

**MEDIA RELEASE
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**Nazaaray Estate: a little bit of India amid very fine wine
on Victoria's Mornington Peninsula**

Paramdeep Ghumman is definitely not your typical Australian winemaker. For starters, he hails from Punjab in India, a region not associated with fine wine. He had never even tasted wine until, aged 30, he had a glass or two of French Champagne on the flight from Calcutta to Melbourne, when he emigrated with his doctor wife, Nirmal, in 1981.

His interest was immediately piqued, but at that stage he never dreamed that one day his own wines would be served at some of Australia's best restaurant tables, nor that he and his wife would run a very quirky cellar door complete with vintage railway carriages and sell-out Sunday Tiffin lunches.

Param and Nirmal bought 50 acres of cattle farming land on the Mornington Peninsula in 1991, while living in Melbourne. It was on a hillside, exposed to wind from all directions, but it overlooked the verdant landscape and wildlife haven of Greens Bush.

"The land exceeded our budget and our wildest expectations, but we had no idea what we would do with it," says Param. They looked at crops such as olives, fruit trees and specialty produce such as pomegranates, but Paramdeep kept coming back to the dream of creating his own vineyard.

Mad or a mid-life crisis?

His son said he was having a mid-life crisis, his wife said he was mad, and a prominent vigneron took one look at the windswept acreage, immediately agreed with his wife and told him to buy land with vines already planted on it.

"But sometimes you have to do what your heart tells you, not your head," says Param, who enrolled in a six month evening course on viticulture (the first of many wine courses), then established Nazaaray (beautiful visions) Estate as the Mornington Peninsula's southern-most vineyard.

His university degree in electrical engineering and his IT role in Melbourne gave him technical skills for his research and development. In 1996 he planted 10 rows of Pinot Noir, Pinot Gris, Sauvignon Blanc, Chardonnay and Riesling, tried different trellising methods and vine spacing, and buried himself in research about making fine cool climate wines.

Five thousand Cypress and other native trees were planted (some by Boy Scouts, who won their forestry badge as a result) and the property at last had proper wind breaks.

He later extended the vineyard, planting more Pinot Noir and Pinot Gris. Once the vines were established, he opted not to irrigate the rich red basalt clay soil, wanting to force the roots deep into the ground in search of water and a true expression of the terroir.

Extracting the real flavours

“That’s what extracts the real flavours from the minerals in the soil and the volcanic deposits that lie under it,” he says. “Our roots go down about two to four metres, but in Burgundy, some of the roots go down much further.”

Param is one of only a handful of Indian winemakers in Australia, and one of the few winemakers on the Mornington Peninsula who make their own wine on their own premises. Grapes are handpicked, wines are handmade and only French oak is used for aging. Param wants to make the very best wines the land can yield, and feels he is about 75% of the way to his goal.

He follows sustainable principles, including spreading hay in the vineyard as mulch, planting more trees to encourage birdlife as insect control and not using chemicals.

He produces between 500 and 1000 cases of wine a year. When he sent wine writer James Halliday his 2014 Chardonnay it scored 94 points, the wine was tasted by revered Melbourne restaurant Vue de Monde, and he suddenly found his Chardonnay and Pinot Noir on the restaurant’s wine list.

“I felt good,” he says, but his wife recalls him saying “Wow, I can’t believe it!”

Some of the Nazaaray wine is sold through the cellar door and the Nazaaray website (there’s no freight even on half cases) and the rest via retailers and fine restaurants, including the 2 hatted restaurants Aria in Sydney and Ten Minutes by Tractor on the Mornington Peninsula.

Indian food and wine

Indian food and wine might seem odd table fellows, but Param says there were vineyards on the foothills of the Himalayas hundreds of years ago. “The Moghuls drank very fine wines – probably from Europe too – and Indian poetry has been written about wine,” he says.

Nirmal initially served table d’hote Indian lunches at the vineyard, which proved very popular. She now employs a chef and serves buffet-style Tiffin lunches of around six different dishes plus accompaniments for up to 60 people. Lunches are generally on the first Sunday of each month.

“If there’s a balance between the wine, food and spices, wine works very well with Indian food,” she says. “Chicken Tikka goes with Pinot Gris, tandoori prawns with Chardonnay, and game such as tandoori quail or duck goes with Pinot Noir. I like to introduce people to different styles of cooking and different regions too.”

Little oil or butter is used in cooking, and vegetarians and lactose-intolerant diners can be catered for. Tiffin boxes can be provided for small groups and special dietary needs.

But Indian food is not the only unusual aspect of the cellar door. A couple of brightly painted train carriages were initially used for wine tasting, but when they proved too hot in summer, the tastings were moved to the converted cow shed. The carriages are now used for lunches in the cooler weather, along with another small free standing timber building called ‘Elimatta’ (Aboriginal for ‘our camp’).

However, the best spot for enjoying a glass or bottle of wine is undoubtedly on the viewing deck which looks over peaceful farmland towards Greens Bush. Kangaroos often bound into view, heading for the tree corridors which the Ghummans and their neighbours are planting from the roadside to Greens Bush.

Yes, it's indeed a beautiful vision.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Paramdeep Ghuman

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Opening Hours

- Open first & third weekends of each month from 12-4pm.
- Open all Victorian public holidays & long weekends from 12-4pm.
- Tiffin lunches generally first Sunday of each month (book via website)
- Also open by appointment.