

Georgia On My Mind



Georgia is one of the oldest wine producing regions in the world. There is even a popular theory that the word *wine* itself comes from the Georgian word “gvino” which the Romans shorten to *vino* and the French shortened it further to *vin*.” Furthermore, there is evidence that Roman invaders learned certain wine making techniques from the Georgians and took those methods back to Italy.

That evidence includes the discovery of ancient winemaking objects, including clay amphorae that date back to around 5,000 BC, in region that is now modern-day Georgia. In addition, the area boasts over 500 hundred different wine grape varieties – *vitis vinifera* - many of which are only found in Georgia. These grapes thrive in the rich alluvial soil laden valleys that are nestled in the shadows of the Caucasus Mountain range. The area also shares the same “viticultural latitude” as other well-known wine growing regions, such as the Piedmont appellation in Italy, the Rhone Valley in France and the Rioja region in Spain. The temperate climate provides warm sunny days and cool nights that allow the grapes to develop firm tannins and great acidity.

Georgia has four main wine producing regions. Kakheti; the largest wine producing region located the south east, Kartli; in the center of the country, where the capital city Tbilisi lies, Imereti; the gastronomic capital known for its signature varietal Tzitzka , and Racha-Lechkhumi; Georgia's smallest wine region, famous for its natural semi-sweet wines.

The winemaking culture in Georgia is an interesting blend of traditional methods – which includes using qvevris (large earthenware jars that are buried underground, with just the neck exposed), in which the entire wine making process takes place, including initial fermentation right through to maturation - alongside modern winemaking techniques, so quality is improving at a phenomenal pace. Best of all, Georgian wines offer an opportunity to discover unique grape varieties from one of the oldest wine regions at a reasonable price.

Saperavi is one of Georgia's most important red wine making varieties. The **2013 Teliani Valley Saperavi** from Kakheti region, is unique because not only is the skin red, but so is the flesh of the grape, which produces a dark, inky color. This version has complex aromas of dark plum, tobacco and black pepper on the nose. The mouthfeel has medium-weight to it, supporting flavors of black cherry cola, black plum and blackcurrant jam. A good choice with soft, creamy cheeses. **\$11**

Fruit, from the Kartli, Imereti and Kakheti wine districts, is handpicked and hand sorted for the **Bagrationi 1882 Non-Vintage Classic Brut** from Tbilisi. The grapes are fermented on the lees in stainless steel tanks at cool temperatures and carbonated via the Charmat Methode. This process tends to preserve the fruit flavors while adding some texture and complexity to the wine. Scents of melon and citrus are found on the nose while flavors of green apple, nectarine and honeydew melon are carried across the palate on medium-sized bubbles. Just a touch of ever-so-slight sweetness gives the wine good depth. **\$15**

If you're looking for something light and bright, the **2013 Pheasant's Tears Chinuri** is a beautifully crisp white wine, made from the Chinuri grape. Vinified without oak, this medium-bodied white wine has great structure with aromas of acacia flowers, jasmine, peach and grapefruit. Abundant acidity keeps the bright flavors of tropical fruits, nectarine and lime fresh and the finish crisp. **\$18**

I am not a fan of “orange” wines. I think they are generally over-rated and over-sold, but in a brilliant marketing move, Georgian winemakers call their version “amber” wines, and I found one I really like. The **2012 Schuchmann 'Vinoterra' Kisi** is made from the indigenous Kisi variety grown in Georgia's Kakheti region. This complex and dark white wine was fermented in Qvevri and matured in oak. It sports a beautiful dark amber color and a bouquet of orange blossoms, almonds, and sweet spices. The refreshingly dry palate features flavors of dried apricot, citrus and stone fruit that leads to a long, layered finish. Try this Kisi with grilled chicken, turkey or pasta. **\$18**