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*Preparing for the traditional crushing of the grapes ritual at the Artsakh Wine Festival.*

## **AGBU News Magazine**

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# Uncorked

*A rich blend of historical mystique, agricultural bounty, and Armenian ingenuity is putting the country on the world wine map*

By **TAMAR HOVSEPIAN**

**A**sk any wine enthusiast to name the countries that produce the world's most sought-after luxury labels and, chances are, you will hear the familiar shortlist—Italy, France, Spain and the United States. However, ask any of the over 50 registered winemakers who have planted a stake in the viticulture (cultivation of grapevines) industry in Armenia and Artsakh, and they will tell you that the list will soon be out of date.

Ever since 2007, when the Areni-1 cave complex was discovered by a team of Armenian and Irish archaeologists in the Vayots Dzor province of Armenia—bearing evidence that wine was made there as early as 6,100 years ago—the rush is on to reinstate Armenia to its original glory as a winemaker's paradise.

After all, according to Genesis, it was Noah who planted the first vineyard in Armenia in the foothills of Mt. Ararat. There are also historical accounts that in

the 5th century BC, Armenians transported wine down the Tigris-Euphrates rivers. Grapevines often adorn the pages of ancient Armenian illuminated manuscripts, and carvings of them appear on churches and khachkars. The Blessing of the Grapes, an annual religious ceremony that relates to the Feast of the Assumption of Virgin Mary, is derived from a pagan custom of sacrificing the first grape harvest to Goddess Anahit.

Historical mystique notwithstanding, the overwhelming scientific and visual evidence points to Armenia as not only the birthplace of viticulture but also the future of a robust premium wine industry on a global scale, thanks to a type of soil and climate that yield a wide variety of rare and superior indigenous grapes.

## Ask the Experts

At a press conference held in Armenia in 2013, Renée Payan, the now former

dean of the oldest wine institute in the world, the Université du Vin—Suze la Rousse in France, aptly noted, “If France is one of the biggest wine producers today, then Armenia is the cradle of winemaking, and it should restore the traditions, re-establish its image and take its rightful place on the global viniculture (winemaking) map.”

Renowned Californian winemaker Paul Hobbs, who is a partner in Armenia's Yacoubian-Hobbs Winery, had this to say upon taking the first sip of the Areni wine that he and his partners Viken and Vahe Yacoubian created in collaboration with Vahe Keushguerian of WineWorks. “The Areni red was quite intense and perfumed, very spicy and surprisingly elegant—it had a lot of the characteristics of very good wine. The even bigger surprise, however, was how good the white wines were. They really speak of the land where they are grown and that was very exciting. At that moment, we knew we could pursue this commercially.”

When they brought the wines to the United States, the reaction was highly favorable. “We sold out very quickly,” reported Hobbs, “and were even able to place the wine in many top restaurants around the country. To achieve that phenomenal success is very gratifying. There have only been a few times in my entire career where I experienced that kind of feeling.”

## Making Up for Lost Time

Ironically, until winning its independence, Armenia had lost its historical identification with wine. As a Soviet

*Grape and vine motifs on the 10th century Cathedral of the Holy Cross, Akhtamar Island (Historic Armenia.)*







*The Areni-1 cave complex discovered in 2007 in the Vayots Dzor province of Armenia.*

republic, it focused on producing vodka and cognac, continuing the practice even after the collapse of the USSR. The few Armenian wines available at the time

were semi-sweet or sweet and used only when vodka was considered inappropriate, such as for wedding ceremonies in churches.

When Armenia became a sovereign state in 1991, many diaspora Armenians, visiting for the first time, were optimistic

about the future of their ancestral homeland. Feeling a connection to the land, they were compelled to contribute to its rebirth through economic development. A few visionary pioneers from the West, some being of Armenian descent, brought their expertise from wine countries like Argentina, Italy, and the United States. They were determined to turn professional winemaking in Armenia into a serious and sustainable enterprise. Planting vineyards and establishing wineries, these risk-takers are the forerunners of more than 150 labels of Armenian wine today, with globally recognized names like Karas, Zorah, Van Ardi, Golden Grape ArmAs, Takri, Kataro, and others. (Their stories and contributions appear on pages 22-23 and 24-29).

### **Armenia's Wine Comeback**

Without the love for the land and



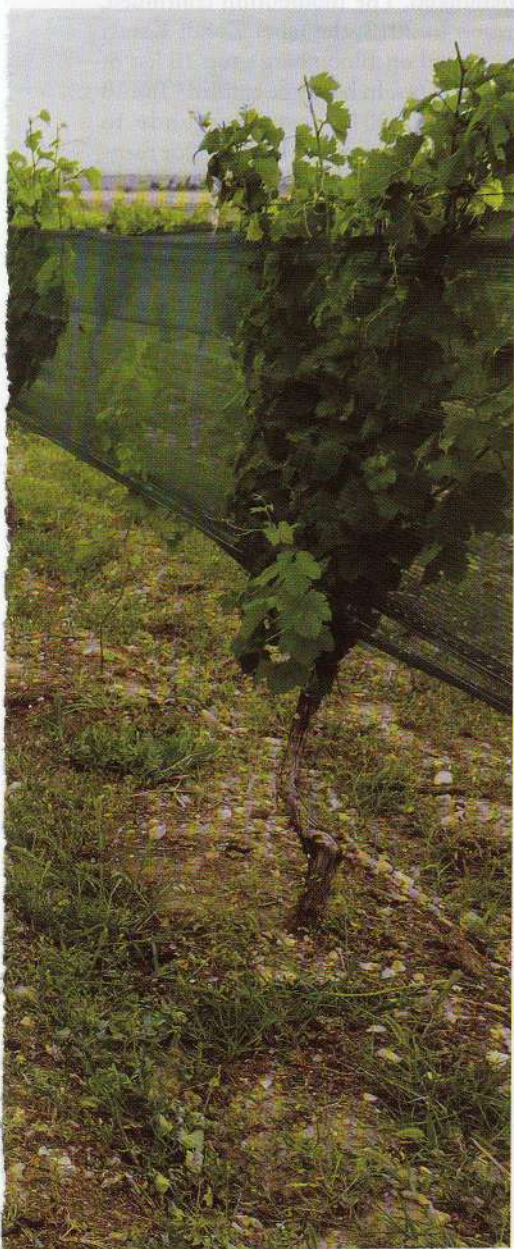


*Vineyards of Karas Wines in Ararat Valley, Armenia.*

ambitions to put Armenia on the world wine map, these early winemakers could not have achieved the success they are experiencing today. With no modern winemaking facilities, equipment or expertise, they mostly had to start from scratch, often inviting foreign experts to help them build their facilities and train staff.

Karas Wines brought winemakers and other specialists from Argentina and France, among them Michel Rolland, an internationally recognized winemaker. ArmAs Estate, similarly, had 35 Italians living in Armenia during the two-year construction period and

*Van Ardi's Varuzhan Mouradian overlooks his vineyard in Ashtarak, Armenia.*



## Nature's Gifts to Armenia

*The trifecta of earth, air, and altitude*

MANY OF THE early pioneers of Armenia's wine renaissance, such as Eduardo Eurnekian, Zorik Gharibian, and Vahe Keushgeurian, as well as Swiss winemaker Jakob Schuler and American wine legend Paul Hobbs, were fascinated that such a small, landlocked country like Armenia was abundantly endowed with indigenous grape varieties unique to its highlands. The high-altitude vineyards and volcanic and limestone soils were ideally suited for growing high-quality grapes for winemaking. With the perfect terroir and indigenous grapes, previously unknown to even the best winemakers in the world, Armenia could carve out an unrivaled niche for itself in the wine world. Gharibian, the founder of Zorah Wines, explains, "Internationally we have no competitors, simply because we are too niche. Armenia doesn't belong to any category yet, and, as the Italians say, we are a 'mosca bianca'—a 'white fly,' a rarity."

Such excess of natural riches extends across eight of the 10 regions of Armenia: Armavir; Ararat; Aragatsozn; Vayots Dzor; Tavush; Syunik; Kotayk; and Lori.

According to the wine industry report published by the American University of Armenia (AUA), most of the vineyards in

Armenia are situated between 850 and 1,400 m altitude and some are more than 1,700 m high. Due to the altitude of the vineyards, there is a high-temperature range during the maturation process, which allows for thicker and better berry skins. This is one of the advantages Armenia enjoys and may leverage as a winemaking country.

The other advantage is the wealth of the indigenous grape varieties. *Areni* is known for red and *Voskehat* for white wines. *Haghtanak*, meaning "victory," and *Kakhet*, are other promising red wine varieties, while *Kangoun*, meaning "standing," is the variety known for making white wines. According to Keushgeurian of WineWorks, there are hundreds of indigenous grape varieties in Armenia, of which only about 30 are used in winemaking. The most notable autochthones are *Areni*, *Kakhet*, *Voskehat*, *Khatun Kharji*, *Movuz*, *Sireni*, and *Chilar*, widely used in Armenian wines. International grape varieties, such as *Merlot*, *Malbec*, *Syrah*, *Tannat*, *Chardonnay*, *Viognier*, *Muscat*, and *Cabernet Franc*, are also grown and used in Armenian wines. Some regional grapes, like *Saperavi* and *Rkatsiteli*, are cultivated in Armenia and used by Armenian winemakers as well. ■



*Bottling of Keush sparkling wine at WineWorks.*

dozens continued to visit for specialized works throughout the years.

Located in many remote regions of Armenia and Artsakh, the wineries created essential jobs for locals, and, in turn, rely heavily on them as a ready workforce. Many workers leave their villages for better opportunities in the cities or the capital, making it difficult for wineries to find qualified employees for the vineyards and wineries. Karas Wines employs about 500 people around the year. "We treat our employees very special," Juliana Del Aguila, CEO of Karas Wines explains. "We provide homemade lunch every day, made with the organic produce that we grow on our farms. This is not just



about making wine, it is about creating a sense of community."

With the success of Karas, which

quickly became the most popular Armenian wine in both Armenia and the Diaspora, the perception that Armenia could not produce quality wines was debunked. The momentum continued, when in 2012, the label Zorah Karasi appeared on Bloomberg's top 10 list of world wines. In her piece entitled "Top 10 Wines of 2012 from Burgundy to Armenia to Sonoma," Elin McCoy mentioned the 2010 Zorah Karasi, saying, "I was wowed by my first-ever taste of an Armenian wine, this stylish red made from Areni noir grapes and aged in traditional clay amphora. I also savored the thrill of

*Many of the wineries are located in remote regions of Armenia and Artsakh and help to create essential jobs for locals.*

## Armenia's Wines: A Growing Industry

### IN-COUNTRY CONSUMPTION

**100%**

Increase in per capita consumption from an average **1.2 liters** to **2.6 liters** from 2017 through 2018.



### EXPORTS

**50%**

Increase in the number of Armenian wine exports in first half of 2017 versus the same period in the previous year.



### TOP 10 FOREIGN MARKETS

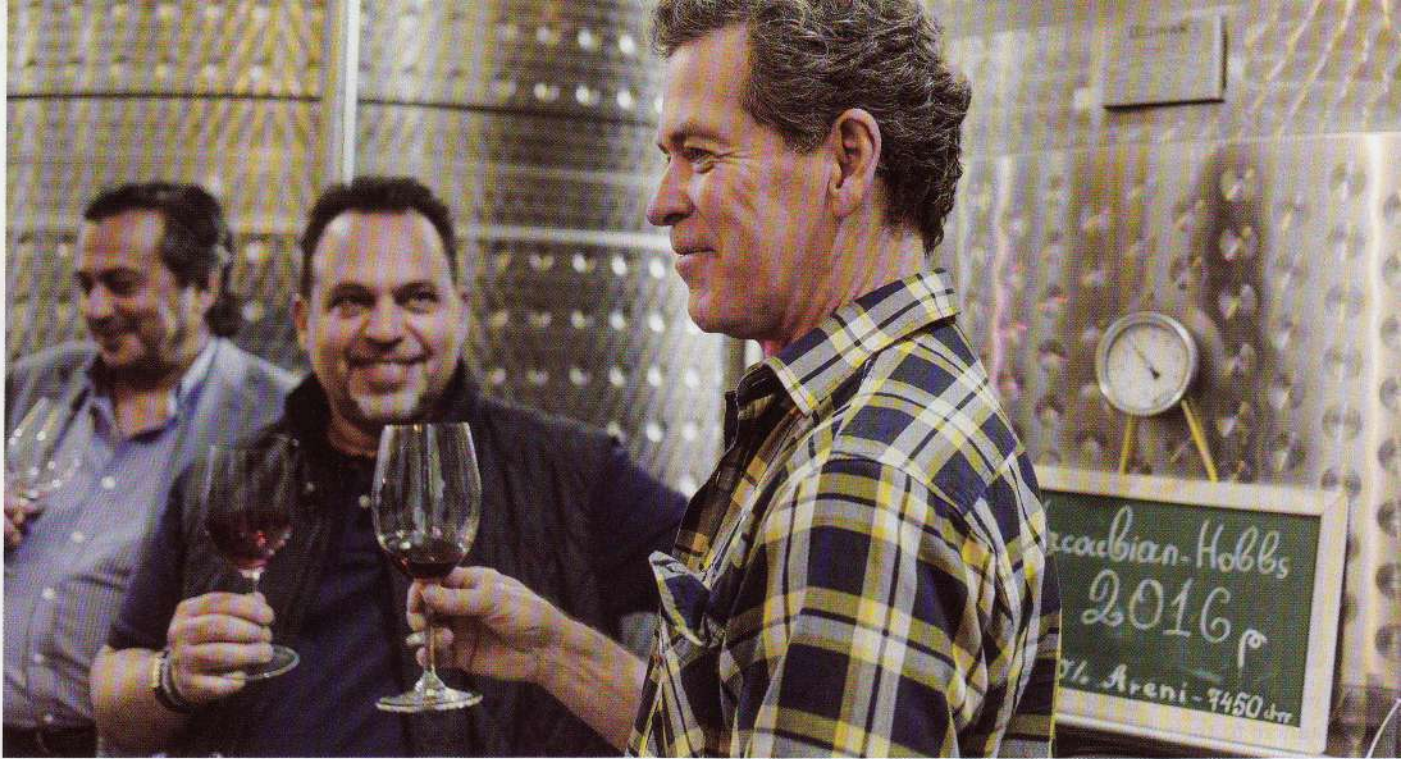
Out of the 30 consumer markets that import Armenian wines, as of 2016.



Sources: Armenia Ministry of Agriculture, from 2016-2018; UN Comtrade Database and American University of Armenia study: *The Development of Armenian Wine Cluster*







drinking history.” Armenian wines continue to receive medals and awards at various competitions and tastings.

gained traction in Armenia. The first wine bar, In Vino, opened in Yerevan in 2012 followed by several others, thereby evol-

*From right: Renowned California winemaker Paul Hobb with his Armenian partners Vake and Viken Yacoubian.*

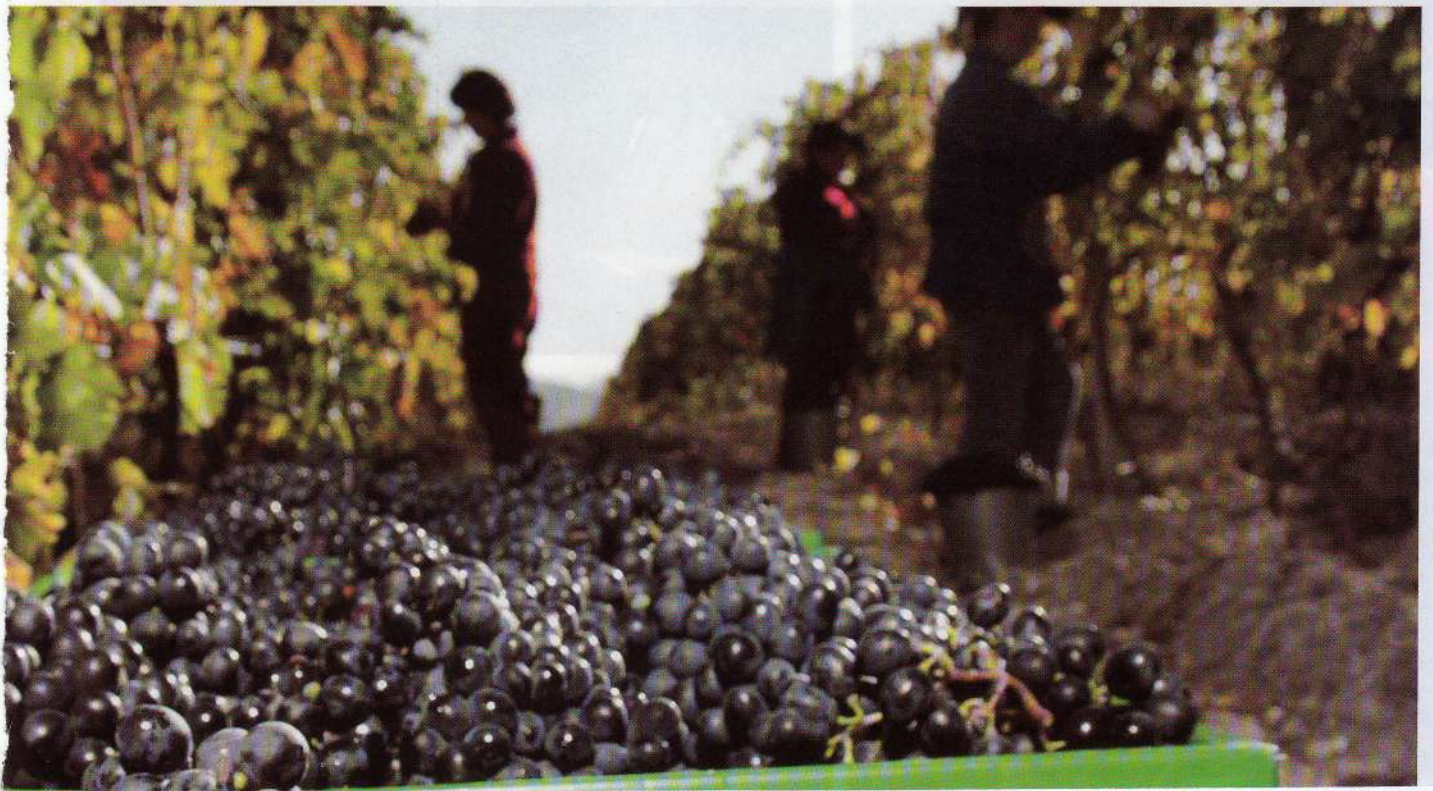
*“If France is one of the biggest wine producers today, then Armenia is the cradle of winemaking, and it should restore the traditions, re-establish its image and take its rightful place on the global viniculture map.”*

**A Tourism Tipping Point**

With the recognition and success of the industry, wine tourism has naturally

ing the society into a wine culture. More restaurants are now offering an elaborate wine list featuring both domestic and

international wines. In 2012, In Vino sold about 600 different types of wine, of which about 20 were Armenian. Today, it has over 850 types of wines and more than 100 Armenian wines from about 27 wineries. Mariam Saghatelyan of In Vino observed, “New wines are emerging very fast; that is why we have a group of winemakers and wine enthusiasts who must try all of the new wines and decide







In Vino Wine Bar, Yerevan

which are well-made, balanced, and adhere to their price-to-quality ratio in order to be presented on our shelves. We wouldn't sell anything we don't drink ourselves."

*"Today, winemaking is one of the fastest growing industries in our country and the fact that such a significant presence is ensured already speaks volumes."*

Wine tasting events are popular at In Vino and all major wineries have their own tasting rooms and organize tours and events. Wine festivals have

become popular and well-attended events that take place in Yerevan, the Vayots Dzor region where the archeological site of the first winery was found, as well as in Stepanakert in

Artsakh. Armenia also started to appear on various travel lists, such as the 2017 CNN list of best wine tours and trails and the *National Geographic* list of

ten places that deserve more travelers.

Most recently, Armenian wines were proudly presented at the Smithsonian Folklife Festival in Washington D.C., giving thousands of visitors a chance to sample Armenian wines.

To help develop wine tourism in Armenia and support boutique wineries, a tasting room called WineCube was built in the vineyard of local winemakers Narine and Nver Ghazaryan, producers of Momik wines.

*The Areni Wine Festival takes place in Areni Village, near the Areni-1 cave complex.*





# Armenia's Indigenous Grapes by Region

## Aragatsotn

**White**  
Chilar  
Voskehat

## Tavush

**Red**  
Sevanush  
Sev Achk'eni  
Kaputkeni  
Koghbeni

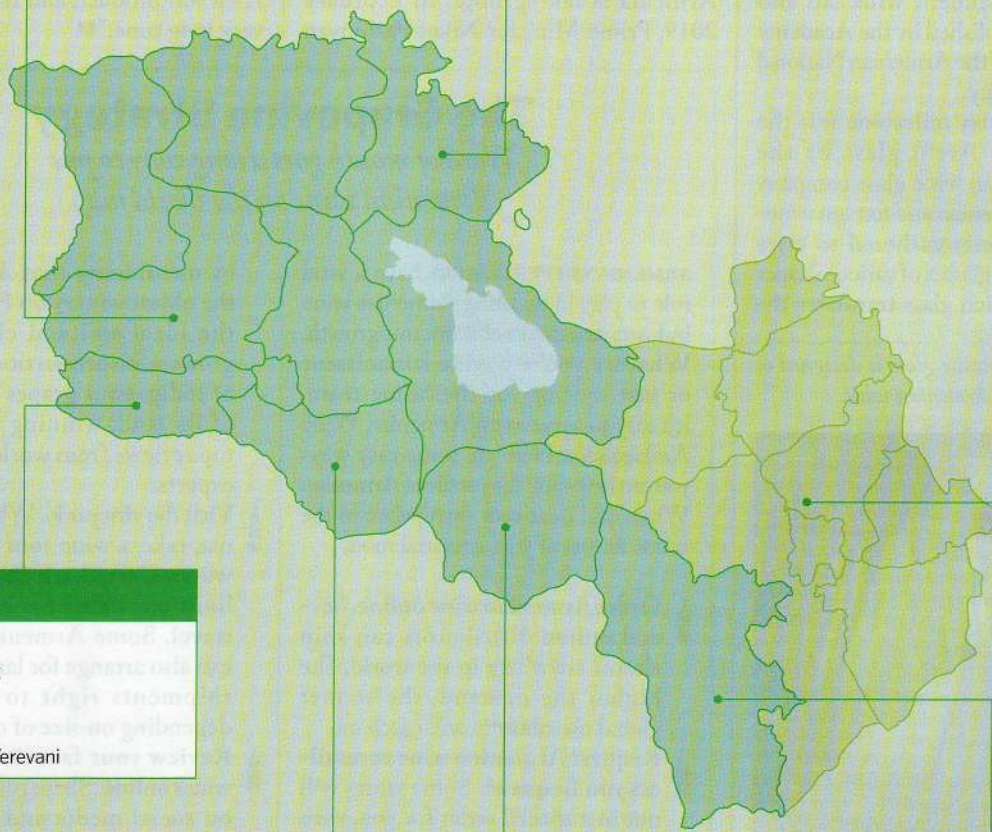
**White**  
Banantz  
Lalvari  
Jrali Kara  
Jrjuk  
Lkeni  
Nosrahat  
T'avrizeni

## Artsakh

**Red**  
Khndoghni  
(Sireni)  
Marandi  
Sev Achk'  
Gandzaki  
Sharabi

**Rosé**  
Marjeni

**White**  
Knot  
Amiri  
Garan Achk'



## Armavir

**White**  
Garan Dmak  
Mskhali

**Rosé**  
Vardaguyn Yerevani

## Ararat

**Red**  
Kakhet  
Sev Aygeni  
Karch Mat  
Sev Ginuk  
Garni  
Yeraskheni  
Vagheni  
Sev Sateni

**White**  
Spitak Arakseni  
Spitakeni  
Sarnashak'ar  
Arevar  
Ararati

## Vayots Dzor

**Red**  
Areni  
Seyrak  
Movuz  
Shaheni  
Movsesi

**White**  
Nazeli  
Mormor  
K'rdi Chakat  
Khatun  
Khatouni

## Syunik

**Red**  
Chragi Yerkser  
Karmir Koteni  
Sveni  
Dghleni  
Itsitseni  
Sevuk  
Hastakot

**White**  
Arevik  
Ambari  
Shahangyul



## Professional Dimensions

With the wine industry taking off, the dearth in properly trained specialists eventually spawned the EVN Wine Academy. Established in 2014 by Semina Consulting and the International Center for Agri-business Research and

true qualities and taste of Areni to the palate. Aimee Keushguerian, Riedel Ambassador to Armenia, reflected, "Creating the Riedel Areni Glass was one of our industry's watershed moments. It is a technical advancement for the way we experience Armenian wine, especially

held a consultative meeting attended by representatives of winemaking companies. The goal was to discuss the opportunities and prospects of industry development in Armenia. The prime minister remarked, "Today, winemaking is one of the fastest growing industries in our country and the fact that such a significant presence is ensured already speaks volumes."

Vahe Keushguerian of WineWorks believes the wine business is in Armenia to stay. While other industries, like diamond cutting or tech, may be outsourced to countries where labor is cheap, winemaking cannot be outsourced. He explains, "Whatever we're doing, this will stay with us forever. First, because no one has soil like ours. Secondly, you cannot outsource winemaking because it's not a brain product. It's a soil product, and it will stay for a very long time." ■

*"Whatever we're doing, this will stay with us forever. First, because no one has soil like ours. Secondly, you cannot outsource winemaking because it's not a brain product. It's a soil product, and it will stay for a very long time."*

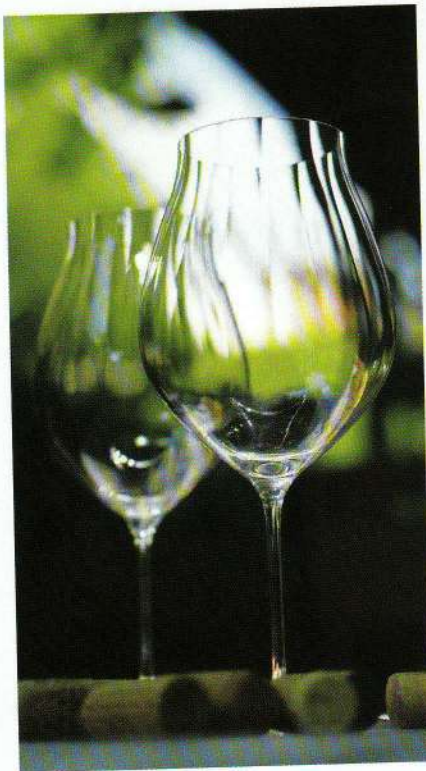
Education (ICARE) Foundation, the Academy offers an 18-month professional certificate program in Enology and Wine Business. It also offers short courses of two or four days that teach wine professionals and enthusiasts wine fundamentals at the student wine lab and tasting room established by the Academy on the premises of the Armenian National Agrarian University.

Another industry milestone was the creation of the Areni glass by the acclaimed Austrian wine glass company Riedel. Both Armenian and foreign winemakers and experts gathered to taste Areni wines from glasses of various shapes to determine which glass translates the

the way we taste our indigenous Areni grape variety." Her wine Zulal was one of the wines used at the tasting for the Areni glass.

As the Armenian wine industry continues to ripen, the new government of Armenia is taking note. In February 2019, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan

*The Riedel Areni wine glass is designed to enhance the taste of Armenian wine.*



## The Grapevine Strategy

*Word of mouth goes a long way to put Armenian wine on the world map*

ARMENIANS EVERYWHERE have a vital role to play in boosting Armenia's wine industry as a driver of economic growth. Whether you're a wine connoisseur or just rooting for the home team, it's easy to serve as an Armenian Wine Ambassador. Here are some easy ways you can help raise the profile of Armenian Wines and treat your own palate to the subtle flavors of your ancestral roots.

- **Order Armenian wine online.** Several online distributors can ship almost anywhere in the world. The higher the demand, the sooner global distributors will catch on.
- **Request Armenian wine at retailers you frequent.** Some stores will put in a special order for you, with a case or more. Mention some specific labels for them to investigate. (See wine list on opposite page).
- **Ask your server or sommelier at fine restaurants and lounges.** If they don't carry Armenian wines, suggest labels to the house. For BYOB situations, introduce Armenian labels to your dining partners.
- **Start a wine trivia conversation.** Break the ice at a party or happy hour

by mentioning that Armenia has the oldest winery on Earth, boasts the ideal soil and climate, and grows a disproportionate variety of indigenous grapes for the size of its land, winning awards and top reviews from world-class wine experts.

- **Visit the vineyards.** When in Armenia, take a wine tour and sample wines. Carry back the two-bottle limit allowable for cross-border travel. Some Armenian wineries can also arrange for larger overseas shipments right to your door, depending on size of order.
- **Review your favorite Armenian wines online.** Share your experience on social media and wine blogs, along with photos of labels.
- **Serve Armenian wine for special occasions.** And, if you're organizing a local community event, serve Armenian wines and set up a tasting table with literature provided by the winemakers.
- **Gift Armenian wines to your hosts.** Armenian wine is always an opportunity to introduce the uninitiated to the wider Armenian story. ■



# Armenian Wine List\*

*The list of Armenian wine labels grows with every vintage, offering something for every taste and preference.*

## Red

Alluria 2016 Reserve  
Alluria 2017  
Alluria Grand Reserve 2015  
Aparteny 2015 Dry Red  
Arba Reserve 2014  
Ariats Amarone Reserve 2015  
Ariats Areni Sweet Kakhani 2015 🍷  
Ariats Garoun Hakhtanak 2017 Red  
Ariats Ripasso Style 2016 Dry Red  
Ariats Ripasso Style Reserve 2014  
ArmAs Areni 2012  
ArmAs Areni Reserve 2012  
ArmAs Dry Red 2013  
ArmAs Karmrahyut Reserve 2013  
Armenia Wine Takar Areni 2016  
Armenia Wine Takar Reserve Areni Saperavi 2015  
Armenia Wine Tariri Dry Red 2016  
Armenia Wine Yerevan Areni Karmrahyut 2015  
Avetisyan Kataro 2015 Reserve  
Avetisyan Kataro Red 2016  
Berdashen Khindogni 2017  
Berdashen Khindogni 2017  
Berdashen Khindogni Barrel Aged  
Getnatoun Areni Noir 2015  
Highland Cellars Koor 2016 Red  
Highland Cellars Koor Reserve 2014  
Hin Areni Red 2015  
Hin Areni Reserve 2015  
Karas 2016 Red  
Karas Areni Khndoghni 2016  
Karas Reserve 2014  
Karas Syrah 2015  
Manukyan Wine Kouash Red 2016  
Maran Bagratuni Reserve 2015  
Maran Special Areni Rouge 2010 🍷  
Momik Red 2017  
Noyan Tapan 2015  
Noyan Tapan Areni 2016  
Old Bridge Red 2014 Reserve  
Old Bridge Red 2015 Reserve  
Oshin Areni 2017  
Partez 2013 Red  
Qotot Red 2016  
Rikars Wine Arag Amphora Wine 2017 Red  
Rikars Wine Davit 2017 Red  
Samvelyan Red 2017  
Sarduri Historical Vintage 2015  
Takri 2015 Red  
Takri Reserve 2014 Red  
Trinity 6100 Red 2016 Areni Noir  
Trinity E Areni 2015  
Trinity JAZZ Red 2017  
Trinity Khachmeruk Areni Cab. Sauv.  
Trinity Khachmeruk Areni Syrah  
Tushpa Red 2015

Van Ardi Areni Reserve 2016  
Van Ardi Kakhet Areni Hakhtanak 2017  
Van Ardi Syrah Kakhet Reserve  
Vanand Red 2017  
Voskeni 130 Reserve Areni  
Voskeni Areni 2016  
Voskeni Dry Red 2015  
Voskeni Dry White 2015  
Voskevez Areni 2013 Dry Red  
Voskevez Dry Red  
Voskevez Hakhtanak 2015  
Voskevez Karasi col. Areni 2015  
Voskevez Katarine 2006 🍷  
Voskevez Nuraz 2016  
Voskevez Vanakan  
Yacobian-Hobbs Red 2014  
Yacobian-Hobbs Sarpina 2014  
Zara Wines Haghtanak  
Zara Wines Saperavi  
Zarm 2012  
Zart Red 2017  
Zorah Karasi Areni 2015  
Zorah Yeras Areni 2013  
Zulal Areni Reserve 2017 Red  
Zulal Koghbeni 2017

## White

Ariats Garoun Kangoun 2017 White  
ArmAs Dry White 2012  
ArmAs Kangoun 2012 🍷  
ArmAs Voskehat Reserve 2013  
Armenia Champagne Brut 🍷  
Armenia Champagne Semi-Sweet 🍷  
Armenia Wine Muscat 2012 🍷  
Armenia Wine Takar Extra Brut Sparkling 2014 🍷  
Armenia Wine Takar Kangoun 2016  
Armenia Wine Takar Rosé Sparkling 2017  
Armenia Wine Tariri White 2016  
Armenia Wine Yerevan Kangoun Rkatsiteli 2017  
Armenia Wine Yerevan Sparkling Brut 🍷  
Armenia Wine Yerevan Sparkling Semi-Sweet 🍷  
Getnatoun Voskehat 2015  
Highland Cellars Koor White 2017  
Highland Cellars Koor White Reserve 2015  
Hin Areni Voskehat 2016  
Hin Areni Voskehat Reserve 2016  
Karas Dyutich Sweet Sparkling Wine 🍷  
Karas Extra Brut Sparkling Wine 🍷  
Karas Muscat Sweet 2018 White 🍷  
Karas White 2017  
Keush Blanc de Blanc 2013 🍷  
Keush Origins Brut 🍷  
Manukyan Wine Kouash White 2016  
Maran Special Khatun Kharji Blanc 2010 🍷  
Momik White 2017  
Noyan Tapan Rkatsiteli 2016

Oshin Voskehat 2017  
Qotot White 2016  
Samvelyan White 2017  
Sarduri Historical Vintage 2015  
Sarduri Sweet Muscat 2011 🍷  
Seraphim White Sparkling 🍷  
Trinity E Voskehat White 2016  
Trinity JAZZ White 2017 🍷  
Tus 2017 White  
Tushpa White 2017  
Van Ardi Dry White Mskhali 2017  
Van Ardi Kangoun med. sweet 2017 🍷  
Vanand White 2017  
Vankasar White 2015  
Voskeni Kangoun Semi-Dry 2017  
Voskevez Karasi col. Voskehat 2016  
Voskevez Muscat Rozali 2009 🍷  
Voskevez Urzana 2016  
Voskevez Voskepar 2015  
Voskevez White Dry  
Zabel Chilar 2015  
Zabel Garan Dmak 2014 White Dry  
Zart White 2017  
Zorah Voski 2016  
Zulal Nazeli Cuttings 2017  
Zulal Voskehat 2017 White

## Rosé

Ariats Areni Rosé 2018  
ArmAs Rosé 2015  
ArmAs Voskehat Dry 2012  
Armenia Sparkling Rosé Semi-dry 🍷  
Armenia Wine Takar Areni Rosé 2017  
Armenia Wine Yerevan Rosé 2016  
Avetisyan Kataro 2016 2017 Rosé  
Hin Areni Rosé 2016  
Karas Rosé 2017  
Maran Noravank Rosé 2017  
Momik Rosé 2017  
Noyan Tapan Areni Rosé 2016  
Qotot Rosé Dry 2016  
Sarduri Rosé 2015  
Trinity 6100 Rosé Estate Bottled 2016  
Van Ardi Rosé 2017  
Voskeni Siro Rosé 2017  
Voskevez Rosé Dry 2017  
Zart Rosé 2017  
Zulal Areni Rosé Extra Brut

## Type

All wines are dry unless otherwise noted.  
Sweet 🍷 Semi-Sweet 🍷 Semi-Dry 🍷  
Sparkling 🍷

\*Most labels listed here are offered by In Vino, the first wine bar in Yerevan.





# The Wines of Artsakh

*Patience, perseverance, and history in every vintage*

By **LAURA L. CONSTANTINE**

**T**he wine-friendly regions of Armenia extend far beyond official borders to embrace the pristine mountain air and mineral-rich earth of Artsakh, a land on which life is lived on the edge of tomorrow, while patience is measured in decades, if not centuries. The mystique of Artsakh takes on deeper dimensions as it experiences a wine renaissance of its own, thanks to a one-of-a-kind grape called *Khndoghni*, also known as *Sireni*, which is

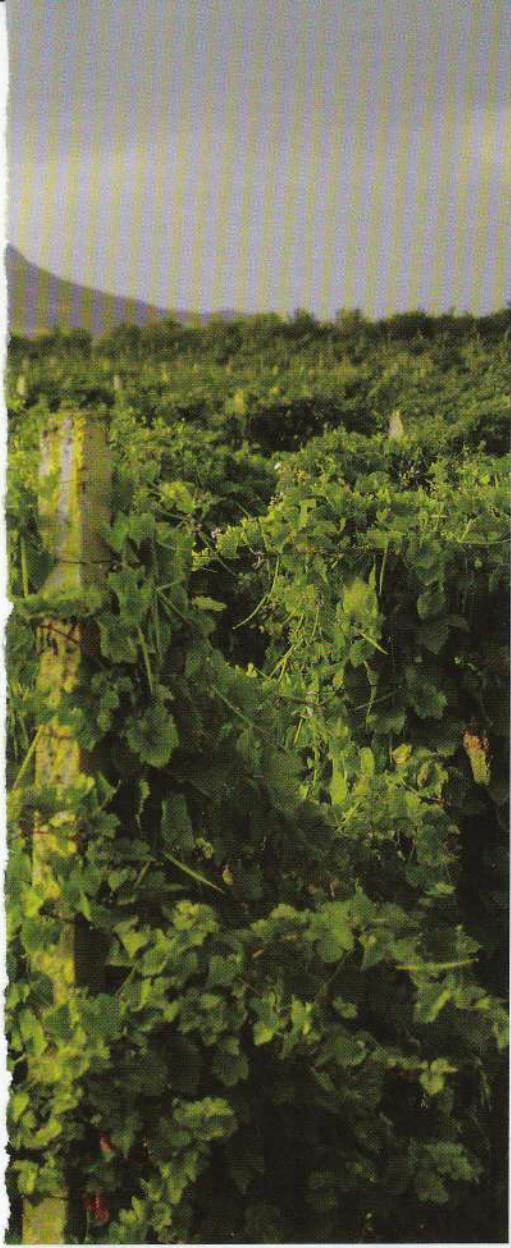
characterized by a powerful, deep and rich complexity.

Leveraging the expertise of WineWorks, a wine incubator in Armenia, three wine companies operating in Artsakh have already launched two successful labels—Kataro and Takri. In 2019, Aran Wines will release its first vintage, serving as one more reminder that, in Artsakh, all good things are worth the wait.

Speaking of patience, the story of Kataro Wines is one that spans the generations, as well as revolutions,

blockades and wars. Established by the Avetissyan family, natives of Artsakh, to revive the once thriving vineyards of their homeland before their decline beginning from the 15th century, the name Kataro steadily climbed the charts as one of the best wines in the country. Domaine Avetissyan owns 10 hectares of vineyards planted on the rolling hills of Togh village, with an elevation ranging from 600–700 meters and the enviable clay soils from which the *Khndoghni* grapes flourish.





HAKOB POGHOSYAN/HETQ; ARTSAKH TOURISM

### All in the family

Following in his grandfather's footsteps, Grigory Avetissyan practices the same grape-growing traditions, while expanding the Kataro brand in hopes that the outside world will view Artsakh as a wine-lover's haven rather than an enclave in the crosshairs of geopolitics. "It is my goal to revive our rich wine history," says Avetissyan, going on to explain the inspiration behind the Kataro name—the ancient monastic chapel atop the peak of Dizapayt Mountain, in close proximity to the vineyard. Kataro produces four types of wine: dry red, dry red reserve, white and rosé.

Family history is also a powerful motivator for another winemaker, Hratch Kaprielian. Before the Armenian Genocide in the early 20th century, Kaprielian's ancestors owned 11 vineyards in Western Armenia, a legacy that sparked his

childhood dream of one day reviving the family tradition on Armenian soil. With thriving businesses in New York and Switzerland, as well as a long record for his humanitarian initiatives in Armenia, Kaprielian took a leap of faith and planted a stake in Artsakh on 30 hectares of land in Banadzor village near the south-eastern province of Hadrut. His long-held dream came true a century later with the first vintage of Takri, which fittingly means "roots" in the Artsakh dialect, symbolizing Kaprielian's return to his ancestral origins.

In 2015, Takri produced its first ever reserve and intends to add white, rosé and sparkling wines to its product line by 2020. "The quality of our wines keeps improving," says Kaprielian. "We harvest in late fall and although this lowers the quantity of grapes, waiting allows us to produce higher quality wines." With tourism a key industry for growing a sustainable, self-sufficient economy in Artsakh, Kaprielian has plans to open a restaurant and wine tasting room where Takri will be available for purchase.

### Wine and Tourism Pair Well

Along with three other co-founders, Armenian-American Alex and Talar Sarafian built the Shushi Grand Hotel at a time when investment, access and infrastructure in Artsakh were daunting

propositions. In 2005, they planted five hectares in eastern Askeran, in the village of Ughtasar, on what was once fertile but now dormant fields. After years of selling their grapes to other wineries and distilleries, they recently decided to create their own label with its first vintage ready for market in late 2019. "Our goal is to make interesting and distinctive wines in Artsakh," explains Sarafian. "For

example, in addition to the more traditional full-bodied reds, we are the first winery that I am aware of to produce a rosé style wine from the Sireni grape."

### Harvests of Hope

Every autumn, winemakers from Armenia and Artsakh gather in Togh village for the Artsakh Wine Festival, an annual event that draws local crowds and foreign tourists alike, featuring traditional music, dance and local cuisine, along with the best of Armenian and Artsakh wines. Guests interact with local winemakers, discover the secrets of their craft, and bring their authentic experiences back to their home countries, raising the image of Artsakh as a vibrant wine culture brought back to life. ■



*Inset: Avetissyan's grandfather working the vineyard in Togh village. Below: The Artsakh Wine Festival draws crowds of people from around the world.*





# Visionary Vintners

*Armenian trailblazers who reclaimed the nation's wine legacy and pioneered an industry*

**W**ith over 50 registered winemakers in Armenia to date, the prospects for a thriving wine industry are clearly on the horizon. But Armenia's ascendancy to wine royalty will be forever rooted in the vision of the groundbreakers of Armenia's momentous wine comeback. These bold and daring individuals planted their stake in a nascent industry early, wisely and passionately. Each brought a unique attribute influenced by their

*Vabe and Aimee Keushguerian overlooking a vineyard in Khachik Village, Vayots Dzor.*

backgrounds and experiences in other countries, eventually building an end-to-end wine industry with the capacity to change the fortunes of an entire nation.

After more than a decade since they took a chance on Armenia, the verdict is in—Armenian wines are in a rarified class by themselves, just like these game-changers who saw Armenia's future through a wine glass half full.

With any seminal discovery of a precious commodity, be it gold in California, diamonds in Africa, oil in the Middle East, or the first high tech company in Silicon Valley, the lore is rife with cautionary tales

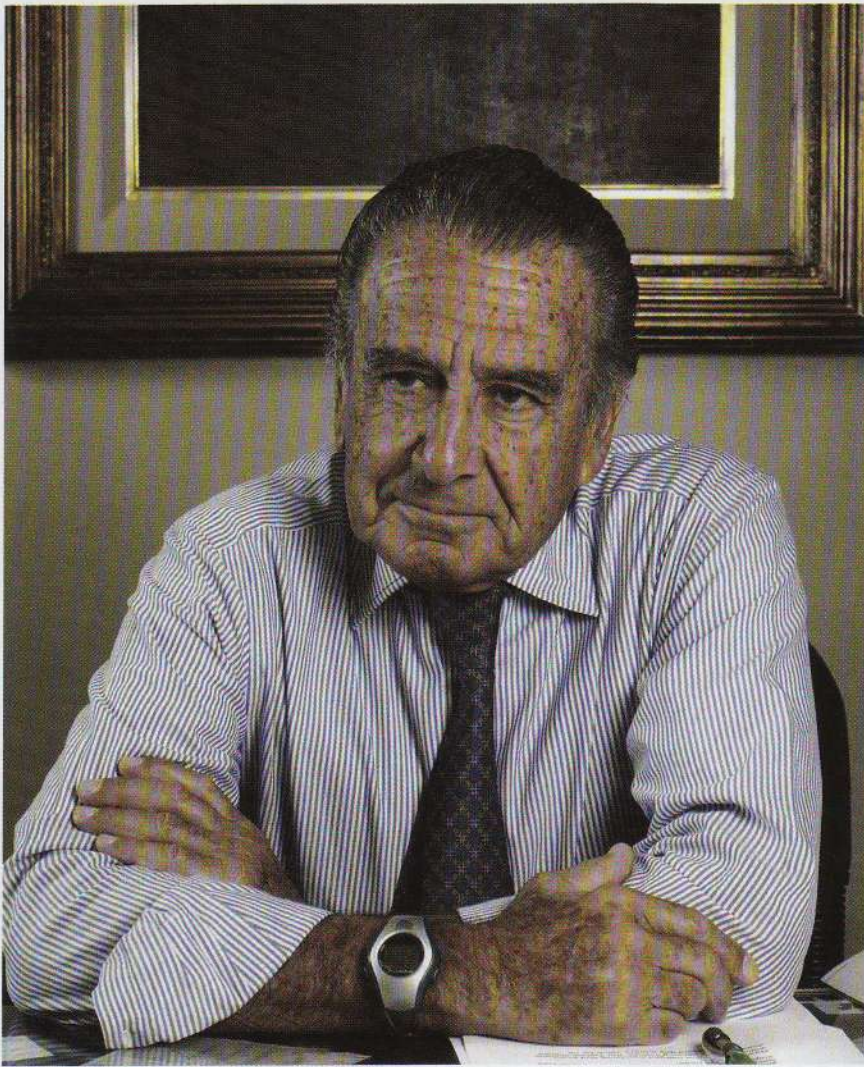
about how an industry can be a powerhouse for national prosperity or a case study in human and environmental exploitation. Fortunately, each of the winemakers who shared their stories with us agreed that, at the core of the wine business, is a respect for the land and a commitment to follow responsible agricultural practices—always with a mind for generating local jobs and sustaining a growth economy.

The integrity, creativity, and ingenuity of these extraordinary visionaries will serve Armenia well as it completes its transformation into a wine capital of the world.

REPORTING BY TAMAR HOVSEPIAN







**VISIONARY**  
**Eduardo Eurnekian**

**Country of Origin:** Argentina  
**Company:** Karas Wines  
**Location:** Armavir, Armenia  
**Unique Attribute:** Brand Visibility

One of the best-known names among Armenian wine labels, Karas Wines was conceived by a name synonymous with nation-building in Armenia—Argentine business magnate Eduardo Eurnekian. His early investments in the infrastructure of the homeland reflect on his instincts for identifying national imperatives with uncanny timing and investing in their successful implementation. “Everything that Eduardo touched, every investment and project he got involved in had one main objective—to create bridges between Armenia and the world,” observed his niece Juliana Del Aguila, to whom Eurnekian fully entrusted the Karas enterprise as its Chief Executive Officer upon purchasing the land in the Armavir region of Armenia.

KARAS WINES, WINWORKS

its borders, was struggling to survive. With the huge success of the airport, Eurnekian then set his sights on the next big bet on Armenia’s future—its agricultural potentials. He purchased 100 acres of land in Armavir and began planting grapes and other crops as his first order of business.

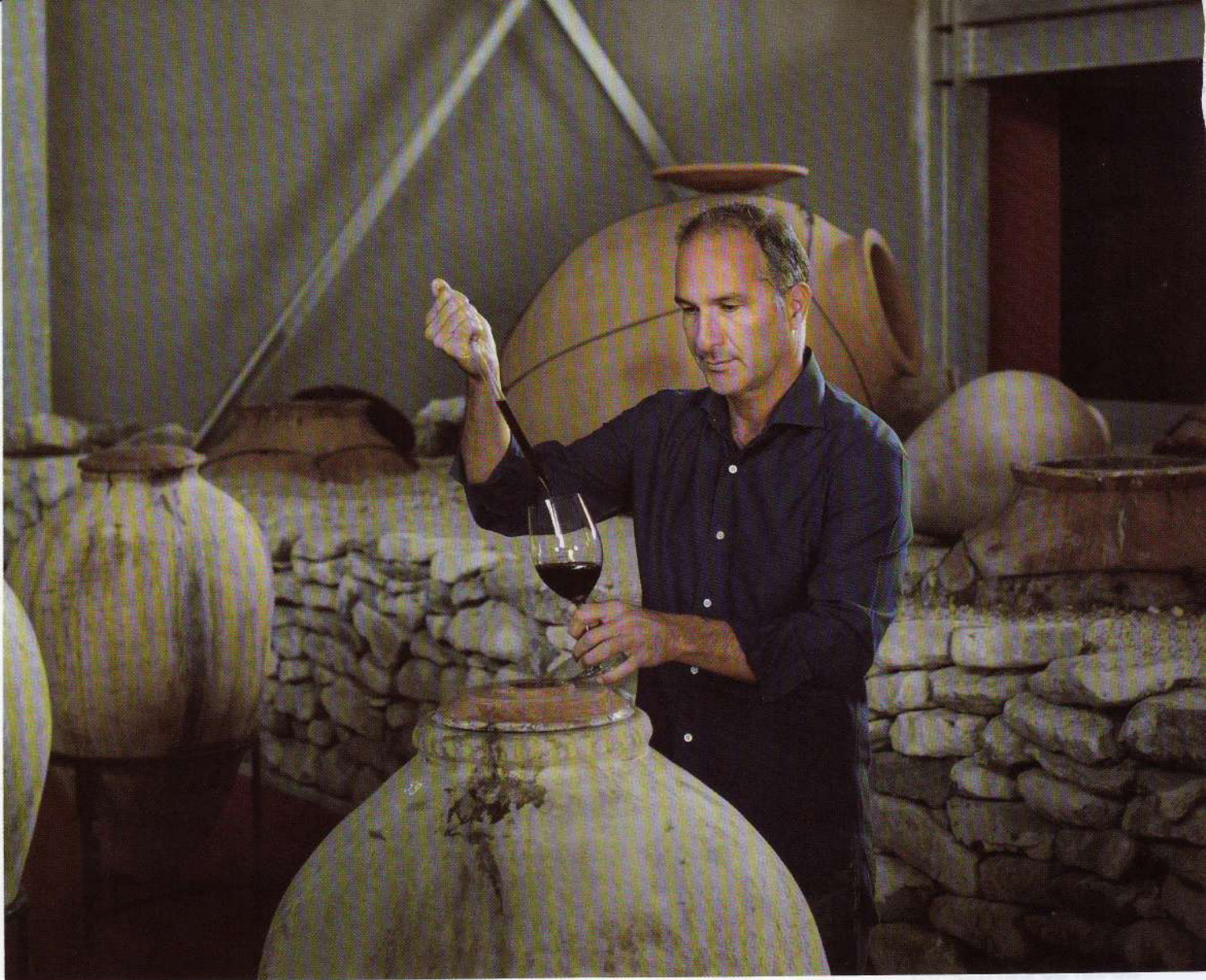
Today, Karas Wines lays claim to over 500 acres of land and employs over 500 people. Its vineyard grows both indigenous Armenian and foreign grape varieties from Italy and France. “Every grape we grow in Armenia has a distinct character, due to the unique terroir of our vineyards,” explains Del Aguila. “Even the Italian varieties like Montepulciano or Ancellotta taste and feel different in Armenia.”

Now, Karas has ventured into growing organic grapes to meet the rising demand for organic wines in the international market. With a current capacity to produce and bottle over 2,000,000 liters of wine, Karas projects an increase to 3,500,000 liters in the next few years, to be aged in its state-of-the-art local wine cellars. Fully committed to growing Armenia’s economy, Karas chooses to purchase its bottles and labels from Armenia and hire locals to work in their vineyards. Del Aguila acknowledges, “Our project is quite ambitious. We are not only trying to make good wine but also looking to enhance people’s lives.”

Karas Wines has won numerous international awards and is a best seller in Armenia and the Diaspora. The brand is available online from several online wine sellers, as well as in wine shops in Los Angeles, New York, and New Jersey, to name a few. Visitors to Armenia can tour the picturesque Karas vineyards, located in the lush Ararat Valley, a location Eurnekian had chosen intentionally. There is also a tasting room in which visitors can sample the variety of wines under the Karas name—red, white, rosé, and sparkling.







**VISIONARY**  
**Zorik Gharibian**

**Country of Origin:** Italy  
**Company:** Zorah Wines  
**Location:** Vayots Dzor, Armenia  
**Unique Attribute:** Authenticity

Italian-Armenian Zorik Gharibian, the founder of Zorah Wines, has a simple secret to success: to make wines he believes in. His artisanal products reflect his philosophy, as well as the heritage, culture, and land from which they originate. Working exclusively with native Armenian grapes grown in his vineyard in Rind, Gharibian shields his winemaking process from both human and technological intervention as much as possible, employing instead ancient Armenian winemaking methods, which involve aging the wine in clay amphoras. Wine critic Henry Jeffreys of *Food and Wine* magazine appreciates the approach, writing, “I tried a wine last

month that stopped me in my tracks. It was a red, aged in amphorae, traditional clay jars, from Armenia.”

With high marks from wine publications and top mentions on wine lists, the Zorah wines continue to delight the “winerati,” although Gharibian doesn’t seem to be focused on ratings and awards.

“If I am able to inspire the young generation of Armenian winemakers to believe in the potential of the land and create high quality, interesting wines from indigenous grape varieties, following traditional aging methods, Armenia can become a category in itself and I will have succeeded,” says Gharibian. He firmly believes that Armenia should focus on the quality of wines and that more family-owned boutique wineries should be established so that each winemaker can retain the authentic character of its label.

Aspiring to elevate the status of Armenian wines worldwide, Gharibian admits, “In order to achieve recognition, we have to be aware of the fragility of what we have and act responsibly.” He contends that the Armenian government should help ensure that the wine industry is built on a sound foundation with laws and regulations protecting the land and sparing the native grapes from diseases like Phylloxera—a grapevine parasite that can spread quickly due to irresponsible planting. “We risk losing a patrimony of ancient grapes, which are the heritage of our country and the world at large,” says Gharibian. He also advocates for winemaking in Armenia to be treated as a long-term enterprise and the industry should not aim for quick profits. “Wine is a slow process and patience is key,” he adds. Zorah produces two dry reds, Karasi and Yeraz, and one dry white, Voski.



VISIONARY

**Varuzhan Mouradian**

**Country of Origin:** United States

**Company:** Van Ardi

**Location:** Aragatsotn, Armenia

**Unique Attribute:** Prestige

There are many boutique wineries in Armenia and one of them is Varuzhan Mouradian's Van Ardi, located in the unique terroir of the city of Ashtarak in the Armenian Aragatsotn region—a setting with historic dimensions and an undeniable calling for winemaking since the medieval times. Mouradian repatriated with his family from the U.S. to

Armenia in 2008, investing entirely in his vineyards. "Our goal is to raise the profile of Armenia as the source of exceptional and exquisite wines that are of high quality and unique character," says Mouradian. "We are proud to say that in only five years of production we have achieved this goal, now entering our sixth vintage." The achievement has not only helped polish the impressive reputation of Armenian wines across international markets but also plays a significant role in the wine renaissance of Armenia.

Van Ardi grows five varietals in its vineyards, four of which are endemic Armenian varieties—*Areni*, *Kakhet*, *Haghtanak*, and *Kangun*. According to Ani Mouradian, her father was the first to disprove the notion that the Areni grape only grows well in Vayots Dzor, where the Areni village and the site of the world's first winery are located. "He planted Areni vines in the Aragatsotn region, and it performs fantastically," she says.

Van Ardi produces red, white and rosé wines and offers tours of the vineyard.



VAN ARDI





#### VISIONARY

### Vahe Keushguerian

**Country of Origin:** Syria/U.S./Italy  
**Company:** Wine Works  
**Location:** Yerevan, Armenia  
**Unique Attribute:** Originality

A Syrian-Armenian who spent parts of his life in Lebanon, the United States, and Italy, before permanently moving to Yerevan with his family, Vahe Keushguerian is the man behind some of the most esteemed and novel wine labels produced in Armenia. Considered by some to be Armenia's resident "wine guru," Keushguerian has mastered all phases of the winemaking process, from growing the grapes to producing, bottling, labeling, marketing and distributing products around the world. He even launched a print magazine called

*Origins*, a visual and verbal celebration of Armenian wine and cuisine.

Along with his daughter Aimee Keushguerian, who manages the daily operations while her father travels far and wide promoting Armenian wines, the two are on a quest to put Armenia on the map by putting its wines on the lists of the world's best.

Keushguerian's journey began as a waiter turned restaurant owner, which morphed into a wine manufacturing operation in Tuscany and Puglia. When he arrived in Armenia, his first pursuit was analyzing the potential of indigenous grapes, mostly by experimentation. The first of these experiments paid off with varieties like *Chilar* and *Tozot*. Starting with just a few barrels of untried wines, the results were surprisingly positive.

During this time, renowned winemaker Paul Hobbs, dubbed the Steve Jobs of Wine by *Forbes* magazine, visited Armenia to pursue a joint venture with partners Viken and Vahe Yacoubian of California. They enlisted Keushguerian to collaborate with them, which resulted in their first batch of Yacoubian-Hobbs wine, created at WineWorks.

Given these early successes and his state-of-the-art facilities, Keushguerian established WineWorks, the first and only wine incubator in Armenia. In just four years, WineWorks' output grew from 30,000 to 200,000 bottles. It currently incubates 14 labels both from Armenia and Artsakh.

WineWorks has special appeal for investors looking to create their own wine label. Once they purchase the land, plant vineyards or harvest existing grapes, they can bring them to WineWorks. Keushguerian takes it from there, producing, aging and bottling the wine under the family name or custom label. The WineWorks client can then market and distribute the stock independently. These limited signature-projects may be as modest as 10,000 bottles. In that case, the wholesale cost to the owner could be as low as \$4 per bottle, which includes everything from grapes to aging and bottling the wine. With an efficiently run distribution, the retail price could command twice or triple the amount, yielding a respectable profit. Alternatively, instead of purchasing land and growing the grapes, an investor can source the grapes directly from a local vineyard and develop the product under the aegis of WineWorks.

Keushguerian sees immense potential in Armenian wine to make the country famous while growing its economy with grapes as a major commodity. "Unlike other agricultural produce, wine is the only commodity that can be transformed into a luxury item. The same grapes can make wine that's \$2 a bottle or \$500 a bottle, but it's always that one kilogram of grapes. We have great tomatoes in Armenia, but no one boasts their tomato juice as the best on any list since nobody really cares. But for the wine they do. Only by serving up the highest quality products can we put Armenian wines in the company of wine nations," Keushguerian insists.

Some notable labels incubated at WineWorks include Yacoubian-Hobbs, Noa, Keush, Koor, Tus, Sarduri, Seraphim, Oshin, and Z'art, to name a few.



**VISIONARY**

**Armen Aslanian**

**Country of Origin:** California, U.S.  
**Company:** ArmAs Wine Estate  
**Location:** Aragatsotn, Armenia  
**Unique Attribute:** Immersion

Armen Aslanian repatriated to Armenia from California to establish ArmAs Wine Estate in 2007. Two years later, his daughter Victoria Aslanian joined him to continue advancing the ArmAs Estate brand. Sitting on 180 acres of land in the Aragatsotn region, ArmAs is more than a winery. It also runs a distillery and a dried fruits plant, as well as a boutique hotel and a grand tasting room with family-friendly entertainment. A lake, a farm, and a dormitory that is currently under construction, are also part of the estate.

“ArmAs has many plans for the future, all of which not only intend to grow and expand our “business,” which I prefer to call it our vision but also to develop our country’s wine and tourism sectors and the recognition of our country at large,” explains Victoria Aslanian.

ArmAs also organizes many events, including the Wine and Jazz Festival,



Blessing of the Grapes ceremony, Laugh and Wine, Summer Nights, and Harvest and Harmony get togethers where locals and tourists alike are invited to pair wine with

delicious food and breathtaking scenery. ArmAs produces nine award-winning wines using indigenous Armenian grape varietals.

**VISIONARIES**

**Hovakim Saghatelyan, Vahe Balouljian, and Andranik Grigoryan**

**Country of Origin:** US/Armenia  
**Company:** Trinity Canyon Vineyard  
**Location:** Vayots Dzor, Armenia  
**Unique Attribute:** Organic

Back in 2009, first time restaurateurs Hovakim Saghatelyan and partners

Vahe Balouljian and Andranik Grigoryan were searching for superior wines to serve at their newly opened restaurant in Yerevan. Not finding anything that suited their palates or menu, they decided to take matters into their own hands, purchasing a plot of land on which to

grow their own vineyard and produce their own brand of wine. Trinity Canyon Vineyard, located in Vayots Dzor, the cradle of Armenian winemaking, is the first and only vineyard in Armenia to produce organic wines. “We are a boutique winery expected to increase production to 35,000 bottles this year, most of which will be sold out before it is released,” says Saghatelyan.

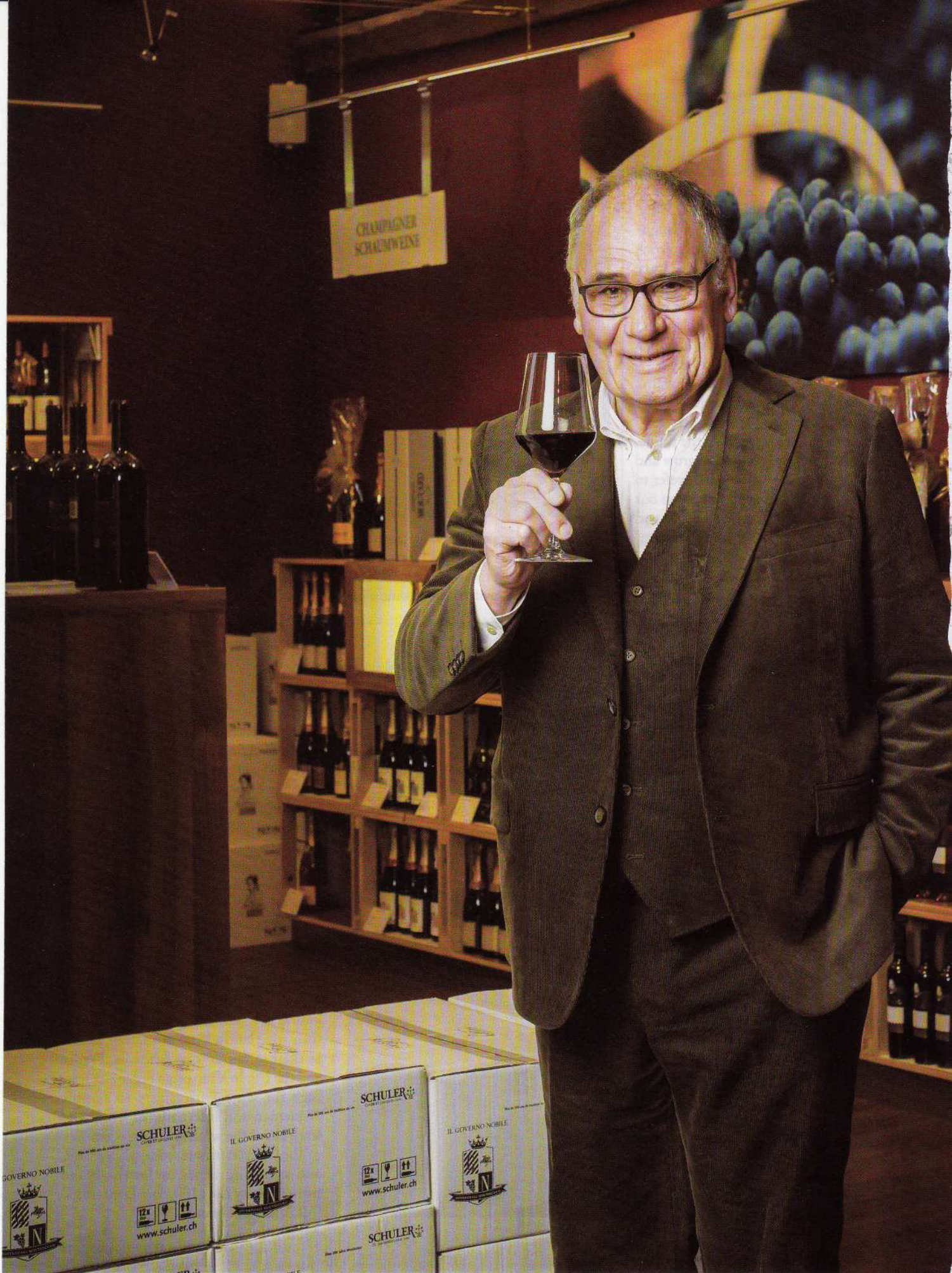
He explained that making organic wine in Armenia is an extremely challenging and expensive endeavor. “Everything works against you and unless you have limitless patience and an unwavering dedication to organic principles, it is very tempting to give up and take the easy industrial route.” The trio sells its wines in their wine bar In Vino in Yerevan, as well as their restaurants in Armenia, France and the US. In Vino often organizes tastings for wine enthusiasts to sample Armenian and international wines and learn about the winemaking process.

The Canyon features reds, whites, rosés and sparkling wines under the brand names Trinity Eh, 6100, Areni Ancestors’, JAZZ, and Crossroads. ■



TRINITY CANYON VINEYARD; ARMAS WINE ESTATE







# 2012: A Very Good Year for Jakob Schuler

*The timing couldn't have been better when the Swiss winemaker visited Armenia in search of the elusive grape*

Interview by **TAMAR HOVSEPIAN**

**I**ntrigued that wine originated in the Caucasus, Swiss winemaker Jakob Schuler, whose family owns boutique wineries in Tuscany and the Canton of Valais in Switzerland, tried to convince his team to start a new venture in the region. They didn't seem to be interested. In 2012, Schuler decided to explore on his own to see what the land had to offer. The first stop was Georgia to learn more about its famous grape variety *Saperavi*. Not quite convinced, he took an unexpected side trip to Armenia and stumbled onto Areni. The rest is history.

Today, Jakob Schuler produces NOA—Noah of Areni, using indigenous grape varieties while watching his business grow. In response to our question about the one thing about his experience that he would like people to know, Schuler replied, “I just want to emphasize that I am very happy to have started this very interesting venture/adventure in Armenia.”

The following is the full interview with

*Inset: A bottle of Schuler's NOA—Noah of Areni Red. Left: Jakob Schuler in one of his wine stores, Schuler St. Jakobskellerei, located in Switzerland.*

this master winemaker from abroad who fell in love with wine country in Armenia.

**Q** What inspired you to start a winery in Armenia?

**A** As a winemaker, I knew that wine had its origins in the Caucasus and that interested me greatly. In 2012, I traveled to Georgia but was disappointed by its autochthon grape variety *Saperavi*. Then someone mentioned Armenia and I decided to investigate. Yet I was disappointed once again with the big modern wineries that made Cabernet-Sauvignon, Merlot, etc. To me, it was just more of the same as every other wine industry in the world. It was only during the last two days of my visit that I discovered the very fascinating autochthon grape varieties Areni and Voskehut. I was amazed and knew I had found what I had been searching for.

**Q** Where is your winery located and what kind of wine do you make?

**A** We produced our first two vintages in cooperation with an existing winery in the Areni Valley. They produced Areni wine for us, following our instructions to prune the vines more aggressively and delay the harvest. It worked out well, but I felt that there was even more potential. We decided to purchase vineyards to







better control the entire production from pruning to harvest. This vinification is conducted in cooperation with a partner for whom we financed some of the cellar equipment. The fermentation and edification of the young wine are there and our partner Arman, a very good winemaker, oversees the process.

We don't have our own cellars yet, but it's what we have planned for 2021. Until then, we will continue developing and improving our vineyards. Our goal is not to create as large a winery as Karas or Armenia Wine. Instead, we will always be a niche player with very special products of the highest quality. We have 50 hectares of vineyards and 30 hectares of nude land on which we want to plant more vines. Our vineyards are in Rind and Aghavnadzor [in the Vayots Dzor region]. We have been producing NOA Red Classic and Red Reserve since 2017 and NOA White since 2018, as well as a few bottles of Rosé.

**Q What makes Armenia unique and appealing to foreign winemakers?**

**A** I believe Areni is the oldest grape variety. Our vineyards in Armenia are 1,200-1,500 m above sea level with very high day temperatures and cool nights, allowing berries to ripen with a unique aroma. We can make wine in Armenia that we cannot make anywhere else. This opportunity to cultivate something exquisite is very appealing.

**Q What were the initial challenges as well as the opportunities for establishing a vineyard in Armenia?**

**A** This project in Armenia was challenging in every possible way. Yet it was also extremely satisfying. We worked with good people who were eager to learn and work hard to achieve our goals.

*Schuler has vineyards located in both Rind and Aghavnadzor.*

**Q What is your overall vision for your brand?**

**A** We do not want to become the biggest, we don't even want to be big. However, we do try to be the "Best in Class."

**Q What are your measures for success?**

**A** When the customer comes back for more. That's what we consider success. The first time a customer orders a bottle of our wine in a restaurant or at a wine shop may be out of curiosity. When they buy it again, it shows that we have succeeded. Repeat business is critical for us.

**Q What differentiates you from your competitors in Armenia and elsewhere?**

**A** Maybe that NOA-Noah Wines are the first Armenian wines produced by a non-Armenian. We do many things differently, such as producing barriques with different sorts of woods that are tailor-made to the different origins and varieties of grapes and we run *Vinalytic*, quality control, and a research center. Although these are rather difficult things to do, we believe they will allow us to realize our full potential.



**Q What is your marketing strategy?**

**A** We all work and live for our customers. Satisfying or even fascinating our customers is our goal. The rest will follow.

**Q What does Armenia need to do to put its wine on the world wine map?**

**A** Armenia is on the right track. Only a few years ago Armenia produced only sweet, semi-sweet and aromatized wines mainly for the Russian market at cheap prices. Today the country is going to great lengths to achieve the desired varieties and terroir. Compared to the big wine producers in the world, Armenia is a small wine country. The only chance for it to succeed is to focus on the quality of its wines. Leave the mass production at low prices to Chile, Australia, and others.

**Q Do you envision a time when Armenia will join the ranks of other locations that are universally famous for wines?**

**A** Absolutely. The potential exists and many young, ambitious winemakers are working toward this objective.

**Q Do you have any new wines that are ready to go to market?**

**A** Unfortunately, our wines are not sold in Armenia. As of today, all our wines have been exported, sold and served in Switzerland and Germany. The 2017 vintage will be the first to be sold also in Armenia, China, and Russia. This wine is still aging in the barriques and has not yet been bottled.

**Q What is your personal favorite wine in the world and why?**

**A** The world of wine is so fascinating that it would be wrong to designate a favorite. I have many preferences. However, since I am closely involved with Armenia, NOA is certainly one of my favorites. 🍷

*Currently being aged in barriques, Schuler's 2017 vintage will be the first sold in Armenia.*