

Georgian wine, ancient and modern:

Promise & Paradox

This fascinating tasting, presented by Lisa Granik MW at the 2015 Conference of the Society of Wine Educators, explored the varied styles of the Republic of Georgia, an ancient wine region lying in the cradle of wine. The intriguing title suggests the tension between the past and present as well as competing – indeed, contradictory – styles: modern, conventional whites and reds as opposed to those fermented in individual, sunken clay amphorae called *qvevri* in Georgia. To make it even more complicated, the *qvevri* white wines range from dark yellow, even amber in color to a typical light gold. A few oddities with sediment will put off all but the most adventurous consumers. Moreover, there are many indigenous (or certainly little-known) grape varieties to challenge the uninitiated such as Mtsvane, Tsolikouri or Rkatsiteli in white and Saperavi in red. The latter grape, a *teinturier* with pigmented flesh, seems to perform well whether handled in tank or *qvevri*. With its impressive color in the glass and vibrant, fruit-filled taste profile, Saperavi has the qualities to appeal to wine drinkers in many cultures. It also helps that prices are absurdly low. It will be interesting to follow the commercial progress of these Georgian wines on the U.S. market.

White Wines

Teliani Valley Tsolikouri 2011, Lechkumi – Western Georgia ***

Pale straw gold. Clean, pronounced aromatics of nuanced yellow fruits. The palate has texture and subtlety and delivers a finely accented finish, dry yet soft and balanced. Easy to like.

Schuchmann Mtsvane 2013, Kakheti – Eastern Georgia ****

Pale gold. Ultraclean to the nose as well as intense and focused, with inflections of citrus, white fruits and white pepper. On the palate, the first impression is of softness and restraint. This appealing white is medium weight and clean, revealing a persistent and delicately expressive aftertaste with very fine acidity and dusty, peppery notes. I have been favorably impressed by other Schuchmann wines as well, which are certainly worth seeking out.

Kondoli Rkatsiteli 2011, Kakheti – Eastern Georgia ****

Pale straw gold. Forthcoming, expressive aroma expressing dried yellow peach and quince. On the palate, the wine is clean, medium-bodied and smooth, with moderate length and faint apparent sweetness. An appealing and individual wine which may have seen brief aging in old oak.

Satrapezo Rkatsiteli 2009, Kakheti – Eastern Georgia (qvevri) ****

Gold to the eye. Concentrated, focused nose dominated by dried apricot. The wine exhibits a polished mouth-feel and is medium-full in weight. The finish imparts a soft feel with delicate, embedded acidity. This qvevri white has individuality and finesse.

Iago's Rkatsiteli 2011, Kartli – Eastern Georgia (qvevri) *?**

Light gold. Arresting, intense nose characterized by an unusual profile, principally dried yellow fruits and an unidentifiable spice. These attributes carry over to the taste, and the wine is medium weight and smooth, with hidden acidity. Idiosyncratic but will find its fans.

Vinoterra Mtsvane 2011, Kakheti – Eastern Georgia (qvevri) *?**

Dark yellow gold. Striking aroma exhibiting a mélange of dried yellow fruit and a note of orange peel. In the mouth, this qvevri-fermented Mtsvane at first shows a dustiness and phenolic overtones. Medium plus in weight, the wine has a touch of astringency and then finishes with less intensity.

Antadze Mtsvane 2011, Kakheti – Eastern Georgia (qvevri) **?

Cloudy amber yellow with sediment. Particular nose combining dusty notes with white pepper and dried yellow fruit. The wine is surprisingly rich as it enters the mouth and well-defined by lemony acidity. There is a distinct flavoring of sediment in the conclusion. Eccentric.

Marani Tvishi 2012 (Tsitska-Tsolikouri blend), Imereti – Western Georgia ***

Pale straw. Very clean nose, yet lacking expression and identity. Faint dusty white fruit. The taste is clean, balanced and dry until the finish, when the residual sugar becomes apparent. This semi-sweet white with 40 g/l of RS is easy to drink but does not have a distinct personality.

Red Wines

Shalvino “7 Steps” Aladasturi 2011 – Western Georgia **

Nearly moderately dense dark red with a purple rim. The wine has an exaggerated, penetrating dark cherry scent. The taste is abrupt and sharply dry, with elevated acidity. There is an undercurrent of jammy berry fruit. Severe.

Pheasant’s Tears Tavkveri 2013, Kartli – Eastern Georgia (qvevri) ****

Pale red akin to rosé. Fragrant, lifted small red fruits to the nose. The wine is soft and polished on the palate, medium-bodied and shows considerable length, although the finish is understated and subtly flavored.

Marani Kvareli Saperavi 2012, Kvareli District, Kakheti – Eastern Georgia *(*)**

Nearly dense dark red with purple rim. The nose indicates concentration and offers notable complexity characterized by mature red cherry, tobacco and pepper. On the palate, the impression is once more of ample red fruit along with moderate plus concentration and weight. The wine is well-structured, possessing balanced acidity and tannin. Young and in need of bottle aging to open and soften.

Orgo Saperavi 2012, Kakheti – Eastern Georgia (qvevri) *(*+)**

Dense dark red with thin purple rim. Youthful, reserved, concentrated nose with a core of attractive dark red fruit. The wine is young, vibrant and full-bodied as well as fleshy and muscular. There is a marked structure of acidity and tannin leaving a measure of astringency to be resolved. This is a far more serious example to cellar.

Fortified Wine (white)

Shalvino Kardenakhi 2011, PDO Kardenakhi, Kakheti – Eastern Georgia **+

Pale tawny orange. Unclean nose with a background of nut and wet wood. The taste is far better, marked by roasted nut and a balance of sweetness and acidity. Has its good points, but lacks purity. 35 g/l RS.