

# THE WINES OF GEORGIA

## The wines of Georgia

Lisa Granik MW

# The full story of the birthplace of wine and how it was reborn

Natural wines are currently in vogue. With wine producers from the Barossa Valley, to Bordeaux, to Napa experimenting with artisanal and minimum intervention winemaking, they have become the subject of much debate in wine publications and on social media. The methods used in creating such wines owe much to the traditional winemaking of the Republic of Georgia. Here, wines have been made for centuries using the same methods, which involve the grapes being allowed to ferment in sealed, buried clay jars called *qvevri* or *churi*. This has revived interest in Georgian wine but as one new book demonstrates there is much more to enjoy here than natural wine.

In *The wines of Georgia*, US author Lisa Granik MW explores the current winemaking revival in this ex-soviet state. A former lawyer, Granik was first enchanted by Georgia thirty years ago when she visited the Soviet Union to teach on a Fulbright programme. Over the years her obsession grew. She gained an MW qualification, quit the law and returned to Georgia on a second Fulbright, this time aiming to find out all she could about the land, its wines and the people who make them.

Having immersed herself in this culture she is well placed to provide a detailed and scintillating picture of a land where wine is integral and tradition is strong. But despite wine's centrality to Georgian culture the current industry is very young, having expanded from a handful of producers to 1,300 in little more than 20 years. While Granik writes lovingly of these wines she is not uncritical: this old-new industry faces a particular set of issues. Many of those creating the wines are hobbyists with no formal wine training and believe that producing wines is simply a matter of putting grapes in a *qvevri* and allowing them to get on with the winemaking by themselves. This can yield some delicious, rustic wines but it can also produce flawed, unhy-

gienic wines or wines unsuited to travelling beyond the winery gates. One of her stated goals in writing the book has been to encourage Georgian producers to strive for greatness. "Georgia may be the birthplace of wine, but its reputation as a source of fine wine will rest on producing balanced, stable, intriguing, expressive, unique and, yes, delicious wines," she says.

The chapter on Georgia's varieties is justifiably vast. Estimates vary but most experts agree that there are at least 400 native *Vitis vinifera* varieties here. Granik profiles nearly a quarter of these, in a lucid and easy-going voice that makes the descriptions a pleasure to read. Granik's portraits of the eight major wine regions are vivid, describing not only the wine-growing environment but also focusing on features of the landscape and explaining how everyday life here is lived. Profiles of some notable producers and their wines are woven into the story to complete the picture.

In short, anybody who really wants to know Georgian wine needs to read this book.

### About the author

Lisa Granik MW has a wine career that includes work in retail, import and distribution channels in the United States. In her current business, she advises wine companies and regions seeking to improve their sales in the United States. Lisa became a Master of Wine in 2006, and was a Professor of Wine at the New York Institute of Technology from 2013–15. She continues to speak about wine internationally, and judge in international wine competitions. She has written for publications such as the *New York Times*, *The World of Fine Wine* and *Sommelier Journal*, and has an ongoing column in *Revista de Vinhos*.

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