

**BC GUILD OF WINE JUDGES**  
 2014  
**CLASS F – DESSERT WINES**  
 Presented by Wayne Crossen (Mainland Chapter)

These notes are basically the same as the notes Sam Hauck produced for the 2009 tasting. I have added a few additional pages dealing with some interesting and unique wine types.

**Class F - Dessert**

Wines to be drunk with the dessert course of the meal. Should be sweet and luscious, but with sufficient acid to prevent them from being cloying. Alcohol must have been developed by fermentation of the wine. These are NOT fortified wines.

Wines such as ports, sweet Sherries, Madeira types, and other wines that are fortified, baked or otherwise made using port, sherry, Madeira etc. processes do NOT belong in this class.

The Dessert Class has three style sub-categories: Botrytis Affected, Ice wine Style and Other Dessert Styles (such as Late Harvest, etc.). The style of the wine should be indicated on the Registration Form and/or Bottle Tag.

**Technical Characteristics:**

	<b>Botrytis affected</b>	<b>Ice wine style</b>	<b>Other</b>
Ingredients	No restrictions		
Alcohol	12% - 14%	8.5% - 13.5%	8.5% - 14%
Colour	No restrictions		
Sugar	7.5% - 10%	Min. 8.5%	5.5% - 8.5%
Specific Gravity	1.024 – 1.034	1.028 – 1.048	1.028 – 1.048
Acid	Min. 8 g/l	9 g/l – 14 g/l	Min. 8 g/l
pH	3.1 – 3.9	3.1 – 3.9	3.1 – 3.9

All entries in this class will be considered for the AWC National Competition as AWC Class F - Dessert.

**Note:** *"Technically, in the US a wine is classified as a dessert wine if it has an alcohol by volume (ABV) level of 14%-24%"* regardless of what the BCAWA Class rules state. France, Australia and other countries also make some of these Muscat type wines in the same manner, i.e. stopping fermentation and fortifying.

While sweet wines can be expensive, many of them are remarkably good buys. They can offer great depth and complexity for a fraction of the price of a good quality, complex dry wine, especially a Burgundy or Bordeaux, which would command a far higher price. In addition, for a variety of reasons, dessert wines are difficult to make and often have painfully low yields, so give these underappreciated wines a try.

Since dessert wines are very rich, they are usually bottled in half (375 ml) bottles. Likewise, they should be served in smaller glasses than you would usually serve wine in and never filled more than 2/3 full. A serving temperature of between 43° and 53° F (6° to 11° C) will allow you to enjoy them at their best.

Sweet wines are made everywhere wine is made and have a long history. The ancient Egyptian and Greek wines were very likely sweet wines. Sugar acts as a preservative, so sweet wines are good for storing and can last a long time. Sweet wines were popular during the 1700's. They got a bad reputation shortly after the repeal of prohibition in the United States during the early 1930s. Little table wine was produced at this time. Most wines were sweet, fortified and poorly made from poor quality grapes and sported nonsensical generic names such as "Hearty Burgundy", "Mountain Chablis", "Muscatel", "Sherry," "Port", etc. The time has come to forget the torrid past and look at sweet wines, the well-made ones, in a new, appreciative light. Here is a brief list of examples of sweet wines and the countries where they are produced. There are other countries that produce dessert wines that are not listed here.

France - makes many different styles of sweet wines from many different regions:

- Sauternes
- Barsac
- Muscat Beaumes-de-Venise
- Vouvray
- Vin de Paille
- 

Italy

- Asti Spumati
- Moscato d' Asti
- Vin Santo
- Recioto
- Vin Passito
- 

Germany

- Auslese
- Beerenauslese
- Trockenbeerenauslese
- Eiswein

Hungary

- Tokaji (Tokay)

Chile

- Late harvest wines
- 

Canada

- Ice wine
- Late-harvest wines

**THERE ARE SEVERAL BASIC METHODS FOR MAKING SWEET WINES:**

1. Fermentation can be stopped before all the sugar is consumed by yeast. This is done with SO<sub>2</sub> and filtration.
2. Grapes that are very high in sugar will stop fermenting when alcohol levels reach about 14%.
3. Grapes can be left out in the sun to dry and raisin, thus concentrating sugars.

4. Grapes can be left to hang on the vine to concentrate sugar levels.
5. Wines can be affected by *botrytis cinerea*, which concentrates sugars.
6. . Grapes can be left on the vine until they freeze. When the grapes are crushed, the solid water crystals are removed; the remaining juice is high in sugar. Temperature at harvest is colder than -8° C.
7. Freeze the juice and extract the ice to have higher residual sugar.
8. Add sweet reserve or, for many home winemakers. add sugar solution.

The last two methods are generally not permitted in commercial wine making. Even in ancient Rome wine was often sweetened by adding lead pellets [lead oxide is much sweeter tasting than sugar]. An argument has been made that this practice is partially to blame for the fall of the Roman Empire and the mental results of lead poisoning.

## SAUTERNES WINE

**Sauternes**, 40 miles (65km) south of Bordeaux city, is a village famous for its high-quality sweet wines. Although some wineries here produce dry wines, they sell them under appellations other than the sweet-specific *Sauternes* appellation. The village is surrounded on all sides by vineyards, the best of which produce some of the worlds most prestigious, long-lived and expensive dessert wines. A half-bottle of top-quality, aged *Sauternes* wine from a good vintage can command prices in excess of US\$1000.

The classic Sauternes wine has an intense golden color (darker than most other dessert wines), which turns deep amber as it ages in bottle. The aromas include blossom and stone fruit, with a hint of honeysuckle – the trademark of botrytized wines. The best wines balance sweetness with acidity, concentration with freshness, and power with elegance.

### Chateau d'Yquem: symbolic of Sauternes

Sauternes' wines are made mostly from the Semillon grape variety, which accounts for about eight in every 10 vines in the local vineyards. Sauvignon Blanc accounts for much of the remaining vineyard area and is the dominant variety in just a small handful of Sauternes wines. Semillon forms a broad, well-structured base with aromas of beeswax and apricot, while Sauvignon Blanc brings its trademark herbal aromatics and sufficient acidity to keep the resulting wine fresh rather than palate cloying. This pair (which are sometimes complemented by a tiny amount of Muscadelle and Sauvignon Gris) have become the preferred varieties here not only because they are also used to make Bordeaux's dry whites, but because of their susceptibility to a particular kind of fungus, *botrytis cinerea* (often just *botrytis*).

Other than yeasts, without which grape juice could not ferment into wine, one might not expect a fungus to play a key role in winemaking. And yet the distinctive *Sauternes'* wine style is entirely dependent on this particular fungus strain. Under adverse conditions, *Botrytis cinerea* causes grapes to rot and disintegrate, further exposing their flesh and juice to all manners of other fungi and bacteria. In this form, it is known as 'grey rot', and leads to sour, unpleasant aromas in wine. But when botrytis spores land on healthy grapes under favorable weather conditions, they have quite a different effect and develop into benevolent 'noble rot'.

Noble rot develops most reliably in areas where morning mists, which allow the fungus to thrive, are followed by warm, dry afternoons that dry the grapes out and prevent the development of grey rot. When repeated over a number of weeks, this process gradually dries the grapes,

reducing their water content and naturally concentrating their sugars and flavor compounds. The result is intensely sweet, flavor-rich juice. In autumn, Sauternes and its neighbors Barsac, Bommes, Fargues and Preignac have exactly these climatic conditions, thanks to the warming and cooling of air around the nearby River Ciron. The Sauternes appellation laws state that grapes may be picked only when their must weight reaches 221 grams per liter (the minimum for regular, dry *Bordeaux Blanc* wines is just 162g/L). Because not all these abundant sugars are fermented into alcohol, the finished wine contains naturally high levels of residual sugar. In good vintages, nature needs no help getting grapes to such high levels of sweetness, but in poor vintages, winemakers turn to cryoextraction and even chaptalization to achieve this. Cryoextraction involves freezing the grapes before they are pressed, which reduces the amount of water in the resulting juice. Chaptalization – the addition of sugar or artificially concentrated grape juice – is permitted only in poor vintages and, even then, only to a limited extent.

Sauternes' wines are extremely expensive to make, for several reasons. First, there is substantial risk involved in leaving ripe grapes on the vines for an extended period of time; frost, rain and grey rot all pose significant threats to the health of the harvest. Second, skilled grape pickers must be paid to make the multiple passes (*tries successives*) through the vineyards, searching for grape bunches affected by botrytis. Third, Sauternes wines are usually aged in expensive oak barrisques for between 18 and 36 months, costing both time and money. Above and beyond all of the above, there is no guarantee that botrytis will develop in the vineyards at all, being entirely dependent on specific climatic conditions. In some years, almost no Sauternes wine is produced at all. The rain-affected 2012 vintage famously prevented the appellation's best-known producer, Chateau d'Yquem, from making its sweet wine. The chateau's director was quoted as saying, "We did everything that we could, but unfortunately nature was not on our side this year". Other vintages in which d'Yquem didn't release its wine include 1900, 1915, 1930, 1951, 1952, 1964, 1972, 1974 and 1992.

Although consumer demand for sweet wines has fallen significantly (favoring instead sparkling whites and powerful, dry reds), Sauternes' place in the wine world is secure for now, thanks to its strong history and long-standing prestige.

## THE BITTERSWEET TALE OF SAUTERNES

### Why Sauterne Is Underappreciated

NOV. 21, 2014 *New York Times*

Nobody drinks Sauternes anymore, it seems. That is a shame, because this revered sweet wine of Bordeaux can so often be sublime.

I was reminded of this recently when I spotted a Sauternes offered by the glass on a wine list of an informal restaurant, a rare sight. Though I seldom drink sweet wine after a meal, the restaurant, King Bee, a new Acadian-style spot in the East Village, was offering one of my favorite Sauternes producers, the little-known Cru d'Arche-Pugneau. The wine, from the excellent 2010 vintage, was glorious, almost kaleidoscopic in its lushness yet deliciously refreshing as well.

Statistics suggest at least a few people still carry the Sauternes torch. According to the Bordeaux Wine Council, a trade group, about 210,000 liters of Sauternes were exported to the

United States in 2013, up from about 202,000 in 2008. Nonetheless, that is far less Sauternes than 40 years before, in 1973, when more than 650,000 liters were shipped.

Back then, of course, the world of wine centered on Bordeaux. Nowadays, consumers may choose from a vast panorama of wines from sources that once seemed inconceivable. Bordeaux no longer occupies that position of unmatched esteem. In New York, it's not easy to find recent vintages of Sauternes. Small wine shops may carry one bottle if you're lucky. Sotheby's retail shop on the Upper East Side is one of very few with a wide selection of both recent and older vintages.

Sauternes has also been victimized by a declining interest in sweet wines in general. Once, sweet wines like Sauternes, the products of arduous labor, meticulous care and the luck of the vintage, were venerated as an ultimate pleasure. Their place on the table was evidence of great good fortune and perhaps a heightened perception of the sweetness of life.

Times change, though, and today few people really know what to make of wines with the sweet intensity of a Sauternes, or other similarly sumptuous nectars, like Beerenauslese riesling, Tokaji Aszu, Coteaux du Layon from the Loire or even fortified examples like port and malmsey Madeira.

These other wines, particularly those from the Loire, receive an occasional embrace from the wine vanguard, which can rightly revel in the excellent values available in extraordinary wines that are largely ignored.

But Sauternes? Whether because of its history, its price (rarely cheap) or the perception that, as with much of Bordeaux, it is more luxury good than agricultural product, Sauternes has been consigned in the imagination to the realm of dusty vaulted chambers, paunchy old men in formal dress and cigars.

"It is a shame how these exceptional wines are underappreciated and underutilized," said Neal Rosenthal, a wine importer who happens to bring in my favorite Cru d'Arche-Pugneau, one of a few remaining small, family-run properties in Sauternes. There, based in the village of Boutoc, surrounded by some of the famous names in Sauternes, Francis Daney farms about 32 acres planted with the classic Sauternes grapes: sémillon, which contributes richness and texture; sauvignon blanc, for freshness and acidity; and a bit of muscadelle for fruity accents.

For anybody, but especially for small farmers with limited resources, making Sauternes is a risky waiting game. Not only must the grapes ripen fully until near bursting with sugar, but farmers must also hope the weather attains just the right balance of humidity and autumn breezes to produce *Botrytis cinerea*, the fabled noble rot, whose spores attack the grapes, absorbing water, shriveling skins and reducing healthy bunches to ghastly, desiccated masses. Out of this ugliness comes rare beauty, gorgeously extravagant, honeyed wines in which sweetness is balanced with acidity. At their best, they can age for decades.

Given the realities of modern family life, dinners quickly cobbled together, the food vying for attention with electronic devices, where is the role today for sweet wines, especially one like Sauternes, which can intimidate with its ceremonial associations?

"One of the things that I regret is that the image of Sauternes is sometimes too closely linked with formal gastronomic occasions," said Christian Seely, managing director of AXA Millésimes, the arm of the AXA insurance group that runs a portfolio of top wineries, including Château

Suduiraut, an excellent Sauternes producer. “It is above all a supremely pleasurable wine, and one that needs no excuse, context or pairing: You can just open it for the sheer pleasure of the thing.”

Indeed, the complex spectrum of flavors in a good Sauternes can provide moments of contemplation that require no accompaniment, except maybe thoughtful music or a good book. Beyond this, and the classically brilliant combinations of Sauternes with blue cheese (love it) or foie gras (not so much), can Sauternes be integrated into a more typical modern setting?

Mr. Seely suggested trying it with Sichuan food. I did and found it to be a more provocative than natural match. I can say that a lively, energetic 2007 Château Coutet, with flavors of candied orange zest and flowers, was a better bet than a more opulent '07 Château Guiraud to go with oily, vibrant twice-cooked pork. He also proposed simple pairings: fresh goat cheese, or an orange or mandarin, which makes intuitive sense to me.

I also asked Denis Dubourdieu, an enologist and consultant whose family has a long history with Sauternes at Château Doisy-Daëne, for some ideas. He suggested salty foods like Serrano and Parma hams, Peking duck (“Try it, it’s amazing,” he said), veal cutlets sautéed in olive oil and Sauternes, and simple roast chicken. I found the chicken to go surprisingly well with a racy 2011 Château Doisy-Védrières (no relation to Doisy-Daëne).

Perhaps because of the lush texture of Sauternes, I find myself drinking less of it than I would, say, a dry white. Fortunately, if you do find a supply of Sauternes, it’s often available in half-bottles, a perfect size for experimentation — of which I plan to do more. I do have some great ideas.

While musing about foods that may go with Sauternes, my colleague Florence Fabricant suggested latkes. Brilliant! Latkes and Sauternes is a perfect Hanukkah match of savory and sweet. In Bordeaux, Sauternes is often recommended with lobster. Mr. Rosenthal, the importer, suggests what sounds like a superb recipe: sauté medallions of lobster with shallots, and deglaze the skillet with Sauternes.

“Drizzle the deglazed pan juices over the lobster,” he said, “and drink the Sauternes with glee as you eat it.”

The one thing I am not actually interested in eating with Sauternes is a sweet dessert. It seems like overkill to me when the wine itself is sweet enough.

## **TOKAJ - TOKAJI – TOKAY**

### **WHERE PRODUCED:**

Tokay wines come exclusively from a part of the old Austro-Hungarian Empire, more specifically the foothills of the Carpathian Mountains in northwest Hungary (approximately 125 miles east of Budapest) and a small section of what is the present-day southeastern Slovakia.

## **VINEYARD AREA**

### **Hungary**

Tokaj's vineyard area in Hungary is strictly defined, less than 13,500 acres in 26 villages with well-defined regulations going back to the 16th century. The name Tokay comes from the area around the town of Tokay, which Hungarians call *Tokaj*.

### **Slovak Republic**

Slovakia's part of the Tokay region is specified within the Legal act no. 323/96 of Collection of laws related to winegrowing and winemaking trade. Act supplements include the list of winegrowing strips, which should be used as vineyard only. The Tokay region within the Slovak Republic includes the boroughs listed as follows: Malá Trňa, Slovenské Nové Mesto, Viničky, Veľká Trňa, Veľká Bara, Černochovej a Čerhov. The Slovak Tokay region centre is a borough of Malá Trňa.

In 2004 the Hungarian Government and the Government of the Slovak republic finally agreed to allow an area within the Slovak Republic to be included within the Tokaj Classification. 1395 acres within Slovakia is designated as part of the Tokaj classification with only 726 acres of this under active cultivation

## **HISTORY OF THE REGION AND AREA INCLUDED IN THE TOKAJ CLASSIFICATION**

The 20th century nearly devastated the Tokay region, especially the Slovak part. When the Austro-Hungarian empire dissolved at the end of World War I, the Tokay area was split in two - with 90 percent remaining in Hungary, and the rest going to the new Czechoslovakia. World War II severely disrupted the entire European wine trade, and the post-war rise of Communism in both Tokay countries meant nationalization of the vineyards, and a shift of focus from quality to quantity. In Communist Czechoslovakia, the indifference to the Tokay mystique was so great that the government traded away its right to the Tokay trademark in exchange for the right to export beer to Hungary. That deal has since been annulled, but Slovak winemakers still lacked the right to sell their wine to European Union countries under the Tokay name. Hungary signed a 13-year trademark deal on the Tokay name in 1993; Slovakia, then in the throes of the Velvet Divorce, didn't participate in those talks. Thus when Communism fell, the Hungarian Tokay region underwent a renaissance - foreign investment poured in, and the wine became fashionable again. But the Slovak part languished. Without the right to export into the lucrative EU market, foreign winemakers saw little reason to invest in Slovakia's tiny bit of the Tokay region.

It was not until 2004 that the Hungarian Government and the Government of the Slovak republic finally agreed to allow an area within the Slovak Republic to be included within the Tokaj Classification.

## **PROTECTING THE “TOKAY” CLASSIFICATION – THE DEBATE CONTINUES:**

As part of the agreements for Hungary's accession to the EU, the governments of Italy and France agreed to rename wines called Tokay d'Alsace and Tocai Friulano, which the Hungarian government claims are too similar that of the world-famous sweet wine Tokaji Aszu, produced in the Tokaji region of Hungary.

The Alsacian authorities had responded to the agreement by adding the grape variety to their label, making it Tokay-Pinot Gris d'Alsace, but this approach is not an option for the Friulians as Tokai is the name of the grape used in the wine. The Friuli-Venezia Giulia region in Italy has appealed against the ruling at the European Court of Justice.

Having investigated the appeal, the Advocate General last week declared that, in his opinion, the agreement should be upheld and that Italian Tocai could not qualify as a geographical indication. *"It has no such special quality, reputation or characteristic that is attributable to its geographic origin,"* he said. EU Courts of Justice usually uphold the opinion of the Advocate General, although it is not officially binding.

The case is not as straight forward as others involving the allegedly inappropriate use of wine names – such as Bordeaux or Champagne - as the three wines in question are all very different and the French and Italian versions are not attempting to cash in on the reputation of the Hungarian variety by imitating its style.

Tokay d'Alsace is a light, dry white wine made entirely from Pinot Gris (Pinot Grigio), while the Italian Tocai Friulano is an aromatic dry white made entirely from the Tocai grape (known as Sauvignon Vert in French and Sauvignonasse in Spanish).

The Hungarian Tokaji Aszu, by comparison, is an easily distinguishable dessert wine made using varying percentages of botrytized (noble rot) Furmint and Haréslivelü grapes. The wine is also renowned for its cellaring potential. Bottles that are centuries old have been known to improve.

Perhaps the reason that the Hungarian government pressed for the protection is because Tokaji has traditionally been labeled as 'Tokay' on bottles destined for export. Whether this translation of the Hungarian name should be protected is debatable.

A ruling in line with the Advocate General's suggestion could also raise further problems by effectively prohibiting Italian winemakers from labeling their wine with the name of the grape it is made from. Friulian wine producers argue that being able to use the grape variety name to market wine is their right, according to the EU Charter

## **THE LEGEND OF TOKAY:**

No wine style as old and prized as Tokay can get by without a colourful legend. So, here's what happened, according to local lore. In the mid 17th century, a noblewoman called Zsuzsanna Lorantfly owned an estate encompassing the entire present-day Tokay region in Slovakia. Her priest, who doubled as her winemaker, postponed the fall harvest in 1650, fearing an attack from the Turks.

The priest's precautions may have saved his grape pickers, but it left his grapes vulnerable to a humidity-loving fungus called botrytis. Some of them succumbed and shriveled, but the thrifty cleric didn't discard them. Rather, he had them picked, crushed, and added to the must made from unaffected grapes.

Meanwhile, the threat of a Turkish invasion remained quite real, leading to another innovation in Lórántffy's vineyard. To hide the precious wine from potential attackers, the winemakers dug tunnels into the hillside, the entrances to which could be easily hidden. These distinctive caves, given the region's humid climate and the fact that they contained traces of evaporated wine, were perfect hosts to the black mould that is supposed to be critical to Tokaj's ageing process. Whether or not the above is precisely true, we do know this: The region pioneered the use of botrytis-infected grapes in dessert wine. In fact, the fungus was exploited to such great effect in Tokaj that within 100 years winemakers in Germany and France were using it to create their own celebrated dessert wines. In the process, the fungus gained a much loftier name: noble rot.

### **THE WINE OF KINGS:**

The role played by Tokaj wine over the centuries tells all. Aszú as we know it, was first made in the 1560s. Tokaj wine scored its first international success in 1562 when Pope Pius IV, on the occasion of the Council of Trident, said the following after tasting the Tállyai [Tokaji] wine presented to him by György Draskovich, the bishop of Zagreb. "*Summum pontificem talia vina decet*" [Such wines befit the supreme pontiff]. Incidentally, the Hungarian Diet of 1655 made the separating of the Aszú grapes from the rest of the berries obligatory. By the mid-eighteenth century, Tokaji wines had earned real world fame. Royalty. Great statesmen and prominent figures of cultural life competed in their quest for more and better Tokaji wine. Louis XV of France offered Tokaji Aszú to Madame Pompadour with the following words "*C'est le roi des vins et le vin de rois.*" [This is the wine of kings and the king of wines]. Voltaire, who was a friend of Frederick the Great and lived in Berlin from 1749 to 1753, wrote the following about the king. "*To our greatest fortune he has Tokaji wine in his cellar and this one can only welcome with an Ave.*" Once during a feast, when Frederick the Great was sipping his Tokaji Aszú. Noel, the steward of the royal household, encouraged his master with the words "*Carry on drinking Tokaji. Your Majesty, the first two humans were expelled from Paradise for eating not for drinking!*" Pope Benedict XIV thanked Maria Theresa's gift of Tokaji Aszú as follows: "*Benedicta sit terra, quae te germinavit, benedicta sit mulier, quae te misit. Benedictus sum, qui te bibo.*" ["Blessed be the land that has produced you. blessed be the woman that has sent you., blessed am I who drink you."]

### **CLASSIFIED VINEYARDS HUNGARY:**

In March 1995 the *Classified Vineyards of Tokaj* was created. A group of like-minded vineyards with the intention of restoring the image of one of the most noble wines in the world, through the production of modern, quality wines deserving of their historical stature.

- **Disnókő Estate** - belonging to AXA Millésimes, a subsidiary of the French insurance group
- **Hétszölő Estate** - A former Imperial Estate, belonging to Grand Millésimes de France.
- **Château Megyer** - belonging to the French GAN insurance company.

- **Messzelátó Dülő Estate** - which belongs to the Nantes-Ancenis agricultural co-operative in France.
- **Oremus Estate** - belonging to Vega Sicila vineyards in Spain.
- **Château Pajzis**, belonging to Jean Michel Arcaute, a vineyard owner in Bordeaux, and noted Bordeaux oenologist, Michel Rolland, among others.
- **Royal Tokaji Wine Company** (including the Nyúlaszó, Betsek, Bisalmas, and Botja estates) - Belonging to Anglo-Hungarian group of independent associates.
- **Szarvas Szőlő Estate** - Another former imperial estate, which belongs to the Hungarian government.

## CLASSIFIED VINEYARDS SLOVAK REPUBLIC:

Little if any information is available for classified wineries within the Slovak Republic

## THE LAND THE CLIMATE AND THE GRAPES - A SPECIAL COMBINATION

It is the combination of several factors that produces the special character of the wines of Tokaj-Hegyalja. The vines are grown on two types of soil; most of the local soil is broken andesite and rhyolite tuff of volcanic origin, the rest is loess. The Carpathian Mountains embrace the wine region from the north, east and west, creating an excellent microclimate with long, hot autumns and humid nights. The warmth of the autumn sunshine ripens the grapes to a golden yellow colour. Favourable location and adequate humidity combine with a fungus called *Botrytis Cinerea* exist to produce the so-called noble rot. The skin of the grape is penetrated by the fungus and part of the water content evaporates through it. The 20 per cent original sugar content is concentrated to 40-60 per cent. This high concentration is not the only or even the most valuable property of the Aszú grape. The bouquet and aromatic substances formed as a result of the *Botrytis Cinerea* metabolism distinguish Tokaj grapes from raisins and other artificially dried berries. The Tokaj character requires suitable grape varieties that ripen late in order to make good use of the sunshine and warmth of the long autumn. When fully ripe, they have the 20 per cent sugar content that induces the noble rot and the creation of Aszú grapes. High sugar content must be counterbalanced by distinct and fine acids, and an adequate dry extract content. Centuries of experience and tradition have shown that **Furmint** and **Hárslevelű** grapes meet all these requirements. Furmint is grown in two-thirds of the vineyards, Hárslevelű in the rest. In addition, a small quantity of **Muscat Lunel** is cultivated in order to enhance bouquet and aroma. The carefully planned combination of these three grape varieties produces the wine specialties of Tokaj.

## WINEMAKING IN TOKAJI

Tokaj wines are made from the white grape varieties Furmint, Muskotály (Yellow Muscat) and Hárslevelű (Linden Leaf). The region offers a full and varied range of products; all made according to time-honored traditions.

From the dry or sweet varieties to the exceedingly rare Tokaji Eszencia, the greatest care is lavished on vinification and ageing. The exact methods depend on the type of wine. The most unusual is undoubtedly the famous Tokaj Aszú, which is literally harvested grape by grape between late October and the first snowfall.

*"The weather may be better or worse, but we only start on the feast day of Saint Simon Jude"* (Tokaj proverb). Traditionally, picking does not start until October 28th and can last as long as the first snow. This late harvesting enables the *Botrytis cinerea* (noble rot) to achieve maximum concentration. The grapes, which have reached a candied state at this point, are crushed until an extremely thick, sugary paste is obtained.

The sweet paste of botrytized wine grapes is added **by vintage baskets-full (called puttonyos)** in Hungarian) to the dry white base wine made from non-botrytized grapes. This step is necessary to start fermentation, since in Tokaj the "Aszu" Berries are shriveled way beyond the botrytis levels of France or Germany. **The number of vintage baskets-full determines Tokaji Aszú's sugar level, which can vary from 3 to 6 puttonyos.**

Tokaj wines age in oak barrels for several years in miles of magnificent stone cellars dug out of volcanic rock. The galleries form a veritable labyrinth with constant temperature and humidity levels. The most famous of these is the Rákóczi Cellars, property of the Hétszölő Estate, built at the beginning of the 15th century in the heart of the city of Tokaj.

## VITICULTURE

Viticultural procedures in Tokaj do not differ greatly from those employed elsewhere. Great care, however, is taken in pruning, lest the quality of the remaining buds impair quality. The late vintage is the other important difference. Traditionally, the vintage in Tokaj would start on Simon-Judas's Day, 28<sup>th</sup> October. Nowadays, owing to large scale production, it would be too great a risk to wait that long. Accordingly the vintage starts slightly earlier, but even so it is not over until mid-November. The preparation of the special wines of Tokaj begins with the particular methods used during the vintages. In sections of the vineyard where half or more of the grapes have turned into shriveled Aszú grapes, the berries are picked individually and collected in tubs. In sections with fewer Aszú grapes this procedure would be unprofitable; therefore, the Aszú grapes are harvested and processed together with the healthy grapes. The mixture forms the basis of Szamorodni, meaning, "as it was grown", or "as it comes". This refers to the fact that the Aszú grapes and healthy grapes are processed together in accordance with their natural proportion.

The vintage yields three different basic ingredients: the selected Aszú grapes from which Aszú wine is made; un-selected grapes containing proportion of Aszú grapes from which Szamorodni is made (dry or sweet depending on the sugar content); and grapes from which all Aszú' grapes have been removed and from which *vin ordinaire* is made. The latter is bottled in 75cl bottles and labeled *Tokaji Furmint*, *Tokaji Hárslevelű*, or *Tokaji Muscat*.

After crushing and stemming, the Szamorodni ingredients are soaked for between 12 and 24 hours, during which the sugar content, bouquet and aroma substances of the Aszú grapes are released. Pneumatic presses are usually used to press out the wort.

It does not require any special technology to make Tokaji Aszú. There are two components the Aszú berries and the base wine. The Aszú berries are selected during the vintage, collected in

tubs and stored there until the second component, the base wine, has fermented. Choosing the base wine requires great discretion and expertise. It should have a high alcoholic strength (13-15 per-cent by volume), distinct and delicate acids, a high dry extract content, excellent flavour and aroma. Some unfermented fructose is an advantage.

Traditionally the unit of measure of the base wine is the *Gönc* cask (136 litres). The Aszú number depends on how many *puttony* or hods (approx. 20-25 kilograms) of Aszú grapes are added to a one *Gönc* cask of base wine, there are Tokaji Aszú wines of between 3 and 6 *puttonyos*. To extract the sugar, flavour and aroma from the Aszú grapes, they were first crushed by foot in coarsely woven linen, and the base wine poured over this pulp-like Aszú dough. Because of the varying quality of the base wine, Aszú wines made in this way were variable and differed from each other. This clumsy traditional process has been replaced by updated technology, but one which has nonetheless preserved certain elements of the old tradition.

Today there are explicit standards defining 3 to 6 *puttony*) Aszú, so Aszú wine is made on the basis of the analytical values of the base wine and the Aszú grapes.

The mashing of the Aszú berries is now carried out by means of a mechanical device that does not impair the grape seed. The base wine is poured over the Aszú dough thus obtained and then stirred several times. The valuable compounds of the Aszú grapes are extracted by 24-36 hours of soaking. Then follows the pressing. The new Aszú wines are poured into the aforementioned *Gönc* casks and matured for several years in small, cool cellars (10° C) hollowed out of the rocky hillsides. The walls of these cellars are thickly lined with a fungus called *Racodium cellare*. During the maturing period the wines are moderately sulphurated and kept at a low pH value. Special Tokaji Wines have high nitrogen and protein content. Protein stability is achieved by fining and physical treatment of the maturing of Tokaji wines are enhanced by surface aeration. The casks are not filled up completely for 1 to 3 months, as the Process of fermentation needs both space and air. As a result, an unbroken layer of natural film is formed on the surface, creating the precondition for reduction. The alcoholic strength of the wine decreases while its aldehyde and ester content increases. Tokaji aeration differs from sherryfication in that it takes place at a low temperature.

Although special Tokaji wines are given intensive oxidation treatment (small cask, aeration, moderate sulphurization), a stable reduction system is created. The more Aszú grapes that are used to make Aszú wine, the lower the pH level (between 14.4 and 16). Maturation time for Szamorodni wines is 3 to 4 years, for Aszú wines the minimum age at which they should be drunk is their *puttonyos* number plus two. Aszú must be matured in barrels made from the oak trees of the Zempleni forest, but not just any barrels. Barrels for a high *puttonyos* wine must be at least twelve years old.

Please enjoy some of these fine wines!

Axel Kroitsch  
Wayne Crossen