

THE WINE CLUB



ALOK CHANDRA

The best of red wines

Continuing my round-up of what wines to drink each week in 2019, I'll cover red wines from around the world. We should start (of course) with the red wines of France, the home of Bordeaux and Burgundy, as well as some terrific reds from the Rhône Valley.

In France the wines are named after the region, so "Bordeaux" is both the region as well as the name for the wines produced there — mainly from a blend of three grapes: Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Cabernet Franc — with minute quantities of Petit Verdot and sometimes Viognier to provide the "zing"!

Red wines from the Médoc region of Bordeaux were classified in 1855 according to price (and quality) — 61 châteaux in Bordeaux received a "growth" tag, with the top four (now five) being termed "Premier Cru" (First Growths): Lafite-Rothschild, Latour, Margaux, Haut-Brion and Mouton-Rothschild. Over the years another 371 châteaux have received official classification — out of some 7,000 châteaux in the region!

So, have a classed ("Grand Cru Classe") Bordeaux in your wine bucket list — prices of a decent Bordeaux should be upward of ₹5,000 (in India), although the classed growths would start at around ₹8,000 and go rapidly skywards.

Next would be the red wines of Burgundy ("Bourgogne") and the Rhône Valley. The reds of Burgundy are famously lighter and more elegant than wines from Bordeaux as they are made only from Pinot Noir, and the best (and of course the most expensive) are termed "Grand Cru": any wines with the terms "Corton", "Chambertin", "Clos", and of course "Romanée" on the label will set you back a considerable sum.

In contrast, the wines from lower down the Rhône river are made from a variety of grapes but mostly Syrah and Grenache and so are full-bodied and complex. Look for a Chapoutier or E Guigal from the Northern Rhône, any Châteauneuf-du-Pape and a Châteaude Saint Cosme from the Gigondas region.

Lastly, there would be Beaujolais Cru (made from the Gamay grape), also from the Rhône Valley: look for wines from Bouchard or Drouhin or even Louis Jadot.

Next, I would go to Italy, which has three wines from three different grapes on my to-do list: Barolo, made from the Nebbiolo grape in the Piedmont region of north-west Italy; Chianti and Super Tuscans, made in Tuscany using mainly Sangiovese grapes; and Amarone made using mainly the Corvina grape in the Veneto region of north-east Italy.

Look for Vietti Barolo, Querciabella Chianti Classico, Sassicaia or Tignanello, and Tenuta Sant'Antonio Amarone — all available in India.

And how can this sampling be complete without wines from the Iberian Peninsula? Spanish Rioja is made from the Tempranillo grape and Reserva/Gran Reserva wines are lovely: look for wines from Bodegas ("winery" in Spanish) Roda, Muga or Breton as well as Marqués de Cáceres and Marqués de Murrieta.

Then there's Port, made from a variety of local grapes (of which Touriga Nacional is the best-known) in a process that involves adding brandy to fortify the wine, which leaves it sweet enough to be used as a dessert wine. Look for Vintage Ports from producers like Cockburn, Croft, Dow, Harveys or Sandeman.

Mind you, we've just looked at the principal red wines of just four countries in Europe: so many wines, so little time!

Wines I've been drinking: A friend from Terroir — The Madras Wine Club (who's recently relocated to Bengaluru) was generous enough to host an intimate evening with some terrific wines — of the three wines quaffed, two stood out: the Tenuta Sant'Antonio Amarone 2013 (₹6,825 in Bengaluru) was sublime and complex, with a full-bodied taste and lots of ripe fruit and spice on the palate, while the Rioja Roda Reserva 2013 (Bodegas Roda, ₹6,242 in Bengaluru) displayed a surprising finesse, with ripe cherries, some minerality and a great finish.

A great way to start the New Year. Cheers!

Alok Chandra is a Bengaluru-based wine consultant



Frame for frame

Atul Dodiya's new show is a homage equally to Hitchcock and to the artistic condition, writes Ranjita Ganesan

By marrying voices to thus-far mute images, *Blackmail* (1929) marked a pivot in the films of Alfred Hitchcock and of all Britain. Yet, later on in his career, the master of suspense would declare silent pictures to be "the purest form of cinema". Nine decades after the talkie first released, artist Atul Dodiya has transported it back to a soundless medium. Through black and white oil paints on 36 canvases, he pays homage to the *Psycho* filmmaker.

"Seven Minutes of Blackmail", the title of his new exhibition in Mumbai's Chemould Prescott Road gallery, refers to a disquieting sequence leading up to a murder. In this time, an artist lures the naive protagonist, who has stormed out on her detective boyfriend after a fight, into his studio. They talk and draw a little, he plays the piano and talks her into trying on a tutu so that he can paint her. Very quickly, he launches a sexual attack until she reaches for and uses a bread knife to end it. The timidity, hesitation, furtiveness and strain contained in those scenes are conveyed in Dodiya's frames.

There are two parts to the show: a faithful recreation of moments from the movie, and separately an expressionist enquiry. In the first, Dodiya's precise brush achieves what he describes as a "contact sheet" (a print used in film editing to examine chosen frames before finalising them) for those who have not watched the film. As such, along with the aesthetic genius of the filmmaker, this section becomes a tribute also to the celluloid that carried these precious pictures.

Dodiya is a true-blue Hitchcockian, having seen most of the director's films twice if not three times. "I enjoy the way he would cut shots, put a sequence together, and the way he would show details," he says. He began pausing and photographing the film with his iPhone; these prints covered his desk for months while he reproduced them in paintings of 1.5 X 2 feet. This freezing of frames allows for an appreciation of how the filmmaker employed light, shadows and props in a limited space to produce shock and horror: the top of spiralling stairs, a chandelier casting menacing shadows on the face of the transgressor, the frightening picture of a clown in the background, a lifeless hand jutting out from behind a curtain.

With the use of sharp black and white, the lamp-dipped luminous quality of the scenes comes through, and in light hazy strokes, he renders the grainy effect of photographs taken from television. This speaks of both the original beauty and later deterioration of the images. Some of the paintings feature a tint of ochre, which Hitchcock was known to use at times. Walking through the three dozen pictures in the room, one sees the Czech actress Anny Ondra's face going from coy and playful to terrified and eerily composed.

Of Hitchcock's many visually arresting works, what struck Dodiya about *Blackmail* during a second viewing of the film two years ago was the central presence of "the artist" in the story. "The relationship between man and woman was interesting, of course. But also the work of art and creativity have always been my concerns," he says. The second, more



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ATUL DODIYA
Artist

expressionist part of the exhibition dives into the artistic condition. "That pushing oneself and withdrawing ... something similar happens in the process of painting and creating. You attack the canvas and the canvas tells you not to do it," he observes.

A collage of large wooden palettes (quite like the palettes that appear in the sequence of struggle in the film) runs across two walls. Rather than dabs of paint, they bear dark abstract motifs that illustrate the inner world

of the painter and the dilemmas of the artistic process. Discernible among these are a skull, a half-white-half-black pig and a silhouette of someone sitting on the edge of a wall. Dodiya is known for including objects in his work, most memorably shop shutters and more recently curio cabinets. Cabinets appear this time too, and are filled with photographs, trinkets,

tiny images of his earlier paintings and leftover cuts of wood.

The show reiterates the painter's long-standing love for cinema, a love that does not discriminate between the mainstream, independent and international. Growing up in Ghatkopar in suburban Mumbai, he watched films of Rajesh Khanna in Uday Talkies and Shreyas Talkies, both of which

have made way for malls and multiplexes. He routinely sketched the actor in a bid to impress friends of his older sisters who were all fans.

Films find reference in most of Dodiya's works, notably kitschy stills of Sridevi, Madhabi Mukherjee, Aruna Irani, as well as international figures such as Brigitte Bardot. Breathlessly, he counts the attributes of cinema of doyens such as Hitchcock: lifelike, with great aesthetics, form, textures, tonalities. "I wanted to see how the narratives would transform on the flat, oil medium." They transform rather well.

Seven Minutes of Blackmail can be viewed at the Chemould Prescott Road Gallery in Fort, Mumbai, until February 21

Not again, please

Amrita Singh on *Replicas*, a watchable sci-fi film that no one should dream of remaking

Keanu Reeves is the star he is thanks to his edgy film choices, a penchant for the beyond-believable and, of course, his charming looks. But *The Matrix* star's latest sci-fi thriller, *Replicas*, cannot be salvaged despite all that Reeves has to offer. Directed by Jeffrey Nachmanoff of *The Day After Tomorrow* (2004) fame, *Replicas* is a film that should not be replicated.

Reeves plays the character of William Foster, a brilliant neuroscientist working at a biomedical company in Puerto Rico. Five minutes into the film, we realise that the project at hand is one that fascinates many: imprinting the biological or human mind onto a synthetic or robotic one to create clones. His first attempt is a disaster, with the robot tearing itself apart.

Foster lives with his wife Mona, played by Alice Eve, and three kids. The film kickstarts when the family is all set to go on vacation but meets with a car accident, fatal for everyone but Foster. Physically unscathed, his expression of emotion at this devastating encounter with fate is interrupted by his irrepressible genius. He realises he is smart enough to bring his family back to life. Here begins the story of



Foster recreating his family from scratch, with amino acids and all the other dope needed to create a human being. He is helped by his assistant, actor Thomas Middleditch, whose sadness at the death of the Foster family members is greater than what Foster is allowed to display.

The film makes creating "replicas" seem so easy that I felt I could do it in the basement of my house. Even though the dialogues team with scientific jargon, the simplistic processes on display feel like a laughable farce. The pods

needed to create the Foster family and the batteries needed to keep the pods charged all make their way into the Foster home with bewildering ease, attracting no unwanted attention from neighbours or even the police.

Other such obstacles in the plot are countered with quick, too-simple solutions. For instance, Reeves simply deletes the memory of his third child, Zoe, from the minds of his wife and kids because he has only three pods at his disposal. Similarly, when the replica of his daughter, Sophie, has a bad dream, about the

car accident that took place in real life, he sedates her and deletes that memory too. The cut, copy, delete options are so arbitrarily applied to the minds of Foster's family that it equates the complexity of the human mind to that of a machine.

The film tries to establish a connection between human consciousness and the body by suggesting that what makes us human is the fact that we feel things. Which is to state the obvious. When Foster grapples with how

to imprint his wife's biological mind onto the replica's without her tearing herself apart, he realises that the touch of his hands sends signals to her blank brain. His eureka moment about skin and touch took me back to fifth-grade biology.

Everything goes swimmingly for Foster till he is threatened by his boss, played by John Ortiz. To divulge more details here will be to kill the already too-thin veneer of drama and tension in the film. A short car-chase, a dose of honesty and a tiny surprise wrap up this fairly straightforward watch. While there is nothing wrong with being straightforward and I wasn't exactly bored, the created genius of William Foster made the end predictable. He was a man who knew too much, who had a solution to all problems. It has long been an excellent narrative device, but suspension of disbelief has its limitations — and limits — too.

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