



Belle of nine hills is the toast of the world:
 'Nine Hills Shiraz Rose'



The new flavour of indulgence has won applause from connoisseurs at its very debut.
 'Nine Hills Shiraz Rose' is awarded a Bronze at the Indian Wine Challenge 2008.



■ WOMEN IN wine

Carry on, Karishma

Home from California, Karishma Grover is very aware of the challenges ahead but says her age and her gender are not an obstacle, says **Lindsay Groves**

Young, vivacious and armed with a first-rate education, Karishma Grover is poised to take on the world, with an unlimited number of options at her fingertips. Karishma, however, has not set her sights on a foreign prize. Instead, she is determined to make her mark right here at home in her beloved India.

The third generation of a winemaking dynasty, Karishma grew up around wine. Her grandfather, Kanwal, is a pioneer of the Indian wine industry, establishing the country's first premium wine estate in 1988. With regular business trips to France, Kanwal developed a passion for wine that eventually led him to turn his attention to wine full time. He and his French associate, George Vesselle of Champagne Mumm, spent five years surveying different areas on the subcontinent and researching their suitability to grape growing. As a test-run, they planted 33 different grape varieties in several different locations. After intensive study, they finally decided on the Nandi Hills region of Karnataka, cut down the number of cultivars to a mere nine and established Grover Vineyards.

The 1990s saw many benchmarks for the Grover family. All the patience and perseverance of Grover senior paid off with the release of Grover's first vintage in 1992. The following year, Karishma's father, Kapil Grover joined his father at the winery. In 1994, Kanwal met famed wine consultant Michel Rolland in Bordeaux and within a year convinced him to come on board, offering his expertise as a consultant exclusively to Grover in India.

By the time 2004 rolled around, Kanwal and Kapil Grover had been noted as the fifth most influential Indians by French weekly *Le Monde*. Meanwhile, Karishma began her oenology studies in the US at the University of California Davis, known the world over for its Viticulture and Oenology programme, grooming her to join the family business.

When asked why she decided on the UC Davis programme Karishma said, "The biggest reason was language and also because overall the programme seemed to offer what I was looking for." While in California Karishma worked at various labs on campus as well as got hands-on vineyard experience by

completing a harvest at Cakebread Cellars in Napa Valley.

After an intensive four years in the US she returned home to India. For Karishma, her path was clear, "The wine scene in India is at an extremely exciting juncture. I cannot think of any place in the world currently, where I could be in the middle of such an explosion of wine culture. I would also rather be one in a million than one of a hundred others! Lastly, I am an Indian and have always wanted to settle and live in India. I never wanted to live abroad..."

Karishma Grover represents the third generation at Grover Vineyards



Joining Grover Vineyards in 2008, Karishma has immersed herself in all aspects of the business, spending time at the winery near Bangalore as well as trying her hand at the marketing side of things. Regarding her immediate plans, she says, "I am planning a trip to Bordeaux this September to work with M. Rolland. But right now I am sticking around in India as far as business trips go!"

Despite her optimistic outlook about the future of the Indian wine industry, Karishma is anything but naïve. Aware of the challenges she will encounter, she talks about some of the ongoing obstacles she faces.

"Getting good quality grapes is a challenge. It's the age-old and worldwide struggle between the winemaker and the farmer! We still haven't reached an equilibrium

as the industry is very young. There is gross overproduction, which we all know can never result in grape quality," she points out.

At 24, Karishma is the first Indian woman winemaker. The obvious question is whether her age and gender have been a help or a hindrance. "So far, the reactions have been favourable," she says positively. "Wine is really seen as a woman's drink, and having interacted mostly with people in metropolitan cities, it has been good. Moreover, being technically trained is an advantage."

Nevertheless, Karishma has her work cut out for her. The winery has an aggressive expansion policy with plans to grow by 20% annually. "We have just doubled our capacity, and are continuing to increase capacity further. This expansion will be a never-ending process, so to speak," she explains. •