

CULINARY TOUR
WITH WOMEN
ENTREPRENEURS

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Racha, Bostana I am from Aketi -"akete" means "do it", and I have to do it!

Dear Reader,

This book is primarily for people who are always seeking, those who cannot imagine a life without interesting journeys. This is the travel that brings discoveries, that enables us to meet interesting people, excites us and changes us for the better.

With this book, we have combined the stories of women living in rural areas. Their tireless hands, childish enthusiasm and love have created places, and food, that will undoubtedly leave such an unforgettable impression that you will be inspired to become part of it yourself: plan further roads to travel, see the hotels and other spaces created by these women, get acquainted with them, taste unique wines and various dishes, and become supporters of their empowerment.

UN Women, with the help of the Norwegian Government, has now been working on the economic empowerment of rural women for more than ten years. These women, and many more like them, play a critical role in the development of the country's economy, hence they need special attention and support. We are happy and deeply appreciative that TeraBank has joined our efforts and supported us in the preparation of this publication. We believe that the role of everybody, including representatives from the private sector, is utterly critical for the empowerment of women, for equality and for the formation of a modern, equal society.

We wish you an interesting journey!

**UN Women** 



The culinary tour we are sharing with you in this collection is like a journey through history. It is a reliable bridge between the past and the future, and it is one built by women. As their building materials they have used the most precious things: Georgian traditions, authentic culture, a love of their motherland, the experience of their ancestors, as well as their fortitude and tireless work ethic. Here they use flour and

wine to create. The activity of these ten women however goes far beyond gastronomy; it is the unique taste of local cuisine that unites such amazing examples of hospitality. We are therefore bringing you stories from our main characters together with their own delicious, personalized dishes. While, inspired by their recipes, chef Meriko Gubeladze will offer you fresh, alternative versions of each of these dishes. The culinary tour, organized by UN Women, covered ten locations - each seemingly more beautiful than the next: Bostana village in Racha; Ruispiri, Melaani and Zinobiani in Kakheti; Atsana and Likhauri in Guria; Aragvispiri in Mtskheta-Mtianeti; Ateni in Kartli; Martvili in Samegrelo; and Tskaltubo in Imereti. Our hostesses were visited by four women from different professions and spent a memorable day with each of them. UN Women's representative Gvantsa Asatiani, writer Ekaterine Togonidze, chef Meriko Gubeladze and the photographer Leli Blagonravova grew acquainted with each wonderful hostess. And now we are going to offer you a portrait of these women based on impressions from this creative group, with Ekaterine Togonidze's notes and photos from Leli Blagonrarova.

These ten women, Eka Salukvadze, Ana Patchikashvili, Tako Zhuruli, Teona Taboridze, Eka Chikvaidze, Tekla Janelidze, Nino Lotishvili, Ani Tsikarishvili, Nutsa Tsiskarishvili and Keso Makharadze, were among one hundred women selected from all over Georgia for a UN Women and Farmers' Association joint programme. After professional training supporting women entrepreneurs, they were given the opportunity to participate in a grant competition.

"Winning the grant opened my mind, and I realized what else I needed, what had to be done... a thousand new ideas came to me," says Eka Salukvadze, a miller girl who

brought relief to the entire population of her village by restoring the mill in Likhauri. "The way they support us is no less important than the grant. When you start a business and you can rely on people, it's a great comfort," notes Nutsa Tsiskarishvili, who moved from Tbilisi to Tskaltubo and joined Otia Ioseliani's family farm to manage the house-museum. "During the last stage of the grant competition, the members of the jury asked me only one question: 'Why do you love Martvili so much?" - Ani Tsikarishvili, originally from Imereti, recalls this episode with a laugh, and she still never gets tired of talking about this love. "Without even leaving the house, I've managed to travel all over the world" - highlights Lia, the hostess of Lasha's Ethno-house, as she refers to the tourists who visit her from numerous different countries.

Visit these women, listen to them, taste the dishes they lovingly prepare, the wine they press, and you will realize that these are the people who will help stop depopulation in high mountainous villages, reduce migration from Georgia, employ their neighbors and strengthen each other. They graciously introduce our culture to the world and they develop agrotourism, they bring us closer to nature, give us an example to follow and they fill us with hope: the bridge they build from the past to the future is as solid as their love.

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# **Best Ever Mistake**

The first thing we encountered in Zhuka-Sanos Winery was a "Mistake"... Immediately we found an exposed yard, the owner coming out with open arms, a Ukrainian flag draped over the house and then this inscription... "Mistake" – the name on a bottle of wine sitting on the cellar shelf – along with a colourful, funny label.

This word repeats itself like a lucky refrain throughout the story of the naturalist winemaker, Tako Juruli. This unexpected name unites a whole chain of events, and as a confession it tells us a story built on coincidences that reminds us that sometimes a mistake can lead to discovery. We get to know a woman who is not afraid of innovation or experimentation. Tako Juruli knows that a vineyard is a living organism, a place where three elements intersect: the sun, the soil and the climate each meet here. While she is the witness and chronicler of this very intersection. It is right here, in front of her eyes, where the fate of the wine is decided; the terroir determines the character, the colour, the aromatic spectrum of the wine – although, as the true servant of nature, the human factor is vast. And so, Tako harmoniously follows the cycle of all four seasons. For her, wine is more than work - she can never see winemaking as a business and nor would she ever recommend it to anyone.

"How can I recommend winemaking to a person? The only thing I can do is to hope they try it!... And of course I wish everyone such a happy life. Winemaking is a way of thinking, a lifestyle, it's just your being, it is – you!"

For eight years, Tako Zhuruli worked as an editor in a publishing house, where she corrected artistic texts linguistically and stylistically, and prepared books for print-



Venue: Zhuka-Sano Winery Kakheti, Ruispiri village

Hostess: Tako Jhurul

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ing. Winemaking somehow reminds her of that former life – the author here is different, nature is the creator, and Tako listens to it, understands it, obeys and cultivates it, and she gives it its final shape. She also prepares to deliver and share the final bottled wine with beautifully scribed labels, just like a printed book.

"You know, everything has its time. Before, I was not attracted to nature at all... When I was studying at school, I was even lazy going on excursions. Age brought closeness to the land, and that's how my sweet life began."



A few years ago, tired of the noise and rhythm of the city, Tako, together with her husband, started looking for a farm near Tbilisi. Eventually, she found a house with a vineyard in the village of Ruispiri, Telavi.

"We didn't want a vineyard, we didn't even think about wine. Kakheti was not a concept back then," she recalls with a smile, before recalling the unsuccessful negotiations with the original owner of the house, who would not agree to sell the land without the vineyard. And that's how it all began... This coincidence completely changed the couple's life. The land was acquired with its vineyard, alongside the house – where a few ancient traditional Georgian clay pots, called kvevris, traditionally used for fermenting wine, were buried in the basement. One of which was marked with the year of manufacture: 1907. These vines needed to be cared for, needed regular tending, as well as the 'green operations' - trimming, spraying, topping, and first of all, this all needed learning. After finishing work, Tako would yearn to go back to the village; she couldn't wait to see her vineyard. She spent her weekends in Kakheti, but that was never enough - the vines demanded complete loyalty! Eventually, Tako quit her job, left Tbilisi and devoted herself entirely to the vineyard.

"Wine is poetry for me... but only when there is an honest winemaker behind it, faithful to the idea, a poet winemaker. In poetry, and I don't mean only a poem, for me,



it incorporates many things: idealism, purity, lightness..." – notes Tako passionately, while she prepares an eggplant-tomato puree as a snack to have with the wine. She also bakes the bread that goes with it herself.

The Zhuka-Sano Winery is mostly visited by foreign tourists. They stay for dinner and listen to details about wine pressing, all accompanied by dishes prepared by the hostess. An arbour is currently being built in their yard, along with an open kitchen, where Tako will be able to receive more visitors. When guests do visit, the first thing Tako does is to offer wine and ask: "You like it, don't you?" And

she has since received many fine reviews, with one wine connoisseur describing it as: "A cave of sensations".

Tako herself is a woman of feelings and she follows her heart completely. She believes that the main thing in this trade is freedom – from orders, consumerism, even freedom from the state. That's why she has decided to sell wine independently from the very beginning.

"I don't know a naturalist winemaker who would calculate wine on the market; who would say, 'I won't now mature wine into

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chacha (a Georgian spirit made from grape skins) for Europe, I will make it light. It doesn't happen like that. All of them produce it as they like, they are independent in their decisions. They are enthusiasts. Then the market comes by itself, it definitely comes. If the wine is good, there will be people who will choose that kind of wine and drink it."

The thousand bottles from the Zhuka-Sano Winery never remained untouched, on the contrary, sometimes the stock runs out unexpectedly fast. Tako specially prepares wines for the Naturalists' Festival, which takes place in December. While most of her vintage is purchased by exporters, who successfully sell it in Europe and the United States. Tako is always cautious and checks how the wine travels; whether the transportation conditions are met; and whether the wine behaves well. Equally, she worries if the wine may compromise her, and if the whole year's work was in vain? The story of wine and Tako's own is like a love story. Every day's interaction with the vineyard is recorded in a huge diary. The book itself is a special sight. Those white pages, bound under a thick cover, were brought by Tako from her old publishing house.

"This is a mockup. Before printing the book, the printing house used to send us such samples to confirm the parameters," Tako tells us, gently flipping through the diary, which is full of five years' of stories, describing every day and each activity. In some places there is a pressed, withered flower, in others it describes how the sun fell on the grain and gave transparency to the grape, or how the tension of suction in the vine increases when the water in the soil drops. Plans are also drawn up within – tomorrow she will take care of one-hundred-metre-long rows, the next day she will buy a hand tractor... This book is like a novel, like the vine telling the story of the year's weather, with detailed stories of all four seasons and Tako's whole life from 2017 up to now.

"If you only knew how I talk to and caress my vineyard... I call them girls. They are like ballerinas, my vines. They just stand and wait for me. If I don't see them for a week, it seems that they meet me in a bad mood."

From such a loving, straightforward wine-maker, even a mistake is forgivable – it was the unbalanced, improperly diluted Ikalto red and Rkatsiteli grapes that created an unplanned taste – and this is exactly how "Mistake" was born, only to become one of the signature wines from the Zhuka-Sano Winery and to be forever recorded in the history of naturalistic wine.

So, taste an accidentally created wine. Maybe it will really remind you of poetry, maybe it will remind you of Otar Chiladze's words: "Whatever happens unexpectedly belongs to Eternity."







# **Ingredients:**

3 eggplants

2 bell peppers

2 onions

1 tomato

1 tsp. tomato paste

30 g basil

30 g coriander

Pepper, dry coriander, vinegar and salt – to taste

#### **Directions:**

Boil the eggplant, squeeze, cut or shred it by hand and then cook it together with the finely chopped tomato.

Fry diced onion and bell pepper separately, then pour in some vinegar and mix it together with the eggplant. Add the tomato paste and continue to fry. Season with herbs, spices, salt and pepper. When the ingredients are well mixed and stewed, take the pan off the flame and spread the puree over slices of freshly toasted bread. They should be crispy on the outside and soft on the inside.

# Baked eggplants with strained matsoni and sesame oil

# **Ingredients:**

3 eggplants

200 g strained matsoni

1 garlic cloves

10 g dry adjika

20 ml lemon juice

50 ml sesame oil

5 g sesame seeds

1 green bell pepper

20 g parsley

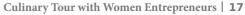
20 g green onion

Salt, pepper – to taste

#### **Directions:**

Prick medium-sized eggplants with a fork and place in the oven with the stems intact. Bake at 200 °C (395 °F) degrees for around 30-35 minutes or until well-softened and browned. Remove from the oven and, when cool, remove the skins and place the eggplants in a colander.

While the eggplat is cooling, you can mix the strained matsoni with crushed garlic, ajika, lemon juice, 30 ml of sesame oil, salt and pepper. Spread the mixture on a plate and place the baked eggplant on top. Pour over the remaining oil and sprinkle with sesame seeds, parsley leaves, the chopped green onion and green pepper.







# **Two Branches and Five Senses**

"You are in the village of Zinobiani, a village inhabited by ethnic Udis. I am Udian on my father's side." This is how Ana Patchikashvili, who lives in the Kvareli district, introduced herself. For her, one of the main charms of hospitality is sharing her history. The guests of her family hotel, Terrace Zinobiani, are always interested in the descendants of the Caucasian Albanians living in Georgia. In Ana's experience, local and foreign tourists alike, along with the variety of services she offers, are often willing to interact with her and hope to learn more details from their hostess.

"There have been times, after having laid the table, when I'd leave, but they called me back and said they wanted to talk, to learn more, and I started telling them more... The name Zinobiani comes from Zinob Silikashvili. In the 1920s, it was under his leadership that the Udis moved to this place. He was an old public figure who became a victim of the notorious soviet repressions of 1937. He was interrogated, tried by the Troika and then shot. Communists renamed the village October. Zinobian was given its name a few years ago, at the request of the locals."

In the past, the Udis have shunned discussion of their origin. Ana too has her own traumatic childhood experiences, when her peers made fun of her because of her ethnic identity and they used to mock her. It took time to break free from the stigma. Today, she shares her culture with pleasure. She explores her history and gladly offers guests Udi cuisine at Terrace Zinobiani.

"At the school in Zinobiani, they still teach the Udi language, but using the Georgian alphabet. The thing is, our original alphabet is long gone, and we too are on the



Venue: Terrace Zinobiani Kakheti, Zinobiani village

Ana Patchikashvili

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verge of disappearance. Marriage has never been a problem here, because religion is common. There are many mixed families here, like mine - my mother is Georgian, my father Udi. In these families, they did not try much to preserve their identity. 'Shvili' was added to my surname when we moved to Georgia. Before that there was 'patchki', which means two branches: 'patch' is branch, 'ki' two. Most of them have 'child' ('shvili' in Georgian) added like this - for example, Aivazashvili, Dalakishvili... Udi dishes are an integral part of Terrace Zinobiani today. Guests really like our traditional 'tchainhoof'. 'Hoofi' meaning pilaf and 'tchain' is clarified butter."

The mixture of chestnuts, raisins, chicken and rice creates a truly amazing combination. After tasting the dish, everyone wants more.

In Ana's family hotel, the old elements of the building have been preserved and harmoniously integrate with its modern style. Now an open kitchen is being built in the yard, there is a vineyard behind, and a wooden cottage built with the beehives at the front. Resting here invigorates all five senses and combines the impressions with sight, taste, hearing, touch and smell alike.

#### Taste:

"Udi cuisine is influenced by Muslim culture. Rice dominates. For example, 'fakhlinhoofi' is made from beans and rice. We use basil as a seasoning, and the dish is eaten with matsoni – a Georgian kind of sour cream. Korekhe is a very tasty beverage. I make it from live, seasonal sour fruits. I like cherry the most – I grate the cherry, the juice comes out, then I crush garlic, cocoa, coriander flower, add a little salt and cucumber inside. It is very a fine drink in the heat."

Zinobiani village belongs within the Kindzmarauli zone, a famous microclimate for wine. The family thus welcome guests with wine they have pressed themselves.

"We Udis make wine like Georgians. Old photos show kvevris. Here, too, my grandfather first built a wine-cellar, put in the kvevris, and then built the house."

## Sight:

There is a captivating view from the terrace of the hotel. The Alazani Valley and the Caucasus are amazing natural sights.

## Hearing:

The day spent here is accompanied by the chirping of birds and the buzzing of bees... The birds gather on the huge walnut tree in the yard and start singing at daybreak. Against this backdrop, Zinobiani's story is even more pleasant to hear.

#### Touch:

Guests can pick grapes in the vineyard if they wish or take part in a masterclass of both Udi and local dishes in the open kitchen. There they can touch natural and local products with their own hands. Together with their wine, the family has their own honey and meat, and the rest is bought directly from their neighbours. While Ana forages for chestnuts, an important ingredient in tchainhoofi, in the forest. She also still collects recipes from old housewives to restore and preserve old, authentic dishes. Fortunately, she was able to equip the kitchen with the grant she won. She is now planning to renovate this space for the winter so as to receive guests in any season.

#### Smell:

Breathing is a topic of special importance here. As the host highlights, Terrace Zinobiani is the only place in Georgia where the complete concept of apitherapy is offered to guests. Ana, together with her husband, discovered this particular method of healing in the midst of Covid.

"During the pandemic, we were closed here, while still taking care of the bees and collecting honey. It was then that I was struck with the idea that bees can do something more. We searched on the Internet and found apiculture – this is the air breathing system of bees. We made a special cottage for



apitherapy. An electric inhaler was installed on the hive, which brings up the most sterile air from the hive. It is a very pleasant procedure, useful and healing. Besides, we have two rooms where you can sleep breathing in this air. We have had visitors from Dagestan specially for apitherapy this summer."

Ana has returned to Kakheti from Tbilisi. Now she works in an international organization, raises children with her husband and runs Terrace Zinobiani.

"I want to live in Kakheti... I want to have an interesting life. An interesting life, which I think, brings about meeting many new people. I have already had many visitors from different countries, and what a lot of interesting things we have shared with one another... Kakheti is associated with feasting, but I don't want people to come here just to get drunk. My ultimate goal is to create a cultural space."

Ana has yet to find exact information about the etymology of her surname, however, the concept of "patch ki", i.e. the two branches, symbolically haunts her.

"My aunt was a researcher of the Udi language and she wrote a lot about it. She died before I was born. These papers were taken to her employee for publication, but everything got burned in Tbilisi during the war.

Sometimes I feel that I am split in two - one branch is here, the other is somewhere else. Now Udis live in two villages in Azerbaijan, in Niji and Oghuz. It is easy to get there from Lagodekhi, it's not far. I might even have relatives there, or I might find the settlement of my ancestors. I am constantly haunted by a feeling that one part of my identity is to be found elsewhere. I will definitely go there this spring..."

Along with tourism, Ana's self-determination process has also become easier. She is happy that young people are no longer ashamed of being Udi by origin.

"Previously, they were ashamed to even 'check in' in Zinobiani, and they 'checked in' in Kvareli... After I started this business and told a lot of people about the story of my past, I developed a desire to do more. Together with several people, we even founded an organization - "Georgian Udies". One of us, Sandro Kavtaradze, is a descendant of Zinob Silikashvili.

"Today, the fact that my identity embraces several cultures, gives me more confidence and makes me much stronger."







# Tshainakhoop -Udian pilaf in melted butter

# **Ingredients:**

1 kg rice

150 g melted butter

500 g chestnuts

500 g raisins

1 jar matsoni

2 eggs

200 g melted butter

1 young chicken

#### **Directions:**

To begin with the rice should be half boiled. Mix together one jar of matsoni and three eggs, then rub this into the rice and spread it over the bottom of the dish (this browned bottom is often regarded the most delicious part) – the bottom layer must be about 3–5 cm thick. Next build up the dish layer by layer: rice, half-boiled chestnuts (the chestnuts get softened later) and raisins - this will make two or three layers in total. Meanwhile boil the chicken.

Place the dish on a very low flame (preferably an outdoor fire), put a fire-spreader under the pot so that the temperature spreads evenly and the bottom is evenly browned. Finally, place the boiled chicken (a cottage pullet is advisable) over it and serve together with the melted butter.

# Chicken pilaf with saffron and dried cherries

# **Ingredients:**

1 chicken

2 onions

500 g rice

200 g dried cherries

200 g pistachios

150 g butter

100 g olive oil

10 g sumac

2 g saffron

#### **Directions:**

Salt the chicken on all sides and pan fry. Once cooked, let it cool and remove the meat from the bones. While that's frying, you can wash the rice well and bring it to a boil, taking it off the fire before it's fully boiled. Then heat a pan and pour in some oil and butter, and sauté onions cut into rings, before adding the dried cherries and pistachios. Remove the pan from the fire after five minutes and let the mixture cool. In a separate pan, fry the dry saffron for two minutes and then, using a spoon, dissolve it in 50 ml of water. In your pan, mix together the rice, fried chicken, the stewed mixture of onions, cherries and pistachios, and add sumac, salt, pepper and the saffron before cooking on low heat until the rice is ready.



# The Past in a Teacup

First there was tea. Wild, herbaceous, hand harvested, dew-covered berries collected before sunrise, useful plants. Created by Teona Taboridze, before becoming a family hotel, this business started with herbal tea. However, this aromatic drink was preceded by Teona's dream.

Melaani Vintage is the uppermost house of the village. This home once belonged to the last inhabitant of the village during Teona's childhood. On weekends, on her way to church, she would pass by the large, wild yard and stop there to rest. She would watch the beautiful view, cozy and magical, and this small piece of land settled in her mind as a paradise. Then she would continue her way, lightly winding her way up the last ascent with pleasant thoughts, and join the choir singers at Trinity Church.

"This place kept calling me." With these words, Teona begins the story of a dream that came true, one which gradually developed into her own ecotourism complex. The house they purchased was first seen as a place for the family to gather. Teona soon appeared on social networks, using tea as her theme, and introduced Melaani Vintage to her audience in the way that, as yet, it only existed in her imagination. With a lot of work and the help of her family, she slowly came closer to that picture drawn in her mind, and soon enough she received her first guest.

"We started with zero investment, with enthusiasm. We were here; even in the frost, we were working. We wanted to create a colourful little paradise. When we exhausted all our resources, I then won a small grant, which helped me at a good time. We equipped the place and opened it as soon as the inventory was brought in."



Venue: Melaani Vintage Kakheti, Melaani village

Hostess: Teona Taboridze

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Teona formulated the slogan for Melaani Vintage as a beautiful promise and incorporated in it all the wonder around her: "If you visit me, you'll discover a completely alien Kakheti: with an unfamiliar culture, an unfamiliar gastronomy, an unfamiliar nature."

Looking back historically, Melaani really is a hearthplace of ancient culture. The village is believed to be one of the cradles of winemaking. Archeological excavations found here reveal anthropomorphic bronze figures holding drinking horns dating back to VIII-VII B.C.E. – now preserved in the National Museum and known as the Melaani deities. While researching its history, Teona also came across a brand of wine called Melaani in the pages of The Iveria from 1909.

"About 24 churches-monasteries can be found here, some are still functional. The family of Prince Andronikashvili lived in Melaani and they founded the first school here. Up there was their palace. There is a legend that the Andronikashvilis were friends of Zakaria Paliashvili, and the composer wrote the opera Daisi (Twilight) inspired by the Melaani twilight while visiting them."

As for unfamiliar gastronomy, Teona is also in a constant search for recipes, and she enriches knowledge from other chefs with scientific literature. For instance, she found one traditional dish, which guests can only taste at the Vintage, from ancient sources.

"Tskhratsvena is a ritual dish. It is prepared using the eight types of beans that are found here, plus yellow maize," Teona tells us, while she prepares the dish in front of us using coriander, onion, safflower oil and Kakhetian oil – simply – as is the custom in local cuisine.

"Our ancestors used to prepare this dish for Christmas. It was brought to the table by the leading figure of the family, as the main dish. Everyone had to taste at least one spoonful, so that the year would be fruitful and bountiful."

Teona treats her guests to variations of Georgian classic meals, ¬like nettle khinkali, tonis mchadi and khachapuri. The tourists themselves are often happy to participate in the preparation too.

"At our masterclasses, guests are often allowed to fold up khinkali alone, but first they go through the whole process with us. They sift the flour, knead the dough. The amazing thing is that people, on first contact with the dough, do it with such an enthusiasm, that the result may even be better than our own. They do it with all their hearts and perform excellently."

Their products are entirely produced by the family, on the farm-to-table principle: wheat from the field, bread from Teona's mother's bakery, oil from their own sunflowers, wine from the vineyards (Mstvane, Rkatsiteli



and Saperavi grapes). However, tea remains the beginning and the leading line behind everything. Along with melissa, marjoram, chamomile and mint, here you share the aroma of wild rose petals, which have become a trademark for Melaani tea.

"Rosehip tea is presented to us not in the form of berries, but in the bud. I call this product 'the child of Corona'. I was here all the time during the pandemic. I was working, studying, researching all day. I accidentally dried a handful of wild roses before flowering, I said, let's see what happens, and I got a really interesting taste."

The third promise of Teona's slogan – the unfamiliar nature – includes a hiking, adventure tour. There truly is a lot to see. Following routes developed by the hostess, the guest first goes to the Guraza stone – a striking, impressive natural monument. From the centre of this moss-covered, house-like boulder, a tree expands out and a stream gushes forth. Then they visit the volcanic mudflats and finally they see the Lakbi Valley, where they find two of the most picturesque lakes.

At Teona's house, the day always starts and ends with tea. Right up until today, tea has

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always been running the engine of her fulfilled dream.

"Emotionally, I follow tea... It's an oral legacy from my great-grandmother. Throughout the summer she collected plants that she used to save for us in the winter. I remember that she would gather plants in her lap. We were small and we used to accompany her. She told us stories. She had to live in very difficult times. She had gone through the Second World War, as had all her generation. Those herbs and plants, dried nettles and others, were very useful in winter. If we continue to do the same and follow her steps, she will still be here. In a cup of lemon balm tea, my great-grandmother is revived just for me."

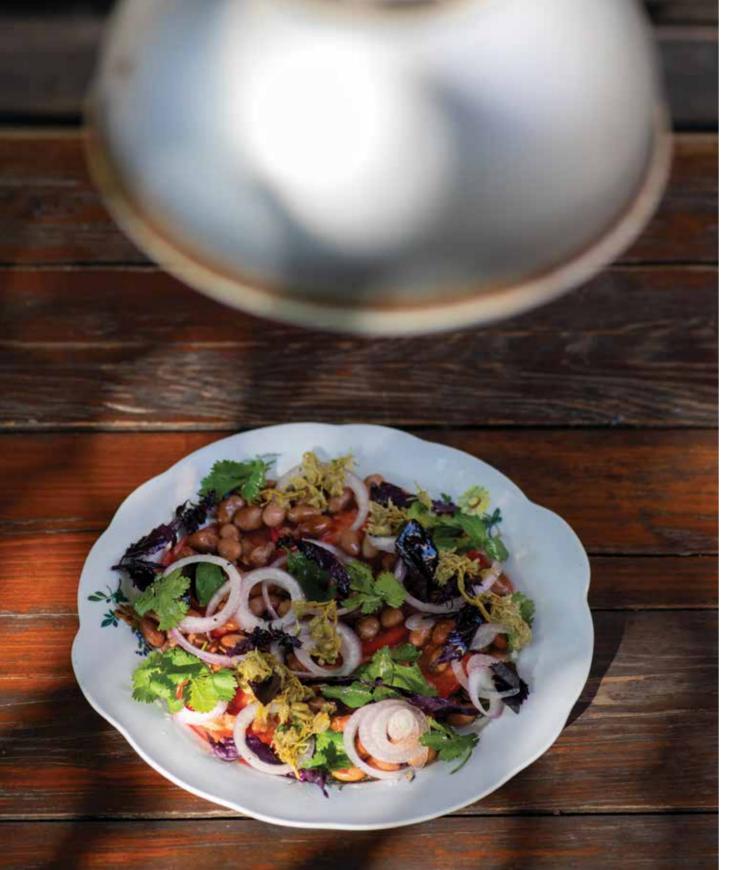
Teona is now a tourism specialist. She believes that in this field, we are predominantly selling a legacy in the form of the experience of our ancestors. And tourism has indeed given impetus to better research and the promotion of traditions. Teona recalls a phrase she once heard at a conference – "Tourism is oil for Georgia" - and she certainly agrees with the notion.

"I believe it is right. The main thing is to develop correctly. All this goes through people and requires a lot of effort. Convincing a local community that, for example, this table should not be thrown away, that it is your past – keep it, mend it, and someone will appreciate what you have done. Tourism has opened many doors for me. I was entrusted with community projects as well, which are not easy. It takes a lot of energy to mobilize and engage women who are locked in their homes in rural areas. When you see that they are following you, you also get a lot of strength."

Melaani was awarded mountainous village status several years ago. The winters here are severe, snowy.

"Depopulation is a big problem, people are leaving here, the place is becoming deserted... Come back! You can do your favourite work here, so that you feel all right, and the population is also maintained, so that the village does not disappear!"





# Kakheti, Melaani

#### **Tskhratsvena**

# Ingredients:

1 kg of eight types of bean 500 g yellow maize kernels 2 onions 4 garlic cloves 20 ml sunflower oil 100 g fresh coriander 10 g dried savory Salt, pepper – to taste

#### Directions:

Boil the beans and maize kernels in a single pot. When cooked, season with chopped onions, crushed garlic, coriander and savory, sprinkle with sunflower oil. Add salt and pepper to taste.

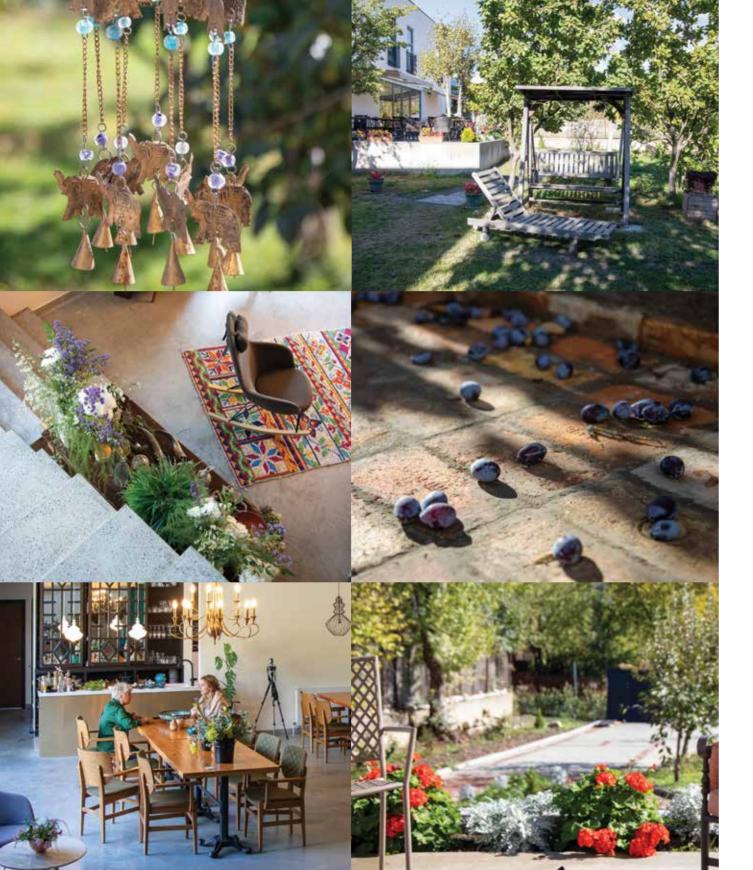
#### Bean and tomato salad

# **Ingredients:**

200 g beans (batumela) 3 pink tomatoes 1 red onion 200 g jonjoli (a Georgian appetizer made from the pickled sprouts of local bladdernut bushes (Staphylea colchica) 100 ml Kakhetian oil 50 ml wine vinegar 30 g fresh coriander 30 g fresh basil Salt, pepper – to taste

# **Directions:**

Boil the beans until they get soft before draining the water. Meanwhile, cut the tomatoes into round, thin pieces and spread over a plate. Season with salt, sprinkle a little oil, vinegar and then add the boiled beans. Cut the onion into rings and spread over the salad. Finally, add the jonjoli, coriander and basil leaves and pour over the remaining oil and vinegar.



# Wine, Gastronomy, Peace and Equality

If you visit Aragvispiri Winery, you will soon understand all those guests who came for dinner and never wanted to return home. A cozy house with a veranda stands in a sunny yard full of fruit trees. On the left you find the home of your hosts, from where you notice a vineyard nestled behind. The sound of the Aragvi River can be heard in the background, while an appetizing aroma wafts from the kitchen. The hostess of this house, Eka Chikvaidze, followed her guests' wishes when she decided to set up a wine and gastronomic space within this family hotel.

"When guests come and eat, they get in a good mood...
Then, when the evening breeze blows, the desire to stay overnight naturally arises. It is so pleasant to go to sleep and then wake up here in the morning. That's how the idea of starting a family hotel was born – so that the pleasure lasts, does not end that evening and flows into the next day..."

The history of the Aragvispiri Winery began with wine pressing back in 2010. Eka's husband has already been engaged in winemaking for 12 years now, and the dishes here are made with a combination of his wines -- Chinebuli (Merlot-Syrah), Rkatsiteli, Khikhvi and Rosé. The produce itself is local and seasonal, so the family offers guests that perfect combination of food and drink.

"Our fruits and herbs are from my garden, the rest we buy from local farmers: mountain cheese from Gremiskhevi, dambalkhacho (Georgian kind of mouldy cottage cheese) from Pshavi, Chaduna from Barisakho, tomatoes from Aragvispiri, while wild mint and flowers are collected by



Venue: Aragvispiri Winery Mtskheta-Mtianeti, Aragvispiri village

Hostess: Eka Chikvaidze

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the riverside and dried for seasoning. I make my own vinegar, fermented sauces, tkemali, dried tomatoes and jams... All this brings us closer to our roots, traditions and nature. I get a lot of inspiration at the Sunday market. The great variety of products allow me to think and create new things. The season also dictates when and what to cook. Guests visiting us at different times will receive unique dishes, because it is important for me to be in harmony with the cycle of nature."

By origin, Eka is from Racha. Now she manages to fill old traditional flavours with modern elements. She believes that people get rid of unnecessary parts of themselves, so that the next generations forget certain elements. Keeping the good is her obligation. This time, she is working on bringing Rachan traditions to her menu.

"Just as there are beans with ham, I'm going to make beans as a side dish for the pork. Tradition is very important, if this thread is broken, part of the identity is lost."

Eka comes from a family of gourmets, raised in constant hospitality. Love of the Georgian supra feasting style, and taking care of its aesthetic side, was something she also inherited from childhood.

"My grandfather was a successful lawyer, he had a large circle of friends, they always gathered at our place. We lived at 11 Janashia Street, where we had a big rose garden and old newspapers often printed articles about it. My grandfather also made a bench there so that a person climbing the Janashia Street ascent could sit down and have a little rest. Our table was almost always laid. For my mother and father's wedding, my grandfather strung strings, twined around ivy and hung grapes in the big room. He arranged an imitation of vines, so people seemed to be sitting in a vineyard. They talked about this wedding for a long time. It seems that all this was passed over to me as well, and the desire to create arose in me too..."

Eka is a film connoisseur. At first glance, cooking has nothing to do with her primary profession, however, with the design of the house, the arrangement of the yard, as well as the decoration of her dishes, it seems that their creator has a peculiar vision and gracefulness. Eka's favourite colour is green; the wall leading to the house matches the colour, and her dishes, enriched with leaves and spices, are also often green.

"I love herbs very much, besides being useful, they bring life. I don't like heavy food. I want people to feel at ease... And the colour green is associated with peace for me. In the past, the ability to work in a stressful environment was something they required from you. But why? When it is tranquility that allows us to create more. Creation requires thinking: before going to bed, in transport, while walking – everywhere. When you are



calm, you're free, you're open... you don't worry, you don't panic, and so many things become lucid."

Eka's house is also filled with a special peacefulness. There are four guest rooms on the second floor, from which a view of the mountains and the river valley opens out.

"One should feel fine here. I want to renew perceptions of Georgian cuisine. I want my dishes to speak a new dialect."

In 2022, Eka was among one hundred women selected by UN Women and the Farmers' Association for a project supporting female entrepreneurs. As a result of the training she received, she submitted a business plan to the grant competition for the development of a traditional Georgian toné, a bakery and grill. In fact, she even won, and now she is preparing this space for masterclasses.

"In the place where you cook dishes, you can share a lot with people about history, folk-

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lore, tradition," notes Eka, as she prepares a dish while talking to us. She's using nadughi (a special Georgian soft cottage cheese), beets and nuts as her ingredients. The starter immediately looks really attractive. Eka continues her story and describes how, on the advice of a friend, she enrolled in a gastronomic school, how she took charge of the cafeteria in a bank, and then was given charge of a much bigger one. Through these years of experience, among many other things, she has learned to sense people's emotions.

"Imagine, every day so many people come to you... They spend the whole day in an office, in a closed space, immersed in work... They should be able to relax and unwind during dinner. Some have conflicts with their bosses, some are in a bad mood. You have to remove, dispel their negative emotions, and make them feel content. All this is possible with good food, beautifully crafted dishes, pleasant relationships... I always listen to people. It is impossible to say something exciting or likable for everyone, but advice is important."

Eka is always looking for something new. And she never stops working until she feels she has fulfilled all her tasks.

"I felt like I was locked up. There was no way to introduce any novelty. Life always gives you a chance, circumstances, and the most important thing is not to miss that chance, not to be lazy, and just to get a hold of it and start developing."

Her own business turned out to be that very new chance – within the gastronomic space, family hotel and wine cellar she created together with her husband. Eka's main principle is equality in relationships, work and life in general. The Aragvispiri Winery labels, decorated with the works of Georgian artist Keti Davlianidze, will be remembered for the unity of men and women.

"I am not alone. I always share my vision. The main sharer is my husband. We connect wine and cuisine - we meet guests with this in tandem. Everything is easier when a person stands next to you and fully shares the responsibility, takes charge from you, takes it on themself and returns it to you even stronger. There is a constant exchange going on. In the family, when things are shared, we learn to listen to each other even more. Equality is crucial. Everything is built together!"







# Ingredients:

2 medium size beets

1 onion

Garlic clove

300 g nadughi

100 g sour cream

100 g pumpkin pulp, sunflower

500 ml red wine

100 g currants

30 ml vegetable oil

20 g coriander

20 g mint

30 g honey

10 g sugar

Salt to taste

#### **Directions:**

Boil the beets in the red wine with the currants. Finely chop the onion and fry in vegetable oil until caramelized. Roast the nuts separately, add honey and sugar and finally add a pinch of salt. Meanwhile, season the nadughi with crushed garlic, mint, coriander and salt.

Finally it's time to assemble the salad: put the mixed nadughi on a plate, top this with the chopped beets, followed by the caramelized onions, cream and, to finish, sprinkle over the honeyed nuts.

#### Baked beets in damson

# **Ingredients:**

3 beets

200 ml damson juice

200 g strained matsoni

100 g beetroot jam

100 g halved walnut kernel

20 g sugar

50 g honey

Salt to taste

#### **Directions:**

Clean the beets, wrap them in foil and oven roast. Take them out, then cool, peel and cut into fine slices.

In a separate bowl, mix the damson juice with the crushed garlic and salt.

Place the walnut halves on a roasting dish, add honey, sugar and a little salt then roast together. Take them out and cool. While you're waiting, season the matsoni with a pinch of salt.

Now let's assemble the salad. Spread the damson juice over the place, evenly distribute the sliced beet, add the matsoni and then pour the beet jam over the top. Scatter the caramelized walnuts over the salad to finish.



# Return

The founder of Athena Vainera, Nino Lotishvili, returned to her hometown of Ateni after twenty years. Her childhood home was once associated with sadness, but, with time, she re-evaluated many things and her attitude has since changed.

Nino is a specialist of the Italian language and culture, and she chose the subject of peace research as her second profession when she completed her master's degree at Lugar University in Switzerland. She currently makes wine in Ateni and runs a family hotel for tourists on the first (A.E.) floor of the house. Peace and tranquility are the leading themes behind her life and her work.

"There will be a physical and psychological rehabilitation location here. People will be able to stay, engage in farming. For example, they can prune vines meditatively... I want everyone who comes to me to share the seed of peace that they can sow wherever they go."

On the way from researching peace all the way to seeking inner peace, Nino underwent a great transformation.

"When the war started in the Tskhinvali region, I was seven or eight years old. I was playing with my cousins in the yard, then I ran into the street and was hit by a car. They took me to the hospital, where they also started bringing in the wounded – soldiers and civilians. Those days spent in hospital were traumatic... After the war, my parents lost their employment. There were three children in the family, and my mother had to take the reins into her own hands. She started sewing, buying and selling products, she tried whatever she could... She even went to Tskhinvali several times. Once, she was even arrested for crossing illegally..."



Venue: Athena Vainera Shida Kartli, Ateni village

Hostess: Nino Lotishvili

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Those difficult childhood years subsequently became the basis for Nino's scientific research. She chose blended families as her theme and decided to explore how Ossetians and Georgians manage to stay together and to support families in the midst of armed conflict. Her choice was met with notable resistance at the university; a Swiss professor asked her to change the topic of her dissertation because it seemed almost impossible, as a researcher, to be separated from the context while still maintaining objectivity. However, Nino did not change the theme and she did not give up. She adhered to her idea to the end, and along with her successful work, she even managed to heal old injuries.

"By working on my master's theme, my inner transformation began. I started sorting out, clearing and making room for memories that had been disorderly thrown into the closet. I finished school in Gori, then I went to Tbilisi. I thought I would never want to look back at this house..."

Geographically becoming more and more distanced from Ateni, Nino was actually getting closer and closer to the place where she was born and raised, and slowly re-establishing the connection with her past and her roots.

"Over time, I realized that this house was only attributed to my grandfather, whereas it was built during cohabitation with my grandfather and my grandmother – together. No one remembered the woman who worked really hard and sacrificed a lot. Both the cellar and the house were named only after my granddad."

Nino was suddenly driven by the desire to restore justice and to appreciate the work of this invisible woman. When she began working in tourism and started introducing Georgian winemaking to foreigners, she soon also became interested in the wine itself.

"I decided to press wine in 2019. I wanted to start with my favourite Saperavi, but one fine day my father called me and asked if I was going to come for the grape harvest. Then I thought, how long do I have to wait to plant the Saperavi vines and then harvest?... Come on, I thought, let's start with what you have! Just do what you have, do it where you have it. Take the first step!"

This principle has always remained in practice in Nino's life. They had a small number of red grapevines in the vineyard: a few Tavkveri and even less Budeshuri. Along with these two grapes, Nino's father and brother also pressed Guruli and Chinuri wines. Thus, a mixture of these four species was eventually produced.

"I told my father and my brother that this year I would be responsible for the red wine." Because it was a small amount, they agreed. In 2018, we had neither cleaned the pitchers



nor bought the cisterns... Anyway, I tried to make chacha in a plastic container. The result was amazing. When a professional winemaker tasted my experiment, he liked it very much and said that it was practically ready to be exported."

One crucial incentive for Nino to continue this work turned out to be a grant that she won within the framework of a UN Women and Farmers' Association project

for the economic empowerment of women entrepreneurs. Nino was requesting kitchen equipment to prepare the space for wine tasting and cooking masterclasses. She almost incidentally also included a grape destemmer and crushing machine into the budget.

"When I wrote the project, I finally thought it would be better if I included something that would fill up the supposed sum, and so I

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added a destemmer for the wine cellar. Well, can you guess what, I got funded?!... Only for this – just the destemmer machine".

Nino laughs when she recalls the story, which has since become an important symbol and a life message for her.

"It wasn't really my priority... But then I thought: after all, the destemmer is part of the inventory of a wine cellar. It means that you have to go beyond the kitchen and have your say with wine! I took this as a sign and named the device after my two grandmothers: Dusa and Nina."

Nino dedicates her work to the memory of women who were neither listened to nor heard enough, those who were not properly appreciated and were given a place only in the kitchen. In reality, their work was far greater than housekeeping, and their potential was much more than they were allowed to reveal. Nino believes that the kind of society we will have truly depends on how much women are heard and listened to. She also connects the name of her winery with the Greek goddess Athena. According to one of version of events, the name of the village of Ateni itself originated from Athena. Nino also follows the lunar calendar, where the winery's logo is based around Greek mythology and phases of the moon.

Beyond this, she matures her wine with music in the background.

"When I listen to music, I feel it touches very deep layers of my soul. I thought, if it affects me like that, what kind of effect will it have on the wine? I called my father and asked him to switch on tango in the cellar. And, however unbelievable it might seem, I was able to persuade him!"

At Athena Vainera you will thus find wine that has matured to the tune of Piazzolla compositions. The hostess serves it in harmony with purslane bruschetta, and also offers a cornelian cherry dish – a particularly popular seasonal dish in Kartli, which beautifully suits sultry autumn weather.

"Atenuri has the taste of sadness and joy," is how one evaluator described Nino's wine. The alternation of sadness and joy also describes her own path - one which brought her back to Ateni, to the abandoned house, and that has replaced her sadness with joy.

"I compare this return to a tree. A tree cannot grow without roots. In the words of one philosopher, sadness is the root that goes deep into the earth. And joy is the branch that reaches up to heaven. The deeper the roots are planted, that is, the more we accept our sadness, the higher and the more boldly the tree can shoot up its branches of joy."





# Shida Kartli, Ateni

# Cornelian cherry dish

# Ingredients:

500 g fresh cornelian cherries 100 g walnuts 1 garlic clove Salt, dry ajika – to taste

#### **Directions:**

Wash the cornelian cherries, cover with water and boil. When cooked, remove the pits, grate the fruit and drain through a sieve. The juice should be like a cream-soup thick. Finally add crushed garlic, dry ajika and walnuts.

#### Beef broth with tkemali

# **Ingredients:**

1 kg beef on the bone 300 g tkemali puree 2 onions 3-4 garlic cloves 2 green peppers 100 g celery 100 g coriander 50 g dill Laurel leaf Salt, pepper - to taste

#### **Directions:**

Pour water over the meat and cook. Boil along with the onions, cloves of garlic, laurel leaf, celery and dill. When the meat is fully cooked, drain it and remove any bone before cutting it into small cubes. Then strain the broth and return the pure broth back into the pot. Add the tkemali puree, crushed garlic and salt and let it boil. Boil for a further five minutes and return the chopped meat to the broth. Finish the dish by adding finely chopped coriander, celery and green pepper.



# I Have to Be Here

In Ambrolauri, you will find many bakeries offering Rachuli lobiani (a baked bean-pie typical in Racha). For real beans, however, people will often direct you Tekla Janelidze's house in the village of Bostana.

In Tekla's yard, the table is spread under a vine arbour. On her table, the shadow of the sugary autumn sun makes the leaves look like lace. An appetizing aroma rises up from the oven, and Tekla, first of all, introduces us to the creator of true Rachuli lobiani – her bustling mother right there. This 57-year-old, Khatuna Oskhereli, is the only woman of her age who prepares the dish by sticking fully to the old rules. Tekla meanwhile is a novice entrepreneur, who devotes herself to family life and all the good things that people share in this beautiful village in Racha.

"It makes a big difference whether you bake the beans in the toné oven, cook in a gas oven, with lard or with oil. Belly fat should be absorbed into the beans. Mashed beans are called 'rachula'. And when it cools down, it should not crumble," Tekla explains. "Our taste reminds the guests of childhood, the warmth of their grandmothers. Sometimes it causes so much emotion, they even come to tears. There is no greater joy for my mother. Foreign guests also like Rachan dishes very much. They especially enjoy the masterclass in the bakery and baking with their own hands.

I love Racha very much and I want to make my corner even more popular, even more attractive and tasty. What our ancestors did with their heart and soul, we must take care of and preserve."

It has been three years since Tekla made the dinners prepared by her family accessible to guests and opened her



Venue: Toné lano Racha, Bostana villiage

Tekla Janelidze

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gates to local and foreign tourists. One fine day, she realized how many things there were in her house that could go beyond domestic consumption and could be used for hosting people: a century-old vineyard, Rachan wine pressed by her father, or the local natural products and traditional dishes prepared by her mother. On top of all this lies Georgian folklore: her father plays the guitar, her mother is a member of the Ambrolauri women's ensemble, and Tekla herself has been singing since childhood. They perform old and modern Rachan songs in three voices. Each of these many wonderful components allow for the best possible hosting space. Primarily though, Tekla chose the bakery as her leading line and picked their name in the Rachian style: IanoToné Iano.

"By keeping all this, first of all, we will not lose ourselves. I've realized the importance of tradition over the years. As we grow older, we value our parents, the people around us, the place where we were born and we grew up."

Bostana is a village with high mountain status. The population is already small, and in winter it becomes more deserted still. However, Tekla's family never leave their (home.

"We are here all the time, like sparrows, like patriots..." Khatuna smiles. She takes out her freshly baked lobiani, bread and mchadi (cornbread) from the tone, before she invites us to the kitchen and prepares pkhalparka (an original herb pie) in front of us. The aro-

ma of herbs emanates from the jar. Khatuna tells us that, for her, every season has its own charms and that their variety of dishes is inspired by different times of the year. Then she starts singing: "Let autumn come first, as yet it hasn't said what it has to say." She soon giggles and fills the table with Rachan dishes.

"Autumn has a great deal more to say. It is fabulously beautiful, rich and always has its say. If you work hard, then you eagerly wait - whatever you put in, it will return to you. A good harvest means that we will get through the winter thriving. You will save for future income, you will make your child happy, you will be able to add something to the family... Winter is good for snow, barbecues, ham... If we women have some spare time, we make oil porridge - a tradition called 'zetipapoba'. It means that we distill the walnuts and extract the oil. Then we knead the bread flour like a dough and pour walnut oil into its heart. It's really something. It goes well with pickles and wine."

Tekla's father is engaged in winemaking, and he grows Khvanchkara, Alexandrouli, Rachuli Tetra, Tsitska, Tsolikauri, Rachuli Green and other varieties of grape. Guests are constantly surprised by the different 'notes' running throughout their wines. According to the hostess, the vines gather special aromas from the flowers planted nearby in the vineyard. It even turns out that peaches had beforehand been specially planted near the vines - entirely to enrich the taste of the wine. This is known as a vineyard peach.



In this Rachan family, they believe that traditional dishes should be preserved in their old form and passed down from generation to generation. Only in exceptional cases should they be refreshed and renewed. However, nothing stands in the way of creating completely new cuisine. This area is rich in variety of herbs, among them nettle, sermountain and goosefoot. Khatuna recalls a song again: "A women went for sermountain into the forest, the woman brought back sermountain..." Tekla's father then also joins the conversation, and they start telling us the history of this song. The thing is, they say, that the original lyrics have been changed. In bygone years, instead of the name "sermountain", it was "Christ is risen", but then the communists changed the words. The rest of the day is spent listening to similar interesting stories, all the while tasting more delicious food.

"If something is happening here, if I look out and see lights here and there in the village, I can't express how happy I am!" – Tekla's mother adds with a sad smile.

The village Bostana is almost empty of young people. Tekla however is an exception, she was brought back to the village by love of her own area. She saw her family's resources from a different perspective and tried to connect her life in her native area with a source of income. In the summer, with the support of UN Women and the Farmers' Association, she received a grant and purchased the

equipment necessary for hosting guests. Her project was all about Rachan gastro-cuisine and included toné masterclasses. Tekla still works hard, studies and sets a good example for others.

"There were many of us who grew up together in our neighbourhood. Now we are completely lost and have dispersed. Some are in Tbilisi, some in America... If there are people who don't know where to go, haven't started their business, have no idea what to do, and at the time, have a house in the village, they should definitely come back. First of all, light a fire, warm the place and start thinking. There are many things that can be done here. Cultivate the land, get a horse and take guests for a walk... The place is full in the summer. A lot of people gather at the Ritseula River. There is a bungalow with cocktails, sunbeds, umbrellas. We jokingly call it Ibiza. When they leave the village, it's worth seeing what they've written on social networks in Racha groups. They are counting the days until next summer..."

Tekla believes that if a person comes to Racha at least once, they will definitely want to come back.

"I imagine my old age in a vegetable garden. It would be very difficult for me without Racha. I can't leave this house; I have to look after my vineyard, my corner. I can never leave my corner - I must be here!"







# Toné lobiani

# **Ingredients:**

Bread dough 1 kg beans 500 g Rachan ham 100 g pork belly fat

#### **Directions:**

Boil the beans together with the ham, when ready strain the remaining water. Rub the belly fat into the beans and place it all into the bread dough. Fold the sides of the dough over the beans and seal at the top. The lobiani is then flattened by hand and rolled out to the desired size. Finally stick it down on to the wall of a heated toné.

#### Mexican beans

# **Ingredients:**

500 g beans
500 g minced beef
1 onion
2 garlic cloves
1 bell pepper
1 green pepper
3-4 radishes
400 g tomato puree
20 g tomato paste
50 g sour cream
50 g sulguni cheese
100 g vegetable oil
50 g coriander
5 g cumin
5 g smoked paprika

#### **Directions:**

Boil the beans. While they're cooking, fry finely chopped onion, garlic, bell pepper, add the minced beef, tomato puree and paste, the paprika and the cumin and fry in the oil on high heat for 7–10 minutes. If the mixture begins to thicken, you can thin it out with a little water. Once cooked, add the boiled beans and heat over a low flame for another 20 minutes. Finally, season with salt and pepper. Plate the dish and add the chopped radish, coriander leaves, sour cream and grated sulguni to the side.



# When You Love, You Discover Something New Every Day

Ani Tsikarishvili guided us to one of the most beautiful ethnographic corners of Samegrelo, to the doors of Lasha's Ethno-house. When we first entered the yard, she was so excited. It was as if she were seeing this indigenous area for the first time just like us, and as if she too wanted to discover every detail, the countless ethnic peculiarities and products, together with us. It was as if she was viewing the traditional Megrelian house for the first time, the architectural style of which was still fully preserved, and she even started taking photos of that fabulous yard full of fruit trees.

In fact, Ani has been coming to this house for years now, bringing groups of tourists along. She is more of a hostess here than a guest, and has now become beloved like a member of the family. She knows all the nooks and crannies by heart, but every time she looks at this beautiful environment, she holds sincere admiration and she never gets bored, the emotion never fades.

"Now I see this roof in a new light. Have you ever seen a roof like this anywhere?" Ani questions and points to the attic decorated with pottery jugs, and pumpkins and maize.

"When you come here, you will learn the kind of houses Megrelians lived in," she tells us, her voice inspired, and leads us to the "patskha" (a small free-standing, mainly wickerwork arbour-type construction used for smoking cheese, meat etc., popular in Western Georgia).

"Families couldn't carry their houses over their shoulders during invasions, could they? So, this 'pastkha' could be



Venue: Lasha's Ethno-house Samegrelo, Najakhao village

Hostess:
Ani Tsikarishvili

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easily taken apart into pieces, and then carried away in a cart."

This arbour-patskha is her favourite place.

"I like to sit here, here is a table, here are chairs... the fireplace is lit too; food is being prepared, they also hold masterclasses for Megrelian dishes. Sometimes we just drink tea and talk. It's kind of tight... Though, I love all the places here."

We continue walking around until Ani shows us the open hearth and the garden.

"Behind the garden, they had cows and sheep. There were thefts in the village, and the family slept there so that the cattle would not be taken."

We then moved on to the wine cellar, with its hundred-year-old winepress and kvevris. There we discover that these kvevris were once used instead of refrigerators and stored dairy products as well as other perishable items. Ani eventually shows us a decorative miniature oda-house (a wooden structure built on pillars to keep away the humidity characteristic of Western Georgia) in front of their home and she kindly explains it to us.

"Everything here was created by Lasha and Soso, his father. Both were artisans and made these wonders with their own hands. When Lasha died, everything stopped, but after this great tragedy, his own desire helped the family to get back on its feet. Lasha wanted this beauty to be seen by many people, to receive guests, to entertain tourists, and to share this ancient history, this praiseworthy culture."

Ani recalls how she found the Ethno-house for the very first time.

"All my life I worked on state structures, sometimes in the Parliament, at times in the General Prosecutor's Office or the Customs Office, but I couldn't find myself anywhere... I lived in the middle of Sololaki, in a big, green, 'Italian' yard, but I wanted to be closer to nature... My husband is from Martvili. Once, I decided to spend the summer here and I thought I would create something..."

Ani is a person full of desire to create, learn and discover new things. A selfless lover of her motherland and her emotions are felt in absolutely everything. It was this strong desire to "create something" that stopped her from staying in only one place that summer and that pushed her to visit sixty villages around Martvili. As she was interested in tourism, she also wanted to find a hostess who could receive guests.

"I would go to families, look around their house. Then they would look at me in surprise, and ask – 'what are you talking about, what tourists, who would come here?' But now they have very good family hotels, and at least ten of them were created from my insistence. This is a great joy for me."



When Ani finally arrived at Lasha's Ethno-house, she was immediately spellbound.

"From that moment I started fighting to bring tourists here. Everyone should see this place."

It was not easy for Ani to get the hostess' consent, as she had been in mourning for years, but slowly the door of this house opened and joy returned.

"Without even leaving the house, I've managed to travel all over the world," Lia, Lasha's mother tells us with a smile, as she refers to her relationship with the various global visitors from over the years. Tourists spend an unforgettable day here – they invariably eat delicious food and then recommend others to come to Martvili.

Together with her helpers, Lasha's mother bustles around the open kitchen and prepares the main dish for the table, elarji (cornmeal with cheese). Housekeepers are often employed here from nearby villages. And so this house has become a source of income for many people. When they are short of their own, they also buy products from their neighbors, and this happens very often.

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"Sometimes a guests happen to witness local girls and boys dancing and playing in the yard. Children light a fire and dance and sing around it," Ani notes and shows us a video taken with a smartphone. "It's a real surprise for the guests who admire Megrelian cuisine. Together with the dishes, they also share in Georgian folklore."

The yard of Lasha's Ethno-house is really different – it's vibrantly colourful, multi-voiced, alive. A swing hangs from a tree, handmade tables and chairs are spread out to accommodate several groups of guests. Everyone can enjoy the harmony of nature, with people and animals together. Along with the chirping of birds and the cheerful exclamations of the hosts, the crowing of a rooster or the braying of a calf can often be heard. 'Bekeka' - a yeanling runs around bleating, and there is a place for everything – rabbits, dogs, chickens, geese and pussycats alike. No one feels hate for one another. And so the children who come don't want to leave, and equally adults are hesitant to depart from Lasha's Ethno-house. The best reward for both the hostess and for Ani is to make guests happy.

"Before adding the tables, I warned the travel agencies that we couldn't accept large groups," Ani recalls a time before winning a competition for women entrepreneurs and eventually receiving a grant to buy inventory and fix the bathrooms. "You can't imagine what was happening here: one neighbour brought a table, the second one - chairs, another rushed in

bringing glasses, another brought plates... and still, we received guests and managed to make them feel crazy about our hospitality and the place..."

Ani was among the one hundred women across Georgia who were selected by UN Women Georgia and the Farmers' Association for training during the first stage of the project. They learned how to write projects and were even given the opportunity to participate in a grant competition. Ani now laughs as she reminisces over how breathlessly she spoke about her project on Lasha's Ethno-house during her interview.

"The members of the jury asked me only one question: 'Why do you love Martvili so much?"

And you should hear Ani's answer to this very question for yourself. She describes Martvili as if it were paradise. And indeed, 13 out of the 41 natural monuments in Georgia are found in Martvili. Along with its famous canyon, the Tobi Waterfall - at 234 meters, our country's highest three-cascade waterfall - can also be found here.

"It turns out that this is my life – introducing my homeland to people. My best, most praiseworthy culture - amazing, rich, inexhaustible! To show them and make them fall in love with it. When you love, you discover something new every day!"





#### Samegrelo, Najakhao

# Elarji

#### **Ingredients:**

300 g sulguni cheese 100 g gherghili (coarse-ground maize) Mchadi flour A pinch of salt

#### **Directions:**

Wash the hominy thoroughly. Add it to the cookpot and pour over enough water to cover the maize. Place over a medium fire and cover the pot with a lid. If the water dries up during cooking, you can add some more cold water. As soon as the water starts to dry, lower the flame and continue cooking the ghomi mixture. Check often and stir with a special wooden spoon mixer so that the bottom does not burn.

When the gherghili is boiled, add as much mchadi flour as needed to reach a mixture of medium thickness. Continue stirring with the wooden mixer and after about 10 minutes add the sulguni cut into long and thin strips – it is preferable to use freshly made sulguni, so it can be stretched well. If the sulguni is unsalted, add some additional seasoning. Keep stirring the doughy mixture periodically, and attempt to melt the cheese softly and evenly throughout. If the mass pulls up with the wooden mixer and does not break, the elarji is ready.

# Gebzhalia with green ghomi

#### **Ingredients:**

900 g Imeretian cheese 200 g strained matsoni 300 g gherghili 100 g fresh mint 100 g coriander 100 g spinach 2 garlic cloves 1 green pepper Salt to taste

#### **Directions:**

Cut the cheese into six pieces of around 150 g each and pour over boiling water. At the same time, prepare the ajika. Blend together the mint, coriander, garlic, pepper and salt. Keep some fresh mint and coriander leaves aside to decorate the dish. Take the pieces of cheese out of the hot water, and, while still hot enough, spread them onto the palm of your hand, and spread the ajika over the pieces. Once coated, roll them into balls (known as gebzhalia) with your hands. Repeat with all six pieces of cheese. Then mix the remaining mint ajika into the strained matsoni. Prepare your ghomi following the traditional method. While it is cooking, throw the spinach into boiling water for 10 seconds and blend it together. When the ghomi is ready, mix both together and add salt to taste. To best serve the dish, spread the sauce on one side and the ghomi on the other side of the plate. Finally, put the gebzhalia balls over the sauce and sprinkle mint and coriander leaves on top as a garnish.



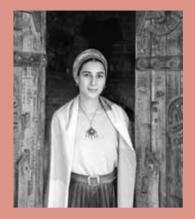
# The East in the West

In the next stop of our culinary tour we reach Otia's Ezo (Otia's Yard). In Tskaltubo, within the house-museum of the late Otia Ioseliani, the famous Georgian writer, we are welcomed by Nutsa Tsiskarishvili, his daughter-in-law, alongside some of the writer's descendants. Kindly, Nutsa acts as our main hostess. In this beautiful area of Imereti, we least expected to find khinkali for our dinner. However, it turned out that Tushi Nutsa, originally from Eastern Georgia, was treating us to this oriental Georgian dish. This synthesis is not only important for her from a culinary perspective - Nutsa also has her say in all other directions and she enriches the Otia house-museum. The museum is the family hearth for agriculture, acting as a cultural centre and a welcoming space for tourists, and it has been enhanced by her own personal experiences. Thus it incorporates both Tushetian and Kakhetian customs, traditions, knowledge, and it makes the place even more diverse.

"I am Tushi by origin. It was very difficult for me to move to Imereti. I never imagined that I would ever live here. I was born and raised in Tbilisi. I spent my childhood in Kakheti. I went to Tusheti for the first time as a student. There I realized that 'the call of the blood' really exists; they are not just invented words... When I opened my eyes there, the day started with a different colour, with a different heartbeat, with a different energy... I don't get tired at all in the mountains."

Tireless work is still one of Nutsa's main characteristics. A historian by profession, she combines museum guiding, Sunday school teaching and helping her husband with brewing in the wine cellar, all while arranging and running the hotel.

"Our country ought to have the right direction, the right niche in the field of tourism. Nature is not enough if your



Venue: Venue: Otia's Yard Imereti, Tskaltubo

Hostess: Nutsa Tsiskarishvili

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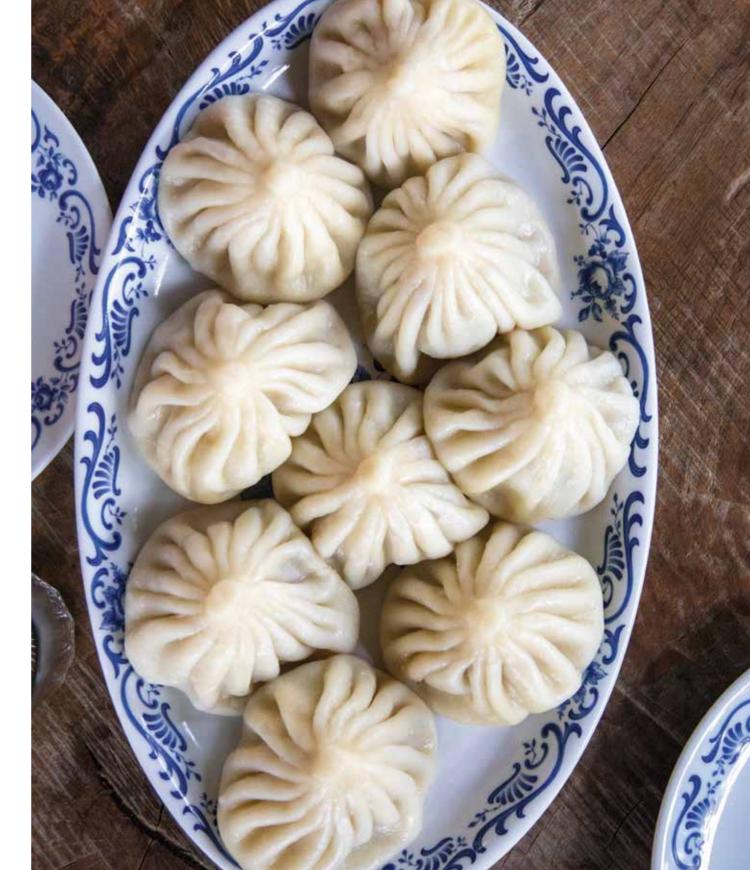
culture is not preserved harmonically. The ideal leverage of tourism, first of all, is our hospitality. The most important thing is that historically we have come this far in a continuous line. It is very rare for a culture to emerge and stay in the same place, to remain there, for example, Egyptians now are no longer the Egyptians they once were. Maybe we are not exactly those Georgians, but we still speak the same language, use the same script, sing and dance the same way, eat the same food... I am still there, I have not gone anywhere. I have never attacked or occupied anybody's country, I have never oppressed anybody. You have to look after and preserve the things that nurture you and define your cultural identity."

For Nutsa, it is especially important to preserve the authenticity of the Georgian character and to free it from an artificially imposed national self-consciousness.

"Our tradition has very deep roots. It just so happened that the three-hundred-year-old Russian boot has crushed all our identity so much that lots of things have been hidden, many things have transformed and been distorted. We have to clearly define and realize what is a bad habit and what is a tradition. For example, being rude is inappropriate, un-Georgian behaviour. In the past, when a Georgian man left the supra after a feast, he wasn't supposed to stagger, as drunkenness was a great shame. The formation of the Georgian character has a strong connection

with religion, for me it is associated with the Christian vision. Along with hospitality and art, human relationships are very important. Warmth, backing up one another and unity - those are characteristic features for us, for Georgians."

Visitors have a wide choice at Otia's house-museum. They immediately find themselves in a house designed and built by the writer himself. On entering the vard, visitors reach a gate decorated with figures of stallions and then see his grave, dug by the hands of the writer's youngest son, Dachi. A quote is etched onto the tombstone: "What remains of a man is his life." This house and the yard left by the writer are a continuation of Otia's life and its tangible parts. Here you can find his personal belongings, his pipes, a Svan hat, a chokha, his books translated into many languages, some handmade objects, a large fireplace, a boxwood chandelier, and a mill. You can also see a Caucasian ibex that he painted, which to this day is regarded as a symbol of Otia's free, unyielding character. On the walls you find posters of performances directors staged based on his plays across different periods. Even now, children still stage performances in this space. They come to the Sunday school, which Dachi founded in 2015, under the leadership of the Otia Ioseliani community from nearby villages. There teenagers can learn the art of reading, archaeology, photography, local history and other subjects entirely for free. Nutsa teaches needlework, embroidery, knitting and felt-work too. On



the first floor, chain-armor hanging above the fireplace catches your attention at once. It was woven by Nutsa and is another beautiful example of her bringing elements of the East into the West – finding Khevsuri tradition within an Imeretian context.

"Needlework has always held an important place for us. In one way or another, we have had a diverse experience in Georgia. For example, there are nations that developed only glass, or clay, or even porcelain. We also have kvevris and silk, which are of very high quality, because we have peculiar kinds of trees: a special kind of mulberry tree grows in this land, milk flows from its leaves. This is what the silkworm feeds on, and this has a dramatic effect on the threads as well. Revival of Georgian needlework and craftwork is my great passion and one of the main motivations of my life."

You can visit this hearth of history and culture for dinner too, join a delicious Georgian feast, with local wine, beer or hard liquor alongside products from the family farm. While a space for tourists to stay overnight will be ready soon enough too.

"There was a great demand for lodgings and this determined the direction of the hotel. We have two oda-houses, for a total of four people. Soon we will add two more cottages to be able to receive guests this year. I bought equipment and furniture with the grant from the United Nations Women's Organization

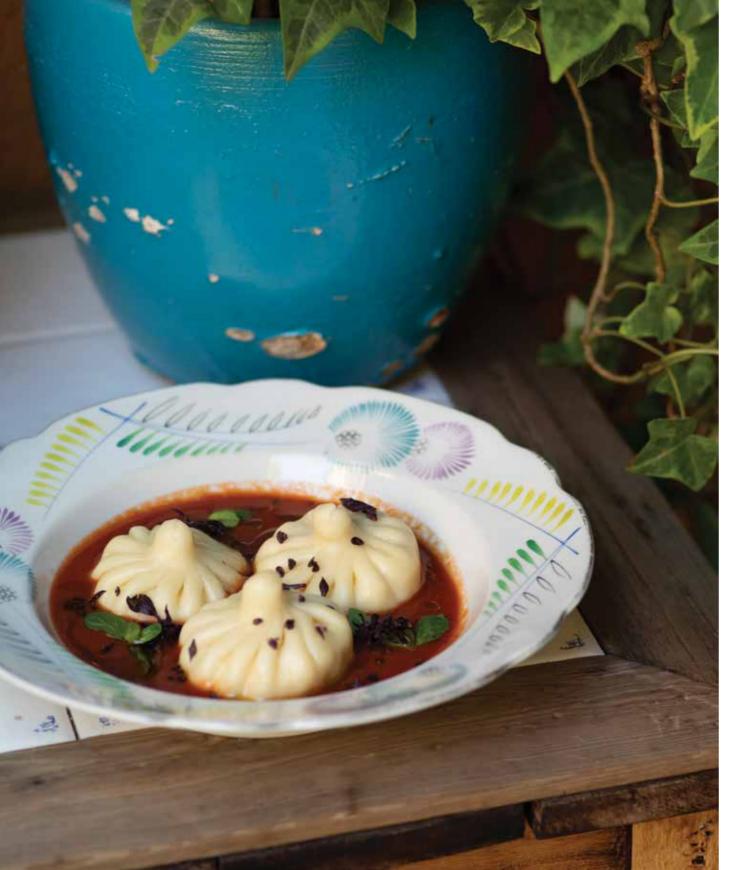
and the Farmers' Association. Participating in the women's empowerment program, first of all, I deepened my knowledge, and in addition, I have made many friends. If we need anything, they are always by our side. And this is a great comfort when you want to start something new."

After the death of Otia Ioseliani, Dachi opened its doors in 2011. This house is now filled with the admiration and delight of many visitors. Charmed tourists have since even referred to the host and hostess as ambassadors of Georgia.

"Once a foreign guest said something like this: 'For me, Georgia starts here and ends here.' He had not been many places. He just visited us and saw so many things at once. I am from the mountains, from the East. Otia, my husband is from the West – from Imereti. We unite the whole country... When I am alone, I apologize to the East and to my Tusheti for 'betraying' them. However, I have my say here too: with the panduri (a Georgian stringed instrument), with singing, with knitting chain-armor... When our guests come, if I have time, I sing. In order to fully enjoy the Georgian supra, it is necessary to introduce poetry, singing, dancing and culture along with the dishes.

I think I was born to preserve Georgian traditions – through needlework, customs, hospitality, the relationships that I have been taught and that I will pass on to others."





# Imereti, Tskaltubo

#### Khinkali

# **Ingredients:**

Dough:

1 kg highest quality flour 460 ml water

20 g salt

# Filling:

1 kg minced meat (700 g beef, 300g pork)

2 medium size onions

1 tsp. chopped pepper

1 tsp. cumin

2 tsp. salt

400 ml water

#### **Directions:**

Stir together flour and salt in a medium bowl. Knead it until the dough is firm and elastic. When ready, place the dough in a lightly oiled bowl and cover loosely with plastic wrap. Meanwhile prepare the filling. Roll out small balls of the dough until it is about 1/3 of an inch thick. Cut out circles of about 2.5 inches in diameter with a drinking glass. Use a rolling pin to roll each circle into a thin eight inch round. Then place about 1 tablespoonful (about 1/2 ounce) of meat filling in the center of each dough circle and using your thumbs and index fingers make an accordion-type fold all around. Fold the nubbin of the dumpling between your index finger and thumb and pinch off extra dough to enclose the filling. Makes 40 medium size khinkali.

# Nadughi khinkali in tomato sauce

# **Ingredients:**

Sauce:

1000 ml tomato puree

3 medium size tomatoes

2 medium size onions

4 garlic cloves

150 ml olive oil

15 g dried basil

50 g fresh basil

20 g fresh mint

Salt, red pepper, black pepper – to taste

# Khinkali filling:

800 g nadughi (a soft cottage cheese, similar to Italian ricotta)

600 g grated sulguni cheese

600 g grated Imeretian cheese Salt to taste

#### Directions for the sauce:

Pour 100 ml of olive oil in to a pan, let it heat, then add finely chopped onions and cook until golden. Add peeled and chopped tomatoes, crushed garlic and dried basil, and continue to sauté. Simmer on a low heat for 15-20 minutes, season with red and black pepper and salt. Take the sauce from the pan, pour the sauce on a dish and put the khinkali in it.

# Directions for the filling:

Mix together the nadughi, grated sulguni and grated Imeretian cheeses. Place 50 g of the filling on top of a circle of kneaded dough and wrap it using the traditional method as described in the recipe above.



# The Miller Girl and the Dolabi Millstone

If you ever visit the Gurian Patskha in Likhauri, you will never forget Eka Salukvadze. It might seem surprising to you, but believe me, you will certainly want to come back. What do milling, teaching driver's license theory, cleaning the municipal building, beekeeping, raising three children, digging the land with a spade and hoe, and creating Dolabi, a unique guest space in Likhauri, all have in common?! Well, it is Eka, a 31-year-old woman from Likhauri who manages to combine all her work as if her days were far longer than only 24 hours.

"Who is helping you?" – this question naturally arises when addressing Eka.

"My own head, my own hands," she smiles in answer, and then starts telling us about her mother and her sisters, who have been further united and strengthened by that strong will and persistent fortitude. There are only women, women and children in this house.

"In the morning, all I ask of God is that this strength and energy does not fail me."

The main thing for Eka, with her indomitable energy and endless work, is her family and ancestors: she considers it her duty to take care of her parents' legacy. She now feels that she is on the right track and that these traditions should continue.

"This mill is more than a century old. It was built by my great-grandfather, Platon Salukvadze, and it was seized during the communist regime. My father fought all the



Venue: Gurian Patskha "Dolabi" Guria, Likhauri village

Hostess: Eka Salukvadze

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time to get it back, and finally, it became possible to buy it back – we had to buy back our own land."

Eka called this hospitality space, where guests are served delicious Gurian dishes in a beautifully decorated courtyard, Dolabi, meaning millstone in Georgian. Eka's own mill has two stones.

"People walked for kilometres to reach the mill. This was a problem for the whole village. Mchadi is the first and foremost food in Guria. Here every family sows maize, and everyone needs to grind it and make maize flour."

Eka restored the mill. And now it works using only natural resources, without the need for electricity.

"Our mill is located on the central Atchistskali River. The river is turning our mill. Ozurgeti mill, as well as many others, work on electricity. Corn ground using an electric mill is completely different, it's coarser, much thicker. Maize ground by my mill is fine, like a 'pipka' [snowflake in Georgian], as we, Gurians usually call it, and so the mchadi made with this flour has a completely different taste."

However, Eka's mill is not only distinguished by this feature alone – a library awaits the visitors here.

"When people come here, they can spend time reading while the corn is grinding.

Many people have donated books to me, I sometimes write: 'This book was donated by this and that person to the library of the mill.' I want to put Otia Ioseliani's words on the wall: 'A hoe and a bar, a book and a cross' - it really is a phrase for life. If you carry the cross that God made, you have a connection with the earth, and the book is with you too - so, you have saved yourself!"

A female miller's hand can be felt in everything here – whether in the library, in the grain storage, or in the beautiful packaging of the prepared flour. Local and foreign guests of Gurian Patskha should first and foremost visit the mill. There you can visit the Ekytime Takaishvili Museum too. And arriving at Eka's house, you will find an unforgettable Gurian supra.

"This is not a restaurant, and it never will be... No matter how much I expand the space, I will still keep the family atmosphere here. We should make our guests feel at home, as if they are at their grandparents' country house... I bought the inventory with a grant and arranged the yard, I had hammocks, tables here... I also served the guests in the Gurian Patskha. They came with their families, children. The little ones ran in the yard, had fun... they were satisfied."

Ever since her childhood, not a day has passed in Eka's family without a guest. And when someone called from the gate, the women were already laying the table.

"My father was 'a bread-and-salt man,' as we call it, he prepared and set the table for us five times a day."

Her father, Londer Salukvadze, drove a trailer as his profession and regularly had to go on long business trips, so he would often take Eka with him. She learned to drive and repair a car from her father.

"Everyone came to us if their car broke down. My mother, my sisters and I would immediately start to prepare food, bake the mchadi... Father never took money for this kind of work, he would give the visitor a good drink, get them drunk and then drive them back home for the night."

Eka always feels her father's support. As soon as people in her region find out that she is Londer's daughter, they help her with everything, support her in every way.

"To be honest, I feel a little awkward when I take money for dinner from our customers. I worry, how would my father appreciate something like this in our family... Then my mother once said, 'I'll tell you a story: whoever comes, in the name of our family, let us give them a dish, for instance, a salad, khachapuri or mchadi, as a gift."

Since then, this rule has become a tradition at Dolabi.



Eka remembers the first guests of Gurian Patskha with a smile:

"I had just opened Dolabi, it was the second day and no one came. Who could know the whereabouts of my Dolabi... I had put out a poster, lit everything, turned on the music. At that time, my aunt was visiting me from Tbilisi. I told her that there was not a single guest in sight and that I would be baking khachapuri on the ketsi, our traditional kind of earthenware bread-baking dish, just for us. The Salukvadze people are traditionally pretty sharp-tongued and she replied, 'there won't be any Khachapuri left for me. Mind my words – there will be someone coming here today.' Not even ten minutes passed before a car parked by our house. Three guests got out and asked if the Dolabi was working. 'What a question,' I said, 'Of course, it works!"

Those first guests later returned to Eka four more times. They even later brought along their grandparents to try her dishes.

We watched the baking of Eka's legendary mchadi as if it were a ritual. It was a beautiful sight, like a work of art. Mchadi with such a distinctive taste is probably only produced in Likhauri with Eka's maize corn, flour milled in her mill, with the aroma of rhododendron caucasicum leaves from the Atchi forest, the warmth of the Gurian ketsi and definitely made by Eka's own hands. It works perfectly along with their family cheese and the salad

known as 'mama-papuri' (ancestral in Georgian) – though it suits everything.

"Pounded nuts, garlic, coriander, saffron, basil, sweet basil, all this pounded in with vinegar, cucumbers and tomatoes. The guests like it very much... They also often ask for Gurian pie, green beans with walnuts, or house chicken..."

Together with the joy of winning the UN Women and Farmers' Association grant competition, Eka was suddenly filled with new ideas. She is now planning to arrange a winter space in the shed built by her father.

"He was so fond of hosting guests, I know he wouldn't have been offended if I renovate it. There will be a fireplace there. I will use the small garage below to store wine. I'll bring down the grand piano from above. My mother is a music teacher. I played the chonguri (a popular Georgian stringed instrument) and sang in the Likhauri folk ensemble."

Singing often arises when there is a good feast in this house.

Eka's energy is like a river, it flows incessantly. She makes her mother forget her age and her high blood pressure, she sets an example to her sisters and her fellow villagers, she lays the way for her children, and she turns both the mill and her Gurian Patskha Dolabi, just like the Atchistkali River.





#### Guria, Likhauri

# Ketsi mchadi

# **Ingredients:**

500 g maize flour A pinch of salt Warm water Caucasian evergreen azalea leaves

# **Directions:**

Knead the dough with warm water for around 10–15 minutes. Once kneaded, distribute the Caucasian evergreen azalea leaves into a well heated ketsi and flatten the balls of the dough, leaving a cross shape on the top. Cover the dish with the remaining leaves and place a lid over the top. Throw glowing embers over the ketsi and bake for around 30-40 minutes.

# Mchadi with maize grains

# **Ingredients:**

500 g yellow maize flour 200 g maize grains 300 g Imeretian cheese 200 g sour cream 30 g dry ajika 2 green peppers

# **Directions:**

Slowly mix all the ingredients together with the maize flour and knead into a dough. Heat the oven to 180 °C (355 °F), form the dough into the shape you best prefer and bake for around 40 minutes.



# I am from Aketi – "akete" means "do it", and I have to do it!

An outstanding hostess, Keso Makharadze, is waiting for you in Atsana village. She will offer you a taste of Gurian brinjula, prepared there right in front of you, and, if you wish, you can even participate. As she cooks, she will tell you wonderful stories that somehow bring out a better taste from the food, and then you will fall in love with Guria in a whole new way.

Keso calls brinjula the pearl of Gurian cuisine. She jokingly refers to it as "the older brother of khachapuri and pizza", one that has given up the arena to younger dishes. And now she believes the time has come to revive this ancient tradition and to rediscover an amazing Gurian taste.

"Brinjula is well forgotten and buried in the ground..." says Keso as she throws glowing embers on to the top of her ketsi (a Georgian stone or earthenware vessel for baking). It is slowly covered with glowing embers so that the curd, cheese and eggs are each fully melted into the rice dough and become a smooth mass. In the past, it turns out, Gurians used rice flour instead of wheat. And this dish is a remnant from that time. Brinjula also soon became Keso's main inspiration and pushed towards success. When she started her business hosting guests, she wondered about what was missing in a market saturated with Gurian tea, wine or dried fruit.

"I was thinking, where are you going, what can you bring to the market? Who should you compete with? I thought – 'what shall I do...?' And then suddenly it struck me that nobody had brinjula!"



Venue: Taberne in Guria Guria, Atsana village

Hostess: Keso Makharadze

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Inspired by this idea, she took out a 20-year-old untouched stone ketsi left by her father and she got down to business. However, Keso has never been idle. She is originally from Aketi, she tells us that the name of her village is related to "akete" – which translates to doing. Bentonite clay, which contains gold particles, has been mined in the land for centuries, and items made with it are said to have special properties. It is also thought that the Supsa River that passes through Aketi brings elements from this beautiful land right into the Black Sea – giving magnetite sand healing properties.

"Ketsi is not made of Aketi clay, it soon cracks and breaks. Instead, it is indispensable for kvevris, pitchers, jugs, well tunnels and tiles," Keso tells us, as she eagerly shows us a tile she found during the second renovation of her house bearing this inscription: "This tile was cut by Grisha Samsonia in 1961 in the village of Aketi."

"In Guria, houses were covered with Aketi tiles. Families' income was tied to the bentonite clay. Everything you see here is made of clay."

In this place you will find a burning hearth, which the Gurians call "kukhna", around there are ancient ethnographic objects aplenty. Here you will find clay used for grain storage, jugs, cheese and dairy stores, large clay pitchers called dergis and churis (similar to kvevris). Keso takes care of each

artefact judiciously and she brings them back to modernity.

"I really want to restore my family tradition and buy a small kiln," she passionately shares her plans with us, and when asked if she knows how to work with clay, she answers without hesitation: "I will learn!" It seems that perhaps this readiness and courage is our unfailing hostess' greatest trait. Her attitude and hard work have turned this twohundred-year-old home into an outstanding tourist destination.

Every object in the place has its own history. The great-grandfather of Keso's husband, Besarion Chkhaidze, brought the huge saw that now hangs on the wall when he was in exile. A Menshevik, who was beaten and banished from his homeland for 16 years, he returned home with this very tool: "if my family has waited for me, I must build a house..." His wife and children barely survived the bloody Russian regime, yet Besarion did indeed cut down a chestnut tree with this saw and he built a house with those logs. Today, Keso Makharadze lives in this same house and its doors are already open to guests.

"First of all, I offer the guests Gurian emotion. It's as natural and honest as our Gurian cuisine, without any additives, good for the soul and the body."



Keso did not stop working, even during the pandemic. With the support of a grant, she completed renovation of the house and started to construct a 50 sqm. degustation space. Now, just through the gates of the yard, you will quickly notice the beautiful walls of the building. Keso hand-picked red bricks from the ruins of a tea factory built in Atsana in 1926, bricks which time and frost have not damaged a bit. She then collected tuff and cobblestones one by one. The builders told her that according to tradition, some coins should be thrown into the foundation. Though Keso didn't think that would suffice and so she attached a letter with the money.

"I wrote that a pandemic is raging around the world. We really didn't know if we would survive or not, it was scary... I have two children, and I started all this because of them... So I was talking about survival, not the development of tourism. Well, under the circumstances of this pandemic, a woman starting construction should either be a guru or a doodle! Or both together. I put this letter in a capsule and it is cemented in there."

That's how Keso instilled a guru's humour into the very foundations of her business and how she continued to take care of the expansion with her usual bright optimism.

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She soon has to cover it all before winter comes and offer new space to her future guests. Here visitors will be greeted with wine and cheese. In the vegetable garden, they will be able to handpick cucumbers, tomatoes and beans, and even cook them to their own tastes in the kitchen. If they wish, they can also collect seasonal fruits, nuts or chestnuts in the forest together with their hostess. They will take a masterclass on Gurian seasoning and an array of Gurian dishes and, of course, they will share brinjula.

Still engaged in conversation, Keso gently brings us back to the hearth, she takes off the top of the ketsi, and from there the browned Gurian khachapuri shines out. The "Kukhna" is now filled with a dizzying aroma.

"I want this to be a place where people will feel not only the flavours of brinjula and Guria, but also peace of mind, in warmth and love.

The Gurian character is full of emotion, and although it is joined with sadness, it is also accompanied by an essential desire to rise, one that cannot adjust solely to the earthly, it must also rise a little towards the sky - exactly like nature in Guria... This diverse geography, close to the sky and the sea, is romantic, direct and sincere, full of a smart sense of humour - from where it connects heaven and earth."

The village of Atsana itself equally has an interesting location. Sakukhia Canyon and centuries-old temples are just a few kilometres away. The beautiful Elinabado Waterfall is nearby. Ureki, rich in magnetite, and Kolkheti National Park are very close. And the village is right on the crossroads connecting the stunning Gomi Mountain and Bakhmaro.

This year, Keso's Taberne in Guria was chosen by various tourist companies as a key points on their tourist routes running through the area, and it is among one of 12 locations offering the "Gurian Emotion" to its guests. This is naturally another incentive for Keso not to stop.

"It's not by accident that I am from Aketi... As I said before, there is this pursuit for doing more, in my soul too, and, as you already know, the word 'akete' in Georgian means 'do it', and I can't rest, I really have to do it!" she says cheerfully as she hands us a hot, thick piece of brinjula...







# Brinjula

# Ingredients:

Dough:

400 g highest quality flour 200 g matsoni with soda Water – knead as much as required with the flour until the dough as thick as sour cream A pinch salt

Filling:

1 kg unsalted cheese

6 eggs

# **Directions:**

Heat well a medium-sized ketsi (earthenware or stone bread-baking dish) and pour the dough over evenly, sprinkle the cheese and egg mixture on top and bake over a fire.

Hostess' comment: Brinjula is like a delicious sibling of Georgian khachapuri and Italian pizza.

# Five-minute pkhlovani

# **Ingredients:**

300 g flour

100 g matsoni with a little soda and vinegar

200 ml water

3 eggs

50 g butter

200 g Imeretian cheese

200 g Edammer cheese

200 g nadughi

100 g spinach

50 g tarragon

# Directions:

Mix the flour and matsoni with soda, and add a mixture of beaten eggs, water, cheese, with chopped spinach and tarragon, to create your dough. Warm the pan, drop in the butter and when well heated, add the prepared dough. Bake on a low heat for 10-12 minutes.