

Try a bottle from Poland

Wine is probably not the first thing you think of in terms of drinks from Poland, but it's all the more to explore something new.

The photographer and winewriter Claes Löfgren tells us about Poland as wine country in both text and pictures.

When it comes to wine production in Poland, it is a fact that wine was already made in the 10th century when the country was a great power. It was mainly monks and nobles, but at the end of the 14th century the Little Ice Age and all the vineyards froze. A better climate led home growers to return to grape growing in the late 19th century, but war and the communist planned economy did not exactly create favourable conditions. After 1947, it was forbidden to grow grapes for wine production.

The modern Polish wine industry is said to have started in 1982 when photographer Roman Myśliwiec founded his Golez winery. He started an experimental nursery to see which varieties thrived. Golez ice wines made from frozen grapes quickly became famous and are still famous to this day.

The authorities were not so impressed, and it wasn't until 2009 that rules and laws allowed commercial winemaking, before which it was purely a hobby.

The last ten years have seen an explosion of new wineries starting up from north to south. Land is relatively cheap, the climate is going in the right direction for Poles, a growing domestic demand among the middle class, a slightly revived interest in wine, are positive factors for Polish winemaking.

The main districts are Lower Silesia around Wrocław, Lubuskie, Małopolska with Kraków as the main city, Podkarpackie at the foothills of the Carpathian Mountains and Świętokrzyskie with the cute historic town of Sandomierz, north of Kraków.

The climate is still a challenge, the majority of grapes grown are hybrids as in Sweden and Denmark, but the trend is clearly towards *Vitis vinifera* grapes like riesling, pinot noir and the usual set of popular grapes. One counts cold (sic) with climate change in other words. Grapes that have good resistance to disease, so-called, PIWI grapes are increasing also, solaris, sauvignier gris and muscaris (white) and cabernet cortis, cabernet jura and cabernet dorsa for red wines are widely used.

Solaris is the grape I have tasted the most and I must say that I am very impressed by the results.

Today, there are around 400 wineries with a cultivated area approaching 1000 hectares. They produce around two million bottles, a far in the wind internationally you might think, but interest is growing steadily and it's a young industry. By way of comparison wine is grown on around 150 hectares in Sweden.

The introduction to my report on Polish wines started with a cup of coffee! A meeting with Wojciech Bonkowski MW who is Poland's first Master of Wine, appointed in 2023. He has long fought to put the country on the wine map through blogs, websites and magazines. With the book *Polskie Wina*,

he has created the first comprehensive review of Poland's wines. He is a bit controversial among Polish winemakers, as he bluntly and bluntly declares that he does not like wines made from hybrid grapes. Then it becomes a bit frosty in a country where 70% of the wines were previously made from these grapes.

Fortunately, he wrote the book with five other collaborators who have a more open mind.

Wojciech has more than 25 years of experience in the international wine world, so it might be good to have someone who takes a sober on the country's development.

As I said, Solaris is the grape that

the most successful. It was created in 1975 in Germany by crossing the Merzling and Geisenheim 6493. The aim was to produce a grape variety that was resistant to disease, a PIWI grape, and which ripened early.

Good for viticulture in cool climates, solaris is very popular even in Sweden and Denmark.

It has previously been labelled as a hybrid,

but is now recognised as pure *Vitis vinifera* which

which means it is recognised as a quality grape in the EU. The name PIWI comes from Pilsnwiderstandsfähig. The German word for

'Solaris' is the grape that

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fungus-resistant. The most common *Vitis vinifera* grapes used in Poland are chardonnay pinot gris, gewurtztraminer, and pinot noir.

Zweigelt is on the rise as well as dornfelder.

A typical Polish vineyard is usually

2-3 hectares, but a few producers have

invested in more extensive plantings. One such

is Turnau, which is the largest with 37 hectares

and was started in 2010 in Baniewice by Zbigniew

Turnau and his son Jacek. His cousin Grzegorz

Turnau and Tomasz Kasicki are also important

parts of the project. The family had previously

been involved in farming and when they took over

another property, the question was asked,

why not wine?

The property was a long way from Poland's

Poland's main wine regions, so the decision was a

gamble. They brought in consultants who

assessment that the climate would still be

possible for grape growing. They invested in a state-of-the-art

state-of-the-art winery that would make

any French or Italian winemaker

green with envy. By chance, they also

they came into contact with winemaker Frank

Faust from the German Rheingau. Although he has

an acclaimed vineyard at home, he became interested and has been on board from the start as a consultant.

Solaris, chardonnay and pinot noir are mostly

planted but rondo, regent, seyval blanc,

hibernal and above all riesling are important

grapes. In some favourable years, ice wine is produced

from frozen grapes which has been sensationally

well-received.

Winnica Turnau is the most famous

Polish wine and has gained cult status. The wine

often appears as the only Polish name on the wine lists of fine restaurants. Apart from the quality of the wine, we should not forget that Grzegorz Turnau is one of Poland's most famous musician in Poland, active for over thirty years. Available on Spotify, really good!

Like so many other Polish musicians

The wine producers are investing heavily in enotourism with wine tastings, guest rooms and concerts in a renovated old house. Turnau differs slightly from the other successful producers by its north-westerly location near the German border, five miles from Szczecin and influenced by the Baltic Sea. The mild climate makes it possible to grow even *Vitis vinifera* grapes and a dozen producers, like Winnica Kojder, have followed suit and are successful today.

After meeting Wojciech Bonkowski MW in Warsaw, I start booking my visits and drive south towards Krakow.

Outside Sandomierz, 20 miles south, I meet the Plochockich family. Barbara and Marcin Plochockich are real veterans and

started their winery in 2006 as a hobby business. A meeting with the legendary Roman Myśliwiec got them hooked on the idea of own wine.

When the laws changed in 2009, they bought more land and started to invest more wholeheartedly. Today, they have expanded to 7 hectares of which 5 are in operation.

They have 20 different grape varieties planted which grown organically with elements of biodynamic methods. They believe that they have found a good

balance and harmony in the vineyard. Frost is always a problem, at least ten days before my visit in May, it had struck, but not

done any major damage. In a good year they produce 20,000 bottles and they are one of Poland's Poland's most award-winning wineries. They are following the trend planting more PIWI grapes and aiming to expand the *Vitis vinifera* grapes even more.

When I enter the wine cellar, bottling is underway. The farm has three employees

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while the son is about to move in with his family, hence the expansion of the cultivation area. Everything is done manually in the old way but hygiene is top notch. Further into the basement I am greeted by Poland's first qvevri, a clay amphora bought in Georgia and transported here.

They visited the country a few years ago and were inspired. In the qvevri they produce an orange wine according to the Georgian recipe. Hungary and Austria are other countries they have visited often and have been influenced by.

I taste through the wines, which are all a very high class. We are talking about pinot noir from 20 in bottle, 21 and 22 in barrel. The white wine Inspira Volcano made from seyval blanc, sibera and hibernal grapes aged in Hungarian oak has won many medals in competitions.

Winding roads through the Polish countryside finally bring me to the lovely city of Krakow, now one of Europe's hottest

tourist magnets. It is teeming with people from the world and Swedish is one of the most languages spoken. At dinner tonight I order a glass of solaris from Winnica Novi, whom I had never heard of before.

1. Winnica Plochockich has Poland's first qvevri, imported directly from Georgia.

2. Marcin Plochockich pours a sample of pinot noir.

3. Barbara and Marcin Plochockich started their winery in 2006. 1

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>that are located there and receive thousands of visitors every year.

In fact, the winery is located right above the salt mine tunnels. Together with her with her husband Piotr Jaskola, Agnieszka runs probably Poland's most famous winery, apart from Turnau. Uncompromisingly, they make their wines from biodynamically grown grapes, only Vitis vinifera, on the 7 hectares they dispose of. Not even solaris has been approved but riesling, gewurtztraminer, chardonnay, grüner veltiner, muscat, merlot, cabernet franc and pinot noir are on the wine list.

Agnieszka is something of a legend in Poland. Educated in Montpellier, France, she has worked in vineyards all over the world. Or as she puts it herself:

- As a flying winemaker, I have advised others on how not to ruin their wine.

The wines are consistently good, some perhaps a little more odd, but it's fun to have winemakers who are taking the plunge with great self-confidence. How about the cuvée regis, a blend blend of merlot and pinot noir? Or the cuvée seraf, chardonnay, sauvignon blanc and pinot gris? The winery was started ten years ago when Piotr drove past the area and saw the amazing possibilities.

The altitude is 420 metres above sea level and the slope 60 degrees.

'In Poland you are not only a winemaker but also a farmer. The investment in land and winery requires a lot of money and it will take 15-20 years before they can expect expect to get any return'

Winnica Jura is another pleasant acquaintance. Marcin and Joanna Miszczak started the winery eight years ago. Marcin has a colourful colourful background to say the least. At the age of 13 emigrated to the United States where he grew

grew up. After studying, he ended up as a political analyst in Washington. He then started a technology company that also became successful. There he faced a life crisis, sold everything and moved to Argentina where he learnt to dance the tango. He then became a tango teacher and travelled the world performing at shows and tango festivals. His time in Argentina taught him a lot about wine and when he met his future wife Joanna, a trained sommelier, a bell rang. We are going to make wine! Poland wasn't the first choice, he admits, but the country's entry into the EU decided the matter, plus some of his family had moved back.

- My mum had moved to Krakow and I loved the city from the start. I've always have always done things 200 per cent and here there were opportunities,' says Marcin. The step from analyst, tech entrepreneur, tango teacher to winemaker is undeniably long and a little odd, but there is a determination in Marcin that impresses. In Poland, however, you're not just a winemaker but also a farmer. The investment in land and winery requires a lot of money and it will 15-20 years before they can expect to get any return. The 15-16000 bottles they produce annually are not enough, so Marcin and Joanna are investing heavily in ecotourism, weddings and dinners, to make it all to make ends meet. Meanwhile, all the wine is sold directly from the farm so he doesn't have to deal with middlemen. The property is very well managed and the wines really good.

American Mike Whitney at Winnica Adoria was born in California and moved to Washington State as an adult, where his interest in wine

5

>was awakened. A job offer lured him in 1995 to the somewhat dazed Poland, which had beginning to open up after communism. The growing interest in wine led him to eventually started looking for opportunities to invest in a vineyard. It took him ten years before, with the help of specialists and after careful analyses, he found what he was for. Outside Wroclaw, in the village of Zachowice, the pieces fell into place. The first wine was made in 2008 when the vines had reached the necessary age. He planted chardonnay, pinot noir, riesling and bacchus. Bacchus is he alone in Poland, but the results in Germany and especially in England gave him the inspiration. The original three hectares he planted is now up to 12 hectares, he rents land from neighbours and buys some grapes, mainly Dornfelder. He has invested heavily in a state-of-the-art equipped winery with the latest equipment from Italy.

In fact, Adoria is currently the only Polish wine available on the Swedish market. The wine people run wine bars in Stockholm and Copenhagen while also

importing wines they like. Via their website vinfolket.se it is easy to order the wines. I did not have the opportunity to visit Adoria during my trip to Poland, but tried the wines at the wine bar on Kungsholmen. I was very positively surprised by both pinot noir and chardonnay wines. When I call Mike, he is filled with enthusiasm and tells me how the journey has taken him through difficulties and joys.

Production today stands at around 60 000 bottles a year and will increase slightly.

When asked if they are organic, he replies a little cryptically.

- 'We make wine like in the 1940s, when there were no chemicals and artificial fertilisers. As close to nature as possible. The climate here is like Champagne and Rheingau but we avoid frost damage as the eastern location gives a slightly longer growing season. No damage in 23 years!

Another Polish winemaker with experience from the USA is Piotr Stopczynski, who studied at UC Davies and worked in Napa. After

1. Winnica Jura vineyards are located among the rapeseed fields.

2. the facility is small but enough for the 16 000 bottles they produce. Corporate events and weddings add to the coffers.

3. Marcin and Joanna Miszczak at Jura decided to make wine together.

4. Wine shop, wine bar and restaurant. Mielżyński is a must-visit in Warsaw. All wines on sale can be drunk with food with a 40% surcharge.

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>back to Poland, he has consulted and has done much to raise the level of the country's wines. Today he is responsible for the wines at the luxurious Palace Mierzecin, a spa hotel near Szczecin (Stettin) in northern Poland.

Other wineries to watch are Jakubów, Skarpa Dobrska, Kojder and De Sas.

The latter is biodynamic and has invested heavily in producing the wines in Georgian qvevris.

Just as I write this, I receive

that a new producer, Winnica

Charbielin has released her first wines to a of journalists and winemakers. With

27 hectares, they are Poland's second largest wine producer and a huge investment. That says a lot

about the confidence in Poland's future.

To summarise my impressions of

Poland as a wine country, it is much bigger and

more interesting than I could have predicted. It's still a young industry with a lot of gold diggers that spoil the serious ones, but it is a

maturing market and, somewhat cynically
that climate change is actually
playing into the hands of Polish winemakers.

WINE BARS I WARSZAWA

Mielżyński

Located in two places in the city and is both a shop
and wine bar/restaurant. They also import
wines so the range is very wide.

More info: mielzynski.pl/en

Ale Wino

An oasis in the big city. You enter through a
portal, walk across a courtyard and end up in a
wine paradise.

More info: alewino.pl/en

Brać Polish Wines

Newly opened bar that is fully committed to
serving only Polish wines.

More info: facebook.com/bracpolskiewina

Barawino

Available in both Warsaw and Krakow. Has a
wide range of wines from Poland and the rest
of the world. They are owned by the wine importer Kondrat
which has wine shops in most Polish cities.

More info: marekkondrat.pl or barawino.pl

Dyletanci

Exclusive restaurant and wine bar. Has Poland's
largest selection of wines, mainly from France.

More info: dyletanci.pl/en

1. Winnica Turnau is owned by
Zbigniew Turnau, his son
Jacek and cousin Grzegorz,
here in the newly built
winery.

2. Turnau Solaris with the
elegant white label is
a bestseller.

3. Solaris thrives in cooler latitudes and resists many
diseases.

4. Wojciech Bonkowski MW
has written a book on Polish
wines.

5. most of Poland's vineyards are located outside
Krakow, here Silver Mountain
Vineyards, Srebrna Góra.

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PHOTO WINNICA TURNAU

PHOTO ISTOCK