



imbibe.com

NEWS AND ARTICLES ▾

OPINION

EVENTS

JOBS

COMPETITIONS

IMBIBE LIVE

IMBIBE SUBSCRIPTION

YOU ARE AT: [Home](#) » [Drinks](#) » [We need to have a qvconversation about qvevri](#)

We need to have a qvconversation about qvevri 0

30 APRIL 2018

CHRIS LOSH

 Drinks: [Drinks](#), [Wines](#) Location: [Europe](#)

Facebook



Twitter



Google+



LinkedIn

Everyone's talking about qvevri. At least, they are at Imbibe Towers where conversation can be a bit slow.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Arne Bercher and Stefan Lergenmueller trade masterclass:

20 June @ 10:30 am - 13 September @ 12:00 pm

36 Pall Mall, St. James's London, SW1Y

London Craft Beer Festival Trade E

3 August @ 11:30 am - 4:30 pm

Tobacco Quay, Wapping Lane London, E1W 2SF United Kingd

Armit Wines 30th Anniversary An Tasting

5 September @ 11:00 am - 5:0 pm

Bargehouse Street London, SE1 9PH

So here's what you need to know if you drop in

What are qvevri anyway?

They're big fermentation vessels made from a very particular type of clay.

Oh, you mean amphorae?

Emphatically not. Amphorae are the same shape, but a lot smaller – designed to be carried. Even Hulk would struggle to carry a qvevri. Actually, he probably wouldn't, but you get the point.

Where did they originate from and when?

Georgia, thousands of years ago. The country is reckoned to be the birthplace of wine, and qvevri are one of the oldest forms of winemaking equipment. Their revival has been one of the most interesting trends of the last ten years.

Is it true that in East London they're compulsory?

We couldn't possibly comment.

How big are they?

Tricky one. They can go from fairly small – 100 litres – right up to a whopping 4,000 litres – presumably for making the Georgian equivalent of Jacob's Qreek.

Who makes them?

Not enough people is the short answer. They're still made by hand, with the clay wound round in strips and shaped by people who don't look at all like Patrick Swayze in Ghost. The craft almost died out under the Soviet occupation. Now everyone wants them, both in Georgia and elsewhere, so there's a big waiting list.

Liberty Wines Australian Portfolio Tasting

11 September



RumFest Trade day

19 October

47 Lillie Road
London, SW6 1UD United Kingdom

[View All Events](#)

JOIN OUR COMMUNITY



29,00
Followers



15,28
Fans



4,652
Followers



205
Followers



175
Subscribe



4,160
Followers

COMPETITION

Balcones Baby Blue Cocktail Competition
Facebook Twitter
Google+ LinkedIn
Balcones, An exciting craft whisky distillery, returns with hotly...

Enter competition now!

BE THE FIRST TO KNOW

I'm not sure I've ever seen one...

You probably wouldn't have – even if you visit a winery that uses them. They're buried in the earth with the opening at floor level. Creating a 'marani' (a winery full of qvevri tanks) is a lot of work.

Punching down

So how do they clean them?

Slowly is the answer. Someone very small has to climb in the top and scrub and scrub and scrub. It takes days. They still use twigs of St Johns Wort – it's better than anything else apparently – plus various pokers, prodders and plungers.

Stop blinding us with technical terms.

Sorry. The point is that qvevri are not an easy option. You need commitment.

Are they mostly used for natural wines then?

Hmm. No. Not really. Natural wine folk like them because they're traditional and old fashioned – and Georgia's qvevri wineries do all use wild fermentation – but, though there are a few weird examples out there, most of the wines are scrupulously clean.

How come they're not oxidised? Isn't the clay porous?

It is. But it's lined on the outside with lime and on the inside with beeswax. There's no oxidation at all in most of the wines. Though a few brave souls are breaking the rules and flying by the seat of their pants with ancient qvevri where, frankly, anything can happen.

But the colours! Some of the whites are nearly orange.

Ah, that'd be yer skin contact, not yer oxidation.

Subscribe to our newsletter:

Subscribe

What's it mostly used for, reds or whites?

Originally, obviously, both. But nowadays Georgia's winemakers mostly use qvevri for white grapes, to create 'amber wines'.

So what are they like?

It varies. Some taste a lot like traditional white wines, others are very, very different. It depends mostly on the amount of skin contact and how good the winemaker is. Generally, though, they're less about fruit flavours than about a kind of dry spiciness (think turmeric, saffron).

Sounds a bit different.

It is. But in fact perhaps the most striking element isn't so much the flavour as the structure. For the winemakers, it's all about texture, and these wines are a lot less about acidity than they are about tannin. We shouldn't, in other words, think about them as being a more intense (or different) expression of white wine, so much as something completely different.

EEK. So how do you serve them?

The Georgians typically serve these amber wines just below room temperature, but not chilled. They're more about texture than flavour – and that seems to show best about 12°C.

So should I be looking out for these wines?

Absolutely. If you don't, you're missing out. Their numbers are growing in the UK and will surely continue to do so. From just a handful of producers ten years ago, there are hundreds of them now, and they're no longer just confined to importers who are addicted to the weird and esoteric.

How should I use them?

Well, since they cover such a broad spectrum of styles, that's up to you. But they're good for full white meat dishes that are overridden by red wines or too

much for whites. Also spicy dishes. But some experts think that they could be ideal for vegetarian food as well.

What, like carrots and roast qualiflower?

You're totally getting the hang of this. Well done!

For a somm's eye take on Georgian wine, check out Kate Hawking's recent article [here](#)

[Facebook](#)[Twitter](#)[Google+](#)[LinkedIn](#)[georgia](#)[Natural wines](#)[Orange wines](#)[Qvevri](#)[wine](#)

[◀ PREVIOUS ARTICLE](#)

Next stop the Dixie Queen:
Southern Comfort reveals
regional finalists

[NEXT ARTICLE ▶](#)

Diageo announces sherry-
finished series Talisker
Bodega

ABOUT AUTHOR

CHRIS LOSH

After five years working on My Weekly magazine (during which time he learned how to write horoscopes and make things out of mince) in 1995 Chris Losh entered the world of drinks writing and, despite all advice from his doctor – and the wishes of most South African winemakers – has stayed there ever since. He began on Wine and Spirit International, editing it for several years before moving on to edit Wine Magazine. Both publications have since gone the way of the Dodo, but he claims to have nothing to do with their demise, and his alibi appears solid, since he was freelance writing for anyone who would pay him at the time. In 2007, he helped to set up both Imbibe magazine and the Sommelier Wine Awards, and has spent much of the last three years eating, drinking, and

listening to French sommeliers talk about minerality. In 2009 he was shortlisted for the Louis Roederer Feature Writer of the Year, but didn't win. Perhaps he should have stuck to horoscopes. And mince.

RELATED POSTS

24 JULY 2018 0

Mixxit rebrands as Th...

24 JULY 2018 0

Stonegate purchases...

24 JULY 2018 0

Non-alcoholic spirit b...

LEAVE A REPLY

You must be logged in to post a comment.

Magazine, website, exhibition & events for on-trade drinks professionals

Twitter 29,005 Facebook 15,285 LinkedIn 4,652 Google+ 205

YouTube 175 Instagram 4,160

Wines

Africa

Awards

Beers

Asia

Business

Ciders

Australasia

Competitio

Spirits & Cocktails

Europe

Opinion

Hot drinks

North America

People

Mixers & Soft drinks

South America

Service

About · Contact · Terms and conditions · Privacy Policy