



ABOVE: Jake Skakun pours a skin-contact wine, Weiss & Grau from Enderle & Moll, at Grey Gardens

# BACK TO BASICS

It might seem like a fad, but orange wine is one of the oldest winemaking processes. The Grape Witches help us unravel the skin-contact confusion.

**F**IRST WE HAD rosé all day, then Aperol spritz took over the Internet, now orange wine is rising through the ranks of top drink trends. The hype is new, but the technique to create this insider-favourite is ancient. Before there were phones, cars (and most things because it was 5,000 years ago), people made orange wine. There's history in each glass, and we've got your lesson covered.

### What is orange wine?

First things first, it's not made from oranges. Orange is just the colour used to describe the vast range of wines that macerate (soak) with grape skins. Amber, orange, skin-contact, skin-fermented white wine, call it what you want, this wine has more names than a member of the Royal Family.

### How is it made?

Skin on. Orange wine is a white wine made like a red wine, so instead of separating the grape skins from the juice after they've been crushed, like you do for white wine, the "white" (usually yellow or green) grapes macerate and ferment with their skins and seeds. This process can last from a couple of days to over a year and gives the wine its texture and unique colour that ranges from a pale yellow to deep red-orange to rusty brown. The longer the fermentation is allowed to carry on for, the darker the finished wine.

### What does it taste like?

**NICOLE CAMPBELL, CO-FOUNDER OF GRAPE WITCHES**

"Some of the best orange wines are made from aromatic grapes, so you end up with this flush fruit aroma, almost like a tropical fruit, but it's super savoury and nutty. When you first smell it you almost think it's going to be a sweet wine."

### Is it sweet?

Actually, no. What contributes to orange wine's savoury notes, and all-round tricky to categorize nature, are its tannins, a characteristic that adds bitterness and astringency. Since the grapes are left in contact with their skins, grape tannins dissolve and create complex, intense flavours that balance well with the underlying acidic quality of white wine. "Wow, wine can taste like this?" - We hear that a lot when people first have orange wine," says Campbell.

### Where is it from?

"It was probably the first way wine was made, just chucking grapes into a pot to ferment," says fellow Grape Witch, Krysta Oben, co-founder and the other half of the coven. This ancient practice can be traced back to 3000 BCE in what is modern-day Georgia (the country, not the state) where grapes fermented with their skins and seeds in large underground, clay vessels known as qvevri. Today, the process looks relatively similar - besides the addition

of technology and barrel or bottle ageing - sticking to its low-intervention, natural roots.

### Why is it trendy now?

Partly social media, but also "maker-culture" according to the Grape Witches. The ancient process of making orange wine was brought back to life in 2000 - during the current era - in Italy, and thanks to some ambitious wine makers, sommeliers and restaurateurs it's now more widely available.

### What does it pair with?

**KRYSTA OBNEN, CO-FOUNDER OF GRAPE WITCHES**



"Skin-contact wine is great for pairing with a variety of food, so anything that can be a challenge, pickled things, fermented things - something a white wine might get lost with and a red wine might overpower. Orange wine can bridge that gap of having the tannin and structure of a red, but the refreshing, higher-acid qualities of a white."

### How should it be served?

The Grape Witches suggest serving it at a white wine appropriate temperature (7-13 C). Start with it slightly chilled, then let it warm up a bit in your glass to allow the wine to breathe and reveal its flavour and aroma.

### Where can you buy it?

Orange wine is hard to find at the LCBO because it's made in smaller quantities. However, in Ontario, you can go direct and get your fave skin-contact wine from the importer. Or go local at Rosewood Winery in Niagara or Trail Estate in P.E.C. [f](#)

## WHERE TO GET IT

### GREY GARDENS

199 Augusta Ave.

A restaurant that's also a wine bar - and specializes in both - what more do you need? You could spend the whole night with the Grey Gardens wine list (expertly guided by sommelier Jake Skakun) without feeling intimidated or getting bored. They have two skin-contact wines by-the-glass and usually six to 10 more by-the-bottle - including their own which they make in collaboration with Tawse Winery. [greygardens.ca](http://greygardens.ca)

### MIDFIELD WINE BAR

1434 Dundas St. W.

At Gladstone and Dundas, you'll find this cozy vino bar where wine nerds pour themselves over the novel-sized bottle reserve list. But even if your wine lingo caps out at two basic colours, there's lots here for you. They have around 10 skin-contact wines by-the-glass, so you can try a whole bunch (no judgement) and see just how different each one varies in taste and colour. [midfieldwine.com](http://midfieldwine.com)

### PARIS PARIS

1161 Dundas St. W.

Don't let the name fool you, this all-day wine-and-snack bar features wine from all over the world. When she's not educating us about wine, Krysta Oben is managing the floor here and curating the extensive wine list. The approach to wine at Paris Paris is unpretentious and meant to complement the colourful dishes and laid-back, airy atmosphere. Skin-contact wines are available by-the-glass or as a whole bottle. [parisparis.ca](http://parisparis.ca)

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