

Ep 75: Wines from the most extreme vineyards in the world: The steepest, the highest, the most northern, the most southern...



Janina Doyle 00:00:07 Welcome to Eat Sleep Wine Repeat, a podcast for all you wine lovers, who, if you're like me, just can not get enough of the good stuff. I'm Janina Doyle, your host, Brand Ambassador, Wine Educator, and Sommelier. So, stick with me as we dive deeper into this ever evolving, wonderful world of wine and wherever you are listening to this, cheers to you!

Hello to all you passionate wine lovers and thirsty drinkers. So today I'm bringing you a slightly different episode and it's just me. We are looking at the extreme vineyards of the world. So I shall be looking at the highest altitude vineyards, the smallest vineyard, the most Northern, the most Southern. And I want to start with the most dangerous. Now, I don't know if any specific countries or vineyards come to mind when I say that. However, dubbed, the most dangerous vineyard in the world goes to Domaine de Bargylus, and this is owned by two brothers, Sandro and Karim Saadé. And they're effectively the poster boys of what wine and war is all about. They have created a winery that is an act of resilience and of resistance. As I'm sure many of you know, they have been suffering with a pretty intense war for quite some time. So this war started in 2011. They were able to make some vintages before this and get an incredible name for themselves. So they started this winery in 2003 with their first wine being made in 2006. And it was in the seventh edition of The World Atlas of Wine, Jancis Robinson wrote that their red, arguably was the best wine in the Eastern Mediterranean regions. I can personally vouch for this. I used to sell it in Beast restaurant in London when I was a Sommelier. And I can tell you now people loved this wine. Felt it was a real experience. And it wasn't just a case of being able to tick off on the wine map saying, yep, I've had something from this country, but more, these wines, they have this Mediterranean feel and absolutely superior quality.

Janina Doyle 00:02:26 So where are they? So, the winery is located in the North Western part of Syria in a region called Antioch. It's actually quite close to the border of Turkey. The vines are planted on the slopes of Mount Bargylus, hence the name. This is what the area used to be called in ancient times. And it's on a plateau at about 900 meters above sea level with really limestone soils and the vineyards is about 16 kilometers inland so you can see the sea whilst you're picking the grapes at harvest time. Now, I tried to paint the picture of romance. However, it is far from it. Now, one of the worst attacks I should say, or the closest they came in contact with all the fighting and the combat was about 500 meters away from the winery. A big fight broke out. They had workers, a hiding in the vineyards until it finished. Bombshells ended up being found in the Chardonnay vineyards and bullets in the walls of the winery. So, you can probably understand since there's war broke out, the brothers have not been able to get across the border and get into the vineyard. So their offices, they are based in Beirut. And so at harvest time, as an example, every two to three days, they have the grapes picked, sent across in ice. It takes

about four hours. So it's 125 miles away from Beirut, so that they can taste the grapes and decide the perfect time to pick. But of course, with all the conflicts and fighting, it's always a concern will they be able to pick at harvest time? But it's not just that. There's also issues with stocks, corks, labels, bottles. So they have to have a huge stockpile in case of any embargoes. In fact, a few years ago, I heard that their French supplier said they wouldn't send any more bottles. So I'm not quite sure how that has been resolved. It takes them 45 days to get their wines out the country, to the Belgium warehouse that they have, because it has to go through Egypt. And even before the war, they had issues with the fact that they had to treat their own water. They had to produce their own electricity. So this has never been that easy a project, but it's become a bit of a symbol of pride for many Syrian families. They work with 35 families and this is their income. So this is their pride and joy, their bread and butter, their love, their passion and their livelihoods. And so they communicate with the brothers every day by phone and by email. They get lab samples sent across to them in Beirut to check everything is exactly how the brothers want it. And they do have another card up their sleeve as they work with world famous Bordeaux, wine consultant, Stéphane Derenoncourt. So along with the fear that something bad may happen to the vineyard because of these conflicts or something, even worse to their winery workers or that they can't get barrels in or bottles to the winery, or how are they going to export the wines. They have still managed to make vintages every year and they make two wines. They make a red made of Syrah, Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot. And this is Oaked generally around 14 months with French Oak barrels and they make a white, which is around 55, 60% Chardonnay and 40, 45% Sauvignon Blanc aged in stainless steel. And that is what I have today. I have the 2015 vintage. I managed to get this from Hedonism for £31. And you can get the red from Hedonism as well. The 2014 at £38.80. Okay. Exciting moment for me. Let's pour it.

Janina Doyle 00:06:19 Okay. Hmm. Very fresh, actually quite restrained, not big aromatics. Definitely the Sauvignon Blanc is playing second place to the Chardonnay. You have like this fresh apricot and then like a citrusy, like a lemon cream, a little nectarine in there and something a little bit flinty, but just a touch. Hmm. Okay. Now that is a surprise. The nose was lovely. It was restrained. It was pretty, but not in your face. The palate is quite explosive, still really fresh, not in your face, but the fruits are crystal clean fresh. Really is very much like tangerine and orange cream. And even like some orange musk and quite clearly sticking with the citrus vibes here. And the acidity is beautifully high. This is like a medium weight it's textural. So I imagine that they'd done some lees aging or allowed the wine to go through malolactic fermentation. Do you know what? I am feeling like I may need to change the notes. It's changing. It's evolving the wine as I'm holding onto it, it's getting warmer and I've been swirling it this whole time. It's getting richer. It's getting rounder. Actually it's leaning toward full body and the nose has completely changed. It's become even more alive. It's even heading towards tropical fruits. There's a little bit of herb's in there. This is an incredible surprise. I will have to leave you some notes later because I think I'm going to have to decant this. And yes, white wine can be decanted. There's no reason not to. This is a wine that's been squished in it's bottled and we need to let it breathe and let it out. And this is screaming for a decanter. Well, I loved the red from Domaine de Bargylus and now I am equally in love with their white. If you want an experience, go and grab a bottle. All right, whilst I take a moment and a breather, let's get ready to talk about the highest altitude vineyard in the world.

Janina Doyle 00:08:42 So the highest vineyard is at 3563.31 meters. So that is 11,690 feet. The vineyard is called Pure land and super high-altitude vineyard. It's not maybe the most original name. You're going to find this in a place called Lhasa in Tibet, China. Now the vineyard was started in 2013,

and it has been with the support of the local government. Now I can't see anywhere the wines being sold, but it does say that tourism will start soon. So that's something to keep an eye on. But as there's very little information about this winery, I've decided to go to second place, the second highest vineyard in the world. In fact, many people, if you look on the internet, think that Bodega Colomé, who were founded, going back to 1831, they think this is the highest vineyard in the world, but sadly they just reach 3,111 meters. So that's 10,000 feet. So the winery you're going to find in Salta, which is in the Northern part of Argentina. And this is where you're going to find some of the highest altitude vineyards in the world and keep in mind being so high up means loads of UV radiation, and all that extra sunshine is going to produce grapes that are structured and have more power and more flavor and concentration. And you also have very high diurnals. So the hot, hot days combined with really cold nights, of course the grapes have time to relax, the acidity can form. So you get freshness as well as that concentration. The grape variety that does really well there is Torrontes, a white grape variety, which is beautifully aromatic. Think flowers, stone fruits, peach, citrus, not really too high acidity, not bone dry either. It's just a really kind of medium, round yummy, fruity grape variety. But of course they grow high altitude Malbec, and even there's a little bit of Tannat, which I adore, which is doing really well in Uruguay and also Bonarda. Bonarda is a grape variety of Argentina that people don't talk about. And you're going to find all of those varieties I've mentioned within the ranges of Bodega Colomé. So they have four different vineyards and some of them, the lowest, and it's not very low. The lowest is 1,750 meters. And of course goes up to 3000. So if you wanted to compare this to our highest vineyards in Europe, you're talking at 1,100 meters. Yeah, 3,600 feet. That's it. That's our highest vineyards in Europe. So on the highest vineyard at 3,111 meters, this is the Altura Maxima range and they have a Malbec, a Sauvignon Blanc and a Pinot Noir. The Malbec will set you back about a hundred pounds, the Pinot at 40 and the Sauvignon Blanc around 28. But hey, they also do their Estate wines and you can get a lovely Torrontes for about 12 pounds. So just look for anything with Bodega Colomé. Everything is biodynamic as well in terms of farming. So if that interests you, give them a go. Right, what are we on to now? Let's look at the most Northern vineyards.

Janina Doyle 00:12:31 Okay. So now I'm going to take us to the Northern most commercial vineyards. And I say commercial, because actually we can go to the most Northern vineyard in the world. And actually it's a, it's an experimental plot. So there's 0.1 hectares planted. They can produce 850 kilograms of a grape called Zilga. And this is the Olkiluoto Nuclear Power Plant. I hope I'm pronouncing correctly. And this is in Finland at 61 degrees parallel. So the most Northern, but let's actually talk about a winery that is producing grapes and you can visit them and you can taste their wines. They are in Norway on the 59th parallel, and they're called Lerkåsa vineyard. So again, please look at my show notes, you'll see a link to the transcript, and then you can look up all these wineries and all these names I mentioned.

Janina Doyle 00:13:39 So I just want to point out the parallels and how north this really is. So in the wine world, we have this belt in the Northern hemisphere and in the Southern hemisphere. And typically it is known that wineries need to fit between 28 degrees parallel to 50, whether you're Northern or south of the equator. And the reason why wine latitudes are important is that's because basically these strips, these belts are where you are going to be able to grow grapes because the climate is good enough. There's enough sunshine. It's not too hot, it's not too cold. However, of course always there are wineries that escape this belt, and it might be that they are much closer to the equator, but simply altitude plays a much greater role or perhaps they are in a much colder place above or below the

50 degrees parallel. And simply they have a microclimate where they can just get so much sunshine that they're able to ripen the grapes. Now, to give you a little bit of a geography lesson on the 50th parallel north during the summer solstice, you get around 16 hours of sunshine. And then in the winter solstice, you get about eight hours approximately. So again, it's all about the amount of sunshine that grapes are going to be able to see. To put that into perspective, wine regions, such as Rheingau in Germany, fit on the 50th parallel, British Columbia in Canada, and in fact, Cornwall in England. So you can imagine already all of our vineyards in the UK that are much further north than that are already going against what we typically have decided is the best places to grow grapes. Certainly it doesn't mean it's impossible. It just makes things harder.

Janina Doyle 00:15:33 So let's get back to Lerkåsa vineyard. So they started in 2007 and have been planting more grapes year after year. For their main white grape variety. They work with Solaris, which is originally from Northern Germany, which is no surprise. You're going to find that grape variety in England, in Luxembourg, in Belgium, in Poland. So all of these cool, cool climate wine growing regions, they worked really well with Solaris, which gives you these beautiful aromatics and lovely almost tropical notes, hints of banana and lovely nuttiness. They also work with a North American hybrid grape called Valiant. There's Rondo. That's a grape variety that's also in England and grape varieties that I've never heard of. A Russian grape called Hasanski Sladki and several others. Right, so where are they? They are located two hours roughly from Oslo. They see plenty of sun, which is obvious. Otherwise there'd be no chance for grape growing. A hundred meters above sea level. Because they're very, very close to a lake this creates a microclimate. So very often with waters, they moderate the temperature. So instead of the winters being too cold, they can be a bit warmer. And in case of summers being too hot, they can make things a little bit cooler. Also with a lake it reflects the sunshine, which can really take advantage of whatever amount of sunshine that vineyard is already receiving. Now, apparently they're located in a tiny little town. I'm not even going to try and pronounce, you could look them up, but they have Timber log houses for you to stay in. So you can go and visit them. I did go and look online on their website to see how much their wines were selling for. They are all sold out. So quite clearly the quantity is very small. So now let's go south.

Janina Doyle 00:17:23 Now, the most Southern wine region in the world at the 45th parallel is Central Otago in New Zealand. But when it comes to the most Southern winery, this award goes to Bodega Otronia. Winemaking at the end of the world. These guys have crazy 110 kilometer winds. They have frosts, they have snow. I talk about these guys on Episode 23, literally at the beginning of the episode, two minutes in as they were my winery of the week. And good news for all of you, there is enough volume and you can get hold of their Pinot Noirs and their Chardonnays. They have a Rugientes range around 23 pounds and their premium high-end range is around 50 pounds. And these guys, I should say, officially are at 45.33 latitude. But hey, if you're not listening to this on current release, by the time you listen, Chile may well have beaten the Argentinians because there's a lot of excitement even further down south going on over there. So who knows who will be making wine at the end of the world soon.

Janina Doyle 00:18:38 Now the next vineyard area is for all you hikers out there who are after another challenge. How does 60 degree slopes sound to you? You will find them in the Mosel region of Germany. Now the whole of the Mosel region in general has some of the steepest vineyards of the world, but there is a specific vineyard of all of them at 65 degrees incline. And this is known as Bremmer Calmont and it is officially the world's steepest slopes. But to put this into perspective, anything above

30 degrees is really steep and so incredibly labor intensive. Now, since the 1990s, they built a monorail train that helps them. So takes away some of the labor, but it is still back-breaking. Apparently per hectares it takes about 1,800 hours of manual work. For that exact reason, there's actually 22 hectares that could be planted, but now only 13 of them are producing grapes.

Janina Doyle 00:19:49 And this of course, Mosel is the region of Riesling and Mosel is Riesling's spiritual home. This is often thought to be the best place where you can find your Riesling. Many will be off-dry or even have that sweetness, but it's this piercing acidity that will just balance those sugar levels with beautiful aromatics and lemon-lime flavors, or even like honeyed apricot's and specifically a slight slatey-ness, a mineral edge, which could be down to the soils, this very rocky cliffs with a clay-slate soils. And because of the angle and the super steep slope, they get all of the sun radiation and you get beautifully, ripe grapes. Now, funnily enough, considering this is back-breaking work, there are bottles of wine for less than 20 Euros. Now I've looked and I can't find any in the UK, but for those of you in Europe, you can get a bottle of Walter J Oster for less than 20 euros or Weingut Franzen for less than 15 Euros. So search Bremmer Calmont because there are several wineries that are making wines from this vineyard area.

Janina Doyle 00:21:11 Okay. Now, to a fun one, do you know the smallest vineyard in the world. It is in Switzerland. It is owned by the Dalai Lama himself and being such a humble man, it seems to make sense that he has something so small. And when I say small, I'm talking three vines. So there is Pinot Noir and Chasselas growing there. Obviously three vines, two to one and one to the other. I'm not sure which way around, but in total they make a thousand bottles of wine. However, not from those three vines. They then take those three vines and blend them with grapes sourced from different vineyards. And in fact, then sell that wine at auction and the money that they raise, which tends to be around 35,000 pound goes to different charities. Now the name of this vineyard is Les Amis de Farinet, and you can find it in the very mountainous Valais region.

Janina Doyle 00:22:24 Now, if you don't know about Valais, about a third of all wines made in Switzerland, come from this wine-producing region, and it's the largest one in the country. Now you could call Valais a higher Rhône Valley, but these are Alpine wines. Most vineyards being planted between 450 and 750 meters above sea level and pretty steep slopes as well. Although after our last vineyard, these are generally only around 40 to 45 degrees incline, which almost seems nothing right? So location-wise, you're going to find this wine region in the Southwest. It's on 46 degrees latitude, which to the west is Macon. So this is one of the Southern parts of Burgundy in France, and that's on equal latitude, just so you get an idea of exactly where you'd find it. And the Rhône River that goes through the Rhône Valley in France. It in fact starts at Valais, goes through the Rhône Valley and finishes off in Marseille. Now, obviously the Dalai Lama, he knows his grape varieties, because for the main reds, it is Pinot noir, but they also plant Gamay. And for the main white it's Chasselas. You're also going to find Syrah, and Merlot. Syrah of course, you can understand. Rhône Valley being so near, that it makes sense. They also do Petite Arvine which is a grape variety from Switzerland. It's a white variety. It can be dry. It can be sweet. Beautiful acidity, lovely fruity citrusy notes, and also a little bit of exotic fruit in there as well. It often has a subtle character of iodine or something, a little bit salty, and it's known to make a high-quality wine. So if you can get hold of this grape variety, give it a go because it's definitely something that you don't see very often. And in fact, all wines from Switzerland, the majority gets drunk in the country and very little gets out. So if you find some, grab a bottle. You may be luckier with Chasselas as it is the most important grape variety of Switzerland. This one, interestingly actually is quite

low in acidity and lower in aromatics and lower in alcohol, but it's really beautifully fresh. And it has a real delicate nature. That's very inviting. So if you'd like a lighter style of wine and a wine that maybe shows the terroir a little bit more, something a little bit more neutral than this actually could be the grape variety for you. Right, so I'm feeling rather inspired. I need to do a podcast on Swiss wines. So watch out for that. Let's now have a little look at the oldest vines in the world.

Janina Doyle 00:25:12 So the oldest grape vine in the world at 450 years old goes to Slovenia . It is the Žametovka grape variety. I hope that's pronounced okay. It produces hardly anything. We're talking 25 liters and apparently gets gifted to people. People, if you're in a place of authority or power, if you're important enough, however, it has been described as virtually undrinkable. So I don't think any of us are going to feel too sad for not being gifted this wine. She you are going to find this vine attached to its own museum. So you need to go to Maribor in Lent, Slovenia, and then you can see this old vine, or as you may find on other bottles of wine around the world 'Vieille Vignes'. That means old vine if you ever see it on a label. Now, because that vine is not really producing any wine of quality or size, I'm going to take us across to Australia, to Barossa Valley, where they claim to have some of the oldest vines in the world. And certainly the oldest Shiraz in the world.

Janina Doyle 00:26:20 Now, old vine doesn't actually have a specific definition around the world. Very often, wineries can say old vine or Vieille Vignes on a label and, oh, it doesn't quite tell you anything unless they say how many years. However, actually in Australia, they have the old vines charter, which is basically a catalog of these vineyards. And they actually have levels of what does old vine mean? So it has to be above 35 years old. And if it's an Ancestor vine, then it has to be 125 years old or more. So if you are interested in tasting the oldest Shiraz vines in the world, you need to go to the winery Langmeil and they have 178 year old Shiraz vines. So these are vines that were brought across to Australia by a Scottish gentleman called James Busby. Now he didn't know much about grape varieties as such, but he seemed to be the only person that could actually manage to take the Vitis Vinifera plants from different countries in Europe and get them to Australia without them dying. So the first set of vines to enter into Australia was in fact, 1832. Now I've had a quick look online and if you want to try the Langmeil The freedom 1843 Shiraz, you can get it from Fareham Wine Cellar at £74.50. Other wines you might want to try, Hill of Grace. They have vines dating back to 1860 and also the Great Western Thompson family Shiraz. Their vines are from 1868. So you can definitely grab a few bottles and really see what old vines can do.

Janina Doyle 00:28:08 Now, if you are unsure, what are old vines and why are they good? Not all vines when they age, produce better fruits, that actually there'll be pulled out. But some, what happens is the roots go much deeper. They can find the nutrients, the water, the minerals. Imagine a young vine, the roots are very new, it might get to one meter. Whereas an older vine keeps going deeper and deeper. It may get to eight meters may even go more. Every time they're going through different soils that have been created over the millions of years. And so they can pick up these subtleties, these nuances, even more. Equally, they're able to get that water that's really far down in the soil. So when a very, very hot year where there's no rain, they've got water, but at the same time, they're also not affected by crazy downpours where the roots that are on a new vine will just absorb all this water straight away. So already that can make a big difference to the quality and the flavors of the fruit. Now, the other thing that happens when the vine gets older, it produces less fruit, but the same carbohydrates and energy and resources coming from the soil up the roots is still the same. So all of that energy and goodness goes into less bunches meaning each individual bunch will have more

concentration. But of course the yields are a lot less. So it's not necessarily a viable option for the viticulturalist, and for that reason, they may pull it up. And therefore we don't actually have that many old, old vines in the world. So if you find one, grab a bottle and give it a try.

Janina Doyle 00:30:02 Now I've run out of time to look at it, more extreme vineyards of the world. But what I thought could be quite an interesting idea. Is a podcast on the oldest wineries of the world. So if you like the idea and you think it could be an interesting episode, let me know. You can contact me by email janina@eatsleepwinerepeat.co.uk. And it's Janina with a J not a Y. Or on my Instagram you can send me a direct message @eatsleep_winerepeat. Right to end this podcast I'm going to leave you with a quote taken from a poem that was written about the Calmont vineyard in Mosel. It's from a poem titled "De navigo suo". And it was written around the year 588 by a Bishop. And his name was Venantius Fortunatus. Now they would travel down the Mosel river and look up at the grandier of these incredibly steep slopes and all of the grapevines. And so he wrote:

"Up their where steeply jointed rocks give birth to the most precious sweetness of the grapes, were leafed vineyards rise, upwards towards naked mountain tops. There yields a harvest of the many coloured grapes to the wine maker, hanging inside the precipice, harvesting the fruit. So steep the slopes, and so bare the slate rocks, that rock itself, giveth birth and wine gushes from it."

Right guys, as always, you know, I dream for you all to have wine gushing towards you. Thank you as always for listening. If you haven't subscribed, you know what to do. Like the podcast, share the podcast, leave me a comment if you can, especially, if you're listening on apple, you know who you are. And a little sneak preview of next week, we're talking wines of Polonia, Poland. And spoiler alert, the wines I'm tasting are really, really good. So I raise my glass of delicious Bargylus Blanc and until next week, cheers to you!