

SURPRISE, SURPRISE!

With its spectacular chateau, dramatic vineyards and extraordinary climate, Château Changyu-Moser XV is one of the most exciting new wineries to appear in the past 50 years

So, where do you think this wine estate is located? Too fancy for Burgundy. Architecture not quite right for Tuscany. Doesn't look like Rioja or California... How about if we tell you that it's doing good things with Cabernet Sauvignon. Ah, yes. Bordeaux. Must be. Those lovely circular towers, the beautiful proportion of the windows, the white gravel drives. Has to be. Except it isn't. Because this, my friends, is Château Changyu-Moser XV, and it's in China.

You're probably somewhere between 'surprised' and 'astounded' to discover that China has a wine industry at all. In fact, it is one of the biggest in the world (top five). Most of the wine produced is aimed at the local market, but the growth of what we could call 'international' wines is starting – and right at the forefront is Château Changyu-Moser XV in Ningxia.

It's a collaboration between Château Changyu-Moser XV and Lenz M. Moser, an Austrian winemaker. Both have plenty of previous. Changyu was set up by a Chinese diplomat in 1892, while Lenz M. Moser's famously pioneering family have been making wine in his home country for 15 generations – hence the 'XV' in the winery's name. With

a £60m chateau and spanking new winery, it's safe to say that this is a project with no expense spared, so what made them settle where they did? Well, it's certainly not convenience. Ningxia (pronounced *Ning-shah*) is about 800 miles west of Beijing, on the southern edge of the Gobi desert. Nor is it the bucolic lifestyle. The temperature drops to about -20C in winter.

And yet for wines this place is quite special. For starters, it receives an incredible 3,000 hours of sunshine during the growing season (compared with roughly 2,000 in Bordeaux), yet the mercury practically never rises above 30C. This is perfect for grapes, since it means a long, slow ripening period – plenty of time to build up flavours without out-of-control sugar levels.

Then there's the altitude. At 1,000m above sea level, there are enormous differences between the daytime warmth and the chill of the night. This does several things: it preserves the acidity in the grapes; it gives the fruit a purity rather than a jamminess; and it adds lighter 'top note' flavours such as leaves or, in this case (fittingly), green tea.

Lenz M. Moser says the place reminds him of Napa 40 years ago, and it's easy to see why. Ningxia really feels like the start of something special. As well as the red featured here (try it instead of a Bordeaux Superieur) there is the Grand Vin (an impressively taut Cabernet Sauvignon) and, most recently, a white wine made using the same grape. Just in case the whole project wasn't already full enough of surprises...



WHAT IT TASTES LIKE

Dark coloured, and with initial spice and chocolate flavours, the sun intensity is obvious to start with, but the leafier tea character, fine-grained tannins and lifted acidity also show the wine's cooler-climate provenance.

WHERE TO GET IT

High Street: From £8.50 @ Tesco, Wholefoods, Wine Rack

Restaurants: Malmaison hotels, Royal Garden Hotel



PAIR IT WITH...

Mildly spiced Chinese cuisine