

Sipping through Europe aboard the Orient Express

Description

As President **Wineglitz India â?? The Wine Club**, Mukul Manku organised a spectacular wine dinner for the members of the club at the **Orient Express** restaurant in **Hotel Taj Palace Delhi**. Held on 14th Nov 2025, the event filled the luxurious interiors of the historic restaurant with conviviality and laughter.

Run up to the Event

This excellent wine dinner at **Orient Express** was preceded by another exceptional one which our club organised earlier this year at the the **Spicy Duck restaurant**, also at **Hotel Taj Palace Delhi**, for the expat members of Wineglitz India (read about it here). As the Club President I was immensely impressed by the flawless manner in which that event was conducted by the **Team Taj Palace**, which led to me having the proverbial ***dil maange more*** moment.

And this put into motion, I would go on to have a series of discussions with the man behind it all â?? **Rajeev Sharma,** F&B Manager at Hotel Taj Palace Delhi. I wanted the best for my club members and the apt choice was the **Orient Express** â?? which is undoubtedly one of the best restaurants in the country. Rajeev agreed, and rest is history. He and his team left no stones unturned in planning and conduct of this amazing Wineglitz India Wine Dinner, and this blog post is dedicated to that.

Orient Express

Let me start telling you about by the restaurant itself. The **Orient Express** at Hotel Taj Palace in New Delhi opened on Christmas Eve, 1983. Inspired by the **historic luxury train** of the same name, the restaurant recreates the opulent ambience of the original trainâ??s dining carriages, serving fine European cuisine.



The picture of the actual Orient Express dining carriage

Over all the years gone by, it has become one of Delhiâ??s most celebrated fine-dining establishments, known for its traditional, white-gloved service and unique, nostalgic atmosphere.

> **Trivia** : Orient Express train inspired many works, most notably, Agatha Christieâ??s *Murder on the Orient Express*.

Wineglitz India relives the Magic of the Orient Express

During our recent Wineglitz India Wine Dinner, the setting of the restaurant added a beautiful sense of occasion â?? as if our wines were being savoured on a grand journey through Europe.

The intimate ambience, thoughtful hospitality and old-world charm made the evening truly memorable. It felt less like a dinner, and more like an experience.

The Wine Flight



The majestic wine flight

The evening had a flight of five wines â?? one sparkling and four still wines. Mukul spoke about each of these wines as and when these were poured in the glasses. The brief of same is covered in following paragraphs.

Villa Sandi Ilfresco Prosecco DOC Brut

The first wine savoured in the starter course was a Prosecco from the wine house called as **Villa Sandi** .





Starter Course with Prosecco

Before I tell you more about this Italian sparkling wine, let me mention about a quote from the current owner of the winery, **Giancarlo Moretti Polegato**, who says that to the effect that:

> For me the best marketing strategy lies in promoting the Prosecco culture as a whole and not just promoting my own Prosecco wines, since the benefits of the overall success of the Prosecco industry would ultimately flow down to all the Prosecco producers in the region including my own.

Infact this line of thought also mirrors the theme of my own Wine Club â?? **Wineglitz India**, where we are not about a particular wine dinner or an event, rather we endeavour to promote a healthy wine culture in the city and in India.



Giancarlo Moretti Polegato â?? owner of the wine house

Coming back the the Prosecco, its full name reads as **Villa Sandi Ilfresco Prosecco DOC Brut**. It is a longish name and let break it down for you, here **Villa Sandi** is the name of the winery which produces this sparkling wine, **Ilfresco** in Italian means ***The Fresh One*** and it indicates the fresh style in which this wine is made, **Prosecco DOC** is the wine region where this wine comes from â?? it is located in the Treviso province in the larger Veneto region in North East Italy.

The last word in the name of the wine is **Brut** which indicates the sweetness level in the wine. When we say Brut, it means that the Prosecco has very less level of sweetness and for all practical purposes it can be called as a dry wine, where dry in wine terms means absence of sugar.



Guests savoured the Prosecco in a relaxed atmosphere

The guests loved the light and the refreshing taste of this Prosecco with the scrumptious starter snacks.

Bosio Gavi DOCG

The next wine of the evening was the Bosio Gavi DOCG where **Bosio** is the name of the wine house, **Gavi** is the name of the wine as also the place from where it comes. The last word in the name of wine **DOCG** is the appellation of this wine. In Italy, DOCG is the highest appellation a wine can have and it implies that the wine is of the highest quality.

A short story of Gavi

Now before I talk more about Gavi, let me narrate a short and an ***interesting story*** about this wine.



Representative picture of this story created by me with AI

As the legend goes, in the 6th Century AD there was a Princess in France who, in order to escape her arranged marriage, eloped with a Knight whom she loved. Both came to the region of Piemonte in North West Italy and settled at a place which got named as Gavi, taking it name after the Princess whose name was Gavia. Not only that, the local grape of this area came to be known as Cortese, taking its name from the courteous nature of the Princess. This old legend still continues to be a part of the popular Piemonte folklore.

History of Gavi

Talking about the history of Gavi, the earliest mention of this wine goes back to the year 972 AD where it finds a mention in one of the vineyard records of that time. Its recent documented record however goes back to the year 1659.



Port of Genoa, Italy by French School. Image with courtesy of â?? meisterdrucke.uk

Interestingly, during that time the port city of Genoa located near the Ligurian sea in south of Piemonte, used to be inhabited by nobles who became very wealthy because of the international sea trade happening from Genoa. These nobles bought lot of land and vineyards in the nearby city of Gavi. Very soon they also developed a liking for the local wine from the city which was Gavi. Their liking grew so much that they started calling Gavi as a wine of their own.



A glass of Gavi along with Truffle Cappuccino

This royal patronage raised the popularity of Gavi immensely and this high status of the wine continued for many centuries to come. Ultimately in 1974 during the period modernisation of winemaking in Italy, Gavi was accorded the DOC status which was further elevated to DOCG in 1998.

Another things about Gavi is that it has a high level of Acidity which enables it to pair wonderfully with a range of cuisines. Accordingly it paired very nicely with the paired food in the wine dinner.

Zonin Valpolicella Ripasso Superiore

The next wine of the evening was the **Zonin Valpolicella Ripasso Superiore**.



Valpolicella Ripasso Superiore first red wine in the wine dinner

In the name of the wine, **Zonin** is the name of the wine house which produces this wine, its origin dates back to the year 1881, Valpolicella Ripasso is the name of the wine, which comes from the Valpolicella wine region located in the province of Verona in North East Italy. Interestingly the name â??Valpolicellaâ?• is believed to have come from a Latin phrase meaning â??**valley of many cellars** ,â?• reflecting its long winemaking history. Valpolicella wines are primarily made with three native grapes â?? Corvino, Rondinella and Molinara.

Now in order to understand the meaning of Ripasso, let me first tell you about the **hierarchy pyramid of Valpolicella wines**. The Valpolicella and Valpolicella Classico, both basic wines lie at the bottom of this pyramid. Next comes our wine Valpolicella Ripasso. Above this is the Amarone and on the top of the pyramid is the Recioto.



Valpolicella Wines Quality Pyramid. Image by courtesy of Wine Folly

Now **Ripasso** in Italian means **repassed**. The name comes from a special process wherein after the main Valpolicella wine is made, itâ??s repassed over the leftover skins and grapes from making Amarone â?? this adds a lot of complexity and structure to the basic Valpolicella to give us the wine we savoured that day â?? the **Valpolicella Ripasso**.



Valpolicella Ripasso served with Sliced Chicken Supreme Mustard Kalamata

The last word in the wine name is **Superiore**, which as the name indicates means that the wine is of a higher quality. Technically it also means that the wine has been aged in wooden oak barrels for a minimum of one year and has got an alcohol content of minimum 12%.

Querciabella Chianti Classico DOCG

The wine in the main course of the dinner was the **Querciabella Chianti Classico DOCG**. In the name of the wine, **Querciabella** refers to the name of the wine house â?? Agricola Querciabella, which is located in the heart of Tuscany in central Italy. Querciabella in Italian means â??**a beautiful oak**â?• which refers to the majestic oak trees which grow in the vicinity of the winery.



Querciabella â?? means a beautiful oak tree

The winery takes its inspiration from the beauty, grace and strength of the oak tree to craft elegant and age worthy wines. Just as the roots of the oak tree go deep into the Tuscan soil, the winery is also rooted firmly in the Tuscan traditions. And just as its branches reach ever upwards, Querciabella also strives to reach higher and higher levels of perfection with each passing year.

The symbol of the Oak tree also finds a central place in the label of this wine bottle. Infact this label itself has been designed by the renowned Italian painter, **Bernardino Luini**. Even the typeface ***Simona*** has been designed by artists Jane Patterson and John Downer for Querciabellaâ??s exclusive proprietary use. The fact that so much of attention to detail has be given to creating this label itself shows the importance which the winery attaches to this premium wine.



Image â?? Agricola Querciabella

The next two words in the wine name, **Chianti Classico** refer to its wine region. Located in central Italy, this region is bound by the city of Florence towards its north and that of Sienna to its south. When Classico is written as a suffix to Chianti, then it implies that the wine has been made from grapes sourced from selected vineyards which are known for producing high quality wines year after year, harvest after harvest.

In addition to this, Querciabella also practices a structured **micro vinification regime** where 60 smaller, high quality plots of vineyard land are selected. The grapes from these plots are vinified separately, which means that they are fermented in separate steel tanks to preserve the individuality of every parcel.



Querciabella with the Main Course

Now once these base wines are ready, the winemaking team carefully assembles the **final blend, which truly reflects the personality of the vintage.**

The last word in the name of the wine is **DOCG**, which, as I mentioned earlier is the highest wine appellation in Italy. It implies that this wine is a high quality wine.

The guests loved this Chianti Classico, which was also the **Queen of the wines that evening**.

Niepoort Port Tawny

This was one of those perfect wine dinners where I intentionally decided to keep a Port wine also in the dessert course. The aim was twofolds â?? one to keep a wine which paired nicely with the dessert which was the **Biscoff Cheese Cake**, and secondly, to do my little bit to promote the culture of Port wine in the city, since personally I believe that time is ripe for furthering of Port wine enthusiasm in

India.



Port wine in a special small sized glass with the dessert course

The Story of Port wine

In order to tell about the origin and history of Port, let me take you on to a journey back into time â?? specifically to the early 17th Century, which was a period of intense political rivalry between England and France. Due to this France had imposed a high tariff on its wines being exported to England.

To overcome this problem, England was looking for an alternate country from where they could buy their wines and since they already were in trade relations with Portugal, they homed on to the Douro Valley there to source their wines. Duoro was already a prominent wine region during that time.

Now the wine merchants transported this wine via the Duoro river to the port town known as **Porto**, located at the mouth of the Duoro river. And Port wine got its name from this port town.



PORTUGAL. Oporto c1885. Image : Google/ eBay

The problem which arose was that due to extreme heat conditions on the ships, the Port wine used to get spoiled enroute while being shipped from Portugal to England.

In order to overcome this issue, the winemakers resorted to fortification of the wine by means of adding distilled grape spirit to the wine. This did two things to the wine â?? it increased its sweetness level and also increased its alcohol content. These twin conditions added strength to the Port and it could now withstand the arduous sea journey without getting spoiled.

Back in England the Port wine soon got popular and was soon embraced by the royalty thereby increasing its prestige immensely. This popularity of Port wine would continue for centuries to come, and even today Port is considered to be one of the finest wines coming from Portugal.

So that was all about the **Wine Dinner by Wineglitz India** at the Orient Express, Hotel Taj Palace New Delhi. I hope you liked reading this post as much as I loved writing it.

Cheers !!

Mukul Manku â?? President Wineglitz India ð??®ð??³