

Georgian wine in the UK

By SARAH ABBOTT MW

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SARAH ABBOTT MW is the founder and director of Swirl Wine Group, which she founded in 2006 after a decade in the wine industry. She is co-chair of the International Wine Competition and has been a finalist in the Louis Roederer wine writing competition, and was co-author of the Burgundy section of 'The Wine Opus', an award-winning wine guide published by Dorling Kindersley in 2010. Today, she is widely recognised for her work with some of the wine world's most exciting emerging regions. She is also a vocal advocate for women in the trade.

Qvevri, the large earthenware pots used for the fermentation, storage and ageing of traditional Georgian wine

More about where to find Georgian wine in the UK: www.georgianwine.uk/stockists

The UK wine trade and consumers are increasingly looking for wines with history, tradition and a back story. Georgia has been making wines for centuries, but it has only been in the last few years that its unique Qveri-style wines have captured the imagination of UK wine buyers and adventurous wine drinkers. Today, Georgia combines tradition and innovation to produce a range of wines in all styles, that are increasingly popular in the UK.

Wine tells the story of its country. In the past three decades Georgia has come from civil war and great hardship to astonishing recovery. I have never seen a country that identifies itself with its wine as much as Georgia. But until relatively recently, the Georgian wine sector did not have the structures and support that we take for granted in France, Italy, Spain and Australia. And most Georgian producers have really only been focused on sustained exports to the UK for the last five years.

Georgian producers are fortunate to have the support of their national wine agency, which is part of the Ministry of Agriculture. Wine is a priority product for the ministry. The country itself has transformed infrastructure and entrepreneurial expertise in the last 10-15 years. Wine is booming.

The World Bank rates Georgia highly for 'ease of

doing business.' Investors have the confidence to support existing and new vineyards and wineries, and the number of wineries has exploded over the last five years.

2021 was the best year ever for Georgian wine exports to the UK. We are now the fastest growing of the new markets. Georgian wines are being imported by specialist on-trade suppliers, by Georgian specialists, and by national agencies. The growing number of retail listings is familiarising UK wine consumers Georgian wines.

Georgian amber *qvevri* wines have niche but powerful appeal, and appeal to adventurous sommeliers and specialist wine boutiques. But the aromatic dry whites are increasingly popular, and such wines made from varieties including Kisi, Rkatsiteli and Mtsvane are starting to be served by the glass in restaurants. The red wines of Georgia have much to offer, and Saperavi in particular is emerging as a bit of a superstar. This deep, succulent red really appeals to UK tastes.

This year we have held five virtual tastings, two virtual press trips, and a fully-booked media tasting. Despite challenging circumstances, Georgian wine exports to the UK have increased by nearly 80 per cent over last year. We are just starting to see what Georgian wines can achieve in the UK, and I think that if the marketing support and the wine quality continue as they have been to date, the UK could become a really important market for fine Georgian wine. **F**

