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# Raise a glass to Indian wine maker's success

BY PHILIP PARKIN

**K**ingfisher, Haywards, Thunderbolt: these are all well-known brands of Indian beer, which many people will be aware of - but what about Indian wine?

"Is there such a thing?" you may ask. Most definitely, although it is only in recent years that the industry has begun to take off. The turning point was reputedly the establishment of Chateau Indage in the western Indian region of Maharashtra, with the help of French winemakers.

Chateau Indage began to import various varieties of grape to make its still and sparkling wines - and other wineries soon followed. The first company to market Indian wine in the UK was Solihull-based Ignis, whose wines are sold under the 'Soul Tree' brand.

Soul Tree co-founder Alok Mathur explained that the company, which began a pilot project to sell the wines in a small number of Midland restaurants just a year ago, was now stocked in some 150 establishments around the country.

Soul Tree produces five wines, two reds, two whites and a rose. The first four are a Sauvignon Blanc, Chenin Blanc, Cabernet Sauvignon and Zinfandel. The rose is a blend of the Chenin and Cabernet.

The grapes for the company's wines are grown in Nasik Valley, which is 100 miles from India's western coast. The wines are made locally to Soul Tree's specification, and labelled and shipped to the UK, where they are typically sold to mid- to up-market Indian restaurants.

"It's primarily Indian restaurants, as the wines complement the cuisine, but we also have some hotels and a few pubs as well," said Mr Mathur.

"We set up Soul Tree because we saw a gap in the market but also because Indian wines are of age and someone had to make the effort to reach out and put Indian wine on the global map.

"There are 10,000 Indian restaurants in the UK, but we decided to break the mould and focus on the international market as well."

As a result, Soul Tree exports to Germany and also to the home of wine, France. The company is also poised to appoint distributors for Ireland and the US.

The company is also focusing on building up its business in the Midlands, and is on the verge of announcing a number of new outlets for its wine, on top of the five restaurants that already stock it.

IAB members can sample the wine for themselves at a special pre-Christmas drinks night, which will take place at Fredericks, in the Jewellery Quarter, in early November.



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## IN BRIEF



**New brand: Eid celebration (left to right): John Concannon (Birmingham Rathbone), Judy Dyke (Tyndallwoods), Caroline Cater (Coca-Cola Enterprises Ltd.), Nasir Awan, Amina Bukhari (IAB), Ravi Masih (Aston Villa), and Imran Khan (Tyndallwoods)**

**Birmingham's Muslims have once again celebrated Eid, which is the end of Ramadan, or the month of fasting.**

The Eid event - which attracted more than 25,000 visitors - took place at Cannon Hill Park, and began with a number of readings from the Quran, or Muslim holy book.

Other entertainment during the day included various musical acts, including Qawwali singer Qari Waheed Chisti from Pakistan.

The day was again supported by the Institute of Asian Businesses (IAB), whose presence featured an information stand shared with local charity Birmingham Rathbone.

IAB president Nasir Awan said: "Each year in Birmingham a wonderful family occasion enables the general public to both enjoy and celebrate the diversity of the city's Muslim community on the occasion of Eid, and each year we at the Birmingham Chamber of Commerce Group give our wholehearted support to its success."

**South Birmingham College is undergoing a £2.5m campus refurbishment, at three of its sites.**

At Hall Green, the college is having a number of classrooms refurbished, as well as an extension to its student-run restaurant, 'Karibunis'.

At Digbeth, a new media production suite is being built, whilst at Bordesley Green a 'training hub' is being constructed.

Paul Morris, assistant principal at the college, said: "We have been working over the summer months to ensure the majority of the works are completed for the students' arrival in September, and we're looking forward to welcoming them to the new and improved campuses."



**An Indian restaurant in a Grade II listed Georgian building has reopened after being refurbished.**

Rose Murree is based on one of Birmingham's busiest roads, Hagley Road in Edgbaston. The restaurant is named after the Punjabi town of Murree.



Grape expectations: Soul Tree founders Alok Mathur (right) and Melvin D'Souza