

Make in India, conquer the world: Wild Tiger rum, Paul John Whisky, Soul Tree wine

Three Indian spirits we wish were more readily available in India.

Written by Vikram Achanta | New Delhi | Published: February 9, 2016 8:10 pm

Karan Bilimoria's Cobra beer and the Jagdale Group's Amrut Whisky were the first Indian-made spirits to serve notice abroad. But now, a bunch of other spirits are following in their footsteps. You'll have a tough time finding them in India — as at least for now, they are conquering the world.



Soul Tree Wines

Soul Tree makes its wines in Nashik, and its portfolio includes a barrel-aged Cabernet Sauvignon Shiraz, a sparkling wine and a Zinfandel Rose among others. Although rising up to meet the challenge of launching wine made in Nashik to the general British population — and not just the Indian diaspora — was considerable, London-based co-founders Melvyn D'Souza and Alok Mathur felt that there were several aspects working in their favour. First being that the UK is one of the largest and most developed markets for wine in the world. Second was the ease of doing business — which is much simpler in the UK than in India. The success Soul Tree enjoyed in the UK — they first started selling their wines in 2011 — also enabled them to enter other markets in the EU. They are now also present in Germany, France and Ireland, apart from launching in markets further afield such as the USA.

Soul Tree is now in its fifth vintage as a wine producer and is listed in over a 1,000 trade outlets in overseas markets. "Our consumers have a choice of wines from every major wine-producing country in the world and have embraced the Souttree brand as a part of their wine cabinet," says D'Souza. Along with consumer loyalty, critical acclaim has also grown — so much so that Soul Tree won a bronze medal at the International Wine Challenge (IWC) in London in 2015. It is only the fourth Indian winemaker to win a medal at IWC.

The duo has no plans to launch in India at the moment, but are not ruling out an entry into their home market sometime in the future. Meanwhile, Souttree has been successful in raising ₹400,000 via a crowd-funding initiative which drew investment from 218 investors from 18 countries.



Paul John Whisky

In December 2014, I picked up a bottle of Paul John Single Malt (the Edited version) at a liquor shop in Goa. Goa and Karnataka continue to be the only two states where you'd be fortunate enough to pick up a bottle of the whisky. This is what whisky guru Jim Murray had to say about the Edited in his 2013 Whisky Bible, "All is beautifully weighted, patient and poised... a new Indian classic, a sublime malt from the continent. To be more precise, a world classic!" And, I can't but agree with Murray. Both the mildly peated Edited and the un-peated Brilliance — which are distilled in Goa — are fine whiskies that can out single-malt Scottish drams.

One would expect that whisky — especially single malt — would be, like wine, a challenge to launch in the UK. In 2012, however, Paul John — who helms Bangalore-based John Distilleries and after whom the brand is named — decided to take the plunge. Unsurprisingly, both consumers and critics speedily accepted Paul John. In last year's edition of Whisky Bible, both variants got the Liquid Gold Award. Whisky lovers in Delhi and Mumbai can rejoice, as Paul John is expected to be available in these cities in 2016.



Wild Tiger Rum

With a family base and history in the liquor industry, Coimbatore-based Gautom Menon often travelled to various liquor shows and expos in the world. At times like those, he was always dismayed by how little India had to offer — especially in comparison to products like tequila or Cachaca, from Mexico and Brazil. He also knew that rum was one category where India had a strong basis for claiming ownership due to its centuries-old tradition of sugarcane growing and rum production. He decided to develop a premium rum which would be a blend of molasses-based spirit and cane juice spirit. He chose Wild Tiger as the brand name and went the whole hog with imagery and packaging.

Gautom has his eyes firmly set on the Indian market — given the young demographic. At present, however, he is focused on jetting around the world to launch Wild Tiger at various international rum and spirits-focused expos. The brand has made early headway in the UAE, where it's available at a range of retail outlets and bars. For India, Gautom has begun with the travel retail market, in which — apart from making the product accessible to Indians — he hopes to plug the gap for the overseas traveller looking for a spirits product with a strong Indian provenance.

The writer is co-founder and CEO of Tulleeho — a drinks training and consulting firm — and www.tulleeho.com, a drinks website.



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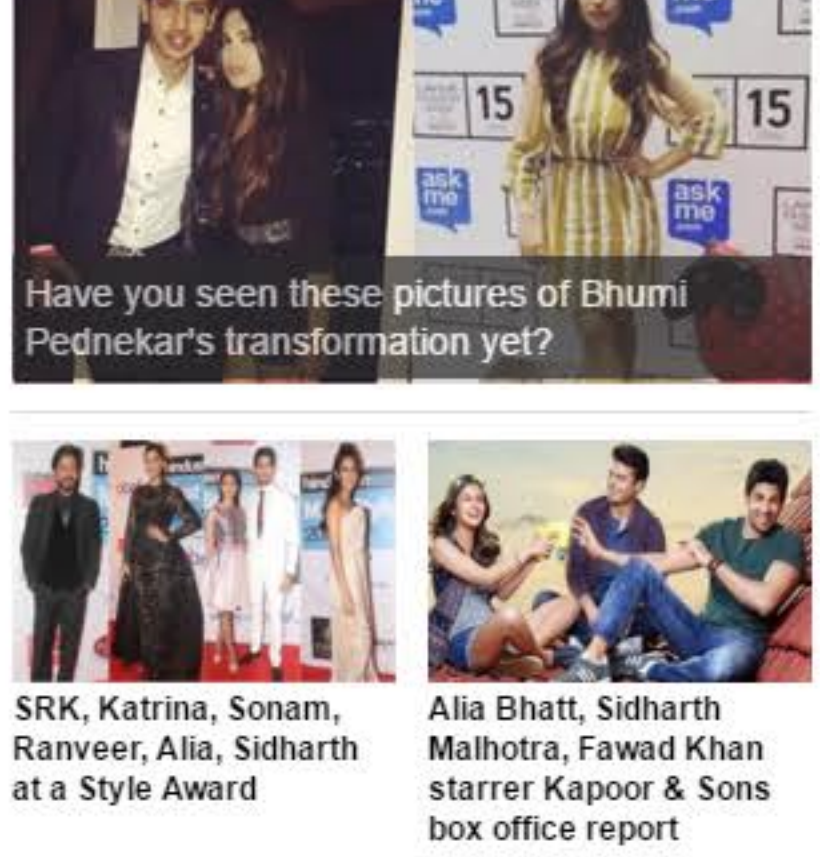
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