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BULGARIA LAUNCHES NATIONAL CAMPAIGN TO PROMOTE WINE TOURISM



*The launch of the national campaign Wine Leads the Way, from left: BAWP Chair Zhivko Enchev, BTA Director General Kiril Valchev, Tourism Minister Miroslav Borshosh, BOWT Chair Petya Minkova, Sofia, September 16, 2025
(BTA Photo/Minko Chernev)*

Tourism Minister Miroslav Borshosh officially launched the national campaign Wine Leads the Way at the BTA National Press Club in Sofia, aiming to promote Bulgarian wine tourism both domestically and internationally. The initiative is part of broader efforts ahead of Plovdiv hosting the 9th UNWTO Global Conference on Wine Tourism, organized in partnership with the UN World Tourism Organization.

As part of the campaign, the Bulgarian News Agency (BTA) introduced a new 2025 section titled New BG WINE Leads the Way, dedicated to covering news from Bulgarian wineries. BTA Director General Kiril Valchev emphasized the importance of offering real stories and information, not just

advertising, to raise awareness and attract tourists.

The campaign also includes plans for Bulgaria's first national conference on wine tourism, jointly organized by the Ministries of Tourism and Agriculture. BTA's coverage of approximately 170 active wineries out of 354 registered, a special bilingual edition of LIK magazine to be presented at the Global Conference. Collaboration with the Bulgarian Organization for Wine Tourism (BOWT), led by Petya Minkova (also Managing Director of Chateau Copsa). Support from the Bulgarian Association of Wine Professionals (BAWP), which will organize Mavrud wine festivals in five cities, highlighting local traditions and wine culture.

Minister Borshosh stressed that wine tourism has developed with little state support until now, and the goal is to change that by uniting state institutions, municipalities, and industry stakeholders under a shared strategy. He emphasized the high quality of Bulgarian wine and its potential to boost regional development and attract high-value visitors.

BAWP Chair Zhivko Enchev confirmed the opinion, stating that Bulgarian wine stands out in quality but needs stronger marketing support. He praised the collaborative spirit behind the campaign, calling it one of the most well-organized initiatives he has been part of.



- Northwestern Bulgaria
- Central Danube Plain
- Northern Black Sea Region
- Southern Black Sea Region
- Sakar and Eastern Rhodopes
- Eastern Thrace
- Western Thrace & Rose Valley
- Struma River Valley

A person with a backpack is walking away from the camera down a path in a vineyard. The path is covered with dry, brown leaves. The vineyard rows are on either side, with green leaves and some red grapes visible. The sky is blue with many white and grey clouds. The text is centered in the upper half of the image.

**BTA WILL PRESENT DOZENS OF BULGARIAN WINERIES IN
THE NEW BG WINE LEADS THE WAY SERIES AHEAD OF
THE 9TH UN GLOBAL CONFERENCE ON WINE TOURISM,
WHICH WILL BE HOSTED IN PLOVDIV.
THE FORUM IS ORGANIZED BY THE MINISTRY OF TOURISM IN
PARTNERSHIP WITH THE UN WORLD TOURISM ORGANIZATION.**

NORTHWESTERN BULGARIA

Lilyache Winery

TWO WINEMAKING FRIENDS CULTIVATE RARE GRAPE VARIETIES IN VRATSA REGION



Viktor Antov and Nikolay Angelov cultivate grape varieties that are rare for Bulgaria such as Senso, Rkatsiteli, Vermentino and Naslada at their winery in the village of Lilyache. Lifelong friends, the two have been involved in wine making for more than 15 years. They have been producing wine professionally since 2020, when they refurbished a house built in 1900, converting it into a winery.

With an annual capacity of 10 to 15 tons of grapes, the winery produces around 5,000 bottles and enjoys good sales. They work mainly with the Senso variety. In Antov's words, Lilyache is the only winery that processes and vinifies certified Senso grapes. „The grapes are certified by the Viticulture and

Winemaking Institute in Plovdiv, where we get them from,“ he adds. Their enologist is Tsvetana Malcheva, a long-time technologist at the old winery in Vratsa. „She has extensive experience and working with her is pleasant and easy. We use her as a consultant because of her high professional and moral qualities, as well as her great erudition,“ Antov says.

Antov is a lawyer by trade, while Angelov is a restorer. „I travel often, working on restoring cultural monuments, paintings, icons, and metal artifacts,“ says Angelov, who spent many years with the Thrace Foundation, Bulgaria's largest private art collection.

The two also plan to plant about 04 hectares of vines on a nearby

property owned by Angelov. „Our families are deeply involved. Everyone helps out during campaigns,“ he says. The winery's logo, „AA,“ incorporates the first letter of both of their surnames.

Years ago, the Senso grape variety (a red variety) was grown in Vratsa and across the country. Along with the well-known Vrachanska Temenuga (a white variety), it was the second best-known and most widely used grape variety, Angelov adds. It was used as a dessert grape and exported to Europe. Vratsa's proximity to the Danube obviously facilitated the grape trade, Angelov notes.

“At the beginning of the 20th century, phylloxera spread into the country and destroyed the

crops. It literally destroyed plant roots and foliage. Ninety percent of the old grape varieties were lost," says Angelov. After the crisis, Senso made a comeback in northwestern Bulgaria. Known for high yields, it is the grape behind many Provencal roses. It is a red variety that gives the wine its aroma. Grenache is another variety used to produce roses, Angelov says. „Senso is tricky to vinify, which is why many winemakers avoid it, but it creates wonderful wine," Angelov notes. He recalls a visit to Berkovitsa where a French woman recognized the variety in their wine.

When the harvest is favorable, the winery also produces red wines. Their Lilyache Red Blend 2022 received the highest rating in the DIVINO ranking. The wine is a blend of Cabernet Franc, Merlot, and Syrah. „A blend means that the grape varieties were combined during fermentation. They develop a kind of early friendship, which gives the wine a balanced taste," says Antov. „Just like us. We both grew up together and understand each other's flaws and strengths."

The winery is also experimenting with Naslada, a white Bulgarian hybrid developed at the institute in Pleven by crossing Hamburg Muscat and Villar Blanc, Angelov says. „It is resistant variety that tolerates climate change very well, and the wine made from it is often considered organic as very little of the plant is chemically treated. We have not yet released it on the market because we only planted a few vines so far and are still monitoring them," he adds.

Their 2024 vintage includes

another rare variety, Rkatsiteli, a Georgian grape with a limited yield of 500 kilograms per 0.1 hectare. Rkatsiteli means red vine - both the vine and the branches are red, even though the grapes are white, Angelov adds, noting that it is not commonly vinified. The vines come from a grower in Vidin Region, whose vines are over 40 years old. The wine will be showcased at an event in Stara Zagora at the end of September. An exhibition is held there, and in 2024, the Lilyache winery earned a medal there for its Vermentino 2023, Antov says. He adds that Vermentino is not a widely known grape variety. „As a small winery, it is hard to stand out with mass-market varieties. For example, there are probably over 300 types of Cabernet Sauvignon wine on the market, and it would be difficult for us to make one that stands out. That is why we prefer rare, certified varieties that offer a specific and refined taste for connoisseurs," Antov adds.

Lilyache Winery also produces a Chardonnay made from locally sourced grapes. One of their standout products is a Chardonnay infused with 23-karat gold - 98% pure edible gold and 2% silver. It is a hit at festive occasions, Angelov says.

The winery's tasting room accommodates 12 to 15 guests. It is known in the region for its two unique, authentic chairs made by craftsmen from Tryavna. One chair is made from 47 wooden pieces, Angelov says, adding that both were purchased online. The other chairs in the room were designed based on those originals. A bowl of last year's Senso grapes, now raisins, sits on a shelf as a

decoration, and a large fireplace at the back of the room keeps guests warm in winter.

In the coming years, the winemakers plan to plant 0.4 to 0.5 hectares of Senso grapes in a demonstration vineyard. It will have a limited yield and the aim is to produce high-quality rose, Angelov says. „We want it to be from our own vineyards because we know that high-quality grapes guarantee high-quality wine," he adds. Since 2020, most of their efforts have gone into investment. They have secured 50% co-financing for new equipment through an approved project for modernization.

Antov and Angelov also plan to expand their hospitality offerings, hosting more events and welcoming more guests. „We already have a guest room in the building where wine is produced," Angelov says. He highlights that the natural landmark „God's Bridge" is located nearby, offering visitors a nature experience. It has become a tradition for the two winemakers to host an event at the beginning of February, where they welcome guests with delicious appetizers, quality wine, music, and a bonfire.

Lilyache Winery is also a member of the Danube Winemakers Association, which includes over 20 winemakers from the western and central Danube Plain. Visitors can explore the region through an online and printed map of the wineries in the region.

CELEBRATING 2025 HARVEST WITH OUTSTANDING GAMAY NOIR



The Borovitza Winery, Northwestern Bulgaria, has placed a special emphasis on the harvest of the perfectly ripened Gamay Noir, as the winery celebrates its 20th anniversary in 2025.

In summer, Borovitza turned the spotlight on a complex and captivating white wine The Guardians MRV. „French varieties Marsanne, Roussanne, and Viognier are not only the „guardians“ of one of the most beautiful wine styles, but they also come from our very own vineyard „The Guardians“, nestled among the red soils near Belogradchik. When these three grapes are blended, something truly special is born,“ the winery team, led by oenologist Adriana Srebrinova, says. The idea was inspired by a French consultant invited to Borovitza. The MRV wine is aged in both new and old oak barrels, capturing the soul of the local terroir.

Another standout wine from Borovitza is their Fume Blanc, which Adriana Srebrinova describes as one of the wines that defines the winery. „Wine lovers know that Fume is used for Sauvignon Blanc aged in oak barrels. Our Fume Blanc is only gently touched by oak, resulting in an elegant, aromatic, and balanced wine,“ she explains.

In March, the Borovitza Winery was once again represented at the international wine fair ProWein in Dusseldorf, Germany.

Once again, the DiVino.taste exhibit and divino.bg ranked Borovitza's wine Bel Muzh among the top 50 Bulgarian wines.

According to Srebrinova, the Borovitza Winery has attracted the attention of the world's leading wine experts from the very beginning. „Eight Masters of Wine have visited the winery, they tasted directly from

the barrels, opened bottles of their choosing, even harvested grapes with us. They observed our work for over a decade.”

She highlighted the immense potential and beauty of the region, adding that „to live up to the level of the region, we, as winemakers, must be worthy of it.”

She quoted Master of Wine Caroline Gilby, who once said during a visit she'd seen all of France from Vidin to Borovitza. Gilby added that if winemakers, wine journalists, or chateau owners from France were to visit, they would envy the locals, because this is a great place for vineyards.

A French consultant, who also works with two legendary wineries, Antinori and Chateau d'Yquem, was so moved by the landscape and soil that he kissed the ground, Srebrinova said. „This has shaped how I see this

region. Though, born in Koprivshtitsa and raised in Plovdiv, I chose to stay here to show the potential of wine tourism, something I witnessed abroad, in regions where wine shapes the local identity.”

Srebrinova sees wine tourism as a central mission for Borovitza: „We want to attract people and show them the charm and value of this region.“ However, she also highlights serious challenges, especially the lack of support for such an important endeavour.

“I’ve been traveling since 1981, and in 1983 I worked in Bordeaux. Every two years, we visited Bordeaux, as exhibitors, judges, and participants. We know how French, German, and Italian winemakers are organized. We are prepared to offer wine tourism of the highest standard.”

There are labour shortages. „We do everything ourselves. We don’t sleep during harvest. Grapes are drying out and dying on the vine because there’s no one to pick them. From 200 decares of vineyard, colleagues brought in only six tons today,” she said.

In an effort to support the region, Srebrinova organized seven winemakers and grape growers from the Vidin region into the Nortikum Association to help one another and promote the unique local terroir.

“I’ve been here for 24 years and have made countless attempts to build the wine tourism the region deserves. When someone who appreciates wine visits, they don’t want to leave. You can see they are overjoyed with this place and the wine. The more cultural events featuring regional wines we host, the more we shape society.”

Srebrinova adds that she works with people who have grown in their craft, in winemaking, wine service, and wine science. „This is a lifestyle and a culture. It’s easy to raise the level here because this is a wine-growing region with generations of tradition.”

She concludes by noting that in countries like France, local officials and national institutions fully understand the value of winemakers. „Abroad there’s no mayor, leader, or cultural figure who doesn’t recognize

the role of winemaking. Wine brings wealth, culture, identity, and secures the future.”

The Borovitza Winery was founded by Ognyan Tsvetanov and Adriana Srebrinova, two of Bulgaria’s most respected winemakers. Tsvetanov passed away in early 2016, leaving behind a legacy of unforgettable wines that changed the face of Bulgarian winemaking, as noted by DiVino.

The winery specializes in small batch wines with strong personality, each reflecting the distinctive terroir. Some series are limited to just 250–400 bottles. Key varieties include Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc, Pinot Noir, Gamza, Cabernet Sauvignon, and Merlot.

Borovitza also owns a vineyard near the Belogradchik Rocks, planted with Marsanne, Roussanne, Viognier, Gamay, and Pinot Noir, growing in red, sandy-stony soil.

Among their highest-rated wines are the red blends Dux, Maxima, and Sensum.



BG WINE

WINERY REVITALIZES A CLASSIC GRAPE VARIETY



Novo Selo Winery focuses on producing wine from the Gamza grape variety, which is characteristic of Northwestern Bulgaria. „Gamza is the face of our winery,” said Anita Mladenova, the winery’s technologist, speaking to BTA from the village of Novo Selo in the Vidin region.

According to her, this year’s grape harvest is slightly smaller, but the quality is very good. The grapes have excellent sugar levels, which is a prerequisite for producing high-quality wines.

The winery was established in 1939 at the initiative of a local cooperative, with the goal of processing grapes from their own vineyards. In 1946, the first wine from the Gamza variety was vinified. That’s where the original name, Novoselska Gamza, of the winery came from, Mladenova explained.

During the socialist era, the winery was nationalized, and after 1989 it was privatized. Since 2019, it has been owned by Ben Han Agro Ltd.,

at which point the new commercial brand Novo Selo Winery was created. The company’s main activity is agriculture and grain production, but after acquiring the winery building and the surrounding properties, it began developing vineyards and winemaking.

Initially, they had 23 hectares of vineyards. Later, an additional 45 hectares of new vineyards were planted. Currently, the winery processes grapes exclusively from about 76 hectares of its own vineyards.

Among the white varieties grown are Sauvignon Blanc, Rkatsiteli, Muscat Ottonel, Chardonnay, and Viognier; and among the red varieties – Gamza, Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Merlot, Sangiovese, and Syrah.

The region is characterized by fertile sandy soils, hot and dry summers, and the beneficial influence of the Danube River, the technologist noted. She added that a project is underway

with European funding to create new vineyards with drip irrigation. „The older vineyards are quite worn out, so we are striving to renew the plantations,” Mladenova clarified.

“For the past three years, we have been part of the Danube Winemakers Association, which unites wineries from the Western and Central Danubian Plain,” said Anita Mladenova. „Some of our representatives are even members of the association’s board of directors. It has become a tradition to organize a joint initiative each year – an Open Doors Day– as well as participation in various exhibitions.”

At this year’s Vinaria 2025, their Gamza wine won a gold medal. At the Balkan Wine Forum in Greece, the Danubian Azure wine received a double gold medal. „This variety is not very well known,” noted Mladenova. „It was created back in 1960 at the Institute of Viticulture and Enology in Pleven as a cross between Rkatsiteli and Villard Blanc.” At the same forum, their Gamza was also awarded a silver medal, she added.

Novo Selo Winery has been renovated, with all equipment, machinery, and facilities fully modernized. It features two tasting halls: a small one with a capacity of up to 12 people, and a larger one that can accommodate up to 70 guests.

“We are not yet working with tour operators, but we offer various tasting packages. One of our main goals is to develop wine tourism,” Mladenova said.

FIRST SPARKLING WINE AND NEW HORIZONS FOR A FAMILY CELLAR



This year, Ahinora Winery, located in the village of Selanovtsi, Vratsa Region, is making its first-ever naturally sparkling wine. It is part of the family's growing line of natural and single-varietal wines that reflect the philosophy of the people behind the cellar.

"We make wine guided by our senses and intuition," says Antoaneta Genova, who has been running the winery for six years. At just 31, she is the oenologist behind the entire portfolio.

The winery produces about ten different wines each year, focusing on Bulgarian varieties like Vrachanski Misket, Misket

Kaylashki, Storgoziya and Cabernet Sauvignon. Around 7 hectares of vineyards surround the cellar, some planted back in 2008.

Misket Kaylashki is a grape developed at the Institute of Viticulture and Oenology in Pleven, Antoaneta explains. It is resistant to disease and produces fresh, fruity white wines. Harvesting is done with the help of seasonal workers, and the winery team is usually just four or five people. This year, the family is celebrating a particularly good vintage.

Alongside their new sparkling wine, they are experimenting with grape juice, so far only for family use, but if it works out, it

may hit the market next year.

Most of their wines are marketed in Sofia and Varna, though Ahinora already exports to the United States and Belgium.

The winery was founded by Antoaneta's father, Geno Genov, who tells how he and the owner of Tipchenitsa Winery in Mezdra Municipality worked together to bring back the Vrachanski Misket variety. Genov first came to Selanovtsi nearly 20 years ago as an amateur fisherman and fell in love with the river and the landscape. „My wine-making hobby turned into a profession," says the former construction engineer.

The family's winemaking

philosophy is rooted in heritage and personal journey. Through family constellation therapy, they discovered that Antoaneta's great-grandfather was a respected winemaker in Stara Zagora Region. „Antoaneta was meant for this place - she makes her own decisions, and I trust her completely,” Genov says.

Antoaneta studied at the Institute of Vine and Wine in Bordeaux, one of just five accredited programmes in France offering a nationally recognized diploma. „My education gave me a broad outlook and a strong foundation in terroir, soils, wine-making and wine marketing,” she explains. She spent seven years in France and even received offers to work in the Loire Valley, but chose to return home instead and build a family wine line.

The winery's signature

collection is the Equinox Series, created in 2012: natural wines without additives, unfiltered and stabilized only through natural processes. There are four wines in the series - one for each seasonal turning point. A rosé from Storgoziya marks the spring equinox, a Vrachanski Misket white celebrates the summer solstice, an orange wine from the same grape honours the autumn equinox, and a Cabernet Sauvignon red marks the winter solstice.

The orange wine, made through extended skin contact and natural fermentation, is particularly notable. „It is a risky process that requires constant attention and care, but it is worth it,” Antoaneta says. The entire 2024 vintage of orange wine has already sold out ahead of its September 22 release.

The inspiration for the series comes from the old belief that grapes harvested at the equinox bring abundance and prosperity. „It all started with the faith that these wines would set us apart and reflect our very own spirituality and energy,” the oenologist says. The wines are presented with colourful labels showing the sun and moon in their seasonal states, a visual echo of the spiritual energy behind them. „We built an entire philosophy around these boutique wines. These four wines reflect my identity and the unique character of this place,” says Antoaneta. Two of them, Ahinora Equinox Rosé Storgoziya 2023 and Ahinora Equinox Cabernet Sauvignon 2023, received top scores this



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130-YEAR-OLD WINERY LAUNCHES NEW FULL-BODIED RED SERIES SKAKLYA



Vrachanska Temenuga winery is located near Vratsa, on the road to Oryahovo, with a capacity to process 100 tonnes of grapes per year. The vineyards are about three kilometres away. „Our story began with my father-in-law, who inherited vineyards with Vratsa Misket. We decided to preserve this valuable grape and make it the foundation of our production,” said technologist and enologist Iglika Kostadinova.

The Vrachanska Temenuga brand is over 130 years old and the Kostadinov family patented it and have been cultivating vineyards and producing wine and rakia from the Vratsa Misket grape variety for more than two decades.

From 2010 to 2018 the family tended the vines with the help of Iglika's father-in-law. At first, the wine was produced under contract bottling and only in one style, with the first vintage dating from 2010. In 2018, Kostadinova specialized in winemaking technology, making production easier to control and develop. Building their own winery in 2021, the family could expand and

experiment with spirits.

Currently, the winery produces various wines - Vrachanska Temenuga white and black edition, sparkling wine, semi-sweet Temenuga, and two types of rakia from Vratsa Misket. Other products include red wines Mara Vrachanka, Bubble Temenuga, Vrattsata and No Name. A new red wine Skaklya made from Cabernet Franc and a dessert wine that has been ageing for three years are being prepared.

The new Skaklya red wine was produced in 2022 from Cabernet Franc, maturing alternately in oak barrels and stainless steel tanks. Another dessert wine is also ageing and will be ready in two years.

“The most objective assessment comes from people, when they like our wine and rakia and choose them. That is our greatest reward,” said Iglika Kostadinova. The family regularly participates in wine fairs and events in Bulgaria, with their elder daughter Greta actively involved.

Greta, 21, is studying food and beverage production and

management in Italy, learning agronomy, food technology, wine, meat, cheese, and chocolate. „Wine is my passion. I travel constantly between Italy and Bulgaria. In summer, I spend three months in Sozopol, where I handle distribution,” she said. For the first time in 2025, her father entrusted her with tending the vines using techniques she studies at university.

“You can't make good wine from bad grapes,” Greta said. The Vratsa Misket variety was brought years ago and cultivated in the region not by chance. It is aromatic, from the Muscat family. „Here the soil retains water, and for this grape variety that is positive. There is a significant difference between Miskets. According to Greta, the terroir is very important. „Our grapes here are different from the same variety grown, for example, 40 km from Vratsa,” she said. In the family vineyards, there are nine-year-old plants and also ones that are forty years old. „The vine is a plant with a non-stop growing root system. How you cultivate the vine, how

you prune it, is also very important. My mother invested a lot of energy and trained people who have been tending the vines for more than ten years," added Greta Kostadinova.

"Hygiene in a winery is very important in order to produce quality wine," her mother added. „We work with four or five women who have been with us for years. They travel 80 kilometres every day to come and return from work, but they are exceptional, and thanks to them we feel secure. They find grape pickers for the campaign, and whenever needed, I can always rely on them," said Igljika Kostadinova.

Vrachanska Temenuga winery has worked over the years with international varieties such as Cabernet Franc, Cabernet Sauvignon, Syrah, but at the moment they are using mainly Bulgarian grape varieties. According to Greta Kostadinova, the winery is designed for their needs. They have all the conditions for producing quality wine - enough tanks, a cold room where the grapes are prepared before processing to the right temperature, a bottling and packaging machine, a laboratory, a special vinificator, a blending vessel.

"The work in the winery is year-round," added the winery's

technologist. „Once the grape harvest campaign ends, you start storing the production, processing, stabilising, blending, forming, so it matures and becomes the final product. You need labels, bottles. We have an idea and work with attention to every detail. On our labels, Manyashki Peak, which can be seen from the vineyards, is illustrated. On the Skaklya wine the well-known waterfall near Vratsa is depicted," added Igljika Kostadinova.

"My father has a unique certificate from an international wine and liqueur competition held in Brussels in 1895, awarded to the famous producer of prestigious branded wines Stefan Kraskiyov from Vratsa. Back then, he received an honorary diploma and a Grand Prix, and there were many representatives of European royal and imperial courts who wanted to buy in advance for years ahead from the fine wine," said Greta Kostadinova. She added that Vrachanska Temenuga also has a gold medal from an exhibition in Paris in 1887. She noted that the family has traditions and an attitude towards viticulture and winemaking, and the respect for the Vrachanska Temenuga variety is enormous. „We realize that we are participating in the revival of an old

variety, over 130 years old, and we invest exceptional professionalism and attention to detail," added Greta Kostadinova. In the winery, the symbol of violets (temenuga) is distinctive, from the paintings on the walls to the porcelain vessels engraved with violets.

"Greta is a young, dynamic, modern person and contributes a lot to the work of the winery. She has an exceptional sense, is a good taster, learns a lot, and constantly trains her senses. We are very proud of her. I can't wait for her to graduate and return so we can give her the opportunity to develop in the winery," said Igljika Kostadinova.

The family offers tastings at the winery, accompanied by local foods like sheep cheese, tomatoes from the garden, Vratsa lyutika. In the future, the construction of guest bungalows and a large events hall is planned.

The younger daughter, Violet, also shows interest in agronomy and the future of the family business.

Vrachanska Temenuga is a member of the Danube Winemakers association, which unites over 20 producers from the Western and Central Danube plain.



BG WINE

CELEBRATING STRONG HARVEST, PREPARING TO LAUNCH NEW WINES FROM LOCAL VARIETIES

Magura Winery has completed the harvesting of white grape varieties this year and boasts a good harvest. Also it is launching several new wines, mainly reds, its newest series focusing on local grape varieties such as Gamza and Vrachanski Misket. Among the latest releases are a Gamza and Syrah blend, as well as a Vrachanski Misket and Riesling blend. A Mavrud will also be added to the winery's portfolio.

"We put a strong emphasis on local varieties," said Elena Baykova, Commercial Director of Magura Winery. „A significant share of our production is from local grapes such as Gamza," she added.

The winery's newest line is the Single Vineyard series, which has already launched the Gamza-Syrah blend, said Magura's oenologist Daniela Georgieva. Earlier this summer, the winery announced it was „reviving the long-forgotten Tamyanka variety," whose wine has become one of Magura's

emblematic releases in the current season.

The winery has received international recognition at major wine competitions. At the prestigious Decanter WWA 2025, its wines The Maiden (Gamza) and The Hunter (Syrah, Malbec, Cabernet Franc) won silver medals, while The Egoist (Sauvignon Blanc) earned bronze. At MUNDUS VINI Spring Tasting 2025, the international jury awarded gold medals to The Maiden (Gamza) and The Celestial Bull (Rubin). Three wines from Magura's Medium series were recognized with silver medals at the Balkans International Wine Competition 2025 in Naousa, Greece.

Magura Winery took part this year in The Ultimate CEE Wine Fair in London, which gathers leading producers from Central and Eastern Europe. In March, the winery was part of Bulgaria's national stand at ProWein 2025 in Düsseldorf, Germany. Magura will

also participate in the upcoming edition of DiVino.Taste, Bulgaria's largest wine exhibition.

Magura Winery is located in the village of Rabisha, between the Danube River, the red sandstone cliffs of Belogradchik, and the natural landmark Magura Cave. The winery operates one of the cave's galleries, The Bats, where its unique natural sparkling wine matures for three years. With soil and climate conditions similar to those of France's Champagne region, the Rabisha area is well suited for high-quality sparkling wine production using traditional methods. The constant temperature of 12°C, combined with darkness and humidity, creates ideal conditions for natural champagnization.

Wine tourism is a major focus for the winery, offering tours and tastings in Magura Cave's wine hall.



AMK 2025

WINES EXPORTED TO 24 COUNTRIES ACROSS FOUR CONTINENTS



Chateau Burgozone wines are exported to 24 countries across four continents, owner Stefan Marinov told BTA. He said the winery's Collection wines series - Iris, Eva, Philippe and Thomas - is served in Michelin-starred restaurants. These wines are blends or local varieties made from the family's finest grapes, produced in limited quantities of 1,200 to 3,000 bottles. Grapes are hand-picked and carefully selected on an inspection line, with yields limited to up to five clusters per vine.

The four Collection wines are very special, marking the birth of the family's third generation and bearing the names of Marinov's grandchildren, he added. Chateau Burgozone is a family-run boutique winery in Northern Bulgaria, near the town of Oryahovo. It is named after the Roman fortress Burgozone, which stood in what is today's vineyard, according to Svetla Marinova.

The vineyard has long been known for producing some of the region's finest wines, Stefan

Marinov said. The 100-hectare estate was planted with high-quality French stock and now grows 13 grape varieties, including Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc, Viognier, Tamyanka, Pinot Noir, Merlot, Cabernet Franc, Cabernet Sauvignon, Syrah, Marselan, Gamza, Egiodola and Pinot Meunier. Local varieties Tamyanka and Gamza were planted in 2016 after long-term selection with the Institute of Viticulture and Oenology in Pleven and a German laboratory to ensure top-quality stock.

Chateau Burgozone, opened in 2010, exports to over 20 countries and has won the Golden Cellar Award multiple times. Its own vineyards guarantee consistent grape quality, Marinov said, with the first export contract signed in 2011 with a major Belgian importer. In 2016, Chateau Burgozone, exporting to over 20 countries, was named Golden Winery of Bulgaria by the export-focused website exporter. bg. Since then, it has received the title three more times at a special event held under the patronage of the Ministry of Economy.

The winery has won over 150 medals at prestigious international competitions. All wines are made from its own vineyards and carry the Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) Dunavska Ravnina. A PGI label for wines means that at least 85% of the grapes have to come exclusively from the geographical area where the wine is actually made. Burgozone uses 100% estate-grown grapes, with each wine evaluated by a tasting commission to qualify for PGI status. The winery produces only dry wines and is the first and

only in Bulgaria to make certified vegan wines under the Swiss V-Label, meaning no animal products such as egg white or collagen are used in production.

The winery's white wines mature on fine lees for several months to enhance aroma and aging potential. According to Marinov, the Burgozone style is fresh, fruity and elegant, a character shaped by the loess soils and the cooling influence of the Danube, which sharpens fruit expression through strong day-night temperature swings. The reds see only limited oak aging, allowing the fruit aromas to dominate. The loess soil, porous and rich in limestone with low clay content, adds finesse and minerality.

Burgozone's Chardonnay won Bulgaria's first Grand Gold for a white wine at the Brussels World Competition and has since earned six consecutive gold medals. Its Chardonnay Barrique is the only Bulgarian white rated 91 points by Wine Enthusiast. The family also produces Viognier, recognized by wine critic Oz Clarke as one of the world's top six in his book *Grapes & Wines*,

with a mission to popularize the variety in Bulgaria.

The winery's Pinot Noir was ranked among the Top 6 wines under USD 30 in the United States and listed as one of Wine Enthusiast's 100 Best Buys of the Year. Burgozone also promotes Bulgarian varieties like Tamyanka and Gamza abroad, both awarded gold medals at France's Gilbert & Gaillard competition, said Svetla Marinova.

Burgozone produces three main wine series - Collection, Premium and Selection - along with exclusive small-batch wines such as Chardonnay Barrique and Viognier Barrique. The Marinov family has been dedicated to winemaking for over 20 years, with their two daughters managing exports. About 50 people work year-round at the estate, with seasonal staff doubling during harvest.

Burgozone features a spacious tasting hall and a panoramic terrace overlooking its vineyards and the Danube. The winery is a founding member of the Association of Danube Winemakers, uniting over 20 producers from the Western and Central Danubian Plain.



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PRESERVING OLD GRAPE VARIETIES AND THRACIAN WINEMAKING HERITAGE IN BERKOVITSA REGION

Todor Kostadinov from Borovtsi is reviving the old grape varieties of the Berkovitsa region and recreating the wine once made by the Thracians. The winemaker owns the Agrofitness winery, producing brands like Tribal after the Thracian Triballi tribe, Kolabrismos after the favourite war dance of the Triballi, and Sirm after one of the most successful Triballian kings. The reverence for the Thracians is no coincidence, as they were renowned as the greatest winemakers of antiquity.

Born in Borovtsi, Todor Kostadinov is a hereditary vine grower, who has been involved in grape cultivation and winemaking since childhood. Over the last 30 years, he has been purchasing old vineyards and plots, where he plants new vines. At present, he manages 2 hectares of newly planted vineyards and about 0.8 hectares of narrow-row old vineyards, bought from their former owners. From these, he produces between 8 and 12 tonnes of wine annually, which he bottles in one-litre and 750 ml bottles and sells in restaurants, at farmers' markets, and at producers' fairs.

Kostadinov's wine is made exclusively from old and traditional grape varieties native to the Berkovitsa region - Zarchin, Garvanovo oko, Vranka, Vechnost, Pamid, Gamza, Byal Dimyat, Kokorko, Tamyanka, and others. As for 2025's grape harvest, Kostadinov believes that despite the summer drought, it is above average and describes it as promising. He notes that the key to a good wine is the winemaking process itself. Care must be taken,

because although the harvest is plentiful, the drought has altered the sugar content of the grapes, making them drier, therefore, the wine must be made patiently, he explained.

The name Agrofitness reflects his belief that tending a vineyard is a kind of fitness, highly beneficial to the human body. He founded the winery entirely with his own funds, without loans or credit. Kostadinov also engages in research, studying the antibiotic resveratrol found in vines, which allows the plant to heal itself. The same substance is present in red wine, giving it antibacterial properties.

Visitors can observe the winemaking process at Kostadinov's home yard in Borovtsi. He has also arranged an exhibition on the history of viticulture and

winemaking in the Berkovitsa region over the past centuries, displaying vine roots, grape-picking baskets, hoes and other agricultural tools for vineyard cultivation.

Inside his house, Kostadinov has arranged two wine-tasting rooms where enthusiasts can sample different types of wine from the past decades, some dating back to the socialist era, paired with appetisers suited to each wine. Guests can even taste wine from ancient-style vessels. After the tasting, visitors can tour the wine cellar, where numerous barrels and bottles are stored, as well as a boutique wine-aging cellar.

For tourists, Todor Kostadinov has also built a special guesthouse, featuring three separate rooms, each dedicated to a different grape variety and type of wine.



EXPANDING IDEA OF WINE THROUGH TOURISM

The Jolly Vintners winery combines wine-making with wine tourism in the northwestern village of Lyuti Brod, Mezdra Municipality. „We create our wines with a wish for joy and celebration,“ said co-owner Dimitar Dimitrov.

The project of Dimitrov and his partner Ivana Tsakova began in 2014 with a family plot near the village of Veslets, Vratsa Municipality, where they planted mostly French grape varieties. The place is historically significant: on May 31, 1876,

Bulgarian national hero Hristo Botev and his detachment had their last rest, food and wine there, thanks to Tsakova's grandfather Tsako. Dimitrov explained that perhaps inspired by Botev's admiration for the French Revolution, they planted Grenache, Syrah, Cinsault and Mourvedre. Still, their idea has always been to use foreign varieties as an accent, combining them with Bulgarian ones.

Their first production was released in 2019, after which they began experimenting with

blending wines from other growers. Dimitrov said that they visit the cellars, select wines from existing vessels and create blends that bring together varieties rarely combined elsewhere, which makes their production distinctive. They do not approach winemaking as a contest for the best varietal but as an opportunity to create enjoyable drinks. For example, they blend Cabernet Sauvignon with Gamza, Pinot Noir with Gamza, and Sauvignon Blanc with Chardonnay and



Gruner Veltliner. The partners themselves determine the proportions, select the base wines and handle bottling.

Dimitrov noted that wine, a drink with a 5,000-year history, brings joy in both difficult and happy moments and enlivens everyday life. Their labels, too, are designed to be cheerful.

The winery produces around 5,000 bottles a year of White Danube, Rosalinda, Hedgehogs, Wild Cherry, Mulberries, Easy by Dimitar, and Easy by Ivana. The wines are available in several outlets in Sofia and other large cities, but the project mainly relies on wine tourism, which they have been developing for the past three years. After welcoming about 150 friends who praised the location as ideal for wine and good company, they decided to expand this

aspect of their activity.

According to Dimitrov, their wine tourism differs from the classic winery visit. It combines walks in nature, stories about local history, tastings of food and wines from the area. The surroundings offer eco-trails, routes such as Cherepish-Lyuti Brod, shorter hikes to the ruins of an ancient church, the Ritlite rock formations and Rashov Dol, where Botev's revolutionaries perished. Visitors learn about figures such as Baba Iliytsa, Tsar Shishman and the Triballi, with the wines serving as a complement to the region's nature, history and culture. Everything served at the table is produced within 30 km of the site, from meats from Chiren and cheeses from Vratsa to pastries from Zverino and seasonal delicacies.

Visitors can choose between a lavish picnic on the banks of the Iskar River, a romantic tasting above the Ritlite under the vines, watching the sunset over the gorge with a glass of wine, or a refreshing finish to a mountain hike to Prosechen Kamak. All experiences are accompanied by convivial conversations about wine.

Dimitrov and Tsakova are also organizers of the annual Vratsa Misket Festival, which gathers colleagues from across Northwestern Bulgaria. It is held on August 15 on the banks of the Iskar River, beneath the Ritlite rock formations. They are also members of the Danube Wines Association.



BG WINE

WINE COMPLEX OFFERS SOME 20 WINE TYPES, FOCUSES ON LOCAL GRAPE VARIETIES



Equipped with state-of-the-art high-tech facilities from foreign and Bulgarian companies, the ChaTony Winery near the northwestern village of Darmantsi offers around 20 types of white, red and rosé wines in various sizes, one of the owners, Nadezhda Yordanova, told BTA. According to her, their newest products are Tamyanka

white wine and Merlot red wine, in 375 ml bottles.

The first sod of the wine complex was turned in 2019 with the intention of building a base that would be an example of modern wine production in Bulgaria. The complex consists of two parts - a winery and a hotel, where, in addition to producing quality wines, wine tourism can

also be developed.

"In 2020, we planted the first 10 hectares of vineyards, focusing on Muscat Ottonel, Chardonnay Rosé and Chardonnay Bianco. This year, we are harvesting for the second year. In 2021, we put the winery into operation, marking the beginning of our wine history. That is when our first wine was produced,"

explained Yordanova.

Currently, the winery also uses grapes from other producers, but only after preliminary quality analysis in its own laboratory. The processing capacity of the facilities is about 500 tonnes of grapes per year. The winery also has a special room where the best wines are aged in oak barrels. The bottling line is automated and has a capacity of 1,500 bottles per hour.

"This love for wine came after we became owners of a hydroelectric power plant in Southern Bulgaria, in the Sandanski area. When we went and tried their wines, my husband Tony Yordanov decided to take up a small winery as a hobby, which turned into this large enterprise," said Yordanova.

Currently, wine lovers can enjoy a wine tour of the complex, which tells the story of the wine and ends with a VIP tasting of a glass of wine and a specially selected delicacy

According to Yordanova, there is a noticeable increase in demand for white wines of the Vrachanski Misket, Tamyanka and, more recently, Muscat Ottonel varieties. These are some of ChaTony Winery's most popular wines, along with Sauvignon Blanc and Chardonnay, she said.

"We want people to recognise the wines from this region, so we focus on local varieties, explained Lalo Geshev, the oenologist at the winery. According to him, because of what this Balkan micro-region has to offer, the wines from the cellar are characterised by

greater freshness, better acidity, the red wines are softer, and the rosés are more drinkable and balanced.

"For me, the most important thing is that people can recognise the wines from our region, so that when they hear „Northwest“, they think of the wines of ChaTony. The area is more white than red. Our white wines are made from the characteristic Vrachanski Misket, Tamyanka, Muscat Ottonel, Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc, Traminer. Rosé wines are made from Shiroka Melniska Loza, Cabernet Franc, Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot. Red wines in the classic varieties - Cabernet Sauvignon, Syrah, Mavrud - from local varieties and for Cabernet Franc, we experiment with Pinot Noir. This is the varietal structure of the wines we produce, as we strive to cover the market with both pure varieties and blends," said Geshev.

He makes no secret of the fact that all the products offered by the winery are his favourites, but he also has his preferences - among the red wines, he prefers Syrah, and among the whites, Vrachanski Misket. „Over the years, I had never encountered it either as a variety or as a wine. In Bulgaria, we have many varieties of aromatic Muscat/Misket wines - Sandanski Misket, Vrachanski, Varnenski, Karlovski, Brezovski, Sungurlanski. But Vrachanski is very specific because, of almost all the varieties I listed, it has this balance between aroma, which is unobtrusive, as in Muscat Ottonel, for example, and the acidity and body of

the wine itself," explained the oenologist, adding that their Vrachanski Misket is good as an aperitif, with food, and even as a digestif.

Geshev explained that at this stage, the winery wants to focus on what it is currently producing, because wine is the slowest-moving agricultural product: „It requires persistence and consistency over the years. The cycle from the vineyard, through winemaking, sales and consumption by the customer usually takes between two and five years.

"We want to promote what we do, but we also experiment, of course. At the moment, for example, we are experimenting with a Riesling and focusing on local varieties. We talk to our colleagues about how, over the last 40-50 years, or even more, we have lost the identity of the individual regions in the country. That is why we now need to rebuild this identity. It is best for a person to first stand firmly on their own ground and then develop," said Geshev.

ChaTony wines can be found in various outlets in Northwestern Bulgaria, Sofia, Plovdiv and Pirdop, as well as in the winery's online store. Although it has only been on the market for a few years, the ChaTony Winery has won many awards. In the last exhibition it participated in - the 2025 Balkan International Wine Competition in Naoussa, Greece - it won four awards.

NEW BLENDS OF BULGARIAN AND FOREIGN GRAPES GAIN POPULARITY ABROAD



Recent trends in the wine sector highlight local grape varieties, while international demand is growing for wines that blend Bulgarian and foreign grapes, Tipchenitza Winery Director and winemaker Nadya Mineva told BTA. The winery is located at the edge of the eponymous village in the Mezdra region. The small winery is licensed to store and produce up to 100 tonnes of wine annually and currently produces between 50,000 and 60,000 bottles from various vintages, Mineva said.

The winery's first commercial vintage was 2018, but the company has been active since 2003, when it planted its first vineyards. It initially operated as a nursery for vine cuttings. Residents of Tipchenitza village have been producing vine cuttings since the early 20th century, exporting them both domestically and abroad. During the socialist era, exports reached several million units, stored in an

underground stone cellar now housing the winery.

"We have records from 1906 of master vine growers who began planting mother vines extensively. Nearly every household used its yard for vine cultivation. From here, cuttings were exported, previously stored in this cellar. We renovated it, and now it houses barrels and bottled wines," Mineva said.

The winery's vineyards are located close to the facility. Grapes are also purchased from other producers within an 80 km radius northwest to preserve the style of the final product. „The soils here are suitable for many white varieties. About 70% of our production focuses on aromatic white wines. We started with roughly 28 ha, some of which are now gradually being renovated," the Director emphasized.

The winery produces two main local varieties – Vratsa Misket and Rubin. „Local varieties allow us to

create unique Bulgarian wines. We demonstrate different approaches to working with them while maintaining consistency. I call them the different faces of Vratsa Misket and Rubin," Mineva said.

In seven years on the market, the winery has won over 80 international awards at prestigious competitions such as Decanter, Mundus Vini, and Concours Mondial de Bruxelles. Its wines are sold domestically and internationally in Belgium, Germany, the UK, the U.S., and Canada. The winery's owner, Velin Djidjev, chairs the Association of the Danube Winemakers, which works on joint projects to promote local wines in third markets.

"We want to change the poor reputation from the past, show that our products can be high-quality and sell worldwide, and we are putting great effort into this," Mineva said.

BULGARIAN WINE SERVED AT MICHELIN-STARRED RESTAURANT IN GERMANY



Vidinska Gamza winery is developing the local grape varieties Gamza and Pamid, as well as Rkatsiteli and Muscat Ottonel, which have long been grown in the Vidin region. The winery's co-owner Petko Mikov recalled that the beginning was set in 2005 with the purchase and cultivation of old vineyards.

"At that time, people could not manage the vineyards and sell the grapes. We decided to invest in old vineyards without any idea of creating a winery. In the very first year, however, it turned out the vineyards were fertile. We carried out all the necessary agricultural activities, but there was really no place to sell the grapes," Mikov said. "We were in a deadlock, so we decided to buy containers, registered the Vidinska Gamza trademark, and officially started wine production."

The winery's vineyards are mainly located in the areas of the villages of Negovanovtsi and Florentin, while the winery itself is in Novo Selo. "We

have a small building, essentially a working facility. We are now building tasting halls for tourists visiting the winery. Due to the growing interest in wine tourism, tastings on site are already a priority for us," Mikov pointed out.

In the early years of the business, wine was not popular as a product, but the local varieties were gradually established. "Gamza and Pamid, as well as Rkatsiteli and Muscat Ottonel, were somewhat forgotten varieties," Mikov said. "With the old vineyards we cultivate, we managed to revive them and believe they are the future."

According to him, wine tourism has gained momentum after the pandemic, when online trade was at its peak. "After the lockdowns and isolation, people felt the need to travel again. Interest in local varieties is very strong, not only in our region but everywhere in Bulgaria. People want to rediscover the taste of the past and the traditions of our ancestors," he commented.

Wine competitions and festivals are becoming increasingly popular, Mikov said. "We try to participate and present our wines. At the Balkan Gamza Festival, our 2022 Gamza won a double gold medal and the grand trophy for a local Bulgarian variety. We produce the so-called orange wine, an old method of keeping the wine in contact with the skins. It has a richer flavour, is aged in oak barrels, and is more intriguing in taste. Our 2021 Rkatsiteli also won a double gold medal and a trophy for a local Bulgarian variety. We are proud that our Gamza and Pamid wines are offered in two Michelin-starred restaurants in Copenhagen, Denmark. It is a real achievement for Bulgarian wine to be sold in elite restaurants in Europe," Mikov said.

He also argued that the sector has been neglected by the state. "All wineries face difficulties finding workers. Pruning, bud removal, trimming, tying, and grape picking are all manual operations. Machine harvesting is gaining ground, but the quality of the wine is different. Perhaps the mistake was made years ago by some official at the Agriculture Ministry who classified grapes only as raw material for wine. For dessert grapes, for example, producers receive considerable state support, unlike wine varieties. The result is that we hire and train workers in pruning vineyards, but shortly afterwards they leave for Italy, France, or Spain, where pay is much better. A review of state policy in the sector is necessary," Mikov explained.

CRAFTING EXCEPTIONAL WHITE AND ROSÉ WINES FROM VRATSA'S DANUBE TERROIR

The wine project Ponte Dio from Vratsa offers white and rose wines with the finest qualities of the excellent Danube terroir. The winery produces up to 10,000 bottles annually from its own vineyards near Mizia and the Montana village of Slavotin.

"The most important prerequisite for good wine is the vineyard. Our plots are in Northwestern Bulgaria, home to the pride of the region, the Vratsa Misket variety. Near Mizia we also grow Riesling, Chardonnay, and Traminer. Only white varieties, because Northern Bulgaria is better suited to them," said the owner Mladen Tsolov.

He and his wife Zhana Tsoleva have been cultivating vines for more than ten years and now manage about 35 hectares. Favourable conditions near Mizia, humus-rich soil, southern slopes, and suitable air currents, allow the vineyards to thrive and yield good harvests from their third year. This led to the creation of the wine project, which began as a dream for an impressive wine.

"Ponte Dio was born from the vision to create something exceptional. I wanted to meet my own need for quality wine, not only for myself, but also for friends and wine lovers. If it worked and people liked it, we would sell it. Many people aim to make good wine, but I wanted something more, and achieved it," Tsolov explained.

The name connects to his native region. „We wanted to open a door, a passage from the present to the past, to history and legend. That is



why we named the brand Ponte Dio, which translates as God's Bridge, a natural phenomenon near Vratsa," he said. According to him, legends also surround the Vratsa Misket variety, also known as Vrachanska Temenuga. This ancient white grape variety is believed by some to have been cultivated by the Thracian tribe of Triballi, who inhabited the area in the 6th-7th century BC, when Vratsa was their capital. Vratsa Misket is highly aromatic, with notes of wild violets, lemon, and cardamom, which are expressed in the wines.

"In production we follow demand. We could make 300,000 bottles, but we don't want that. We make wine for the pleasure of creating something exceptional that connoisseurs can appreciate, not to conquer the market. On the way to the final product we are assisted by oenologist Nadya Mineva of the Tipchenitsa winery, who is an outstanding professional," said Tsolov.

Currently, the main production

is Vratsa Misket, the most popular wine in the region. The second is rose, made in smaller quantities from Rubin, Merlot, and Cabernet. The rose has an unusual origin: „Near Mizia, besides white varieties, we had a few hectares of Cabernet and Merlot, so we tried making rose. We harvested everything, but one of the varieties was not fully ripe, which raised the acidity. To balance the taste, we added overripe Rubin grapes, and the result was excellent. Now we do it that way every year. I personally like it a lot, it has slightly sweet, spicy notes of forest fruits," the winemaker explained.

Ponte Dio's newest product is Rubin Barrel, introduced two years ago and not yet featured on the website. „It ages for two years in oak barrels and is very well received. We produce only about 500 bottles per year in this limited series. It is an excellent wine, so we made sure it comes in beautifully designed bottles, sealed with wax," Tsolov added.

CENTRAL DANUBE PLAIN

Varbovka Winery

HISTORIC WINERY EMBRACES BULGARIAN GRAPES, PLANS NEW EXPERIMENTS WITH KAYLASHKI MUSCAT

Wines from the Kaylaka Muscat and Gamza varieties are among the most preferred from the production of the winery in the village of Varbovka near Pavlikeni. It has not stopped operating for 91 years and is one of the few such wineries in Bulgaria, said the winery's technologist Kaloyan Penev to BTA.

A centuries-old Roman stone stele, greeting visitors in the yard of the winery, symbolizes the continuity between generations, with vines, characteristic of the region since ancient times, carved as decoration.

Varbovka Winery began as a cooperative, but in 1999, Kaloyan's parents, who are both trained technologists in the winemaking industry, purchased it. They left the winemaking factory in Suhindol, where they had worked up to that point, and continued their professional careers in the private sector. Today, the business is run by Kaloyan's mother, Svetlana Peneva, who is both the manager and technologist, alongside her son Kaloyan, daughter Laura, and several employees.

The new harvest, in terms of quantity, is much smaller than the previous one, but the grapes that managed to survive the April frosts are of good quality, Penev said. This means that the wine this year will be more expensive but of higher quality than in the previous two

years. „We were very lucky with the vineyards we work with because the Hail Suppression Agency took care of our region, and the rainfall, though not abundant, came at the right time, allowing us to have good raw materials,” he explained.

The technologist mentioned that the winery does not own its own vineyards and mainly works with local ones. This year, it processes grapes primarily from Lyaskovets, which are old vineyards from the local winemaking factory, with varieties such as Aligote and Chardonnay. From Suhindol, the winery gets Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Chardonnay, and Muscat Ottonel, and from Svishtov – Kaylaka Muscat. The typical local grape variety Gamza is expected to be delivered soon. This year, between 60 and 80 tonnes of grapes are expected to be processed, yielding about 30-40 tons of wine – white, red, and rosé. The winery also produces the traditional Artemisia-flavoured wine.

The technologists at the winery plan to produce new products and intend to experiment with Kaylaka Muscat. Penev said their company was one of the first to start popularizing this variety back in 2018. According to him, the winery was also the first to hold a vertical tasting of this grape variety, showcasing six consecutive

vintages from the same vineyard, which is very interesting for wine connoisseurs. This year, the team plans to experiment with aging Kaylaka Muscat using acacia staves, which will make the wine more complex, the technologist said. He added that they have already experimented with other varieties this way, with good results.

When asked if the winery invests in facilities, new technologies, and equipment, Penev replied that the winery operates on modest funds but with great imagination, achieving sufficiently interesting results.

The Penev family plans to participate in competitions, including international ones, where they have already won many awards. Some contests have high entry fees and expenses, so they carefully consider which ones are truly worth entering.

The winery in Varbovka is part of Bulgaria's wine tourism map in the northeast and, as such, participates in an annual event usually held at the beginning of summer, Penev explained. At that time, wineries in the region welcome more guests. For inquiries from larger groups wishing to visit the winery, they also organize tastings and tours that include a historical element. Among the visitors are foreigners. Partners of the winery owners from the

nearby village of Karpachevo, who run guesthouses, also bring visitors. During one visit, a Swiss family purchased 300 bottles of Bulgarian wine varieties for charity to support local firefighting services.

Visitors to the winery are most often impressed that someone is fighting to preserve something over 90 years old, Penev shared. The preserved old barrels, some of the largest in Bulgaria, also attract interest. There are 24 barrels in total, with varying capacities. The smallest hold about 10,000 litres, and two can hold 17,000 litres each. They were used until 2008 and reflected the production market conditions of that time. The new vessels at the winery now have a capacity of up to 225 liters, showing the industry's shift toward smaller-scale, niche production. Many wineries with small production quantities showcase the remarkable and colorful character of modern

Bulgarian wine. Currently, this is one of the great advantages for winemaking in our country, Penev believes.

In traditional winemaking countries like France or Germany, regions with their long history and regulations effectively limit the styles of wines that can be produced, explained the technologist. On the other hand, in Bulgaria, many projects show a colorful face of winemaking. Thus, every wine lover can find something that suits their taste and vision.

As a calling card of the winery, especially regarding white wines, which currently dominate market demand, Penev identifies the Bulgarian grape variety Kaylaka Muscat. It was developed at the Institute of Viticulture and Winemaking in Pleven in 1976, during a period of intense scientific activity in this field. It was created to be very productive, aromatic, and resistant to all kinds of pests and

diseases, which makes it a successful base for further development, Penev believes. „When you have raw material each year with similar characteristics and quality, it gives you the opportunity to build upon it,” he explained, adding that it is much more difficult with more sensitive varieties. Another preferred wine of the winery is Gamza, which is typical for the region. Overall, we focus on Bulgarian varieties; we also work with Tamyanka and Rubin, Penev added.

Working with grapes and wine gives a unique positive emotion; otherwise, I wouldn't be involved in this, said the technologist. „Wine is a science, and I would even call it one of the most digestible forms of art. Perhaps it is no coincidence that at an exhibition in Varna, a woman tasted our wine and started crying because it reminded her of a close person. To give people such feelings is priceless,” Penev said.



AMK 2025

FOCUS ON WHITES FROM TAMYANKA AND VRATSA MUSCAT VARIETIES

Marin Kovachev, one of the owners of Noya Winery in the village of Oreshak near Troyan, said that this year they are focusing heavily on white wines from the Tamyanka and Vratsa Muscat varieties, and on one or two very good rose varieties.

"Bulgarians, especially those accustomed to more traditional flavors, prefer red wines. Rose wine also has its enthusiasts, while in the summer we mostly sell white wines," he added.

Noya Winery was licenced in 2019 and takes its name from the oldest known name for the Osam River, dating back to Thracian times, which springs very close to the winery. It has a capacity of about 90,000 litres, placing it on the border between a small and medium-sized winery, Kovachev explained.

The equipment used in the winery is extremely modern and high-tech, with all vessels featuring built-in cooling systems, he noted. „The vessels we use represent the cutting edge of technology in our field and allow us to produce truly high-quality wines."

The winery does not own its own vineyards; it buys grapes from producers all over the country, most often from villages around Pleven, Harmanli, Sandanski, and the Black Sea region. „We choose to work with vine-growers who are passionate and cultivate more interesting and higher-quality grape varieties. We verify a wide range of varieties, with over 22 types of white, rose, and red wines," Kovachev emphasized.

"If someone wants to make good

red wine at home, it's possible, with a lot of care and effort. But that's not the case with white wines and roses. The technological processes required to make good, aromatic rose wine are nearly impossible to achieve in home conditions," added Kovachev.

According to him, among the winery's major points of pride this year are the awards from two forums – Vinaria in Plovdiv and Wine Fest in Burgas.

"For yet another year, we were the winery with the most medals. We received gold medals there for our white wine from Tamyanka and for our rose from Marselan," the owner noted.

At the forum in Burgas, the winery again won a series of awards, including a gold medal for a rose made from Cabernet Franc, he added.

"What makes our roses special – what sets us apart from everyone else and is the reason we've won all these prestigious awards, is the high performance across all characteristics used to evaluate premium wines," noted Kovachev. For rose wines, those characteristics include a pleasant aroma, freshness, and a long-lasting flavor. „Our Marselan rose wine fulfills all of these in a very special way, with beautiful notes of red fruits and citrus," Kovachev added.

The owner of Noya Winery also noted that producers are currently in the midst of the grape harvest and processing campaign.

"Unlike the situation with the harvest of other fruits, this year there are enough grapes. However, prices are about 40% higher compared to

last year," Kovachev pointed out.

Since the last harvest, the trend has been to focus on more interesting grape varieties, he said. Based on his impressions from recent wine events, many wineries are starting to produce white wines from Tamiyanka and Vratsa Muscat – varieties that Noya has already been using for three or four years.

The winery has also participated in exhibitions in Germany and Slovenia, but according to Kovachev, visitors there did not show strong interest in Bulgarian wines.

"Support from the state for promotion would be very helpful for small and medium-sized wineries," he stated.

This week, the Bulgarian Plum Festival is taking place in Troyan, and the winery will be participating with its own booth, where it expects to attract considerable attention from visitors.

Noya Winery will also take part in the Young Wine Parade in Plovdiv, Kovachev added.



CRAFTING QUALITY WINES FROM OWN VINEYARDS AMID CHALLENGING HARVEST



The Villa Ovcharovo winery near Targovishte works exclusively with its own grapes. In mid-September, the team is busy with the harvest, which is not the best this year, manager Alev Sabitov told BTA.

Fifteen people from the nearby villages of Ovcharovo and Dulgach work in the vineyards, which cover an area of 15 hectares. The team says that the first steps toward today's success were taken in 2009 with the planting of the first vineyards. And in 2013, the first wine harvest was produced. Now the winery's production capacity is 50,000 bottles, all

from its own vineyards.

Technologist Dimitrina Dimitrova said that last year, a new range of Bulgarian varieties was created here. For this purpose, they purchased Dimyat and Riesling to make a blend. Their wine was awarded a silver medal at the Balkan competition in the Wines from Local Varieties category.

The winery grows the white varieties Sauvignon Blanc and Chardonnay in its own vineyard. Over the years, there has been no change in the size of the vineyard or in the varietal structure of the vines.

This year's harvest is much weaker than previous ones, said

the technologist. The reason is frost, which has caused yields to be much lower. For white varieties, the frost damage is around 80%. „With fewer grapes, we will produce less wine,” said Dimitrova.

Producing good, high-quality wine is a long process. The basis is in the grapes. „Each harvest is different, which is why wines from the same variety are so unique. The quality of the raw material is very important, and then we have to manage the process correctly. It is a microbiological process—wine is a living product. It continues its

life even after fermentation and bottling; each bottle has its own life," said Dimitrova.

According to the winery team, more and more people appreciate wine, but there is still room for improvement in terms of raising the wine culture of Bulgarians, Dimitrova noted. „Wine is drunk. But the question is what kind of wine people are looking to drink!“ According to the expert, any wine made competently and with good raw materials is good. It is very important that the entire process is clean, without any side microbiological processes, to form good aromas and good flavors. But anyway, people have different tastes, and the raw materials produce products with different characteristics. For example, Sauvignon Blanc produces fresher wines, while Chardonnay produces milder ones. Customers who prefer a fresher taste tend to go for Sauvignon. Those who prefer milder wines look for Chardonnay, the technologist commented.

She said that in order to advertise their products and reach more connoisseurs, every year the wineries in the Northeast organize wine tours - Open Days.

This year in May, Villa Ovcharovo was also visited by Romanians, who stayed overnight.

The winery sells its products mainly on the domestic market, with very little export. „The market is quite difficult,“ added the technologist. „This is because wines from Italy, Spain, France, Romania, and Moldova are arriving on the Bulgarian market at prices that are much lower than our cost price,“ she noted.

„Our wines are recognizable to connoisseurs, to people who insist on drinking quality wines, not to the mass consumer. That is also our goal - we are not a mass producer. We make small batches of quality wines,“ said manager Alev Sabitov.

An online store has also recently been created to connect directly with customers. Otherwise, the wine produced in Ovcharovo reaches customers through distributors and retailers. „Our production does not become more expensive, but this way the profit decreases because it remains in the intermediate links - the traders. We are aware that we cannot do without them. We value our partnership with them because in modern trade, it is

impossible to reach everywhere on your own,“ Sabitov added.

The manager shared that seasonal workers are hired on a campaign basis for seasonal activities in the processing of the Villa Ovcharovo fields. This is also the practice in the industry. It is difficult to maintain a permanent staff because the nature of the activity does not require it. „This is one of the reasons why colleagues are turning to automation and mechanization of the process as much as possible. Because the labour situation in the country affects us too. We are unable to hire workers from further away and have to rely on local people. However, the population here has declined, and what is more, it is of retirement age and less able to work. This is one of the major difficulties we have faced over the past month. We have to strike a balance between productivity and humanity,“ said Sabitov.

The wines produced at Villa Ovcharovo have won numerous awards at international wine competitions.



FOCUS ON LOCAL BULGARIAN VARIETIES

Kaynardzha Winery in the eponymous village of Silistra Region has refocused its production on wines made from Bulgarian grape varieties typical of the area, co-founder of the Pink Pelican brand, Boyan Boev, said on Thursday. Pink pelican is among the leading products offered by the winery.

Boev asserts that the wine industry should produce wines from grape varieties cultivated locally to create a unique identity. Tamianka, a variety typical of the Danube Plain, is recognized for its pronounced aroma.

"We use Pamid, which is widespread nationwide. Since last year, we have also started working with Dimyat, a typical Bulgarian grape, common in the Northern Black Sea region. In our area it was once known as Semendra, as it still is in Romania. The qualities of this variety have impressed us, and we believe that we should focus on what is unique to our region," Boev said.

Kaynardzha Winery is also proud of its Cabernet Sauvignon vineyard, established in 1968 by Japanese specialists with planting material from France, and still productive today. The site was chosen after thorough climate research and soil analysis.

Recent years have been tough for producers due to climate anomalies and poor harvests. Yields dropped by over 50% this year due to freezing temperatures in April, compared with previous

years. Nevertheless, Boev recalled that some of the most outstanding wines have been produced in years with weak harvests.

"We have varieties yielding around 50 kg per hectare, compared to up to 600 kg in typical years. While grape quality remains excellent, quantities are inadequate. This situation may result in distinctive blends. Blending different varieties or combining current harvests with grapes from previous years to produce non-vintage wines is becoming more common in Europe as a response to changing weather conditions. The outcome is a unique and appealing product for both consumers and connoisseurs," Boev said.

Boev said that Kaynardzha Winery intends to increase its

investment in wine tourism. The team aims to provide a complete experience that delights visitors. They host themed tastings and outdoor dinners in the scenic countryside and have plans to develop accommodation and a restaurant on site.

Kaynardzha Winery was founded in 2001 on the historic site where the Treaty of Kucuk Kaynarca was signed between Russia and the Ottoman Empire in 1774.

Over its nearly 25-year history, the winery has earned more than 30 international awards, including a silver medal at the Frankfurt exhibition and a bronze at the Decanter World Wine Awards. Most wines are distributed within the domestic market, available in specialist shops and premium restaurants.



WHERE THE OWNER BELIEVES THAT WINE IS PART OF COMMUNICATION CULTURE

Wine is part of the culture of communication, Dragoshinov Winery Owner Daniel Dragoshinov told BTA. The oenologist has dedicated his life to winemaking and started his own production together with his wife in 2018 in the village of Natsovtsi, Veliko Tarnovo Region.

The winery has a small capacity and works with about 20–25 tonnes of grapes per year to make some 10,000 bottles of wine. The product list includes 7–8 series between 500 and 1,500 bottles. Among the whites are Aligote, two types of Chardonnay and Riesling. They also make pink wine from Pinot Noir, while for red wines the main variety is Syrah, although there is also Marseillan. The winery also experiments with traditional Bulgarian varieties such as Kara Pamid and Misket.

The main focus is the work with a vineyard of Aligote, planted between 1970 and 1973 near Lyaskovets, which, according to Dragoshinov, is of exceptional quality. The winery also uses plantations with Syrah in Svilengrad Region. For the winter season, wormwood is produced, which the oenologist defines as the leading drink in the presentation of the winery. He pointed out that this is a specific and labor-intensive craft inherited from the traditions in the region of Kilifarevo and Osmar.

The winery began to develop wine tourism under a project of the America for Bulgaria Foundation in 2023. With the completion of the tasting room, on-site sales already provide about 80% of the turnover, Dragoshinov noted. The winery

works with tour operators, leading groups mainly from Germany and the Scandinavian countries, and annually receives 10–15 large groups and numerous individual visitors. The winery's production is not offered in mass retail chains, but only in specialized wine shops, bars and restaurants. The reason is both the small quantities and the need for proper storage.

Climate change in recent years has caused difficulties in production, Dragoshinov stressed, adding that after the spring frosts, the Chardonnay and Sauvignon Blanc varieties are almost absent in Eastern Bulgaria, while grape prices have increased by at least 60%. Dragoshinov therefore commented that his winery will focus on old grape varieties, with the new products to be based on them as well. „We will emphasize Chardonnay, because their array survived the spring frosts that hit a large part of the vineyard arrays in the country. Having a given variety in a year when almost no one has it is valuable, so we will try

to create something that deserves attention,” the oenologist said.

Due to its small capacity, the winery is unable to apply for European programmes supporting innovations in the industry, and therefore has to buy its equipment with its own funds, Dragoshinov said, adding that he is coping for now, but this further complicates their competitiveness against larger companies in the industry. „We are succeeding thanks to the experience we have, our flexibility and the support of the people who like our wines,” he emphasized, adding that there has been a unification of small wineries recently, which includes 19 wineries. They are making joint efforts to promote their activities and production through the Bulgarian Association of Wine Professionals, Dragoshinov noted, pointing out that the goal is to create common wine tourism packages that will provide the opportunity to tour more wineries in Bulgaria.



FIRST WINES FROM NEWLY PLANTED VINEYARDS SET TO DEBUT NEXT YEAR



The New Vineyards wine tourism complex near the village of Arbanasi, Veliko Tarnovo Region, is expecting its first harvest, the complex's owner, Stanimir Stoyanov, told BTA. This year marks the first fruiting of the vineyard, and the wine will soon be launched on the market. The plan includes several single-variety wines, using local grape varieties such as Gamza and Kaylashki Misket, as well as blends of Bulgarian and international grapes.

The project was launched in 2021. According to Stoyanov, the vineyards are located on an

interesting terrain suitable for viticulture. „Arbanasi is not only a cultural and historical village linked to tourism, but also has a favorable climate for vineyards,” he said, adding that the biggest surprise was that the area itself is called The New Vineyards. Research showed that vineyards had existed there in the past, giving added inspiration for the new project.

The vineyards cover a total area of 3.7 ha and include well-known international varieties such as Cabernet Franc, Syrah, Pinot Gris, and Chardonnay, alongside Bulgarian varieties typical of the

region, including Gamza, Rubin, and Kaylashki Misket.

The location offers good opportunities for wine tourism in a natural setting. Visitors can taste wines and enjoy food and beverages, and group events with live music are organized on request. So far, visitors are mainly Bulgarian tourists. Starting next year, they will also be able to sample wines made from the first harvest of the new vineyards, initially produced in local wineries.

A BOUTIQUE WINERY BLENDS TRADITION, CRAFTSMANSHIP AND INNOVATION IN YALOVO



The small boutique winery Old School Wine, located in the village of Yalovo, Northern Bulgaria, is dedicated to traditional wine-making methods native to the Veliko Tarnovo region and prides itself on artisanal, handcrafted production. The winery opened officially in 2018 in the building of the village's old school, though the project began developing several years earlier. Local grape varieties were cultivated,

producing wines that capture the region's character and spirit.

The focus is primarily on traditional Bulgarian grape varieties: Gamza, Pamid and Dimyat. The winery's portfolio features a diverse range of wines, produced in small, limited batches, most of which are artisanal handcrafted. Many have earned national and international awards.

The winery released three new premium white wines made

from grapes grown in its own vineyards and fermented in oak barrels, Dimitar Dimov, co-owner, CEO and chief technologist, told the Bulgarian News Agency (BTA). A French graduate, Dimov was awarded Oenologist of the Year in 2022 by the Union of Bulgarian Oenologists. The new wines come from the 2023 harvest and are made from Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc and Dimyat grapes.

Dimov shared a fascinating

story about a vine at the nearby Kilifarevo Monastery. A DNA analysis revealed that the vine is of the Shevka variety, an ancient Bulgarian grape. Legend has it that it was planted by master builder Kolyu Ficheto during the construction of the church at the monastery. Shevka is not native to the Veliko Tarnovo region but originates from the Sliven region in Southeastern Bulgaria. Inspired by this discovery, the team decided to plant vines from the monastery into their own vineyards.

The winery also makes wine from the Bulgarian Rubin variety, developed in the 20th century by crossing French Syrah with Italian Nebbiolo. Rubin wines have been among the winery's most successful products on the market and have received numerous awards at competitions. In 2018, their 2016 Rubin Reserve earned a place in the Wine Museum in France for its excellence.

The winery also crafts sparkling wines, with aged, high-end sparkling wines set to be released soon. Their most popular sparkling product is a young, fresh, and light Pet-Nat, perfect for everyday enjoyment.

An over 200-year-old recipe from the town of Kalofer is used to make the cellar's Applied

Wormwood (Nalozhen Pelin) wine. This traditional wine has consistently won awards at various Balkan competitions and expos. It is one of the winery's best-selling products.

From the very beginning, Old School Wine has promoted wine tourism, offering visitors the full experience. The winery attracts between 2,000 and 3,000 visitors annually, according to Dimov. Guests can taste the wines, learn about the production process, and enjoy the cozy atmosphere. Interest is strong from both local and international visitors. „We are part of the tourism scene in Veliko Tarnovo,“ Dimov said, „and people who go there come to us as well.“ There are Bulgarian, Romanian, British, Spanish, French and German visitors, and even guests from Japan, Brazil and the US. Notable personalities have also visited. Most tourists visit independently, though the winery also collaborates with several tour operators.

No EU funding has been used in the establishment or development of the winery. All investments have been made by the partners. „We want to avoid the constraints imposed by funding programmes and follow our own vision and experience,“ Dimov said. Being small and

without modern industrial equipment, the winery relies on traditional techniques, such as organic vineyard management aimed at enhancing biodiversity.

One method involves the planting of grass between vineyard rows to improve soil structure and stimulate the microbiome, resulting in higher-quality grapes. This helps retain moisture, especially important in recent drier seasons. The cellar also uses bioprotection, adding microorganisms that protect the wine naturally. This reduces the need for sulfites and other preservatives, using live, selected yeasts instead, a modern approach for producing higher-end wines.

The winery is working on a joint project with the University of Food Technologies in Plovdiv, aiming to produce wine from their own grapes using selected local yeasts. The wines are aged in high-quality French oak barrels, which reveal distinctive aroma and taste.

The interior design, concept, paintings and bottle labels of Old School Wine were created by local artist Damyan Bumbalov, adding to the unique artistic character of this boutique winery.

TWO DECADES OF ORGANIC VITICULTURE BACKED BY LOCAL COMMITMENT

The Hotul Bunar winery in the village of Gorsko Novo Selo produces around 40,000 litres of wine each year but aims to boost production and expand its markets, co-owner Margarita Damyanova said on Saturday.

She noted that investment in the winery is complete. As a family business, her son and grandson also participate, and up to 30 local residents assist with pruning and harvesting, supporting the winery's operations for nearly 25 years.

A substantial share of profits is allocated to production reinvestment. This year, two large vessels were acquired, including one specifically designed for chilling white wines, along with new French barrels.

The project was founded in 2000 by Jan Ola Lindwe.

Following his death in 2001, ownership passed to his wife Stefka Lindwe and her sister Margarita Damyanova. The 20-hectare vineyards were established in 2001 on land in Gorsko Novo Selo, with 7.6 hectares funded through the SAPARD programme. The vineyards are fully organic, and the grapes receive protected geographical indication status. The primary grape varieties are Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot, complemented by smaller parcels of Cinsault, Pamid, and Dimyat, all processed on site at the winery.

The boutique winery was established in 2007. To expand its range, it began producing white wines from the Aligote grape. The winery works with oenologist Stanimir Stoyanov.

Previously, the winery exported wine to Sweden, but now it primarily targets the domestic market. Production is evenly divided among red, white, and rose wines, all aged in French and Bulgarian oak barrels.

Wine brands take their names from the historic Hasara fortress and the Hotul Bunar area, where the vineyards are situated. This region holds historical importance due to its connection with an ancient Roman road and fortress, with some remains still preserved today.

The winery provides on-site tastings, featuring a courtyard gazebo for outdoor events and indoor accommodations during inclement weather. Vineyard tours are available upon request.



MAKING NATURAL WINES ITS CALLING CARD

Natural wines, which are similar to homemade wine, are the calling card of Gabrovski Winery in Svishtov, Milena Gabrovska, who co-owns the winery with her husband, Ilian Gabrovski, told the Bulgarian News Agency. Ilian comes from a long-established family of vine growers and winemakers, known throughout the Svishtov region for producing vine planting material. He is a graduate of the viticulture and enology school in Pleven. Their daughter Yoana is also involved in the family business, currently studying international wine business in Austria.

“We focus on quality and preserving the natural taste of the wine. This is one of our main strengths,” Gabrovska added.

Established in 1998, Gabrovski Winery now cultivates ten

hectares of its own vineyards and produces around 30 tonnes of wine annually, depending on the harvest, she noted.

The varietals include Muscat Ottonel, Kaylashki Misket, Cabernet Sauvignon, and Mavrud. A rose blend is made from several varieties. The winery's most popular and in-demand label is Muscat Ottonel.

“The new harvest is of better quality, though the quantity is lower. This year the grapes are healthier and larger grapes,” Gabrovska noted. The winery plans to expand its product line with fruit wines made from strawberries, raspberries, and cherries - flavors they say appeal especially to younger wine drinkers.

The winery is also investing in modern equipment, including a

new Italian-made fermenter for wine storage. „We take part in competitions, exhibitions, and farmers' markets, and next year, we are considering visiting trade shows in Germany,” Gabrovska said.

Gabrovski Winery has a tasting room, the only one of its kind in the area. Located in the basement of the company's store in Svishtov, the room offers wine tastings. It also serves as a cellar where vintage bottles are stored for aging. The tables and chairs are crafted from the winery's first oak barrels.

The winery has developed Bulgaria's first vending machines for bulk wine, one of which is stored in the cellar. The idea was to offer customers faster and more convenient access to wine.



WINERY IN RUSE REGION WINS NINE MEDALS AT INTERNATIONAL WINE COMPETITION IN VIENNA

The Seven Generations winery in the Ruse region has won four gold, one silver, and four bronze medals at an international wine competition in Vienna. The secret ingredient for good wine is full dedication, said the winery's chief technologist Boyka Stoeva. „One must live with what they do, give their all, and burn with passion in their work,” she said.

The winery is located about 30 km from Ruse, near the village of Mechka. It was founded in 2010 by the late Lyuben Rabchev, a resourceful Bulgarian who returned from the US after living and working there for 40 years. A fifth-generation winemaker, Rabchev established a boutique winery that also offers wine tourism, a hotel complex overlooking the Danube, restaurants and a spa centre, wine tastings, and walks through the

vineyards and along the riverbank.

“Good wine must have a good balance. What we sense with the nose in the aroma, we must then find in the taste and the aftertaste. Balance is needed from start to finish,” said Stoeva, a graduate of the University of Food Technology in Plovdiv with a degree in wine and spirits, who has worked in wine-making since 1991. She joined Seven Generations in 2012, initially as a consultant, and has been chief technologist since 2021.

According to her, the new grape harvest looks very good so far. „The grapes have ripened with high sugar content, good acidity, and excellent indicators, so expectations are for very good wines,” she said.

The winery has about 20 hectares of vineyards, growing Muscat Ottonel, Cabernet Sauvignon,

Cabernet Franc, Merlot, and Pinot Noir. „The grapes we produce are entirely sufficient for our needs. We make one type of white wine, three types of rose, and premium red wines,” Stoeva said. Two years ago, an additional 1.5 hectares of Muscat Ottonel were planted to increase white wine production.

The winery participates in competitions almost every year, mainly abroad in Austria, Belgium, UK, and Germany. „At the end of last month, results were announced from the international wine competition in Vienna. Of the nine wines we submitted, we received four gold medals, one silver, and four bronze. Gold medals went to Cabernet Sauvignon 2020, Cuvee 2020, Cuvee 2019, and Cabernet Franc 2020. The silver medal was for Rose Classic, and bronze medals were awarded to Muscat Ottonel, Rose Light, Rose Blush, and Merlot 2020,” Stoeva explained.

The winery also organizes wine tours, usually for groups of six to eight people. „When we host corporate team buildings, we arrange a tour to familiarize participants with the production process,” she added.

Stoeva said the winery is a small producer. „On an annual basis, we produce under 100,000 litres of white, red, and rose wines. The last two summers were quite dry, grape yields were low, and as a result we produced significantly smaller quantities,” she noted.



WINE INSTITUTE DIRECTOR SEES GROWING INTEREST IN WINES FROM LOCAL VARIETIES

Interest in wines made from old local grape varieties and Bulgarian-developed breeds is growing, Director of the Institute of Viticulture and Oenology in Pleven Emil Tsvetanov said in an interview with BTA on Friday.

According to Tsvetanov, Gamza is the most iconic grape variety in the Pleven region. This year's open day focused on Gamza and took place alongside the Wine and Farmers' Delicacies Festival

in Pleven. Other traditional local varieties include Rubin, Kailashki Misket, and Kailashki Rubin.

Wineries are increasingly turning back to indigenous grape varieties, according to Krasimir Koev from the Executive Agency for Vine and Wine, as consumers are seeking alternatives to common wines like Merlot, Cabernet, and Chardonnay. Until recently, the local variety Naslada was not permitted for

winemaking because it was not on the list of approved varieties, but since its approval, wines made from Naslada have been very well received, Tsvetanov said.

The Institute is currently at the height of the grape harvest. Tsvetanov anticipates average yields due to drought and high temperatures, though he did not provide specific figures for the expected grape quantities. Harvesting of the white varieties,



as well as Rubin, Gamza, and Bouquet, has been completed. The main red varieties still to be harvested are Cabernet and Storgozia. The Institute typically produces 40 to 50 tonnes of white, red, and rosé wine annually. In addition, wine is produced from the Institute's experimental plots.

The Institute has introduced a new product called wine frappe, which uses a specialized emulsion of wine, fiber, and proteins, formulated by Nikolay Solakov from the Institute of Cryobiology and Food Technologies in Sofia, that is added to fresh milk as an alternative to coffee. Another innovative offering is salad toppings made from wine. Both the wine frappe emulsion and the salad toppings are pending registration as food products prior to market release.

Regarding the adoption of new technologies, Tsvetanov reported that approximately BGN 100,000 has been invested in equipment for the Institute's two cellars over the past two years. He also noted that Bulgarian viticulture needs

to adjust vineyard management practices to evolving climate conditions, which present ongoing challenges.

Last year, the Institute used contour pruning to reduce evaporation, but this left the grapes exposed, resulting in sunburn, early shriveling, and lower yields. This year, due to high temperatures, contour pruning was not implemented, allowing the grape clusters to remain shaded. According to Tsvetanov, this approach was more effective, as low rainfall limited fungal diseases and the grapes were protected from excessive sun and dehydration. He pointed out the need for ongoing climate monitoring to support timely vineyard management decisions.

The core of the Institute is its cellar, established in 1892. As one of the oldest wine cellars on the Balkan Peninsula, it was initially constructed for the viticulture and oenology school of the time. Inspired by French design, the cellar is built into a hillside to maintain a constant temperature of 15 to 17 degrees

Celsius throughout the year. It houses wines dating back to its year of establishment.

To align with current trends, the Institute now offers popular wine tours that include tastings. Visitors can tour the cellar and sample wines upon request. According to Tsvetanov, many guests like to have their photo taken with a bottle from their birth year, and tourists can also view a collection of historic winemaking equipment. An upcoming group of tourists from Germany has specifically requested that only wines made from local grape varieties be served, excluding internationally recognized ones. Tsvetanov maintains that this approach is effective in promoting interest in Bulgarian grape varieties.

After the grape harvest is finished, the Institute continues with wine production and the collection of propagation material. This is followed by annual project and task reporting, providing a summary of the year's research activities.



BG WINE

BOUTIQUE WINERY EXPANDS VINEYARDS AND CRAFTS UNIQUE VARIETALS INCLUDING ORANGE AND NATURALLY SPARKLING WINES

The Stivi Estate boutique family winery, located in the Veliko Tarnovo village of Momin Sbor, has begun developing its own vineyards, oenologist Stanimir Stoyanov told BTA. This year, the estate planted its first vines, focusing mainly on white grape varieties, particularly Vermentino. Another plot is being prepared where, in spring, the Italian red variety Primitivo will be established, founder and owner Plamen Spasov of Veliko Tarnovo added.

Among the winery's most intriguing projects are an orange wine made from white grapes vinified using red-wine techniques, and a naturally sparkling wine. „We are also offering a white wine made from red grapes. It is produced from the Marselan variety and is available in limited quantities,” Spasov explained. This year, for the first time, the estate will work with

varieties that are rare in Bulgaria, such as Ribolla Gialla and Moscato Giallo. Deliveries of Petit Verdot are also expected. Additionally, the winery will produce its first-ever wines from Malvasia and Vermentino.

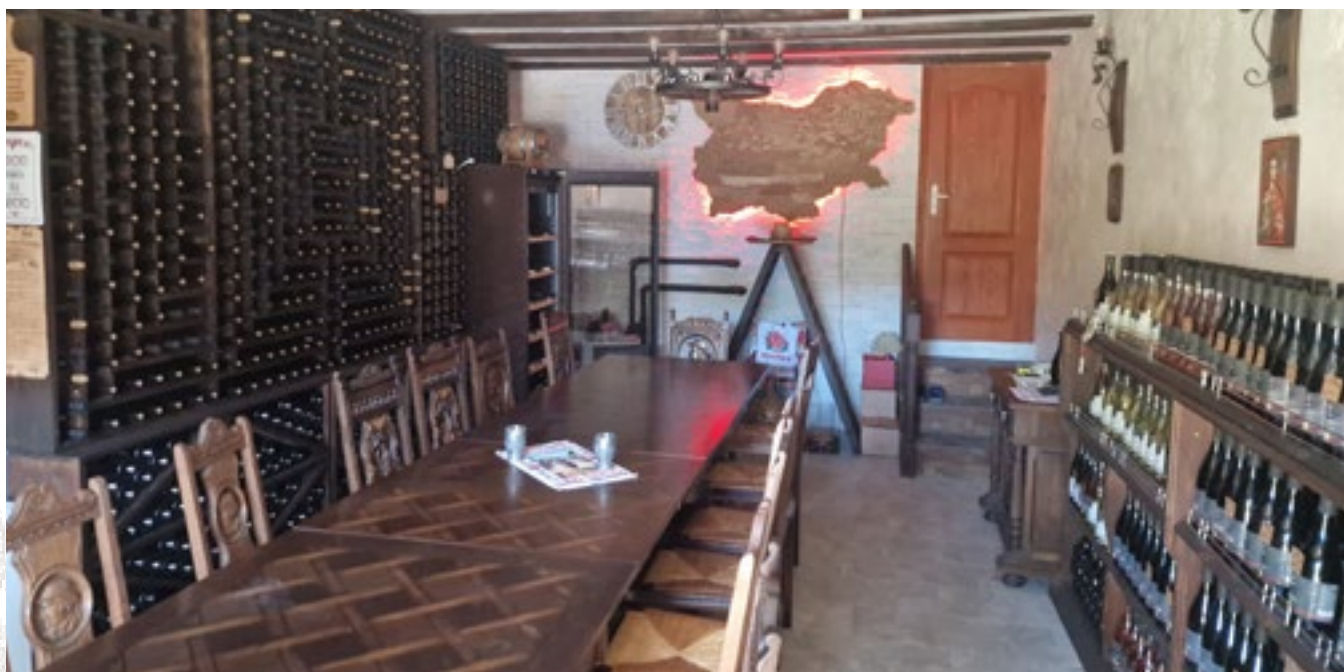
Founded in 2022 by the Spasov family, Stivi Estate currently produces between 15,000 and 20,000 bottles annually. Its wines are crafted in small series from a mix of international and Bulgarian grape varieties, sourced from growers. The international line-up includes Muscat Ottonel, Sauvignon Blanc, Cabernet Franc, and Marselan. The winery continues to expand its portfolio, and production this year will cover nearly 15 different grape varieties. All wines are marketed exclusively within Bulgaria.

Despite its short history, the winery has already earned recognition: two gold medals for its white wines at

the international Vinaria competition, a silver medal for rosé at this year's contest in Kazanlak, and three silver medals at a Balkan wine competition in Greece.

The Momin Sbor winery combines modern technological equipment with traditional methods to craft wines. Special rooms with Bulgarian and French oak barrels provide ideal conditions for maturation, while Burgundy-sourced casks made from untoasted wood are dedicated to white wine aging. Among the unique vessels on site are clay qvevri imported from France, echoing ancient winemaking traditions.

Stivi Estate attracts both individual wine enthusiasts and organized groups from across Bulgaria and abroad, with a growing number of recent visitors arriving from Ukraine.



AMK 2025

NEW EQUIPMENT AND TASTING ROOM ELEVATE EXPERIENCE FOR WINE LOVERS

Maryan Winery in the village of the same name in the Elena region now has new machinery, vessels, and a tasting room thanks to European co-financing, said its founders and owners Svetla and Iliya Ivanovi in an interview with BTA.

Last year, equipment for grape destemming and crushing, a bottling machine, and several storage tanks were purchased. For the first time, European funds amounting to about BGN 90,000 were used for this purpose. This year, a tasting room with a capacity of nearly 30 seats was also built.

The winery was established in 2011

by the Ivanovi family together with agronomist and technologist Stefan Chorarov. Later, their son, Stefan's wife, and three more workers joined the team. „Our initial idea was to produce small batches of wine, just the way we like it, and to present it to people interested in this beverage,” Ivanova told BTA.

They started with smaller quantities, and now produce around 50,000 bottles annually – white, pink, and red wines. The white wines are made from Dimyat, Sauvignon Blanc, and Chardonnay varieties, while the red wines come from Mavrud, Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon, and Cabernet

Franc.

Since last year, Maryan Winery has offered its new white wine Dancing Butterflies, a blend of Sauvignon Blanc, Chardonnay, and Dimyat. Due to strong interest, this wine will be produced in larger quantities. A red option is also set to be launched on the market soon, the Ivanovi revealed, proudly mentioning the winery's numerous awards from prestigious national and international competitions.

The winery does not have its own vineyards but buys grapes from two plots located in the Sliven region. The team carefully monitors how



the growers tend the vineyards and tracks the fruit's parameters to pick the grapes at the optimal moment. „Being a small producer helps a lot in choosing the exact harvest day, since we can select the most desirable combination of parameters and get the best grapes. This is a crucial condition for making great wine,” Ivanova explained.

She added that despite unexpected severe spring frosts and a sudden drought later on, which caused a significant reduction in yields, the quality of this year's grapes is very good.

Visitors to the winery make a diverse group. Before the pandemic, the number of foreign visitors was very good. There were both Europeans and guests from South Africa, Australia, and the US. These visitors were definitely wine connoisseurs, Ivanova shared. They used to do tours all around the Balkan Peninsula or Eastern Europe, coming specifically for wine tourism.

Those were our first encounters with such great wine lovers, ready to cross oceans to visit and explore countries they had only read about, and to taste the wines and food on site. At the winery, during tastings, we also offer appetizers from local producers, typical for the region, to show what is produced here, she added. Foreign guests mainly want to taste wines from local grape varieties, Ivanova explained. Among them, we have one red and one white - Mavrud and Dimyat respectively, offered both as pure varietals and as blends.

After Bulgaria joined the Schengen Area, the number of Romanian tourists visiting the winery increased. Some come on one-day bus excursions, but mostly the groups are around ten people, Ivanov explained. There are people who visit the Elena Balkan region frequently and often drop by the winery. According to the Ivanovs, the share of young people interested in wine is increasing. Among the guests are also members

of wine clubs who travel around the country to get to know wineries from different regions and their production. The Elena Balkan is a very popular place for short family vacations, so many families visit often, some of whom the Ivanovs already know well as frequent visitors. Several times a year, Open Doors Days are held, on International Mavrud Day, Trifon Zarezan (the traditional winegrowers' festival), the holiday of the village Maryan, and the Festival of the Elena Ham in Elena.

Before the pandemic, once a year we exported red wine in containers to Brazil, red and white to South Korea, and had regular exports to London, but after that it became difficult, the Ivanovi explained. Now we send shipments via courier to individual customers in the European Union but mainly sell on the Bulgarian market through specialized wine shops and restaurants.



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LAUNCHING THREE NEW WINES IN 2025, OWNER EYES GROWTH IN WINE TOURISM AND EXPORTS



The Raynov and Sons winery in the village of Nisovo, near Ruse, plans to launch three new types of wine next year, said Dimcho Raynov, owner and managing director of the winery, in an interview with BTA. According to him, the new wines will be slightly different – fruitier variations of white, red and rosé.

Raynov and Sons is located about 30 kilometres from Ruse in the scenic Rusenski Lom Nature Park. It was established in 2006.

“We operate a completely closed production cycle, from grape growing to bottling. The winery will mark its 20th anniversary next year. It was designed according to a French model,” Raynov said.

Currently, the company owns around 80 hectares of vineyards and produces between 800,000 and 1,000,000 bottles per year, including wines packaged

in bag-in-box formats. „Our main varieties are Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, blended reserves, Cabernet Franc, Muscat, Sauvignon Blanc, and Gamza,” said Raynov. He added that before the COVID-19 pandemic, most of their wine was exported abroad, but now 50% is sold on the domestic market.

“Apart from the 6–7 hectares of Gamza, we’ve also introduced some more exotic varieties like Sémillon and Petit Manseng, which we use in our blends,” Raynov added.

He said that up until two years ago, the winery invested heavily in equipment, all with private funds and no participation in funding programmes. „We’ve equipped the winery with modern red wine fermenters with automated processes. For the whites, we’ve installed new vessels. We also have a new chilling plant for cooling white

and rosé wines. We plan further investment in new plantations,” he shared.

Raynov and Sons recently took part in a wine exhibition in Las Vegas, where it submitted 11 different samples. „We received excellent ratings – nine of them won medals. One of our blended wines scored 95 points. Nobody expected wines from Bulgaria to get such recognition in Las Vegas, a global stage. We’re proud,” Raynov said.

“The problem is that here in Bulgaria we’re not organised enough to showcase the strength of Bulgarian wine. A few years ago at the Düsseldorf exhibition, Moldova had a 50-metre stand that radiated power and industry. Meanwhile, we from Bulgaria – despite our massive wineries and vineyard investments – were tucked behind small desks,” said Raynov.

He urged the Bulgarian government to invest in international wine exhibitions and support producers in attending.

Raynov and Sons is also investing in wine tourism. Raynov is currently renovating an old mill, built in 1925, located next to the winery. „We’re restoring the mill and will use it for wine tastings. It will also house a small museum and a shop. I hope we’ll have it ready by May next year,” he said.

COMMITMENT TO NATURAL PRODUCTS DESPITE CHALLENGING YEAR

The Levent Winery in Ruse keeps investing in improvements and remains committed to producing wines with only natural ingredients, despite a difficult year marked by high grape prices and weather challenges, BTA learned from technologist Rumen Iliev. He has been on the winery's team for a decade and its manager for seven years.

Founded in 2005 by brothers Plamen and Atanas Bobokov together with oenologist Tsanko Stanchev, the winery is housed in the historic Levent Tabya fortress, built in the early 19th century to defend the city. The authentic architecture has been preserved, creating a unique setting for wine-making.

Levent focuses mainly on high-quality white wines and rosés but also produces reds. Its portfolio

includes Sauvignon Blanc, Chardonnay, Riesling, Traminer, Vratsa Misket, Grenache and Sangiovese rosés, and reds such as Cabernet Franc, Pinot Noir and the popular K2 blend of Cabernet Sauvignon and Cabernet Franc.

The winery relies on both self-financed investments and EU programmes to modernize operations. Although it does not own vineyards, Levent sources grapes from long-term partners around Varna, as well as from Sliven and other parts of Southern Bulgaria, said Iliev. This year, spring frosts and hail destroyed part or all of the harvest, forcing the winery to seek new suppliers and reduce grape intake to avoid building up excess stock.

The 2025 harvest saw the largest intake of aromatic varieties such as Traminer, Vratsa Misket, Grenache

Rosé, Sangiovese, Pinot Noir and Cabernet Franc.

Levent regularly invests in modern technology to improve production while preserving natural processes. Over the past decade, it has added new tanks, pumps that limit oxygen exposure during bottling, and Italian presses designed for gentler extraction. The next step will be laboratory equipment for automated measurements to reduce reliance on scarce skilled staff.

Iliev noted that this year the winery once again invested in improving the working environment and overall image, stressing that despite their strong background in chemistry, the team produces a fully natural product from grapes, using only organic inputs such as yeast derivatives and tannins.

Levent takes part in wine fairs such as DiVino Taste in Sofia and Winephoria in Ruse. Its awards include a gold medal for Chardonnay Grand Selection 2016 at Chardonnay du Monde in France, and most recently, a gold for Sauvignon Blanc 2024 at Concours Mondial de Bruxelles – Burgas 2025.

"Lately we participate less often, since we already have won the recognition we aimed for," Iliev noted. „Still, we are considering Vinaria in Plovdiv in early 2026. We want to see how this year's wines develop first - we don't just show up - we show up to win."



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FOCUS ON WINES FROM TRADITIONAL REGIONAL VARIETIES



Opreff Winery, located in the village of Dobrotitsa in the Danubian Plain, is focusing on wines from Bulgarian grape varieties typical of the region. Manager Gergana Georgieva told BTA that certain grapes thrive particularly well in the area because of the unique combination of soil, climate and local conditions, giving the wines distinctive regional character.

This year, the winery is working with Traminer, Chardonnay, Misket, Cabernet Sauvignon and Evmolpia. The latter, a cross between Mavrud and Merlot created by Prof. Dimitar Babrikov, remains little known in Bulgaria. „Very few wineries are using Evmolpia. „The idea is to see how Mavrud could adapt here. It produces lighter wines and excellent rosés,” Georgieva explained. She also highlighted Red Misket, a traditional

Bulgarian variety cultivated in the region for centuries. „It was once compromised by mass production of low-quality wines, but we have revived it. This year it has been the most fruitful,” she said.

Despite climate challenges and lower yields due to April frosts, Georgieva noted that some of the best wines come from difficult years - a positive sign for wine lovers, of whom there are many in Bulgaria. She added that wine culture in Bulgaria is deepening, with more knowledgeable consumers, especially women, who increasingly prefer lighter, lower-alcohol wines that pair well with diverse foods.

Beyond wine-making, Opreff Winery invests in wine tourism. Since 2014, it has operated a guesthouse offering themed tastings and art events. The courtyard hosts a monument

to US President Woodrow Wilson, honouring his role in blocking a post-World War I plan to split Bulgaria into three and strip it of independence. The winery also promotes wine routes across Northeastern Bulgaria, combining local history, eco-trails, and natural landmarks. Guests can visit one of the region's oldest churches, admire scenic forests and rock formations, and in May, see a rare wild red peony bloom nearby.

Founded in 2006, Opreff Winery has earned a reputation for pure varietal wines. Its philosophy is that quality begins in the vineyard: estate-grown grapes provide full control from raw fruit to finished product. Equipped with its own laboratory, the winery maintains high production standards.

WINERY EXPANDS BOUTIQUE PRODUCTION AND SHIFTS FOCUS TO WHITES AMID CHANGING MARKET TRENDS

The Lovico winery in Suhindol is equipped for the production of boutique wines and has an automatic Bag-in-Box packaging machine, warehouse manager Georgi Ostrev told BTA. He is also responsible for production, supply, and transportation at the enterprise.

The company is one of the oldest wineries in Bulgaria. It was established in 1909 as the

first viticulture and winemaking cooperative in the Balkans under the name „Gamza.“ In 1952, it was nationalized and continued to operate as a state-owned winery until 1991, during which time it developed many vineyards in the region. At that time, the Suhindol winery specialized in the production of red wines, while the winery in Targovishte focused on white

wines, Ostrev explained. After 1992, in the conditions of a free market economy, the Gamza cooperative was re-established and existed in this form until 2000, when the current owners stepped in.

The winery primarily sells its products on the Bulgarian market and through international retail chains in the country, but it also occasionally



exports to Japan, Canada, and the Benelux countries.

The winery owns and operates over 100 ha of vineyards in the municipality of Suhindol, and another 100 ha elsewhere under the management of another company.

Recently, Lovico has shifted its focus toward the production of more white wines to respond to changing market demand. „Generations have changed, and younger people prefer semi-dry and fruity wines,“ Ostrev explained. He also noted a recent trend of increased consumption of hard liquor and beer, with wine taking a backseat.

Ostrev commented that it's still too early to determine the quality of the new harvest, but overall, the year has been good – with no heavy rains and favorable early-season precipitation. However, the subsequent drought highlights the need to improve irrigation systems in the vineyards to mitigate the effects of future dry spells. According to him, a key challenge for wine production in Bulgaria is the lack of sufficient raw material, which increases the cost of production. A major advantage for the Suhindol winery is its

certified well, which reduces one of the primary expenses in production and maintenance.

Lovico also preserves old wine vessels that are more than 80 years old. Though no longer in use due to inefficiency compared to modern standards, they make impressive exhibits for visitors. Some of these vessels were nationalized from grape growers and winemakers in the region. The winery has 50 barrels with an average capacity of 10–15 tons, with the largest holding up to 20 tons, Ostrev said. The facility also houses built-in glass tanks of 15,000 liters each, delivered and installed by an Austrian company in 1915 for storing distillates and rakia.

In the winery's enoteca (wine archive), some of the bottles date back to 1954 and 1962, which are meant for connoisseurs and collectors only. These are no longer good for drinking and kept as gifts, Ostrev explained. He added that the company now also offers beautifully packaged new gift wines, which are sold in duty-free shops at Bulgarian airports and perform very well.

One of the newer features of the winery is a facility equipped for micro-winemaking, where

high-quality boutique wines are produced. It was established in 2006–2007 with the help of a project funded by EU pre-accession funds. According to Ostrev, the benefits have been substantial, as the facility allows for higher quality compared to mass-produced wines. Small batches of grapes are processed separately using this technology, he explained.

Since 2010, additional new stainless steel vessels have been purchased, with a total volume of around 1,000 tons. A few years ago, a newly equipped bottling facility with production lines and an automatic Bag-in-Box machine was also launched, capable of packaging 6,700 liters of wine per work shift.

The winery participates in various competitions, most notably at the Plovdiv Fair and Vinaria, where in 2023 it won the Golden Rhyton award for rose from the latest harvest.

The team's goal is to continue creating new and more modern wines in both appearance and taste, to meet the expectations of wine lovers.

CHUKARA WINERY TO OFFER NEW CHARDONNAY IN AUTUMN

Chukara Winery told BTA that in the autumn it plans to release a new Chardonnay aged in oak barrels, while next year it opted for Syrah, which is currently being processed. The winery is also preparing a Muscat rakia.

Chukara pointed out that despite the challenges of this year's weather conditions, the fact that it relies on a variety of vineyards across the country allows it to choose the best of the harvest. This enables the winery to guarantee high quality and offer wines with rich flavour and character.

Chukara is participating in a project to upgrade the winery financed by the State Fund Agriculture, which includes new laboratory equipment for analysis. The winery also plans to buy ten new French oak barrels.

Chukara plans to participate in competitions and festivals such as DiVino and Vinaria in Plovdiv, as well as various local events, as this provides an opportunity to present the wines to a wide audience and gain recognition for their quality.

The winery offers daily tours and wine tastings. Guests of Wine &

SPA Hotel Chukara were recently treated to an event Honey and Wine which had them pair wines with bee products.

Chukara Winery is a boutique winery located in the Tryavna Balkan Mountain Range. Founded in 2019, its main goal is to create limited editions of expressive wines that preserve the distinctive characteristics of the Bulgarian terroir. To make their wines, the winery's team of professionals carefully selects high-quality grapes from the country's well-known wine-growing regions.



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NORTH BLACK SEA REGION

Royal Winery Queen Marie

A MAKER OF ROYAL HERITAGE WINE IN BELCHIK

Royal Winery Queen Marie is located in the cellar of Queen Marie of Romania at the State Cultural Institute - Cultural Center 'The Palace' in Balchik. Their vineyards are spread both along the Northern Black Sea coast and in the Struma River valley around Melnik and Sandanski. They also have vineyards near Aytos, said Ralitsa Eneva, a representative of the winery, in an interview with BTA.

Royal Winery Queen Marie offers wines made from old Bulgarian grape varieties, as well as dessert, sweet, and fruit wines. They produce wines made from fig, raspberry, and melon. „We also offer a Royal wine, the recipe of which is said to have been found in Queen Marie's diaries. It is made from three grape varieties: Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Merlot, and blue plum. This is our bestseller. However, there is a growing trend of returning to native varieties. We grow and offer Bulgarian varieties like Rubin, Melnik-55, and Tamyanka, which is a somewhat forgotten variety but is now being revived. We also offer snow wine, which has turned out to be very interesting,” added Ralitsa Eneva. She also explained that the winery is located in Queen Marie of Romania's cellar, and the tasting room is actually the old room where the queen received her guests.

According to Ralitsa Eneva, the busiest months for the winery are July and August, when it receives the most Romanian tourists. She also noted that since the Palace is visited by tourists year-round, there is strong interest in their wines throughout the year as well.

“Bulgarians prefer classic dry wines, whether white, red, or pink, but they should be dry, while foreigners tend to prefer sweeter wines,” noted Eneva, adding that this is why they offer dessert, sweet, and fruit wines.

Among the challenges in growing grapes, Eneva mentioned the climate conditions, drought, and finding labor. According to her, these factors also lead to rising prices, but the winery strives to keep them affordable.

“We do not participate in

festivals; we offer our wines exclusively at 'The Palace' under the Royal Winery Queen Marie brand. This is the only place where people can find us. I think this is what makes us special,” said Ralitsa Eneva. She also explained that all tourists can taste the wines offered by the winery, and various tour operators organize wine tours.

Ralitsa Eneva said that she personally favors red dry wines from old vintages that are well-aged. Among her favorites are Syrah and Cabernet Franc. „My advice to people who are about to make homemade wine is to do it with love because if you put love into it, everything turns out well,” Eneva concluded.



REVIVED GERGANA GRAPES BRING GLOBAL AMBITIONS TO THIS BULGARIA WINERY

The owners of a winery in the village of Tsarev Brod near Shumen have revived the nearly extinct Bulgarian white grape variety Gergana, they reported to BTA on Tuesday.

They said their efforts helped reintroduce the variety, arguing that native grapes are key to putting Bulgaria on the world wine map.

Ivan Ivanov and Svetla Ivanova started cultivating vineyards near Tsarev Brod in 2001. Encouraged by the quality of their harvests, they established a winery in 2015 close to the vineyards, allowing for immediate processing of freshly picked grapes.

"The 20-year-old vineyards and freshly pressed juice are the foundation for producing world-class wines," said the winery's oenologist, Nikolay Krastev.

Krastev noted that eight grape varieties grow well in Tsarev Brod's climate, and the winery currently produces about 20 different wines, including some unfiltered options. Gergana, however, has yielded the most successful results.

"The variety is both versatile and technical. We now offer three styles: a naturally sparkling reserva, an aromatic dry white, and a dessert wine produced from frozen grapes," Krastev said.

In 2026, they will expand the existing 36-hectare vineyard by planting two indigenous grape varieties: the red Evmolpia and the white Gergana. These are the

estate's most anticipated wines each year.

The winery participates in leading wine exhibitions and competitions, including the DiVino Top 50 ranking for Bulgarian wines. In the latest edition, it received two awards: best white wine and best dessert wine. „We also welcome visitors to the winery with weekly tours," Krastev said. Many guests visit out of curiosity, and the team aims to present their winemaking approach clearly and accessibly.

For the past five years, the winery has participated in a tourism association for wineries in Northeast Bulgaria, collaborating on events such as Open Doors Days. The winery is

also a member of the Bulgarian Association of Wine Professionals, which established a national wine holiday on October 26, St. Demetrius Day. Each year on this date, the winery hosts an evening in Pliska to present its local wines.

According to Krastev, the entire Northeast and Ludogorie regions experienced a cold spring this year, with frost damaging the vines. This was followed by a dry summer, which significantly reduced the grape harvest. So far, 70% of the grape harvest has been completed. The grape juices show good concentration and quality, and wines are expected to be flavourful, aromatic, and fresh.



A SHIFT TO WHITES



Kaliakra Winery shifted its focus to producing white grape varieties, technologist Ani Kostova told BTA on Tuesday. The winery also maintains vineyards with red varieties as the market seeks grapes for white, red and rosé, while the region's climate is better suited to fresher whites and rosés and to more fruit-driven reds, she

added.

The area where the vineyards now stand had long been planted with vines. „Yields are good, but rain before and during harvest does not help; it rather hinders,” Kostova said.

“Heavy rainfall affects ripeness and the sanitary condition of the grapes, as diseases begin after

treatments have finished. Plant protection in the vineyard is over by then and the vines should be ripening and accumulating sugars; when there is rainfall, it affects the sugar levels,” Kostova said. She explained that vines have deep root systems, Dobrudzha soils are rich, and the vineyards are equipped with drip irrigation.

“We will work with the Varna Misket variety this year, and wine from it is expected in up to two years,” Kostova said. „There is a trend of returning to old Bulgarian grape varieties and we decided to try exactly Varna Misket. We are from the region, and both the variety and the wine are in demand,” Kostova added.

The winery implemented an innovative approach by acquiring a specialized sprayer capable of treating four rows simultaneously, enhancing plant protection and resulting in improved grape quality and vineyard hygiene.

“We have the most difficulty finding workers. Everything we do requires manual outdoor labour. We have workers from Uzbekistan and from Sliven, especially now during harvest. It is getting harder to find people for field work,” Kostova said.

She added that another issue is the lack of State support amid a wave of Romanian imports at very low prices that undercut the

grape market. „The subsidy for vineyards is approximately BGN 40 per decare, which is insufficient given our high production costs. I cannot assess the quality of imported Romanian grapes, but if they are offered at very low prices, it is likely that they benefit from substantial state support,” Kostova said.

The winery takes part in wine exhibitions.

“Every year we participate in VarnaWINEkend at the Archaeological Museum, and this year we will debut in Dobrich at Food and Wine from October 3 to 5. The wines are well received, primarily due to their limited availability and high quality. In Varna, all stock sold out, including the bottles used for tastings,” Kostova said, adding that the winery primarily produces standard dry wines and does not produce sweet or sparkling wines.

“A larger, new tasting room in Tuscan style will be built here, which can also host events. The idea is

that visitors will have somewhere to stroll, try a glass of quality wine, look at the vineyards and varieties, and make their choice,” Kostova concluded.

Kaliakra Winery produces limited series of high-quality wines as well as table wines. The vineyards were developed with Agroles EOOD. The company secures quality grapes from 370 decares of its own vineyards established in 2013 and has produced wine since 2016. The shop and vineyards are located in the Shabla Vineyards area, 2 km from Kaliakra.

The estate cultivates Muscat Ottonel, Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc, Riesling, Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Pinot Noir, and Syrah, with recent additions of Varna Misket. Ani Kostova is the winemaker. A small tasting room is available for sampling and retail purchases, with the option to tour the vineyard. A larger venue for events is also planned.



BG WINE

FIGHTING THROUGH LOWEST HARVEST SINCE ITS ESTABLISHMENT



Belogradetz Winery, located about 45 kilometers from Varna, on the Black Sea coast, reported what is likely its lowest grape harvest since its founding around 20 years ago. In an interview with the Bulgarian News Agency, the owner, Atanas Karageorgiev, explained that the reason is the sharp cold snap in April.

Despite this, he is satisfied that his vineyards still yielded some crop - especially the red grape varieties. However, he is also sourcing grapes from other parts of the country in order to meet the demand from customers looking for white wines such as Vratsa Misket, Varna Misket, Muscat, and Sauvignon Blanc.

Since 2023, the winery has also been offering a wine called „Zeilas“, made from a previously unknown local grape variety discovered

in the Rhodope Mountains. According to Karageorgiev, the plants are disease-resistant and have great potential, but yields are still small, so the product is not yet being presented at exhibitions.

According to him, the wine industry in Bulgaria could learn from France, where grape growers are united in cooperatives. This allows for the cultivation of large areas with less equipment and labor while maintaining good purchase prices. „With us, it is the opposite - we are fragmented, we do not help each other, and we drive prices down,“ commented Karageorgiev. He emphasized that cooperation would also make it easier to find skilled and reliable labor, as the same workers could tend to the vineyards of different growers one after the other.

He also noted that, at present, he

has to „raise“ his own staff - paying scholarships in order to have a good agronomist, technologist, and accountant. Karageorgiev is convinced that the sector cannot remain so fragmented for much longer and that it will inevitably begin to unite, leaving behind the negative memories of the former Labor Cooperative Agricultural Farms [an agricultural cooperative in the People's Republic of Bulgaria on the Soviet model].

He further pointed out that for wine tourism to develop, better infrastructure and advertising are needed to attract tourists. In his view, wine tourism should include not just tastings, but also accommodation and additional services - such as spa treatments or grape-based therapies.

The producer also commented that unfair competition still exists in the sector - not only from small-scale growers and individuals selling wine in plastic bottles at markets. According to him, a more significant issue comes from companies importing various materials, whose wines are not always made entirely from grapes.

Karageorgiev emphasized that the sector needs a new law dedicated solely to wine, as well as a reduction in bureaucracy. He pointed out that subsidies for grape growers in Bulgaria are significantly lower than those in Romania - BGN 20 per decare compared to EUR 49.

ADAPTING TECHNOLOGY TO MEET EVOLVING BULGARIAN TASTE

Varna Winery is located near the village of General Kantardzhievo and mainly produces white wines and rose, as the region is suitable for such grape varieties. The vineyards include Sauvignon Blanc, Pinot Gris, Riesling, Chardonnay, small quantities of Traminer and Gruner Veltliner, as well as the Bulgarian varieties Varna Misket and Vratsa Misket.

The winery uses French oak barrels to refine the wine's flavour. Some of its wines have been presented at international exhibitions and won awards, but according to the winery's chief technologist Tihomir Trifonov, the best prize is the customers' feedback. The winery has also exported abroad in the past, albeit in small quantities, since its annual capacity is about 200,000 litres and does not allow for regular exports.

The wine culture of Bulgarians is constantly improving, and the business is making efforts to meet expectations, said Trifonov. According to him, many people travel and discover interesting wines which they want to taste at home. „That is why we, as producers, make efforts to adapt our technology to the taste of Bulgarians who are looking for something different, something more interesting,” Trifonov added.

The winery's clientele includes many foreigners. „These are our friends who come to the Bulgarian Black Sea coast every year and always visit us for a ritual tasting,” Trifonov explained.

Speaking about wine tourism in Bulgaria, he said the sector is working hard, developing and applying various marketing initiatives. The problem, however, is the rising trend of wine

imports in recent years. „To reach the Bulgarian market at competitive prices, these Italian, Argentine, and other wines are unlikely to be of the highest quality. They are attractive at first glance, but what really sells them is their name and origin,” Trifonov commented.

He noted that imports of both wine and grapes cannot be restricted. The solution, in his view, is for state-level mechanisms to be developed to support the vine and wine sector through regulation and compensatory measures, so that grape growers and wine-makers have incentive to work. He recalled that a change in the Wine Act has been under discussion for years, but no steps have yet been taken. According to him, the new legislation should not copy French rules literally but take into account Bulgarian specifics, the changes in the industry over the past decade, and its transformation from large factories to many small wineries. „The law must consider different production volumes and provide mechanisms to support both production and marketing of the

product,” Trifonov said.

Bulgaria is renowned for its excellent conditions for vine growing and, consequently, for producing high-quality wine, he emphasized. However, in the past decade climate change has had an increasing impact on the sector. This, too, must be taken into account when amending the legislation, Trifonov said, stressing the need for clear rules on irrigation agriculture and how it will be applied. „Boreholes, surface water sources, these things need to be regulated, otherwise the sector faces serious problems,” he added.

As for the wines produced at Varna winery, he said they come from vineyards planted shortly before the winery started operating in 2008. Although the focus is on whites and roses, the range also includes two reds, with grapes sourced from Southern Bulgaria. „Our task is to provide the right wine for every taste,” Trifonov said, adding that while the winery strives to differentiate itself as a producer, it cannot abandon red wines since they remain in high demand.



FAMILY-RUN WINERY BALANCES TRADITION, TOURISM, AND EXPORTS DESPITE HARSH CONDITIONS IN 2025



Osmar Winery sells most of its wine on the Bulgarian market but also exports to the Czech Republic, the United States, and Austria, technologist Vyara Strahilova told BTA. „We produce up to 100,000 liters of wine annually,” she added.

In addition to its signature pelin, a herb-infused wine, the winery also produces dry whites and reds. It owns around 200 decares (20 hectares) of vineyards near the village of Osmar, cultivating Chardonnay, Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon.

Strahilova said the 2025 harvest was the most difficult and worst the winery has experienced. „There was frost damage in the spring, followed by hail, then drought. In some vineyard blocks, the frost completely destroyed the crop, and we had no yield at all,” she explained. „We managed to buy some grapes and had wine from previous vintages,

so we'll cope. But since we're both grape growers and winemakers, this poor harvest has made things extremely difficult.”

The winery has no plans to introduce new wines for now, Strahilova said. „We mainly produce Osmar Pelin, which makes up about 80% of our total production.”

Osmar Pelin is a semi-dry, aromatic wine classified as a quality wine. It has a balanced, slightly tart and bittersweet taste, made from aged wine infused with more than 30 wild herbs and fruits. The ingredients—grapes, apples, quinces, and herbs—are layered in five-ton oak barrels until two-thirds full, then topped up with either white or red wine, which determines whether the final product will be white or red pelin.

“It's very difficult financially,” said winery manager Zhaclina Nikolova. „Unfortunately, state support is

minimal. The subsidies we receive for grape growing cover only 2–3% of our actual costs, so it's hard to make larger investments at this stage.”

Nikolova added that the winery has not participated in competitions and doesn't plan to for now. „It's enough that people in Bulgaria know and have long sought out this pelin and our wines,” she said.

The winery organizes wine tours, which are typically fully booked on weekends. „We welcome tourists from all over Bulgaria and abroad,” Nikolova said, noting that until recently, the winery worked with the tour operator TUI, which brought in German visitors.

Osmar Winery has a long history—before 1944 it operated as a cooperative and became a private business in 1994.

NEW PREMIUM CHARDONNAY JOINS LINEUP OF BOUTIQUE BULGARIAN WINES

One of the new initiatives at the Salla Estate winery is that, starting this year, it will release a Chardonnay wine with a controlled designation of origin, the highest classification. The winery's vineyard lies in a region already recognized for producing such wines, so the team plans to leverage this and offer a Chardonnay under that special designation, said Anelia

Hristakieva, the chief enologist, who has worked there since its founding in 2010.

Salla Estate is located in the village of Blaskovo, Provadia Municipality, situated in the heart of the famed Provadia plateau Sarta, about 60 km from Varna. The winery was founded in 2010 by brothers Ivan Ivanov and Georgi Anastasov, who remain its owners. They

planted their own vineyards on 30 ha of land adjacent to the winery, on a southwestern slope with favorable soil and climatic conditions.

Their varieties include elite white grapes such as Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc, Traminer, Riesling, and the local Vratsa Misket, as well as red grapes like Pinot Noir and Cabernet Franc. „In 2005 we purchased 30 ha



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of old, overgrown vineyards – just stones and trees, parts of which hadn't been tilled for 20 years. We spent two years on soil preparation, then contracted the French firm Guillaume to perform a soil-climate analysis and guide our plantings. They told us what to plant where," Ivanov explained in a BTA interview.

Hristakieva noted that so far the winery offers only dry wines, all with protected geographic designation. The wines are offered in two series. The Salla line is high-end, with varietal wines from Vratsa Misket, Sauvignon Blanc, Riesling, Traminer, and Chardonnay in two versions (with or without oak aging). They also make oak-aged Riesling, and from the red varieties they produce both varietals and a blend called Salla Red.

The second series, Salinas (named for ancient saltworks near Provadia), targets a younger audience. It includes varietal wines like Sauvignon Blanc and Pinot Noir, as well as blends. The rose is made from the two red varieties, and white blends include Riesling-Traminer and Chardonnay-Sauvignon Blanc.

Hristakieva said that the 2025

harvest was extremely low in yield. „Though the quality is excellent, the quantities are small. We were hit hard by April frost," she said. She described the weather extremes: „The winter began unusually warm. In December through February temperatures were mild, but in April we suddenly dropped to -18 °C, even snow, while vines had already begun budding. Then a hot summer followed. We don't have water shortage thanks to drip irrigation, but heat still took its toll. The grape and juice parameters are excellent, so we hope the wines will turn out very well, even if in limited volume. The 2025 vintage must be considered precious." Previously they harvested 600–800 kg per decare; this year about 200 kg – roughly three to four times less, despite no water scarcity, said Ivanov.

Hristakieva said that Salla Estate strives to participate in every initiative promoting Bulgarian wine varieties. „Soon come the Days of Mavrud events, and we'll contribute with our Vratsa Misket, since the aim is to promote all Bulgarian varieties, not only Mavrud. We regularly take part in

DiVino – one of Bulgaria's largest wine fairs – held in late November and early December."

"Our goal is to appear at every wine-related event so our products reach a wider audience. We have no advertising budget. Events like this give people the chance to hear about us and taste our wines, particularly as our core market is restaurants and niche wine shops," she said.

Every May they also take part in the Open Doors Days of Northeastern Bulgaria – two days when everyone may visit and sample wines for free. They hold thematic events at their hotel and restaurant complex to reach more people. Regular tastings have been held since 2014, she said.

Ivanov noted that in addition to the hotel, the estate features a new complex with a conference hall, large restaurant, tasting rooms, and more. „There is also a children's area and an equestrian center. We keep Lipizzaner horses – a rare and historical breed, which were once owned only by aristocrats in Slovenia and Austria," Ivanov added.

SOUTH BLACK SEA REGION

Vinex Slavyantsi Winery

SUSTAINABLE IRRIGATION AND INNOVATION DRIVE OPTIMISM FOR SUNGURLARE VALLEY HARVEST

Nacho Angelov from the sales department of Vinex Slavyantsi AD told BTA that his company is optimistic about the quality of this year's harvest. The company owns 700 hectares of vineyards located in the Sungurlare Valley, Southeastern Bulgaria.

Despite the dry weather and low rainfall during the summer of 2025, vineyards that are irrigated with a drip system are showing excellent results. The grapes are good, which gives hope for an exceptional harvest.

Vinex Slavyantsi grows a variety of white and red grape varieties, including Chardonnay, Muscat Ottonel, Sauvignon blanc, Riesling, Red Misket, Dimyat, Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, and Syrah. The

production of the manufacturer, which unites four wineries in the Burgas region, is well known on the domestic market and has a strong presence in Sweden and Poland. The company also sells wines in Germany and Belgium.

Vinex Slavyantsi focuses on sustainable water management. Drip irrigation is key to optimizing yields, with more than a third of the company's vineyards currently irrigated using this technology. Angelov reported: „We continue to invest in irrigation systems as part of our long-term strategy for sustainable agriculture. We are currently developing a project to expand our irrigation system."

Vinex Slavyantsi is a wine producer with almost 100 years

of history. The company relies on traditional winemaking but also strives to implement modern technologies in order to produce higher quality and more competitive products.

Angelov told BTA: „Innovation begins in the vineyards, with the use of predictive models for vine disease development, intelligent irrigation and fertilization of vineyards, sustainable viticulture, and organic production. In our cellars, we have modern equipment for wine and rakia production, controlling the entire process from grape reception, pressing, and fermentation at a controlled temperature to filtration, stabilization, and packaging."



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FAMILY ROOTS AND NEW TRADITIONS IN BALKAN WINEMAKING

Andrey Melnikov and his family make wine in their Hands & Friends winery near the village of Esen, between Karnobat and Sungurlare at the foot of the Balkan Mountains.

The family's story began far from Bulgaria, in Saint Petersburg. Over a decade ago, Melnikov and his wife decided to seek a new life in Bulgaria. Now, instead of city noise, their days are spent among the rows of about 20 hectares of vineyards planted in 2017. The first harvest was gathered in 2021, and the fifth is expected this year, Melnikov said.

Dry summers in the region reduce yields but produce concentrated, high-quality grapes. The vineyards cultivate several varieties, including white grapes like Sauvignon Blanc, Tamyanka, Moschofilero, and Assyrtiko, known for its freshness, mineral character,

and high acidity, and originally from Santorini. Red varieties include Syrah, Cabernet Franc, Cabernet Sauvignon, and Grenache, a Spanish grape widely grown in France and the broader Mediterranean region.

The winery is small yet fully equipped. „We use only natural intelligence,” Melnikov joked, favouring hands-on methods over advanced technology. Each vine is individually tended, and every barrel is carefully supervised. This approach produces wines with minimal intervention, free from chemical additives, and with a strong commitment to environmental stewardship.

Their production is primarily dedicated to rose and white wines, all of which are distributed within the Bulgarian market. „Everything we produce sells well, and interest in the brand is growing,” Melnikov

shared. He is particularly interested in a 2024 red blend that is currently aging and will be ready in two to three years. Manual labor plays a key role in the Hands & Friends approach, but the involvement of friends is equally crucial. Each September, the winery organizes a lively harvest celebration with numerous guests, wine tastings on a panoramic terrace, and a festive atmosphere that transforms the harvest into a communal tradition. In summer, the winery is open to anyone who wants to taste their wines and experience the scenic Melnikov region.

“We’re not seeking to expand at any cost,” the winemaker added, „it’s more important to offer people a wine that carries our signature: pure, natural and made with love.”



A HUNDRED AWARDS AT DECANTER WORLD WINE AWARDS



“We are proud to share that DiVes Estate Winery has once again received prestigious recognition, reaching a milestone 100 awards for our wines,” said Vasilena Rangelova, Marketing Manager at DiVes Estate, in a statement to BTA.

Since 2012, the winery's labels have won not only medals, but also top positions at the most significant wine events in Bulgaria.

The 100th award came from the 2025 edition of the Decanter World Wine Awards, where Merlot & Cabernet Sauvignon Barrique Limited Edition 2021, the winery's newest red wine blend, received a silver medal. The same wine has also earned a silver medal at Vinaria 2025 and a gold medal at MUNDUS VINI 2025, Rangelova added.

Two other DiVes Estate wines, Merlot Barrique 2020 Special

Selection and Sauvignon Blanc 2022 Aged in Oak Barrels, won gold medals at the prestigious Vinaria 2024 competition in Plovdiv. This long-standing event is one of Bulgaria's most respected wine contests, attracting both producers and enthusiasts. The medals were awarded by an expert jury and presented personally by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Hristo Spasov, Vice-Rector of the University of Food Technologies –

Plovdiv, on February 21, 2025.

In the DiVino TOP 50 ranking for 2023, listing the 50 best Bulgarian wines, DiVes Estate wines claimed top positions, including Cabernet Sauvignon & Merlot Barrique 2019 Grand Reserve, winner of a silver medal at MUNDUS VINI 2023 and a gold medal at Vinaria 2023 and Sweet Muscat, named among the best wines in Bulgaria, awarded at the Toplocentrala Ceremony in Sofia on February 24, 2024

The Sweet Muscat also took home the title of Best Dessert Wine of 2023, in addition to winning a gold medal at Vinaria 2023. The award was presented by Krasimira Kodukova, founder of Wine Tour Maker, with over 10 years of experience in wine tourism.

DiVes Estate's success has transcended Bulgaria's borders since the winery's founding and its very first vintages. In 2023 alone, the winery was awarded a total of nine medals, including 1 gold and 2 silver medals at MUNDUS VINI, 1 silver medal at the Decanter World Wine Awards, 2 gold medals at the Concours Mondial de Bruxelles, 1 silver medal at the Concours Mondial du Sauvignon and 2 gold medals at Vinaria.

"These awards not only confirm our commitment to quality but also motivate us to continue creating wines of exceptional character that meet the high

standards of our clients and wine enthusiasts. Every recognition inspires the DiVes team to pour even more love and dedication into the winemaking process," said Rangelova.

The team at DiVes Estate Winery takes pride not only in its 100 international medals and awards from the world's most prestigious wine competitions, but also in the countless glowing reviews from visitors, which remain the winery's most valued form of recognition.

This summer season, DiVes Estate welcomed wine lovers from around the world, including the United Kingdom, Poland, Belgium, Germany, France, Italy, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Israel, the United States, Australia, Kenya, Vietnam, Iceland, and many others.

DiVes Estate is open year-round for visits, but summer along the Black Sea coast is the perfect time to explore all it has to offer. The winery features three unique visitor tours.

Situated on the historic Simeonova Mound, the winery is located on the site of the legendary Battle of Achelous, fought on August 20, 917 AD under Tsar Simeon I of Bulgaria. Guided by a knowledgeable tour leader, visitors explore the battle's legacy and the nearby „Eye of the Victor“ monument.

Developed over the course of nearly 10 years, this wine

tour has become an established destination for wine tourism in the Nessebar and Sunny Beach region. The experience offers insight into winemaking practices and includes guided wine evaluation training combined with carefully selected food pairings, following the Food & Wine Pairing concept.

The winery owns its own vineyards, where five grape varieties are cultivated: Muscat, Sauvignon Blanc, Pamid, Merlot, and Cabernet Sauvignon.

DiVes Estate is equipped with a state-of-the-art bottling line, which bottles the wine in an anaerobic environment, ensuring the highest quality. This is supported by a skilled team of technologists and winemaking technicians. The wines are aged in premium French and Bulgarian oak barrels, with the team demonstrating 100% commitment to every detail, crafting each wine with great care and passion.

From May to September, tastings are held daily in four languages: Bulgarian, English, German, and Russian. From October to April, wine tastings and tours are available during weekday working hours (Monday to Friday) in Bulgarian and English, by prior reservation.

FOR WINE TOURISM TO DEVELOP, SECTORS MUST WORK TOGETHER, SAYS OWNER



For strong wine tourism to thrive, different sectors, vine growers, winemakers, hoteliers, tour operators, and restaurateurs, must look in the same direction and work together, said Stefan Baltadzhiev, owner of Prisoe Winery, in an interview with BTA.

The family-run winery is located near Varna and is managed by Baltadzhiev with the help of his mother. He is involved in vineyard cultivation, technological processes, hosting guests, and sales.

According to the winery, this year's harvest is weaker due to unfavorable weather conditions - a cold spell in April and drought, especially in Northern Bulgaria. Another serious issue is the lack of labor. Workers are needed both in the vineyards and in the winery, but such staff are hard to find, the producer noted. He added that it's now common for wine makers to wait for Bulgarians who go to France to harvest grapes to return home so they can work in local vineyards as well.

Climate change is also affecting the work. The Prisoe vineyards grow Merlot, Chardonnay, Cabernet Sauvignon, and Vratsa Muscat varieties. According to Baltadzhiev, tackling these challenges requires a comprehensive approach - changes in viticulture, technological adaptation, and partial replacement of grape varieties. In this regard, a European programme for vineyard restructuring and conversion is helpful, Baltadzhiev said, adding that

he is considering applying for it himself.

The young winemaker stressed the need for consolidation within the industry. „Here, everyone is trying to survive on their own, they've found some way and they keep going. But in the West, people have figured it out - they join cooperatives, support each other, and that's how they solve many of their problems,“ noted Baltadzhiev.

At Prisoe, wine tourism is a leading part of the business. The winery welcomes guests from various countries, with most visitors being wine enthusiasts rather than professionals. Tastings are conducted in English and French, and for Russian-speaking tourists, the owner's mother also assists. Guests from traditional wine-producing countries like France, Italy, and Spain are pleasantly

surprised by the quality of Bulgarian wines, especially reds. Most of the guests are young people, Baltadzhiev added, clarifying that only about 5% of the visitors to Prisoe have solid experience with wine tastings.

According to him, in order to increase the number of visitors, the viticulture and winemaking industry needs to collaborate more actively with the tourism sector. „We need to align our thinking with restaurateurs, hoteliers, and tour operators,“ Baltadzhiev stressed.

Another issue facing the sector is the shortage of young technologists. The reasons are difficult working conditions, high responsibility, and the remote locations of many wineries from large urban centers. Baltadzhiev believes that more investment is needed in the training of a new generation of winemakers.

He considers himself lucky, as his father worked for many years as a technologist at the winery in Euxinograd and helped him learn the craft. „The problem is that the connection between generations is breaking, and winemaking is something that must be learned,“ Baltadzhiev said. According to him, the industry needs to think about and invest as well in the education of young people. And not just to train them to be winemakers, but to teach them everything from A to Z - from how to grow grapes to how to make quality wine.

He added that, for example, he personally uses only Bulgarian barrels - old, oak ones. „They are also a tool for achieving quality,“ said Baltadzhiev, noting that he had tried foreign barrels as well but returned to the local ones.



BG WINE

ADDING TWO MORE WINES TO ITS ASSORTMENT



Stratsin Winery will offer two new wines on the market – a limited batch of white wine from the Albarino variety and a light red wine from the local Pamid variety. This was announced in an interview with the Bulgarian News Agency by Marina Kostadinova, manager of Ven Group, owner of the winery located in the Pomorie region.

"The Albarino vineyard is still young and produces little, so the first batch will be limited but extremely interesting," Kostadinova said. The new Pamid wine is aimed at fans of more ethereal and traditional Bulgarian flavors.

According to her, despite the good quality of the harvest, this year's drought has led to lower yields and higher grape prices, which will affect the final price of the wines.

The winery marks ten years since its establishment. During this period, significant investments have been made in technological equipment and new vineyard plantings, including grape varieties suited for cultivation near the sea. By the end of the year, Stratsin Winery will participate in prestigious events such as the „Young Wine Parade“ in Plovdiv and DiVino Taste 2025 in Sofia.

The winery was founded with inspiration from family tradition—co-founder Krasimir Kostadinov's grandfather was a winemaker before the socialist era. „The secret to good wine is dedication, consistency, and love. What sets us apart is our scale—we are a small winery with great attention to detail,“ emphasized Kostadinova.

Stratsin Winery is located in

the village of Stratsin, 30 km from Pomorie, and produces wines with a distinct Black Sea character from 300 decades of its own vineyards. They cultivate varieties such as Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc, Muscat, Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Syrah, as well as rarer ones like Vermentino, Grenache Blanc, and Albariño. The proximity to the Black Sea provides favorable conditions for grape ripening and imparts a characteristic minerality to the wines. Winters are mild, autumns are long and warm, springs are cool, and summers are warm and humid with prevailing daytime and nighttime breezes.

The winery's wines are featured in three series - Picky Magpie, Early Birds, and Soulmates. Some of the most talked-about and interesting wines include the Soulmates Sauvignon Blanc Rosé, the Early Birds Vermentino, and the Soulmates white blend of Grenache Blanc and Vermentino, which was included in the Divino TOP 50 ranking for 2023.

Stratsin Winery's wines have won awards at international competitions and are sold exclusively in specialty stores and venues with a focus on wine. The winery is open to wine tourists year-round, offering a tasting room and a large terrace with scenic views for outdoor events.

WINERY BOASTS NEW PACKAGING ROBOTS



to China, Japan, the US, Germany and England, however, its main market remains Bulgaria. Simova reported: „Our wines have won international awards and are highly regarded. In recent years, their price has risen and is often higher than that of some French, Italian, and Spanish wines.”

The history of the Black Sea Gold winery began in 1924, when Bulgarians established the first vine and wine cooperative, Dimyat, in Pomorie. Winemakers built the first modern winery in Pomorie in 1932.

In the 1950s, Black Sea Gold took on the appearance of a modern factory whose products were highly valued. Twenty years later, the Pomorie winery designed a special building to store 12,000 oak barrels for aging wine distillate. In 1994, the winery imported eight stills from Charente in France, with which it began producing rakia and brandy.

The original winery from 1932 is now the heart of a hotel complex for wine tourism that also has a restaurant, tasting room, and museum.

Between 2007 and 2013, Black Sea Gold invested over EUR 5.5 million in the construction of a micro-winery. Micro-winemaking is a technology that requires each process to be performed manually. It enables the production of high-quality wines in limited editions.

The company today employs around 250 people. It grows its grapes on more than 700 hectares of its own vineyards.

Georgi Angelov, who works at the Marketing Department of Chernomorsko Zlato (Black Sea Gold), told BTA that his winery has introduced new robots for packaging finished products as part of its efforts towards modernization and sustainable development. He said that the new technology has upped the company's efficiency as well as the quality of its products.

He added: „We have invested in solar panels that provide environmentally friendly electricity for our bases.”

Commenting on the 2025 grape harvest, he reported that drought, hailstorms, and fires reduced yields by over 20%. The situation is particularly dire for white varieties, with grapes almost completely absent in some areas.

The company maintains its active presence on the international scene and continues to present its products at global wine competitions and

exhibitions. Its wines have appeared in Concours Mondial de Bruxelles, Frankfurt International Trophy, Decanter World Wine Awards, ProWein in Dusseldorf.

Deliana Simova, winemaker at Black Sea Gold, reported that the winery works with modern machinery and pumping equipment. It has a micro-winery, where most of the work is done by hand, as about 90% of the processes are carried out manually. The winery produces limited series of wines, with very precise grape selection and high quality. The wine is stored in oak barrels.

Simova shared that customers today are not only looking for classic wines. Fruity, fresh, and light wines that are easier to drink are in vogue. According to her, Bulgarian wines are competitive on the world market thanks to the terroir—the unique climate and proximity to the sea.

The winery exports its production

SAKAR AND EASTERN RHODOPES

Villa Basareya

WHERE WINE AGES IN ACACIA BARRELS

Wine aged in acacia barrels is the latest series launched by the Villa Bassarea winery in Harmanli, the winery's co-owner Kamen Koev told BTA.

The first wine in the series is Sauvignon Blanc, with only 1,200 bottles on the market under the name Acacia Touch. „Every year we try to offer something new in the product list. And the most important attestation for the new product is whether someone who has tried it once will come back (to try it again),“ Koev pointed out.

In addition to the quality of the new wine, Koev also highlighted the bottle label with intertwined acacia branches and Sauvignon Blanc, which was designed by Ivo Sirakov, a Bulgarian who has been working and living in Italy for years. „Quality is very important, but the label on a bottle of wine is like the eyebrows on a person's face,“ Koev noted. The cellar of Villa Bassarea has a rich product list with mainly white wines from the varieties Tamyanka, Chardonnay and Muscat. The series is always boutique, with only between 1,500 and 3,000 bottles.

In the acacia barrels the technologist now intends to plant grapes of the Viognier variety with a quantity for only 900 bottles. The Villa Bassarea winery, which

was founded in 2014, reported a grape harvest with low yields, but good quality for 2025, as two-thirds of the grapes have already been harvested by mid-September and the quality indicators are very good. Koev stressed that the reduced yields are mainly due to frostbite of the massifs in April and the subsequent hailstorm in May near the villages of Kolarovo and Bulgarin, from where the winery supplies its wines.

The winery has been working with the same grape growers from the region for more than ten years, Koev commented, adding that the places where grapes are purchased are at most 20 kilometres away from the winery. „We insist on regional varieties and that is why we

maintain this tradition,“ he said. He also emphasized how the local winemakers' association called Wines of Sakar was founded with the idea to bring together like-minded people and help each other, even though the winemakers are also each other's competitors.

„The market that some of the larger wineries have is different from that of the smaller producers. Such an association is a rare union, but we are proud of it. This is how we manage to organize a wine festival every season, hosted by one of the wineries from the association,“ Koev said. The wine festival in December in Harmanli is to be hosted by the Rosalea winery.



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CZECH INVESTORS DEVELOP WINEMAKING IN HARMANLI

The Rosalea Winery, created by Czech investors Petr Beletz and Vladislav Winter, is one of the newest wineries in Harmanli. The two wine connoisseurs initially came to Bulgaria in 2011 to found an IT company, but were impressed by the terroir and the wines in the Sakar area. So in 2016, they bought a plot of land in the Harmanli village of Shishmanovo and planted a vineyard there, the winery's oenologist Ekaterina Gargova told BTA.

The winery works entirely with its own production of wine varieties, including Chardonnay, Cabernet Sauvignon and Mavrud. In 2022, new vines were planted from mainly local varieties, such as Dimyat, Cherven Misket and Pamid. There is also Pomoriiski Biser, which is a Bulgarian complex-resistant variety, created after a cross between Cherven Misket and Riesling, an old white grape originating from Germany, noted Gargova, who has been an oenologist at the winery since its founding in 2020, when the vines from the massif in the village of Shishmanovo began to bear fruit.

Regarding the taste qualities of the wine produced, she pointed out that the uniqueness comes from the terroir, adding that the human factors also play a role. „In Harmanli, there are traditions in winemaking, the region is favourable. There is a rich variety of soils. In the Shishmanovo massif, diversity is found even just in one row", Gargova emphasized. The

development of the grapes is also affected by the influence of the Mediterranean climate and the large number of warm days, she said.

Winemaking is one of the industries in which production remains quite traditional, Gargova pointed out, noting that in 2025, the winery was re-equipped under a European project. „No matter how many innovations are introduced, in winemaking there is manual labor and, above all, the personal attitude of the people involved in it. Our team is small and although we are different specialists, we are together both in the vineyard and in the winery. That is why the classics are preserved more in small productions," she stressed.

Every year, the winery increases production a little because they are preparing for the moment when the vineyards will enter full fruiting. For the oenologist, the

most emotional are the turbulent moments at the start of the autumn campaign. „The moment when the grapes are received, the start of fermentation, when the juice begins to slightly carbonate and the aroma begins to emerge. There are many dynamic moments in this season and I like that in my work," Gargova commented.

The winery produces two main ranges. According to the winery's sales representative, Maria Hodzheva, the baseline series comprises lighter, everyday wines that do not age in oak barrels, while the „Writer's Wine" series comprises pure varietal wines that do age in high-class barrels. A total of 18,000 bottles were produced across all series in 2024.

Rosalea Winery is a member of the local Wines of Sakar winemakers association in Harmanli. It will host one of the seasonal wine festivals of the association in December.



ONE OF VERY FEW IN BULGARIA PRODUCING PETIT VERDOT WINE



Chateau Kolarovo is among the few in Bulgaria producing pure wine from the Petit Verdot grape, not typically grown in the country. Although the winery is located in the heart of the Merlot-growing region, over the years pure wine from the French variety has become Kolarovo's trademark, the owner and technologist Iliana Koeva said.

She noted that in Bordeaux, Petit Verdot makes up between 5 and 10% of blends. „In Bordeaux they say Petit Verdot is the little spice needed for the blend, like black pepper added to food to make it

sparkle. That's why we at Kolarovo are proud that the grapes for our most popular wine come from our own vineyard," Iliana Koeva said.

The winery was established in 2009, after being converted from a dairy. In 2021, when Koeva became the owner, the winery was given the name Kolarovo.

She recalled that in the early 1970s Austrian agronomist Prof. Moser identified the vineyard near Kolarovo as unique. Taking into account the terroir, he advised investing in Merlot plantations. By the 1980s, 700 hectares were planted with vines

from French stock, Koeva said. „This Merlot vineyard is now over 50 years old and remains emblematic. Merlot should come from Kolarovo, it's a quality mark in itself," she added.

The vineyards around Kolarovo are managed mainly by two local cooperatives. Despite the high quality of Merlot, Koeva believes the strength of small boutique wineries such as hers lies in the diversity they bring to the market. „Modern Bulgarian viticulture started in 2000 with the launch of the SAPARD programme. Until then, everything around Kolarovo was Merlot and

Cabernet, with some Pamid and Mavrud. These varieties are still popular, but people want new and different wines. At exhibitions we're always asked what new we have. That's why we planted our own vineyards not only with Petit Verdot but also with Malbec," Koeva said.

Her winery is part of the Wines of Sakar association, which also includes her husband Kamen Koev, technologist and co-owner of another Harmanli winery, Villa Bassarea.

Originally from Targovishte, Koeva met her husband while studying wine technology at the University of Food Technology in Plovdiv. Both later gained experience at the large wineries in Lyaskovets and Targovishte. „In large-scale production, there are experienced colleagues, and it's hard to make mistakes because someone will always guide you. That's why I advise beginners to first work in bigger wineries, to get used to the workload and dynamics, and to learn from senior experts before being tempted to experiment on their own," she said.

In 2006, the couple decided to leave large-scale wine-making and begin experimenting independently. Kamen was the first to arrive as technologist at a winery in the Harmanli region, while Iliana won a project and left for California, where she worked for a year at a winery in Sonoma. After returning, the family settled permanently in Harmanli. „We could have gone anywhere in the world. We were young and eager to experiment, with every door open to us. But the southern slopes of Sakar won us over with their uniqueness. The region is ideal for wine-making, climate, soil diversity, everything gives character to the wine. We came for a short time, but we've been here nearly 20 years now. Our daughter grew up at wine exhibitions and around wine-related topics," Koeva said.

Asked which wine they open at home in the evenings, hers or her husband's Koeva said: „We always drink other people's wine. In our house, wine is like a religion. By tasting colleagues' wines, we both enjoy what they have achieved and understand where

we stand with our own."

As rival technologists, the couple have split their production focus over time. Bassarea specializes in white wines, while Kolarovo makes reds. One of Kolarovo's most popular series is Metamorphosis, with all labels featuring a ram, the winery's logo. The ram is a symbol of one of the incarnations of Dionysus, the god of wine. According to a pagan theory, every person carries something of the god of wine, Koeva explained. She also shared a curious detail about choosing the ram as the winery's emblem: when the land was ploughed deeply before the vineyards were planted, a silver ring with the image of a ram was found. The artefact was donated to the Harmanli Museum.

Another pride of the winery is the Sweet Wine Rose, a dessert wine aged nine years in barrels, produced from Merlot grown in local vineyards. Koeva noted that dessert wine is rarely made in Bulgaria because there is little local tradition of drinking it, unlike in Hungary or Spain.



BOUTIQUE WINERY PIONEERS GRAPE PRESS INNOVATION



The boutique winery Terra Divine has developed innovative grape presses that fully protect the fruit from oxidation, wine technologist Diyan Tochev said on Sunday.

The Haskovo-based winery focuses on preserving the quality and potential of grapes during winemaking.

Tochev noted that the small winery cultivates two hectares of Mavrud vineyards near the village of Trakiets, with main operations based in Haskovo. He earned a doctorate in oenology from a French university, where he also trained at French experimental centres, primarily the Centre for Rose Wine. He is currently a senior assistant at the Department of Biotechnology at the University of Chemical Technology and Metallurgy in Sofia.

Founded in 2011 as a consultancy specializing in vineyard development in France, the company later transitioned its operations to

Bulgaria and launched its own winery in 2021.

Terra Divine focuses on Bulgarian grape varieties. Nearly 40% of its production is organic Mavrud cultivated on the estate. The winery is also working to promote Melnik 55, another organic hybrid grape. Tamyanka and Vrachanski Misket are sourced from local growers. Depending on the vintage, the winery produces about ten types of wine. After grape processing and fermentation, the wines are bottled immediately, without ageing in oak barrels.

Tochev explained that the goal is to demonstrate precise grape handling throughout processing and fermentation. The presses, currently in the prototype phase for a utility model developed in collaboration with Haskovo engineers, utilize an inert atmosphere to protect grape integrity and align with the winery's philosophy. The company

is organically certified, producing vegan wines free from allergens and made with minimal intervention in accordance with current regulations. Limited amounts of organic Mavrud are exported to France, while the majority of sales are within the domestic market. Annual production is approximately 10,000 bottles, with a portion sold as bulk wine.

"Our wines are primarily sold through personal networks," Tochev said. He noted that Bulgaria has no unions, cooperatives, or organizations to assist small wine producers: „Everyone has to manage independently."

The flagship of the chateau's portfolio is its organic red Mavrud, awarded a gold medal at Vinaria in Plovdiv. The winery's red and rose wines have also earned silver medals at respected national and Balkan wine competitions that assess product quality.

TERRA TANGRA WINERY PRODUCES 500,000 BOTTLES ANNUALLY

With more than 300 ha of its own vineyards and an annual production of around 500,000 bottles of wine, Terra Tangra Winery in Harmanli, Southern Bulgaria, is one of the largest domestic producers, the company's management told BTA. The chateau has two wineries, with the new production facility built in 2020 near the village of Balgarin equipped with state-of-the-art technology and all necessary conditions for the development of wine tourism. Those include a tasting room, accommodation studios, and other amenities.

Terra Tangra was founded in 2004. Over the years, it has increased both its production and its own vineyards. Plantations with

15 white and red grape varieties are located near the villages of Balgarin, Shishmanovo, and Branitsa.

The wine catalogue includes seven options: Exclusive Selection, Yatrus, Black Label, Terra Tangra, Organic, TT, and H&S. Terra Tangra wines have won more than 300 medals and awards at international exhibitions in England, Germany, France, Japan, New Zealand, Sweden, Canada, Switzerland, China, and Russia. A notable year for the entrepreneurs was 2009, when Single Barrel Wine ranked in the top 50 in the world at the Winexpo Bordeaux exhibition in France.

The pandemic affected the business and led to a decline in

customers and turnover. However, there is now a positive long-term trend towards an increase in bottle sales and a corresponding increase in the average selling price per litre. Steps are being taken to seek new trading partners, including foreign ones.

The company's manager Emil Zaychev shared one challenge that the company faces is the unfavourable climate changes. He said that the industry throughout Bulgaria is not in good shape and added: „We receive no support from the State. Subsidies for viticulture and wine production in Bulgaria's neighbouring countries are ten times higher."



BULGARIAN WINE TRADITION PRESERVED THROUGH LOCAL GRAPES, OAK BARRELS

At one of the emblematic wineries near the village of Kolarovo, Harmanli Municipality – Little Star, the team takes pride in working exclusively with local grape varieties, while their wines age only in Bulgarian oak barrels crafted by Bulgarian coopers.

“We work with barrels made from oak in Malko Tarnovo. The idea is that we produce Bulgarian wine, from grapes grown in our vineyards, and it matures in barrels made by Bulgarian masters. From start to finish, our wines embody the phrase ‘Made in Bulgaria,’ owner and winemaker Svilen Georgiev told BTA.

The winery’s name comes from „The Star”, an ancient crossroads associated with wine trade. Little Star was founded in 2005 by Dr. Stefan Angelov and partners.

Just steps away from the winery lies one of its own vineyards – around 5 hectares planted with Syrah, Merlot, and Chardonnay. Due to late frost in April followed by hailstorms in the region, 2025’s harvest from

that vineyard will not be collected, explained Svilen’s wife, Gergana.

The couple share responsibilities in the winery: Svilen, who gained international experience as part of the Stone Bridge Wines team in Clare Valley, Austria, oversees the vineyards, yields, and winemaking technology. Gergana handles administration, sales, and guest hospitality in the tasting room.

Another part of the winery’s vineyards stretches across 140 hectares in Lyubimets. About 90 percent of those grapes are sold, as production has been scaled back significantly in recent years to around 20,000-25,000 bottles per vintage. „The idea was to free up more time to spend with visitors, to be among the people who come to taste our wines,” Gergana Georgieva said. According to her, wine tourism in Bulgaria is developing, albeit slowly. „Most people still come with the idea that wine should be ‘masculine’ – heavy. We focus instead on lighter, more drinkable, fruit-

forward wines,” she explained.

The winery works with both popular international varieties and less familiar ones in Bulgaria, such as Colombard, Carménère, Marselan, and Malbec, which are attracting growing interest, alongside native varieties like Melnik 55 and Melnik Rubin.

Little Star specializes in producing limited series of premium wines. Its main line is Enigma, while its most acclaimed labels are Experience and Essence.

Inside the cellar, wines mature in barrels for periods ranging from eight months to six years. „One of the barrels has been resting here since October 2015,” said Georgiev. He explained that he had also experimented with acacia and walnut barrels: „Acacia works for certain grape varieties, but walnut is very risky – if the wine isn’t taken out on time, it can pick up iodine-like flavours.”

A distinctive feature of the cellar is its natural well, which helps maintain optimal humidity.

This year, the winemaker is experimenting with open-vessel fermentation, a technique that, he says, allows for „a smoother, gentler extraction.”

Little Star is a member of Wines of Sakar, the local winegrowers’ association in Harmanli. „Even though we compete, we help each other a lot within the organization. Making wine is not a long-distance race. Wine is love and self-expression. In every winery, you can find what we call the winemaker’s signature,” Gergana Georgieva added.



AMK 2025

ORGANIC BULGARIAN WINE MAKES INROADS IN SCANDINAVIA WITH NATURAL WINEMAKING TRADITION



In 2025, Dositeevo Winery in the Harmanli region exported organic wine to Norway, where it was very well received. The winery's owner, Yonko Gyudzhenov explained that the company has been working with Norwegian partners for years. Until now, however, it only exported grapes from its own vineyards, which were processed by partners there.

"There is a high wine consumption culture in Norway, and people are well-off. We believe there is a wide-open window for our production in Scandinavian countries, and we are also holding talks with Sweden," Gyudzhenov said.

The winery started operations in 2022. „Until then we only produced grapes. We have 8 hectares of Cabernet Franc in the village area," said chief winemaker Tihomir Gyudzhenov, son of the owner. „We

decided to build on grape growing by creating a natural product from the organic grapes, wine produced through natural fermentation without artificial yeasts, enzymes, chemical stabilizers to prevent re-fermentation, or sulphites. Our goal was to continue the centuries-old tradition of the Thracians and our ancestors of natural wine-making, in which the processes occur entirely in a natural way," explained the winemaker, who specialized in New Zealand and in Sicily, Italy.

The wine series, produced as red and rose, is named Tokmakli after the area where the vineyard is located. Both the vineyard and the wine are certified organic. This means that no synthetic fertilizers, pesticides or herbicides are used in cultivation. The controlled yield of 2.5-3 t/ha, lower than the usual, also guarantees high quality of the final

product. 2025's harvest is also very good due to the absence of rainfall since May, Gyudzhenov added.

Plans for the current year include purchasing white grapes to diversify the product range, again in partnership with certified organic producers. The still young winery is also preparing to present its products at trade fairs.

The vineyard currently produces about 25 tonnes of grapes annually, yielding 10,000-15,000 bottles of wine, but there are ambitions to increase capacity. The company has so far received one targeted financial grant under the viticulture and wine-making programme of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forests to further equip its facility. A second project is being considered, under which funding will be sought for an in-house laboratory.

EASTERN THRACE

Chateau Avli

BETTING ON RARE FRENCH GRAPE AND INNOVATION TO STAND OUT

The boutique winery Chateau Avli cultivates 33 hectares of its own vineyards, split between two large plots: the older „Rupov Dol“ vineyard, which is around 20 years old, and the younger Bozalyaka, planted 6–7 years ago. Most of the vines are located in Rupov Dol.

The vineyards are planted entirely with French grape varieties – Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Pinot Noir, and the lesser-known Caladoc, which has become the winery's signature.

"Caladoc is a French variety unfamiliar to Bulgaria, and until recently, we were the only winery growing it here. We built our identity around this grape to attract wine lovers," said winemaker Plamena Arabadzhieva.

Avli currently produces several Caladoc-based wines: a light red, an aged red matured in French oak, a rosé, and even an experimental white. Some of the wines are also aged in clay vessels, which lend them a distinct nuance in flavor and aroma.

The winery has also gained attention for its naturally sparkling wine, made using the French petillant naturel (pet-nat) method. First introduced in 2022, it was initially a small experiment with around 600 bottles.

"We started with a small batch in 2022. The method is labor-

intensive because fermentation finishes in the bottle, but the market responded positively, and we've since significantly increased production," Arabadzhieva explained.

Despite climate challenges—grapes ripening earlier and extreme heat affecting quality—Chateau Avli has harvested a good crop this year.

Built with European funding, the winery has an annual production capacity of up to 100,000 liters. Its wines are primarily marketed in Bulgaria, targeting the premium price segment. A portion of the production is sold online, and small export batches are being sent to Belgium and Germany.

Approximately 60–70% of Chateau Avli's vineyards are planted with red varieties. However, Arabadzhieva noted a growing domestic preference for white wines, which presents a marketing challenge. As a result, some of

the grapes are sold to other wine producers.

Chateau Avli is also developing its wine tourism offering. The winery hosts tastings and is planning to build a hotel section.

"This year we organized between five and ten tastings," said Arabadzhieva. „Guests often want to stay overnight, so we're considering building hotel accommodations. For now, we arrange lodging in Sliven, which is 15 km away."

The winery operates with a small team: two tractor drivers, an agronomist, a mechanic, winemaker Plamena Arabadzhieva, and Italian consultant Federico Ricci.

"We are a small winery, but we believe that through innovation and unique varieties like Caladoc, we can captivate audiences. It's something new, different, and definitely worth trying," Arabadzhieva affirmed.



AIMING FOR WINE WITH ZERO CARBON FOOTPRINT

"The grape harvest is a period of intense work and challenges to the industry," Afuzov Winery Owner Mincho Afuzov told BTA. He stressed that this season is a time when nobody sleeps and everyone works more than they should, with problems arising constantly.

The winemaker pointed out that 2025 is a very confusing year, as prices first soar due to the shortage of inputs but then plummet unless the grapes are sold promptly. Muscat, for example, degrades in just two weeks, he emphasized, adding that now this variety sell at under BGN 1 per kilo because it doesn't last and most often it is simply dumped. „For us, there are no bad grapes, as long as someone has worked hard to get them," Afuzov noted.

Afuzov Winery implemented two large-scale projects in previous years, the winery owner pointed out, adding that the target is to produce wine with a zero carbon footprint. In addition, his company purchased a vineyard equally divided between red and white grape varieties. „If someone had ever told me that we would buy vineyards, I would have laughed", he recalled, noting that it can be done only under certain conditions. „I plan to set up a winegrowers' cooperative, through which all production

will be sold care of our winery. The capacity has trebled since the opening 12 years ago, which requires more inputs", Afuzov emphasized.

He stated that his winery focuses on the domestic market, as well as on neighboring countries like Romania and Greece, and noted that he has no favourite grape variety: „I like them all. It's like a designer wanting to make only pink jackets," he commented.

The winery takes pride in Cor Caroli and in quality tap wines for up-market restaurants. However, the best-sellers are the fruit wines. „The market in

Bulgaria is a tap wine market. This is not terrible, it's just the way it is," Afuzov noted, adding that his winery's product range exceeds 100.

Afuzov is skeptical about participating in competitions, stressing that the market is the real assessment. „When you serve some wines on the table for a blind tasting, there is a huge discrepancy between the opinions of consumers and experts." Therefore, his advice is for professionals to dull their ego a little and adapt to the market. „The market is much more intelligent than the individual subject," he concluded.



REPLANTING, SPARKLING WINES, AND GLOBAL REACH DRIVE MODERNIZATION

Villa Yustina will replant part of its vineyard with 30,000 new French vines next year, Director of Tourism Maria Baeva said on Friday. The replanting is necessary because the soil gradually exhausts the vines, Baeva added.

The winery plans to increase its focus on Bulgarian grape varieties, including Dimyat, Mavrud, and Rubin. Baeva mentioned plans to produce sparkling wine from Dimyat as well. Global trends show a growing preference for fresh, light wines, especially sparkling ones. Since 2020, the winery has operated a facility dedicated to producing naturally sparkling wines using the tank method.

Regarding the latest harvest, Baeva reported that the grape quality is excellent, though the yield is considerably lower. Grapes are accumulating sugar rapidly and must be picked at the optimal time. Since last year, the winery has used both manual and mechanical harvesting to achieve target yields. This year, they collected 350 tonnes of grapes, which are expected to produce approximately 400 tonnes of wine.

Most of Villa Yustina's production is sold within Bulgaria. They enter competitions not to increase market reach, but to compare the quality of their wines with those of other producers.

The winery offers daily wine tours and tastings for both small and large groups. The goal is to develop high-quality wine tourism

in line with European standards. Notably, more international visitors are familiar with Villa Yustina than Bulgarian guests. Last year, the winery welcomed tourists from 61 countries, including Lesotho, Nicaragua, the United States (with visitors from Hawaii and Alaska), Lithuania, and Estonia. On average, the winery hosts three to seven groups per day and collaborates with both major tour operators and individual visitors. A new relaxation area near the villa's hotel section is also scheduled for completion.

Villa Yustina Winery is located at the base of the Rodopska Yaka in the village of Ustina, a region known for its strong winemaking traditions. Founded in 2006, the

winery reflects the contemporary style of Bulgarian winemaking. It produces high-quality wines and features an exhibition hall for Tomika Metal, a leading manufacturer of stainless-steel tanks and technology solutions in Bulgaria. The estate spans 200 hectares in the Gorkata area, with 40 hectares dedicated to its own vineyards and a park designed for wine-related events. The winery produces wines from white grape varieties such as Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc, Semillon, Aligote, and Gewurztraminer, as well as reds including Merlot, Cabernet Franc, Pinot Noir, Mavrud, and Rubin. The wines are organized into three collections: Villa Yustina, Four Seasons, and Monogram.



FOCUS ON MINIMAL INTERVENTION AND LOCAL GRAPE VARIETIES

Winery Topolovo has acquired equipment to help control fermentation temperatures, owner Boryana Chorbazhieva said on Friday.

She said this currently meets their needs, as they seek to minimize technological intervention by focusing on vineyard management, harvest timing, and fermentation temperature control.

The family-owned winery produces about 30,000 bottles annually, focusing primarily on local grape varieties such as Mavrud, Rubin, and Dimyat. Around 1.5 hectares of vineyards are family property, established in the 1960s and 1970s. The Chorbazhiev family aims to showcase the unique character and full potential of each grape variety.

Chorbazhieva noted that the year had been difficult due to spring frosts, May rains, hailstorms in Topolovo, and subsequent drought. She explained that these conditions impacted grape varieties differently and emphasized the need for rapid adaptation, stating they will make necessary adjustments.

The family winery regularly participates in events including the Young Wine Festival Plovdiv, Wine & Gourmet, and the Kazanlak Rose Wine Festival. Their wines have received awards over the years. In the coming days, they will join the event A Glass of Wine's Distance from Plovdiv, which offers visitors tours of wineries within the Plovdiv Wine Routes Association.

Winery Topolovo offers small-

group wine tastings by prior reservation, featuring selections paired with regional dishes. Nearby attractions include the Thracian sanctuary Belintash, Asenovgrad, and Bachkovo Monastery.

Winery Topolovo, established in 2018 by the Chorbazhiev family, specializes in small-batch, high-quality wines. Red wine fermentation occurs spontaneously, with no filtration, and clarification relies on natural processes. Wines are aged either in used barrels or exclusively in stainless steel tanks to express the unique characteristics of their micro-region's terroir as authentically as possible.



NEW WINE CELLAR TO EXPAND PRODUCTION AT FAMILY WINERY

A new cellar for ageing wine will be built at Bogdanitsa Winery, owner Boyka Kozhuharova said on Friday. The project, worth BGN 430,000, includes both expanding the facility and purchasing new equipment to boost the production of white wines and rose wines, which Kozhuharova noted are currently among the most sought after on the market.

The cellar is located in the Kozhuharova family home, where she, her husband and their children all work.

According to Kozhuharova, the new harvest has been modest, delivering high quality but low yield. This year, around 20 tonnes of grapes

were collected from the winery's own vineyards, which cover an area of 2.5 hectares.

Bogdanitsa Winery participates in events like the Young Wine Festival and has received gold and silver Dionysus awards for its Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot in consecutive years. The family focuses on direct sales and maintains a regular customer base, with many clients visiting the winery for tastings.

According to the owners, Bulgarian Patriarch Maxim has previously presented Bogdanitsa Winery wine as a gift to Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I.

Bogdanitsa Winery is a small, family-owned winery located in the Trakia Plain, in the village of Bogdanitsa, within the grounds

of a family home. Founded in 2015 by Boyka Kozhuharova, the winery processes grapes from its own vineyards, which were planted after 2000 and cover 2.5 hectares with Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon, Syrah, and Mavrud. The winery produces full-bodied, aromatic red wines suitable for ageing, and also white wines and rose wine.

Hristo Kozhuharov, the founder's son and a trained viticulturist, is involved in winemaking, while her daughter Emiliya manages distribution. Most wines are released young, while selected vintages are aged in oak barrels. Production is limited, with batch sizes between 300 and 600 bottles.



MAJOR MODERNIZATION AND VINEYARD OVERHAUL PLANNED AT THIS WINE ESTATE NEAR SLIVEN

Chateau Windy Hills near Sliven is launching a full-scale modernization of its facilities and renewal of its vineyards. Over the next two years, the entire complex will be renovated, and the existing 45 hectares of vineyards will be replaced with new grape varieties tailored to current market demand.

“Our goal is to modernize the hotel, the restaurant, the tasting hall, as well as the production technology in the winery. At the same time, we are gradually replanting the vineyards, placing a stronger focus on white wines and rose,” the estate’s new owner Ventsislav Petrov said.

The estate, built more than 20 years ago, is due for a complete refresh, including the outdoor spaces and the winemaking process itself. A major part of the project is the replacement of about 45 hectares of vines surrounding the chateau. Old plantings will be entirely removed and gradually replaced with new

varieties. White grapes and rose will dominate, while reds will remain limited to about 20% of the area, keeping established varieties such as Syrah and Cabernet Sauvignon. Among the whites, Alexandria Muscat, Tamyanka, and Sauvignon Blanc will be prioritized.

“Market preferences have shifted, consumers now seek fresh white wines and rose. That is what we will focus on. We expect the first harvest from the new vineyards between 2027 and 2029,” Petrov said.

Alongside the renovation, the winery is preparing to revive the production of strong spirits previously made under popular local brands. The process requires time and regulatory approvals but is part of the long-term vision for the estate’s portfolio.

Currently, the winery’s capacity is about 500 tonnes of grapes per year, with a goal to reach 800 tonnes in the coming years, positioning it as a

mid-sized producer. Wines will target both the Bulgarian market and international customers, without focusing on mass retail chains.

The complex’s hospitality facilities include 11 rooms, a tasting hall, and terraces accommodating about 120 guests. Starting next year, wine tourism packages will be offered to Bulgarian and international visitors. „Bulgarians truly appreciate wine and understand it well. In Bulgaria, we make small quantities but with high quality,” Petrov said.

2025’s grape harvest has been severely impacted by unfavourable weather, late spring frosts destroyed up to 100% of the yield for some varieties. „Unfortunately, the harvest this year is disastrous, but we remain committed to long-term investments and producing small but high-quality wines,” Petrov stated.



LOWER YIELDS, HIGHER PRICES FOR BULGARIA'S NEW GRAPE HARVEST, SAYS WINEMAKER

The 2025 grape harvest in Bulgaria is producing lower yields but commanding higher prices, according to Snejana Mutafchiyska, chief technologist and production manager at Rox's Winery. Speaking to the Bulgarian News Agency (BTA), Mutafchiyska, also a member of the Sliven Regional Wine-Tasting Commission and an internationally recognized wine judge and a sommelier with years of experience, said the reduced grape yield is largely due to frost damage earlier in the year.

"We had extremely low temperatures in April, which were devastating for the vineyards. In such conditions, yields can drop by 40 to 50%, which will also result in significantly lower wine production," she added.

Despite the lower quantity, Mutafchiyska said that the quality of the grapes that did survive is

high, and the wine made from them is expected to meet the usual standards. „Grape prices are higher than last year, and for some varieties, especially whites, the price has nearly doubled," the oenologist added.

Rox's Winery is currently experimenting with a new white wine, made from a new grape variety, with plans to bring it to market in the near future. The exact production method is still being fine-tuned.

In October, the winery's new tasting room will reopen to visitors, offering wine tastings and curated culinary experiences. „We recently started hosting tourists and organizing tastings with guest chefs. The goal is to pair fine cuisine with our wines. We publish the menu and all event details on our website in advance. There's a lot of interest, and we're seeing growing

enthusiasm for wine tourism in Bulgaria," Mutafchiyska said.

One of the winery's standout products, the SM Syrah & Marselan blend, was recently awarded a gold medal at the prestigious Decanter World Wine Awards and is set to be featured in a specialized UK wine catalogue.

The winery is set to participate in the Avgustiada Wine and Cultural Heritage Fest where its products have also won gold medals twice.

Rox's Winery is located in the picturesque village of Vinarovo, between Stara Zagora and Chirpan, at the foot of the Sredna Gora mountain range, Central Bulgaria. It was established in 2014, and since 2019 it has been owned by two families, Snejana and Atanas Mutafchiyski and Delyana and Dako Nikolovi. Snejana and Atanas Mutafchiyski are oenologists and well-known names in the Bulgarian wine industry.

Between 50 and 60 tonnes of grapes are processed with the possibility of increasing production to 100 tonnes. The cellar has modern technological equipment, stone rooms with oak barrels for wine aging. Rox's Winery does not have its own vineyards but works with several of the best grape producers in the region and throughout Southern Bulgaria.

Three wine brands have been developed: Regb, Dandelion and SM. SM is the winery's top wine. The blend between Syrah and Marselan bears the initials of its author Snejana Mutafchiyska.



EXPERIMENTING WITH NEW WINE STYLES IN PUSH FOR INNOVATION

Oriachovitza winery is working on oenological experiments to develop a new wine style and expand its product range. Mariana Kyuchukova, oenologist and chief technologist of the winery, explained that the process of developing the final product is lengthy, but the project is underway and will be presented soon.

"We will focus on carefully selected harvests and will not rely on quantity, but on quality and innovation. The market is globally difficult, and in Bulgaria, due to the lack of wine culture, this is felt even more strongly. It is necessary to develop the region as a tourist destination, with wine tours and tastings. For this purpose, we are already building a special tasting room. We must maintain consistent quality and strive to always have something new and different, so as not to bore customers, while at the same time upgrading what they already know," said Kyuchukova.

The history of Oriachovitza winery dates back to 1936. The winery region has a protected designation of origin, which guarantees that the wines possess specific qualities and characteristics determined by geographical location and unique

natural factors, explained the chief technologist.

She added that currently the winery manages 37 hectares of its own vineyards, 32 of which are in the land of Oryahovitsa village on the southern slopes of Sredna Gora mountain, at an altitude of 170 to 260 metres. Among the main red varieties traditionally cultivated are Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon. The local Merlot gives soft wines with aromas of ripe fruit, while Cabernet Sauvignon stands out with a more intense colour, firm tannins and high potential for ageing.

The Rubin variety, a Bulgarian hybrid between Nebbiolo and Syrah, is also highlighted, characterized by deep colour and aromas of forest fruits, spices and violets, and considered a symbol of national identity. The winery also grows Mavrud, Syrah and other varieties used in a significant part of the rose wines. Among the white wines, Aligote stands out, which is a rare variety for Bulgaria, but yielding excellent results in the Oryahovitsa area.

Part of the vineyards are located in the land of Shanovo village near Kazanlak, where sandy soils provide

ideal conditions for white varieties such as Sauvignon Blanc and Riesling. „We are primarily a red wine region, but we also experiment with white varieties, because we believe that diversity is part of our strength," noted Kyuchukova.

The winery combines tradition and innovation, from classical stainless steel vessels and oak barrels to innovative Wine Globe glass vessels, developed in France and rarely seen in Bulgaria. They are used for fermentation and even long ageing of some of the more special wines. The glass structure is completely impermeable, ensuring better oxidation control and developing a clean neutral profile of the drink. It is in these vessels that the limited series Unusual is created, high-class wines intended for connoisseurs, explained the oenologist.

Other established lines of the winery include Gaetan with single-varietal and blended wines, Rubin (vintage 2023), as well as the blend Cuvee of Merlot and Cabernet Franc (vintage 2022). Of particular note is the Small Talk series, created for roses, which has already been awarded a prize for brand identity at Rose Wine Expo.

Work in the vineyards and winery has faced significant challenges and difficulties in recent years, with climate changes, water stress, frost and hail often affecting the harvest. Producers have to adapt and strive to gain the maximum each year, without room for error. „Times are not easy, but the love for wine keeps us going," emphasised oenologist Mariana Kyuchukova.



NEW WINES EVERY YEAR

2025 posed serious challenges for the vineyards, but the wines will turn out well, according to oenologist Ralitsa Doncheva of the Edoardo Miroglio winery. „The year is not over yet. There was a severe drought, and in April temperatures dropped low, causing frost damage. This made the harvest challenging. Despite that, I believe we will succeed in creating good wines,” she said.

According to her, the style and character of a wine are defined mainly by the terroir and climate. „Every wine is strictly individual, even in different vessels its qualities change. There is no category of the best wine. To get to know it, you have to taste it,” Doncheva added.

The most difficult task for an oenologist, she said, is to create wine in a weak vintage. „I am happiest when the wines are ready and we can see the result,” she noted.

The winery plans new wines every year, following the principle of not fully repeating the past. „Technologies in the industry

are constantly evolving. We also have new plantations that will provide more opportunities,” Doncheva explained.

The winery regularly participates in national and international competitions and in 2024 won numerous awards, among them a gold medal with 95 points for Soli Invicto 2019 at the Decanter World Wine Awards, as well as DiVino Top 50's recognition of Edoardo Miroglio Reserve Elenovo Mavrud Karadere 2019 as Bulgaria's best wine of the year. „The best wine is the one that is sold and enjoyed. Competitions evaluate by certain criteria, experts by others, but we work for the consumer. Awards and medals matter, expert assessments matter, but the most important are consumers and their taste, and that changes every year,” Ralitsa Doncheva stressed.

She added that the current trend is towards lighter, fresher, easy-drinking wines, but there are also admirers of more complex, „thoughtful” wines.

„Every person and every situation has its wine,” Doncheva said.

For her, winemaking is a passion, not just a job. „If it were only a job, I would not be able to work 14-hour days. This is a team game, together with my colleagues we achieve success,” she shared.

The Edoardo Miroglio winery is located near the village of Elenovo, Nova Zagora Municipality, in the Thracian Valley. It was established in 2002 by Italian entrepreneur Edoardo Miroglio. The winery has 220 hectares of its own vineyards, situated on hilly slopes, and the boutique hotel Soli Invicto, which offers wine and culinary tourism.

The main grape variety for the winery is Pinot Noir, but Mavrud, Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc, Traminer, Syrah, Cabernet Sauvignon and others are also cultivated with care. The philosophy of the winery is to combine Piedmont winemaking experience with the potential of the Thracian terroir.



LAUNCHING BULGARIA'S FIRST ORANGE WINE FROM RIBOLLA GIALLA



Alexandra Estate winery plans to release an orange wine made from Ribolla Gialla, a grape variety not previously grown in Bulgaria. Its owner Svetlana Slavova said that the winery has been producing orange wines since 2020, but the variety will be used for the first time.

"Orange wines are, broadly speaking, white wines made by the „red method". For white wines, the grapes are crushed, the juice is extracted and fermented, while in red wines the fermentation takes place with the solid parts in large inox vessels before they are removed. For orange, also known as amber wine, we apply the red-wine method to white grapes," Slavova explained.

The winery uses qvevri, which are traditional Georgian egg-shaped clay vessels, some of them buried in the ground to maintain the best fermentation temperature. „Georgia is the country with evidence of winemaking as far back as 8,000 years ago," Slavova added.

By the end of the year, Alexandra Estate will present the new Ribolla Gialla wine, as part of its orange wine series. „We are experimenting with this variety, as it has never before been used in Bulgaria. In previous

years we made orange wines from Sauvignon Gris and Vermentino. Our focus is on combining different grape varieties and fermentation vessels. An example is the Rubin, for which we are the only winery in Bulgaria to use qvevri," Slavova said.

In addition to international varieties such as Cabernet, Merlot, Sauvignon Blanc, Tamyanka and Chardonnay, the winery also works with less common grapes such as Mourvedre, which, although not widespread in Bulgaria, is used in blends. Besides clay qvevri, Alexandra Estate uses concrete eggs, a modern version of traditional clay vessels, oak barrels and stainless steel tanks. „Usually, clay and concrete preserve the varietal character best, because the material doesn't impart anything, so the wine stays clean and true to itself," she stressed.

Another distinctive approach of the winery is combining Sauvignon Blanc from Northern and Southern Bulgaria. „It's interesting to compare the two, because they have very different characteristics due to the climate. Tamyanka is also very well liked, it is light, airy and with a lower alcohol content. Among whites, we also ferment Roussanne and Marsanne together, instead of blending them

separately. Our Chardonnay is made in a concrete egg to avoid being overly loaded with oak notes. For rose, we use less familiar varieties such as Mourvedre and Grenache," Slavova said.

She described 2025's grape harvest as very poor. „I cannot recall a worse year, frost, late snow and hail all caused damage. Yields, if any, are extremely low. Those who managed to preserve grapes are now selling them at twice the previous year's price," she said.

When choosing wine, Slavova emphasized, the most important thing is pairing it correctly with food. „Even the best wine can be ruined by the wrong combination. Conversely, a modest wine served properly can bring real pleasure. And the most important thing is the people around you, then everything else fades into the background," she shared.

Alexandra Estate story began in 2012, with the first harvest from its own vineyards in 2013. An important stage was the creation of the wine house in 2019, when an authentic stone building was renovated and equipped with fermentation tanks, a bottling line, oak barrels, Georgian qvevri and concrete eggs.

Over the years, Alexandra Estate has developed several memorable wine brands with the winery's distinctive style - expressive, complex, yet elegant and juicy, following the original vision.

Since the 2023 vintage, the technologist has been Monika Kenarova, who brings her own touch to the established portfolio while also creating new wines. The winery produces white, rose and red wines across several series.

COMBINING VAST VINEYARDS AND EXPERTISE FOR OUTSTANDING RESULTS

Southeastern Bulgaria's oldest winery Villa Yambol is facing challenges in 2025's grape harvest, but the combination of its large vineyard holdings and the professionalism of its team provides confidence for once again excellent results. „It is in difficult harvests that the winemaker's mastery shows," Villa Yambol Executive Director Krassimir Avramov said.

According to him, in the current year's continuing drought, the harvest is lower in some places in terms of yields, but with high sugar levels. „As a large producer, however, we have two essential advantages. First, we cultivate nearly 1,000 hectares of our own vineyards, as well as leased ones. We grow over 10 Bulgarian and foreign varieties, not concentrated in one place. Our second advantage is the rich professional experience of our team. We apply certain practices already in the field, such as pruning, harvesting, constant control and daily monitoring of grape development and the winery itself. This ensures we make optimal use of the harvest," Avramov explained.

„This is not our first difficult year. Our

experience shows that it is precisely in challenging harvests that unique wines are born, as demonstrated by our achievements at the largest international forums, we aim to replicate in the future," he added.

The winery is not planning to release a new wine series, focusing instead on varietal diversity. „Our portfolio is well structured across the main price categories. The Villa Yambol basic series is among the most popular and best-selling brands on the market. Kabile, inspired by Thracian traditions, is a record-holder in terms of medals won at international competitions. Our premium line, Vineyards Selection, has proven to be at a unique level," Avramov said.

„Technologically, we can boast being at an international level. Two years ago, we introduced technology for sparkling wine production, and today we are using the classic method from the French Champagne region. At the vineyard level, our efforts remain focused on good care. We will invest in new technologies and in our own vineyard plots," he noted.

At present, the winery is focused on production and does not have

hotel facilities or a tasting hall for end customers. „Nevertheless, we are fully aware of how strong the personal touch with our brands can be, and we will certainly consider ways to be closer to our customers," Avramov said.

Villa Yambol is one of the oldest wineries in Bulgaria. This year marked 100 years of winemaking traditions with a major event in Yambol's city garden. Thousands attended the celebration, organized with several tonnes of wine, delicious food, and performances by popular artists. A photo exhibition tracing the winery's 100-year history and the winemaking traditions of the region was also presented.

The Yambol winery participates in the world's most prestigious wine competitions. One of them is Vinalies Internationales in France, organized by the Union of French Oenologists. This year Villa Yambol won six gold medals there, two of which were Grand Gold medals, awarded to the terroir wine Vineyards Selection Tenevo (a blend of Merlot, Cabernet Franc, and Petit Verdot, 2019 vintage) and to Kabile Reserve Syrah, 2019. „This is equivalent to an Olympic title. No Bulgarian winery has ever won that many before," Avramov pointed out.

„This year was also particularly strong for us at the Concours Mondial de Bruxelles, where we set a record with 10 medals. Again, we won two Grand Golds, both for Syrah wines, Vineyards Selection Topolitsa 2019 and Kabile Reserve Syrah 2019," Avramov added.



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NEW WINE SERIES, SHIFT TO TRADITIONAL BULGARIAN GRAPE VARIETIES



Galera is the new wine series by Villa Meden, which expands the product portfolio of the boutique, family-run winery. Due to climate change and new market trends, the winery plans to change the varietal composition of its vineyards over the next few years, develop wine tourism, and invest in production capacity, its owner and manager Georgi Chalakov told BTA.

The Galera range belongs to a higher class than the already well-

known Villa Meden wine series. It has been developed with a new label design and comes in heavier bottles. The winery produces wines from grapes grown in its own vineyards from the following varieties: Sauvignon Blanc, Chardonnay, Muscat, Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon, Syrah, as well as white and red blends and pink from Cabernet Sauvignon. The wines are aged in Bulgarian oak barrels. The winery will also soon release a rosehip wine to

the market.

The winery and its vineyards are located about 20 km southwest of Yambol, near the Svetiiliyski Hills near the village of Meden Kladenets, in Tundzha municipality. Villa Meden cultivates about 28 hectares of red grape varieties and 10 hectares of white varieties. The vineyards were planted nearly 20 years ago, and the winery itself was built a few years later.

"We strive to make quality wine

from our own production so that we can control everything in the process – from the grapes to a bottle of fine wine. Our concept is to make quality wines in small quantities. Large volumes often lead to a decline in quality. We want to stay in this niche and will work hard to remain small wine producers. We produce around 50,000 liters of wine per year,” said Chalakov.

According to him, in recent years market trends show a growing demand for white wines, while the consumption of red wines is declining. That is why the winery plans to expand the white grape varieties in its vineyards and start cultivating traditional Bulgarian grape varieties, in addition to the French ones.

“Unfortunately, the fashionable trend now is to drink more and more white wines, while red wines are falling behind in consumption. This requires us to rethink our concept. We are considering changing our varietal composition to include Bulgarian varieties such as Tamyanka, Muscat, Mavrud, and Pamid,” the winery manager added.

A DIFFICULT YEAR FOR WINEMAKERS

According to him, this year has been a difficult one for winemakers. In many regions of the country, vineyards were affected by spring frost, and the harvest is significantly lower.

“Last year, the average yield was around 6500–6800 kg per hectare, but now it’s almost cut in half,” said Chalakov.

At the same time, the costs of fuel, plant protection products, labor, and supplies have increased by about 30%.

“In some cases, the percentage may be even higher. My colleagues and I are saying this is widespread. After the April frost, some even suffered a total loss of income,” added the owner of Villa Meden.

According to him, this will inevitably affect the final price of the wine from this year’s harvest:

“We’ve already incurred the costs of growing the vineyards. But when, at harvest, you get less grapes, those same costs are distributed over the smaller quantity. This year, the situation is not good at all for our sector.”

CLIMATE CHANGE AND WINEMAKING

According to Chalakov, climate change will force winemakers and vineyard owners to make increasing investments in protecting grape crops. This, in turn, will lead to higher production costs, which will raise the price of raw materials and, consequently, the market price of wine.

“The new climate realities affect the early ripening of grapes. Summers have become very dry, and now spring and autumn are also quite dry. There’s a lack of

necessary rainfall to keep the vineyards in good condition.

This is a major problem, especially in places where there’s no irrigation, and building irrigation systems requires serious resources,” noted Chalakov.

CHALLENGES FOR SMALL AND MEDIUM-SIZED WINERIES

Unlike large wine producers, small wineries have a harder time benefiting from European programs, especially when it comes to marketing and exports. Support schemes are not structured to provide equal access for both large and small businesses, according to Georgi Chalakov, manager of Villa Meden.

„We hit certain limits, after which it becomes very difficult for us to finance projects. Not enough consideration has been given in this area. The capacity of micro-enterprises has not been sufficiently appreciated. The problem isn’t winning the project, but actually implementing it afterwards,” Chalakov noted.

He further commented: „The idea is maturing for small wineries to form cooperatives in some way. Although this initiative is still at a very early stage, some initial steps are already being taken. A cooperative would be able to secure funding much more easily, especially through programs for marketing in third countries.”

A COLLECTOR'S BATCH AGED TO MOZART'S MELODIES



Boutique winery Balar is releasing a new collector's batch of approximately 700 bottles of vitalized wine from the 2022 vintage, aged under the music of Mozart. The wine is currently undergoing tasting evaluations and is expected to hit the market in 2026, said Dimitar Varbanov, one of the winery's owners, and winemaker Diana Stoyanova in an interview with BTA.

According to them, Balar's unique, patented technology produces the only vitalized wine in the world with a proven improved molecular composition. „Some vineyards are simply played music, others play it in the vinification tanks, but we do it with special devices. The method we developed is the result of years of research," Varbanov explained.

Balar and its vineyards are located in the heart of Eastern Thrace, at the foot of the Manastirski Heights near the village of Skalitsa in the Tundzha municipality. The winery oversees 13 hectares, primarily planted with red varieties. The main red varieties are Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, and

Syrah, while the supporting varieties for blends include Petit Verdot, Carménère, Malbec, and Tempranillo. They also have 1,5 hectares of white varieties, including Muscat Ottonel and Gewürztraminer.

The boutique winery produces between 15,000 and 20,000 bottles of wine annually. The crown jewel of their range is the vitalized wine aged under classical music. Collector batches are made in limited quantities every few years, using only the highest-quality wines. Each bottle comes with a certificate and a serial number.

The wines are vitalized and musically enhanced while aging in barrels for at least two years before release. So far, two blends have been musically treated: a Beethoven blend of Merlot and Petit Verdot from the 2013 vintage, totalling around 300 bottles, and a Vivaldi blend of Petit Verdot and Merlot from the 2016 vintage, totalling nearly 1,100 bottles. „We are eagerly awaiting the batch that will be treated with Mozart's music," Stoyanova said.

The vitalization process is supported by years of engineering research and is patented by Balar. Special devices convert sound signals into electrical ones, which, when entering the wine, transform into mechanical waves that vibrate through the fluid, Varbanov explained.

„To objectively measure what happens in the wine, we used Kirlian photography, which showed an increase in the wine's energy. The constant vibrations alter the structure and emission spectrum of the molecules. When treated this way, the wines multiply their taste qualities and positive effects on the human body," he added.

Balar Winery has received numerous awards from prestigious wine competitions. Most recently, at the 2025 Balkans International Wine Competition in Greece, the winery won two gold medals for its red wines K1 Petit Verdot and Merlot 2020 and K9 Quartet 2022, as well as two silver medals for K3 Syrah and Merlot 2020 and Balarina Rosé 2024, Stoyanova noted.

SCALING UP FOR GLOBAL MARKETS



Menada Winery & Vineyards, based in the southern Bulgarian region of Stara Zagora, has seen business growth in recent years and has invested in expanding its production capacity. „Today, the winery produces millions of bottles of high-quality Bulgarian wine,” said Tsvetelina Stoyanova, a company manager, in an interview with BTA.

She noted that investing in people is also a key priority in Menada’s development plan, particularly through improvements in the working environment and occupational safety. This focus reflects the wider values of the winery’s French parent company, Marie Brizard Wine & Spirits.

The company operates primarily in the Stara Zagora region, where it cultivates over 300 hectares of vineyards. The wine and spirits production facilities are also based there.

One of Menada’s most visible community-focused initiatives is its annual charity grape harvest, held at the company’s estate in the village of Elhovo, near Stara Zagora. This Saturday marked the ninth edition of

the event. This year, the funds raised will benefit two local sports clubs and the emergency medical centre at a nearby hospital.

New wines at Menada Winery & Vineyards are continually developed in tune with both market demand and the rhythms of nature, as the winery believes that good wine takes patience and the right vintage. „We are convinced that the combination of modern technology, professionalism, and respect for nature’s natural rhythm is the key to our sustainable future,” Stoyanova said.

Menada works mainly with grapes from its own vineyards, and much of the fruit used for its wines with Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) status comes from the Thracian Lowlands.

“We work with both classic international varieties and traditional Bulgarian ones,” she added. Among the winery’s signature labels is Tcherga, possibly the most recognizable brand. It blends classic and local grape varieties, with a long tradition and a

wide range of cuvées. „It’s the label that a whole generation associates with the ‘Bulgarian taste,’” said Stoyanova.

The Menada Series highlights classic varieties such as Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Sauvignon Blanc, and Chardonnay – offering accessible wines with high quality and distinctive style. The winery’s Barrique Point is tailored for connoisseurs of fuller, more complex wines aged in oak barrels, where varieties such as Cabernet, Merlot, and Rubin reveal a deeper character.

Founded in 1901 as the Loza Cooperative, Menada Winery & Vineyards is one of the oldest wineries in Bulgaria, and today forms part of the French-owned group Marie Brizard Wine & Spirits. Currently, Menada has the capacity to process over 10,000 tonnes of grapes and produce 20 million bottles of wine per year. The company is also the only one in the Balkans licensed to import and distil Scotch whisky – the result of which is their label Glen Stone.

FOCUSING ON EXPANDING PRODUCTION, INTRODUCING INNOVATIONS, LAUNCHING NEW WINES

Midalidare Estate is focusing 2025 on investments to expand production, introduce innovations, and launch new wines, the winery told BTA. Key projects include the renewal of vineyards and the construction of a new production and storage facility in the village of Mogilovo, designed to increase annual output from the current 650,000 bottles to 800,000. In 2024, Midalidare produced around 500,000 bottles.

Among the winery's latest market releases are the sparkling Midalidare Blanc de Noirs, two mid-range reds from the Premium Selection series (Tannat & Merlot and Malbec & Syrah), and two high-end wines – Barrel Fermented Tannat and Cane Cut Syrah.

Midalidare is also adopting innovative approaches in both viticulture and winemaking. The Cane Cut method, originally from Australia with roots dating back to Ancient Greece and Rome, involves cutting the fruit-bearing canes at optimal ripeness, leaving the grapes to dry naturally on the vine. This process concentrates sugars, pigments, and phenolics, producing wines with richer aromas and pronounced spice notes.

In winemaking, the estate now employs Carbonic Maceration – a technique mainly associated with young Beaujolais wines in Europe. Whole bunches or berries are placed in a sealed vessel with carbon dioxide to create an anaerobic environment, triggering intracellular fermentation inside intact grapes. The fruit is later destemmed, crushed, and finished with yeast under standard winemaking conditions, resulting in wines with pronounced fruit character, especially from less aromatic varieties.

Midalidare's sparkling wines achieved their best-ever performance at the prestigious Champagne & Sparkling Wine World Championships, winning five gold and three silver medals. The winery emphasized that this is the only competition they enter annually, focusing exclusively on sparkling wines.

The estate cultivates varieties carefully matched to Mogilovo's terroir: whites such as Sauvignon Blanc, Chardonnay, Sémillon, Viognier, Riesling, Traminer, and Pinot Gris, as well as reds including Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Syrah, Malbec, Petit Verdot,

Pinot Noir, Meunier, Tannat, and Mourvèdre. Its newest project centers on developing Tannat, with a second vintage soon to be unveiled. The area's large temperature range, diverse soils, varying altitudes, and steady air currents shape the distinctive character of Midalidare wines. The winery's philosophy is that „wine is created in the vineyard“, which is why much of its investment is directed toward viticulture.

Beyond winemaking, Midalidare hosts cultural events, most notably the Midalidare Rock in the Wine Valley festival, first held in 2017. The family-friendly event combines music with games, football and backgammon tournaments, cycling, children's theatre, open-air cinema, book presentations, and artist meet-and-greets. The sixth edition will take place July 10-12, 2026, with Twisted Sister and Helloween already confirmed.

Midalidare introduced its first vintage in 2009, and within a decade, the winery had earned recognition as one of Bulgaria's leading producers of traditional-method sparkling wines. By blending centuries-old practices with modern innovation, it continues to craft terroir-driven wines with distinctive style and character.

Located in the village of Mogilovo near Chirpan, the estate encompasses two wineries and a semi-underground sparkling wine facility surrounded by 160 hectares of vineyards. Guests can also enjoy wine tourism experiences with tours and tastings, fine dining at the estate's restaurant, relaxation at the Midalidare Hotel & Spa, and casual meals at the Gastro Pub.



CHIEF TECHNOLOGIST BELIEVES YOUNG CONSUMERS ARE LEANING TOWARD ROSE, WHITE WINES

Svetlana Vasikovich is chief technologist at Angel's Estate Winery, part of the international Purcari Wineries Group. A native of Corten, Moldova, she is a Bessarabian Bulgarian, who has been living and working in Bulgaria for over a year and a half.

"I am from Moldova, the village of Corten. Our ancestors came from Corten in Bulgaria and founded a new settlement there. So, my destiny is tied to both places," she said.

Her love for wine started at home. „My mother was involved in winemaking. As a child, I spent a lot of time with her in the cellar. It was fascinating to me," Vasikovich added.

Initially drawn to science, Vasikovich earned a degree in chemistry and began her career at the scientific institute of viticulture and oenology in Moldova, where she worked for seven years and completed a doctoral thesis. She later joined the renowned Purcari Winery, where she was offered to work in Bulgaria.

"My husband, who is the production director at the winery, and I have been living in Bulgaria for a year and a half," she said.

In her words, climate change in the Thracian Plain brings challenges. „This year we faced frost and then hail. Every year is different. You cannot simply follow last season's playbook. But that is the beauty of this job: you are always learning."

The success of a wine lies in terroir and technology. „We have introduced new practices in the cellar: grape cooling, different types of fermenters. Every detail makes a difference," she said.

Vasikovich believes that a wine's character can be sensed as early as fermentation. „When I see the quality of the grapes, I already know the direction the wine will take," she added.

She also keeps a close eye on market preferences. „Young consumers are leaning toward rose and white wines - light, fresh, and aromatic. We need to adapt," Vasikovich added.

Wine tourism in Bulgaria is also developing. „More and more people want to visit the winery, see the production process, and enjoy tastings. We are planning to launch wine tours next year. It is a wonderful trend. The culture of wine consumption in

Bulgaria is growing," she said.

Located near the Zhrebchevo Dam, close to Nova Zagora, Angel's Estate has been part of the Purcari Wineries Group since 2023. The Group brings together wineries from Moldova, Romania, and Bulgaria. The winery has a production capacity of over 1 million bottles per year, with facilities covering 14,000 square metres, including 7,000 square metres underground. The estate spans 100 hectares of vineyards, planted in 2007-2008 in the nearby village of Chervenakovo. The varietals include approximately 70% red grapes - Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Syrah, Petit Verdot, Grenache, among others - and 30% white - Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc, Viognier, Traminer, and more.

By 2025, the winery has already earned notable recognition: Gold Medal at the Concours Mondial de Bruxelles for Stallion Selection Sauvignon Blanc 2024, Value Gold at the Decanter World Wine Awards for Angel's Estate Rose 2024, and the Golden Kiliks Award at Rose Wine Expo in Kazanlak for Stallion Rose Selection 2024.



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NEW MACHINES ENSURE MORE PRECISE GRAPE PROCESSING, HIGHER QUALITY WINES

In recent years, Konopane Winery has increased their vessel capacity and purchased new grape processing machines, which has contributed to more precise processing and higher quality of their wines, Konopane Winery manager Tihomir Marinov told BTA. He pointed out that the winery mainly processes Cabernet Sauvignon, Mavrud, Grenache, Rubin, Syrah, Sauvignon Blanc, Chardonnay, Semillon, and Rkatsiteli varieties.

"We are distinguished by our very fresh and aromatic white wines, and for reds, we have only one wine that is aged in oak barrels, and that is our Bunalya Reserve," said Marinov. According to him, over the past three years, the Mavrud from the Urtha series has emerged as the benchmark for the winery. „Many of our customers like it because of its fruity aroma and taste. Unlike most wines of this variety on the market, which are in contact with oak, we emphasize its varietal expression," commented the manager.

Every year, Konopane participates in five or six wine events. The next one the winery will attend is the Young Wine Parade in Plovdiv (South Central Bulgaria).

Commenting on the current grape harvest, Marinov said that every year is increasingly challenging for the industry. „We are currently in a campaign that is once again not easy. Climate change has a significant impact on the yield and quality of grapes. We are adapting to them," he said, adding that tastings are organized at the winery by prior arrangement.

The Mon Ami series is a blend of three varieties – 30% Mavrud, 40% Syrah, and 30% Cabernet Sauvignon. The wine has a typical terroir from the Thracian Plain, an intense and multi-layered aroma with delicate ripe tannins. It is not aged in oak barrels, as the idea is to preserve the harmony and balance of the varieties.

Bunalya Reserve red wine is

harmonious, balanced, and soft on the palate. It has a grassy aroma with spicy notes. The aroma of red grapefruit, mango, and ripe pineapple predominates.

Urtha Mavrud is characterized by a ruby red color, soft taste, sufficient freshness, and balanced tannins. The aroma is specific, with hints of blackberry and ripe blackcurrant.

The Konopane Winery is located in the village of Mogilovo. The winery was established in 2018, and initially the wines were marketed under the Mon Ami brand. The following year, two more series were launched – Bunalya and Ot Loze.

In early 2021, the Urtha series, named after the area where Mavrud and Rkatsiteli are grown, was also successfully launched on the market. The winery produces limited series of wines, ranging from 1,000 to 2,500 bottles per variety.



INVESTING IN NEW CLAY VESSELS AND VINEYARD EXPANSION

Better Half Garage Wines invests in new clay vessels from Italy, Spain and Georgia, sustainable vineyard practices and vineyard expansion, according to Stefan Dalakov, the winery's commercial and marketing director.

The winery works with over 20 grape varieties, including international types like Cabernet Franc, Syrah, Malbec, Carmenere, Sauvignon Blanc, Chardonnay, and Bulgarian varieties such as Mavrud, Misket and Colombard. Dalakov highlighted that the winery stands out for its limited series, between 300 and 2,000 bottles, and its revival of ancient techniques, including vinification and aging in amphorae, qvevri, pithoi and other clay vessels. The volcanic soils around Betera Peak in Zmeyovo impart distinctive minerality and freshness to the wines.

Limited series wines are designed to tell the stories of their terroir. Dalakov cited examples such as Dalakov 4

Miskets, a modern take on Misket made from four variations of the grape, offering floral expression and elegant freshness; Dalakov&sons Colombard, notable for its unusual grape variety in Bulgaria and bright, fresh, mineral style, shaped by clay vinification and volcanic terroir; and Dalakov Amphora Wines, fully vinified in clay vessels, evoking the ancient Thracian tradition.

Dalakov described the 2024 vintage as exceptionally balanced, with wines showing strong aging potential and a clearly expressed varietal character. Better Half Garage Wines plans to participate in both Bulgarian and international events, including DiVino. Taste and prestigious European competitions, showcasing Bulgarian wine on a global stage.

In addition to limited-series wines, the winery offers tastings and wine dinners at its boutique hotel, Villa Yana, also located in Zmeyovo. Visitors can

pair wines with local cuisine and farm products for a complete gastronomic experience.

Dalakov also stressed the village's unique wine tourism tradition, the Festival of Pelin, celebrating the local wormwood (Pelin) wine made from over 20 herbs. Each family has its own recipe, and the festival gathers locals and visitors every autumn. The tradition symbolizes the connection between wine, nature and regional culture.

The winery is a family project of one of Bulgaria's most recognizable winemakers, Nikolay Dalakov. Founded in 2007 with the first vineyards in Zmeyovo, it expanded a year later with 12 hectares in the village of Dalboki, Stara Zagora Region. The south-facing vineyards sit at 516 metres above sea level in an area with significant day-night temperature variation, ideal for producing expressive, high-quality wines.



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WESTERN THRACE & ROSE VALLEY

Rumelia Winery

SUCCESS BUILT ON MAVRUD, SYRAH, MERLOT, AND CABERNET SAUVIGNON



Rumelia Winery, located in Panagyurishte, was established in 2006 by Rumen Kostov. Near the village of Smilets, in the Pazardzhik region, 56 hectares of vineyards have been planted with Mavrud, Syrah, Merlot, and Cabernet Sauvignon. The winery has a

processing capacity of 500–600 tons of grapes per year.

This autumn, the harvest is of excellent quality, though yields of white varieties are lower due to frost damage in April. As a result, the winery plans to increase pink production to meet market

demand. For the red varieties, yields are expected to match last year's levels, said the winery's manager, Tsveta Kostova, speaking to BTA.

"We work exclusively with our own grapes and only the varieties we've planted – Chardonnay and

Muscat for whites, Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon, Syrah, and Mavrud for reds. We're not planning new varieties, but we are focusing on quality," explained Kostova.

In recent years, Rumelia has made significant investments in modern technology, including a lab device that provides 12 key indicators in just a few minutes, and new barrels for aging not only red wines, but also white and pink. The winery currently has 480 French oak barrels of the 225-liter barrique type and aims to expand capacity to 1,000 barrels.

The minimum aging time is one year, which allows them to label wines as „Reserve“, indicating a higher quality category. The winery also practices zero-waste production – stems, skins, and seeds are repurposed as animal feed.

Rumelia Winery's wines are offered in five series. The first, created back in 2006, is Merul – featuring lighter and fresher wines aged in stainless steel tanks, and Merul Reserve – varietal wines aged for at least 12 months in barrique barrels. The series is named after

the Merul area, where the famous Panagyurishte Gold Treasure was discovered – a symbol of the city and of wine-related rituals. The label features a colorful spot representing the region, the nine vessels from the treasure, and three ellipses symbolizing the Deikov brothers, its discoverers. Fittingly, the winery is located in Deikov Brothers Street.

The third series, Erelia, is a blend of all four grape varieties grown by the winery and ranks among Bulgaria's top wines. Its label shows a symbol of four interwoven rings – representing the unity of the varieties. The name comes from the old name of the village of Smilets, where the vineyards are located, once known as Erelia.

At the top of the range are the Rumelia and Rumelia Reserve series, named after the winery itself. The name 'Rumelia' was chosen for three reasons. First, Panagyurishte is located in the historic region of Eastern Rumelia. Second, the name is well-received internationally, and third, it is the same as the name of

the founder Rumen Kostov.

Manager Tsveta Kostova added that Rumelia wines have already won international recognition, including a Grand Gold Medal for Merul Reserve Merlot 2018 at the Concours Mondial de Bruxelles in China and Mexico, which opened up new markets in Mexico and South Korea. In 2017, the Rumelia Mavrud Reserve won the Grand Trophy for the Best Wine in the Balkans.

Rumelia Winery actively develops wine tourism, with its own tasting room. This month, it will welcome two Czech groups, and in November, a visit from Brazil is expected. On weekends, the winery also hosts individual Bulgarian visitors and groups organized with local hotels. It often hosts business forums and team-building events. For larger groups, the team organizes presentations outside the tasting room as well.

In November, Rumelia will participate in DiVino.Taste, the largest wine exhibition in Bulgaria.



BG WINE

THE CHALLENGE AND SUCCESS OF REVIVING THE RARE GAMZA GRAPE NEAR KAZANLAK

The Cherganovo Winery near Kazanlak offers wine from the old Bulgarian variety Gamza, which is uncharacteristic for the region, Founder Daniel Velikov told BTA. He noted that the variety is currently grown in Vidin Region and the areas of Pavlikeni and Suhindol, but has gradually fallen out of mass production, as it is difficult to grow and requires a lot of knowledge.

"The Gamza variety has a characteristic taste, but only professional winegrowers can grow it," he emphasized, adding that the grapes of this variety have a very thin skin that

easily cracks in rainy autumn. He pointed out that the area near Kazanlak is suitable for its cultivation, and the variety gives very good results.

Cherganovo Winery, founded in 2016, is a small family company, which offers Syrah, Rubin, Chardonnay and Sauvignon Blanc, Velikov said. The winery has the necessary equipment for a small wine producer, as well as a tasting room for small groups of tourists. „We also have an approved project to build a larger base with tasting and underground cellars, but for now these are just plans and it

is not known when they will be implemented," he added.

On the market, the winery is known for the brands Tcheraganovo and Trake. „Trake is the mother of the first Thracian ruler Dolong, who united the different tribes and named them after his mother - Thracians," Velikov recalled.

The harvest in 2025 is good, he commented, noting that the vineyards are always exceptionally well maintained and that the production is environmentally friendly, with few and completely harmless pesticides being used.



INTRODUCING ELEGANT LOW-ALCOHOL MAVRUD AMID FOCUS ON TRADITIONAL VARIETIES

Georgiev/Milkov Wine Atelier will release a new line of elegant Mavrud wines with lower alcohol content, co-owner Petar Georgiev said on Thursday.

This year, the winery will launch a new label, expanding its Mavrud portfolio to three series: sparkling Mavrud, classic red Mavrud, and a new, lighter style.

According to Georgiev, the new product will feature a lighter color and lower alcohol content, achieved through a specialized processing method. Grapes are harvested earlier to preserve lower alcohol levels and are vinified using techniques similar to those for dark rose wine or light red wines.

Currently, the company does not intend to acquire new equipment; rather, investment will be directed toward refining winemaking practices. The goal is to limit technological intervention in both the winery and the vineyards.

A portion of the grape harvest has already been collected, according to the co-owner. He noted that while some vineyards remain unaffected, others have suffered from frost, hot summer temperatures, and insufficient temperature fluctuations between day and night.

With the grapes harvested, Georgiev/Milkov Wine Atelier plans to produce approximately 40,000 bottles. The team specializes in Bulgarian grape varieties such as Rubin, Mavrud, and Red Misket,

along with rose wines.

The winery consistently participates in international and national competitions and exhibitions, earning awards this year in Czechia and Austria. Upcoming events include a forum in New York on September 25, an exhibition in Romania later this year, and the local Defile of Young Wine Festival. The winery is also engaged in the International Mavrud Days and regularly organizes tastings for wine enthusiasts.

Petar Georgiev and Georgi Milkov, colleagues and friends from the University of Food Technologies in Plovdiv, started the venture in 2014 to experiment with Bulgarian grape varieties, without an initial business plan. After gaining experience in

Austria, Malta, the United States, New Zealand, China, and Bulgaria, they produced their first 600 bottles of Mavrud and Rubin in 2014.

The winery does not own vineyards, sourcing grapes from heritage Bulgarian varieties: 45-year-old Mavrud from Novi Izvor, 40-year-old Rubin from Brestovitsa, and, since 2019, 50-year-old Red Misket from Prolom. Annual production ranges from 35,000 to 43,000 bottles. The winery produces six wines exclusively from local grapes: Mavrud Novi Izvor Vineyard, Pet Nat Funky Mavrud, Rubin Brestovitsa Vineyard, Pink Side of Rubin, Why Not? Red Misket, and Skin Contact Nonvintage Red Misket Pet Nat.



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TRADITIONAL WINEMAKER EYES INNOVATION WITH ALCOHOL-FREE OPTIONS AND SCHORLE

Domaine Trifonov Winery is considering launching alcohol-free wine and the German drink Schorle, owner Slavi Trifonov said on Thursday. Trifonov noted these innovations come as global wine consumption continues to decline.

According to Trifonov, the wine sector in Bulgaria needs a strong marketing programme, robust representation, and significant support. He added that one important aspect that deserves greater attention is the use of traditional winemaking methods.

"I support the traditional methods of wine production and believe they should be encouraged. I do not favor Australian technologies or digitalization. I remain committed to the classic approach and believe it should be promoted. All our processes are traditional, without digitalization or modernization," Trifonov said.

Domaine Trifonov Winery was

established in 2008 in the village of Pesnopoy, Kaloyanovo Municipality in Southern Bulgaria. It is located at the foot of Chukurli Bair Peak next to a pine forest, part of which extends into the winery's grounds. The winery specialises in small batches of high-quality wines and was certified for organic production in 2017.

The yield of red grapes from Trifonov's own vineyard was not strong this year, the owner noted. „The quality is very good, but the harvest is about 30% of the normal volume and this is the case across almost the entire country," Trifonov said. He explained that one cause originated at the early stage of vine pollination, and the other was due to weather conditions. With this year's grape quantities, Trifonov expects to produce about two tonnes of Rubin, while Cabernet and Merlot will be blended into approximately five tonnes.

The winery manages 30 hectares of its own organic vineyards, which are located in Staro Selo, Sliven Region. White wines are produced from the varieties Gewürztraminer and Red Karlovo Misket. The winery is a pioneer in Bulgaria for making organic wines from chokeberry, raspberry, and cherry.

Domaine Trifonov Winery has a tasting room with 40 seats. Group tastings are organised in partnership with travel agencies from Plovdiv and Sofia and are led by the winery manager, Slavi Trifonov, who guides guests through the winemaking process. Trifonov also plans to participate in wine tours in the future.

The winery has taken part in both international and national wine competitions and won numerous awards, but most often participates in the Flora Burgas exhibition.



ADAPTING TO CLIMATE CHANGE WITH LIGHTER RUBIN WINES

Every year brings a new idea, depending on what nature provides. In 2025, Bendida Winery will produce a Rubin red wine that will be lighter, with lower density and intensity, in line with the current trend in red wine consumption.

The winery's technologist Elizabeth Porteva said that Bendida will continue producing natural wines, where external interference and processing are kept to a minimum. „They are handmade, and everything follows the rhythm of nature, not what we, as technologists, want and when we want it,” Porteva said. The essence of natural wine, she explained, is that it comes entirely and only from grapes, without added stabilisers, aromas or other manipulations.

According to her, grape yields

in 2025 are low due to recent climate changes. „It takes a lot of adaptation, a lot of energy, and a deep knowledge of nature itself, in addition to the science of winemaking, to cope with the challenges,” Porteva noted.

Bendida winery will work with about 40 tonnes of grapes, planning to produce approximately 25 tonnes of wine. „We adapt to the harvest quality. When it is not suitable, we aim to make less wine and not from every series,” she explained.

The winery has a sheltered facility for receiving and processing grapes and fermenting red wines. After fermentation, the wines are moved to the cellar. Then wine is stored in stainless steel vessels and oak barrels. A few major investments were made under a project three years ago.

The winery rarely takes part in wine exhibitions and competitions, but regularly organizes tastings.

Bendida is located in the fertile Thracian Valley, in the village of Brestovitsa. The history of the winery began in 1936 with the construction of a stone cellar by Metodi Portev, which has been preserved to this day. Today, the third and fourth generations of the family create wines from Bulgarian varieties in limited and collectible series. Their philosophy is inspired by respect for nature, with the aim of keeping the wine as natural as possible.

The winery has a capacity of 25 tonnes (33,000 bottles). Its emblematic wine is a rose made of 100% Rubin. Of particular interest are the pure Rubin, the Rubin-Mavrud blend, and the white Vratsa Misket.



FAMILY-OWNED WINERY LAUNCHES LIMITED SERIES WINES AND EXPANDS FACILITIES

A limited series blend of Sauvignon Blanc, Chardonnay and Misket will be among the new products that family-owned Berenice Winery will present in 2025. „We are also preparing something exclusive, a limited series to be revealed at a later stage, as for now we want to keep it secret. We can hint, however, that for this jewel we will use selected rows from our small Mavrud vineyard. We will not stray from our style and recognizable signature, which define our wines as clean, fruity, and with minimal technological intervention,“ the owners said.

“For the family and Berenice Winery, 2025 is a particularly special year as it marks their ‘first five.’ This inspired the idea to create I primi cinque, which is 100% Mavrud, vintage 2024, aged in old French barriques, with a series of up to 400 bottles, telling

their story and offering a completely new reading while also expressing the terroir of the microregion in Parvenets village,“ the owners explained.

The family will also invest in storage vessels and fermenters. A shop is in the final stage of construction right next to the production facility and is expected to be completed within two months. Above it, several guest rooms will be built for overnight stays. A larger project is also planned, which will include an underground cellar and a tasting area.

The winery has about 1.5 hectares of its own Merlot vineyards, and rents land for Mavrud. „For us, 2025 has been very fruitful, we managed to harvest good and healthy grapes from our two vineyards near Parvenets. We strongly believe we will create beautiful, fruity and elegant wines from this harvest, which has

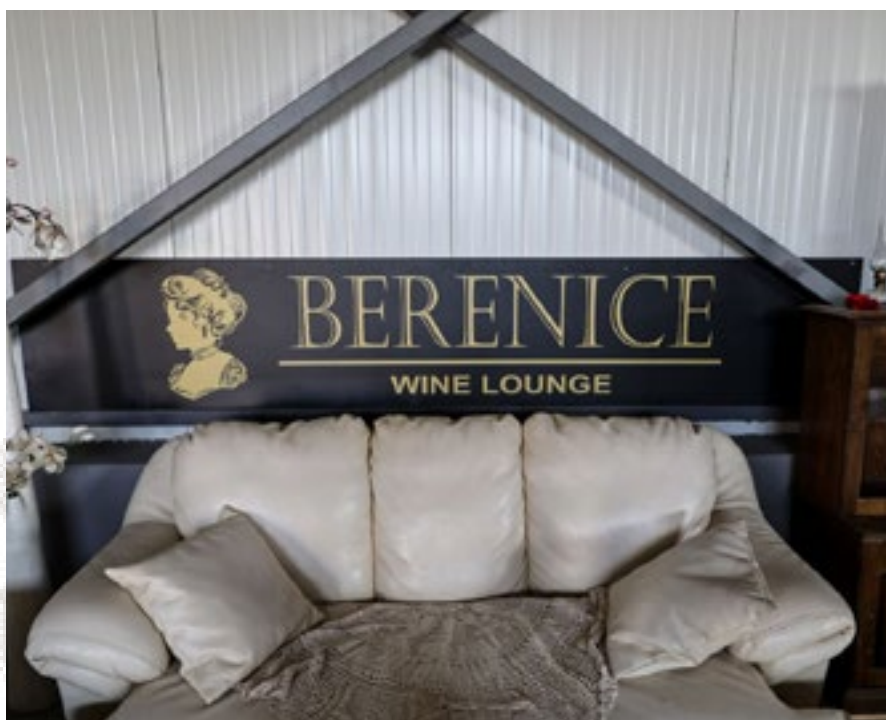
been the mission of our winery since its establishment,“ the owners noted.

In 2025, about 10 tonnes of Merlot grapes were harvested, five of which were sold, and about four tonnes of Mavrud are expected. The winery plans to produce around 2.5 tonnes of Merlot wine and two tonnes of Mavrud, co-owner Ivan Nedelchev said.

“As a relatively young winery, we participate in various competitions and events to promote wine culture and introduce the public to local Bulgarian varieties. We received a Gold Medal from Vinaria 2023 for Berenice Merlot 2022 and a Silver Dionysus from the Young Wine Parade for Berenice Merlot 2024,“ co-owner Veselina Nedelcheva said.

“This summer we hosted two events at our winery dedicated to Bulgarian wine, vineyards and the regional specifics of Western Thrace. The first was an exclusive preview in the Heart of Berenice, and the second, a celebration of our first five years, harvest, and a special masterclass Paintings of Thrace, which featured wines from the Plovdiv Wine Routes association,“ the owners said.

The Nedelchev family inherited the business from another family-owned company where they gained 25 years of experience in the wine industry. In 2021, when the first Berenice wine was produced, experienced technologist Zdravko Trendafilov joined the team. The family personally hosts tastings at their elegant wine salon in Plovdiv city center, offering three tasting packages.



INVESTING IN TRELLISING, TECH, AND LOCAL GRAPES TO EXPAND MARKET REACH

Replacing trellising in the vineyard and purchasing new equipment are among the activities on which the Vitus Marinovi winery is focusing, technologist Venelina Latinova told BTA on Friday.

The winery, established in 2018 near the village of Dolnoslav, has invested in advanced technology since its first harvest in 2019.

According to Latinova, the winery is currently exploring concepts for a new blend, but its primary focus remains on reinforcing its existing products in the market.

She reported that the quality of the new grape harvest is very good, but the yield has declined. She attributed this reduction to changing climate conditions. The winery has currently harvested around 15 tonnes of grapes

and anticipates collecting an additional 20 to 25 tonnes.

The winery is designed to process 100 tonnes of grapes, but so far has not reached full capacity. „We usually make about 30 tonnes of wine, which equates to between 40,000 and 45,000 bottles. We produce different types of wines, working with local varieties such as Mavrud, Rubin and Misket from Brezovo. They are included as single-varietal wines in the batches, though some are blends. We make white, rosé and red wine. The vineyards cover more than 35 hectares, located in the Brezovo area. The red varieties are Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Rubin, and we buy in Mavrud. The white varieties are Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc and Brezovski misket. Overall, we focus on the

local varieties,” Latinova said.

The winery primarily competes in national wine competitions, but has also achieved recognition at international events. Notable participations include the Balkan Wine Exhibition in Sofia, the Young Wine Festival and Wine and Gourmet Festival in Plovdiv, the Mavrud Days, and Augustiada in Stara Zagora. The winery has also exhibited at a local grape variety event in Tryavna. In early October, it will participate in the „A Glass of Wine’s Distance from Plovdiv” event, which invites visitors to tour all wineries belonging to the Plovdiv Wine Routes association.

Tastings are offered at the winery by arrangement. „We are also trying to develop the tourism business. There are many attractions to see here,” Latinova added.

Founded in the summer of 2018, Vitus Marinovi is a family-owned winery situated at the base of the Thracian cult sanctuary Belintash in the foothills of the Rhodope Mountains. Located in the village of Dolnoslav near Asenovgrad, in the region renowned for Mavrud and Rubin grape varieties, the winery features state-of-the-art winemaking equipment. All grapes are sourced from its own vineyards in the Brezovo area and the nearby village of Tyurkman, allowing full quality control throughout production.



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BOUTIQUE WINES AND ARTIST LABELS

Labels featuring artworks by painters distinguish the production of Elvino Ganeff Winery in Pazardzhik, founded in 2016 by the family of Kostadin Ganev. Initially, the entire family worked together, and currently the winery is managed by him and his daughter Ani Ganeva, who is also the chief oenologist.

“We focus on the production of pure varietal wines. At present, consumers emphasize above all quality and products with a personal touch. We produce small boutique series, about 5,000 bottles a year,” Ganeva said.

She explained that the red grape varieties they grow are

Malbec, Mavrud, Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, and Pamid, while the white varieties include Tamyanka, Rkatsiteli, and Muscat Ottonel. Among the emblematic wines offered by Elvino Ganeff is Malbec, a variety often debated as either French or Argentinian. „The Bulgarian Malbec, however, succeeds in combining the best of both worlds while carrying its own distinctive character,” Ganeva added.

The idea of using labels with paintings came from Ganeva's parents, who are art enthusiasts. The Mavrud and Cabernet bottles feature paintings by Vasil Petrov, while the rose and

Pamid labels show works by Petia Papazova. Wines are also offered with customized labels featuring different artworks, upon individual client requests, she said.

The Elvino Ganeff brand name refers to both wine-making and the family's business in electrical materials and services, which today is run by Ani Ganeva's brother.

The winery now also operates its own laboratory to monitor key indicators during fermentation, storage, and ageing of the wines. The winery insists on offering wines with lower sulphite content, Ganeva added.



PLANS FOR BGN 3 MLN INVESTMENT IN NEW EVENTS AND TASTING HALL

Dragomir Winery Estate, founded in 2006 in Brestnik, Plovdiv Region, quickly rose to prominence as one of Bulgaria's most attractive boutique wine producers with a flair for experimentation. Its wines are made from grapes grown in carefully selected vineyards that are monitored year-round by their agronomists and oenologists.

The company has signed a contract with State Fund Agriculture for the construction of a new events and wine tasting hall, owner Natalia Gadjeva told BTA. According to her, the project has a contractual

implementation period of 24 months. „The investment will likely amount to around BGN 3 million”, Gadjeva said.

“I hope we can complete it within a few months and have the hall operational next year. It will allow us to host slightly larger groups of wine enthusiasts, as our current space has quite limited capacity. In addition, we'll be able to combine various activities here at the winery – exhibitions, concerts – with the aim of promoting direct sales after these events and boosting overall sales growth,” Gadjeva said.

She added that this year,

Dragomir will release two new wines from its premium Signature Dragomir line, both aged in barrels for five years. The varietals are Cabernet Sauvignon (vintage 2018) and Rubin (vintage 2017).

Dragomir Winery Estate has been included in the Top 100 Wineries and Vineyards in the World. „We take part in all the Bulgarian wine expos and international competitions, and our wines always return with medals. Last year, our wine was named Best Bulgarian Wine at DiVino,” said Gadjeva.

Dragomir Winery Estate offers daily tastings and wine tours.



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WHITE WINE PORTFOLIO GROWS WITH NEW SAUVIGNON BLANC PLANTINGS

Zagreus Winery will broaden its portfolio of white wines by planting 8,5 hectares of Sauvignon Blanc in its own vineyards, Chief Technologist Tatyana Stefanova told BTA. The new white vines will replace existing plots of Cabernet Sauvignon. Currently, the estate already grows Dimyat and Rkatsiteli, which are in production, although since its founding Zagreus has primarily focused on red wines.

The winery owns a total of 130 hectares of vineyards, planted mainly with red varieties such as Mavrud, Syrah, Cabernet Sauvignon, and Merlot. Since

2010, the vineyards have been certified as organic. „We do not use synthetic pesticides or herbicides, only copper sulphate and green vitriol,” Stefanova explained.

She added that the winery has been strongly committed to a philosophy of minimal intervention winemaking. „We rely on spontaneous fermentation, add only minimal amounts of sulphites, and use light filtration. Our goal is to avoid manipulations that would strip the wine of the natural character of the grapes,” Stefanova said.

Zagreus also experiments

with small-batch ‘Hand Made’ series wines. „Over the past year we have invested in smaller fermentation vessels to allow for a greater number of experimental lots. We also ferment in traditional wooden vats, where everything is done by hand,” she noted.

Among the winery’s newer products is Pet-Nat, a naturally sparkling wine made by completing fermentation in the bottle.

Based near Parvomay and established in 1998 by Yordan Kostadinov, Zagreus takes its name from the ancient Greek figure Zagreus, known as „the great hunter”, believed to be a precursor to Dionysus, god of wine and festivity.

The hallmark of Zagreus is its work with Mavrud, from which it produces three varietal wines: a rosé, the Bely (White) Mavrud blanc de noir, and the estate’s flagship Vinitsa, crafted using a technique reminiscent of Italian Amarone. Other well-known labels include Santimenti, Hand Made, Tiara, and Noble. Zagreus is also the only winery in Bulgaria that produces grapeseed oil.



BLENDING CRAFTSMANSHIP AND MODERN TECHNOLOGY

Via Vinera Karabunar Estate combines a craft approach with modern winemaking technologies, said Vladi Zhelev, one of the winery's owners, in an interview with BTA.

The winery began its journey in 2007 in the Sharovitsa area near the village of Karabunar, close to Pazardzhik – a region where vineyards and wine have been part of local life since time immemorial. In 2017, the winery introduced its new name, Via Vinera, under which Karabunar's quality wines began to be marketed in Bulgaria and internationally. The rebranding reflected the owners' desire to continue the region's traditions with a modern touch and to establish their own identity. In the future, the winery will be represented by its eponymous Via Vinera series, along with its existing lines: Bulgarian Heritage, Contour, and Castellum.

Originally a distillery, the facility was expanded after being acquired in 2011. In 2016, a second expansion increased the winery's capacity to 1,000 tonnes of grapes. The winery

maintains two vineyards – one in the Thracian Plain (Karabunar) and one in the Danubian Plain (Kilifarevo). The Kilifarevo vineyard, near Veliko Tarnovo, spans 22 hectares and is planted mainly with white grape varieties, including Sauvignon Blanc, Chardonnay, among others. The Karabunar vineyards, which host the production facility, cultivate additional varieties, including local grapes Red Misket, Rubin, Mavrud, and international varieties Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, and Merlot.

Zhelev noted that over the past four years, harvests have been declining due to climate changes. In 2025, frost and heavy rainfall have reduced the harvest to 80% compared to 2024, which itself had an unusually low yield.

Approximately 70% of the winery's sales are for the domestic market, with the remainder exported. According to Zhelev, Bulgarians are increasingly paying attention to local wines, although imported wines continue to attract interest.

Unfortunately, he added, the market does not sufficiently promote Bulgarian wine, as imports continue and many restaurants primarily serve foreign wines instead of local ones.

The eponymous Via Vinera series focuses on international grape varieties aged in oak. These are artisanal wines that are approachable, appealing in both style and price. Despite their relatively short time on the market, Via Vinera wines have been recognized at prestigious international competitions.

Thanks to the combination of skilled craftsmanship and modern technologies, the Misket and Dimyat wines in the Bulgarian Heritage series have consistently received recognition for their quality at leading international contests. The 2014 vintage earned special recommendations at the Asian edition of the Decanter Asia Wine Awards in 2015. The 2015 Misket vintage won a bronze medal at the same competition in 2016. The 2016 vintage captured a gold medal at Bulgaria's leading international competition, Vinaria 2017, and received the Best White Wine from a Local Bulgarian Variety award from the Union of Oenologists.

Continuing its commitment to promoting „the Bulgarian signature“, Via Vinera expanded the Bulgarian Heritage range with red wines from traditional local varieties Mavrud and Rubin, featuring the brand's distinctive character. At the Concours Mondial de Bruxelles in May 2017, Bulgarian Heritage Mavrud 2015 earned a gold medal.



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HIGH-QUALITY 2025 HARVEST DESPITE CLIMATE CHALLENGES

The Starosel Winery, Hisarya Municipality, Southern Bulgaria, expects the 2025 grape harvest to stand out for its high quality, despite the challenges posed by the weather conditions. Valentin Bambalov, the winery's technology consultant, told BTA. He explained that the high temperatures and low rainfall throughout the year have impacted the quantity of grapes, but thanks to the established irrigation system and the expertise of the teams, the quality has been preserved.

"There won't be a large amount of wine, but we are aiming for very high quality," Bambalov said.

In recent years, the Starosel cellar has built a reputation as a producer that combines tradition with modern approaches. Its portfolio has expanded with new products. In 2021, the premium red wine Vintage 2017 was launched, Bambalov said, adding that two years later the same label gave its name to a limited-edition

rakia aged five years in oak barrels. In 2023, the winery introduced its first white wine, Wine Treasure. For the 2025 harvest, no new products are planned; instead, the focus will be on maintaining the high quality of the existing wines.

"The winemaking business is like a living organism. Every year brings something new, and everything new is an investment," Bambalov said.

He added that the vineyards are located on four carefully selected terroirs, and efforts are made every year to optimally maintain the structures and ensure the health of the plants. The wave of artificial intelligence, he said, is already impacting winemaking, though currently mainly in marketing and sales, while production and storage still require a human touch.

Starosel wines have received numerous awards at international competitions, including gold medals from Brussels and Geneva.

Participation in new competitions will be determined after the grape harvest concludes.

The Starosel Complex is located in the heart of the Valley of the Thracian Kings and combines winemaking with spa and cultural tourism. Guests can take daily walks along the Wine Route and taste the winery's products in the Temple of Wine tasting hall. On festive days such as Trifon Zarezan (the day of winemakers, February 14), the Dionysian Festival, and Enyovden (the day of healing herbs, Midsummer's day), tastings are accompanied by themed programmes.

On October 7, Starosel will host a wine tasting event under the auspices of the UN World Tourism Organization, which will bring together around 50 professionals from around the world, Bambalov added.



PRODUCER PLANS WINE TOURS AS PREMIUM BARREL-AGED SERIES EXPANDS

Kozya Gramada family-owned winery, located in the village of Matenitsa in the region of Sredna Gora, was founded in 2010 by two brothers who have spent the past two years actively managing production with dedication to the vineyards and respect for tradition, winery manager Todor Neychev told BTA.

The winery has 12 ha of its own vineyards, growing Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Muscat, Tamyanka and purchased varieties such as Syrah, Mavrud, Chardonnay, and Sauvignon Blanc allow for a diverse portfolio of white, rose, and classic red wines. Recent experiments include blends of Sauvignon Blanc and Chardonnay, as well as red combinations of Cabernet, Merlot, and Syrah.

"This year has been challenging for the vineyards due to drought, but the harvest is healthy, and we expect very good wines," Neychev said. The grapes are of high quality, and traditional aging in oak barrels adds depth and character. The winery uses mainly French 225-liter barriques, as well as Bulgarian barrels from Vracheh. Currently, there are 25 barrels in use, with each red wine aging for a minimum of one year.

Among the most special offerings is the limited Mason series, aged for three years in barrels and produced in limited quantities of 300–600 bottles per year. Another premium wine is the Chardonnay Barrel Ferment, fermented directly in barrels.

The winery focuses on quality

rather than mass production. Its main market is Bulgaria, targeting wine connoisseurs, with small exports to the UK, Neychev noted.

Kozya Gramada is already recognized among enthusiasts and festival audiences, participating in events such as the Hisarya Jazz Festival and, later this November, the Young Wine Festival in Plovdiv.

The winery's name comes from the Kozya Gramada peak, a former Thracian residence. Here, the family cultivates its vineyards, and every drop of wine tells the story of Sredna Gora's heritage.

The winery also has a tasting room in Plovdiv and an online store with regular customers. Starting next year, Neychev plans to launch wine tours, offering enthusiasts the opportunity to taste wines where they are made.



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EXPANDING WINE PRODUCTION IN A REGION NOT TRADITIONALLY KNOWN FOR VITICULTURE

Vino's Winery in Smolyan is producing its second vintage and expanding production after the first was sold out due to high consumer interest. The winery focuses on natural wines, which are in demand primarily in the Smolyan region, said owner Stoyan Chavdarov in an interview with BTA.

This autumn, the winery is producing Syrah, Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, and Mavrud. The grapes are sourced from vineyards in the Plovdiv and Ivaylovgrad regions, while fermentation and the entire production process take place in Smolyan. According to the producer, this year's harvest has high sugar content, which improves the quality of the wines.

Last year, the winery produced about 3 tonnes of wine, and this year's plan is to produce 5.5 tonnes. For now, the focus remains on red wines. Clients include both restaurants and individual consumers in the region.

According to the winemakers, the climate in the Rhodope Mountains positively influences wine aging, with the altitude and local conditions enhancing the wine's quality.

The winery's products have also been recognized abroad. At a wine exhibition in the Greek city of Drama, Vino's Syrah from Smolyan ranked fifth, while the ouzo produced by the winery took second place.

Chavdarov refutes the skepticism of many who believe winemaking in Smolyan is not feasible. „With climate

change, it's not unlikely that in a few years, good grapes could be grown right here in Smolyan," he said.

Vino's Winery was established through a Bulgarian-Greek project under the INTERREG Cross-Border Cooperation Program. It was built as a complex with tasting halls, and its architectural design and interior follow the style of a modern château. Situated on one of Smolyan's hills, the winery offers a picturesque panoramic view of almost the entire city. The project also provided modern equipment for the production process. Plans include importing Greek white wines as well.



MASTERS OF WILD FERMENTATION



One defining feature of the wines from Bratanov Winery is that, for nine years now, they have been produced using the so-called „wild fermentation,” explained Tanya Avramova, wife of one of the owners, who is responsible for the winery’s branding and marketing.

“We are the first, and probably still the only ones in the country, who since the 2016 vintage

ferment our wines solely with the natural yeasts from the grapes. This is our choice - to let the terroir express the distinctive features of the wine from the region,” says Avramova.

The winery is a family endeavor, started by a father and his sons, who revived a family winemaking tradition after more than five decades of interruption. The inspiration came from Stoycho

Bratanov, who used to cultivate a vineyard in the village of Shishmanovo and ran the local tavern, his daughter-in-law shares. The new vineyard plantations were created on his land.

In 2015, enologist Maria Stoeva joined the team. She graduated from the University of Dijon in France.

Today, the winery cultivates 44

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hectares of vineyards around the village of Shishmanovo, with a variety of local and international grape varieties. The new plantings were established in two stages – in 2006 and 2016. The varieties include Tamyanka, Chardonnay, Bulgare, Merlot, Syrah, Rubin, and Cabernet Franc. Later additions include Viognier, Cabernet Sauvignon, and, on an experimental basis, Gamza, which is used in a rose blend with Mavrud and Rubin.

From the very beginning, the vineyards have been farmed sustainably, without irrigation and without the use of herbicides. Since December 2024, they have been certified as organic farming.

The winery blends tradition with modern technology. To optimize their processes, they use more efficient equipment and environmentally friendly practices, such as low-fuel-consumption tractors, recyclable sprayers, and optical grape sorting machines.

Avramova says that few

wineries in the country operate independently, without support from other business ventures.

In the case of Bratanov, the initial funding came from another activity, but over time, winemaking became the family's main source of livelihood. Investments have been directed toward both vineyard equipment and the development of the winery, with support from loans and European programs.

The signature wine that makes Bratanov Winery stand out on the market is made from Tamyanka. After being neglected for many years in Bulgaria, with many of the vineyards uprooted, the winery in Harmanli was the first to decide to revive the traditions of this grape variety. Their Tamyanka from the 2013 vintage earned the winery a gold medal at the 2014 Balkan International Wine Competition. Their 2024 vintage from the Shishmanovo Vineyards series was released in a limited edition of 3,406 bottles.

Bratanov's latest release is a

red Mavrud wine from their own 2024 harvest.

„We are establishing a new style of Mavrud – fresh, fruity, different from the widespread perception of it being a heavy wine, the kind people say you have to ‘wrap in a handkerchief to carry it,’” says Tanya Avramova.

According to their observations, when Mavrud is not subjected to various winemaking techniques, it can truly reveal its natural character, she adds.

Bratanov Winery is one of the members of the local producers' association Wines of Sakar, based in Harmanli.

The winery is currently awaiting the results of the vinification of the Dimyat grape variety, harvested from a 60-year-old vineyard in the village of Dimitrovche, near Svilengrad.

According to Tanya Avramova, this will provide an opportunity to compare different approaches to working with this grape variety.



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HERITAGE AND INNOVATION MARK LIMITED-EDITION BULGARIAN WINE SERIES



Chateau Copsa will introduce a new limited-edition range for collectors and connoisseurs this year, Chateau Copsa Winery Chief Executive Officer Petya Minkova told BTA on Tuesday.

The series will introduce Tamyanka and Pinot Noir for the first time and broaden the Angelica wine line with additional grape varieties, Minkova said.

The two limited-edition grape

varieties are cultivated in newly established vineyards near Anevo village. The plantations have recently been expanded by 18 hectares to include Cabernet Franc, Pinot Noir, Merlot, and Tamyanka. The first harvest is anticipated next year. Drip irrigation was implemented throughout the vineyards this year.

"Innovation works in tandem

with respect for tradition," Minkova said. In recent years, the winery has invested in advanced equipment and vinification technologies to achieve precise fermentation control and preserve the grapes' natural aromatic qualities. Vineyard expansion and renewal are ongoing, alongside the implementation of sustainable practices such as soil

management, water resource optimization, and biodiversity conservation.

Approximately 300 tonnes of grapes have already been harvested, primarily white varieties and reds picked early for rosé production. By season's end, an additional 200 tonnes are expected to be hand-picked, placed in crates, and delivered to the winery.

Harvest 2025 in the Rose Valley started under excellent conditions. A mild spring without late frosts ensured uniform vine growth. Warm days and cool nights during the summer promoted optimal sugar accumulation and preserved freshness and aromatic complexity. Minkova reported that the region avoided hail, which was crucial for maintaining grape quality.

According to Minkova, yields are stable; not exceptional, but adequate to ensure excellent concentration and high-quality grapes. Wines from white varieties such as Karlovo Misket and Tamyanika are expected to exhibit the characteristic floral aromas and minerality of the Rose Valley. For red varieties like Cabernet Franc and Pinot Noir, climatic conditions allowed for optimal phenolic

ripeness, resulting in elegant, well-balanced wines with good ageing potential.

For Minkova and her team, competitions and wine forums provide both recognition and an opportunity to assess international and regional trends. The winery consistently participates in the DiVino rankings, the Balkan Wine Festival, and key Plovdiv events such as the Young Wine Festival. Participation offers valuable feedback and the satisfaction of seeing their wines appreciated by both professionals and wine lovers. This year, Minkova and her team will present new vintages and limited editions at these and other leading forums.

The winery organizes a range of events, including wine tours, tastings of wine and rakia, concerts, and more. The newest venue is a recently outfitted cellar in Klisura, where oenologists present the wines and guide visitors through the production process from vineyard to bottle. The new tasting hall, with a capacity of up to 60 people, is designed to provide a comfortable and authentic experience.

Located in the heart of the Rose Valley, Chateau Copsa was established in 1998 by Minko

Minkov, who inherited his passion for winemaking from his father, Ivan Minkov. Today, the third generation, Petya and Ivan Minkov, manage the family estate, combining tradition and innovation to produce wines that reflect the region's heritage. The winery's striking building is inspired by medieval castles, with the cellar integrated into the foundation. Oenologists Madelena and Angel Kuzmanov create elegant wines from Chardonnay, Muscat, Sauvignon Blanc, Merlot, and Cabernet Sauvignon. The flagship wine is a refined white made from the indigenous red Misket grape, notable for its delicate aroma, refreshing character, and subtle hint of bitterness.

The family-owned winery manages 55 hectares of vineyards, acquired between 1998 and 2008. In 2008, the Klisura cellar and the main building with tasting rooms near Karlovo were completed. The winery welcomes visitors for tours and tastings by prior reservation and offers accommodations, two restaurants, a corporate event hall, and a wellness area with wine and rose-based therapies.

EXPANDING PORTFOLIO WITH PAMID, DIMYAT, MAVRUD SERIES



The Dvor1 Winery in Perushtitsa will expand its portfolio in 2025 with wines from the Bulgarian varieties Pamid, Dimyat, and Mavrud, the owner of the winery, Kiril Nikolov, told BTA. The winery produces small quantities of wine annually, about 2,000 to 3,000 bottles per label, which corresponds to about one to two tonnes per variety. The winery does not have its own vineyards but purchases its grapes from the vineyards in the villages of Momkovo and Ustina.

Nikolov shared that there has been growing interest in Bulgarian varieties among both winemakers and consumers. His winery aims to focus on Bulgarian varieties and show

consumers the value of drinking Bulgarian wine made from Bulgarian varieties.

Nikolov shared: „After 2023, which was a very good year in my opinion and that of all the winemakers I have spoken to, there have been difficult seasons and difficult harvests. This year is also difficult, but dedicated winegrowers are coping with these challenges, and we have managed to harvest grapes that are quite good relative to our expectations. We have high hopes that they will make good wines.”

The winery's products regularly receive awards at wine exhibitions and competitions. This year, they will once again participate in

the Young Wine Parade and the DiVino rankings, as well as in next year's Vinaria. They organize tastings, during which Nikolov personally welcomes his guests and tells them about the path of wine.

A group of friends established Dvor 1 back in 2014 as a hobby. Five years later, Nikolov purchased the business and conducted its first market-oriented campaign.

The winery has a capacity of about 30 tons of wine. It has modern vinifiers and storage vessels, as well as a small barrel section. Its focus is on short series of bottles of young and fruity red wines.

BOUTIQUE WINERY DEDICATED TO PRODUCING WINES OF EXCEPTIONAL QUALITY, AROMA

The boutique winery Grivitsa, named after the nearby village in the Pleven region, is dedicated to producing wines of exceptional quality and aroma, chief technologist Nikola Nikolov told the Bulgarian News Agency.

The boutique winery is located 10 km from the city of Pleven, in the heart of an area rich in winemaking history and tradition.

The winery began processing grapes from its own harvests on an industrial scale in 2020. The first vineyards were planted in 2016. All wines are made exclusively from the estate's vineyards, which span 50 hectares with the winery situated at their centre. Ten hectares are dedicated to Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Riesling, Chardonnay, and Tamyanka. To preserve both consumer health and the integrity of the land and the wine, no pesticides

are used. The winery's annual capacity is around 100 tons, Nikola Nikolov added.

The very first harvest yielded good wines with excellent quality, thanks to several factors. Modern equipment allows for the implementation of modern technology which brings out the full aroma and character of the wines. Because the vineyards are in immediate proximity to the winery, the grapes are not damaged in transport. Their quality can be monitored throughout the growing season, and this makes it possible to harvest at the right moment, ensuring the wine is of good quality. This helps focus production on high quality wines.

In addition to stainless steel fermentation tanks, the winery uses 225-liter French and Bulgarian oak barrels called barriques. These allow for the production of special barrique

wines. The wines ferment and age in these barrels. The barrels are also used for the bottling of more developed, oak-aged wines.

All this makes it possible to craft several wine series. The main series emphasizes the fruity character of the wines, made with selected grapes and techniques that highlight varietal aromas.

Another, wax-sealed series includes selected blends of white, rose, and red wines, created from the finest examples of each type.

The third consists of still wines and barrique wines, including Riesling Barrel, Chardonnay Barrel, and Merlot Barrel.

The winery has the equipment to produce sparkling wines, including sparkling Chardonnay and sparkling rose.

From Chardonnay alone, three styles are offered: a natural white, an oak-aged barrique, and a classic sparkling wine.

Grivitsa Winery has earned more than 10 medals at international competitions in Germany, France, and the Balkan Wine Festival. It also participates in the annual wine festival in Pleven and showcases its wines at wine evenings in various locations, with most sales taking place in Bulgaria.

At present, the winery has no plans to expand its vineyard area, focusing instead on optimizing production without purchasing grapes from outside producers.

A restaurant next to the winery is nearing completion. Plans are underway to add guest houses.



STRUMA RIVER VALLEY

Medi Valley Winery

A MAKER OF MULTI-LAYERED TERROIR WINES



The mission of the Medi Valley winery complex in the village of Smochevo, Rila Municipality, is to create delicious, multi-layered and complex wines from the grapes of its own vineyards, reflecting the specifics of the region, the winery told BTA.

"Medi Valley aims to work for the development of Bulgarian grape varieties and to reveal their potential, because they have the qualities to be the face of Bulgarian winemaking before the world", the winery emphasized.

They pointed out that since 2010, the creation of impressive terroir wines has begun here, which are rich and with its own style, each of which bears the unique imprint of the region. For each wine, carefully selected grapes are used, which have

reached optimal maturity, tailored to the variety and style of the final product.

Medi Valley wines are sold under three main brands, namely the basic A Good Year series, the mid-range eXcentric Incanto and the premium Incanto line. The winery won the Cellar of the Year Award in 2016, as the geographical location, the conditions and the wines it offers make the place a desirable destination for wine tourism.

The winery complex was founded in 2007 and is located in the village of Smochevo, at the southwestern foot of the Rila Mountain, at 630 meters above sea level. Millennia ago, the lands along the middle reaches of the Struma River were inhabited by the Thracian tribe Medi, known for their developed viticulture and winemaking and their cult of wine. In honor of them, the winery was also named Medi Valley (Valley of the Medes).

The complex itself consists of a modern winery and vineyards planted with the varieties Chardonnay, Gewürz Traminer, Sauvignon Blanc, Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon. The goal in creating the vineyard plots was to implement a complete production cycle, from the grapes to the wine in the bottle,

with the process including not only the climate and soil, but also the natural conditions and infrastructure, Stoycho Stoev, Manager and Chief Oenologist told BTA.

"We built the new production structure and clarified what we want to produce, how to produce it, in which price categories and which quality territories we want to position ourselves," he said, adding that the winery manages two vineyard estates, one in the village of Smochevo and the other in the village of Boynitsa in Vidin Region.

"We work with many Bulgarian and French varieties. The most popular variety in the country for several years and the most sought after is Sauvignon Blanc", Stoev pointed out, stressing that due to climate change white wine is increasingly in demand.

"We are positioned in all quality categories, with a pyramidal structure - the most expensive wine is produced in the smallest volumes, trying to satisfy the needs of wine connoisseurs and consumers. In terms of price-quality ratio, we stand quite well on the market, which allows us to work successfully," Stoev commented.

"We set ourselves the task of developing Bulgarian varieties.

We do not have our own and we buy grapes from single vineyards, with selected grapes, from vineyards specially selected for our needs", he stated.

"The awards we have received are many, we haven't even counted them. We have accolades from international and domestic competitions," Stoev emphasized, adding that Medi Valley offers its products in several European countries, including the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany and the Czech Republic.

"The last three years have been difficult for Bulgarian wine production and for agriculture in general," Stoev stressed, noting that climate change is increasingly noticeable. „The hot and dry summer for the third consecutive year has led to lower yields in various regions of the country. It requires more labor and resources to grow better grapes," he pointed out.

"We can say that this year the harvest will be good in terms of quality, and in terms of quantity it will be comparable and slightly better than the previous one. It is not one of the strongest and best harvests (...)," Stoev said.

TRADITIONAL METHODS, STRICT CONTROL ARE KEY TO WINES WITH THEIR OWN STYLE

Tsvetelina Bilareva-Paskova, manager of the Uva Nestum complex near Gotse Delchev, told BTA that Uva Nestum strives to have minimal intervention in the winemaking process, as the experts working for it believe that wines express the distinctive qualities of the region. Bilareva-Paskova said that traditional methods and strict control at every stage of the process are the key to creating wines with their own style and character.

The expert shared with BTA that a wine's quality depends primarily on the quality of the grapes and the exact moment when the fruit is harvested. Uva Nestum harvests its grapes by hand to avoid damaging or crushing them before they are processed in the cellar. The harvest this year has been very good so far. The ripeness of the

fruit is monitored through indicators such as sugar content, acidity, and seed maturity.

The 2025 vintage will bring new offerings for consumers, including wines from Cabernet Sauvignon and Cabernet Franc, as well as a new wine from the Rubin variety. Production is boutique and limited to 20,000 bottles per year, allowing for complete control over the processes and high quality.

Uva Nestum plans to participate in this year's edition of the prestigious international Decanter competition, as well as in the DiVinoTaste exhibition. Uva Nestum wines have already been recognized on the world stage, with its Chardonnay 2021, Uva Nestum Rubin & Merlot 2021, and Uva Nestum Cabernet Sauvignon & Merlot 2021 having

won bronze medals at Decanter.

The complex organizes wine events and tours for visitors. Since 2013, the winery has been hosting themed tastings, a celebration of Trifon Zarezan (in honour of Saint Tryphon, patron of wine makers), and a presentation of the first young wine every autumn.

Uva Nestum was established in 2009 as part of a family complex near Gotse Delchev, which combines a hotel, restaurant, spa centre, and farm. The name of the winery comes from the Latin words for 'grapes from Mesta'. The vineyards spread across 2.5 hectares and include Rubin, Syrah, Cabernet Franc, Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon and Tamyanka varieties. The oenologists are Magdalena Bilareva and Dimka Medareva.



INNOVATIVE VINEYARD CONCEPT COMBINES GOURMET CUISINE WITH SCENIC OUTDOOR SPACES

The Villa Montevino boutique winery near Rila is working on the construction of a tasting room and an outdoor barbecue with a brunch menu, Manager Stoimen Gorov told BTA.

There, visitors will have the opportunity to eat in a park environment amidst nature in spring 2026, when the construction is expected to be completed. Part of the concept includes organizing picnics in the vineyards and the park, as well as enriching the environment with swans and animals typical of the region, Gorov noted, adding that the winery complex was built in less than ten years on land that was an empty field before 2015.

The winery cultivates nine grape varieties, of which four white (Chardonnay, Sauvignon, Viognier and Pinot Grigio) and five red (Cabernet, Merlot, Syrah, Petit Verdot and Malbec). The vineyards are planted with

planting material from the Veneto region in Italy, and the rootstocks are Bulgarian. „We have made major investments in reservoirs and irrigation systems, turning the reservoirs into lakes to feed the park,” Gorov said. The complex also has a restaurant called Famoso, where gourmet dishes are offered, as well as a gastro-bar with products from local producers.

He emphasized that the cellar has a capacity of 120 thousand litres and that the fermenters are mostly small, which allows individual control of each batch. In production, experiments are being carried out with different French yeasts, he said, adding that the result will be known in a few months. „We have no desire to enter the retail network, as we want to sell only where people have discovered and appreciated us. This will help us make our wines better

both in price and in quality, instead of betting on discounts for retail chains and logistics,” Gorov stressed. He pointed out that at Villa Montevino they are limited in quantities and sales, but they have customers who want to stock their own restaurants and shops with their wine.

“We currently offer only five types of wine, because 2024 we were still under construction and it was a tough year for winemaking. The five types are the standard five varieties, including Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc and Merlot”, he said, adding that they are packaged in Italian packaging and have Spanish cork stoppers. „We have also taken care of the good vision, but we do not want to resemble other wine regions in Europe, but to be ourselves and stand out as such. Each winery should have the appearance of the one who creates it,” Gorov commented.



INNOVATIVE PRODUCTION AND RENEWABLE ENERGY PROJECTS UNDERWAY AT THIS WINERY

Logodaj Winery is preparing to launch three or four new products developed over the past year, including a new Sauvignon Blanc clone, a rose made from three grape varieties, and a new Melnik Reserve, the company's Commercial Director Metodi Georgiev told BTA on Friday.

Founded in 1994, the winery is located in the village of Logodazh in Blagoevgrad Municipality (Southwestern Bulgaria). According to Georgiev, the new wines are targeted more at restaurants and hotels than at retail stores.

"This year, unfortunately like the previous one, the harvest is insufficient due to significant drought and scarce water in the region. Nevertheless, the quality is good, though about 20% lower in volume. On this basis, we expect to produce some excellent wines," Georgiev added.

The winery has introduced numerous innovations

both in the vineyards and in production. „We implemented grape harvesters and replaced much of our equipment. The automated bottling line was fully modernized. We pay great attention to energy efficiency and renewable energy sources," Georgiev explained.

A major upcoming project is the installation of photovoltaic systems on the vineyards and winery buildings. „All our roofs will be fitted with solar panels and batteries to store energy during the day and release it in the evening," he noted.

Logodaj wines have won multiple awards at local and international competitions. Earlier this year, one of its wines was included in the „Top 50 Bulgarian Wines" ranking.

An ambitious plan is also underway to build a wine cellar in the vineyards, where visitors can taste wines directly from the barrels and even create their own blend, Georgiev said.

He also highlighted the

upcoming Struma Wine Fest, scheduled for October 3-5, where the focus will be on Logodaj's sparkling wines. „We are the only producer in Southwestern Bulgaria, and possibly in the country, making naturally sparkling wine from the local Broad-Lived Melnik Vine variety. This is very well received by customers. We will demonstrate, in an improvised workshop, the differences between prosecco, cava, champagne, and naturally sparkling Bulgarian wine, as well as the advantages of our own sparkling wines," he added.

Logodaj Winery operates with modern Italian equipment and has a production capacity of over 3 million liters. Its winemaker is Svetlana Treneva, and its wine consultant is Mourad Ouada, who develops the winery's concept for promoting local varieties such as Broad-Lived Melnik Vine and Early Melnik Vine, according to information on the company's website.



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**BOUTIQUE WINERY INVESTS IN SPARKLING WINE EQUIPMENT
AS IT BLENDS TRADITION AND INNOVATION**



Zlaten Rozhen winery history began in 2009 with the purchase of several small vineyards. The Melnik region is renowned for its centuries-old wine-making traditions and the owners fell in love with the taste of the local wine and the beauty of the Struma Valley. They opened a small boutique hotel in Rozhen, bought more vineyards and started building a modern winery.

The winery's sales manager Maria Stoykova said that the Zlaten Rozhen brand stands for a small family hotel in Rozhen, the winery in the village of Kapatovo, and the only retro car museum in Bulgaria.

In 2014, the first wines were bottled at their own facility in Kapatovo, and in 2018 a tasting room was opened, which welcomes wine lovers all year round.

"We have been on the market for a relatively long time. In recent years there has been a boom of new winery projects. When we opened the winery in 2018, we were only the second in the Struma Valley region to offer on-site tastings," the manager said. According to her, 2025's grape harvest is better than the previous one, both in

quality and in yield.

Zlaten Rozhen was among the first in the region to start cultivating foreign grape varieties, which have developed very well. The winery now has a rich assortment. „Our motto is to seek a balance between innovation and tradition in wine-making. We value the local varieties, such as Broadleaf Melnik Vine and its derivatives, Sandanski Misket, Melnik 55, Melnik Rubin, but we also cultivate many new, foreign varieties that thrive in our area. This gives us the opportunity to showcase the richness of the terroir here," Stoykova added, noting that the wines produced are competitive with internationally recognised ones.

The winery produces specific wines, such as rose from Broadleaf Melnik Vine and white wine from Sandanski Misket, local varieties emblematic of Zlaten Rozhen. It also offers wines and blends made entirely from foreign varieties, such as Cabernet Franc, which has won numerous awards.

According to the manager, consumers prioritize quality. For the consolidation and future development of wineries, wine tourism is key. „It is a very good

tool for introducing people to wines, which then determines the demand for a particular product. The development of wine tourism, to which we have contributed a lot and continue to contribute, actually drives the demand for Bulgarian wines, because the two go hand in hand," Stoykova said.

She added that wine producers are striving to avoid drastic price increases. In her words, in the past few years a slight rise has been essential due to the general rise in all costs. „Bulgarian wine has remained undervalued and not priced highly enough. Worldwide, boutique wines are expensive. In recent years Bulgaria has won many awards internationally. Our winery was recognized at global wine fairs, which is proof that our efforts are successful," the manager said.

Stoykova also spoke about the innovations introduced at the winery. „For the next harvest we will have a machine for sparkling wines to keep up with trends. We have solar panels across the entire surface of our buildings to be energy efficient and environmentally friendly," she added.

INNOVATIVE PRODUCTION AND RENEWABLE ENERGY PROJECTS UNDERWAY AT THIS WINERY

Rupel winery's vineyard was planted in 2000 and covers 30 hectares, of which 15 hectares are with local varieties such as Early Melnik Vine, Rubin, Sandanski Misket, and Tamyanka. The rest are planted with Merlot, Cabernet, and Barcelona.

The winery's owner Pavel Gramatikov said that the 2025 harvest is the best in four years, regardless of the drought. „We cultivate the vineyards without irrigation, yet the average yield per variety is between 500 and 800 kilograms per decare, which is very good. Of course, drought affects the yield, but in terms of quality and the

requirements of oenologists and technologists, the grapes are perfect. We are particularly fond of Early Melnik Vine, from which we produce red wines, roses, as well as dessert wine,“ he added.

As a winery in the Struma Valley, Rupel produces mainly wines from local varieties and blends of local grapes with other varieties. Customer interest is mainly in the local varieties. „Each region has its own representatives, and customers like to drink wines typical for the region. Overall, our local varieties and especially the blends in the roses are in

high demand. These are blends of local with other grape varieties, and the roses turn out excellent,“ Gramatikov said.

According to him, the winery also exports small quantities abroad, but the main sales remain on the Bulgarian market.

Gramatikov noted a trend of slight price increases for wines, as grape production is directly linked to the price of fuel and the minimum wage. The costs of wine supplies, such as glass bottles, labels, and cartons, have also risen. „All these factors will eventually lead to a slight increase in the final product,“ he added.



A WINNER AT BRUSSELS COMPETITION PLANNING MODERN VINEYARD IRRIGATION

Sintica winery won an award at the Concours Mondial de Bruxelles, and its history dates back to 1951, when a comprehensive experimental station under the Ministry of Agriculture was established. Co-owner Ivan Gizdavkov explained that the winery's aim was to introduce new grape varieties from abroad for selection and develop new varieties suited to Bulgaria's terroir and climate.

Some of the finest Bulgarian grape varieties were created in the region, including Sandanski Misket, Melnik Ruby, Melnik 82, and Melnik 1300. According to Gizdavkov, the crown jewel is Melnik 55, developed from the Broad-leaved Melnik vine,

cultivated in the region for millennia, and French varieties.

In 2003, the experimental station was acquired by the Privatisation Agency and transformed into a renovated complex through European programmes. Modern technology was used to revive the existing winery, which, over the years, in addition to developing new varieties, produced experimental wines presented at numerous exhibitions, winning multiple awards and certificates. In 2007, the winery underwent a technological renovation through European programmes, including the purchase of new equipment. The first vintage from the

renovated winery was produced in 2008. Since then, Sintica has won numerous international awards, including four Golden Rhytons and countless gold medals from various competitions, as well as recognition from the French magazine Elle, Gizdavkov said.

Currently, Sintica winery owns 20 hectares of vineyards, located in an exceptionally favourable region along the Struma River Valley, near the Rupite area, and the ancient Thracian city of Heraclea Sintica.

According to Gizdavkov, harvests over the past seven to eight years have been poor, due to early picking caused by drought and prolonged summer temperatures above 35°C. Dry years follow one another, and rainfall is irregular compared with previous decades, affecting grape quality. „Wine is made from grape juice, but the yield is low because the fruits are not juicy enough. It is extremely important to implement drip irrigation,“ he said.

He added that the lack of rainfall and prolonged heat disrupt the balance between sugars and acids, forcing grapes to ripen unnaturally. Sintica exports wine, though in limited quantities, achieving good prices in Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany, and France. The winery has plans to expand international sales and has secured funds under two European programmes. One involves modern drip irrigation and new tanks to address water shortages. New equipment, including some machines, barrels, and filters, is also planned, Gizdavkov concluded.



EVERY GRAPE COUNTS IN A WINERY BUILT ON QUALITY

Ivan Stankov, owner of Bogdaya Winery, said on Saturday that the winery prioritizes quality over quantity in vine growing and wine production.

The winery produces between 20 and 25 tonnes of wine per year. Stankov reported that the new harvest is of excellent quality, and both yield and characteristics meet expectations, with prospects for producing exceptional wines. He does not intend to experiment with unconventional styles, preferring to focus on classic white, red, and rose wines. Bogdaya Winery offers both oak-aged and unoaked wines. Only Pinot Noir is used for the rose and for Blanc de Noirs, a white wine made from red grapes. Stankov comes from a family of winemakers.

The winery operates its own

10-hectare vineyard in Smochevo, Rila Municipality. The cultivated varieties are Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc, Viognier, Pinot Noir, and Tamyanka. The vines were planted in 2016, and the first limited production of wine took place in 2020.

Stankov identifies the quality of grapes, specifically their technological ripeness and mechanical integrity, as the key factor in producing high-quality wine. For white wine production, he notes the critical need to prevent oxidation, which starts immediately after grape crushing and can diminish the wine's aromatic profile and overall quality. At Bogdaya Winery, grapes are processed in an inert environment to maximize aroma preservation. Stankov also uses bio and organic products derived from yeast lees to

promote biological stability in the wines, allowing for minimal sulphite addition.

"Because we own our vineyards, we control all aspects of vineyard management and choose the optimal time for harvest. With low yields, about 500 kg per hectare, we achieve higher grape quality, which directly improves the wine's taste and overall quality," Stankov said. He explained that, unlike larger producers, the winery cannot produce large volumes and instead focuses on quality to remain competitive. For this reason, Bogdaya Winery produces only one class of wine.

Stankov believes Bulgarian wine matches the quality of imported wines, but the State has not prioritized its promotion. As a result, Bulgaria does not share the international reputation for wine production enjoyed by Italy, France, and Spain. He points out that Bulgaria has strong traditions and institutions in viticulture and winemaking, but increased State support is necessary for Bulgarian wines to gain wider recognition.

Bogdaya Winery is currently equipped with presses, chillers, filters, pumps, and all necessary equipment for producing quality wine. However, Stankov noted that market access is still a challenge, as retail chains impose product fees and wine imports remain high. He also mentioned that there are over 400 registered wineries in Bulgaria, along with a significant grey sector.



AMK 2025

A LIVING LIBRARY OF MELNIK GRAPES

Villa Melnik Winery offers the most extensive selection of Melnik grape varieties, said Militza Zikatanova, one of the owners of the winery, located in the village of Harsovo near Melnik.

Construction of the winery began in 2011, and it officially opened in 2013. The first vintage to be vinified and bottled at the new facility was from 2013. The entire project was partially funded through the SAPARD programme.

The winery incorporated two revolutionary ideas at the time. The first is a vertical layout of the production process, which makes it energy-efficient and extremely gentle on the grapes and wine.

The second is that wine tourism was included in the architectural design from the start – visitors can follow every step of the production process, leaving nothing hidden.

The Zikatanova family, native to the region, cultivates 30 hectares of vineyards.

“We were born in this region. Villa Melnik has the largest collection of local Melnik varieties. We grow Shiroka Melnik, the ancient Zenith variety, as well as all its ‘offspring’ created during the 1950s, 60s, and 70s. We grow Melnik 55, Melnik 1300 Jubilee, Ruen, Melishki Rubin, and Melnik 82. We also grow Mavrud, and we are the only ones in the Struma Valley with a

commercial plantation of Mavrud. It truly performs exceptionally here. Among the white varieties, we cultivate Sandanski Misket and Keratsuda. Additionally, we grow classic international varieties – Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Chardonnay, Sangiovese, and among the whites – Chardonnay, Chenin Blanc, Viognier, and others,” Zikatanova explained.

The winery has been open to visitors every day for more than ten years and is one of the pioneers of wine tourism in the region. It was designed so that tourists can follow the production process logically, view each stage in chronological order, and taste the wines.

This year, Villa Melnik is organizing a new event – an autumn festival for all the wineries in the region. Scheduled activities include gourmet dinners and a mini marathon through the vineyards. In 2020, the winery received an international award equivalent to a Michelin star. It was ranked 39th among the top 50 wine destinations worldwide. Zikatanova noted that this is not an award for which wineries can apply; selected wineries are visited discreetly, and judging and voting are conducted in secret. The jury for the top 50 wine destinations consists of around 500 wine experts from across the globe. Other winners include some of the most famous wineries from California (US), France, and Italy.



FAMILY WINERY WITH NUMEROUS BULGARIAN AND INTERNATIONAL AWARDS

The Orbelia Winery has won a number of Bulgarian and international awards, owner Kostadin Chorbadiyski told BTA. The name of the winery comes from the ancient Thracian name of Mount Belasitsa, at the foot of which the cellar is located, and translates as „white,“ „beautiful“ mountain.

Over the years, the winery has won awards from the world's largest wine competition, Decanter World Wine. It has also been awarded several silver and bronze medals. Orbelia has also been honored with an award from the Concours Mondial de Bruxelles, as well as from prestigious Bulgarian competitions such as the Balkan wine exhibition Vinaria.

Chorbadiyski said that the winery, located in the village of Kolarovo near the southwestern town of Petrich, opened in 2014. The cultivation of the vineyards began a little earlier. „Located in one of the most favorable areas for wine production in Bulgaria, Orbelia is our dream come true, which turned a hobby into a professional and responsible activity with a mission - to revive and popularize Bulgarian wine and local varieties,“ he added.

Vine cultivation is a family tradition. In 2006, the first vineyards were planted. This gradually gave rise to the idea of starting wine production. Currently, the family has its own winery and about 22 hectares

of vineyards around Petrich.

Most of the vineyards are planted with typical local varieties. The white varieties include Sandanski Misket, and the red varieties include Shiroka Melniska Loza, Ranna Melniska Loza, Melnik 82, Melnik 1300, and Ruen. There are also plantations with some typical international varieties for the region, such as Chardonnay for white wines and Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, and Syrah for red wines.

Orbelia wines are mainly sold in Bulgaria, but the winery also has partners in several European Union countries. Wines from local varieties such as Sandanski Misket and Melnik 55 are preferred.

The winery is equipped with modern technological and laboratory equipment purchased from leading manufacturers in Bulgaria and Italy. The tank capacity is 100,000 litres of wine, and there are also tanks with a capacity of 500 to 5,000 litres, which allows for the selection of small batches of high-quality wines. The quality of the wines is monitored using modern laboratory equipment. The wines are aged in Bulgarian, French, and American oak barrels in a special room with constant temperature and humidity control.



A TASTE OF WINE, A PLACE TO STAY



Rose, white, and red wines are produced at Lozenitsa Estate near Melnik, owner Rosen Hristov said on Sunday. To date, the winery has concentrated on domestic sales, while export initiatives are currently under discussion.

Currently, discussions are in progress with a leading Chinese company; if these are successful, Lozenitsa Estate wine will be exported under the Chinese partner's label and brand. Otherwise, the winery would have to register

its own trademark for export, which Hristov said is not currently feasible for them. He told BTA the winery started in 2017, when he made the first wines for family and friends. Later, he invited a friend to join the project, and together they expanded their shared vision into a larger business.

Currently, they manage 32 hectares of vineyards on the southern slopes of the Struma River Valley, including 12 hectares of old vines, some planted in 1978. Their holdings

feature Bulgarian grape varieties such as Shiroka Melnishka Loza, Melnik 55, Melnik Rubin, Mavrud, Sandanski Misket, Ruen, Melnik 1300, and Tamyanka. The estate also cultivates internationally recognized varieties, using premium Italian plant material, including Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, and Syrah.

The regional varieties Shiroka Melnishka Loza and Melnik 55 are in highest demand, with approximately 6 hectares dedicated to Syrah.

Hristov noted that construction began last year on a distinctive residential complex set among the vineyards. The development will include 18 contemporary houses integrated with the natural landscape, along with a restaurant, lounge bar, reception area, shop, and wine tasting hall. Amenities will also feature a spa zone, fitness centre, children's facilities, and extensive park areas. More than 1,000 trees have been planted across 3.5 hectares. The property includes a natural lake, around which an additional 12 houses are planned.



BG WINE

FAMILY BOUTIQUE WINERY REVIVES RARE LOCAL GRAPE VARIETIES

Mihovi Estate, a family-run boutique winery located 15 km from Sandanski in the village of Ilindentsi, was profiled on Sunday. The winery, situated between the Pirin, Ograzhden and Maleshevska mountains, is operated by several generations of the Mihov family and specialises in rare local grape varieties.

The estate's story stretches across generations, with each contributing to building its vinicultural traditions in the scenic foothills of three mountain ranges. As third-generation winemaker and oenologist Peter Mihov explained, Mihovi Estate focuses on reviving forgotten and mystical grape varieties, such as the legendary Keratsuda and Melnik 82.

The family started growing grapevines in the 1990s, with Peter Mihov as their first professionally trained oenologist. The winery began operations in 2020 and uses only grapes from its own vineyards. Their approach focuses on small batches of rare, local varieties, including Keratsuda, Melnik 82, Shiroka Melnishka Stara Loza, and Melnik 55. The Melnik 82 vines are approximately 45 years old, planted in the early 1980s, while the youngest vineyard, featuring Chardonnay Sauvignon and Malbec, is four years old.

likely has the largest Keratsuda vineyard in Bulgaria, spanning over 0.7 hectares. Mihovi Estate also grows Melnik 82, which gained national recognition four years ago with a gold medal at the Balkan Wine Festival. The vineyards are not irrigated, but this does not impact yields. This year, the winery maintains regular production, with most output distributed within the Bulgarian market.

"Our motto is to reveal the local varieties, and this is our goal," Mihov added. The estate is developing a new line of natural wines, Chardonnay and Sauvignon Blanc, using organic fermentation, no added sulphites, and aging in Bulgarian oak barrels. Experimental production of a Keratsuda dessert wine is also underway. Last year, Mihovi Estate's Shirok Melnik 55 ranked among Bulgaria's top 50 wines for 2024.



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Mihovi Estate specializes in small-batch wines, with Keratsuda as its signature variety. The estate

WINERY WITH DEEP ROOTS AND GLOBAL AMBITIONS

Wine from the Sveti Vrach winery is distributed globally, owner Valentin Atanasov said on Sunday.

The winery, located in Sandanski, has operated privately since 1994 and its history traces back to a local wine cellar from the 1950s.

The winery creates and maintains its own vineyards, planted with Muscat, Syrah, Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon, Melnik 55, Rouen and Melnik Rubin grape varieties.

Its cellar, home to fermentation vessels and wine-aging barrels, is dug into the ground. Every autumn, alongside grapes from its own vineyards, experts select and purchase grapes from the Melnik-Sandanski terroir. The winery has a total vessel capacity of 850,000 litres and is equipped with state-of-the-art technology from leading Bulgarian and international firms, including 12 fermentation tanks.

Atanasov added that the winery produces both white and red wines, with local traditional varieties particularly popular. This summer, new equipment was introduced under a European programme. The output is sold both in Bulgaria and internationally, he said, with previous exports even reaching China. Among Sveti Vrach's most prestigious awards is second place for its Syrah red wine, vintage 2022.



WINERY PLANS TASTING ROOM AND SHOWCASES BOUTIQUE WINES



Bratya Georgievi Winery plans to open a tasting room for visitors, owner Todor Georgiev said on Sunday. The boutique winery in Ploski, near Ilindentsi, produces approximately 15,000 bottles of wine, primarily from its own Shiroka Melnishka Loza vineyards.

Founded in 2014 by two brothers, Bratya Georgievi Winery is a boutique producer and does not supply large retail chains.

Customers purchase wines through the online shop or receive regular deliveries as returning clients. The

vineyards near Ploski and Ilindentsi are located at the highest elevations in the region.

"Our wines are made for pleasure. For more than seven years, we have taken part in the Balkans International Wine Competition, winning gold, silver, and bronze medals, which puts our wines in a higher quality class," Georgiev said. He noted that this year's grape harvest is smaller in quantity but very good in terms of quality, as less rainfall led to smaller berries with better flavour.

Building a winery takes years, Georgiev said, with the main objective of establishing quality and brand recognition in the market. The winery participates in numerous events, including charity initiatives where it donates wine, and consistently supports non-governmental organizations. Boutique wine tourism is a key priority. While there is currently no tasting room, plans are underway to open one, allowing visitors to sample wines on site, Georgiev added.

STRUMA VALLEY WINERY OFFERS IMMERSIVE TASTINGS AMID SCENIC VINEYARDS BOUTIQUE WINES



Libera Winery cultivates around 35 hectares of local and international grape varieties. Founded in 2013, the winery takes its name from Libera, the goddess of fertility and freedom. It is located in the village of Hotovo, Sandanski municipality, situated between Sandanski and Melnik in the Struma Valley, a wine-growing region, production and trade consultant Galin Damyanov told the Bulgarian News Agency. The diversity of grapes is exceptional. The largest areas are planted with varieties endemic to the region, including Shiroka Melnishka Loza, Melnik 55, Melnik 82, Keratsuda, and Sandanski Misket. These are complemented by international varieties such as Chardonnay, Merlot, Muscat, Syrah, and

Cabernet Sauvignon.

The winery relies solely on its own vineyards, covering an area of around 35 hectares. Since 2018, it has introduced less traditional grapes for the area, such as Assyrtiko, Grenache, and Mourvedre, which are used to produce a good Provence-style rose. Cabernet Franc and Syrah are grown successfully as well. There are old vineyards of Syrah, which has established as one of the winery's best sellers.

Among Libera Winery's recent projects is a tasting room set amidst the vineyards. It has drawn considerable interest from customers and tourists alike. Visitors can sample the full range of wines while enjoying stunning views of the vineyards. „We focus on local, regional products such

as cheeses and cured meats,” Damyanov said. „This year, we experimented with a Sauvignon Blanc blended with Assyrtiko, which has been in high demand,” said Damyanov. „For our reds, Syrah, Cabernet Franc, which have been very well received. For roses we introduced a Sangiovese rose from the 2024 harvest. We have about 2 hectares of Sangiovese,” he added. According to him, the most popular wine among customers remains Melnik 55, a hallmark of the region. Muscat and Sandanski Misket are also sought-after. The winery works with partners in Belgium, England, and the United States. The majority of its production is sold on the domestic market.

LIVE WINE OFFERED BY MELNIK'S LARGEST AND OLDEST WINERY

The Kordopulov House in Melnik is home to the town's largest and oldest winery, around 270 years old, according to manager Krasimir Spasov. The winery preserves nearly 300-year-old production methods without preservatives or modern technology, maintaining the authenticity of its craft.

Visitors tend to favour traditional red varieties. Guests can sample the increasingly popular live wine, which retains the natural flavours and qualities of the grapes without stabilization, requiring special storage conditions.

Wine is produced from roughly four hectares of the estate's own vineyards, primarily the traditional Shiroka Melnishka, or Broadleafed Melnik, grape, along with Rubin, Melnik 55 and small quantities of Muscat. Wine is aged in large 20-ton barrels placed in tunnels built into the walls over 12 years, spanning around 200 metres in length.

Built in 1754, the Kordopulov House is the largest Revival-period house in Bulgaria and the Balkans, recognized as a cultural monument and listed among the country's 100 national tourist sites. The three-storey building houses the winery in its lowest level, with fermentation rooms.



BULGARIA'S FIRST WINERY CERTIFIED FOR ORGANIC PRODUCTION



Vladislav Zhelev, part of the management of Orbelus Winery, told BTA that Orbelus Winery is the first in Bulgaria to be certified for organic production, producing entirely organic wines since its establishment in 2007.

The project to establish Orbelus began in 2000, when the first 7.2 hectares of land were purchased near the village of Kapatovo, in the Struma River valley. By 2010, the company had acquired over 20 hectares divided into 20 separate plots near the villages of Kromidovo, Kapatovo, Marikostinovo, and Harsovo.

The region is hilly and characterized by a variety of

soils. The vineyards are located at an altitude of 160 to 250 metres above sea level. Orbelus grows about 70% red and about 30% white varieties. The reds include Cabernet Sauvignon, Grenache noir, Marselan, Syrah, as well as the Bulgarian Rubin, Broad-Leaved Melnik, and Early Melnik. The white vines include Muscat Sandanski, Viognier, and Chardonnay. According to Zhelev, Assyrtiko is also an interesting variety that adapts well to these latitudes.

The winery welcomes visitors seven days a week, offering tastings, tours, and an exploration of the winery's history. Orbelus's main goal is to produce high-

quality, predominantly blended wines. The winery believes that the process begins with choosing the most suitable location, grape varieties, and carefully cultivating the vines. That is why the wines bearing the Orbelus name—Orbelus Melnik, Orbelus Getika, and Orbelus Prima—are made exclusively from the winery's own organically grown vines.

All Orbelus vineyards are certified according to Bulgarian and European legislation for the production of organic grapes. Special attention is paid to the Early Melnik variety, which is present in all of the winery's red wines.

FATHER-DAUGHTER WINE PROJECT GAINS GLOBAL RECOGNITION AHEAD OF 10TH ANNIVERSARY

The wines from the Augeo Family Estate wine project have won silver and gold medals at prestigious international competitions, owner Gergana Manolova told BTA. The project was founded in 2016 by Stoyan Manolov and Gergana Manolova, a father and daughter who are continuing their family tradition. The Manolov family has been connected to winemaking for five generations.

The name „Augeo“, derived from Latin, means „to grow, expand, increase“. It symbolizes their goal to build upon the labour of their predecessors and to develop in a more professional way what was started over 60 years ago, said Gergana Manolova.

The wine project will celebrate its 10th anniversary next year. The family's vineyards are located in the village of Vranja, 12 km from Melnik, in the Struma Valley. These are old, inherited vineyards planted with 40-year-old vines of Shiroka Melnishka (Broad-leaved Melnik), Melnik 55, and Cabernet Sauvignon.

Wines under the Augeo Family Estate brand are produced in limited series, focusing on local grape varieties, and have won awards at competitions across three continents.

"We focus on Bulgarian grape varieties that grow only in the Struma Valley. We work entirely with our own grapes and produce under our own brand," said Manolova.

Their market is primarily in Bulgaria. They occasionally receive small orders from abroad. Domestically, they sell through specialty stores, a few restaurants, and in recent years have offered their wines in gift boxes, holiday hampers, corporate Christmas gifts, and event packages, Manolova added.

At Augeo Family Estate, the focus is on red wines, and depending on the harvest, rose wine is also produced. Their flagship variety is Melnik 55, a grape that is a staple of the Struma Valley.

"This is a wine we've made in four vintages, and with it, we've won several awards," said Gergana Manolova.

Over the years, their wines have received recognition at various competitions, including the Decanter World Wine Awards in the UK, widely considered the most prestigious wine competition in the world.

"We have a silver medal from Decanter, a gold medal from Mundus Vini in Germany, arguably the second most prestigious competition, and several gold medals from the Balkan Wine Competition and Festival for different wines," Manolova added.

Among the future plans of the wine project is the restoration of a vineyard and the expansion of production.



WHERE ART AND WINE CO-EXIST



On September 27, 2025, the AYA Estate Vineyards winery was officially opened - a destination unique to Bulgaria and the region, combining wine and art. Located at the foot of seven mountains, near the Struma River, the winery blends modern architecture, contemporary art, and top-class winemaking, Gergana Georgieva, Corporate Communications Manager at MFG, told BTA.

AYA was founded by two families (Stanimir and Dilyana Vasilevi, and Nedelcho and Irena Spasovi), united by their love of wine and art. Their concept is to create a place where wine and art speak the same language - that of inspiration, emotion, and beauty.

The vision includes not only the production of high-quality wines, but also turning the winery into a cultural destination, with large sculpture and art installations, artistic spaces, and programs, curated so far by Vesela Nozharova and Veselina Sarieva. The art director and main driver of the AYA collection and the development of

the cultural space is Irena Gergova-Spasova.

The complex boasts a winery, an art gallery, and an estate that will include a horse stable, farm, orchard, amphitheater, restaurant, and hotel.

The story of AYA Estate Vineyards begins with a clear vision that art is not just artistic expression, but creation itself. That's why the founders created a place where art and wine live together. Inspired by the rich history and traditions of the Melnik region, the creators of AYA Estate Vineyards are turning the location into a wine-cultural center. The exhibitions that AYA will host will include both works by artists inspired by the region and artworks by international artists.

The winery spans 14,000 sq m and is built on the principle of gravity-flow winemaking, where the juice moves naturally between floors without mechanical intervention. This allows for an extremely delicate approach to wine production. The complex consists of three levels, with a production capacity of 250,000 bottles.

AYA owns 45 hectares of certified organic vineyards in the Melnik region, where the climate and sandy soils create ideal conditions for winemaking. Some of the vines are over 50 years old. The hilly terrain sits at 250-330 meters above sea level, and the vineyards have predominantly southern exposure.

"Our greatest asset is the over-50-year-old vineyards of Cabernet Franc and Broad-Leaved Melnik Vine," said Gergana Georgieva.

"To add color and diversity, we also planted Syrah, Cinsault, Early Melnik Vine, Merlot, and Sangiovese."

Their portfolio includes white, rose, and red wines, created with the aim of expressing harmony between tradition and innovation.

Even before the official opening, AYA's wines had already earned recognition, with medals from international competitions like the Decanter World Wine Awards and the Concours Mondial de Bruxelles (for Syrah and Cabernet Franc), as well as high ratings from wine critics.

KRESNA REGION WINERY PLANS TASTING ROOM AND HOTEL TO EXPAND WINE TOURISM

Villa Daros winery plans to build a tasting room and a hotel to host visitors and organize events as part of its future development, the winery's co-owner Teodor Iliev told BTA. Founded in 2018, the winery was established by two families with the aim of developing the Kresna region. It is located between Kresna and Dolna Gradeshnitsa, in a picturesque area offering stunning views of Sinanitsa Peak, Iliev noted.

Villa Daros owns around 20 ha of vineyards, primarily cultivating Sangiovese, Merlot, Syrah, and Cabernet Sauvignon. The most sought-after wine is Syrah, with the 2023 vintage recently receiving an award at the Balkans International Wine Competition in Greece. Other award-winning wines at the same festival include Rose Sangiovese and Rose Cabernet Franc, which won silver and bronze medals, while the Cabernet Sauvignon also received a silver medal.

Currently, Villa Daros primarily sells its wines on the Bulgarian market. The area has a well-developed wine tourism sector. „We are often visited by guests who have tried our wines, liked them, and return to buy more,” the owner concluded.



MELNIK WINEMAKER PRODUCES PRESERVATIVE-FREE WINES FROM LOCAL GRAPE VARIETY



Pri Shestaka winery produces wine without preservatives, owner Mitko Manolev told BTA. He specified that the winery mainly produces Melnik wine from the local grape variety Shiroka Melnishka, or Broadleafed Melnik.

“We have been working for 33 years. In 1992 we started with vineyard cultivation. I can say that I am among the first in the region to engage in wine production. Most of our vineyards are Shiroka Melnishka Loza, about 70% of what we grow. Most of our wines are made from it as well, because we want to keep our traditions. We make only natural wine, without preservatives or chemicals,” Manolev said.

The winery owner sells his production mainly to regular customers, who, in his words, appreciate authentic wine. There are fewer occasional clients. According to him, recent years have not been good in terms of yields. In terms of quality, however, this year’s harvest is better than last year’s, he commented.

Manolev added that demand for his wines is highest during the Christmas and New Year holidays, as well as throughout the winter season. „In winter we sell two-thirds of our production,” he added.

FAMILY WINERY SHOWCASES AWARD-WINNING LIMITED-EDITION WINES IN EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

In 2008, Kyosev Winery was selected to represent Bulgaria at the first Bulgarian Wine Salon in the European Parliament, said Nikolay Kyosev, the winery's owner, in an interview with BTA. The presentation exceeded the expectations of initially worried Bulgarian diplomats, as everyone was charmed by the taste and aroma of the wine.

At the press conference, when a journalist from AFP asked, „How do you make wine in Bulgaria and in your winery?“, Mr. Kyosev won the hearts of everyone present by answering: „We, the family wineries, make wine the way we raise our children - with dedication, love, heart, and soul!“

“Our wine is grown and made

with love. We are the continuers of tradition,” he still says today.

Over the years, the winery has received numerous awards such as gold medals, a trophy for best rose wine, and a gold medal for Best Red Wine at the Balkans International Wine Competition, among others.

The winery is located in the village of Ilindentsi, a beautiful wine region at the foot of the Pirin Mountains, in the Struma River Valley.

In 2003, Nikolay Kyosev purchased the land in the center of the village and began building the new family boutique winery. The first wine made there, vintage 2006, was „MonMar“, dedicated to his two children, Simona and Mario.

The Kyosev Family Boutique

Winery specializes in high-quality wines in limited editions, ranging from 300 to 5,000 bottles per series. It offers a selection of limited-edition wines – white, rosé, red, and dessert wines. Every bottle reflects their commitment to quality, „from the grape to the bottle.“

They produce small batches for people who truly appreciate quality, and offer fast and reliable delivery across Bulgaria and Europe. Whether you're looking for a fine red wine to pair with dinner or a delicate rose wine for a special occasion, their online store provides an excellent selection from one of Bulgaria's top boutique wineries. They also offer custom-labeled bottles with a wine selected by the customer.



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**FAMILY ESTATE PRODUCES WINE AND PLUM BRANDY
UNDER SAME-NAME BRAND**



Located in the heart of the Struma Valley, just five kilometers from Melnik, the Kapatovo Family Estate offers a modern interpretation of the wine tradition in the region. The grapes, grown on site, are used to produce wines and rakia under the brand Kapatovo, said Valentin Valkov in an interview with BTA.

The estate's history began in 1992 as a fruit orchard, and today it covers over about 120 hectares, of which 26 hectares are planted with vineyards. In 2006, the French company

Pepinieres Guillaume, with a history of over 100 years in viticulture, conducted an in-depth analysis of the terroir. Based on the results, non-traditional grape varieties for the Melnik region were planted, including red varieties like Grenache, Mourvedre, Syrah, Primitivo, Petit Verdot, Carignan, and Marselan, as well as white varieties like Sauvignon Blanc, Chardonnay, and Viognier.

Today, the Kapatovo wines have won gold, silver, and bronze awards from prestigious Bulgarian and international

competitions, including DiVino TOP50, Decanter, Balkans International Wine Competition, IWSC, and others. The winery's portfolio includes four blended wines and three single-varietal wines.

In 2023, the winery opened a tasting pavilion with panoramic views of the vineyards and the Melnik Pyramids at the foot of the Pirin Mountains. For longer stays, guests can stay at the Guest Houses Kapatovo, which offer six private apartments in three cozy houses.

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