2023 Barta Furmint Öreg Király Dűlő

Tokaj, Hungary



Founded in 2013, we first visited Barta back in 2015 because we had learned that they had brought the famed Öreg Király Dűlő (Old King Vineyard) back to life and restored a 16th century cellar in the town of Mád. At first I was a little leery because the Barta family has no roots in Tokaj, viticulture, or winemaking, but were wealthy outsiders making a big investment. Upon meeting Károly Barta, hearing about his long-term vision, discovering the people he had brought on board to carry this all out, it was clear that the investment was not some sort of ego trip, but an all encompassing investment in and for Tokaj. Driving towards the village of Mád, it's impossible to miss the Öreg Király Dűlő. It's the highest altitude, steepest hillside, and most distinctly terraced vineyard in Tokaj. First mentioned in 1285, a 1st class site from the 1737 Classification, it was tragically fallow from the 1960s until 2004. There's also written evidence from 1664 that the iconic Rákóczi family, then the rulers of Transylvania, farmed this vineyard. Needless to say, this vineyard has pedigree, was never farmed industrially, and has been resurrected with organic farming and painstaking mending of the terraces. Lastly, Frank Dietrich (founder of Blue Danube Wine Company) and I were also inducted into the Confrérie de Tokaj at the Barta Estate in Mád. The honor of being included in such company and the formal ceremony that followed are among my favorite memories from Tokaj.

VINEYARDS

Carved into volcanic red clay and rhyolite-tuff, work began on resurrecting the terraces and replanting of Öreg Király Dűlő in 2003. Three years later, 10 hectares of stake trained vines and the terrace system were completely restored. While most of the site is dedicated to Furmint, there is also Hárslevelű, Sárga Muskotály, and Kövérszőlő. Károly Barta doesn't come from a winemaking or viticulture family but he has surrounded himself with those that do and given them incredible agency and resources. The vineyard manager is János Hajdú, who is also the winemaker at Bodrog Borműhely, another one of our Tokaji estates. Farming is organic and due to the forest behind it, wild boars and starlings are the major threats to be managed.

WINE MAKING

The winemaking follows suite from the viticulture. Since they were given a vineyard that had never seen industrial chemicals ever, so shall it be in the cellar. In the cellar he hired Attila Homonna whose wines we don't represent, but who we greatly respect and admire. Attila finished his run after the 2015 vintage (consulted a little bit on the 2016s) and handed over the reigns to Vivien Újvári. Vivien came from the Grof Degenfeld Winery in Tokaj and like Attila, continues to focus on minimal intervention and organic farming. All fermentations are spontaneous and nothing else is added apart from SO2.

NOTES & PAIRINGS

Aromatically, this vintage screams Tokaj right out of the gate despite being super young. Thankfully, that kind of intensity is not followed by any heat, bitterness, or any perceivable residual sugar (although it absolutely needs and has some for balance) on the palate. 30% was fermented in 500L Hungarian oak and 70% in stainless steel. Then 60% was aged on the lees in neutral Hungarian oak for 5 months and only racked by gravity. Ready to drink now, we can't wait to see where this goes in 3-5 more years in bottle. The honey, smoke and salt derived from the terraced Öreg Király Dűlő are just their infancy. 2023 was not nearly as hot as 2024, but the Spring was a little stressful with frost and a delayed bud break. A middle of the road botrytis vintage for sweet wines, but a great quality over quantity high acid/high extract vintage for dry wines. For those looking for a seamless integration of botrytis and furmint without being oxidative, this is the ticket.



ANALYTICS & PRONUNCIATION

APPELLATION: Tokaj
GRAPE COMPOSITION: 100% Furmint
CLIMATE: Cool Continental
SOILS: Volcanic rhyolite tufa with some zeolite and red clay.
EXPOSURE: South-Southwest
MACERATION & AGING: Fermented in 500L Hungarian oak barrels then aged on the lees for 4 months.
ALCOHOL: 12.8%
RESIDUAL SUGAR: 5.9 g/l
ACIDITY: 5.9 g/l

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