

To promote and support Georgian winemaking, the most respected industry of Georgians, Georgian-Swiss Business Association (GSBA) organized its annual vintage on October 18. Signagi, the picturesque ancient Georgian city in Kakheti region, was the vintage venue this time.

Winemaking is not only an industry but a part and parcel of Georgia. It is believed to be the wine's birthplace on the Earth judging by the archeological findings that trace back to 8 thousand years. Grape, vine growing and wine making have been the inalienable part of Georgian culture and history. The most beautiful chants, hymns and poems of Georgian cultural heritage are dedicated to the vine; the vine is sanctified and identified as the gift of God. The images of vine, vine leaves and grapes are the most frequently used decorations on the walls of churches, frames of icons as well as on clerical items.

The first thing the conquerors were doing when invading Georgia, was cutting down vineyards 'grown like a child' (as the folk poem says) by Georgian vine-growers. The enemy believed they could defeat the country by cutting down vineyards. But vineyards were replanted and refreshed again and again...

However, times change and the free market principles, rather than the lack of business skills and state strategy in the sector forced some Georgian vine-growers to cut out vineyards themselves starting 2007 after Russian market was lost in 2006. The viticulturists claimed they were suffering huge losses since they could no longer sell the harvested grapes,

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cover the expenditures incurred with keeping vineyards and get profit to support the family. Wineries reduced production significantly and were reluctant to buy new harvest that perished by tons.

To replace Russian market by alternative markets, specifically by European ones, was not an easy goal. It required time and finances. To support Georgian wine industry GSBA (founded in 2005 by Swiss Embassy and Georgian businessmen), undertook activities focused on the promotion of Georgian wine sector starting 2006 (when Russian embargo was imposed on Georgian product).

To this end GSBA established a tradition to organize vintage events annually in different districts of Kakheti. It bought more than 10 tons of grapes from farmers, bottled special

wine in the name of GSBA and presented them to European honorable guests and businessmen in order to promote Georgian wine. Moreover, it organized the wine tasting ceremony, inviting outstanding Swiss wine experts and investors in Georgia in 2007. Guests travelled across Georgia and selected 4 wineries to be promoted in Europe.

'You cannot find Georgian wine shops in Europe. For example, in Paris you cannot get a bottle of Georgian wine. They say, there is no demand, but it is up to you to create the demand,' Nino Ugulava, General Coordinator of GSBA, said. 'There is a strong competition in Europe led by excellent French, Italian and Spanish brands, the market is saturated with wines from Latin America, New Zealand and Australia, and nobody cares for Georgian wines be-

cause nobody knows them. You should promote your culture first, to embed awareness of your country and identity, and then follow up with wines, by setting up special Georgian wine shops. But it's up to the state; companies alone cannot deal with this task.'

To promote Georgian wine, some smart people came up with an idea to couple wine with tourism. John Wurdeman, one of the founders of the winery 'Pheasants' Tears' founded in 2007 in Signagi, and host of GSBA vintage event this year, fitted together two integral parts of Georgian hospitality - wine and traditional supra (feast) in his marketing strategy.

This professional artist (a painter) and fan of Georgian culture eagerly introduces to his guests/potential clients ancient traditions of Georgian winemaking, allows them to participate in the vintage and grape crushing process and visit cellars.

To please visitors Wurdeman tours them around the historical Signagi, relating to them the stories connected with the history and culture of the city. Traditional supra, treating the guests with local cuisine and toasts, crowns the event. Visitors can buy wine and learn the essence of the wine at the same time. 'Pheasants' Tears' managed to export 8 thousand bottles of wine to USA last year and plans to enhance business furthermore.

'Wine and tourism should save Georgia,' Gela Patalishvili, the key wine-expert of 'Pheasants' Tears', believes. 'We have to understand this and work on brand-building in this direction.'