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Wine 101 - Part 1: The Basics

Lucy Archibald | December 21, 2010

Vogue meets India's only female sommelier,
Lindsay Groves



Wine experts have a bit of a reputation for being a snooty, unapproachable bunch, but Lindsay Groves, Head Sommelier at Oberoi Hotels is quite the opposite. The only female sommelier amongst the very select group working in India, Lindsay grew up in Ontario, Toronto where she also took a comprehensive diploma in Wine and Viticulture, before completing her training in Champagne, Bordeaux and South Africa. About eighteen months ago she came to Mumbai for the Taste

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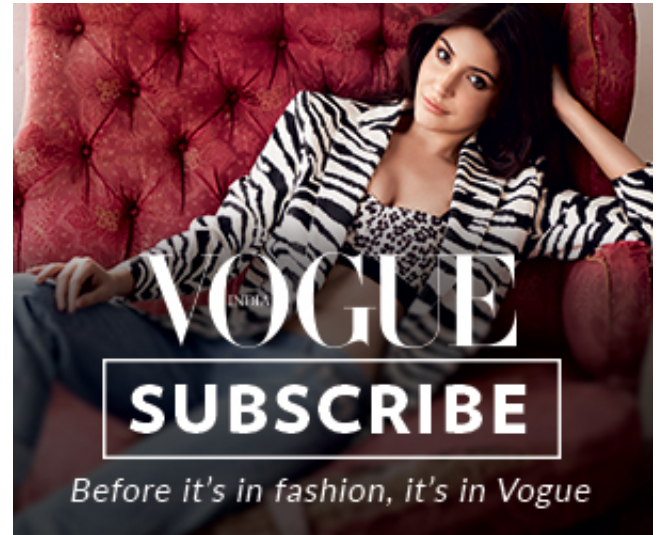
festival and the allure of travel won her over once again. She moved to the city to take up her post as Head Sommelier for the prestigious Oberoi group and to discover what the Indian wine scene has to offer.

We've heard the rule that white wine should be served with fish or vegetarian food and red wine with meat- is that correct?

These are basic guidelines. When pairing food and wine, think about intensity. Is the food heavy or light? Based on that go with wine that matches accordingly. Similarly think about the weight of the food. If you're serving a crisp salad go for a crisp, white wine: like for like in direct relation. Food has five essential tastes: acidity, sweetness, bitterness, saltiness and umami. Wine has just two taste variables: acidity and sweetness. The trick in picking an appropriate wine is to think about how these qualities interact with one another and to balance the meal to create a more enjoyable whole.

Champagne is the classic party drink. Is it best straight up or with added extras?

I wouldn't take a bottle of Krug and start adding things. If you have a lovely wine, that's already well-balanced, then it's just going to get lost if you add things on top. But a Prosecco or a Cava, or even entry level sparkling wines like



Sula Brut are great value as a base if you want to try something fun!

Which wines go well with Indian food?

Indian food varies tremendously, even according to who's cooking it. Every meal is a new meal so you really have to pair according to what's on the plate, rather than the theoretical. To generalise, New World wines [those grown outside the traditional wine regions of Europe] work best with Indian food, because they have a more up-front fruitiness and are a little less structured. Pick something with lots of intensity, and nothing too complex because that will just get thrown into the background against the strong flavours of the food.

What about pudding wine?

A favourite of mine is the late harvest Sula Chenin Blanc. The York late harvest Chenin Blanc is also good- it has more caramelised, nutty flavours. Sweet wines come in half bottles and keep very well; you can have a small glass after dinner, put the cork back in and keep it in the fridge. It will last for about a month, assuming you're keeping it at a cool temperature- handy if you have guests coming over once in a while.

