



“The first problem is historical,” he said. “For a long time Bulgaria supplied cheap wine to Eastern Bloc countries and getting rid of that perception is difficult.

“Then we have the relationship between wine and food. When I am eating French cuisine in France I love a glass of Bordeaux. When I am in Tuscany, I love a glass of Chianti, for example. Wine has naturally evolved to perfectly accompany the regional foods it is served with, and the harsh fact is Bulgarian food is not hugely popular across Western Europe and so for diners it is not a natural choice.

“Then there is tourism. Every year millions of British people visit France and Spain, and wine is part of that holiday experience. They have great memories of drinking it and so, when they return home, they naturally seek the same wine. As Bulgarian tourism is in its infancy for UK travellers, we do not have that selling point or reputation.

“The truth is, while in Bulgaria our domestic sales continue to rise, year after year, export sales overall are shrinking,

because consumers equate Bulgarian wine with the past, even though the product is now very different. Other wines are perceived as more desirable and having a better image, even though they might not taste as good.

Give it a go

Such a description is enough to make anyone want to drown their sorrows. But Mr Haramliysky is upbeat.

He said: “The major challenge we face is simply to get people to try it. More often than not, their reaction is “wow.” We are producing great wine at great prices and we need people to discover that. Despite export sales issues, we operate on good profit margins which allows us to invest more in marketing and advertising, and Bulgaria is now

being more heavily promoted as a tourism and wine destination.

“Covid saw our export sales rise: As we are concentrated in the retail sector overseas, the closure of restaurants and hotels did not damage us, and people were buying more wine to consume at home as they could not go out.”

Mr Haramliysky concluded: “In the early 1980s there was a Bulgarian wine marketing initiative in the UK which roughly said ‘Quality is not related to origin, after all Jesus was born in a manger’. What we need is a similar way of getting that message across – probably in 2021 without using Jesus’ – but we just need to convince people to try our wines, and they will be in for a pleasant surprise.” We can all drink to that. ■

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