



King George Chapter
May 2025
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May 9th, 2025

Topic: Sam Lerman, President and CEO of Spyrt Worldwide, presented a line of SHABO Winery wines from Odesa, Ukraine

Eighteen members and six guests met at City Vino for the King George Wine Society's May 9th tasting. The guests are members of the City Vino Wine Cru. The group was encouraged to take this field trip to City Vino by owner Rita Allan to then host Sam Lerman. Secondly, it was for a quick change of scenery and to have the members explore the new store.

Sam Lerman, CEO and Founder of Spyrt Worldwide, a company focused on importing Ukrainian wine, vodka, and other spirits, visited City Vino to share his remarkable journey, the story of SHABO Winery, and a flight of eight Ukrainian wines with the King George Wine Society. The evening was a captivating blend of history, personal mission, and exceptional winemaking. Here are the highlights of a night that took guests from the shores of the Black Sea to the vineyards of Odesa, Ukraine.



Sam, a Washington, D.C., native, served twelve years in the U.S. military and continued his career in the defense industry. Much of his work involved equipping Special Operations units with life-saving gear. In March 2022, when war erupted in Ukraine, he volunteered to assist the Ukrainian Ministry of Strategic Industries, and what was meant to be a brief mission turned into a life-altering experience. Only weeks into the full-scale invasion, Sam found himself staying in a safe house in Ukraine, where he quickly connected with the Ukrainian people, their purpose, and their resilience. He also discovered Ukrainian wine—a hidden gem he would later bring to the United States.



Over the course of several trips, Sam began “bootlegging” wine home to share with friends and family. He quickly discovered a gap in the U.S. market: There was no Ukrainian wine available in retail or restaurants.

Recognizing both a business opportunity and a way to support Ukraine, Sam founded Spyrt Worldwide in January 2023, with Maksym, president, a Ukrainian veteran, friend, and successful serial entrepreneur who taught Sam about Ukraine while in the safe house; and David, a retired U.S. Marine Corps officer and colleague from the defense industry who has built numerous successful companies. Their mission is twofold: Introduce Americans to the



excellence of Ukrainian products, and support humanitarian and tactical aid efforts. Spyrnt Worldwide has pledged 15 percent of profits to Invictus Global Response, a veteran-run EOD group providing lifesaving aid on the frontlines in Ukraine by clearing Russian landmines and training Ukrainian deminers.

The wine flight began with the **NV SHABO Winery Primo Secco Brut**, a Charmat-method sparkling wine made from the indigenous Telti-Kuruk grape. This varietal, grown exclusively in the Odesa region for over 200 years, is believed to be the only sparkling version of its kind in the world. The grape, known for its resilience in sandy soils, produces a light, fresh, floral wine reminiscent of Prosecco. SHABO Winery, established in 1822 by Swiss settlers who declared the land “Heaven on Earth for winemaking,” is situated in the town of Shabo, just south of Odesa. The location enjoys 300 days of sun per year, and the cooling effects of the Black Sea help preserve acidity in the fruit, making it ideal for quality winemaking.



Ukraine’s winemaking tradition dates back 2,500 years to the Greeks. Successive waves of empires—Ottomans, Turks, and Russians—shaped its wine culture. During Soviet times, SHABO was nationalized and its focus shifted to quantity over quality. When the winery was privatized, Vaja Lukuridze, a Georgian immigrant with a vision, decided to mortgage all his assets to raise \$50,000 as a down payment to purchase the winery. Over time, Vaja and his son Giorgi, who now runs the business, invested nearly \$115 million into modernizing the facility, bringing in cutting-edge technology and French expertise. Today, SHABO holds 35 percent of the domestic brandy market, and their wine program, while smaller in output, is a showcase of passion and precision.



Next in the flight was the **2023 SHABO Winery Telti-Kuruk Reserve**, a still white wine made entirely in stainless steel to highlight the grape’s natural character. This unoaked expression showcases the grape’s purity: light floral notes, crisp acidity, and an almost chameleon-like ability to pair with nearly any cuisine. The name Telti-Kuruk, meaning “foxtail,” was given by the Turks in reference to the shape of the grape clusters. Because phylloxera cannot survive in sand, many of Shabo’s vines remain on their original rootstock, some dating back to the 1970s. The head winemaker, Olga, leads a team of seven women—not by design but by merit. Their collective vision is to let the grape speak for itself.

SHABO has also embraced sustainability. All vineyard pruning from its 3,330-acre estate are converted into energy by a custom-built biomass boiler, heating the entire production facility.



The **2022 SHABO Winery Chardonnay Reserve** introduced the group to SHABO's tiered wine program. The Reserve level is fermented in stainless steel and aged for six months in large, second-use French oak barrels. These barrels provide gentle oxygen exposure and a subtle textural roundness without overwhelming the wine with oak. SHABO also experiments with Austrian oak in small batches. The goal is balance—to soften the wine without masking the varietal's identity. The Chardonnay Reserve demonstrated that beautiful balance, with soft acidity, bright orchard fruit, and a creamy mid-palate.



Sam shared a slide of SHABO's sparkling wine facility, a stunning modern structure constructed using reclaimed bricks from an 18th-century castle in Lviv. Anchored in tradition, yet facing the future, the building also houses one of Ukraine's only atomic clocks. This visual served as a metaphor for SHABO itself—a winery grounded in centuries of heritage, yet constantly evolving.

The **2022 SHABO Winery Telti-Kuruk Grande Reserve** was the first Grande Reserve wine of the night. This level is vinified with meticulous attention: Picked at dawn and immediately refrigerated for the trip to the winery in small crush-proof boxes, grapes go through multiple rounds of hand selection before being individually sorted and selected in a machine from Bucher Vaslin that uses optical sensors and lasers to measure every single grape for size, shape, and weight. Fermentation occurs in temperature-controlled French oak, followed by extended aging also in new French oak. The Telti-Kuruk Grande Reserve exhibited richer texture, depth of flavor, and subtle oak integration. The vines used for this wine were planted as far back as the 1970s and have reached full maturity. This expression revealed how versatile and age-worthy this indigenous grape can be, showcasing notes of stone fruit, herbs, and a touch of salinity.

Next came the **2023 SHABO Winery Merlot Reserve**, a red wine that demonstrated Ukraine's ability to produce internationally recognized varietals with finesse. Fermented in stainless steel and aged six months in oak, this Cabernet showed bright blackcurrant, cherry, and cedar aromas. On the palate, it had soft tannins and a long, elegant finish. SHABO's red wines focus on balance over brute force, which differentiates them from many New World styles.



The Merlot Reserve offered a more opulent experience. Aged in a combination of French and Eastern European oak, the Merlot was velvety and rich with notes of plum, mocha, and dried herbs. SHABO's careful oak regimen and the moderating effect of the Black Sea allow these Bordeaux varietals to achieve ripeness without losing freshness.

The penultimate wine was the **2023 SHABO Winery Saperavi Reserve**. Saperavi, a

teinturier grape from neighboring Georgia, has adapted well to Ukraine's southern terroir. Deeply pigmented and powerful, the Saperavi Reserve was structured and spicy, with flavors of blackberry, clove, and tobacco. It was a crowd favorite and exemplified the potential of cross-cultural varietals in Ukrainian soil. The wine had been aged in oak for six months, allowing its robust character to harmonize.

The final wine of the evening was the **2023 SHABO Winery Cabernet-Merlot Grande Reserve**, a wine of intensity and refinement. Along with the Grande Reserve process mentioned earlier, this wine is fermented in temperature-controlled 5,000 liter Taransaud French oak vats, then aged 12 months in new French oak. This was the flagship red, showing rich layers of black cherry, cassis, vanilla, and leather. This wine underscored SHABO's ability to craft age-worthy reds that could rival counterparts from Napa, Bordeaux, or Tuscany. Despite the challenges of ongoing conflict, the winery has never lost a vintage, a testament to its resilience and commitment. A fun side note on this wine. The Grande Reserve is showcased at the La Cité du Vin in Bordeaux. It should say something, it's SHABO's Bordeaux Blend. The French, in their



infinite wisdom, are selling a Ukrainian wine in Bordeaux!



Throughout the tasting, Sam wove stories of courage, resilience, and hope. He shared images of drone interceptions, and daily challenges that the SHABO team faces. Despite six drones being shot down near the estate in 2024, no lives have been lost, and the vineyard continues to thrive. The Dniester Estuary bridge, a strategic link to Odesa, was destroyed, forcing longer travel routes. Still, SHABO presses on.

The winery has repurposed its two hundred year old historic cellars, built by Swiss settlers, into a cultural space that hosts rotating exhibits of contemporary art inspired by the vineyards. These creative expressions reflect the spirit of a nation that continues to create beauty in the face of adversity.



The evening concluded with a sense of reverence and excitement. For the guests at City Vino and the King George Wine Society, the tasting was far more than a wine event. It was a journey through a country's past, present, and hopeful future—told through the lens of an inspiring veteran and a collection of extraordinary wines. Ukraine, through SHABO and Sam and his partners' vision, now has a place on American tables and in American hearts.



Below are the voting results:

#	Wine	Fav/ White/ red	Favorite Overall	Cost \$
1	Shabo Winery Primo Secco Brut White Odesa Ukraine NV	7	2	\$16.99
2	Shabo Winery Telti-Kuruk Reserve Odesa Ukraine 2023	1	2	\$27.99
3	Shabo Winery Chardonnay Reserve Odesa Ukraine 2022	5	1	\$27.99
4	Shaho Winery Telti-Kuruk Grande Reserve Odesa Ukraine 2022	15	11	\$59.99
5	Shabo Winery Merlot Reserve Odesa Ukraine 2023	7	5	\$27.99
6	Shabo Winery Saperavi Reserve Odesa Ukraine 2023	9	7	\$27.99
7	Shabo Winery Cabernet Sauvignon Merlot Blend Grand Reserve Odesa Ukraine 2023	10	5	\$59.99
8	Shabo Winery Limited Edition Saperavi Merlot Odesa Ukraine 2022	-	-	\$35.99

