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Sommelier INDIA

THE WINE MAGAZINE

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FINEDINING:BANGALORE

Lupa – The Wolf and the Vine

Lupa – Manu Chandra’s Tuscan inspired restaurant in Bangalore is a wine lover’s dream-come-true

Ever since its wrought iron gates swung open on 6 February this year, all eyes have been on Manu Chandra’s new Tuscan-flavoured 220-seater restaurant, Lupa. It’s been two years in the making, but the chef and his business partner, Chetan Rampal, have finally created ‘a little bit of Tuscany’ in the heart of Bangalore.

It is not his food offerings alone that draw people to Chandra’s restaurants. With his storied background of education and experience with the best restaurants in the West, he has generated curiosity about his next steps after quitting as chef-partner of Olive Beach in 2021. At Olive, his carefully curated wine list was artfully divided into sections based on style and mood rather than the more common regional divisions. It made selection easier, put diners at ease, and wine sales soared.

His latest offering is named Lupa after the mythical she-wolf who fostered Rome’s founders, Romulus and Remus, and features stunning custom-created interiors and state-of-the-art equipment to enhance diner experience. But given the chef’s personal interest in wine, the star attraction is Chandra’s 2000-bottle wine cellar – the first of its kind in India. Down a flight of stairs, the stone-



Chef Manu Chandra and business partner, Chetan Rampal, founders of Lupa restaurant

clad subterranean room, complete with wooden wine racks, a state-of-the-art cooling system, and cosy nooks for wine-tasting experiences, is available only by prior appointment. Chandra says he has long envisioned running a restaurant with such a cellar. Not just to create a beautiful space, but to offer his diners “a wine programme that is impactful, visually rich, tangible”. Those who view the 150-strong collections of labels might be stimulated enough by the selection to order a bottle, or more.

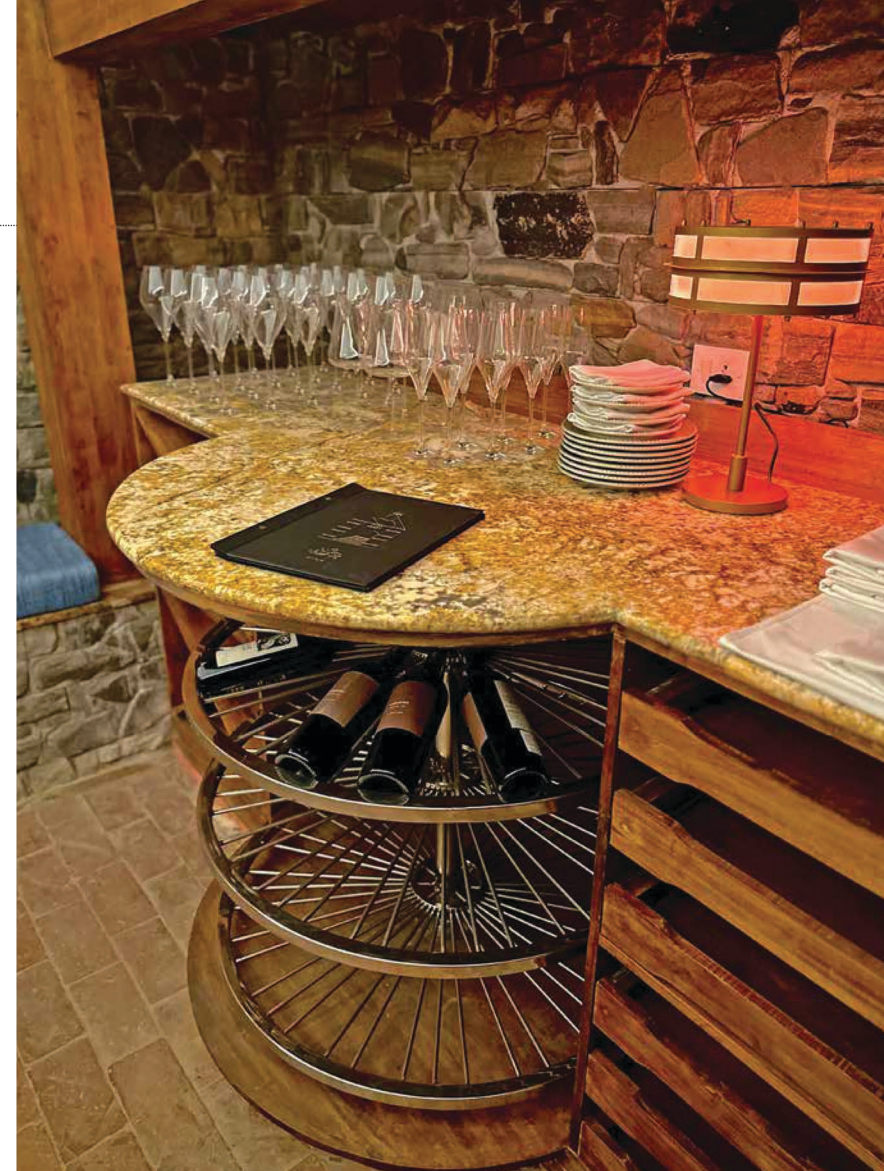
The Lupa wine list, says Chandra,

is still a work in progress, and will be out in its full form perhaps by May; a restaurant such as this one cannot feature a static wine inventory based on commercial decisions alone; it must contain something for everyone to look forward to. Top-end wines like Sassicaia, Tignanello and Bordeaux cru classés will find a place along with selections from exciting, newly-fashionable regions such as Etna, South Africa and Austria, with prices ranging from Rs 4,500 to Rs 50,000 a bottle.

Diners might enjoy effortless

pairings like the Super-Tuscan Querciabella Mongrana (Rs 8,500) with Lupa’s signature charcuterie or cheese platters. For the more adventurous, the hot Brie, a popular starter, would work well with the champagne and prosecco selection (from Rs 6,500 to Rs 10,000). And with dessert? Consider their 24-layer chocolate cake with the Vietti Moscato d’Asti (Rs 7,000).

This level of offering caters to a more highly wine-savvy clientele; Chandra believes that the Indian wine consumer has come a long way. While an interest in wine has developed over the years, the earlier tendency to drink only known names or brands, coupled with a fear of ordering by the bottle owing to lack of confidence, has now given way to a willingness to experiment. The growing mid-priced segment of



Below: Interior view of the 220-seater restaurant in the heart of Bangalore. Above: A section of the underground cellar equipped to store 2,000 bottles of wine

Photo Courtesy: Kuber Shah





Sommelier-led activities and vertical tastings are part of Lupa's programme

wines available in India, priced at Rs 3,000-plus has seen premiumization, and there is a greater willingness to spend Rs 5,000 or more on a bottle.

Chandra dreams big. He envisions retaining a sommelier on call, should demand permit. This would make the restaurant one of the few stand-alones in the country with a dedicated sommelier. Lupa will also

Named after the mythical she-wolf who fostered Rome's founders, Romulus and Remus, Lupa features stunning custom-created interiors and state-of-the-art equipment

host a slew of wine-centric activities, from sommelier-led food and wine experiences to vertical tastings. Also on the cards is Lupa's own proprietary label of house wines, likely Italian – red, white, sparkling and rosé. While Chandra's personal preference veers towards structured, full-bodied Italian reds (read Brunellos, Amarones and Super-Tuscans), he is aware that he has a wide audience, and the wine list will feature a range of choices and prices. Wine-based cocktails are not forgotten; the cocktail menu showcases several, including the trendy Negroni Spagiato.

Chandra is only too aware of the weight of expectations. From Day One the Lupa list featured 31 reds from both the Old World and the New, 14 whites, four rosés, six sparkling wines including Champagne, and a couple of dessert wines. There is a selection of 18 reasonably-priced wines by the glass that he understands will drive wine consumption. Not surprisingly, within the first week, there have been orders for Bordeaux classified growths and super-premium Napa wines to be served at private dinners at his strategically-located private dining room on the mezzanine floor.

As the spanking new restaurant settles into its new space and continues to evolve, Chandra is planning ways to "steer Indian palates into more interesting wine choices. There is a world beyond the usual".♦

– Ruma Singh

GETTING THERE

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