

Wine from Georgia, vegan with low sulfites

**The Saperavi grape
has been made into
wine for 8,000 years**

By Gail Ciampa
Journal Food Editor

PAWTUCKET — Before we start to chat about Saperavi, let me remind you about Napa Valley. The storied California wine region was barely a blip on the national consciousness 50 years ago.

So when I tell you there's a new Rhode Island wine distributor marketing wines from Georgia, as in the former Soviet

republic and the nation located at the crossroads of Europe and Asia, don't turn the page.

Wine lovers, of which I am one, will geek out over the details of these wines which are vegan, low sulfite and start at \$10 a bottle but have premium choices that go well up from there.

They also have a history that goes back thousands of years.

But let's start with the vegan part. Didn't you think all wines was vegan? Or am I showing my

See SAPERAVI C6



Green harvest is the way Georgia's Shumi Winery creates the rich purple wines imported by Saperavi USA. It requires removing a third of grapes in early summer to make those that remain more intensely flavored.

[THE PROVIDENCE JOURNAL / SANDOR BODO]

SAPERAVI

From Page C1

ignorance alone?

"Worldwide, winemakers typically use 'fining' techniques to filter out sediments and clarify wine before bottling," explained Gayle Corrigan, co-founder of Saperavi USA. "Many of these fining processes include the use of animal products such as milk or fish proteins, egg whites or gelatin."

But Vinobiza, the wine label she has launched with partner Linda Dykeman out of a warehouse in Pawtucket, is different.

Their Georgian winemaker, Giorgi "Goga" Khatishvili at Shumi Winery, rarely uses these animal products.

"He embraces the natural wine philosophy, so there may be a tiny bit of sediment in the bottle," she said.

The exception is Vinobiza Saperavi Premium, for which he used gelatin in the clarifying process. But that still leaves eight wines vegan from their line.

"Vinobiza Saperavi and Vinobiza Mukuzani, at

\$10-\$12 a bottle are excellent values for a vegan diet," Corrigan said.

Which leads me to their company motto of "One grape, nine wines." That is for now, but there will be more.

How can one grape do so much?

It's all about technique, which apparently the Shumi Winery works hard to perfect.

The vineyards are in the foothills of the Caucasus Mountains and surrounded by forests in Tsinandali Village, Kakheti, Georgia. Historically, the land belonged to the kings of Georgia and served as part of the summer residence of the 19th-century Russian Emperor Alexander III.

Shumi was only formed in 1997 and harvested its first grapes in 2001. A cultural pavilion was built the next year for the development of enotourism. Visitors can stomp grapes, bake bread or cook traditional foods. When there isn't a pandemic, of course.

They produced a certified organic wine, Vinobiza Bio; a biodynamic wine, Vinobiza Salome, which



The griffin is the symbol of the Shumi Winery in Georgia whose wines are sold by Saperavi USA. Gayle Corrigan and Linda Dykeman visited the vineyard as they prepared to launch their company in R.I. [COURTESY PHOTO]

has a \$100 price tag and is similar to a Napa Cabernet; and Qvevri, made with wild fermentations in egg-shaped earthenware vessels buried underground for six to eight months.

That is one of the ancient methods of wine-making that they've revived in Georgia, and that tourists can see on a winery visit.

But it is the method by which grapes are green-harvested that gives the wines their rich color and deep flavor.

This means that in early

summer, small unripe grapes are removed by hand, about one-third of the crop. This allows the vine to put all its energy into the remaining grapes, which are later hand-picked in small baskets to limit damage.

The wines are mostly dry and all reds. On the K wines, for Kindzmarauli, are semi sweet and delicious when chilled.

They all have low sulfites because they are not added, but just the naturally occurring ones from the winemaking process.

Now that you've geeked out, let me tell you about how the pandemic affected the women entrepreneurs who embarked on this endeavor.

In early March, they launched the business at Vinexpo New York, the largest U.S. wine trade show, in the Georgia wine pavilion. Unlike the many other distributors, they modernized their labels to have an Americanized look, with bar codes and info consumers like to read.

They drew the attention

of Carnival Cruise Lines, a Broadway musical based on Michael Jackson that was in the market for an "M" wine to sell at the theater, and Total Wine and More, a multi-state liquor superstore.

They left with promises to be on cruise ships and in stores.

Their first container arrived full of Georgian wine on March 11.

You know what happened next.

"Within a week, our world had changed," Corrigan said.

So things are on hold. But the wines are in stores, ready to try, at Wines & More of Rhode Island, Cork & Bottle and Majestic Liquors & Spirits, all in Cranston; Centerville Liquors in West Warwick; Fernandez Brothers in Pawtucket and Eno Fine Wines in Providence.

It's also on the menu at Rachel's Cafe in South Kingstown and Rancho EZ in Providence.

Their goal is to be in restaurants and stores in every one of the state's 39 cities and towns.

Learn more at Saperavi.com.