

A marker of progress in Macedonia

by Christy Canterbury MW

MACEDONIA IS SMALL – very small; almost the exact size of Alabama in the US or South West England. It's remarkable that this tiny country, with (until last year) its high import tariffs, historically exported 95% of its wine. Moreover, Macedonian wine volume is not small: as the world's 25th largest producer, it makes approximately half the quantity the Kiwis do.

It is no newcomer to winemaking, which has existed here since the 13th century BC. But the wine scene entered its modern era just over a decade ago. The winery Bovin changed the paradigm. Founded in 1998, it focused on quality and charged six times more than the average for its wines. Rather than balk, people bought. Wineries soon popped up all over, and today there are about 60.

According to Ivana Simjanovska, co-author of *Macedonian Wine Guide 2011*, most investment has been homegrown until recently. Now outsiders are trickling in, notably from neighbouring Serbia, to where much of Macedonia's wine is exported. But winemaking expertise comes from many sources. Most winemakers work harvests in other countries, and a number of Bulgarian and Serbian oenologists work full-time at Macedonian wineries. The highest profile flying winemaker to date is the Rhône's Philippe Cambie, hired by Tikves.

Like in the New World, the Macedonian industry is free to grow what it wants and vinify how it wants. The climate is both Mediterranean and continental; the west is three times as rainy as the east, but one constant is the luminosity – the sun shines 75% of the year.

Macedonia hosts three primary regions. Povardarie (Vardar Valley) is the heartland, pumping out 80% of the annual production. Out west, Pelagonija-Polog trails well behind with less than 15% of total output, and Pchinya-Osogovo in the east provides the rest. The most exciting native varieties are Vranec and Kratosija in the



black-grape camp and Smederevka, Zilavka and Temjanika in the white.

Leading the pack is Vranec, whose name means 'black stallion'. It's a wine of near-impenetrable intensity, with youthful aromas of red forest berries that develop into darker tones and baking spice with age, which it does well. Kratosija, a relative of Zinfandel and Primitivo, tends to be jet black with lots of viscosity. Neither of these grapes is shy in sugar, and 15%–17% alcohol is not rare. It's striking how well their structure, Vranec's in particular, keeps the balance in check.

The white Smederevka can also be heady, but has good acidity. Primarily a varietal wine, this is the most widely planted white. Zilavka (known as Furmint in Hungary) is nutty and citrusy, while Temjanika (aka Muscat) is charming. Dry or sweet, all are exotically fragranced.

Many excellent international varietal wines and blends are also made. Top producers include Bovin, Chateau Kamnik, Stobi, Popov, Tikves and Vinar.

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Above: Bovin is one of the top producers, and Vranec the most popular red grape variety

Top: vineyards near Skopje in the Povardarie region, which produces 80% of Macedonia's wine



Photographs: Bill Bachmann/Alamy; Mick Rock/Cephas

mouth with redcurrant and raspberry flavours. Balanced.

Domeniul Coroanei Segarcea, Principesa Margareta, Segarcea, Muntenia & Oltenia 2008 (13.2%) **C**
Complex aromas of earth, red pepper and dried fruit, big and full-bodied with firm tannins but still fresh.

Serbia
Aleksandrovic, Rodoslov Reserve, Oplenac, Nišava-South Morava 2006 (13.5%) **D**
Complex nose of plums, black fruit and cigar box. Fresh with mellowing tannins, but there is evidently still plenty more to come.

Belo Brdo, Alma Mons, Srem 2011 (14.4%) **C**
Quite oaky with vibrant, crushed berry fruit and smooth, well-textured tannins. Good mouthfeel.

Braca Rajkovic, 33, 2010 (14.5%) **D**
Pure brambly fruit with a hint of vanilla oak. Finely structured.

Dibonis, Difranc, Subotica-Horgoš 2009 (14%) **A**
Full-bodied with sweet flavours of bramble jelly and wine gums, lifted acidity and an appealing finish.

Matalj, Kremen, Krajina, Timok 2011 (13.5%) **B**
Slightly closed nose of tea leaves and cassis. Dry palate. Needs time.

Podrum Radovanovič, Cabernet Sauvignon Reserve, Sumadijsko Velikomoravski 2009 (13.5%) **C**
Lots of liquorice and black fruits. Low acidity with an earthy, tannic finish.

Podrum Vina Aleksić, Kardaš, Vranje, Nišava-South Morava 2011 (13%) **C**
Cassis character and hints of vanilla oak, juicy and pure. Will develop.

Serbia
Temet, Ergo, Jagodina, Šumadija-Great Morava 2011 (13.8%) **C**
Robust and youthful, plenty of ripe red fruit, earthy notes. Needs time.
Vinarija Molovin, Plavi Princip, Srem 2011 (14.5%)
Youthful nose of violets, vanilla and cherries. Intense, juicy and very ripe.
Zvonko Bogdan, Cuvée No.1, Subotica-Horgoš 2010 (13%) **B**
Delicate berry fruit, plenty of oaky spice. Quite tannic with a long finish.

Slovakia
Martin Pomfy, Mavin Selection Cabernet Sauvignon, Juznoslovenská 2011 (15.2%) **B**
Cassis, pepper and a touch of oak. Quite ripe with grainy tannins, and quite complex.

Martin Pomfy, Mavin Selection Zweigeltrebe, Juznoslovenská 2011 (13.6%) **A**
Bright raspberry fruit, very crisp and light-bodied, shows good typicity.
Žitavské Vinice, Dunaj, Nitrianska 2011 (14.5%) **C**
Plummy with tea leaves and coffee, slightly sweet with a complex, bramble jam finish.

Switzerland
Weinkellerei Rahm, Magistral, Pinot Noir, Schaffhausen, Eastern Cantons 2010 (13.6%) **C**
Spicy with flavours of pepper and thyme, juicy and sweet with rosehips on the finish.
Weinkellerei Rahm, Schaffhauser Art Cuvée Rouge, Schaffhausen, Eastern Cantons 2011 (12.7%) **B**
Youthful crushed-berry notes on the ➤