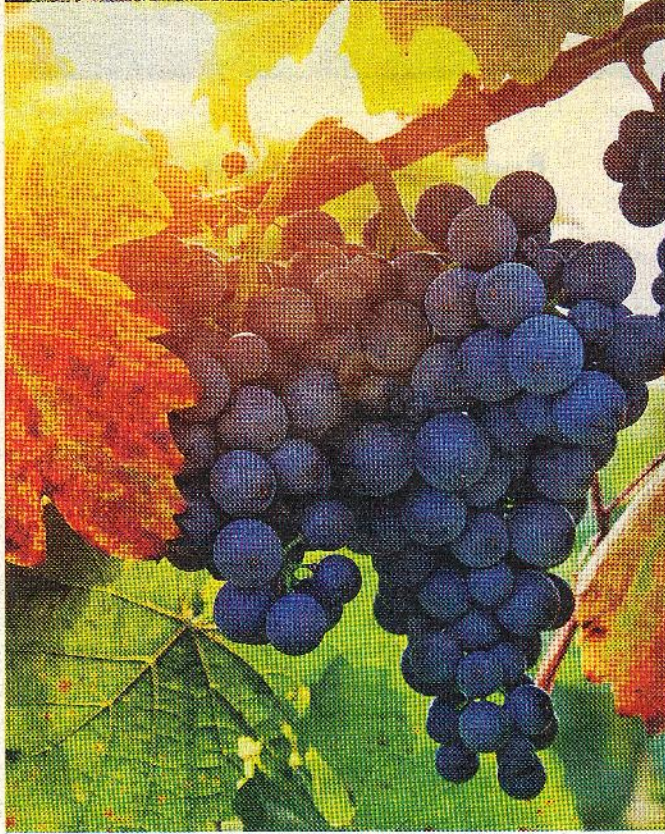


DORTMUND



The most popular football team,
in the most unlikely of places

*Clockwise from top left:
The hilltop town of
Sighir; the spirit
winery vessels; the
vine straight from the
vineyard; white wine
in the amber flask.*





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GEORGIA HERE WINE LIVES

Sarah May Grunwald, sommelier, professor of wine and owner of Taste Georgia, explains what makes this historic occupation so important

At the crossroads of Europe and Asia, along the eastern shores of the Black Sea, there is a fertile country surrounded by the stunning Caucasus Mountains. Tucked between Turkey, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Russia, rests this land of myths, legend and rich cultural identity. Georgia is the birthplace of wine; an honour it wears well with traditions inextricably linked to feasting, hospitality, Christianity and one of the world's most-loved drink.

Throughout the ages, invasions and oppression, Georgia and the production of wine have always been interlinked. With a plethora of indigenous varieties, the vine is the symbol of both country and people, evident as grape motifs are everywhere. Despite the efforts of foreign invaders, ranging from Mongols to Soviets, the Georgians have managed to sustain their cultural identity. No other country on earth can boast such a long and continuous tradition of wine making as Georgia, with a technique dating back 8,000 years. The proof is not only in the archaeological records of the past, but alive and well in the passing of knowledge and traditions down through the generations.

Since the beginning, Georgians have used a simple egg-shaped terracotta vessel known as a qvevri. The qvevri forms the heart of traditional Georgian winemaking and wine storage, and has been recognised by UNESCO as protected intangible heritage. The Georgian qvevri is the world's oldest known wine vessel. Its wide mouth tapers at the bottom, which is buried in the cool earth in a marani, or wine cellar. Wines made in qvevri have distinct aromas and flavours compared to the wines of more modern and conventional winemaking methods. Though there are regional differences in these tactics, generally after the grapes are crushed, everything from skin to seed is placed in the qvevri for fermentation. After fermentation, the wine maker seals the qvevri, solid materials sink to the bottom and a few months later the qvevri is opened. The results clearly reflect the grape that was used and the local terroir. Due to contact with the

grape's skin, white wines are not the conventional yellow hues most wine drinkers are accustomed to, but range in orange tones from bright tangerine to a rich amber. The most common red variety is saperavi, which produces inky red wines with wild berry and pine aromas, common white varieties include Mtsvane and Rkatsiteli.

The best way to experience this mystical land with its mountains, wines and opulent cultural tapestry is to visit it. At the Georgian table in wine country a traveller is welcomed warmly and becomes a friend. Eating, toasting and drinking wine at a Georgian supra (feast) in the hands of an experienced tamada (toastmaster) is a magical experience, as piles of Georgian dishes are placed on the table, one after another, followed by copious amounts of wine. Wine is consumed following the poetic lead of the tamada. Guests go through a feeling of total sensory stimulation, with the eclectic colours and flavour of the food that are matched perfectly with wine.

Kakheti, Georgia's primary wine region, can be found just a one-hour drive from its capital city, Tbilisi. One of the world's oldest wine regions, it's home to a revival in traditional Georgian winemaking. Guests can

experience the ancient winemaking methods of the Alaverdi monks, who have been making traditional qvevri wine for more than 1,000 years; visit the gorgeous hilltop town Signaghi; and take in a multitude of wineries that have fantastic tasting facilities for travellers and friends to enjoy.

It's at the Georgian table that travellers truly experience Georgian culture. This is where the hard work and sweat of the grape growers and the winemakers is enjoyed, it's the physical and cultural expression of the Georgian people; it's the link they share today with their Neolithic ancestors and a call to stop for a moment and appreciate this wonderful gift to humanity. Drinking Georgian wine is remembering our collective past.

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