

#WinesofGeorgia



## HOW TO SELL THE WIDE ARRAY OF GEORGIAN AMBER WINES BY **CHRISTY CANTERBURY, MASTER OF WINE**

Georgians are famous for their ancient method of fermenting white grapes with their skins in buried clay qvevri vessels. They call them amber wines because "orange wine" could signify wines made from oranges.

In these clay qvevri, grape juice typically is left in contact with grape skins during fermentation and aging, often up to five or six months. This is the predominant production method in Georgia's largest and easternmost winemaking region, Kakheti. However, as one moves west toward the Black Sea, winemakers tend to use less—and sometimes no—skin contact, and the length of time with the skins and in qvevri shortens. Throughout Georgia, winemakers also make adjustments based on preferred style, grape variety, vintage characteristics and other parameters.

There are many ardent admirers of amber wines, yet there are many more wine lovers who don't understand the category or haven't yet tried amber wines. Just like white and red wines, amber wines come in a broad spectrum of styles. To simplify things, I wanted share the views of noted sommelier and educator, Lasha Tsatava, DipWSET, who I credit with coming up with an instructional guide that describes three basic categories of Georgian amber wines. Helpfully, Georgian wine back labels often describe the wine's vinification and style which can also aid trade and consumers when selling the wines.

- **Easy-going amber:** These are a great introduction to amber wines. Many of these amber wines are made with little or shorter skin contact in qvevri—often hailing from central or western Georgia. This group also includes grapes fermented with skins in thermoregulated tank rather than in qvevri. This category shows more fresh fruit flavors and lighter tannins with a moderate to medium body.
- **Oaked amber:** This is a cross-over category where the wine is fermented and aged in qvevri but then goes into oak barrels. The oak rounds out the tannins and adds suppleness to the palate. Still, these are heartier, fuller-bodied wines with medium tannin levels. Their flavors included dried fruits and savory notes, often with hints of toasty, spicy oak. These are wines for the table.
- **Full-on amber:** This category is best-suited to those familiar with ambers. These definitely are wines for food. The tannins are as robust as any hearty red wine and often technically have higher levels of tannin! The wines are full bodied and often have higher alcohol to balance those tannins. The tannins are usually more prominent than the acidity. These wines tasted of dried fruits mixed with savory nuances.

To sell amber wines, a crucial starting point to understand is that amber wines do not share a middle ground between white and red with rosé. Amber wines behave like reds, not rosés. Amber wines are fermented (mostly) with their skins, so they have moderate to high tannin levels. Rosé wines behave like whites because they're made like white wines—with very little skin contact—and have no to little tannin.