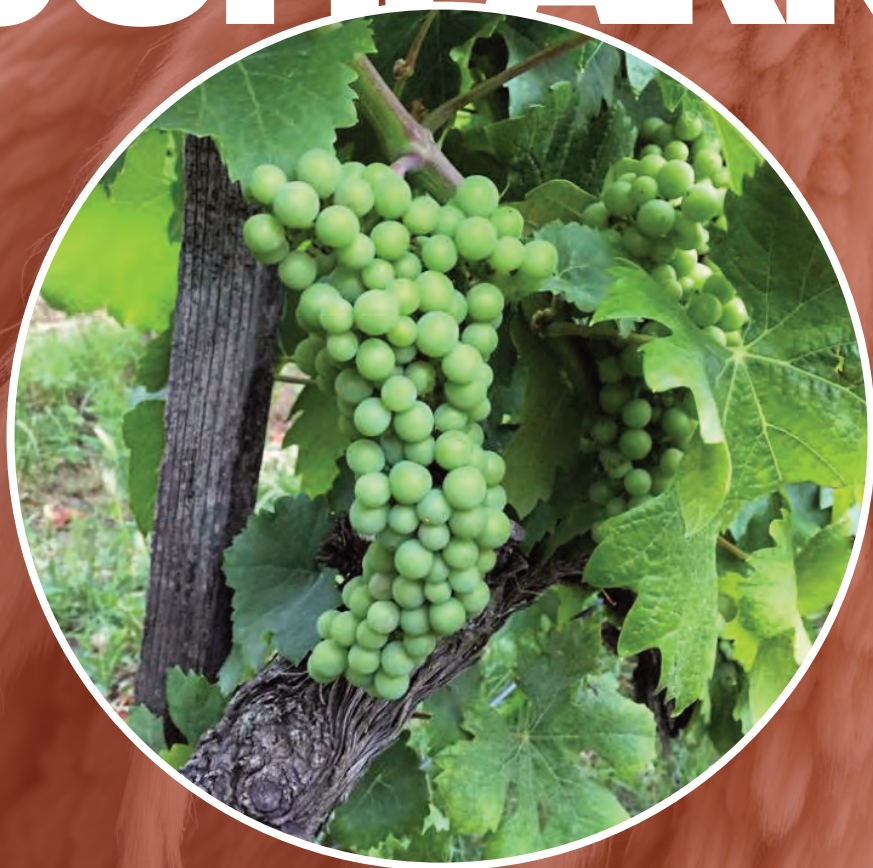


# JUHFEARK



## Somló's Pure Terroir Wine

By Elizabeth Smith

Juhfark (“Sheep’s Tail” in English)\* — named as such probably due its long clusters — is one of Hungary’s ancient indigenous white varieties that almost became extinct until it was brought back to life in the early 1990s, according to *Wines of Hungary*. It remains a smaller-production variety with fewer than 200 hectares planted across Lake Balaton appellations, Etyek-Buda, and Pécs. Over half of those plantings are in Somló-hegy, Hungary’s smallest appellation — a hill that used to be an underwater volcano — where winegrowing and winemaking date back to the 11th century. Its basalt-laden, volcanic soils provide the ideal home for this terroir-driven variety.

Three key producers of Juhfark in Somló include **GÁBOR AND ZSÓFIA (ZSÓFI) RIESZ** of Fekete Pince Somló, **TAMÁS (TOMI) KIS** of Somló Vándor, and **ZOLTÁN (ZOLI) BALOGH** of Somló Apátság Pince, who share their perspectives about growing and making Juhfark in Somló, explaining the variety to those who have never tried it, and offering food and other pairing suggestions in this five-question interview.

### 1. Is Juhfark difficult to grow and make?

**GÁBOR AND ZSÓFI** | They say it is difficult, or at least it was difficult, but since our founder Béla Fekete did what he was doing (low yield and clean, airy areas around the fruit), we have not encountered huge challenges, but it does not mean there are none. Juhfark has thin skin and is not pliable, so it has trouble handling big changes in water supply. Autumn is normally pretty rainy, which used to result in the sudden explosion of the berries. To avoid this happening, winemakers used to harvest them early. But since Juhfark naturally has high acidity, this resulted in a wine that was almost undrinkable. Thanks to the previous generations, we have more experience managing the vineyard. Now we can let the grapes hang longer to mitigate the acidity levels.

**TAMÁS** | It is not that difficult. However, if we compare it to other varieties, like Olaszrizling, we might say it is difficult. Juhfark is a very acidic, thin-skinned variety. You have to harvest it at the right time to capture ripe flavors and lower acidity. But it is difficult to wait because the thin skin is very sensitive to high humidity and rain.

**ZOLI** | No, it is not particularly difficult to grow Juhfark and make wine from it. It is a very strong and healthy variety. Having said that, it has one characteristic that divides producers. Bunches are very dense and tight, and this makes it prone to fungal infections. Naturally it means that we must be very vigilant and thorough with plant protection. But if we manage to do that right, then Juhfark is a very reliable workhorse. This characteristic also makes it prone to botrytis, which I personally like (maximum of 5-10%), while others do not.

### 2. How do you make Juhfark — what is your winemaking style in the cellar?

**GÁBOR AND ZSÓFI** | We allow it to collect enough sugar to support long aging, leave it for a year in used oak barrels for a little oxidation, then let it rest for another two to four years in tanks to age it perfectly.

**TAMÁS** | We use an open-basket press, some juice sedimentation, and we do spontaneous fermentation in 500-liter Hungarian and French oak — 10 months on the lees, unfinned, and unfiltered.

**ZOLI** | Similar to our other varieties, one day of maceration, natural fermentation in large (1000-liter and/or 2000-liter) oak barrels and one year of aging in the same barrels.

### 3. How would you describe Juhfark to someone who has never tried it?

**GÁBOR AND ZSÓFI** | Juhfark greatly shows the terroir and the winemaking style. One can make a nice, fresh, dry white with a great volcanic touch, a late harvest sweet white, or — as we make it — a dry, aged white. For us, Juhfark is a

serious wine. It has a richness and complexity that is even appealing to those who would normally enjoy red wines.

**TAMÁS** | Juhfark is a pure terroir wine that gives us the “salt of Somló” like no other variety. Flavors tend to be more on the green and herbal side rather than floral or citrus.

**ZOLI** | Juhfark is a neutral variety. So, anybody who uses fancy words to describe it — or names flowers or exotic fruits — is just making that up. Juhfark is best for expressing the terroir. It is a white wine with pronounced acidity, concentration, full flavor, and a distinct profile that is different from light, trendy, mainstream whites. A good Juhfark is a wine that you remember not only the next day and week later, but also months or even years later.

### 4. What foods do you think go well with Juhfark?

**GÁBOR AND ZSÓFI** | Great question. Our 2019 vintage, which is fruitier, is great with fish, but our 2020 is a perfect choice for poultry such as turkey with lots of spices. Our Juhfark is also on the menu at a Michelin-starred restaurant in Budapest, where they offer it as a pairing with fish soup because of its richness and salinity, the latter which comes from the volcanic basalt soil.

**TAMÁS** | I recommend smoky and fatty foods, cheese, creamy sauces, and fish dishes, including Hungarian paprika style.

**ZOLI** | Food, I do not know. Toy Dolls, King Crimson, Wagner, Tolstoy, and a rainy trail marathon go well with Juhfark. Only brave people drink Juhfark on a first date, but I have a hard time finding better wine to celebrate 50 years of marriage.

### 5. What do you want the world to know about Juhfark — and Somló, its home?

**GÁBOR AND ZSÓFI** | Juhfark has had rough days in the past. It used to produce wines that were sold in pharmacies as medicine. During the years of Communism, it was not possible to produce bulk quantities of Juhfark. It was even banned. It almost became extinct — at one point, only seven hectares remained. Today we ask everyone to come and sit on our terrace, then they will understand. I am sure that everybody has their own magic from their cellar, and this is ours.

**TAMÁS** | The goal is to make it more well known and sought after. It is a great terroir variety. It has great aging potential and very dramatic flavors, which allow it to be paired with the most sophisticated foods.

**ZOLI** | Somló Juhfark, if done well, can and will turn your wine world upside down. If you are looking for a wine that is pleasantly different, something that is not boring and mainstream, but is still fun and full of joy, then go with Juhfark.



### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Elizabeth Smith is a former French and Spanish professor and wine club manager turned award-winning writer, marketer, and brand manager. Her writing awards include the 2017 Born Digital Wine Award for Best Tourism Content with a Focus on Wine, She was a Koch Winery category winner in the 2022 Hungarian Web Wine Writing Competition and a finalist in the 2023 and 2024 Wine Travel Awards “The Brightest Journey” category.