

Karner Gábor & Fanni Szőlőkert #3

Matrá, Hungary

The Mátra appellation is something we often zoomed past without much thought on our way to Eger and Tokaj in the Northeastern part of Hungary. Perhaps it was because the freeway largely bypasses the towns or because many of the supermarket wines seemed to come from these hills. Below the country's highest mountain of Kékestető, this is the second largest wine region with 7574 hectares. In recent times, it has largely been dominated by just a few larger industrial players leftover from the Communist COOP years. Think wide row spacing for Soviet tractors, high yielding low quality grapes and industrial farming. For a small group of winemakers, the pendulum is swinging the other way. At the same time, this region has plenty of history that predates Communism. Vineyards began with the Celts as early as 1042, and the village of Gyöngyös has written records from 1334 licensing a freedom to produce commercially. By the 15th Century these wines were trading well and being heavily taxed during the Turkish occupation. During Rákóczi's War of Independence against the Habsburgs in the early 1700s (spoiler alert, they lost) the wineries of Mátra were punished with Serfdom. Then came Phylloxera, the World Wars, and the aforementioned Communist COOP era. That brings us to today. What made this area attractive for industrial farming also makes it attractive for organic and regenerative farming. There is low disease pressure, volcanic soils, and protection from extreme weather. Founded in 2000, Gábor Karner now has 5.5 hectares and along with his daughter Fanni, run the estate in the nearby village of Szücsi. Gábor is also a founding member of Tőkések Mátra (Handcraft Winemaking Circle of Mátra) along with Bálint Losonci and Tamás Szecskó who live a few miles down the road in Gyöngyöspata. They devoted themselves to organic farming, low yields, spontaneous fermentations and no additions other than SO₂. As of the 2017 vintage, Gábor and Fanni do not add any additives of any kind. Along with the rhythm of growing and making wine, he's also a long time drummer most notably of the band rock Æbsence. Drumming makes him happy. When you taste with him he's constantly tapping the table and moving his feet. It's also clear that having his daughter choose to work with him brings him even more happiness.



VINEYARDS

Karner's vineyards are located near the village of aforementioned village of Szücsi. There are over 100 cellars built into the hillside in the Szücsi "Pincafalu" (cellar village), but maybe a dozen or so are still in use and mostly as hobby winemaking. The soils are a mixture of andesite, rhyolite tuff, hummus rich black loam and clay. Mount Kékestető blocks the cold winds from the north, there's direct exposure to the south, and there's great airflow year round. There are no absorbable chemicals, rarely tills, and sprays organic treatments 1-2 times per year at most. Sometimes there are zero sprays for the growing season. Most rainfall for the year comes in early summer and then it's typically dry until harvest. He crops things back to around .5 kilo per vine.

NOTES & PAIRINGS

This wine has been denied export paperwork longer than any other wine in the portfolio. When we tried to get Szőlőkert #1, Fanni wasn't married nor did she have a daughter. With #3 finally in the warehouse, she has both. Perhaps it's fitting since her daughter's middle name is Borostyán, which translates to "amber." And that's exactly what this is, the amber side of Olaszrizling. Grown in the volcanic andesite and limestone rich Vitézföld vineyard, it's also planted to a special clone of Olaszrizling that Gábor sourced from Pál Kozma at the research institute in Pécs. Olaszrizling is one of the most (over) planted varieties in Hungary, but this clone has small-berried clusters and something special going on. It's also non vintage. The 2018 fruit was macerated for two months and aged in barrel. It was blended with purely direct pressed and fermented in tank 2019. Punched down by hand, zero pumps, and moved and bottled with zero additions only with gravity. It's got plenty of structure, 14+ alcohol and even a few grams of RS, but the balance and freshness is extraordinary.



ANALYTICS & PRONUNCIATION

APPELLATION: Matrá

GRAPE COMPOSITION: 100% Olaszrizling

CLIMATE: Continental (hot summers & cold winters)

SOILS: volcanic andesite and limestone

MACERATION & AGING: 2018 fruit macerated for two months and aged in barrel blended with direct pressed 2019 fruit fermented in tank.

ALCOHOL: 13.1%

RESIDUAL SUGAR: 1.2 g/l

ACIDITY: 6.8 g/l

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