

## The North Hampshire Wine Society Blog



### 'The Georgian Wine Society' Presented by Chris Bowling

25 May 2011

Georgian wine is not widely known in the UK, but you can find the odd article in the wine press and some wines have done well in recent trade tastings.

See [www.georgianwinesociety.co.uk](http://www.georgianwinesociety.co.uk)

#### Welcome aperitif

I appear to have no note so I must have been distracted by the thought of all the 'unknown' wines to come... Apologies!

### The wines

#### Whites

##### **Bagrationi 1882 Reserve Brut 2007 - Bagrationi**

£16.99

From Georgia's biggest sparkling wine producer, a blend of Chinuri, Tsitska and Mtsvane grapes. 1882 not the vintage! – that's when the winery was established. Traditional method – fermented in the bottle like Champagne. Pale gold with a greenish tint. Nice nose - a bit like a blanc de blancs with plenty of citrus and just a little yeasty development. Surprisingly rich and full palate after the lightish nose, creamy finish with a distinctly bitter note like apricot kernels. Generally liked. I thought this a very successful sparkling wine with unusual character and a competitive price for the quality.

##### **Tsolikouri 2005 – Teliani Valley Winery**

£9.79 13%

A wine that demonstrates the new approach in Georgia of 'production down, quality up' and the influence of flying winemakers who are modernising processes. Very bright lemon/pale gold. Fresh nose with crunchy apple notes (a traditional Georgian trait we were told) with some definite stony mineral backbone. Astonishingly full palate with splendid acidity – a bit reminiscent of Chenin perhaps, but less apple on the palate and a more rounded mouthfeel than most dry Chenin. Finishing soft and persistent. Teliani Valley winery is one of the largest producers in Georgia. Very good value.

##### **Mtsvane-Rkatsiteli 2007 - Orovela**

£12.99 13%

Blend of 15% Mtsvane (aromatic) and 85% Rkatsiteli (full bodied). Huge legs on the glass, mid gold. Real development and an almost Burgundian restrained pineapple character on the nose (unusual in Georgia Chris said). After the nose a surprising slight spritziness on the palate, which was rich and full with (again) great acidity and an unusual hint of pine on the mid palate. 'Sour plums' was a comment from one of our group – but not intended as a criticism! Dry finish with minerality very apparent, and just a bit of alcohol. Oily viscose style with a weight that requires food, though my notes say 'not sure what'!

## Rose

### **Saperavi Rose – Telavi Wine Cellar**

£9.99 13%

Quoted as 2009 vintage but couldn't see it on the bottle. Dark salmon pink, developed nose with a hint of spicy eucalyptus on the palate. Very soft, acidity there but not so obvious as in the previous wines. This is a 'big' rose! My notes say 'rich - fruit certainly, but an odd medicinal back note too'. Saperavi grapes are unusual in that their juice is pink, so this wine is made with the skins in contact with the juice for only 8-10 hours, accounting for the softness and absence of obvious tannins. Well balanced wine with an unusual combination of ripe red fruit and spice.

## Reds

### **Napareuli 2005 – Teliani Valley Winery**

£11.99 13.5%

Chris mentioned that there has been investment from Pernod-Ricard in this winery. Napareuli is the appellation and Saperavi the grape, which in these particular vineyards - according to Chris' tasting note - has a character unlike other Georgian wines with leather, smoke and tobacco prominent. Sound familiar? A lovely mature nose, a bit reminiscent of Rioja with a strong vanilla character. On the palate showing upfront aromatic 'tea' flavours - very unusual! A Jancis Robinson tasting note quoted by Chris uses the words 'bloody' and 'damson'. High acidity and a firm finish - my note says 'a slightly odd finish on its own but miles better with food'. Not a great match for the pate, but went well with the cranberry fruit cheese.

### **Mukuzani 2007 – Teliani Valley Winery**

£12.99 13% on bottle, tasting note said 13.5% *IWSC Bronze/Decanter Silver*

Mukuzani is Georgia's most famous appellation. Here the Saperavi grape is aged longer in oak barrels to maximise depth and complexity. Lovely 'Cabernet' nose, quite restrained compared with the last wine. Dense and opaque with very little rim, purple legs. Powerful palate, big mouthfeel, nicely balanced tannins and acidity, life ahead of it but ready now I thought. A typically dry finish. Vanilla notes not so obvious here - more cherry and chocolate and altogether darker. Interesting that they don't need high alcohol levels to achieve this apparent weight and body.

### **Saperavi 2004 - Orovela**

£18.99 12.5%

Just 8500 bottles in the 2004 vintage. Aged 12 months in French and American oak. A wine that has attracted positive comment in the wine press (Jancis Robinson reckoned it was the best Georgian wine she had tasted, and it was Wine Alchemy's March 2010 wine of the month). Perhaps currently 'the best wine coming out of Georgia'? Opaque and dense again, very dark. 'Iron' effect on the nose (one of us described it as having 'a touch of the slaughterhouse about it - but in a good way'!) Another Cabernet-like nose - my note says 'a bit like mature Bordeaux but with even more development'. On the palate morello cherries and well integrated tannins. Classy wine, ready now but clearly more to come. And just look at the alcohol level for the concentration - not a mistake, I checked the bottle. (NB bottle weight reprehensible - they don't need to jump on that particular bandwagon to imply 'quality'!)

### **Khvanchkara 2009 – Telavi Wine Cellar**

£12.99 12% on bottle, tasting note said 11% and Chris said that would be more typical (2009 a very ripe vintage in Georgia as everywhere else)

**We were the first tasting group in this country to try this wine – a North Hampshire Wine Society 'first'!**

This is a 'semi-sweet' red wine – a Georgian speciality manufactured since 1907 and reputedly a favourite of Stalin. It's Georgia's most famous sweet red wine – a blend of 50% Alexandrouli and 50% Mujuretuli grapes (Khvanchkara is the appellation). This wine style used to be the result of fermentation stopping with the cold weather leaving the wine 'semi-sweet'! – but of course now all is temperature-controlled. Nose not at all sweet, all pepper and dried fruit. Palate much sweeter - 'dark strawberry and pepper' say my notes. Acidity excellent (seems to be a Georgian characteristic) balancing the sweet palate really well. Used in Georgia as a 'toasts' wine. Fascinating and unique.

This was a really interesting tasting, suggesting that Georgian wine is lesser-known more because of history and politics rather than the intrinsic quality of the wines, although significant foreign investment is clearly producing more consistent results and wider accessibility may follow. See <http://www.jancisrobinson.com/articles/a20100318.html> for an article with further background – and of course Chris' own website at the top of these notes.

Chris also mentioned that for reds the vintages to look out for are 2006 and 2007, and 2010 for everything!

**The North Hampshire Wine Society Blog** is by **Julia Shaw**