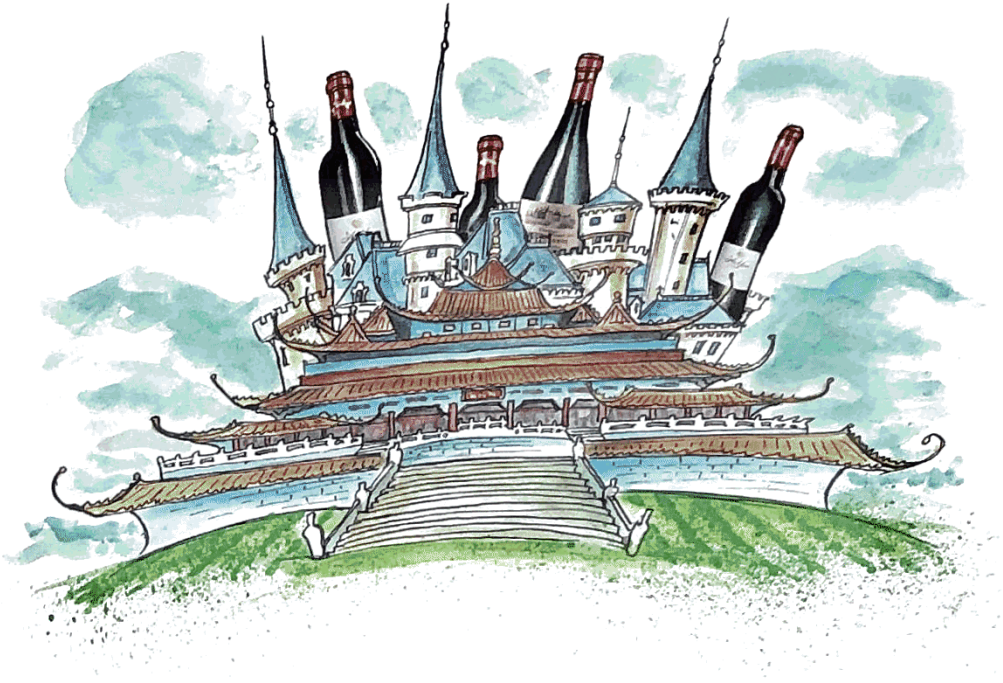
vine china

Chinese wine is upping its game and "going international". Will these two top reds be the heralds of a new vinous frontier?



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To rectify this, the International Wine & Spirit Competition recently organised the UK's first large-scale tasting of Chinese wines for the trade. There were more than 50 medal-winning wines on show (although the majority were "bronze", which isn't much to shout about), ranging from old world-style Cabernet Sauvignons to Rieslings and even sweet ice wines.

I found a lot of them a bit clumsy, particularly in their use of oak. But increasingly there are some top-class wines coming out of China, such as Château Changyu Moser XV (£59 from Berry Bros & Rudd), a Cabernet blend from the country's oldest and biggest wine company.

Founded in 1892, Changyu Pioneer Wine Company has eight châteaux in six different parts of China (as well as several interests overseas). The XV is made at its flagship winery in Ningxia, west of Beijing, which has a climate a bit like Mendoza in Argentina, according to Austrian winemaker Lenz Moser, who's been a consultant for Changyu since 2005.

"It's only since 2015 or '16 that the Chinese have really got to grips with winemaking," says Moser. "The investment, the hardware, was there already, but 2015 was all about the 'software' – the know-how and better winemaking practices. There was also a real change in mindset, a willingness to 'go international', coupled with the drive and passion to make it happen."

In 2016, Moët Hennessy – which counts Krug, Dom Pérignon and Cheval Blanc in its portfolio – released the first vintage of Ao Yun, a high-end bordeaux blend made in a remote corner of Yunnan Province, in the Himalayas. I tasted the second vintage, the 2014 (£280 from Clos19), last year and it was great – inky and generous, with a firm tannin and cassis-like acidity. (Whether it warrants the price tag is another question – you could buy a lot of good bordeaux for that.)

"It's a dream for a winemaker to do a project like this," says Ao Yun's Bordelais winemaker Maxence Dulou. "The terroir here is so diverse – we are learning more every year." Ao Yun 2015 will be released next year.

European winemakers like Moser and Dulou have been instrumental in raising China's game. But a new generation of (often female) talent is now coming through, says Moser, highlighting Zhang Jing, who makes the Jia Bei Lan wine at Helan Qingxue Vineyard. "We're going to see a huge increase in quality." **ALICE LASCELLES**

BERRY BROS & RUDD, 63 PALL MALL, LONDON SW1 (0800-280 2440; BBR.COM). **CLOS19,** CLOS19.COM.

CHRIS BURKE

THE GANNET

delhi full of delights

The city's cuisine is a gourmet dream, from a new-wave café to a century-old Mughal stalwart

When The Gannet first flew to Delhi as a mere fledgling, standalone restaurants were thin on the ground. There was terrific street food and smart hotel dining, but precious little in-between.

More than two decades later, a young, affluent, open-minded clientele hops from bar to restaurant to club, and staid old Delhi has discovered the joys of nightlife. Take the quirky Farzi Café, for example, overlooking the Royal Crescent-inspired Connaught Place: around the central bar are various dining areas featuring birdcages strung from the ceilings, AstroTurf-covered walls and distressed wood, while to one side is a stage with a drum kit.

It was lunchtime and the percussion stayed mercifully silent, but the live music drums up an evening crowd that knocks back pints of Kingfisher Ultra and grazes on a menu that cleverly reworks Indian cuisine's greatest hits, while lobbing in some exotica – mac 'n' cheese pakoras, Amritsari fish and chips, Baileys lollipops – to tickle its adventurous patrons' palates.

Exotica like mac 'n' cheese pakoras tickle the palate

Panipuri (or golgappa to Delhi-wallahs) – crisp, deep-fried unleavened bread shells filled variously with chickpea, potato, yoghurt and tamarind, and drenched in a thin, sweet-sour liquor – are served DIY-style alongside terracotta pots of fillings and sauces from Uttar Pradesh, Agra and Kolkata. Each is a perfectly judged little flavour bomb. Raj kachori (pictured), another puri-based street snack, is perked up with pomegranate seeds and crisp shards of deep-fried okra, the whole bathed in a tamarind foam; a "taco" made with fenugreek seeds is filled with slow-cooked lamb and lentils; and the Southern-style prawn fry was excellent, in a tangy, piquant, curry leaf-rich sauce.

Chef Saurabh Udinia has great technique and a penchant for playful, stylish presentation. When I saw him, he was writing the menu for Farzi Café London, due to open on Haymarket this summer. I will be first in the queue.

Exciting though Delhi's culinary new wave is, no trip to the city is complete without a visit to Karim's, the century-old Mughal stalwart in Chandni Chowk, Delhi's chaotic, sprawling old market district. Any rickshaw driver will know where to find the right side street, though. Outside, cooks in white topis hunch cross-legged over simmering pots of curry and press breads against the walls of flame-blackened tandoors.

Inside, the food is as sublime as the decor is basic. If you want nihari (beef stew) or paya (sheeps' trotters), arrive early – they are breakfast dishes – otherwise, bag a seat at a Formica table for superb, fragrant seekh kebabs; karahi gosht, mutton simmered in a deep, richly spiced gravy; and chicken, finger-scorchingly hot from the tandoor with a fresh green chatni on the side, all mopped up with billowing, crisp-edged naan breads. The shock of the new or the tried and trusted? I strongly recommend you try both. **BILL KNOTT**

FARZI CAFÉ, E-38/39 RAJIV CHOWK, CONNAUGHT PLACE, NEW DELHI 110001 (+9195-9988 9700; FARZICAFE.COM). **KARIM'S,** 16 GALI KABABIYAN, URDU BAZAR ROAD, NEAR JAMA MASJID, OLD DELHI 10006 (+9111-2326 4981).

THE GOBLET

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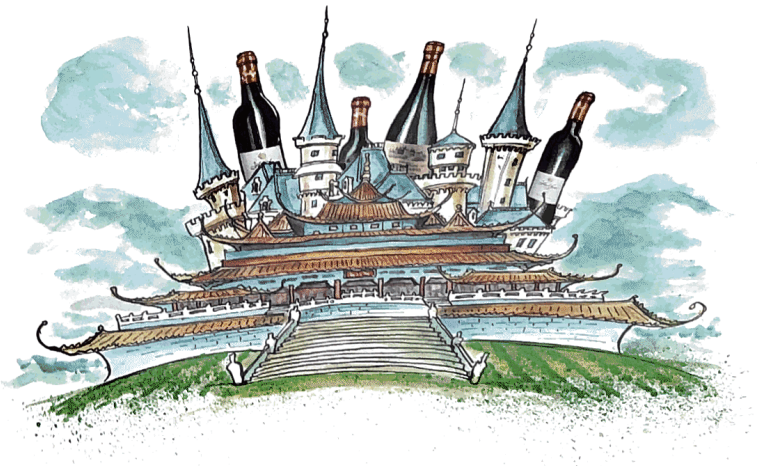

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