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American orange wine gains popularity as producers refine style and consumers seek new flavors

Winemakers focus on balance and approachability while overcoming misconceptions and expanding the category’s reach in the United States

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Orange wine, a style of white wine made by fermenting grapes with their skins, has roots that stretch back 5,000 years to Georgia and the Fertile Crescent. Despite its ancient origins, orange wine has only recently begun to attract attention in the United States. American winemakers are now developing their own versions, focusing on lighter color and tannin levels compared to traditional Old World styles. These New World orange wines are often fresh and fruit-forward, making them approachable for consumers who may be unfamiliar with the category.

Nicole Walsh, director of winemaking at Warroom Cellars in California, began experimenting with orange wine in 2021 after discussions with company president Andrew Nelson. Their goal was to create a Pinot Gris-based orange wine that would appeal to new drinkers. Production started small, but demand quickly grew. Today, Walsh produces about 35,000 cases annually for Bonny Doon Vineyard and private label clients. She has observed a significant increase in consumer awareness: while only about one in ten U.S. wine drinkers knew about orange wine a few years ago, she now estimates that half of the wine drinkers she encounters are familiar with it.

Field Recordings Winery in Paso Robles, California, is another leader in the American orange wine movement. Founder Andrew Jones started making orange wine in 2017 with a blend called Skins, which includes Chenin Blanc, Pinot Gris, Colombard and other white varieties. Since its release in 2018, Skins has become a major driver of growth for the winery. Jones says orange wine now accounts for more than half of Field Recordings’ production and reports annual growth rates between 15% and 25%.

Despite this momentum, orange wine still faces challenges breaking into the mainstream. Many consumers associate it with natural wines, which can have a reputation for being hazy or having unusual flavors. Aaron Walker of Pali Wine Company acknowledges that some buyers are hesitant because they believe natural wines can be flawed. Still, his Wild Series orange wine has been a consistent top seller since its launch in 2021.

Producers emphasize balance when crafting their wines. They aim for enough tannin to add structure without overpowering the fruit flavors. Keith Johnson of Devium Wine in Walla Walla, Washington notes that reactions to orange wine can be polarized—some

people love it while others do not understand it. In regions known for other styles, such as Washington’s bold reds, alternative wines like orange can struggle to find shelf space and consumer recognition. However, interest is growing in larger cities like Seattle.

Orange wines first gained popularity in independent shops and trendy bars in metropolitan areas before spreading more widely. Producers agree that education is key to expanding the category’s reach. Doreen Winkler, sommelier and founder of Orange Glou—a Manhattan shop dedicated entirely to orange wines—believes these wines are among the most versatile for food pairings. She says they solve pairing challenges that previously stumped sommeliers.

Nicole Walsh finds orange wine pairs well with spicy cuisines such as Mexican food because the tannins can handle heat without the heaviness or high alcohol of red wines. Other winemakers recommend skin-contact whites with Asian dishes traditionally paired with sweet whites like Riesling.

Erik Miller of Kokomo Winery produces an orange wine called Marmalade under his Breaking Bread label. He has seen significant growth over the past three years and notes that some restaurants now feature “Skin Contact” sections on their wine lists alongside rosé.

While Old World orange wines from Georgia or Italy are often savory and high in tannin due to long maceration periods on skins—sometimes up to a year—American producers tend to favor shorter skin contact times and focus on fruit and acidity. The result is a fuller-bodied yet refreshing style with aromas ranging from citrus zest to apricot and spice.

Most New World producers avoid new oak barrels to preserve fruit character and use stainless steel tanks or neutral oak for fermentation. The finished wines often have a hazy appearance due to pectin from grape skins; while this is seen as a nod to natural winemaking traditions, producers take care to minimize sediment through settling or gentle filtration.

The choice of grape variety is flexible; Pinot Gris, Chardonnay, Muscat Blanc and even Riesling or Gewurztraminer are used by different producers depending on desired aroma and acid profiles. Picking grapes at lower sugar levels helps maintain acidity and keep alcohol low—a priority for many winemakers seeking balance without additives.

Winemaking techniques vary but generally involve destemming grapes (except for some minimal-intervention producers), allowing extended skin contact during fermentation and using native yeasts rather than commercial strains. Some winemakers allow malolactic fermentation for added stability; opinions differ on sulfur use, with some adding small amounts for protection while others avoid it entirely.

The time spent on skins ranges from two weeks to two months depending on grape variety and stylistic goals. Temperature control during fermentation helps preserve aromatics; most aim for temperatures similar to those used for white wines.

As American producers continue refining their approach, New World orange wines are finding an audience among younger consumers looking for something new and versatile. While still not as mainstream as rosé, orange wine’s unique character and adaptability at the table suggest it could soon become a staple in U.S. wine culture.