

Havant U3A Wine Appreciation Group

5th Lockdown Newsletter 16th May 2020

Welcome

Hello Wine Appreciation members, this is the fifth of our regular emails during the Coronavirus lockdown period. Hopefully this will prove an interesting diversion from the current situation and the uncertainties of resuming normal life whenever that will be.

Attached is a wine related joke we can all practice with the advantage of doubling consumption!

Members News

If you have wine-related news or information to share, please let us have that and we will try to include that in the next newsletter. Also, if you are able to offer help to or if you need help from any members, please let us know and we'll share that as necessary.

From Nick Haward concerning UK availability of Romanian wines: Asda sell two Romanian wines made from the [Feteasca Neagra](#) and [Feteasca Regala](#) grapes as part of their Wine Atlas series. They are quite cheap, £5.25, but have both been given IWSC quality awards, the white also having a Decanter Gold award. Nick has previously tried them both and found them very good, especially for the price.

Study topic

We are a learning organisation so each newsletter will cover one wine learning subject each time. Your suggestions for future subjects and the way that the subject is covered will be gratefully received.

This time the topic is the wine of Hungary

Most European countries have the Romans to thank for their wine industry but there is indirect evidence that local Celts in Hungary knew viticulture as early as the third century B.C. Despite such long history Hungarian wine production has suffered the same dramatic changes after the fall of the USSR as other countries, such as described for Romania in a previous newsletter. The government took control of vineyards, favouring quantity over quality, and many of Hungary's unique varieties and the distinct quality of vinification disintegrated. In 1985, at the dictates of Moscow, exports were 300 million litres, whereas in 2016 the same figure covered complete wine production, of which only 60 million litres was exported.

Hungary is 8th in the EU by area planted but far behind say Romania with only a third of their area. Only 30% of vines are more than 30 years old and the majority, just under 70% are white varieties. This is the third highest proportion in the EU just behind Slovenia and Slovakia which are adjoining countries. So the terroir and tradition is for the white grape.

EU data suggests that 99% of production is PDO quality (protected designation of origin in EU speak), impressive, but this conceals a major problem. The majority of export is sold as bulk wine without designation of origin and at a very low price, in 2016 the average price was 1.14 euros per litre, half of that of Austrian wine exports. One reason is that many of the largest wineries in Hungary are owned by German companies which buy the bulk wine to improve their harvest, though there are no statistics on this.

The Hungarian wine industry believes its future lies with exports to Germany and Poland though due to weak central organisation this will rely on individual wineries building ties in these markets. Heumann Winery in Villány is an exception, having exploited this approach. They export 70% of production, mainly to the USA, Switzerland and the UK, whereas the norm is 10% or less.

Amazingly Lidl dominates exporting being the largest and increasing rapidly, exporting 7.5million bottles in 2017 and selling the same number in Hungary. The wines most in demand are Királyleányka, Tokaji Furmint and Szürkebarát. Lidl organizes a wine expo every year where international experts can select the wines they wish to put on Lidl store shelves abroad. Obviously their British buyer is not keen, as the only currently listed Lidl Hungarian wines are a Pinot Grigio and a late harvest Tokaji. Perhaps if we Brits get drinking Hungarian we can change their priorities!

Until the late '90s or even a bit later, the most popular wines were the heavy, oaky reds and now, just like in many other places, the focus is shifting to local varietals and less oak. Hungary is also becoming better known for fiery white wines, alongside its famed sweet whites.

The protected designation map of Hungary is fairly complicated (see below) but an excellent article explaining all can be found [here](#)

This explains that DHC is a higher quality sub-category of PDO given to only 7 areas:

- **Eger DHC** – Encompasses the whole region. Also includes **Egri Bikavér DHC** (Bull's Blood) and **Egri Bikavér Superior DHC** wine styles.
- **Debrői Hárslevelű DHC** — A sub-region of the Eger PDO.
- **Villány DHC** — Encompasses the whole region.
- **Somló DHC** — A sub-region of the Nagy Somló PDO. Includes the **Somló Nászéjszakák bora DHC** and **Somlói Arany DHC** wines.
- **Káli Medence DHC** — This is an area on the northern shore of Lake Balaton.
- **Izsáki Arany Sárfehér DHC** — A sub-region of the Kunság PDO.
- **Tokaji DHC** — Includes **máslás, fordítás, szamorodni, aszú,** and **eszencia** wine styles.



The two historically best known Hungarian wines are Tokaji fortified sweet white from Tokaji (area 22 on the map), and Bulls Blood red (Egri Bikavér) from Eger (area 20 on the map).

After the Magyar invasion of Hungary in 896, what would later become the much lauded vineyards of Tokaj were awarded to the followers of Árpád. By the 17th century, these vineyards merited the world's first vineyard classification system, introduced in 1700. By the end of the 19th century sweet Tokaji was world famous. Made from a combination of local grapes including Hárslevelű and Furmint, Tokaji is produced in one of several sweetness categories: Aszú, 3, 4, 5, or 6 *Puttonyos*, the unique unit used to measure a wine's sugar content, 6 Puttonyos being the sweetest, with a minimum of 150 grams of sugar per litre. The grapes are usually hand-picked from shrivelled clusters when they reach peak ripeness, making Tokaj aszú a very labor-intensive but rewarding harvest. The final wine is aged for a minimum of two years in oak barrels before being bottled, adding to its deep, rich flavour. The wine has an amazing gold-amber colour, honey, pruned apricot aromas, with some honey and citrus on the palate and a beautiful creamy texture. There is a brief introduction to the Tokaj terroir and effectively a 2013 statement of intent for the future from various winemakers [here](#). A much more detailed review of Tokaj wine make-up, styles and production process is [here](#)

The blend behind Bull's Blood is Kékfrankos, Kadarka, Zweigelt, Cabernet Franc, and Syrah, though each winemaker uses their own combination. It was invented in the early 20th century by Jenő Gruber. Kékfrankos must be the main wine used, making up between a third and half of the blend. It is the principal red wine variety in Hungary today, as well as one of the oldest, dating back to the 13th or 14th century. A short tasting video of Bull's Blood is [here](#)

and a longer subtitled video covering Northern Hungary including Eger as well as the wine producer of the tasting video is [here](#).

There are at least two speciality UK based Hungarian wine importers [here](#) and [here](#). The Wine Society list three whites, three reds and one Tokaji Aszu, starting from £6.50.

Lottery win wines

This is one of an occasional series about the world's greatest (and most expensive) wines. Ones which probably are only something we could only consider buying after a very big lottery win and even then might balk at the price!

Since we are in the middle of summer like sunshine, if not the heat, then champagne seems appropriate. Veuve Clicquot is reckoned one of the best, and even the name has some interesting history. In 1772 Philippe Clicquot established a small wine business, making use of vines he already owned in Bouzy and in 1798 Philippe's son, François married Barbe-Nicole Ponsardin, the daughter of a wealthy Reims textile manufacturer. In 1805 François died and Barbe-Nicole showed her force of character by asking her father-in-law to let her run the business. She injected plenty of cash into the business and soon learned the essential skills for making Champagne. She became known as Veuve Clicquot, or 'widow Clicquot'. And then in 1810 Madame Clicquot created the region's first recorded vintage Champagne, the product of a single harvest.

The most expensive Veuve Clicquot is a quirk of history. The discovery of a rare 1841 vintage, found in a shipwreck in the Baltic Sea in 2010, made one Veuve Clicquot variety even more covetable. 145 bottles of champagne were discovered in the wreck, 46 of which were Veuve Clicquot. Just one went on to sell for \$34,000 (£20,900) at auction in 2012. Which leaves the question where are the other 45 and how much are they worth now?

Member's cellar

In this section we'll share information about your current favourite bottle or something you're saving for a special occasion, please let us have that and we'll include in future newsletters.

This is a current and continuing favourite of ours, but experienced only once a year at Christmas, specifically alongside the divine Christmas pudding made by Alison. Discovered from the sweet white wine section of the Wine Society List, this is a half-bottle of Stanton and Killeen Rutherglen Muscat, 12 Years Old, 18%. A mature fortified Muscat, dominated by the Muscat grape, in a style found nowhere else in the world, from a winery in North-East Victoria, Australia, the centre of the countries fortified wine production. A mouth-watering blast of treacle, coffee and chocolate, like nothing else I have ever tasted and heavenly in combination with Christmas pudding!

The best wine or wine experience

Do you have a real wine highlight either the wine itself or the overall experience? Please email in to share with other members?

Members Feedback

Pat Collins - Thanks for the 3rd Lockdown letter, I really enjoy & appreciate them. I was able to enjoy a bottle of Malbec which I found in my airing cupboard where I keep my red wine, with the first letter. I didn't have any of the wines mentioned in the 2nd, ahead of the 3rd letter I opened a bottle of Primitivo and reminisced about my holiday in Puglia last year. I do not have any Sauvignon Blanc at the moment but it will be on my shopping list this week. Looking forward to the next edition.

Roger Green - We were sorry to hear of Margaret's misadventures. Judith has sent a card. Hopefully it's giving you (Geoff & Val) some respite! Your mention of Zinfandel brought to mind a visit to a small Californian Vineyard where we sampled some decent stuff. The proprietor told the story of producing some Zin which they deemed undrinkable so wasn't bottled. A year later a barrel was discovered lurking in the inner recesses of the shed. They intended to pour it down the drain but some brave soul tried it and found it to be sublime! Generally I find much Californian Zin unimpressive and overpriced while some Primitivo can be very drinkable at a reasonable price.

We have just shared a bottle of Australian Dark Corner Durif Shiraz, part of a mixed case of Big Reds from Laithwaites and also available from the Sunday Times Wine Club. It went down very well with very evident berry fruit on nose and palate. There's an initial slight sweetness (dare I say that?) from the fruit but well controlled tannins making it very drinkable with or without food. Delicious! £9.99 in case quantities. This combination of Durif and Shiraz is also employed in Black Stump which is a huge seller for Laithwaites. I generally buy from Laithwaites and find their descriptions pretty accurate although some of the sales blurbs are a bit fanciful. Not very knowledgeable on Sauvignon so I look forward to the views of others. I enjoy it and can usually identify its distinctive smell which is unusual for me as I'm not good in that respect. Seem to have had reasonable examples from a number of countries suggesting that the grape is pretty tolerant of terroir. Carol's piece on Vinsanto was interesting and great that it survived so well. Its many years since I drank Greek wine. My recollection is that the first bottle was for acclimatising and the second very acceptable. Must check out the Italian Vin Santo as it's more accessible for me. I was unable to open the links. Came up with 'Cannot locate server or proxy server.' Thanks for everyone's efforts in producing the news sheet.

Thanks to all those members who give us such feedback on the newsletters and offer contributions, however we always keen for contributions to help fill future newsletters. Please take a moment of your time to find something appropriate in any of the sections above and then email same to Geoff. We all want the newsletter to be a combined group effort.

Happy Drinking. Keep safe and secure!

Cheers, **Steve**

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