

WINES AND MAKERS

LE CARTON // POP UPS

TUESDAY, 30 MAY 2017

## PHEASANT'S TEARS

TASTING NOTES, WINE LYRICS  
& WORDS

It was on day four that I first started suspecting they wanted us dead. We were in Georgia and I'd yet to brush my teeth for passing out each night, the only difference being that on day three I'd passed out not in Tbilisi but in Signagi, called the city of love but probably better known as 'where [Pheasant's Tears](#) is'. We'd spent the night having taken a taxi out for lunch, and were on our way back for our friend David's leaving party; [David](#), our lighthouse or destroyer, depending how you looked at it, John Wurdeman (similar story) driving, me contemplating the likelihood of death by kindness by alcohol having already moved from the back seat up front car sick, sick of drinking, all around us sheep, goats, cows, skinny dogs and shepherds following, sitting, walking, John talking.

John's a good talker. And he'd been doing that since he pulled up a chair and after lunch; a long, slow, no-plan-how-to-get-all-the-way-back to Tbilisi event that turned, suddenly, into a race down the hill against the dark to get to the vines, cellar and cha cha fires before dinner — all the while talking stories laughing talking. His eyes burn like those fires when telling those stories; the details of which I don't remember so much as I do as the breadth of the topics we touched upon (art, music, monks, monasteries, [Thierry Puzelat](#)), and his earnestness.

Pheasant's Tears was started in 2005 and twelve years, a whole lotta back, blood, sweat, fairs and *supras* later and the world is drinking Georgian wines that not only sing, but sing in their own distinctive Georgian tongue. And to each to their own tune, too.

It would be convenient for me to forget to mention how, before our first trip, my experience with Georgian wine could be described as; 1) singular and, 2) 'horse blanket' (albeit a nice woven one). Three hours on landing and a flying head start wine-wise at [Azarphesha](#) later, and it was also; 3) totally wrong. And while it's true that in Georgia I found a [different breed of beast](#) in my glass than the familiar animality of, say, France; but this is where we must bury the blanket. So much finesse! So many layers! Texture! Endless themes and variations but then — she says from the safety of the couch — how could there not be? Not when you have over 500 ingenious grape varieties and if not quite a million, than many, many different micro climates, climate-climates, *terroirs* and a winemaking culture that not only stretches (uninterrupted) over 8000 years, but that includes literally everyone you meet. From your taxi driver to your

waiter to the guy who sold you the incense and beeswax candles in the orthodox church shop on the corner: everyone will have put their own stamp on some wine at some point. [Talk about polyphony.](#)

And so of course we'd come to Pheasant's Tears for lunch but also for the wines. And there were a *lot* of wines: 14 to 'taste' (tasting does not happen in Georgia), two pét-nats for fun, another something cold down at the vineyard after the kettle-warm *cha cha* (Georgian Grappa, '*cha cha*' means grape skins), the bottles we dusted off from the cellar for dinner (Puzelati!) and then, finally, those orange toasts out of plastic jugs to a golden Georgia with our guesthouse hosts.

But first, lunch:





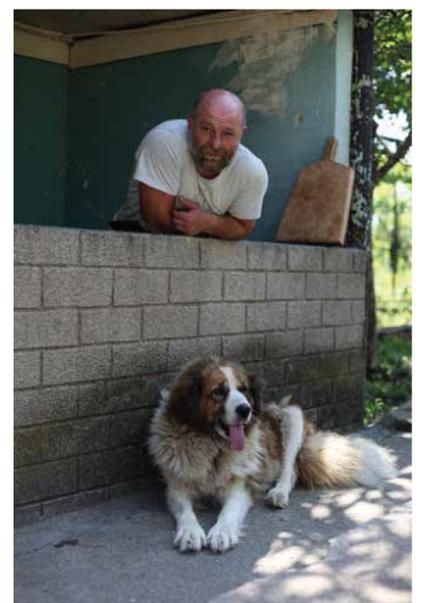
'FOUTRE D'ESCAMPETTE'  
2015, DOMAINE DE L'OCTAVIN



HIGH ON ACID | TAVKVERI  
2016



'NOVELLO', DENNY BALDIN



RAMAZ NIKOLADZE

'We're going to start with a **2015 Chinuri**, a grape from the Karteli region (central Georgia, to the east of Tblisi); a perfect example of the sort of wine people seem not to expect when they come here: a white with no skin maceration'. And so it was: a "white wine"-white wine: light bodied, green to clear with notes of bright, not-quite-ripe **conference pear** and **nettle tea**; it's 'not what you'd expect-ness', I suspect, making it the kind of thing Georgians might drink for those special occasions that call for something a little different to the ambers sold road side from 10 litre plastic jugs.

Next up, a **2015 Mtzvane Kakhuri**: 75 year old vines, **juice of half a honeydew melon**, **Japanese blossom mania**, **smokey honey comb** plus a glob of milky **ricotta** with 10 days maceration and two '!' in my notes though I've never really figured out a scale or system. We're told that the Mtzvane — thought to be one of the oldest varieties in Georgia (5th century) — is slowly making a comeback after being ripped out by the yield conscious soviets (growing ancient, forgotten grapes is, wonderfully, something we heard a lot of from a lot of the winemakers we spoke to). It belongs to the Kakhetian family, Kakheti being the region (south-east, sub-tropical) we were in, home to over 60% of Georgia's vineyards and home, also, to the next grape and frequent blending partner: a **2010 Rkatsiteli** (meaning 'red cane', being one of the most commonly planted white grapes), macerated on skin and stems for four months, pressed then softened with the addition of more skins (skins add tannins and then \*MAGIC\* at one point start to retract them and, \*\*MORE MAGIC\*\* is it possible they can also work to remove mouse?). A beautiful fossilised amber, food-friendly amber. Smelled like a lady's **kid leather** driving glove: her **tobacco**, **perfume** and **dried spice** of **old wood**.



DENIS MONTANAR: HARVEST  
2016

They kept coming. Another **2015 Mtzvane Kakhuri** (younger vines, smelled like **salt caramel**, notes of dusty **sherry**); a **2012 Kisi** (also Kakhetian, no sulphites added: **white flowers**, **apricot-mango juice**); a **2015 Kisi** with 2 mg/l sulphite, the dosage used since 2012 to cushion the export ride (**pears!** And the 2012 tasted remarkably younger);

a **2015 Tsolikouri** (a grape from the Imeretian region to the west where skin contact doesn't come standard: bigger body, custard cream cookies), a **2015 Tsitska** (also Imeretian, this one high acidity, spicy, lemon squeeze zesty. More melon. Apples) and then John pulls out a rosé Rkatsiteli that tasted like Valentines Day (roses, chocolate, liquorice).

With our lamb arrived the reds.



'COMMENDATORE' 2015, DOMAINE DE L'OCTAVIN



GEORGIAN GIRL POWER = GEORGIAN POWER WINES | MARIAM IOSEBIDZE "TAVKVERI" 2015



A **2013 Tavkveri** with a leathery earthiness I associate with French wines and more roses but this time deeper, darker like a left-too-long (rosehip) teabag. (Interesting: the Tavkveri grape is female and must be planted close to Chinuri to produce fruit).

A **2015 Chitisvala** (No notes, no memory).

A **2010 Shavkapito** meaning 'black cane', the wine of Georgia's old kings and queens. A Kartlian variety: inky blueberry jam spread warm, slinky velvet draped across, gosh I don't know, an old marble statue in a summer palace? Rubies, power tannins. The French, we're told, love this one. Also very good with walnuts.

A **2015 Chkhaveri** (rubies, roses) from the semi-tropical Guria to the west where historically they grow vines up trees or at least pergolas.

A **2014 Saperavi** (the grape that's grown everywhere): wet earth, iron and red berries

And then, finally, a **2008 Saperavi** that reminded me of the time we tried to preserve a sheep's skin but only got as far as putting it in a plastic bag on the balcony under a salt for months before I dared to open the lid to check and it was FINE, though then I threw it away. In a good way.

End lunch.



