

Wine of Moldova – A Legend Alive

Moldova, one of the world's oldest wine-producing regions, has recently undergone a series of startling transformations, from new investments to the founding of a national wine body. Located at the crossroads of Europe, the Republic of Moldova is a producer of fresh, novel wines.

Flying into Chisinau, the capital of the Republic of Moldova, the visitor sees green, rolling countryside. It's not surprising to learn that Moldova used to be the vegetable garden of the former Soviet Union, supplying vegetables, walnuts, cherries, plums and other stone fruits – and wine.

Not only are there vineyards everywhere, but most villagers grow their own grapes and make their own wines. Wine is more than a drink to Moldova – it's part of their national identity.

In the past eight years, Moldovan wine producers have been buffeted by historic events that have sent them in a new, international direction. The changes have been tremendous and, at times, painful. But the hard work is paying off...

CRAFTED BY GENERATIONS OF WINEMAKERS

In the centre of the capital, Chisinau, is a park dedicated to the ruler Stephen the Great. During the 15th century he not only defended the country against the Ottoman Empire, but he also imported new grape varieties, increased vine area, and made huge quality improvements.

The first Moldovan vines have been dated to 7000 BCE, while wine has been made here since 3000 BCE, first by the Dacian people, through to the Roman period in the first century. But under the Ottoman Empire, winemaking stopped for 300 years. It began again in the 19th century, only to be devastated by Phylloxera, and then World War I. The modern Moldovan wine era dates to the Soviet period, when the vineyard area expanded to 220,000 ha, to ensure the Russian market was supplied with wine; every second still

wine and every third sparkling wine consumed in the USSR was produced in Moldova.

Mikhail Gorbachev's anti-alcohol measures resulted in grubbing up vines on a vast scale, gutting the industry. After the collapse of communism, however, many wineries were privatized and the new owners invested in modern technology and higher quality clonal material. Popular international varieties spread, and flying winemakers brought their expertise.

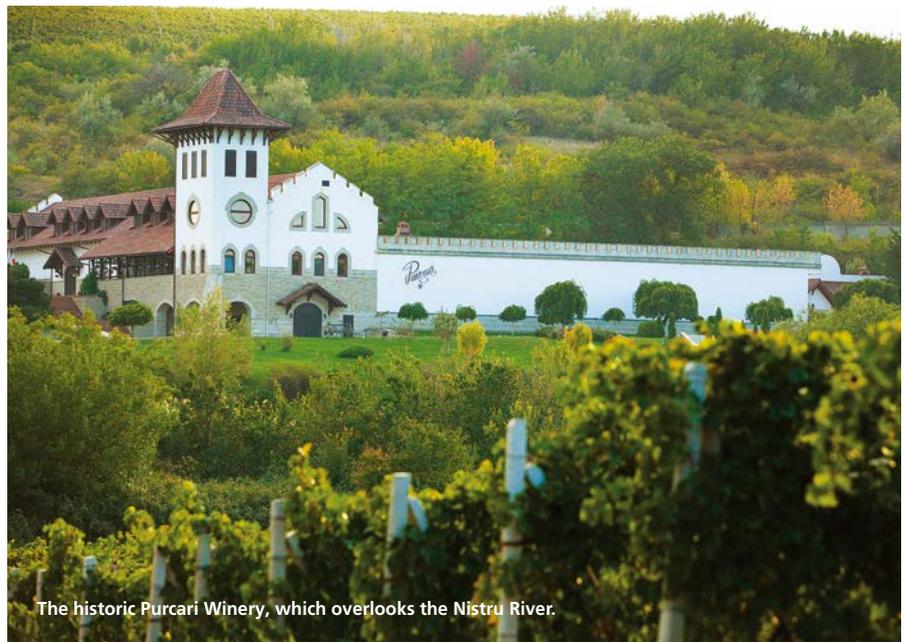
Russia remained Moldova's major market, taking up to 90% of exports, until the 'wine ban' of 2006 – when Russia refused entry to Moldovan wines in apparent retaliation for political decisions – were devastating. Although the wine ban was lifted in 2007, Moldova refused to drop its pro-European policies and the ban was re-imposed in 2013. As New York Times journalist Nicholas Kristof said in an April 2014

opinion piece: "If there were an Olympic competition for bravest country in the world, the gold medal might well go to Moldova."

RADICAL OVERHAUL

The Moldovans reacted to the loss of their Russian market by making dramatic changes. A tour through Moldova's wine regions reveals new investments, new vineyard plantings, new clonal materials, a rediscovery of autochthonous varieties and new wine tourism infrastructure.

Today, Moldovan exports 80% of its wines, sending 67m bottles to more than 30 markets. Exports to former Soviet countries now represent 68% of total exports – a much healthier figure than the 90% of 2004. Since 2009, Moldovan wines have made inroads into the markets of Poland, the Czech Republic, Romania, the USA and China.



The historic Purcari Winery, which overlooks the Nistru River.

To support these efforts, the wine laws have been overhauled, protected geographical indicators (PGIs) formalised, and €330m invested in the wine sector. Significantly, a national program for generic promotion – Wine of Moldova – has been created.

In December 2013, in the presence of US Secretary of State John Kerry, the new Wine of Moldova brand was revealed. Launched officially at ProWein 2014, Wine of Moldova is the flagship of the wine industry, bringing Moldovan wines to the world.



**WINE OF
MOLDOVA**

A LEGEND ALIVE

THE WINE OF MOLDOVA LOGO: THE STORK

When Moldova was invaded, soldiers at the historic Soroca fortress kept the aggressors at bay. But as supplies dwindled, the defenders began to starve. Legend has it that flocks of storks appeared and fed them grapes. Refreshed, they were able to defeat their enemies. The striking new logo of Wine of Moldova – A Legend Alive – commemorates both the stork and the grapes, as a symbol of the continual revival of Moldova.

Moldova at a glance

Moldova sits in the Black Sea basin where viticulture first appeared:

- There are 112,000 ha of land under vine.
- It has more than 30 *Vitis vinifera* varieties: 70% white, 30% red.
- 10% of the vineyards are planted to indigenous varieties.
- Wine accounts for 3% of Moldova's GDP.
- Wine represents almost 8% of Moldova's total exports.
- The sector employs more than 200,000 people
- Moldova is ranked by the OIV as the world's 13th largest wine exporter.
- The total harvest is about 500,000 tons, producing 1.3m hL of wine.
- €330m are being invested in the sector.

THE REGIONS

Moldova, whose shape recalls the grape cluster, is located at 46° latitude. The Black Sea terroir, including low hills, sunny plateaus, plains and forests, crisscrossed by streams flowing into the Prut and Nistru rivers, is moderately-continental. Indeed, there are few places on the earth where the wine grape performs so well. There are four historic wine regions, three of which now have EU-recognised PGI status:

Balti is Moldova's smallest, most northern region. With longer and cooler winters than the other regions, coupled with warm, dry summers. Suitable for white wine and brandy (known locally as 'divin') production.

The central PGI of **Codru**, where more than 60% of wine is produced, enjoys mild, warm summers, with long winters. The region's many forests protect the vineyards from drought. Codru is renowned for its whites.

The southern PGI **Valul lui Traian** is where most of Moldova's red wine production takes place.

Southeastern PGI **Ștefan-Vodă**, located in the basin of the Nistru River, includes the famous Purcari region. It produces both red and white wines.

INDIGENOUS GRAPE VARIETIES

As well as international varieties, Moldova is home to a number of promising autochthonous varieties, including:

Feteasca Albă

a delicate white, also used in the production of sparkling wines.

Feteasca Regală

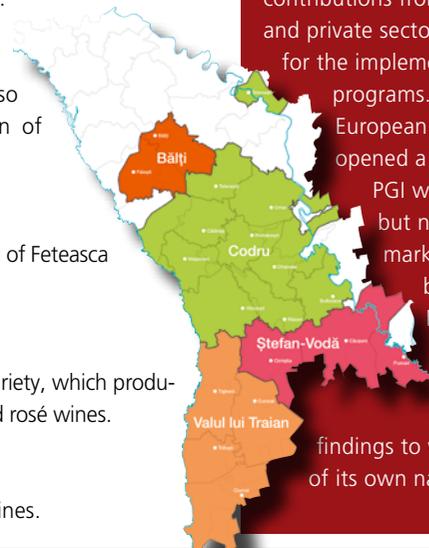
a refreshing white hybrid of Feteasca Albă and Furmint.

Feteasca Neagră

is a pre-Phylloxera red variety, which produces dry and semi-red and rosé wines.

Rara Neagră

produces light, fruity wines.



MOLDOVA ENTERS AN AGREEMENT WITH THE EU

In November 2013, Moldova and the EU entered an Association Agreement which includes a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA). As well as opening markets to one another, this offers Moldova a way to align its standards with the EU. In practice, this means Moldova now conforms to regulations aimed at producing quality, not quantity. The core institution to implement these changes is the National Office for Wine and Vine, which is fully empowered to develop the program. The National Wine Fund – funded with 50/50 contributions from both the state and private sectors – is the resource for the implementation of the new programs. In addition the European Investment Bank has opened a €75m credit line for PGI wine producers. Last but not least, a focused marketing program has been developed. Moldova has studied the world's best practice, and is now putting these findings to work, in the building of its own national framework.

In the largest cellars in the world

It's early evening in Chisinau, the capital, and the Carpe Diem wine bar and shop is filling up with young professionals. Wine tasting is going on at the bar, while meat and cheese platters are served to the wine lovers squeezed around the tables.

Owner Ion Luca says wine was his destiny. "I come from a family very involved in wineries – my father and brother work at Cricova," he says, naming one of the country's most famous wineries. Luca is also president of the Small Wine Producers Association; Moldova has historically been dominated by large, former state-owned enterprises. Now, small winemakers are emerging, as once onerous regulations are removed. Luca says that his 11 members are the next chapter in Moldova's long wine history. "Only six of them are on the market right now. The rest are planting their vineyards and planning their brands." The typical member, he says, is someone young and passionate, who has worked internationally, but returned to Moldova because they believe in the terroir.

The wines being served as Luca speaks range from international varietals and crisp roses, to fine expressions of Moldova's lively indigenous varieties. The wines are proof that it's not only the small and up-and-coming producers who are investing in quality – across Moldova, the wine industry is reinventing itself.

GUINNESS RECORD FOR THE LARGEST WINE COLLECTION

Cricova, located 20 km from Chisinau, is an astounding winery, by any standards, situated in the heart of Moldova, and surrounded by natural and historic attractions such as the Codru Wilderness Area. Famous for its sparkling wines, Cricova began as a limestone mine. After World War II there was an urgent need for building materials, so limestone was in huge demand and as blocks were removed from underground, a network of tunnels was created. This coincided with a post-war need to find somewhere to store and stabilise the wines that

Moldova was producing in such great quantities. Cricova was established in 1952.

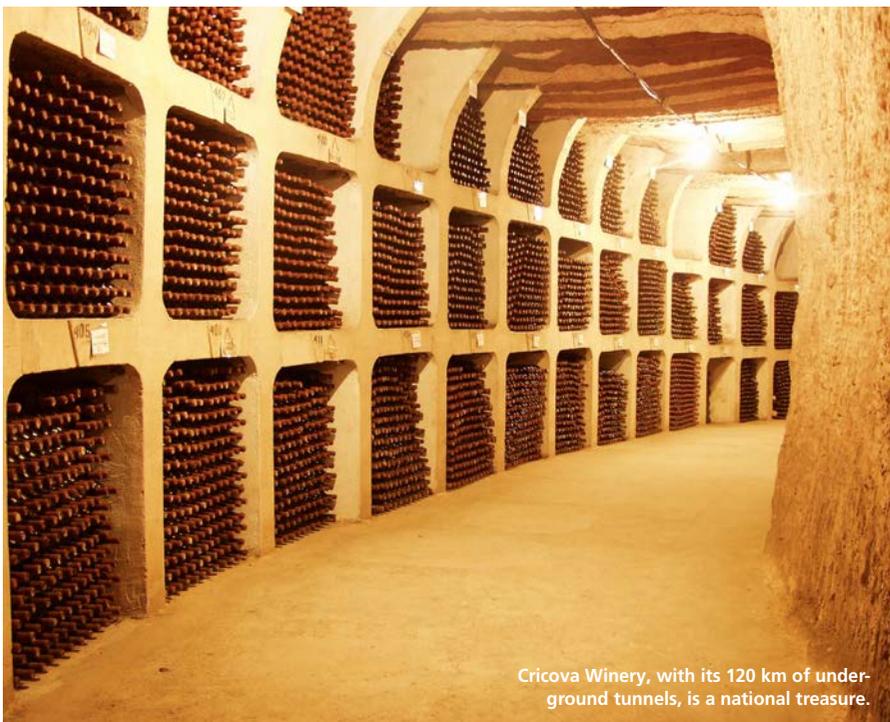
Today, it's an underground city, complete with 120km of underground roads, vast sparkling wine facilities, wine storage halls, and lavish tasting rooms. So impressive are the facilities, that foreign dignitaries are not only entertained here, but are given their own wine collections; it's all too tempting to stop and touch Vladimir Putin's collection, or Angela Merkel's. When US Secretary of State John Kerry visited last year, he too was granted a set of wines.

Another collection is that of German Field Marshal Hermann Goering, who took his wine to the Eastern Front with him; the wines were subsequently seized by the Red Army. The cellar guide says Cricova is regularly approached by collectors and auction houses hoping to buy the wines, but that Cricova will never sell.

Cricova is not the largest Moldovan winery; that honour goes to Milestii Mici, created as a state enterprise in 1969. Two fountains on the surface appear to be spouting red and white wines (but which are just coloured water, alas). Milestii Mici also has underground streets - all 200 km of them. As well as being the largest cellar in the world, the 2007 Guinness Book of Records noted that it had the largest wine collection in the world (2m bottles).

APPRECIATED BY CONSUMERS IN BOTH EAST AND WEST

In the bucolic village of Butuceni, the producer Mimi Wines came to show wines over lunch. Over a meal of stone fruits, walnuts, cucumbers, tomatoes and pickles, with meats and cheeses, a variety of modern, commercial wines were poured, from Sauvignon Blanc and Merlot to Rose. But what's also striking about the wines is the modern, colourful labels, which are so different to the traditional labels that used to adorn Moldovan wines. The labels are a testament to how seriously producers are taking the preferences of Westerners.



Cricova Winery, with its 120 km of underground tunnels, is a national treasure.

They are not the only winemakers to reorient their wines towards Western preferences. Gitana Winery has called in an Italian design company, whose daring labels have stylised and eye-catching female faces on them, in a radical break with tradition; the Fautor winery has both clean, elegant labels and a range of modern wines that scooped a number of international medals.

And speaking of radical breaks with tradition, Château Vartely – founded in 2004 – was the first Moldovan winery to take complete control of the entire wine process, from grapegrowing on 250 ha of vineyards, to bottling, through to selling of its 2.5m-bottle production. The intent is serious, from the high tech winery equipment, through to the international wine library in the tasting room, intended to help visitors understand where modern Moldovan wines sit in the international context. The complex includes a restaurant, plus several holiday homes, each built in a different historic style. And the wines are serious, from international varietals like Cabernet Sauvignon and Chardonnay, to the Feteasca Regală and even an Ice Wine.

Work is also currently underway at top speed at the wineries of Asconi, where the sales manager and winemaker Ion Mereuță has international winemaking experience, and at Et Cetera, a winery founded by two brothers, Igor and Alexander Luchianov. Situated in the southeast, in the warmer region of Ștefan-Vodă, the tiny Et Cetera winery is surrounded by new vineyards and an almost-complete restaurant.

But while there is tremendous excitement around the new investments, the grand old names of the country have been building on their strengths as well.

The winery of Purcari may not have hundreds of kilometres of underground tunnels, but it has a cellar worth seeing – even if you have to bend to enter some parts of it. It was built that way, so visitors would bow to God as a mark of respect.

Founded in 1827, Purcari is an impressive chateaux-style building that overlooks the Dniester River, in southeastern Moldova. From its earliest days, Purcari wines attracted international attention, particularly after its Negru de Purcari won a gold medal at the Paris Exhibition of 1878, when the judges mistakenly identified the wine as originating from Bordeaux. Purcari wines were later



found on the tables of Czar Nicholas II, Queen Victoria, and Queen Elizabeth II and there are, apparently, still Purcari bottles in the cellars of Buckingham Palace. Needless to say, Purcari wines were also valued by high-ranking Soviet officials.

In 2003, the winery became the privately owned Vinaria Purcari and has had all of its equipment and buildings upgraded and restored. Today, not only is it a must-see showcase, but it is forging an international reputation for the country, as its wines are increasingly found in markets from Japan to Germany.

AND SUPPORTED BY LEGENDS EVERYONE CAN EMBRACE

As evening falls in Chisinau, Vasile Bumacov, the Minister for Agriculture, comes into Carpe Diem and buys wine to

take to dinner. Although he's got an appointment, he's happy to sit and talk about what it means for Moldova to have closer ties to the European Union. "Wine is a priority for my country," he says. "We've made wine for thousands of years – the first vineyard was cut down when we fought the Romans and the king decided the soldiers were drinking more than necessary!"

Bumacov says the wine sector has made major reforms, including changing laws, organising a national office of wine and vine, and launching the country brand, 'Wine of Moldova. A Legend Alive'. Bumacov says the country actively seeks investors and partners from abroad. "Now is the moment to invest," he says. "The price of land is much lower than elsewhere, and viticulture is easier." He adds that he's quick to answer emails.

There are good reasons to do business here, not least of which are the value for money, high-quality wines available in commercial volumes, ready to be despatched from the heart of Europe. Wine of Moldova wants to diversify the export markets, and stands ready to help buyers, importers and other trade professionals, through tailored marketing programs.

Luca leans over and says the industry is making huge strides forward, saying that administrative difficulties have gone. "Now we have a small producer association!"

Bumacov takes his bottles of wine and gets up to leave. "Wine is in our blood," he says. And, soon, Moldovan wine will be on international shelves, as the world discovers the lively, fine wines of this unique country.

DISCOVER THE WINES OF MOLDOVA FOR YOURSELF

You are invited to visit Moldova Wine Day, held in Chisinau on 4 to 5 October 2014. Please also visit us at the Wine of Moldova stand at ProWine China, from 12 to 14 November 2014.

If you are interested in visiting Moldova or tasting its wines, please contact Mr. Dumitru Munteanu, the director of Wine of Moldova at +373 69101601 or at

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