



comunicazione

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Drinks



Trendy orange wine has been made for centuries. Here's why you should drink it now.

Orange wine has been popular with sommeliers and wine aficionados for years, but it continues to become more mainstream. Local experts tell you what you need to know and how to shop for these wines.



From tea and quince to honey and savory mushroom, orange wines intrigue wine-lovers with an alluring range of flavors. Illustration by Joseph Hernandez



Recently, to pair with sushi at a friend's house, I brought an orange wine made from Virginia-grown viognier grapes. My friend looked at me quizzically and asked, "Is this wine made from oranges, or is it the color orange?"

The wine was in fact orange. While fairly pervasive among wine aficionados over the last couple of decades, orange wine is a style that continues to make in-roads into the mainstream. Sometimes pinkish, other times amber or a deep copper hue, this style derives from white grapes, in which their skins and seeds are left in to macerate (and sometimes ferment) with the grape juice, imbuing the wine with its telltale color, which deepens the longer it remains "on the skins." Also known as skin-contact white wine, orange wine is produced the world over — and has been for centuries.

Modern history

Orange wine's origins point back some 8,000 years to the sixth century BCE in the republic of Georgia, where wine was aged underground in ancient clay vessels called qvevri (or amphorae). The wine aged with the skins, imparting an orange hue and richer flavor. About 40 years ago, two winemakers — Radikon and Gravner from the town of Oslavia in the Collio wine region in Friuli-Venezia Giulia, in Italy's northeast corner along the border of Slovenia — experimented with this ancient winemaking process and introduced it to the modern world, according to Doreen Winkler, owner of New York's [Orange Glou](#) wine shop and wine club, which specializes in these wines exclusively.

These days, while Radikon, Gravner, and a small group of renowned Collio winemakers may claim to make some of the world's most sought-after bottles — often crafted from local ribolla gialla or friulano grapes — orange wine production has found its way around the globe and is now made from South Africa to Oregon's Willamette Valley to Australia. What once was a hip trend favored by wine geeks, orange wines now attract anyone interested in discovering new flavors.

What to look for

"For a lot of people, it comes to a pursuit of new experiences," said Emily Kovach, co-owner of Port Richmond's [Lunar Inn](#) and [Tiny Bottle Shop](#), which both offer orange wines. "Orange wine allows you to experience white wine varietals you know [like pinot grigio or sauvignon blanc], but it's about exploring new flavors and textures, [to] drive people to find things outside of the mainstream."

"The easiest thing to get into is sparkling wine," said Winkler, who suggests starting with a pétillant naturel, more casually known as pét-nat. "Pét-nat is the gateway to others."

Generally slightly effervescent with some cloudiness, these orange wines tend to fall to the lighter side of the spectrum. Think of flavors like kombucha, cider, or a sour beer and you get an idea, according to Chloe Grigri, owner of the [Good King Tavern](#) and [Le Caveau](#) wine bar off South Street, where she regularly rotates orange wines by the glass.

Beyond pét-nats, orange wines come in a wide range of flavors, colors, and styles from white grapes like pinot grigio, viognier, malvasia, and rkatsiteli, one of Georgia's oldest grapes. As beautifully light pink rosé wines have gained popularity recently, imparting crisp, dry wine with notes of strawberry, watermelon, and stone fruit, orange wines often resemble rosé in color, but are often produced with minimal intervention or manipulation.

"My favorite thing to tell people is rosé is to red wine as white wine is to skin-contact," Grigri said. "It'll be more structured. You'll find more tannins than white wine. And with the flavor profile, you get nuttiness, umami, earthy, mushroom, savory notes." These wines can taste bitter, barnyardy (that is, funky), and musty, or just plain dry and tannic to some. But others enjoy the robust mouthfeel, honey and nutty notes, even savory herbal flavors that skin-contact white wines offer.

"There's a wide range of fruit [flavors] you'll find," says Grigri, "but often you can have macerated golden apple skin that's zippier, pear, orchard fruit, peachy sometimes. The category is expansive."