



# Marching to its own beat



Turkey has been called the 'vicultural Garden of Eden'

**Quality over quantity is the new mantra for Wines of Turkey, which is taking promotion of its premium, boutique wines into its own hands, finds Carol Emmas**

**T**he newest, but simultaneously oldest, wine country to enter the UK market is Turkey. That may seem like an oxymoron, but it's the newest in the sense that although it is the world's sixth-biggest grape producer, only a small proportion of its harvest is grown for wine – and it's that which is about to be rolled out into the UK.

As for its being the oldest, that possibility will be debated at Discover the Roots, Wines of Turkey's inaugural conference and tasting, which takes place on February 24 at London's Vinopolis. According to biomolecular archaeologist Dr Patrick E McGovern, the author of *Uncorking the Past*, Turkey could be the "vicultural Garden of Eden", as his investigations have it dating back to at least 7000 BC.

#### **A long history and a promising future**

This is a good start for Wines of Turkey. The country has a long history, and its five winemaking regions grow more than 800 indigenous grape varieties, some with unpronounceable names such as Öküzgözü and Boğazkere. Sommeliers and independents are always on the lookout for quality wines with complex names, as

there's less chance of them hitting the mainstream.

The backing of leading wine critics could also help the country's wines gain wider popularity, with Jancis Robinson MW predicting that "it won't be long before Turkey produces something truly exceptional".

International Wine Challenge co-chairman Charles Metcalfe is equally optimistic: "There are several large companies in Turkey making very decent wines in an era of the boutique winery that is just beginning," he says.

At last year's IWC, the country scooped a 72% award rate. Of the 39 wines entered, 13% were awarded a silver medal, 18% a bronze medal, and 41% were commended. These accolades prompted the government to lend its weight to the creation of Wines of Turkey as a generic body. It was only the second time the originally industry-sponsored organisation had appeared at the LIWF, and in 2010 it could do so only with funding from the Turkish Tourism Office.

When the results were announced at last May's LIWF, the director of Wines of Turkey, Taner Ögütoğlu, called them "a great testament to our wines", before adding "this is just the beginning".

Since then, Wines of Turkey has been concentrating on establishing its portfolio and perfecting its marketing



Image: Photos.com

## WINES OF TURKEY'S PARTICIPATING WINERIES

■ Dating from 1926, **Doluca** now has over 35 wines in four different categories: red, white, rosé and sparkling. Its recent successes include Turkey's first varietal wines in the Sarafin series and Safir and Turkey's first natural sweet wine (doluca.com)

■ **Kavaklıdere** was founded in 1929 and has a product range of 49 wines, using the best Anatolian noble grapes and international grape varieties. Its wine production is carried out in Ankara, Cappadocia and Pendore in the Aegean region. Kavaklıdere exports 20% of its total production (kavaklıdere.com)

■ **Kayra** produces wines from both indigenous Anatolian grapes as well as international grapes in two wineries, one in Thrace and the other in eastern Anatolia. Its brands include Kayra Imperial, Kayra Vintage, Buzbag Rezerv, Terra, Leona and Buzbag (kayrawines.com)

■ **Likya** produces wines in the vicinity of Lycian ancient cities, between Arykanda and Oenoanda. Its portfolio includes such red wines as Merlot, Syrah, Cabernet Sauvignon, Kalecik Karasi, Öküzgözü, Pinot Noir and Pinot Meunier; and such fine wines as Sauvignon Blanc and Chardonnay made from white grapes grown at 1,100 metres altitude (likyawine.co.uk)

■ Established in 1962 as a family company, **Pamukkale's** vineyards are at an altitude of 900 metres in Guneş, Denizli, in the Aegean region. Since 1989, 20% of its production has been for Germany and France. It also exports to the Netherlands, Denmark, Austria and other European countries. Its products include Senfoni, Anfora and Anfora Trio (pamukkalesarap.com)

■ **Selendi** produces a single brand of red wine every year using chateau-style winemaking whereby grapes are carefully handpicked and processed on-site. Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Shiraz wines are blended to produce the Selendi wine for that year (selendi.com.tr)

■ Family-run **Sevilen** was founded in 1942 with just 4ha of vineyards in Izmir on the western Aegean coast. It now has 160ha of vineyards there and also produces grapes in the cool Mediterranean climate of the Anatolian plateau (sevilengroup.com)

■ **Vinkara** produces grapes from vineyards at an altitude of 680 metres in Kalecik, northeast of Ankara, a registered wine region with a special climate and terroir nourished by the Kizilirmak River (vinkara.com).

**'It won't be long before Turkey produces something truly exceptional' – Jancis Robinson MW**

strategy to enable the seven wineries it represents to enter the UK marketplace (see box). Reinforcing this message of quality over quantity, Ögütoğlu says: "First of all, Wines of Turkey will not offer simply another wine that is on the shelf. We do not need to compete because of our small scale at the moment compared to the international players. We will be a small generic boutique brand with our sales increasing slightly higher than the increase in rate of the wine market."

It may still be the beginning, but what of the future? The future is bright, according to Ögütoğlu, and he pulls no punches when he describes the country's winemaking prowess: "If the world was a united country and each country was a winery, Wines of Turkey would be one of the best boutique wineries of the world".

Ögütoğlu's aim is to concentrate on premium winemaking, with wine and gastro-tourism featuring as a strong part of the strategy. "We are making our plans with a long-term perspective and we want to find the right partners in the market," he explains.

Traditional tourism will also play a prominent role in the generic body's strategy, he adds. A strategy enhanced by the current strength of the euro, with Turkey offering great value for money as a tourist destination. "Turkey has become a second home to the British and our wine will become special for them. We see our distributors, retailers and each and every person in the chain as our partners. We will create added value for our partners," he says.

"The most important thing is to create a bond between the wine and the consumer. We have everything in our hands to create this bond." ■

## DISCOVER THE ROOTS

The inaugural Wines of Turkey conference and tasting takes place on Thursday, February 24 at London's Vinopolis. Director of Wines of Turkey, Taner Ögütoğlu, calls it "a milestone for Turkish wines at a time when the Turkish wine industry is producing fine wines from native grapes worthy of gracing the top tables of the world".

Chaired by food and drink writer and consultant Kevin Gould, the conference includes biomolecular archaeologist Dr Patrick E McGovern discussing Turkey as the possible birthplace of wine, and Jancis Robinson MW giving an introduction to Turkish wine and its place in the British market.

A tasting will see grape geneticist Dr José Vouillamoz and viticulturalist Professor Dr Gökhan Söylemezoğlu discussing leading indigenous Turkish grape varieties and their origins, genetic insights into grape varieties and an overview of viticulture in Turkey. Grape varieties explored will include Öküzgözü Boğazkere and Kalecik Karasi for reds and Narince and Emir for whites. Tim Atkin MW and Charles Metcalfe will also lead a series of masterclasses.

■ Register online at [winesofturkey.org](http://winesofturkey.org) by Friday February 18, or email [winesofturkey@redmintcomms.co.uk](mailto:winesofturkey@redmintcomms.co.uk)