



Five-a-Day

Moscow restaurant Twins Garden produces a range of innovative vegetable wines

Words by Laura Price. Illustration by Tim Lahan

Sergey and Ivan Berezutskiy are as different as identical twins could be. One loves science, the other loves nature. One is talkative and confident, the other shy. They bicker all the time. But one thing they have in common is an ambition that has led them to dismantle a highly successful restaurant and start afresh, building a 50-hectare farm to supply their own ingredients and even inventing their own wine. When they closed their original Twins restaurant and opened Twins Garden on a new site in 2017, the brothers created a vegetable-only degustation alongside their regular tasting and à la carte menus. Developing a vegetable wine was the natural next step because, for them, a juice pairing felt “too easy”, and conventional wine wouldn’t allow them to highlight the true flavour from their veg-based dishes.

“We wanted to be able to show the full potential of the vegetable,” says Sergey, the quiet one. Ivan adds: “We found that with juice, you don’t actually change anything about the ingredient, but when you have it in the bottle as wine, you can extract more aroma from it and show the ingredient from a different angle.” A little over a year ago, they started experimenting with vegetable wines on their farm just outside Moscow. Parsley, dandelion, rhubarb, tomato, parsnip, leek, carrot – if it grows on the farm, it’s likely to become wine.

Production is small – around 15 to 20 litres from each vegetable – so the wines are served exclusively at the 12-seater chefs’ table, alongside the Garden menu. Over the 13-course tasting, diners try courgette flower alongside rhubarb rosé, dry-aged cabbage with carrot wine, and tomatoes and onion with leek mead.

The results are varied and, as with traditional wines, subjective. Ivan’s favourite is the parsnip wine; Sergey prefers rhubarb. Tomato is the closest to real wine – the riper the tomato, the greater the honey aroma, and the brothers grow 12 varieties of the fruit to serve alongside the drink. Dandelion wine is a feat – the bitter milk of the stalk is discarded and the yellow petals are infused with cold water before vinification, resulting in a lightly sweet, medium-alcohol beverage. It’s not for everyone, of course, and sommelier Alisa Salimyanova gives strict instructions to taste the food, then the wine. “Normally it’s vice versa but we would like you to try the food first and then the drink,” she says. “The rhubarb rosé is lightly sparkling and very intense and sour if you drink it by itself, but with the sweetness of the courgette flower and peach purée it works perfectly.”

Salimyanova is involved with every step of the process, which is similar to conventional winemaking and takes about two weeks. The juice is squeezed from the rhubarb stalks, with the hard

Anti-Social Media

The Noble Rot guide to gastronomic Instagram tribes

Words by George Reynolds | Illustrations by Chester Holme

part left in the container because they use organic plastic for vinification. A little sugar goes in, plus some enzymes and Burgundy yeast (“because Burgundy yeast is better”) and vinification takes place over four to six days, depending on the weather (it takes longer during Moscow’s harsh winter). Afterwards, it is strained and left to stabilise for two to three weeks at room temperature, before CO₂ is added manually with a pump. Alcohol ranges from 3.5% for the leek mead to 10% for the parsnip and parsley wines.

“We take the product and decide what’s best to do with it,” Sergey says. “Rhubarb is pretty sour so it’s better as white wine or sparkling. If you have root vegetables, it’s better to use red wine technology because it’s more intense. We age some of them in oak barrels, but the winemaking is traditional. It’s the same as with grape wines but you have parsley instead.” It doesn’t always work out, but half the fun is in failing. “Logically, the best vegetable for wine is beetroot because it’s red, it’s super traditional for Russia and it has a lot of sugar – one of the highest amounts of sugar to make fermentation,” says Ivan. “But we failed with it. Beetroot has a lot of earthy flavours and it didn’t work with wine. So we make beer from it instead.” Indeed, their IPA-style beetroot beer served with a beef-like vegetarian chopped cherry tartare is one of the highlights of the menu.

Initial reactions to the project were mixed, but now winemakers are beginning to take notice. “When we started to do this, we talked a lot with the wineries and winemakers and they thought we were crazy people trying to do something impossible,” says Sergey. “But now we have a lot of winemakers coming to the restaurant and enjoying this wine.” And with Twins Garden debuting at No.19 in The World’s 50 Best Restaurants 2019 list, there’s even more demand for their

vegetable wines than ever. For those with more conventional tastes, the restaurant also has one of the largest regular wine collections in Russia, with over 1,000 listings.

It’s hardly surprising that the 33-year-old brothers decided to do things differently. They built their farm just after the counter sanctions in 2014 that meant Russian chefs could no longer import the ingredients they had relied on for so long from Europe and the US. In the five years since the government measures, a whole new Russian dairy industry has sprouted, and cooks have had to become more and more creative with local produce to feed their customers. Add to that the fact that Ivan trained at El Bulli, the legendary restaurant where Catalan chef Ferran Adrià created foams and spherification. It was an experience that opened the young Ivan’s mind to new ideas, and undoubtedly led to some of his more creative dishes – he spends two hours in his test kitchen each day and concentrates the flavour from vegetables such as tomatoes and bell peppers, a classic Adrià technique.

Vegetable wines aren’t common in fine-dining restaurants or in Russia, though berry wines are popular in the south. “There’s a glut of berries in season in the Russian south and people don’t know what to do with the whole harvest, so they make wine,” says Ivan. “But we tried berry wine and didn’t think it made sense for us. It’s good but it’s super simple.” And, clearly, ‘simple’ isn’t in the twins’ vocabulary. As for their future plans, the Berezutskiys are working on a pumpkin wine and the ultimate goal is to make beer from the liquid extracted from birch, Russia’s most emblematic tree. And after that? “When we think about the ingredient, we always try to ask the same question,” says Ivan. “‘Why not?’ There are no boundaries, there are no limits.” That’s one thing they both agree on.

Instagram shapes how we eat and drink today, but to anyone unfamiliar with how it works it can be bewildering: a self-contained ecosystem in which various factions clamour for engagement and ‘likes’. So, in the interest of good old-fashioned service journalism, Noble Rot presents the following spotter’s guide to the various tribes a new user is likely to encounter upon signing in for the first time. #Happygramming!

Name: The Natural Wine Evangelical

Profile: Loves natural wine; refers to it as ‘natty juice’ with distressing frequency. As in: “Come to my Joy Division remixes x Isaan food pop-up ‘Larb Will Tear Us Apart’ next Thursday for one night only. Sick beats and banging natty juice from magnum all night”. Or: “So sick to spend the weekend in the Loire Valley tasting Domaine Pet’s field blend direct from qvevri. Just the freshest, cleanest natty juice #respect”. Perhaps a minimal intervention is in order.

Sample hashtags: #loire #juice #sick



Name: The Travelling Product Placement

Profile: Circles the globe as an ambassador for a number of decidedly unglamorous but highly lucrative kitchen products – all for the price of a few excruciatingly contrived captions promoting said white goods. For example: “So stoked to be here in #Guanzhong touring the factory where @XXX source their #chicken #rectal #thermometers. There really is no better way to check your #sundayroast is done.” Or: “Sitting back in sunny Pripjat this evening enjoying a FEAST courtesy of @XXX’s exclusive new #waste removal system. They really are the market leaders in commercial and industrial kitchen solutions for professional caterers!”

Sample hashtag: #ad

