

My journey into researching and popularising Ukrainian wine began in 2014. Back then, I often faced scepticism from experts, sommeliers, and even ordinary Ukrainians: Where can you find good wine in Ukraine? They all had roughly the same arguments: the climate and soils of most regions of the country are not suitable for viticulture, the country has no good winemakers or interesting grape varieties of its own, and there is no habit of consuming dry wine.

How did all these biases develop? Once I understood why people felt that way, I saw what linked them: a childhood surrounded by imported wines and a deep-rooted, multi-generational trauma. For centuries, the Russian and later Soviet empires systematically undermined Ukrainians' faith in their own history, traditions, culture, and products. As a result, most of us simply did not fully realise the depth of the winemaking tradition, nor did we believe it could be revived. Wars, famines, vineyards uprooted by the Soviets, and the mass production of low-quality semi-sweet wine have all contributed to the idea that there has never been, and never will be, good wine in Ukraine.

I understood where they were coming from, but I couldn't accept it — I wanted to prove them wrong, and I welcomed the challenge. What I saw in 2014 as just an opportunity has since developed into an entire industry — one that has only needed a bit more trust and support from its best representatives. With this in mind, I launched the Kyiv Food and Wine Festival and, together with partners, opened a network of Like a Local's wine bars. In 2025, a new space featuring the best Ukrainian wines, Uwines, opened in Kyiv. When I met new Ukrainian winemakers, I didn't focus on production volume or investment size. Instead, I looked at the person behind the wine, their approach to business, the quality of their product, and their long-term vision. That's how I discovered the first 10 winemakers who, like me, truly believed in Ukrainian wine.

Ukrainian winemaking is on the rise, and new vineyards are being planted even in regions once dismissed as unsuitable for viticulture. Each year, more family wineries emerge, experimenting with grape varieties and winemaking techniques, while legislation continues to evolve. Ukrainian wines are now winning top awards at international competitions, outshining renowned global labels in blind tastings, and appearing on the wine lists of dozens of restaurants worldwide. Combined with the effects of global warming and the surge of international interest in Ukraine since 24 February 2022, it's clear we have every opportunity to claim a prominent place on the world's wine map.

With the outbreak of full-scale war, licensed winemakers with sufficient reserves seized the moment, capitalising on the surge in global demand for all things Ukrainian and gaining recognition abroad. Producers such as Beykush, Stakhovsky Wines, and Kolonist expanded their reach, with exports to Japan, the UK, the Baltic and Scandinavian countries, Poland, and the US now part of the new reality. At home, demand for Ukrainian wine has also risen, with

→ Serhii Klimov.



restaurants increasingly featuring it on their wine lists and consumers showing strong support for their favourite producers.

The full-scale war also changed the domestic wine market. Shells are continually raining down on the vineyards, yet the winemakers continue their work, risking their lives. At the time of writing, the fate of most occupied wineries in southeastern Ukraine remains unknown. The Three G winery near Mariupol and Artwinery in Bakhmut have been destroyed. Stoic Winery (formerly known as Vynorobnia Kniazia Trubetskoho, or Prince Trubetskoy Winery), near Nova Kakhovka, has been looted; its vineyards have been mined, and its equipment damaged. Graevo Winery's plantations in Zaporizhzhia lie in the occupied part of the region near Enerhodar. Russian artillery shells the vineyards of Slivino Village and Olvio Nuvo on the left bank of the Dnipro River. Following the destruction of the Kakhovka Hydroelectric Station, the environmental disaster has spread to some of the Prychornomoria vineyards.

Today, a new history of Ukrainian winemaking is being written before our eyes. Within these pages, readers will come to know the hands and hearts shaping this unfolding history, follow their journeys, understand the depths of their motivation and values, and decide whom to stand beside.

➤ A warehouse destroyed by Russian shelling.

→ A surviving bottle of wine.

→ The remains of a shell in a vineyard.

