

Ep 161 Tokaji Aszú The sweet wines of Tokaj with Zoltán Kovács, Winery Director for Royal Tokaji (Part 2)



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 the last episode of 2023. But I am leaving you with what I think is a perfect episode to get you ready for all the festivities. Now I hope amongst the lights and the joyous occasions you are indulging in some special wines to accompany those leisurely long lunches with friends and family.

And so, with the Tokaj wine region in Hungary being one of the oldest and most historic wine regions in the world, and with the winery, Royal Tokaji, known for its production of Tokaji Aszú, which is the legendary sweet wine made from grapes affected by Noble Rot. These sweet wines are just perfect for that extra sweet tooth that, you know, most of us, we kind of adopt during this season.

So, this is part two with Royal Tokaji Winery director Zoltán Kovács. He will be taking us through the differences of what a Late harvest wine is compared to the five and six Puttonyos wines. And even the Essencia, an ultra rare and extremely sweet wine. Essencia is so concentrated that it can take years to ferment and it is often considered one of the world's most luxurious and unique wines.

So, I don't know, maybe that's going to be a really special Christmas present for someone you love. Well, actually yourself. Now talking of gifts, and as we cosy up to this holiday season, I've got a special Christmas wish for those of you enjoying these podcasts and with access to Apple podcast, could you take a moment to share your thoughts by leaving a quick review and rating. And as my festive gift to you screenshot your review, sometimes they do take a few days to pop up, shoot it my way via email –

So, janina@eatsleepwinerepeat.co.uk or direct message me on Instagram @eatsleep_winerepeat. And you can win an hour of personalised one on one wine tasting or training you could bring your family in, it could be just you. We will talk about that because what better way to toast the holidays then with a little extra cheer and with of course, the podcast algorithm sharing this podcast to more listeners? So, cheers to the season of giving and sipping. And I hope you savour the delectable delights of this episode.

Janina Doyle 00:03:11 We are now going to go on to the sweet wines. It is sticky time. Everyone's like, alright, okay, great. We were very interested in the still wines but we signed up for sweet Tokaji. So, okay, I want you to possibly explain to people the importance of these dessert wines. So, Tokaji has often been referred to as the Wine of kings. So, why is this?

Zoltán Kovács 00:03:41 The fame of the wine region was given by the sweet wine produced in the wine region. And because of their complexity, their balance, their acidity. They started to be highly

appreciated around Europe towards the 16th-17th century, when very often Hungarian rulers, kings were using the Tokaji as a political... Let's say!

Janina Doyle 00:04:13 A bargaining tool. Yeah, somehow in all the stories, and I can't quote any because I can't remember exact names, it was like money, or I don't know, like, quite clearly, this is liquid gold.

Zoltán Kovács 00:04:28 Yes.

Janina Doyle 00:04:29 And you know, if you gave enough of it to somebody, everyone can be bought, can't they?

Zoltán Kovács 00:04:35 And then even though because of his natural sweetness was highly appreciated, because those times, besides honey actually, no other source of natural sweetness could be affordable because those times in Europe, we didn't have cane sugar or beet sugar because it didn't exist that time.

So, that's why sweet wines were so expensive and highly appreciated and because of their price, it was only afforded by very rich people and by the royalty. So, this is the reason why it was mentioned by Louis Quatorze, Louis XIV as the wine of kings. And the king of the wines is the same reason, actually, because it was a very high quality, highly appreciated wine by everybody. So, this is how I was joking with the words.

Janina Doyle 00:05:40 He wasn't joking. This is exactly what it is, the wine of kings. I love it. I think it's amazing. Okay. So, I have talked about the Botrytis, which is a Noble Rot, which is actually a good kind of fungus. I have talked about this before on previous podcasts. However, I would love for you in your personal words, just to explain what it is, again for people to listen to because it is fascinating, beautiful nature doing really weird and wonderful things.

Zoltán Kovács 00:06:16 Yeah. So, what we call Noble Rot, it is called in the other region worldwide, grey rot. And it's caused by the same rot which is called Botrytis Cinerea, which arrives on the berries during autumn time. If you have humid weather, it will destroy the crop very shortly. This is how it acts. People all over the world, they have to take care to fight against Botrytis with different tools.

In the wine region where we are in Tokaj, we have natural tools to fight against the Botrytis – I will tell you what. And then, we are going to have weather tools which will fight against Botrytis, not to cause his damages, actually, to the grape variety.

So, which are the tools? We have too late ripening grape varieties, the Furmint and Hárslevelű, which have a quite thick berry skin, which could resist for a long time against the damages of the Botrytis. So, the Botrytis will stay on the berry, will eat, step-by-step let's call it like that, the skin of the berry but could not damage it.

And then, the other thing which is helping the grapes is the drying of the berries, which is given by the climate of the wine region and very long summer-like weather during autumn time, which will dry the berries.

So, to reach a perfect berry quality, you will lose about 80% of the total weight of the berry, actually. So, you lose 80% of the water, and it is shriveling. So, this is how nature and the grape variety is fighting against Botrytis. And finally, you will get Noble Rot from the damaging action of the Botrytis. So, you really need special conditions and grape varieties which will help you to get this golden berry.

Janina Doyle 00:08:42 Yeah. And I get what you say you get exactly. So, everybody, grey rot, bad. Noble Rot, good. It comes from the same fungus. But it's all based on once the grape gets it, are you going to get the breeze? Are you going to get the sunshine and where you are, it's just perfect, isn't it, from those planes bringing up the sun, the right winds, the rivers that you mentioned in the first episode, all working together to create that perfect balance.

And so, yeah, I didn't realise it was 80%. Gosh! Now that is also why dessert wine made from Botrytized grapes or dessert wine with Noble Rot is not the cheapest sweet wines in the world because you're losing your profits as they dehydrate, as they shrivel and become more like raisins. But they taste better, do they not?

Zoltán Kovács 00:09:40 Yes, that's true. And then on top of that, then you have to collect them manually because they couldn't be done by machines. So the harvester could collect around the five kilograms per day of these berries. So, you can imagine...

Janina Doyle 00:09:56 Five kilos?

Zoltán Kovács 00:09:56 Yes.

Janina Doyle 00:09:58 That's all you're bringing in? Oh, my God! Okay. That's tiny. Five kilos is tiny, I can't even comprehend. So, you're basically, because you are going through the vineyard time and time again. You mentioned in the episode before that this harvest basically lasts about two months here. And that's obviously the beginning part. You're starting with the grapes that you're going to turn into still wine, dry still wine, but throughout it, you're going through and then when you find that perfect shrivelled grape, you just pick that and just and leave everything else. And you keep going through just picking about, what? Five kilos a day?

Zoltán Kovács 00:10:42 Yes, that's correct. And then you bring in the berries and you store it in our storage facility for one and a half, two months, till we finish all our vinification with the other wines, and only that time, we will start to work with these berries in the winery. So, it's a very, very labour intensive work, actually.

Janina Doyle 00:11:04 Totally. So, everybody, get excited when you realise actually the pricing is nothing compared to how hard these guys are working. But just to throw in a curveball, because you know, we want to keep everyone on their toes. It's confusing enough these Aszú berries, this is the name for the shrivelled berries in Tokaji, the Aszú berries. But you have now late harvest wines.

Zoltán Kovács 00:11:24 Correct.

Janina Doyle 00:11:25 Now around the world late harvest, it's a standard term. The grapes have been left on the vines for longer; they were harvested later. Perfect. But how does somebody know if there's some Botrytized grapes in there or not? They don't?

Zoltán Kovács 00:11:40 Yes. So, our late harvest, what we produce, which is around 100 grams of residual sugar. This is our style a bit to say it. This richness level, you can't get grape varieties without Botrytis. So, what we use to produce this wine is halfway in between dry and also shrivelled berries. So, it's halfway.

Janina Doyle 00:12:07 Okay.

Zoltán Kovács 00:12:08 We have Botrytis already on the berries, but they are not completely shrivelled. And we are harvesting those branches or those clusters, which are characterised mainly by these berries. And on our web page, you will find a very nice picture of what we use. It's quite ugly when you really look at that quality, but that's what we use. It's already rich in flavours. High sugar content. It's not desiccated completely. This is what we use actually. And we make a winemaking process as we do for the dry wines as direct pressing and then fermenting it.

Janina Doyle 00:12:52 Now, just, everyone, now knows this is a halfway house between still and a wine using the berries...

Zoltán Kovács 00:12:59 Botrytis.

Janina Doyle 00:13:00 Exactly. Just for people to understand if they do just see late harvest on a label of another Tokaji, is that all going to be with some Botrytized grapes, a 100% no matter what?

Zoltán Kovács 00:13:07 Yeah. So, actually it's quite a wide range in the late harvest. You can make a late harvest in Tokaji avoiding Botrytis grapes, but there you are going to have a lower concentration in sugar.

But from our point of view, late harvest, it's a wine which is a step before the Aszú wine. So, it's a wine to introduce people to have a lighter style and easygoing wine, an understandable style to make people understand a bit of the sweet wines of Tokaji and to let them introduce to the next level, which will be the Aszú wines.

Janina Doyle 00:13:58 Amazing. And obviously, the wines, they are the special ones, but actually, am I right in thinking there was like a Botrytis drought, quote drought where there was several years where people couldn't get Botrytis. Did I read that or am I making this up? Have I asked a question that I should have never asked?!

Zoltán Kovács 00:14:19 No, it's not that type of question. But there are vintages where we have less Botrytis. You can't avoid Botrytis in Tokaji. You will always have Botrytis. And there are two sources of Botrytis. One is from the interior, which is going into the berry and will live there inside the berry and will infect the berry after the flowering, when the petals will fall down, small injuries still exist and Botrytis will go inside.

So, very often, when you arrive in autumn, you will see very nice ripened berries without Botrytis from the exterior. But if you see them inside, you will have a nice web, reddish brownish web, inside, under the skin, which is Botrytis inside.

Janina Doyle 00:15:07 Fantastic. Because I would have thought that if Botrytis came during flowering, which is, I presume the same for us around June time, flowering going into fruit set. Yeah. I would have thought that that could completely annihilate the grape. So, actually, what you're saying is, okay, so it's really hit or miss.

Zoltán Kovács 00:15:36 Yes.

Janina Doyle 00:15:37 But if during flowering, the Botrytis gets in, the conditions are great enough, not the humidity level is down, it kind of just penetrates the grape in a way that when it – well, it's a flower, it turns into a fruit set. So, the berry is containing it and it just kind of works its magic from inside. That is fantastic. That's so intriguing.

Zoltán Kovács 00:16:05 And then, of course, during autumn time, when you get wet conditions then, from the exterior, you will get maybe a berry burst. So, there we'll get you an open window, again for the Botrytis to be on top of it, and then you will see those nice stripes on the berry with that greyish colour of Botrytis, and then the dried berries as well.

So, those are the Botrytis from the exterior, but if you don't see those from the exterior, inside you will still have Botrytis on our grapes. So, you can't avoid Botrytis. It will be just differences with more and smaller amounts.

Janina Doyle 00:16:46 Okay. Well, either way, I was gonna say that, you know, a positive thing of having late harvest is on those years that there are slightly less, you got your late harvest. Okay, right. So, the late harvest I have is 2018.

Zoltán Kovács 00:17:00 Yes.

Janina Doyle 00:17:01 So, are you using just Furmint or are you now, because there are three grape varieties used in the wines of Tokaji, we talked about in the episode before we talked about Furmint and Hárslevelű. We didn't talk about the third grape variety.

Zoltán Kovács 00:17:21 These are the three main grape varieties, to be very precise. The third one is the Yellow Muscat. Yellow Muscat, it's called in our wine region but is the same great variety of the Muscat in the south of France called Muscat Blanc à Petits Grains.

Janina Doyle 00:17:38 Oh, that was a beautiful accent.

Zoltán Kovács 00:17:42 Yeah, thank you.

Janina Doyle 00:17:43 I thought that you called it Sárga Muskotály.

Zoltán Kovács 00:17:47 Yes, Sarga. Sárga is yellow.

Janina Doyle 00:17:50 Gosh, my pronunciation! Sárga. Sárga?

Zoltán Kovács 00:17:55 Sárga. Yes.

Janina Doyle 00:17:56 Sárga Muskotály. Yeah?

Zoltán Kovács 00:17:58 Muskotály. Yes.

Janina Doyle 00:18:00 Oh! Oh, my God! Oh, I am embarrassed.

Zoltán Kovács 00:18:03 So, we use the three main grape varieties to make these wines. Furmint is responsible for the spine, the structure and the acidity of the wine. It will made up more than 50% of the final blend.

Muscat which gives the aromatic side of the wine, we'll have about more than 10% in the final blend. And the remaining 30% is the Hárslevelű. Hárslevelű, with its elegance, binds nicely together the other two grape varieties.

From the vinification point of view, Furmint and Hárslevelű are vinified in barrels. Muscat will stay in tank to preserve the aromatic complexity of it. After five six months of barrel ageing, we blend these three grape varieties to get the final late harvest in bottles.

So, it is a wine. It has very pleasant nose. And then in mouth, it will show you already the complexity and balance, the acidity of Tokaji, where the three grape varieties really make a wine with a lot of structure and complexity.

Janina Doyle 00:19:19 It's just luscious. Now I know when I say luscious, when we go up to the others, it's going to be completely different. The density, the richness of the others are going to be completely different.

But again, I mean, it's luscious, and silky. And I get this, for me, it's just really lovely. Honey. I almost even get on the nose, like, some white chocolate. That kind of smell. We're not talking about chocolate where it's dark and bitter. This is that kind of really sweet, creamy edge. It's quince. It's like white peach. Oh, it's just yummy! I mean, that's my description, everyone. If you want a yummy, sweet wine.

Zoltán Kovács 00:20:00 Yes.

Janina Doyle 00:20:01 This is it.

Zoltán Kovács 00:20:03 It is the reason to make this wine. It's really a wine what we would like to make enjoyable, easy to understand. Just have a glass of wine. Don't think about it and just enjoy it and then go for it.

Janina Doyle 00:20:21 Yummy and satisfying. Okay.

Zoltán Kovács 00:20:23 Yes!

Janina Doyle 00:20:24 Well, I want to keep a little bit of my glass because I will compare.

Zoltán Kovács 00:20:25 Okay.

Janina Doyle 00:20:26 But we're gonna get on to now, what you guys are most famous for. And I am going to have to do my pronunciation again when I'm educating people on the sweet wines. Now we're talking about Five Puttonyos and Six Puttonyos.

Zoltán Kovács 00:20:45 Puttonyos.

Janina Doyle 00:20:46 Now... All right. That was alright. Wait. Wait. Puttonyos.

Zoltán Kovács 00:20:50 Puttonyos, yes. Because it's double T, so you make it more pronounced.

Janina Doyle 00:20:57 Puttonyos. Okay, I'm actually doing all right. Okay. When we talk about the sweet wines that have, and it will say on the label, Five Putton... Oh, my God, Five Puttonyos or Six Puttonyos, we're basically talking about the sweetness level. And obviously, these are the highest. Are we even making four anymore? There used to be 3, 4, 5 and 6. Have we've got rid of three and four? Or is four still around?

Zoltán Kovács 00:21:31 We get higher the initial richness because before, Aszú wines started at 60 grams of residual sugar.

Janina Doyle 00:22:40 Yes, which would have been three.

Zoltán Kovács 00:22:41 Yes. Now everything will start at 120.

Janina Doyle 00:22:46 Okay. Fine.

Zoltán Kovács 00:22:47 But we didn't abolish the nomenclature. So, you will still have three and four Puttonyos Aszú wines from some companies starting at 120 levels of residual sugar. It's creating a bit of misunderstanding of the whole thing.

Yeah, we know that and maybe in the future we are going to work on it a bit to make it more understandable and maybe eliminate the three and the four from the nomenclature and make it more easy for everybody to get it but this is how we have it now. So, we higher the richness but didn't abolish the three and four Puttonyos. So, it still exists.

Janina Doyle 00:22:01 So, for just for everyone to understand, we are actually talking about the residual sugar, the amount of grams per-litre. So, when originally the 60 grams of residual sugar per-litre, that was a three Puttonyos. And then if you've got to 90 grams of residual sugar per-litre, it was four Puttonyos. But now the rules are that all Aszú sweet wines need to be at least 120 grams of residual sugar per-litre

Zoltán Kovács 00:22:57 Correct.

Janina Doyle 00:22:58 Okay. But anyway, it's good to know because if you do see wines that are 10, 20 years old, and it's four Puttonyos, then you know that it's got at least 90.

Zoltán Kovács 00:23:11 Yeah, it could be a lighter style.

Janina Doyle 00:23:13 Yes, precisely. Okay. So, now this is where we get confusing for some people because we are talking about these Aszú berries. They've turned into berries. Again, they've shrivelled up. We've lost 80% of the water inside. But we're not making wine from 100% the Aszú berries. You're adding those Aszú berries into a base wine, aren't you? Can you explain how that winemaking process works?

Zoltán Kovács 00:23:42 You correctly mentioned that we are adding a base wine. What is the reason for that? The reason is the dryness of the berries. So, the berries are so dry, you hardly get any must when you push the berries, when you squeeze the berries, actually.

So, actually, you need something to take out all the richness from the berries. So, how to do it? It's very simple. By maceration. So, you should macerate the berries in a still wine or fermenting must or still must. And of course, during this maceration process, you will be able to extract everything which is stored inside the body. For us we are using a fermenting must and we macerate, we ferment together the must and the berry for one and a half, two days to get all the flavours, acidity, and sugar out of the berry.

And after two days when the berries are actually sucked into the fermenting must, you are able to press directionally. And by pressing it you will get everything out of the berries. So, this is why we use what we call a base must. It's not a basic must. It's the must use as a base to make our Aszú wine.

Janina Doyle 00:25:07 Yeah, well, and we should then touch on the fact that you can make a sweet wine 100% from Aszú berries and this is known as Aszú Essencia, right? People listening, they can't see you shaking your head. Why are you all uncomfortable now?

Zoltán Kovács 00:25:30 What we make 100% from the berries, it is called Essencia. Not Aszú Essencia, just Essencia.

Janina Doyle 00:25:39 Yes, okay. Essencia.

Zoltán Kovács 00:25:40 So, it is Essencia. It is Essencia. And what is that wine – So, during the storage I mentioned, one and half, two months in the harvest time we are storing these berries in stainless steel containers.

So, due to the gravity, they start to release a must, a very thick must from them. And we collect this must. We have a tap on the bottom of each container so we can release the must with that tap. So, we collect this very, very, very rich must, which further is maturity, the glass jars in our cellars. And after maturation, these reach, let's call free juice of the Aszú berry, becoming the Essencia.

Janina Doyle 00:26:30 Yeah. As far as I remember, the sugar level needs to be at least 450 grams of residual sugar per-litre, which is insane. And you can find some Essencia that are like up to 850 grams of residual sugar per-litre. This is the sweetest. This is literal nectar. And in fact, how much alcohol is in these because you're taking up sugar. Like, how much alcohol is in it?

Zoltán Kovács 00:27:02 When you take the Essencia, you have no alcohol at all, because that's a must. During the maturation for years in your cellar, it could ferment slightly but never reach a higher level than 2%, maximum 4% of alcohol because being so rich, the yeasts, they could not ferment it. So, the sweetness of the Essencia, it's a killing factor for the yeasts. So, they could not or hardly ferment it.

Janina Doyle 00:27:36 Now, if I remember correctly, I'm sure that I had a bottle of your Essencia, which was in my wine fridge, as a Sommelier, I was there for two years. You had a spoon. You offered spoons, right?

Zoltán Kovács 00:27:52 Yeah.

Janina Doyle 00:27:53 So, the idea is, this is so thick and liquidy you don't serve it in a glass, you pour onto a spoon and just literally have a spoonful, right?

Zoltán Kovács 00:28:02 Yes, we sell our Essencia packed in small presentation boxes. And part of the presentation box is this very nice crystal spoon which we offer it together with the Essencia bottle. And we suggest for our clients to have it by the spoon, to enjoy it by the spoon.

Janina Doyle 00:28:25 I worked for two years as the Head Sommelier of Beast. This bottle of your Royal Tokaji Essencia was in the fridge. Nobody ever ordered it, of course, because it is the...

Zoltán Kovács 00:28:40 They thought of the best thing...

Janina Doyle 00:28:42 When the prices of lots of other sweet wines. And don't worry, they were ordering your Aszú dessert wines but just not during my time. So, I wonder, everybody, in London, if you go into Beast, go and look in the wine fridges, see if it's still there. I'm sure it will have gone now. This was years ago. But for two years, unfortunately I never got to because if I opened it, I'm sure that the customers would have been very kind and let me have a sip, right?

That would have been very special. But hey, I'm just gonna have to settle for the five and the six Puttonyos. Now before we compare the two, why are we using this term 'Puttonyos'? Why are we saying that?

Zoltán Kovács 00:29:28 Puttonyos is a Hungarian word for the harvesting hod carried on the shoulders, which was used in the olden days and even these days in some wine regions to carry out the crop from the vineyard to the carriages, which took down to the winery.

And this harvesting hod made of wood in those times, was quite heavy anyway, was used to measure the quantity of the Aszú berry added to a fixed amount of fermenting must. And the amount of fermenting must was measured with another traditional tool called gönci barrel. Gönci is a type of 136 litre.

Actually, the recipe in the past was if you added five hods puttonyos of Aszú berries in 136 litre of fermenting must still wine, you leave it to macerate for two three days, you press it ferment it, and then you mature it into your cellars for several years. At the end, you got a five Puttonyos.

And if you added into the same amount of wine, 136 litres. Six hods, six puttonyos of Aszú berries you will have of course a richer wines and the six puttonyos also. Very simple. In the old days, the people, they were thinking in a very simple ways. So, yeah, we are using only five puttonyos, six puttonyos, which are indicating the richness levels of the sweet wine what we produce

Janina Doyle 00:31:13 Perfect. So, we've got five and six. The five is known as the blue label. The six is known as the gold label. So, to give you an idea...

Zoltán Kovács 00:31:25 So, this is the reason of the Blue Label, it has a blue frame, actually.

Janina Doyle 00:31:29 Are these going to change labels? You know, you're designing all the stills as we were talking about on the last episode. They have now got an artist...

Zoltán Kovács 00:31:36 No.

Janina Doyle 00:31:37 No. Okay, the desert wines will stay the same. Fine. So, with the pricing for everyone, just so you know, as we're talking along the late harvest. Again, you can get that in majestic if you get a Mix Six, £11.99. Super, super amazing value. The five Puttonyos, the blue label, you can get it in Majestic also for £22.99.

And again in Majestic... Okay, you can do this tasting for everyone. Christmas is coming up. Okay, the third one, the gold label, the six Puttonyos is £41.99. So, if you want to do this tasting like we've just done, you can and all from the same place if you're in the UK. Okay, I'm very excited to try the two. Whilst I'm sticking my nose in, the five and six, apart from the amount of rich Aszú berries that have gone into the base wine, is there any difference in winemaking techniques?

Zoltán Kovács 00:32:36 The big difference in between the five and the six are in the five puttonyos, we buy Aszú berries from small producers all around the wine region. This is one of the key factors for the five puttonyos. And the five puttonyos is always a blend of the two main grape varieties of the wine region, Furmint and Hárslevelű.

From a vinification point of view, we do slightly the same amount of our maceration in one and a half, two days. But what we do differently for the six puttonyos is that the six puttonyos is based on the Royal Tokaji Vineyards, and it is always a Furmint. So, it's a mono varietal. Because we thought that Furmint, as being the greater grape variety of the wine region, deserves to be expressed in the six puttonyos.

And really, it is giving wine with a lot of structure. A very focused wine. A lot of balance and totally different acidity to the five puttonyos. Even analytically, you will have very close acidity levels. Then in mouth, you will always have an explosion of acidity and freshness from the six puttonyos.

Janina Doyle 00:33:58 They are so, so different. And I'm really genuinely happy to have the six puttonyos because very often, when I'm looking for a very good dessert wine, and I'm having to treat other people to drink, I buy your five puttonyos.

I highly recommend it. It's a great example of well made Aszú sweet wine. But I have only ever had your six puttonyos once years and years ago because of course, it is a step up in the price point. So, it is so gorgeous to now compare the difference.

And so, interesting that the blue label, the five, has Hárslevelű in it, whereas you're saying the six has just the Furmint, which is less aromatic because apart from the fact that texture wise, the six is far more vibrant. It's far more lively. But there's slightly more smokiness going on in there. There's this really beautiful, like, lemon peel. There's dried notes. There's an earthiness. There's a real restraint.

Whereas the five is actually much more like the most gorgeous pineapple juice you could ever drink in your life. If you could ever imagine drinking pineapple juice in heaven with a bit of a honey tone character and this kind of ginger marmalade, which, oh, my God! Both of them don't even matter. You're going to be happy, but it's so shocking how different the two are going from five to six.

Zoltán Kovács 00:35:29 Yeah. Both of them are from the same vintage, actually, 2017. So, even though it shows a lot of differences.

Janina Doyle 00:35:41 Oh, my gosh! Honestly, the candied nature and smokey elegant vibes of the six is divine, but I have to say, Oh, my God! Mm-hmm. Anyone that just likes explosions of fruit, you're also going to be so fine with number five. Oh, gosh!

Zoltán Kovács 00:36:02 Yes, that's true.

Janina Doyle 00:36:03 I am so happy right now. Like, I don't drink enough sweet wine because, I mean, obviously there's sugar in there. You know, I tried to, you know, watch. I'm watching my waist and all that but right now, I have three bottles – I say that as I hold up four fingers. I have three bottles. I'm gonna have to do something with them. I don't know. What do you think I should do with them? Do you think I should drink them all?

Zoltán Kovács 00:36:32 Well, you should drink them with different types of foods and you enjoy at the maximum, actually.

Janina Doyle 00:36:39 Well, okay, talking about food – I mean I was just going to sit in the corner and be like, “Nobody talk to me. I'm really happy.” And work my way through the bottle but okay, fine. Let's be practical here. What foods would you recommend with the late harvest, the five puttonyos, and the six.

Zoltán Kovács 00:36:57 So, in the wine region in general, we are fighting against to be categorised as a dessert wine.

Janina Doyle 00:37:06 Yeah.

Zoltán Kovács 00:37:07 Because I believe that sweet wines have a wider...

Janina Doyle 00:37:13 Spectrum.

Zoltán Kovács 00:37:13 Capacity. Spectrum to match with different foods. And I will try to give some to maybe, I will get some more ideas for customers. For example, the late harvest, very often, we offer it as an aperitif as well. In the beginning, just well chilled, it goes very well. But because of its good acidity, it goes well, for example, with the smoked and dry hams. Very well. Especially, when you have a nice bit of, let's say, melon with it.

So, it's really that type of wine which will go very well with the ham. It goes very well with the spicy, sour and sweet kitchen of Sichuan, Canton – so, Chinese type of foods. But pairs as well, good because of the spiciness, the different Indian curries as well. So, it is really a very versatile wine.

Janina Doyle 00:38:22 Yeah.

Zoltán Kovács 00:38:23 So, it doesn't have too high acidity, too high sugar content. So, it really is just highlighting the food and it's giving a lot of freshness to the mouth. Five puttonyos, I'm trying always to match it with a main.

Janina Doyle 00:38:43 Okay!

Zoltán Kovács 00:38:43 Just have a think about roasted pork knuckle on his skin, where on the top of the skin, you have a bit of sweetness from the wine or from honey. You have a spicy sauce with it and you cut it and then you have a bit of fat and meat and the acidity of the wine with the sweeter taste and the slightly fattiness of the meat will always go very, very well.

Janina Doyle 00:39:15 And you're forgetting. With the pork, you very often certainly hear, we do apple compot. We do a sweet apple-ly sauce to go with the pork. Okay, perfect.

Zoltán Kovács 00:39:27 I had the gorgeous experience this year. Actually, I was in California. And in a Japanese restaurant, We tried with our five puttonyos. It was a nice cube of pork belly roasted skin. It was like cracklings. And then on top of it, you had a sweeter caramel sauce. So, it was unbelievable how the whole dish went with the sweet wine. So, it was a unique experience for me to discover that side of the five puttonyos as well. Of course, then you can have it as a dessert.

Janina Doyle 00:40:11 Yeah, creme brulee is a great one.

Zoltán Kovács 00:40:14 Tarte Tatin.

Janina Doyle 00:40:15 Apple Tarte Tatin! Yeah.

Zoltán Kovács 00:40:18 Yeah, so ice creams or fruit based desserts or all these things, which is true for the six puttonyos as well. Very often with the six puttonyos, we suggest to have some blue cheese. Harder style blue cheeses, like Stilton and blue cheeses made in the northern part of Italy, for example. So, really...

Janina Doyle 00:40:41 Sweet and salty. Nice.

Zoltán Kovács 00:40:42 Yeah, it pairs perfectly. And well, as a dessert at the end, you can have a spoonful of Essencia just on its own.

Janina Doyle 00:40:52 Gosh, yes. Yeah. Well, there you go. Everyone, Christmas is coming up. Maybe it's time to get the bottle. Yeah, and you definitely will want to share it because no one can drink a

whole bottle to themselves. Now, actually a question. We're talking about sweet wines. How long, when somebody opens up the bottle, do you think these wines can last? How quickly do they have to drink them?

Zoltán Kovács 00:41:15 So, for the five and the six puttonyos, we very often doing these tests. And I could recommend that 7 days, 10 days without any problems, you can keep it, open the bottle, in your fridge, and you will have more or less the same taste.

Janina Doyle 00:41:37 Perfect. Because that means we can open it up on a Friday, have a little bit on the Saturday, and even when we get to Friday again the next week and we're feeling really crappy, and we need to start the weekend with something fab, boom, we do it again. Okay, that's good to know.

And also, you've already mentioned the late harvest, great even as an imperative and, like, chill it down really well if that's how you wanted it in that moment. Do you have ideal temperatures? Like, I took these wines out of the fridge – well, actually by the time we've tasted them, these have been out of the fridge for about an hour. And I actually really liked them like this, they're still really fresh, but they probably, right now, are around I don't know 12 degrees, 13 degrees.

Zoltán Kovács 00:42:26 The Aszú wine, the five and the six puttonyos, you could have them a bit cooler as well. But as they get warmer, they open and they give you more and more from their richness. So, if you would like to have the perfect temperature, I will suggest something in between 11 and 13 degrees. So, it's really the temperature when they open and you will enjoy it.

Janina Doyle 00:42:58 That's why I'm so happy right now. Okay, now the final question on enjoying these wines to the maximum. What it's in your opinion, the best wine glass that they could be served in? Should we be putting them in just a really nice white wine glass with a largest bowl or do you want something quite small to try and confine the flavours?

Zoltán Kovács 00:43:20 Okay. So, for the dry wines, the wine region made a so-called 'Furmint Glass,' with the Riedel wine company.

Janina Doyle 00:43:30 Okay.

Zoltán Kovács 00:43:31 Which has a big bowl. So, this is for Furmint. Furmint not being very aromatic on the nose. So, we created a big bowl, which has a bit of reduction on the top.

Janina Doyle 00:43:42 It tapers in. I guess it tapers in a little bit.

Zoltán Kovács 00:43:47 Okay, so these kinds of glasses. For the sweet wine, I like to use this quite classic shape. It's not a big one, a big bowl, but it's concentrated as well, the flavours towards the top of the glass. It could go very well from tulip shaped glasses as well. It gives a very nice enjoyment when you really have the sweet wines.

Janina Doyle 00:44:14 Amazing. Well, I mean, I'd love to stay in chat, but I've got three bottles of dessert wine now. Oh, sorry, dessert wine! I'm not gonna say dessert wine. I've ruined the whole thing. I've got three bottles of wine that is sweet, that I am now going to drink with savoury dishes, as an experiment! Oh, honestly!

Zoltán, thank you so much. Because this is a region that I think is fascinating, it doesn't get as much attention as it deserves. There's all the spectrum. And of course, as we both know, Christmas is around

the corner, which is the perfect excuse to really get into the sweet wines because we need to be indulgent, right?

Zoltán Kovács 00:44:54 Indeed, yes. So, thank you for the invitation.

Janina Doyle 00:44:57 Oh, it's my pleasure! Thank you and we'll catch each other in real life soon.

Zoltán Kovács 00:45:01 I really enjoyed it.

Janina Doyle 00:45:01 Thank you! We'll speak soon and I'll let you know all my perfect food pairings!

Zoltán Kovács 00:45:07 Thank you very much!

Janina Doyle 00:45:08 Speaks soon.

Zoltán Kovács 00:45:08 See you soon. Bye!

Janina Doyle 00:45:09 Bye!

Janina Doyle 00:45:14 So, as I sign off for this year, I want to take a moment to genuinely express my heartfelt gratitude to each and every one of you who tunes in week after week, sending emails and thoughts. You guys are the star on top of my tree, and I'm truly thankful for your constant support.

This year has literally been a dream not only for the fact that I've been able to build this team behind the podcast that has been made possible by the incredible support of my sponsor, [Wickhams Wine Merchants](#). So, do go and show them some love and get yourself some incredible wines for Christmas from them, you will not be disappointed.

And if you get in touch with me, I will be really happy to genuinely give you some of my personal recommendations and favourites from their site. Do not forget you can use the code 'EATSLEEP10' for 10% off of your first order.

And so, the last wine quote of 2023 is from Roy L. Smith, an American minister and writer and he so beautifully sums up this episode with:

"He who has no Christmas in his heart will never find it under a tree. Feast on the joy, savour the love, and let the warmth of the season be as comforting as a well-aged wine shared with dear friends and family.

So, as I bid farewell to this year, I encourage you to reflect on your triumphs and the hurdles you have overcome. May you find renewed energy and excitement for the adventures that await in the coming year. Wishing you all a joyful holiday season and a sparkling new year. I will be back in four weeks time. So, until then, my wine friends, cheers to you!