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Historic Wine Symposium Unites East and West in Georgia

Over 30 Grand Cru Burgundies and top Chinese Cabernets featured alongside Georgian vintages

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The Tsinandali Estate in Kakheti, Georgia, recently hosted a two-day Grand Jury du Vin Symposium, bringing together over 30 Grand Cru Burgundies and a showcase of wines from around the world, including top Chinese Cabernets and Georgian wines from the 2019 vintage. The symposium, typically held at Lake Como, made its way to Georgia, giving wine lovers and critics an opportunity to experience rare and expensive wines

side by side. Among these was Romanée-Conti, which can sell for over $2,000 a bottle, highlighting the luxurious atmosphere of the event.

The choice of Georgia, a country with a wine history dating back 8,000 years, was symbolic. Levan Davitashvili, Georgia's Minister of Economy and Sustainable Development, emphasized the significance of showcasing Georgian wine to global markets, pointing out the country's geographic and cultural role as a crossroads between Europe and Asia. This setting was fitting for a historic meeting of Western and Eastern wine traditions.

Tsinandali Estate, the venue, is a significant cultural landmark, once owned by Prince Alexander Chavchavadze, a celebrated Georgian poet and Major General who turned his estate into a hub for art and winemaking. The estate was modernized by the Silk Road Group in 2008 and now features a luxurious Radisson Collection Hotel, blending old and new architectural styles. Today, it stands as one of the top destinations in the Caucasus, with wine playing a central role in its appeal.

The event was an essential moment for Georgia's wine industry, which has undergone substantial transformation since the end of the Soviet era. The Soviet Union's occupation damaged Georgian winemaking by enforcing strict production methods and uprooting many indigenous grape varieties. After gaining independence, Georgia struggled to break its dependence on the Russian market, especially after a damaging wine embargo in 2006. This forced the industry to adapt to Western tastes, moving away from sweet wines toward dry, high-quality options.

The Grand Jury du Vin was established in 1996 and is known for its blind tastings of exceptional wines, featuring critics from across Europe. Honorary President Laurent Vialette explained that the Grand Jury seeks to evaluate wines independently, using tasters with proven, consistent palates. The group relies on support from governments and has organized tastings in several countries, including help from China to showcase their best Cabernets alongside global benchmarks like Sassicaia and Château Angélus.

Attendees at the symposium not only sampled Burgundies but also had the chance to explore Georgia's unique wine traditions. At the Tsinandali Estate winery, winemaker Sopo Khutidze demonstrated the use of qvevri — traditional clay vessels buried

underground. Guests sampled qvevri wines, including a promising 100% Rkatsiteli, and learned about the estate's new biodynamic vineyard project. Khutidze explained the use of biodynamic methods, including Swiss preparations of herbs and manure, which have improved grape health.

Georgia's wine culture extends beyond the vineyards. The event was punctuated with performances of polyphonic singing and appearances by the Georgian National Ballet, reflecting the country's rich musical heritage. The wines, from the Tsinandali Estate and elsewhere in Georgia, were consistently praised for their quality, raising the question of whether Georgia still needs to compare itself to established regions like Burgundy. The country has evolved, offering world-class wines rooted in its own deep traditions.