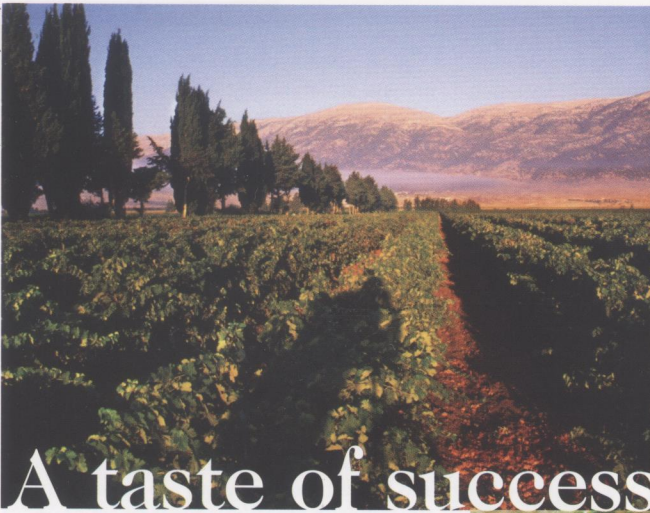


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A taste of success

Lebanon's wine industry may be small, but it is achieving global recognition.

The wine industry is flourishing in Lebanon. Although Lebanon doesn't produce a lot of wine, international connoisseurs hold the region's best in high regard, and its rarity adds to its appeal.

Annual production amounts to about 5 million bottles, equivalent to the yield of per-



haps one French vineyard. Consistency, however, is a particular quality of Lebanese wine. Most of the vineyards and wineries are situated in the Bekaa Valley, a fertile valley running 75 miles through mountains at an average height of 3,000 feet (914m) above sea level, where, with reassuring regularity, the grapes receive an abundance of sunshine in the summer and rain in the winter.

Today, two of the largest and most successful wineries are Château Ksara and Château Kefraya, both in the Bekaa Valley. Château Ksara is the oldest, dating back to 1857. Under its forward-thinking chairman, Zafer Chaoui, the winery has developed an outstanding international reputation.

"The weather conditions here give our wines an aroma and complexity that do not exist in many places," says Chaoui, adding

that the vineyard has made substantial investments in equipment and human resources.

Château Ksara grows its grapes without the use of pesticides or herbicides and harvests them by hand. The wines are

aged in underground limestone galleries, where the temperature is consistently 52 to 55 degrees Fahrenheit (11 to 13 degrees Celsius), providing ideal conditions for bringing them to the peak of perfection.

Château Kefraya began producing wine after Michel de Bustros, the founder, chairman and chief executive, initiated construction of the winery in 1951.

It continued to grow vines and produce wine despite being under siege and bombardment throughout the civil war that occurred between 1975 and 1990. De Bustros had to accompany the wine containers by boat from the south of the country to Beirut, a 24-hour journey, because the roads were impassable.

One of Kefraya's most celebrated blends is Comte de M, 1996, which leading wine critic Robert Parker awarded 91 points out of 100, describing it as an amazing accomplishment.

Today, the Kefraya vineyards stretch across 740 acres, and its wines are sold in more than 35 countries. "Every year new markets are conquered," says de Bustros. "Last year, our wines reached Mexico and Venezuela."

Emile Majdalani, Château Kefraya's commercial director, says: "Allowing the noblest produce of our territory to travel and be known to the world is the most satisfying aspect of our work."

Both Château Ksara and Château Kefraya produce more than 2 million bottles of wine each annually and are seeking to boost sales abroad. ❖

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