

Genius in a bottle

Wine making is the new obsession of the rich and famous. Captains of industry, film makers and financiers, designers and pop stars get in touch with their roots. **Alice French** uncorks the story



He's CEO and Chairman of a clutch of listed companies, but nothing lights up **Richard Balfour-Lynn** more than the wine he makes on his 400-acre property in Kent, Balfour Brut Rosé. He was determined to make a sparkling wine that could rival the French, but he couldn't call it Champagne. So he used *champenois* know-how to prepare the site – slope, drainage, soil – and in 2002 he planted the three classic grape varieties:

chardonnay, pinot noir and pinot meunier. With Master of Wine Stephen Skelton on board, they produced the first vintage, Balfour Brut Rosé 2004, a delicate salmon pink colour with a fresh, clean flavour and good length. It has been an extraordinary success story, propelling British wines into the major league of and winning a Gold Medal in the 2008 International Wine Challenge. This is the biggest blind tasting in the world and the 'World Cup' of wine-tasting events. Balfour-Lynn believes in the cachet of niche brands and his sparkling pink fizz will remain an

expensive limited edition. Just 9,000 bottles of 2004 were produced; 15,000 bottles of the 2005 vintage were released last Christmas, and 22,000 bottles of 2006 will be available towards the end of this year. Top London restaurants including The Ivy and Scott's serve Balfour Brut Rosé and it is available, £33 a bottle, from Bibendum Wine, 020 7722 5577 or visit www.bibendum-wine.co.uk

Roberto Cavalli hits the headlines with his flamboyant fashion label, glittering clientele and party lifestyle. His wine label, Cavalli Selection, is a collaboration with his son Tommaso who manages the family estate between Florence and Siena. The first 2004 vintage produced just 5,000 bottles but there are ambitious plans for growth. In May this year, the 2005 wines were launched in London at a glamorous event with a host of A-listers, but the star turn was the wine. Though the vineyards are still young, it's surprisingly good, composed of 60% merlot and cabernet sauvignon with 20% petit verdot and the balance made up of cabernet franc and alicante bouchet. The wine earned 90/100 from the *Wine*



Spectator and the accolade 'beautiful, well-crafted'. The packaging is extravagant and sexy – the essence of Cavalli – with black leather gift boxes lined with leopard print, black crystal goblets, and a bottle opener in the shape of a serpent. Wine labels are inspired by nature and the fashion collections: cheetah for 2004, zebra for 2005, and butterfly for 2006, plus a limited edition wine in an unlabelled black bottle embossed with a brass RC logo. Cavalli Selection wines are available at London restaurants including Daphne's and Lucio, and can be ordered, from £45 a bottle, through FortyFive10 Ltd, 020 7795 1802 or email masi@fortyfive10.eu.

Renzo Rosso built up the Diesel label from a tiny jeans manufacturer into a worldwide fashion empire with a turnover exceeding a billion US dollars. He also makes wine on his small Italian farm near Vicenza where he has vineyards and olive groves for his own olive oil. Rosso aimed at the high standards set by French Margaux and Italian Sassicaia and he has succeeded. The wine is produced to a very high quality and in tiny quantities but is regarded as superb – perfumed, multi-layered and true to the terroir. Each vine produces only two or three bunches of grapes from which he makes bottles of 'pure genius'. There is Bianco di Rosso (chardonnay), Rosso di Rosso (merlot and cabernet sauvignon), and Nero di Rosso (pinot noir). The wines are available at just five restaurants



including Maze, River Cafe, Les Trois Garçons, Zuma and Roka, and can be ordered exclusively through Quintessentially Wines, approximately £90 a bottle, on 020 7758 3360 or visit www.quintessentiallywines.com

Alexander Batchvarov is an investment banker who refined his palate in top restaurants all over the world. Based in London, he has joined forces with an uncle and cousin in Bulgaria to act as consultant and ambassador for Terra Tangra wines on the world stage. After the collapse of the Soviet empire, Bulgarian farmers retrieved their land from state control and began a major reshaping of the wine industry. Award-winning Terra Tangra is a landmark in modern Bulgarian winemaking. The estate covers 300 hectares in the beautiful region of Sakar Mountain, an ancient land of Bronze Age remains and megalithic tombs. The unspoilt terrain, virgin soil and ideal climate produce near-perfect conditions for high-quality vines including Chardonnay and Traminer for white wine and Cabernet Sauvignon,



Merlot, Cabernet Franc, Syrah plus local varieties Mavrud, Rubin and Melnik for red. The new vineyards are certified for biological production (the next step is organic status) and in 2005, Terra Tangra started producing small quantities of single varietals and elegant blends. The wine will be available in the UK in the next few months. Watch this space. www.terratangra.com

Alessandro Marchessan is the wine buyer and group sommelier for fashionable Knightsbridge restaurant Zuma, which has outposts in Hong Kong, Dubai, the USA, China and Istanbul. To satisfy a



wealthy, demanding clientele, he compiles wine lists of the world's finest labels – but deep down, Marchesan has a secret passion. For the last few years he and a chum, Jordi Masdeu, have been making their own wine, Mas La Mola, on a small property near Tarragona in Spain. It's 400 metres above sea level, with slatey, mineral-rich soil and blisteringly hot days, but it produces an elegant, delicate wine, beautifully balanced with soft tannins and fruit. The process is artisanal and labour-intensive, using basket press not modern machinery. During the harvest, Alessandro and Jordi inspect every single bunch of grapes, discarding 30% not up to scratch, and working 16-hour days. The vines are chiefly garnacha and carinena with a small amount of



cabernet sauvignon and merlot. The first vintage, 2005, produced 7,000 bottles of Mas La Mola, available now at £23.99 a bottle, along with just 650 bottles of a single estate 70 year old vineyard, La Vella Vinyeta, Mas La Mola, £37.99. Both wines can be ordered by the case from Liberty Wine, 020 7720 5350 www.libertywine.co.uk

It doesn't get much swankier than this: your own Champagne made just for you and by you, with the top winemaker from a legendary French house. Perrier-Jouët, best known for its iconic *art nouveau* bottle, has announced the **By & For** cuvée, a bespoke Champagne using the precious 2000 vintage of Perrier-Jouët Blanc de Blancs. Available only to the privileged few, this is an unprecedented opportunity to craft your own made-to-measure Champagne. You may prefer your fizz with yeasty body, or something more ethereal; you may enjoy forward fruit aromas or subtle complexity and restraint. Whatever your views, Chef de Cave Hervé Deschamps (*below*) is at your disposal, and at the end of the process, you are the proud owner of a unique and priceless collection of 12 bottles in a handsome personalised case. If only. For more information visit www.perrierjouet.com

