

Decanter

# MOLDOVA

A wine country full of surprises:  
Destinations, producers and award-winning wines

A *Decanter* guide produced in partnership with Wine of Moldova



WINE OF  
MOLDOVA

UNEXPECTEDLY  
GREAT



Despite being one of Europe's smallest countries, Moldova exports wines to 69 countries around the world

# A country of unexpectedly great wines

Moldova's wine industry is taking many by surprise, winning awards with native varieties, capitalising on global trends and positioning itself as a strong presence on the international wine scene

Situated between Romania and Ukraine, Moldova is one of Europe's smallest countries. A hearty spirit is required for winemaking here, where freezing winds are a common occurrence. Yet it is these winds that provide the cooling influences needed for more gentle, slow ripening despite the fierce Moldovan sun. Soils are predominantly alluvial: composed of a mix of sand, clay, limestone and a thin layer of dark, nutrient-rich chernozem.

## The changing face of Moldovan wine

It may not be the most well-known winemaking country, yet producers have

quietly revolutionised the industry in recent decades, creating quality wines with personality. After a century of political and cultural upheaval, Moldova has carved its own path and secured a strong future for the sector. Quality continues to rise and the country's wines have won over 7,000 medals at international competitions in the last five years.

Moldova's wine industry now benefits from more rigorous traceability standards and quality controls, and dynamic marketing that has opened new markets. In 2024 Moldova exported bottled wine to 69 countries, with its top markets being the USA, Romania, the Czech Republic, Poland

## MOLDOVA'S KEY GRAPES:

**Fetească Albă:** Delicate and fresh, often used for sparkling. Aromas of acacia flowers, citrus and apples

**Fetească Regală:** Crisp, aromatic still whites with body and texture; notes of grapefruit, pear and citrus

**Viorica:** Aromatic expressiveness and refreshing acidity: intense jasmine flowers, hints of lychee and herbs

**Fetească Neagră:** Deep, serious reds with wild cherry aromas, black pepper spice and good structure

**Rară Neagră:** Grown mainly in Ștefan Vodă PGI. Delicate tannins and flavours of rosehip and redcurrant

**Saperavi:** Brought to Moldova in the 1800s, it offers notes of smoked plums, blackcurrants and blackberries

and the Netherlands, with 51% of exports destined for Europe.

The International Organisation of Vine and Wine (OIV) has chosen Moldova to host the 46th **World Congress of Vine and Wine** from 16–20 June 2025, recognising the country's work towards sustainability, and further raising Moldova's winemaking profile. This milestone event, which will be held in the capital city of Chișinău, marks a key moment for the country, where over 700 experts will come together to grapple with the future challenges and opportunities that the wine industry faces.

## Keeping things local

Like many small and dynamic producers in Moldova today, Ion Luca of **Carpe Diem** is committed to promoting indigenous varieties. 'They are unique and give us a better chance to survive,' explains Luca. With so much competition in international markets, particularly at premium price points, local grapes offer differentiation.

Luca is particularly enthusiastic about Viorica, a white variety that is proving very versatile. It is the protagonist in a new dry wine in his range, as well as an orange wine and even a late-harvest sweet wine that won a Best of Show award at Mundus Vini.



Ion Luca, winemaker at Carpe Diem

## Another reason for celebration

'Our historical habits of celebrations heavily drive the popping of bottles,' president at **Radacini**, Dimitrii Titica is excited about growing sparkling wine consumption, which in Moldova outstrips that of still wine.

The country has a long tradition of sparkling production, thanks to perfect conditions in Codru PGI in the centre of the country, where a cooler climate produces grapes with good acidity.



Dimitrii Titica, president of Radacini



Vasile Roșca, president of the Divin PGI Association



## 'From local varieties Viorica and Rară Neagră to Divin brandies and world-class bubbles, Moldova's wines and spirits are setting new expectations'

Titica is encouraged by the development of different styles: 'We have seen a steady switch from semi-dry products to Brut, Extra Brut and even recently Brut Nature.' Radacini's own range includes delicious sparkling wines from indigenous grapes such as Viorica and Fetească Albă, as well as the award-winning Métier line of traditional-method sparkling wines.

## History distilled

Moldova also enjoys a long tradition of brandy production. These distilled wine spirits undergo significant ageing and are classified within the Divin PGI (meaning divine in Romanian). 'What makes Divin so special is its harmonious blend of tradition, terroir and time-honoured craftsmanship,' explains Vasile Roșca, president of the Divin PGI Association, 'It's a soulful expression of a place and its people, starting in the 19th century.'

These brandies follow a strict categorisation to maintain quality, according to defined minimum ageing requirements. 'This patience results in a depth of flavour that's both complex and approachable,' states Roșca: 'You're not just tasting a drink – you're experiencing the spirit of Moldova, a piece of history, a labour of love passed down through generations.'

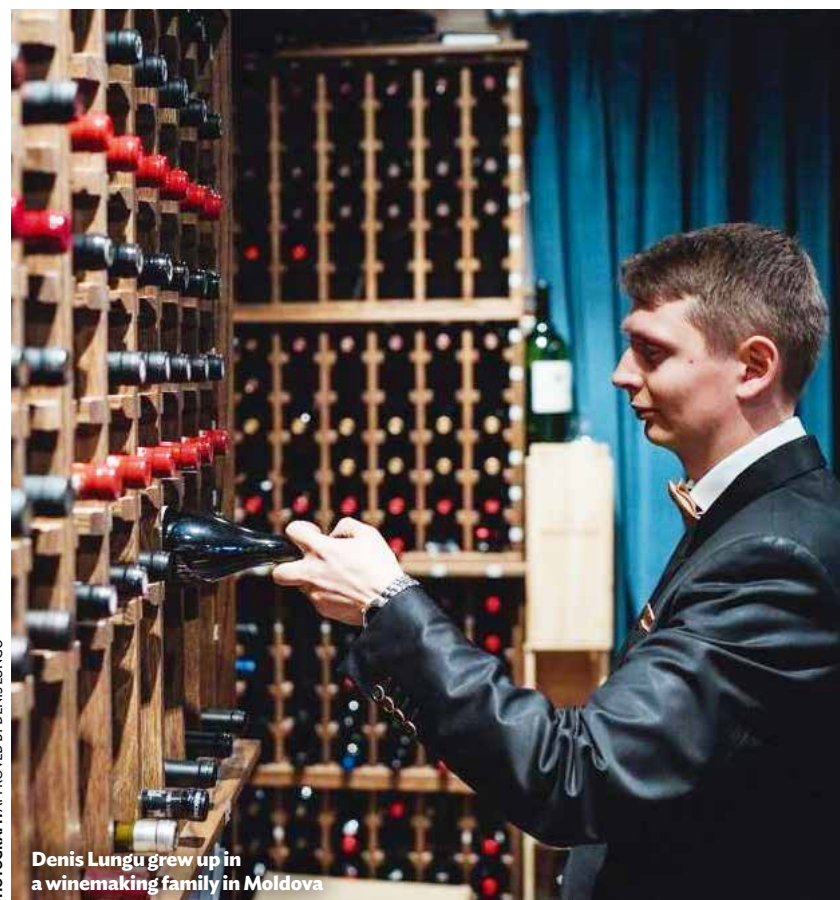


Sergiu Pislaru, director of Sălcuța

## Setting new expectations

For Sergiu Pislaru, director at the **Sălcuța** winery in the Ștefan Vodă region, the UK market is proving very receptive to its wines. Highly successful on the export market, Sălcuța's unique offerings include white blends of Viorica, Chardonnay and Riesling, as well as its Winemaker's Way Fetească Neagră, a celebration of an ancient variety that thrives in the terroirs of south-eastern Moldova.

From local grapes Viorica and Rară Neagră to Divin and world-class bubbles, Moldova's wines and spirits are setting new expectations.



Denis Lungu grew up in a winemaking family in Moldova

PHOTOGRAPH APPROVED BY DENIS LUNGU



Moldovan wines offer exciting food matches

**‘Growing up in a winemaking family in Moldova, Lungu learned firsthand about low-intervention winemaking’**

# In conversation with senior sommelier Denis Lungu

*Decanter* sits down with Gleneagles hotel’s talented Moldovan sommelier to discuss his home country’s wines and perfect pairings

**G**rowing up in a winemaking family in Moldova, Denis Lungu learnt firsthand about low-intervention, natural winemaking. He remembers fresh, fruity wines, made from local grape varieties such as Fetească Neagră and Fetească Regală.

Now as senior sommelier in the Gleneagles team, he’s introducing Moldovan labels to the UK market, both through the wine list and via public tastings with WoodWinters, in collaboration with specialist Moldovan importer **WineChateau.co.uk**. He chooses local Moldovan grapes as a unique proposition for the UK market.

As examples, Lungu highlights **Mileștii Mici’s Purpuriu de Purcari**, made from Pinot Franc (a crossing of Pinot Noir and Cabernet Franc, developed in Moldova in 1965, and rare to find as a monovarietal wine) and **Lupi**, a beautiful blend of Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Saperavi produced by **Gitana**.

**How would you pair Gitana’s award-winning Manastirea Rohrbach Cru 2020?**

This 100% Riesling expression from Gitana is fresh and vibrant, with aromas of honeysuckle. Slightly off-dry (like many

Moldovan wines – due to the hot climate), it ages beautifully, gaining petrol notes. Pair with a traditional Moldovan rabbit dish, cooked in double cream. The wine’s fresh acidity and gentle hint of sweetness complements the tender, light meat and buttery, creamy sauce. Smoked lobster is another perfect pairing.

**What gives Moldovan winemaking a point of difference?**

From rustic, skin-contact, natural wine styles made in small quantities, to a rise in biodynamics and traditional approaches such as foot treading, winemaking in



Château Vartely in Codru PGI

Moldova celebrates innovation. One exciting example is the first wine to be made with AI in Moldova, which was presented at ProWein, Düsseldorf, in 2024.

**What challenges and opportunities does Moldova’s climate bring?**

Temperatures can reach 40°C in summer and can drop as low as -16°C in winter – but Moldovan wineries have adapted to these extremes. Careful pruning is needed to avoid frost damage: either in autumn or closer to spring. In winter, the vines are buried with compost or ash to protect them from frost.

Moldova is also experimenting with ice wine – **Château Purcari** produces a nice example from Muscat Ottonel and Traminer, whilst **Château Vartely** makes a delicious expression from Riesling.

**What can you tell us about Moldovan sparkling wines?**

Moldova makes traditional-method sparkling wines as well as tank-method wines. A key producer is **Cricova**, who pioneered the traditional method in Moldova and still hand-riddles for its vintage cuvées, which see five years on lees. I shared Cricova’s **Grand Vintage Brut 2012** (100% Pinot Noir) as a part of a blind tasting for my team, and they were blown away.

Sparkling styles in Moldova range from extra brut to sweet, often made with local grapes such as Fetească Albă and Fetească Regală. **Château Purcari** was among the first in Moldova to use local varieties in its sparkling wines, all of which are made using the traditional method. Its **Cuvée de Purcari Fetească Albă Brut** is a great example of how well suited these grapes are to sparkling wines.

**Finally, can you recommend two local grapes, and how would you pair them?**

The white variety **Viorica** can be made in a range of styles, from dry to off-dry, and orange too. It’s somewhere between Gewürtztraminer and Pinot Gris, with notes of acacia, lemon, lime and apricot: making for very ripe wines, yet with beautiful vibrancy and freshness. When vinified as an orange wine, it gives notes of dried apricots, nectarines, honeysuckle, honeycomb and a hint of sourness.

I’d pair **Viorica** with traditional Moldovan fish dishes: lake fish fried in breadcrumbs or baked carp. It works beautifully with the oiliness, nice acidity and fruit balance of a dry or orange **Viorica**.



Crama Mircești in the Ungheni hills, in Codru PGI

For reds, **Rară Neagră** – which I see as somewhere between a Pinot Noir and a Gamay – is made both in fresh, vibrant, lighter styles as well as oak-aged expressions, and is well-suited to carbonic maceration. At **Château Purcari**, they are experimenting with late-harvest examples as well as night harvesting to preserve freshness and acidity. I would pair a chilled glass of **Rară Neagră** with a traditional Moldovan savoury pastry, **plăcintă**. The wine’s red fruit works beautifully with the fluffy, buttery pastry and salty cheese fresh from the oven. This is a very food-friendly variety – the vibrancy of its fruit would also suit fish dishes.



Château Purcari is a historic producer in Ștefan Vodă



Cricova's wine cellars are housed in 75 miles of subterranean tunnels

# The Wine Routes of Moldova

Part of the *Les Chemins de la Vigne* network of European wine routes, the Wine Routes of Moldova are the perfect way to discover the country's exceptional wines, beautiful landscapes, rich cultural heritage and warm hospitality

The Wine Routes of Moldova link together key wine destinations across the country. The network is accredited as a European Wine Route by the Council of Europe, and was named best wine route of 2024 by the Iter Vitis federation. Journeying along it, visitors can discover Moldova's unique blend of traditional and modern winemaking with five days of tasting, culture and relaxation.

## Day 1

Start by exploring the Neoclassical boulevards of Moldova's vibrant capital, **Chişinău**. Come face-to-face with the sculptures of the Alley of Classics in **Stefan Cel Mare Park**, admire the frescoes in the **Nativity Cathedral** and delve into the country's heritage at the **National History Museum**. Enjoy discovering

the wonderful wine shops and bars that the capital has to offer, including: **Plincuvin Wine Boutique**, **wine.md** and **Wine Republic**. For lunch, try some *plăcintă* (local pastries) at the aptly named **La Plăcinte** café.

Then head to the city's outskirts to visit **ATU**, Moldova's first urban winery, housed in a former warehouse covered in murals and graffiti. This boutique winery crafts expressions of local varieties such as white Viorica and red Codrinschi, in very small volumes. In summer, enjoy the tranquillity of the nearby **Botanical Garden** or travel back to the 17th century at the **Village Museum**. Then spend the evening sampling boutique Moldovan bottlings at cosy wine bars or enjoying fine dining at the stylish **Divus Restaurant** in the Thomas Albert Hotel.

## Day 2

Start your trip through the central **Codru PGI** region at the historic **Cricova Winery**, famed for its sparkling wines, and explore its 75 miles of wine cellars in what was originally a limestone quarry. Visit over winter to join (or just watch) **Wine Run**, a 10km race through the labyrinth by torchlight.

At picturesque winery **Crama Mirceşti**, you can admire the view over the Măgurii hills, known as Moldova's 'Little Tuscany', and relax over a light lunch, paired with Mirceşti's wine. Brandy lovers should continue north to the **Barza Albă Distillery** in Bălţi to sample its award-winning Divin (Moldovan brandy).

Alternatively, cycle through the landscape on one of the region's bike routes or explore the river Nistru (Dniester/Dniester) by kayak,



Traditional folk dancers celebrate Moldova's National Wine Day

**'Moldova's National Wine Day celebrates the country's wine culture with music, tastings and open cellar events'**



Explore Moldova's history at Chişinău's National History Museum

visiting the 13th-century **Saharna Monastery**, or the **Tipova Cave Monastery** within the cliffs themselves. In the evening, head to **Château Vartely** for a gourmet meal with its award-winning wines, then stay in one of the Château's private villas.

## Day 3

Nearby you'll find **Orheiul Vechi**, a Stone Age archaeological complex ringed by limestone cliffs. The surrounding Orheiul Nature Reserve is also home to birdwatching routes and hiking trails along the Raut river gorge, and each June hosts the open-air **Descoperă Classical Music Festival**.

Heading south of Chişinău, you won't want to miss the world's largest wine cellar at **Mileştii Mici** winery, holder of the Guinness World Record for the largest wine collection – now over two million bottles. You can cycle along some of its 125 miles of tunnels before enjoying lunch in an elegant dining room – the traditional *sarmale* (stuffed cabbage rolls) are delicious.

Check into a traditional cottage at the family-owned **Asconi Winery**, then savour authentic Moldovan hospitality and food such as *mămăligă* (polenta), paired with Asconi's excellent wines.

## Day 4

It's well worth a detour into the south-western **Valul lui Traian PGI** region to visit the large, modern **Vinuri de Comrat** and sample local Gagauzian cuisine.

Situated close to Chişinău, the architecture of the magnificently restored **Castel Mimi** is not to be missed – you could easily spend the day here, especially if staying at its sustainable five-star hotel. Relax in the spa or pool, take a tour, picnic in the gardens, taste the wines and eat in the fine dining restaurant.

## Day 5

In the south-east of the country, the **Ştefan Vodă PGI** region offers picture-perfect vineyards, peach orchards, lavender fields and cutting-edge winery **Et Cetera**. Visitors can enjoy a home-cooked lunch in its cosy restaurant, where rabbit is a specialty.

Tour the vineyards and winery at nearby **Château Purcari**, one of Moldova's oldest and most prestigious wineries. Here you can taste famed wines including **Negru de Purcari** (a favourite of Queen Victoria) or the poignant Georgian-Moldovan-Ukrainian **Freedom Blend**. After a few hours boating or fishing on the Nistru, or



Check into a traditional cottage at Asconi Winery



The Tipova Cave Monastery in the cliffs overlooking the Nistru river

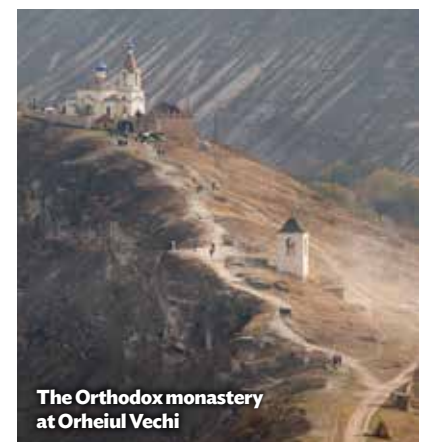
admiring the scenery from the terrace, round off your Moldovan adventure with dinner and an overnight stay.

For an even more unforgettable experience, plan your visit to coincide with exciting wine events or festivals. Come on 4-5 October for Moldova's **National Wine Day**, including festivals and open cellar events, in September for the **Author Wine Festival**, dedicated to small producers, or in December for the year's largest Moldovan wine showcase, **Wine Vernissage**.

If you have extra time at the end of your trip, head down to the village of **Slobozia Mare** in the Cahul district to enjoy the diversity of **Lake Beleu's** wildlife, from pelicans to water lilies. Whilst you're there, you can visit third generation winery **Vinăria din Vale**.

### Discover more:

- [moldova.travel](http://moldova.travel)
- [wineofmoldova.com](http://wineofmoldova.com)



The Orthodox monastery at Orheiul Vechi



# Taste Moldova

Seek out these Gold medal-winners from specialist Moldovan wine importers [transylvaniawine.co.uk](http://transylvaniawine.co.uk) and [winechateau.co.uk](http://winechateau.co.uk)



**Casa Vinicola Luca, Carpe Diem Fetească Albă, Codru 2022**

100% Fetească Albă. Delicious white peach, melon and crunchy green apple notes bustle and swirl over the lime peel acidity and delicate mineral character. Long, pure and saline. **Alc** 13%



**Crama Mircești, Fetească Albă 2022**

100% Fetească Albă. Delightful lemon blossom, white peach and fresh apple flavours gently lap against mineral backbone and whistle-clean acidity. Beautifully made with a long, elegant finish. **Alc** 12.5%



**Gitana Winery, Manastirea Rohrbach Cru, Valul Lui Traian 2020**

100% Riesling. Enthralling lime, lemon zest and ripe yellow peaches with engaging, waxy texture and lingering, lifted acidity. Stony and austere toward the salty finish. **Alc** 13.5%



**Château Vartely, Individo Rară Neagră-Malbec-Syrah 2021**

37% Rară Neagră, 33% Malbec, 30% Syrah. Lavish spiced plums, blackberry and red cherry notes interact skilfully with nutty oak and coffee. Plump and buoyant with elegant tannins. **Alc** 13%



**Château Purcari, Academia Purcari Rară Neagră, Ștefan Vodă 2020**

100% Rară Neagră. Damson, cherry and forest fruit dance over subtle oak and slate-like texture. Velvety and sleek with a long, mint-infused finish. **Alc** 13%



**Château Purcari, Nocturne Rară Neagră, Ștefan Vodă 2022**

100% Rară Neagră. Alive with crunchy red fruits, brambles and bounteous florals, full of energy and verve. Supple and smoky with refined tannins and a crisp freshness on the finish. **Alc** 13.5%