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22 Apr 2021

More wines from east of Vienna

Wines (and bottles) from Romania, Moldova, Georgia, China, Cyprus and Ukraine reviewed. Vlassides winery above with some of their vines planted at elevations of 700 to 1,100 m around the village of Koilani, Cyprus.

This little collection of tasting notes is a follow-on from my tasting article entitled [Promising Eastern Europeans](#), followed up by an overview of [Eastern European adventures](#).

One of the UK importers of Eastern European wines, Transylvania Wine, missed the boat for that first tasting article, so some of its wares are reviewed below. It has some nice wines – from Romania, Moldova and Georgia – but some real horrors in terms of bottle weight. Indeed, this article includes some of the heaviest bottles I have ever come across, nudging a whole kilo in weight (once one subtracts 750 g from the full bottle weight for the weight of the wine). Romania seems schizophrenic in terms of bottle weights, being the source of some of the heaviest bottles but also probably the lightest bottles (340 g) I've encountered in the form of those of the dominant Romanian wine exporter Cramele Recaş, whose latest releases I also review below. (A varietal Fetească Regală from this supplier is part of M&S's new Found range of exotica, to be reviewed by Andy Howard MW tomorrow.)

Also included in this somewhat heterogeneous collection are wines from Ukraine, Cyprus and China. (Well, China is east of Vienna, isn't it?) The produce of Austro-Chinese joint venture Chateau Changyu Moser XV has been reviewed here many times before. And we have been keeping a keen eye on heartening developments on the island of Cyprus for some time too and are delighted to discover more and more fine table wines being produced there. See [these previous articles](#) on Cyprus.

But we have hardly written about Ukrainian wine before – other than about the famous sweet wines of controversially annexed Crimea. Ukrainian wine writer Olga Pinevich offered to send me what she reckoned were six of the best current table wines and I was delighted to make their acquaintance – although here too there was evidence of naughty heavy bottle syndrome. But it's clear that fine winemaking is alive and well in Ukraine, despite the fact that it is currently such a geopolitical hotspot. See also [Kyiv \(Kiev\) for wine lovers](#), an entry in our 2019 wine writing competition, which describes the wine revolution there.

Shabo, on sandy soils in the south of the country near Odessa, has an interesting history in that in 1822 it was decided to repopulate the region by inviting Swiss settlers from Vaud to cultivate the vineyards there. This led some to believe that the local white-wine grape Telti-Kuruk could be the Swiss favourite Chasselas. Indeed our co-author of *Wine Grapes*, Dr Grape himself José Vouillamoz, also Swiss, was asked in 2018 by the winery called Shabo to analyse the DNA of the Ukrainian grape. He found that, far from being Chasselas, Telti-Kuruk's genotype didn't match any other in his vast database. Since even the Ukrainians admit that it was introduced by the Ottomans, it presumably originated somewhere else in the Ottoman empire, possibly Turkey. Shabo winery, incidentally, belongs to the Iukuridze family, whose origins are Georgian, who have ambitions within Georgia, and who are significant producers of Ukrainian brandy.

You can jump to each of the national groups of tasting notes within this article, 29 in total, using the links below.

- [Romania](#)
- [Moldova](#)
- [Georgia](#)
- [China](#)
- [Cyprus](#)
- [Ukraine](#)

Romania

Budureasca, Premium Tămâioasă Românească

2019 Dealu Mare

Full bottle 1,250 g.

Pale straw. Quite a subtle grape aroma (compared with the showier Viorica). Lovely fresh, crisp, floral, satin-textured wine. Really quite subtle and clean as whistle. Light hint of violet cachous. Dry finish. Probably best drunk without food. Rather reminds me of a fine Muscat d'Alsace. Smartly packaged.

13.5%

Drink

2021

-

2022

£12.95 Transylvania Wine, Chez Vin (Otley)

16.5

Cramele Recaș, Dealuri Fetească Regală 2020

Romania

Nice lightweight screwcapped bottle 1,090 g.

Fresh, simple, floral. I wouldn't immediately suggest keeping this but the Paparuda 2017 version from the same source is still in good nick chez Tanners. This variety is certainly brilliant at producing well-priced, attractive off-dry whites. Good grip on the end.

11.5%

Drink

2021

-

2022

£4.99 Aldi

16

Cramele Recaș, Found Fetească Regală 2020

Romania

Screwcapped bottle 1,090 g. Recommended by the Australian and Spanish winemakers with a local dish or feta and ham polenta.

Less aroma but a little more savour than the Aldi version. Quite a bit of dissolved gas in here. Nice wine and likely to be **GV**.

11.5%

Drink

2021

-

2023

£7 Marks & Spencer

16

Cramele Recaş, Solara Organic Orange 2020

Romania

Full, screwcapped clear bottle 1,090 g. Certified organic, skin contact and low SO₂. And why not?

Very pale orange indeed - a rather timid orange wine! But on the palate it's lots of fun. Just slightly astringent and really easy to like. Quite soft but the light astringency stands in for the acidity. This would make a great introduction to skin-contact wines. Orange Lite but everyone's got to start somewhere.

13%

Drink

2021

-

2023

16

Cramele Recaș, Dealuri Rosé 2020 Romania

Full screwcapped bottle 1,090 g. Very pale, provençal pink.

Rather soft and then a bit pinched on the end. Crisp in the middle. I don't think this is going to last all that long. A bit simple. Though clean enough.

12%

Drink

2021

-

2021

£4.99 Aldi

15

Cramele Recaș, Solomonar Reserve 2019 Romania

Full screwcapped bottle 1,340 g. Blend of the rather good Romanian grape Fetească Neagră with Cabernet and Merlot.

Bright mid crimson. Smells rather raw. Sweet fruit and a suggestion of oak influence. Not as fresh and pure as the Fetească Regală whites. Bit heavy and pinched on the end. And then the sweetness lingers rather.

14.5%

Drink

2021

-

2023

15

Legendary Dracula, 555 Fetească Neagră 2018 Romania

Full bottle a very heavy 1,555 g. (Is this why it's called 555?!)

Transparent garnet with a little evolution. Clean, fresh nose. The packaging is way over the top but the fruit is very attractive. It's a little sweet but not sickly. Good balance of acidity and light tannins. Vivacious. It would be fun to serve this blind! Definitely fair value.

14%

Drink

2021

-

2026

£19.99 Transylvania Wine

16 +

Moldova

Purcari Viorica 2019 Moldova

Full bottle 1,175 g. The Viorica grape variety was bred in Moldova in 1969 by crossing Seibel and Aleatico. Hand-picked. Unoaked. TA 5.7 g/l, RS 3 g/l. Decanter trophy winner.

Very opulent, powerful aroma. Presumably this is because of the Muscat character of the Aleatico. The palate, however, is appetisingly crisp with the acidity well integrated. Persistent. I wouldn't call it a fine wine but it's very easy to like. Sipping in the afternoon?

13.5%

Drink

2020

-

2022

£14.95 Transylvania Wine, £17.10 Turton Wines

16

Purcari Rară Neagră 2019 Moldova

Full bottle 1,190 g. Decanter gold medal.

Lustrous, transparent garnet. Pure damson fruit on the nose and a nice balance of fruit and freshness. Real integrity to this wine. Firm but not aggressively tannic. Really fresh. Very much its own master – not a copy of anything else I can think of. Sincere.

12.5%

Drink

2021

-

2024

£15.95 Transylvania Wine, £16.49 Novel Wines

16.5

Purcari, Negru de Purcari 2018 Moldova

Very naughty bottle: 1,610 g when full.

Bright crimson. A trace of sweet, spicy oak and not as attractive as the cheaper Rară Neagră 2019 from the same producer. But it has focus and lots of ripe fruit even if it's a little sickly on the finish.

14%

Drink

2021

-

2025

£24.95 Transylvania Wine

15.5

Georgia

Dugladze, Saperavi Reserve 2014 Kakheti

Full bottle 1,775 g!!!! Ridiculously heavy bottle. Fermented and aged in oak barrels according to the back label.

Transparent bright ruby. Fresh nose but on the palate it's even a little too tart – though perhaps that's just Saperavi. Not quite enough fruit concentration. Pretty chewy. I might be a bit more sympathetic to this wine if it represented the noble qvevri tradition of Georgia. I suspect this was a little more alluring a couple of years ago.

13%

Drink

2018

-

2022

£21.99 Transylvania Wine

15.5

China

Ch Changyu Moser XV, Helan Mountain Range

Blanc de Noir Cabernet Sauvignon 2019 Ningxia

Clear-glass full bottle 1,250 g. This (fairly deep) white Cabernet is a speciality of the house.

Smoky nose. (Is charcoal used to remove colour, I wonder?) Lots of round fruit and some sweetness. This is a fabulous commercial wine: easy to like, quite fresh enough, with the name of China's most popular grape variety on the label. But I

suspect it could get pretty sickly quite soon.

14.5%

Drink

2020

-

2021

15.5

Ch Changyu Moser XV, Moser Family Blanc de Noir Cabernet Sauvignon 2018 Ningxia

Full, tall, dark bottle all of 1,425 g. Aged in new French barriques. Claimed to be the world's first and only Cabernet Sauvignon Blanc de Noir.

Pale apricot colour. Rather neutral nose with a very light oiliness and definite sweetness. Well done for not imbuing it with too much oakiness. Reasonably appetising, say I begrudgingly. It would be fun to compare this with a dry white oaked bordeaux (alas I don't have one to hand - shame on me). Though I think this would be much sweeter and less savoury.

14%

Drink

2020

-

2022

16

Ch Changyu Moser XV, Helan Mountain Range Cabernet Sauvignon 2019 Ningxia

Full bottle a modest 1,265 g.

Mid youthful crimson. Pale rim. Clean, fresh Cabernet nose without a trace of oak. Just a little sweet on the end with a hint of rusty nails - that actually grows in the mouth. The nose is frank and straightforward but it's almost like iron filings on the

finish. What a shame!

14%
Drink
2020
-
2021
15

Ch Changyu Moser XV, Moser Family Cabernet Sauvignon 2017 Ningxia

Full bottle 1,440 g. Aged in French oak.

Deep garnet with some evolution at the rim. Clean, fresh, Cabernet nose. Very straightforward nose and frank fruit – and then that suggestion of iron filings on the finish (see the regular Cabernet Sauvignon 2019). What a shame! This has more fruit weight than the regular Cabernet Sauvignon 2019 but the finish is no fun. I hope this will somehow disappear ... but how?

14.5%
Drink
2021
-
2024
15.5

Ch Changyu Moser XV, Grand Vin Cabernet Sauvignon 2017 Ningxia

Full bottle a completely unnecessary 1,590 g.

Pretty deep crimson. Like all three of these Cabernets, there's a light green-fruit aroma. Is there a little Cabernet Gernischt in the blend? Round, sweet and flattering with admirable texture. This wine seems initially free of the rusty-nail finish - perhaps because of the concentration and fruit weight? Glamorous in some ways.

15%

Drink

2021

-

2025

16

Cyprus

Vlassides, Alátes 2018 PGI Lemesos

Old Xynisteri vines grown on sandy silt and clay. Picked at the end of September and immediately cooled to 10 °C. Fermented and aged in a 2,000-litre untoasted oak vat.

Fairly neutral nose. Coravin/Diam problem again? Quite a lot has been taken out of this sample bottle already. But good freshness on the palate with light grip, that lemon-cough-sweet character plus a little element of aromatic herb/flower - lavender even. Proper wine. Impressive. And it's easy to see a relation between this and the Xynisteri from Zambartas.

13.5%

Drink

2020

-

2024

£19.95 (2019) M J Wine Cellars

16.5

Zambartas, Koukouvagia 2020 Cyprus

Screwcapped full bottle 1,130 g. Unoaked blend of Xynisteri and Muscat of Alexandria.

Well-judged blend with just a touch of that orange-blossom water I associate with Muscat of Alexandria on the nose – not too overwhelming. Excellent body and structure – and well-integrated acidity – on the palate. Distinctive with good fruit weight. **GV**

12.5%

Drink

2021

–

2023

£9.95 M J Wine Cellars

16

Zambartas Xynisteri 2020 PGI Limassol

Full bottle 1,250 g. Nice and light! From gnarly bush vines of the island's signature white-wine grape grown on calcareous soils at 800 m above sea level. Bushvines of 20 to 30 years old in Omodos, Krasochoria Lemesou on the south side of the Troodos mountains. Unoaked.

Chock-full of character. Real bite and grapefruit-peel finish after a great whack of textured lemon-cough-drop fruit on the palate. This is proper wine! And not a silly price. Something really different and nicely packaged.

13%

Drink

2021

–

2023

£12.50 M J Wine Cellars

16.5

Vlassides, Óroman 2018 PGI Lemesos

Full bottle a naughty 1,450 g. Local grape variety Yiannoudi with 15% Shiraz grown on calcareous sand, clay and silt. Picked at the beginning of September and aged in used French oak barrels for 12 months. Rainfall here between October and July was 751 mm. Unfiltered.

Bright crimson. Really nice fresh fruit with an attractive inkiness and quite stern tannins on the end. But proper grown-up wine with real personality. No hurry to drink this!

14.5%

Drink

2021

-

2027

£23.45 M J Wine Cellars

16.5

Zambartas, Koukouvagia 2018 Cyprus

Screwcapped full bottle 1,130 g. Unoaked blend of 60% Shiraz, 40% Mataro (Mourvèdre).

Transparent ruby. Fresh and light on the nose. Sweet start and really rather appealing. Soft but not lacking refreshment. Very clean and direct. Fairly simple but reasonably charming. **GV**

14%

Drink

2020

-

2022

£9.95 M J Wine Cellars

16

Zambartas Shiraz/Lefkada 2018 Cyprus

Full bottle a modest 1,235 g. 65% Shiraz and 35% tannic Lefkada, known as Vertzami in Greece.

Fairly deep crimson with sweet-but-fresh Shiraz fruit encased in the tobacco-leaf structure of Lefkada. A very positive, serious wine with an attractively juicy finish.

14.5%

Drink

2021

-

2027

£20.45 M J Wine Cellars

16.5

Zambartas Maratheftiko 2018 Cyprus

Full Diam-stoppered bottle 1,255 g.

Mid crimson. Smells of damson juice with a floral note. Very contained with a light dusty note on the finish keeping this rather charming fruity grape in check. It reminds me of a fruitier version of Xinomavro. Clearly a high-quality grape variety. Lovely light touch on the finish but so composed and well balanced! Well worth exploring.

14.5%

Drink

2021

-

2026

£20.95 M J Wine Cellars

17

Ukraine

46 Parallel, Grand Admiral Brut Nature 2018

Ukraine

Full, fat bottle a very naughty 1,645 g. Blend of Pinot Meunier, Chardonnay and Pinot Blanc. Traditional method. There is a host of text on the back label but it's so tiny that, alas, it's illegible,

Not much mousse visible but on the palate there is no shortage of tiny bubbles. Clean but very light nose. The fruit/acid balance has been well judged in terms of dosage; it's dry enough - just. I would happily drink this at one of Kyiv's wine bars. Light astringency on the finish but not too much. Light lemon mousse flavour. Perfectly respectable even if a little light on flavour.

12.3%

Drink

2021

-

2023

16

Beykush Timorasso 2018 Ukraine

Full bottle 1,250 g. Family-owned estate of 11 ha. 'Made in the Ukraine with love ... on the Black Sea coast of Mykolaïv region' according to the front label. Apparently the vineyard is on a promontory. Who would have thought to have found a varietal Timorasso here? Vines are nine years old. Aged for 12 months in French barriques. Deep colour and that characteristic 'burnished' nose of Timorasso, followed by slight 'cheesiness'. On the palate it's a little more ordinary and the oak may not have been tip-top. The phenolics are a little rasping. But the label's attractive and it's a very enterprising effort. No shortage of acidity.

13.8%

Drink

2021

-

2025

Shabo Telti-Kuruk 2017 Ukraine

Full black bottle all of 1,535 g (I had no idea the bottle contained white wine...). This is apparently an indigenous variety associated with the Ottoman period and the name means 'fox's tail', the shape of the bunches. Shabo is the name of a village near Odessa where winemaking was revived by Swiss colonists in 1822. There are 1,200 ha of vineyards in Shabo. Stéphane Derenoncourt is cited on the back label. Numbered bottles. The background notes say that production is always limited to 4,000 bottles but my bottle is number 8,336. Aged in French and Austrian oak for 'at least nine months'. Hand-picked grapes into small crates. Gravity-fed winery. Shabo is both the name of the producer (founded in 2003) and the village/terroir. Light, fresh nose of almonds. Quite a phenolic grip on the palate but no particular oaky flavour. This is clearly a variety with quite a distinctive minerally character and nobility. There's a laurel-leaf freshness. I can see why they boast it can last 'at least five to seven years'. Intriguing! I wonder whether it's identical to some Turkish grape variety?

12.4%

Drink

2021

-

2025

€12.61 RRP

16

46 Parallel, Grand Admiral Merlot 2016 Ukraine

Full bottle 1,330 g. From 20-year-old vines, 'the best grape suppliers' and, according to the label, 'proudly Ukrainian'. This producer makes much of being in the same 46th parallel as Bordeaux. Aged for 24 months in 100% new bordeaux barriques and then for 12 months in bottle. Limited edition of 272 bottles (one barrique?). This bottle number 251 has a leather neck pennant.

Transparent garnet. Pretty mature nose! But definitely sweet, spicy Merlot, plus a bit of sweet, spicy oak. I'd happily drink this in Kyiv. But I suspect it might have had

a bit more fruit concentration a year or two ago. Just a little stringy on the finish. But fascinating to have tasted it.

13.3%

Drink

2019

-

2022

€126.05 RRP

15.5

Beykush, Kara Kermen 2016 Ukraine

Full burgundy-shaped bottle 1,280 g. Nine year-old vines in the Nikolaevskij region, Chernomarka. 50/50 Saperavi/Tempranillo. Grapes are dried so that they lose 40% of their weight which can apparently take up to 14 days. Dried grapes are slowly pressed, and the resulting wine is aged for 24 months in French oak.

I wonder what the potential alcohol of the grapes was when they were picked?

Skilful handling of the sweet oak on the nose of this wine. Good balance of ripe fruit and freshness with no apparent residual sugar nor excess of acidity. Very clean, ripe fruit. I don't think I'd ever be able to pick out the two grape varieties blind but they make a very pleasing whole.

14.5%

Drink

2020

-

2025

16.5

Iukuridze, Heritage Vaja Cabernet 2017 Ukraine

Full bottle 1,565 g. A special selection from the Shabo terroir made by the family enterprise of the family who own Shabo wines. 'Created by God - raised by humans' according to the front label. Derenoncourt consults. Aged in 'high-tech French oak barrels at least 12 months'.

Mid crimson. Notably fresh, clean nose with some energy. Sweet, cassis palate entry though the palate is a tiny bit lean, if one were to be hyper-critical (for a change, I hear you say). But it's obviously a Cabernet made with care that can hold its head up high.

13.5%

Drink

2020

-

2025

€126.05 RRP

16