

#WinesofGeorgia



## გამარჯობა | Gamarjoba!

### GEORGIAN WINES FOR EVERY PALATE BY **CHRISTY CANTERBURY, MASTER OF WINE**

The US is embracing Georgian wines. Imports of Georgian wines have increased fourfold since 2012. Georgia exported over 1 million bottles to the US in 2021, a 19% increase over 2020 sales. More than 150 Georgian wineries are now available here.

Yet, Georgian wines are off most wine drinkers' radars. In fact, most wine professionals - even in major markets - remain unfamiliar with them.

Happily, there is a Georgian wine for every palate. Georgia boasts a diverse grape variety pool - with about 20 in widespread use - and produces many different styles. There are three major categories.

#### Dry Qvevri Wines, Especially Amber Wines

Most who are familiar with Georgian wines first think of qvevri wines. In fact, this category represents under 5% of production. These are rare!

Qvevri wines come in **red**, **rosé** and **amber**. Qvevri wines have more texture and grip than wines made with modern techniques. Qvevri wines are for the table, not for drinking on their own.

While red qvevri wines behave much like "European style" reds made in stainless steel and wood, amber wines are more distinctive. Their colors range from gold to dark amber and their palates are tannic because the juice is generally (though not always) fermented with grape skins and stems. Ambers have ten times more tannins than their "European style" counterparts!

With their firm palates and unfamiliar aromas, if classic amber wines initially are too hard a sale, two sub-categories provide a gentler introduction:

- Amber wines from central and western Georgia, which are lighter and brighter in style and body. These usually are not fermented with their skins, or at least not all the skins, and stems are rare. These have less tannin.
- Amber wines made in tank rather than in qvevri, which spend less time overall on skins.

By the way, Georgians strongly prefer the term "amber" over "orange". Why suggest another fruit when referring to grape wines?!

# GEORGIAN WINES FOR EVERY PALATE

## Dry European-Style Wines

Almost all Georgian wine is made in a "European style". These wines are the perfect starting place for consumers. European-style winemaking allows wine drinkers to explore comfortably unique Georgian grapes made in a way that easily allows them to compare the wines to styles they already know.

## Semi-Sweet Wines

Semi-sweet wines are Georgian specialties, made in all colors. In fact, Georgia's most famous and most exported wines are its semi-sweet reds, like Usakhelauri, Khvanchkara, Kindzmarauli, Akhasheni, and Ojaleshi.

Though few currently make it to the US, these reds are exquisitely balanced with fine acidic verve. Generally, they are more refreshing and lifted than US red wines with residual sugar.

## Placing Georgian Wines on Retail Shelves and Wine Lists

Telling personal wine experiences are great for closing a sale, but some customers simply need a visual prompt. Prominent placement goes a long way. Highlighted groups with tags like "Sommelier's Choice", "Staff Favorites" or "Wines Under \$xx" draw attention.

Similarly, try showcasing Georgian wines with other wines of similar style and weight. A Cabernet Sauvignon-lover may never wander to the "Other World Regions" section, but if a Georgian Saperavi sits next to Washington State blend and a St. Joseph Rouge, chances of a Saperavi sale are irrefutably higher.

Additionally, there is power in numbers. One Georgian bottling might inadvertently suggest that a buyer isn't willing to stake a claim on the category. Several - or more - Georgian wines emphasize the establishment's interest, reassuring a customer considering a purchase.

Finally, and critically, never group amber wines with rosés! This is the greatest possible disservice to the category. Ambers behave like reds. Rosés behave like whites. Placing amber wines with rosé wines makes consumers think they are interchangeable. They absolutely are not. Amber wines should be sold as red wine equivalents because they have tannins. Plus, they should never be served cooler than cellar temperature. Finally, ambers are not only definitively food wines. They also are wines for heartier foods.

After finding the right Georgian wine for your customer's palate, wish them the traditional Georgian toast, "Gaumarjos!", meaning "Victory to you!" Ironically, this toast would be appropriate for you and your sale of a Georgian wine, too.

