

Ep 160 Furmint and the dry wines of Tokaji with Zoltán Kovács, Winery Director for Royal Tokaji (Part 1)



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 cannot 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 wine friends, and welcome back to another episode. Now, if you've got a sweet tooth, you've probably heard of Royal Tokaji and their luscious Botrytized sweet wines. The Royal Tokaji are the international market leader. In fact, in Hungary they were the first independent company after the new regime, founded in 1990 by Hugh Johnson. So many of you may recognise that name, also, first reintroduce vineyard names on the label.

But before we dive into the world of Noble rot and what makes these incredible sweet wines. We're taking a little detour today. In this episode, we are going to trade the sweetness for some serious still wine vibes.

On the podcast. I have Zoltán Kovács, the winery director for Royal Tokaji and he is going to put the spotlight on Hungary's main white grape variety, the one, the only, Furmint. We'll be looking at this fascinating grape, its flavours and the stories it can tell in each bottle. But we're not stopping at Furmint. We'll also be exploring the other white grapes of Hungary like the charming, Hárslevelű.

Prepare yourself to get to know the Tokaji region, its climate, and its geography so much better. And as always, a big shout out to my incredible sponsor of this season, [Wickhams Wine](#), which if you have caught the last two episodes, listening to the founder, Dan, talking about Beaujolais, I am sure you will agree, he is fab, the wines are delicious and they are a super cool company.

So, do not forget to use the code 'EATSLEEP10' to get 10% off your first order. But for now, it's Furmint time. so, over to Zoltán to educate and enlighten us.

Janina Doyle 00:02:39 So, Zoltán, I'm so excited that you are here on the podcast to teach me how to pronounce Hungarian words. Number one, did you know that that was your job? But two, for you to inform everyone listening, why we all need to be drinking more Tokaji and that it's not just sweet wine. So you've been making wine for how many years?

Zoltán Kovács 00:03:03 Well, since 98.

Janina Doyle 00:03:05 Well, am I allowed to ask that?

Zoltán Kovács 00:03:07 Yes! 98.

Janina Doyle 00:03:08 98. So, a few years now what brought you into the world of wine? Were you born into a winemaking family? Or did you just taste a wine later on in your years?

Zoltán Kovács 00:03:21 Actually, my family was connected to the vine. My grandfather planted vineyards. My father was a researcher at the Research Institute. So, he was always in the vineyard. So he took me with him when I was a small child, actually. And he showed me all the things that are on the vineyard. So, I got infected from a very small age with all of these things.

Janina Doyle 00:03:52 If only I was infected from a small age.

Zoltán Kovács 00:03:54 Yeah!

Janina Doyle 00:03:55 That's convenient. So, okay, but you didn't grow up in the Tokaji region, did you?

Zoltán Kovács 00:04:02 No. I'm Transylvanian. I grew up in that region, which has its own wine regions as well. So, after making my university studies, I came to the Tokaji wine region.

Janina Doyle 00:04:15 Amazing So, let's talk about Tokaj, which for everybody, Tokaj, the region ends with the J not the I. The I part on the end of Tokaji is for the sweet wine. That's correct, right?

Zoltán Kovács 00:04:32 Not really.

Janina Doyle 00:04:33 Ah, I was gonna say like, please, elaborate.

Zoltán Kovács 00:04:38 Yeah, so Tokaj is the noun. And Tokaji is the genitive of Tokaj. From Tokaji, it means.

Janina Doyle 00:04:50 Right? Okay. But in general, when we talk about the region, it's Tokaj. So, don't put the I on there.

Zoltán Kovács 00:04:59 Yeah. Well, Tokaj is the city. And the region, it's Tokaji.

Janina Doyle 00:05:05 Oh, gosh! Now I just give up. Okay. All right, fine. So, for us English people, can we just spell it however we want? And you're just like, allow us?

Zoltán Kovács 00:05:12 Yeah. It's okay. I don't want to make it too complicated.

Janina Doyle 00:05:08 I think I've just confused everyone even more anyway. Okay, fine. I want you though, to tell us the beauty of Tokaj. What attracted you to this region? What's it like there?

Zoltán Kovács 00:05:29 Well, actually, to be very honest, it wasn't really the beauty of the region which attracted me. It was a job offer, what I got being student in my final year. Yeah, a new company was set up in the wine region and the owner was a former Transylvania who emigrated in South Africa. Dr. Julius Lazlo, well-known winemaker in South Africa, a pioneering winemaker.

After he retired in South Africa, he came back to Hungary and invested here in the wine region. And he knew my father, my family. So, he came to the University, contacted me and offered me a job as a representative of the family to join the company here, a starting company. So, this was the reason for coming to the wine region, actually.

Janina Doyle 00:06:24 So, which winery was this, if anybody wants to investigate?

Zoltán Kovács 00:006:27 That was called the Lazlo winery. It was a smaller winery in Tallya, a smaller city next to Mád, actually.

Janina Doyle 00:06:36 Well, we're going to talk about Mad. I mean, brilliant, the best name you could possibly have for a wine region.

Zoltán Kovács 00:06:43 Yeah, of course. It's very international. And they thought Mád.

Janina Doyle 00:06:46 It's hilarious? Yeah, absolutely. Okay, so practically, that was practicalities. That's what brought you across. Can you talk to us about the climate, the terroir, because there's defining factors here, isn't it that has made this region quite famous?

Zoltán Kovács 00:07:04 Yeah, there's the basic thing for us. So, if we speak about the terroir, 12-15 million years ago, there was a very strong volcanic activity here in the region. That time this region was still covered by the Pannonian sea. So, it was underwater and everything.

And due to this very strong volcanic activity, the whole region grew up actually, together with the Zemplin mountains, which are on the northern part of the wine region. And all these small vineyard hills were small volcanoes in the past with different volcanic activity, and this is the reason why the different single vineyards are so different in days actually when we make wine from them.

So this is the volcanic background. And then the soils, we have loess in the southern part of the wine region, which covers the volcanic bedrock. And on the bigger part of the wine region, we have a very heavy clay soil, which together with the minerals which cover it, gives a terroir a lot of structure to the vines.

This is the most important thing for us. And then the climate, the geographic location, which is very, very important, the wine region is located in the southeastern part of Hungary, close to Slovakia, not far away from Ukraine and Romania as well.

From the north, as I mentioned, we are bordered by the Zemplin mountains, which are like fences against the chilly winds from the Carpathians located further to the north in Slovakia and Poland. That's the protection of the wine region. Then from Southwest we are bordered by the great Hungarian plain, which gives us good weather, the sunny weather, and a nice breeze during the autumn time as well, which helps with the shrivelling of the berries.

And from the southeast, we are bordered by the Bodrog river. So, a river, very important. We joins in Tokaj city, the Tisza, the second biggest river of Hungary. And from these two rivers we got the moist, the humidity, which is necessary for the Botrytis to grow. So we have in place protection, we have Botrytis, and we have shrivelling. So, these are the three main factors which contribute to the quality of our grapes to make excellent sweet wine, actually.

Janina Doyle 00:09:45 I think it's fascinating because obviously the history goes back and it is about the sweet wine, but now table still wines coming out and they're fantastic. So, as a winemaker working in this region, what have you found to have been some of the biggest challenges for you or in fact, the biggest rewards as a winemaker that perhaps people listening would not be aware of?

Zoltán Kovács 00:10:05 To be a Tokaji winemaker, it's a challenging thing because you have to think completely in a different way. So, in Tokaj, the hardiness and to do a very quick thing is not the thing to do, actually, because we need a lot of patience.

We are in autumn time, and deep in autumn time – very often with the harvest could have some rains, which will damage a bit, your crop, but then they'll come some other sunny days as well afterwards, which will dry then and then you can harvest them.

The harvesting in Tokaj is to be prepared for a very long time for the harvest. The harvest starts, let's say mid-beginning of September and very often will last till mid November. It's not like in Burgundy, you have to harvest everything in 10 days, two weeks because then it's a catastrophe.

In Tokaj, you will always be prepared to harvest that small amount of berry which is ready on the vine. So, you take that and then you come back and you check your parcels and go back to that one which is prepared to be harvested.

Day by day, you do this work and you have, back of you, 100-150 people prepared to harvest those small berries which are needed for your sweet wine. And after the harvest, mid November, then you can start vinification and with fermentation and everything you will arrive in January somehow to finish everything and then come down and start the maturation.

And it's fascinating in the same time because you got the crop and through the fermentation you will have this fascinating world of sweet wine, which gives you a lot of joy. After bottling, you present it to your customers and they found, actually, what you would like to show them the balance of Tokaji inside and it makes you over the top, actually.

Janina Doyle 00:12:16 Well... Okay, so this is the charm. Tokaji has a whole range of wines and it is about this balancing of acidity and in very many of the wines that sugar. So, I have to ask you, what has been your very best wine that you have ever made that you're most proud of? And don't hold back here.

Zoltán Kovács 00:12:41 Well, I believe I still have some time in front of doing...

Janina Doyle 00:12:47 Don't be humble here. I didn't say the best wine that you will ever make. I said the best wines, okay, so far. Do you have a favourite? Or is there a favourite vintage that just made you so happy? I'm broadening the question now.

Zoltán Kovács 00:13:03 Yeah, at Royal Tokaji, we are very aware of the Single Vineyards where we have our vineyards. Well, one of my preferred vineyards is Szt. Tamás. It's not only because of its soil composition exposure but because as well that our vineyards are going to the top of the Szt. Tamás and you have an amazing view.

Very inspiring view actually, I believe actually all Szt. Tamás, 6 puttonyos Single Vineyards, what I made since I'm here at Royal Tokaji, are all of them in a way something unique for me and giving me a lot of a lot of joy, actually. So, we only released the '17, since I'm here to the public, it was very appreciated by everybody. But I believe the others upcoming, I hope we'll have the same appreciation.

Janina Doyle 00:14:47 Amazing. Okay, so I've always really liked the story of Royal Tokaji, the winery, because of course we are talking in this wine region, I think 400 years of history. There's so much but then during the communist era, as far as I know, and hopefully you'll correct me if I'm wrong, but everything really fell apart and then Royal Tokaji has this kind of amazing story of bringing everything back. So, can you just let everyone know a little bit about Royal Tokaji and where it started?

Zoltán Kovács 00:14:35 Yeah, so I'm not saying a big thing if I'm saying that Hugh Johnson was our founder. Himself was tasting Tokaji wines even before the falling of the Iron Curtain. He came here when he was busy writing his worldwide Atlas.

So, he tasted and he was always amazed by the quality and the balance of the sweet wines from the Tokaj wine region, especially from Mád. Because of this fact, he always had in mind that one day maybe will happen something and he can contribute here to set up a company or to do something here in the wine region.

And yeah, that time came in 1990 when the former communist system collapsed, he found himself with the Danish investor around him coming to the wine region, to Mád, especially to Mád village. And he found 62 small producers, and they decided all together to form a sort of cooperative in the beginning.

So, the small producer, they supported their land, the investor brought their money, knowhow, and had a winemaker consultant at that time as well. And together with Hugh Johnson knowledge about market, marketing. So, all together actually to set up a successful company. So, these are the early days of Royal Tokaji in 1990-1991 was when everything started. And everybody was enthusiastic about it.

Janina Doyle 00:16:23 And I am still enthusiastic about it. And I'm so enthused that I am now going to go to the first wine which is, by the way, everybody, if you thought we were going to have sweet wines in this episode, we're not. you're gonna have to wait for episode two.

So, we're gonna do still wines today, which is exciting because I think it is still a style of wines that many people don't know about. So, I have in front of me, a 2021 Furmint. Am I pronouncing the grape variety correctly?

Zoltán Kovács 00:16:53 Furmint. So, the accent is always on the first one. Furmint.

Janina Doyle 00:17:00 Yes, Furmint. Okay, so Furmint – I'm still saying it naturally. I'm such an English gal. So, Furmint is the main grape variety of Tokaj, I think. Is it still accounting for about 70% or so of the planting?

Zoltán Kovács 00:17:17 That's correct.

Janina Doyle 00:17:18 Okay. So, any other grape variety we mentioned guys, you can always discard it if it's too much. Just Furmint.. Okay, so this is 100% Furmint. It's dry. It's 2021. This is your youngest wine. It's on a screw cap. I'm going to have a little taste because this conversation has got me thirsty. Can you tell all of us listening about Furmint? And what this grape variety give? What is special about him?

Zoltán Kovács 00:17:43 So, Furmint is the native grape variety of the wine region, we consider it actually. Actually, it's not an aromatic grape variety. But because of the terroir, here in Tokaj, it gives a lot of minerality, a lot of structure and aromatic complexity in the mouth, especially.

Of course, with a bit of maturation, the nose as well will be very complex and very, very pleasant. And there is another thing, the acidity of the Furmint given by the volcanic soil, which will make always a tremendous balance in your mouth when you taste the wine.

Janina Doyle 00:18:26 Of course, beautiful acidity, but I like the tanginess. There's some really nice citrus and peach notes, but with a really nice little bit of salinity afterwards. Are you drinking the same wine as me?

Zoltán Kovács 00:18:39 Yes! You are characterising it as it should be!

Janina Doyle 00:18:45 Super mouth watering. And I actually finished with this kind of interesting, almost powdery, maybe cinnamony, like something kind of like a sweet spice vibe. It's really... but more than anything, my mouth is watering.

When we talk about high acidity wines, we talk about Sauvignon Blanc and others. This is just for me, really I feel it in all parts of my palate. And the notes as well have a little bit of this kind of slightly herbal floral note as well, which I find quite... There's a slight savoury, but you said that's not a very aromatic grape variety, right? And it's not. If somebody wants something big with a big bouquet. It's not. It's very intriguing.

Zoltán Kovács 00:19:29 Yes.

Janina Doyle 00:19:30 Super fresh.

Zoltán Kovács 00:19:31 It is.

Janina Doyle 00:19:32 I want to ask you, this is the standard Furmint, which everyone in the UK, Majestic has a load of these wines. And if you buy a Mix six, it's like £9.99. Okay, so this is a great one just to start. But I guess to compare, maybe we should compare this to the Vineyard selection that you've sent me, which is 2017. I am not going for the life of me to try and pronounce the name of this. How do you pronounce this?

Zoltán Kovács 00:20:07 You mean the Hungarian? Dulovalogatas.

Janina Doyle 00:20:09 Okay, okay. Everyone, you're gonna laugh at me. Okay? No, no, no, this will be fun. So, I would pronounce it, D-U-L-O-V-A-L-O-G-A-T-A-S. How was that?

Zoltán Kovács 00:20:21 That was very good. Dulovalogatas means Vineyard selection, actually.

Janina Doyle 00:20:25 Oh, my God! By the way, actually, my pronunciation was pretty good.

Zoltán Kovács 00:20:31 Yes.

Janina Doyle 00:20:32 Okay. All right, great. Listen, everybody. It's not about the pronunciation. It's about wine knowledge. And that is what we're trying to get today. Okay, so this is what it means. It means vineyard collection.

So, this is 2017. What are we doing here now? Are you selecting? Am I correct, in Tokaj, there's the first growth. You've already talked about Szt. Tamás, but then there's like second growths, third, and then like unclassified? Is that correct?

Zoltán Kovács 00:20:56 Yes.

Janina Doyle 00:20:57 Right. So what's going into this vineyard selection?

Zoltán Kovács 00:21:02 To come back a bit to the first wine and its label as well. Since 2019, we have slightly change the label of our wines.

Janina Doyle 00:21:10 I wondered. Okay. Yeah.

Zoltán Kovács 00:21:13 Yes. We asked a young Hungarian artist to come to our winery, and we talked with him about our wines, etc, etc. So, finally, he tried to showcase labels which are communicating a bit about the wines.

And on the first wine, the wine itself is a wine region blend where we blend together Royal Tokaji parcels with bought-in parcels from small producers all over the wine region. So, what we have on the label is the Bodrog River, the Tisza River, and the three main volcanoes in the three corners of the wine region and in the middle of the wine region itself. So, it's the Tokaj wine region on the label.

Janina Doyle 00:21:59 That's great. Because yeah, everybody getting a bottle of this when they're listening to the podcast and what you're saying about the terroir, you can kind of see it. So, listen, the label is teaching us stuff. I'm very excited about this. Okay, cool.

Zoltán Kovács 00:22:17 2017 still doesn't get the new label of the Vineyard Selection. But the Vineyard Selection, it's a village level selection. So, it's a higher class wine. In village level selection, we have the only Royal Tokaji single vineyards from Mád village blended into the wine. And it's 100% barrel fermented and barrel matured.

Janina Doyle 00:22:43 So, are all of the single vineyards, if I heard you correctly, they are all coming from the town of Mád.

Zoltán Kovács 00:22:49 Not all of them, except one, which is Mézes Mály, coming from a different village called Tarcál.

Janina Doyle 00:22:57 I mean, if somebody was to come and visit you, this is where you're based in Mád.

Zoltán Kovács 00:23:02 We're based in Mád. Yeah.

Janina Doyle 00:23:05 In crazy land.

Zoltán Kovács 00:23:06 Yes.

Janina Doyle 00:23:07 No one will forget Mád. And funnily enough, if you were to look at all of the other villages, I think there's 27 villages, isn't there, within the Tokaj. I mean, most of them are very, very hard to pronounce. Mád is the only village with three letters.

Zoltán Kovács 00:23:22 Yes, that's true, the only one.

Janina Doyle 00:23:29 This is for us, for us Westerners, this is the perfect place. Okay. So, this is slightly better quality. Alright, fine. And you've said whereas the other one was stainless steel, correct?

Zoltán Kovács 00:23:37 So, the first one is half-half – half stainless steel, half barrel. So, even in the first one, we have barrels.

Janina Doyle 00:23:45 And maybe as well that's why there was that savoury edge. But have you got this Vineyard Selection 2017 in front of you or not?

Zoltán Kovács 00:23:54 Yes.

Janina Doyle 00:23:55 Okay, so this one's really interesting. There's a real like, powdery charm to it. Again, it's really savoury but it's much more kind of like Apple Blossomy. And do you know what

potpourri is? I don't know if this is a thing across the world. Potpourri is probably like dried flowers, dried fruit all condensed and then it's quite old fashioned. And then people used to put it in a bowl and then put it in a house and it smells.

Zoltán Kovács 00:24:20 Okay.

Janina Doyle 00:24:05 To be honest, I haven't seen anyone with potpourri. And it has this...

Zoltán Kovács 00:24:27 Ah, potpourri! Okay. I know. I got it. Yes.

Janina Doyle 00:24:30 But it's got this kind of powdery, dried flowers, dried fruit edge thing. And it's very intriguing to the nose.

Zoltán Kovács 00:24:40 Yeah. So, it has already a nice bottle maturation as well being 2017. So, besides the bottle matured phase of the Furmint, the maturation potential of the Furmint, I believe it's a very nice evolution of the wine.

Janina Doyle 00:25:01 I love it! Again, gosh, my mouth is watering. It is spicy. But I have to say when I drink these wines, it's not spicy like other wines. You know, like sometimes we could talk about a Gruner Veltliner from Austria, which has these white pepper spice, but this is for me with Furmint, it's the spice that comes on the finish with the acidity, and it's got this savoury sweet vibe going on. So, it's a very different type of spice for me.

Zoltán Kovács 00:25:31 Yeah. So, actually, it's our signature, let's say component of the wine. It's the acidity, which will help us a lot to build around it or this flavour. The acidity, for us, it's like the spine or it's like a Christmas tree.

Janina Doyle 00:25:48 Oh, I like this!

Janina Doyle 00:25:49 You have the Christmas tree branches, like the acidity and then you can hang all the flavours. And the acidity will hold everything together and they will give this power and minerality as well to the wine.

Janina Doyle 00:26:06 I totally agree. Interestingly though, I felt that the first one was more saline but you do definitely get a little steeliness. But then with this one, it's lovely, it's not too weighty. It really isn't. But yeah, like there's just a slight lick of vanilla, I guess, from the oak. But really, I think the fruits are still coming through.

And it's interesting because on the nose I get much more of these dried fruits and flowers but the palate, like, it's real pear, fresh pear and then the spice. Oh, it's really lovely! And I'm looking, okay, so I found...

Ah! This wine, I couldn't find it in England. I couldn't find it online. So, if you guys find me retail, I'll put it in the show notes. But for my American listeners, they'll be happy because they always get missed out. Hi, everyone across the pond. Redwaggonshope.com – ShopE, got an E on the end. \$24.99 That's what I found. But I'd love to know where to get it in England.

Zoltán Kovács 00:27:06 We do have it in England as well because it is in our store, in our storage facility.

Janina Doyle 00:27:13 Oh, storage facility! Okay. Yeah, let me know afterwards.

Zoltán Kovács 00:27:16 I can give you some... Yeah, I can give you some...

Janina Doyle 00:27:21 ... some places. Okay.

Zoltán Kovács 00:27:22 Yes!

Janina Doyle 00:27:22 Right. Now, I really enjoy, because the thing is it's nice to actually do this comparison tasting to understand Furmint but also to see how the quality changes. And now in front of me I have one of your first growths. Can you pronounce this for me, please?

Zoltán Kovács 00:27:40 So, it's very easy actually. It's Mézes Mály.

Janina Doyle 00:27:46 Okay. Mézes Mály. I could have totally said that. Easy peasy. So, I've got the Mézes Mály 2018. And all of these so far have been 100% Furmint. Right?

Zoltán Kovács 00:27:58 Yes. And this one, Mézes Mály is Furmint as well. It's coming from a totally different terroir. It's our neighbouring village called Tarcal. And Mézes Mály is located on the Tokaj Hill, which is the Southwest location of the wine region.

And being there, the soil around the Tokaj Hill, it's totally different. It's called loess. It's sandy-like soil. And it's transported soil from the great Hungarian plain. Actually, the Tokaj Mount is the front facing the great Hungarian plain. So, all the soil around the single vineyard was transported from the great Hungarian plain and deposited on the volcanic slopes of Tokaj Hill.

And it's a very deep soil. 10-50 metres in deepness. So, it really allowed the roots of the vines to go very deeply down in the soil to reach the volcanic rock and the water, which are deep down in the soil, and even being a sandy-like soil, even in drier vintages, you can still get very good quality on this soil.

The most characteristic thing of the Mézes Mály in the wine is the flowery character – white flower, yellow flower. It's giving these... how can I say... aerial lightness to the wine in a good sense. But when you taste it, you will always face the structure and the acidity given by the volcanic soil.

Janina Doyle 00:29:50 The elements of the soil. Absolutely. There's a reason why this is such a special wine. And funnily enough, the notes are slightly more restrained than the other two. And I've had this before, I think, on my Instagram. If somebody is bored one day and they want to keep on flicking through, they can see that I think last year I was drinking a bottle of this and I adored it because this is almost for me about elegance, restraint, slight more subtlety.

It's a very pretty wine but you have to take your time with it. I agree with you on the florals. But again, quite clearly, you're putting this in some oak. There's this lovely lick of vanilla. And I want to use the word butter in a way that's not going to scare anyone because people think of a buttery Chardonnay. And it's not.

Zoltán Kovács 00:30:35 No. No.

Janina Doyle 00:30:39 Not at all. But it has. And again, the interesting thing is this is slightly more weighty than the Vineyard Selection, but actually seems far brighter, seems more lighter, seems more elegant, the lift on it. But I get this kind of honey blossom, and lots of more stone fruits alongside those flowers that you get more on the notes.

Zoltán Kovács 00:31:00 I agree completely. Well, it should have more weight than the Vineyard Selection. It's a single vineyard with his characteristics. And its itself vinified 100% in oak barrels is the reason you will get a bit of vanilla in the notes and in the taste as well. Yeah, the buttery-ness, as you mentioned, it's a totally different thing to what you get in some wines, because you have the acidity beside it. So, we'll always refresh it and will give a totally different character to it.

Janina Doyle 00:31:38 100%. I think anybody who's listening to this, I mean, I always feel bad sometimes tasting the wines on these podcasts because people are obviously going, "Yeah, but we can't taste it." And ultimately, you need to taste it.

But what I want to, I guess, clarify here is that the absolute mouthwatering acidity is so apparent with all of them that spiciness on the finish is something that I'm getting across all of them. And then it's really about, I guess, how much money do you have to spend. And if you have more money, you get slightly more weight, slightly more roundness and slightly more complexity, but at the end of the day for £9.99, even the first one shows the perfect characteristics of Furmint. So, you don't have to go to this last one.

But for anybody who's interested, it's in England £24.99, a bottle. And I looked at Cellar Door Wines or shelteredwines.com. So, it's a few places. And that's in fantastic value for the, especially, this last one, the complexity. If we were to compare that to certain Burgundy wines, you're gonna get nothing for that price point. And this has finesse. It has elegance. It has brightness, mouthwatering acidity. What would you pair with these wines or just Furmint, in general, if somebody was going to grab a bottle?

Zoltán Kovács 00:32:52 I can have it as an aperitif. As a wine to start with. It's a wine that you can have with friends just around the chat or things like that, but it fits very well the seafoods for example, fish, all sorts of salad and this lighter type of starters, I believe, it's the best wine.

The second and the third are wines with a higher richness, more complexity. Because of the volume as well, given by the barrel maturation, they will fit more sophisticated foods made with different meats, chicken meat, pork meat, goose meat. So, these types of meats, roasted or just cooked, I believe it will go very very well, actually.

Janina Doyle 00:33:49 So, I always say to everyone, when you got good acidity, it's going to cut through all the fat, the oil, all your protein and and because of this minerality, this flintiness, this steeliness, the salinity, and the texture that you're putting in there more premium wines because of barrel ageing, that's how they're gonna go with the more smoked toasted roasted meats.

I have to say, though, because of the great acidity and this spiciness that I'm getting, I would like to play around with a whole load of maybe, like, Japanese dishes or something with really fatty fish, and with all the lovely spices and the ginger and things... and I haven't done that, but I think okay, good. I'm glad you're approved.

Okay. So, to finish on the stills, we're throwing in a curveball here. So, everyone is now completely educated on Furmint. But the second most planted grape variety, which accounts for about 25% or so of plantings, is...

Zoltán Kovács 00:34:49 Is...?

Janina Doyle 00:34:49 Drumroll here. Oh, you're gonna make me pronounce? Okay. Well, I would say, Hárslevelű.

Zoltán Kovács 00:34:57 Hárslevelű. Good. That was good.

Janina Doyle 00:35:-3 Okay, all right. Good. Okay. And I really liked this grape variety because actually, interestingly enough, this grape variety has been taken to random places in the world. And there is a producer in South Africa who does 100% of this grape variety and it's gone from my mind, I want to say... I'll put in the show notes that wine if anybody wants to taste this 100% Hárslevelű. Sorry, I'm just gonna do my terrible pronunciation. Just make sure you keep on saying so everyone hears it correctly.

Zoltán Kovács 00:35:36 Hárslevelű.

Janina Doyle 00:35:37 Yeah, okay. Hárslevelű. But I really like this grape variety. Because I just think, again, it's got this kind of floral... really, I'm smelling yours already. And it always smells like Linden blossom. So, what's the translation of Hárslevelű?

Zoltán Kovács 00:35:53 So, Hárslevelű is a grape variety with very long and loose bunch, smaller berries. The leaf of the grape variety, it's round actually. It's round as the Linden tree leaves. So, this is from where it gets its name because Hars it means Linden, Levelű – Leaf. So, Linden leaf, actually in translation.

It's a semi-aromatic, half-aromatic grape variety. Very often, when it's vilified in stainless steel, you will get this Linden, honey or elderflower, sometimes a bit of Sauvignon-like aromatic profile as well. For us, this Hárslevelű is a single vineyard and it's 100% vinified in barrels. It's coming from Betsek single vineyard. Betsek single vineyard, as it is shown on the label, is a moon shaped single vineyard and over it, the breeze which is coming from the great Hungarian plain is ripening and drying the berries.

Janina Doyle 00:37:05 So, oh, okay... So, wait! Pause for a second. You talked about these new labels.

Zoltán Kovács 00:37:08 Yes.

Janina Doyle 00:37:38 Every new wine when it comes out now, there won't be any of the more plain traditional labels. Every single one will have that artist label that will represent...

Zoltán Kovács 00:37:20 Yes.

Janina Doyle 00:37:21 If it is a single vineyard, it will be drawn and it will have something to do with it. Oh, I love it! And this is a beautiful, beautiful label because yeah, the moon is blowing out these beautiful breezes or whatever. It's gorgeous.

This is 2019, everyone. And I absolutely love this wine. I find it so unique. It's, for me, I mean, it's floral, but it's herbal at the same time. I feel like I'm walking... In fact it's autumnal. I feel like I am walking through a beautiful ancient woodland in the autumn when everything's starting to dry up. It's rained recently so there's a little bit of dampness but some flowers are still holding on to give these aromatics. That is what I get with this wine. Oh, my God! And the texture though, it still has the silkiness. I really liked the silkiness of this grape variety.

Zoltán Kovács 00:38:25 So, it's totally different to the Furmint. Furmint is very striking, very focused with a very big structure. Hárslevelű it's always the silkiness, roundness, and slightly aromatic side as well. So, it's milder a bit in your mouth.

Janina Doyle 00:38:45 I get like, obviously, so the nose is taking me to the forest. This season, it's perfect. But the palate is, like, there's a little hint of honey but then also like something like chestnut

which is great because that's taken me into the winter. Like, it's not roasted chestnuts but it's taking me there, this slight woody outdoorsy-ness and then there's like some kind of yellow apple. It's brilliant. You hardly make any bottles of this, right?

Zoltán Kovács 00:39:12 Yeah.

Janina Doyle 00:39:15 726.

Zoltán Kovács 00:39:18 Yeah.

Janina Doyle 00:38:19 I'm drinking one of the 726 bottles produced. I feel very special. Everybody get a bottle of this. Right. This is £24.95 from Cellar Door Wines, if you are in the UK. But this is such a great wine if you want quality but also you just want to try something so different because there's so little of it around, right?

Zoltán Kovács 00:39:44 Yes!

Janina Doyle 00:39:45 Well, that makes me so happy.

Janina Doyle 00:39:49 Now that is it for the stills of Tokaji but of course it's impossible to have Zoltan in the hot seat and not talk sweet wines. So, next week we will be opening up their late harvest, a 5 Puttonyos and a 6 Puttonyos wine and in perfect time just before Christmas as this is the moment for Tarte Tatin, Creme Brulee, beautiful cheese platters and you need the perfect indulgent wine for that.

So, to finish off with an appropriate quote, a quite notable one comes from Louie the 15th of France, who reportedly referred to Tokaji as, "The wine of Kings and King of wines." So, if you didn't already know, now you know what we have in store next week.

So, that is it for this week's episode. Thank you all as ever for listening, learning and sharing this podcast with your wine loving friends. Thank you to those of you who have left a rating on Spotify or view on Apple podcasts.

And if you haven't, well for my Christmas gift this year, it'll fab if you find a moment to leave one, if of course you are getting value out of these podcasts. So, as the day's continue to grow shorter and colder, I hope you're all being warmed by all the festive delights and season's magic. So, grab a cosy blanket, pour yourself something nice and I'll meet you back here next Monday. Until then, wine friends, cheers to you!