



✦ RUMA SINGH

Last year during the lockdown, when wine stocks dried up in home bars across the country, Indians began to look to local producers to meet their needs. This not only gave the industry a boost, but as consumers began trading up, and drinking better quality, Indian premium wine moved front and centre.

A few wine stalwarts led this change, bringing new ideas and processes to the table. Whether it is in terms of upping quality levels of premium Indian wine, introducing a diverse international portfolio to the Indian market, championing the cause of sustainability (a hot button topic worldwide), making wine a fun and joyous topic, or just directing world focus on to India with ambitious plans and projects, there is much happening that is positive.

Those featured on *The Hindu Weekend's* pandemic Power List are few, but already it is possible to see new shoots everywhere – the doughty Indian spirit of entrepreneurship is blooming quickly across the country. While next year's list will hopefully be longer and more diverse, this year's already brings new cheer and confidence as we move into 2022.

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THE 2021 INDIAN WINE POWER LIST

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The list may be small, but each of the five has proved their mettle during the pandemic – strengthening both their business and India's wine market. Plus, recommendations for an end-of-pandemic wine



Uma Chigurupati | 61

Founder, KRSMA Estates

Focus on sustainable viticulture and a portfolio with premium-only wines

Two years ago, Uma was worrying about the lack of rainfall at their vineyards near Hampi. Today, she is despairing at quite the opposite. "Our crop is fantastic this year, but with rain during veraison [ripening of grapes]... the risk of damage to the fruit and increase in pests is high."

The size of harvest is important as KRSMA boasts premium-only wines in their focussed portfolio, made from grapes grown only in their vineyards. So, production is small (50,000 bottles), their market smaller, out of choice (Hyderabad, Bengaluru and Goa), and they dominate the premium wine landscape in India.

While Uma leads with decision-making – from vineyard to the finished product – her husband, and co-founder, Krishna, steps in to offer advice when required. "I tend to play safe, he is the bolder decision-maker," she explains. Her wish list includes growing the production of their 'second' wine, the approachable, fruity brand K2, which caters "to those getting introduced to wine drinking".

Uma is firm about following the rules of sustainable viticulture. "It is vital to stay away from indiscriminate use of fungicides and herbicides. When a consumer opens a bottle of wine, they shouldn't taste chemicals." Soon on the cards is their Covid-delayed project – constructing a state-of-the-art tasting room overlooking their vineyards, as well as a couple of rooms for visitors to the winery. "People visit us while they're at Hampi [a 1.5-hour drive away] so we do not need larger hospitality facilities."

While Uma regrets ignoring repeated demands to export to countries like the US, the UK and Japan, as well as withdrawing from New York, where they were once listed at top restaurants and bars – "we couldn't continue owing to growing domestic demand" – she hopes to now increase their plantings, which will help their ability to supply to additional markets. At the end, what is vital for her is quality. "We are not about numbers. KRSMA is not a business for us, but a passion project."

End-of-pandemic wine:
La Sirena 2010 Cabernet Sauvignon by Heidi Barrett is a bold and well-balanced wine with fine tannins that is well integrated with oak.