

Vietnamese wine

Written by Lan Nguyen Thi

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When we say that Vietnam is warming with reds these days, we aren't making a political statement, of course. We're talking about wine. With the easing of government restrictions, both commercial and cultural, the past ten years have seen a welcome increase in wine importing and awareness. You can now find a good quality Bordeaux in most upscale and many mid-range restaurants or chic wine bars and shops in Hanoi and Ho

Chi Minh City

. Nevertheless, while international wines are making headway, the most interesting vintner we find on the market are local contenders.

Rice alcohol. Alcohol has been called spirit because it symbolizes for men willingness in the old time. Besides tea, plain rice alcohol is also offered respectfully on the ancestor altar in rituals or ceremonies to show deep gratitude such as wedding parties, ground - breaking, *Tet* holiday... Vietnamese also drink alcohol to celebrate joy to reduce sadness or wish for blessings.

However, the way Vietnamese drink alcohol is worth mentioning. Unlike Western countries where bigger cups or glasses are frequently used, buffalo - eyed cup is more preferred to serve in Vietnam.

How can rice become wine?

Yes, Vietnamese alcohol is made from rice so it is called rice alcohol. Firstly, rice is steamed, and then fermented for a couple of days before being distilled. With several traditional methods and materials, you will have many kinds of rice alcohol; however, their flavors are totally different from each other. In some cases, herbs or snakes are pickled in alcohol jar to use as medicine.



Can wine. The name *can wine* comes from the reason that Vietnamese call a stem - a small

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bamboo straw- to consume wine from the jar. This kind of wine is the most special one in Vietnam even it belongs to minority groups in highland and some other places in Vietnam.

Can wine is special for the way it is made and served.

Firstly, simple available local materials such as cassava, tapioca, sweet potato are altogether fermented by wild herb in a pottery jar for days. Of course, its taste is total different from rice alcohol or any kind of wine - *can wine* is so bitter or strong that may lead you dizziness. Its sweet taste would make you drunk - a sweet and slow drunk - without any predictable consciousness.

The way *can wine* is served clearly shows the community unity and hospitality of highlanders. Now, let's see how Vietnamese people drink *ruou can* to serve dear guests, special celebrations or ceremonies. At these moments, the spirit container would be fixedly placed in the middle of the yard, house or even communal long house (called

nha rong

- in central highland). Then, both host and guest take seats around while fresh water from a buffalo horn will be slowly leaked out through a small holed. Now, it should be time for the village master to try through one of stems dipped into the jar. In some cases, he can offer it to honorable guests. After that, turns will come to the rest whenever they want. Every body will try to offer stems to each other to show their willingness and respect. The container would never be dry, it always requires fully filled with water by ladies. Besides, there would be

gong

performance, which is usually accompanied by dancing during the time.

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Bottoms up!

- Vietnamese wine
- "One cup of tea, please!"
- Hanoi's coffee culture, like no other