

Bucharest Stories: Alina Iancu, Wine Ambassador

Every time you see Alina Iancu of Revino.ro, she is holding a glass of wine. Most likely a white Fetească Regală, a semi-aromatic Romanian variety similar to Chardonnay and first discovered in Transylvania. It's her favourite. Her Facebook page is an endless list of envy-inducing landscapes seen through the cup of a chilled wine, all in the vineyards of Romania. Since 2013, she's become a tireless promoter of Romanian wine tourism. "I was drawn by the people I met while traveling," she says. The more she travelled throughout the country and fell in love with its winemakers and their unique stories, the more she wanted to share the distinct value of Romanian wine.

"By comparing with vineyards I visited abroad, I realised Romania has much to offer in the way of local grape varieties." Romania doesn't have the long-enduring heritage of France or Italy – marred by decades of communism no less, when quality was largely diminished – but it does have significant, auspicious land and a growing number of people who harvest its potential. With some 180,000 ha of vines and scenic backdrops few know about, Romania is fifth in terms of vineyard surface in the EU after Spain, France, Italy and Portugal, and sixth in terms of wine production.

In recent years, Romanian wine tourism has registered an upward trend, which is why Iancu first came up with the idea of founding *crameromania.ro* in 2014, the only bilingual online database of Romanian vineyards catering to people interested in discovering them. The next step was launching ReVino.ro, a rich information based website taking visitors on Romania's wine trail, with tips on where and how to plan your visit to local vineyards. The site includes access to Romania wine maps (in both Romanian and English), explaining the local grape varieties and pinpointing to some 168 vineyards in the country's five main wine regions. Options are plentiful – where to start is the golden question.

"I feel most at home in Drăgășani Vineyard in Oltenia," Iancu admits, at Stirbey winery. Closest to Bucharest, however, 90 minute drive away and a suitable destination for a day or weekend trip is the Dealu Mare Vineyard, home to some 35 to 40 wineries where reservations for tours should be made in advance, preferably for more than just two people. Some even include accommodations.

Connoisseurs and newcomers alike can learn more about Romanian wines at the yearly ReVino Bucharest Wine Fair Iancu launched in 2016. Envisioned as a wine



salon where guests can taste premium wines and meet the winemakers and winery owners face-to-face or by participating at a master class, the festival proved a success from the very start. On offer are a variety of reds, whites and rosés, as well as Romanian sparkling wines that are increasingly evolving and diversifying. "Following each festival, we see a solid 5-10 per cent growth," Iancu says, already setting the stage for next year's edition to take place on May 11-13, 2019, at the Novotel Bucharest City Centre. Thanks to wine ambassadors like herself, requests for tours from the international press are pouring in.

So what's the best way to choose a good Romanian wine? "Head to a specialty store instead of the supermarket," Iancu advises, "where there is a larger diversity and wines are kept at constant temperatures preserving its quality. Personnel are also better qualified to answer questions."

Luckily so, opportunities to sample local wines abound. Many wine bars in Bucharest hold weekly tasting nights (during the cold season), such as VINO Wines and More on Strada Mihai Eminescu, and more likely monthly during the summer season. And for those curious for more, WINE CRAFT Tasting and Paring Academy also holds WSET (Wine and Spirit Education Trust, founded in the UK) courses. "The consumer culture is growing very quickly," Iancu says. And judging by the sheer number of fantastic wine bars popping up in Bucharest, the desire for premium local wine is evident. Whether it's a white Sauvignonasse 2017 from Bauer wine cellars in Oltenia, a rosé from Liliac, harvested from the rolling hills of Transylvania or the exceptional red Cuvée Charlotte from Serve, first time visitors to Bucharest don't need to go far for a taste of quality wine.

When she is not traveling the country meeting winemakers, Iancu spends her days in Bucharest, holding her meetings where else – in wine bars and bistros. She is asked so often where to go for good wine, that she created a list to be found online at *crameromania.ro*. Oscar, her cat, is particularly joyful roaming the discreet garden terrace at Nido's Kitchen & Wine, in the posh Aviatorilor district. In Bucharest's Old Town, Corks (see page 61) and Abel's Wine Bar are perfect for a glass of wine and charcuterie, with seats getting filled up quickly at the stylish Păine și Vin (page 55) who function on a walk-in basis only. Gourmet lovers can further indulge in bistro fare at Floreasca's Tasting Room by Ethic Wine (see page 65). There are 50 of them in total.

Her latest passion project aims to portray the genuine experiences and people producing wine that got her hooked in the first place. A ReVino.ro and Black Hat production coming out in September, *Wines of Romania - Pure Experiences* is a travel documentary that follows Robert Marshall, an Englishman living in Romania, throughout his journey discovering Romanian wineries and their surrounding regions. Robert is a wine specialist who wanted to learn more about Romanian grape varieties and so he travelled around the country to discover where these vines grow and to learn more about their history. "We wanted to change the way Romanian consumers drink wine in the countryside – home brewed, kept in a plastic bottle – without compromising the authenticity of Romania's traditions," says Iancu about her dream endeavor. Cheers to that. We will certainly be watching.

To learn more about Romanian wine, visit www.revino.ro/en or follow Alina on Instagram @revino.ro.

Wine Ambassador

ALINA IANCU PROMOTES ROMANIAN WINE TOURISM. HAVING TRAVELLED ACROSS ROMANIA VISITING OVER 70 WINERIES, SHE FOUNDED CRAMEROMANIA.RO IN 2014 AND REVINO.RO TWO YEARS LATER. SHE SPEAKS TO MONICA SUMA