

Volos Natura Apricot Rakija

Pomoravlje, Serbia

Not having a fruit distillate in the portfolio has been a clear dereliction of duty. They are the most ubiquitous, culturally significant, identifying, historical and meaningful drinks in Central Europe and particularly so in the Balkans. Seeking atonement, we've finally found something special in Serbia and in a rare moment of good timing, as of December 2022, Serbian Šljivovica (plum Rakija) has also been added to UNESCO's list of intangible cultural heritage. Šljivovica (SHLI'-vuh-vitsah) is Serbia's national drink, the first national brand, and they have the highest rate of consumption in the world. Despite occupations, wars, genocide, Socialism, and avoiding the allure of cheap mass-produced industrial brands, the homemade tradition has survived it all. Typically, you have it with your morning coffee, when you invite someone into your home and whenever there's cause for celebration or tragedy. Most agree that Turks likely brought Arab alembic distillation to the region in the 14th Century. Rakija itself derives from the Arabic word "al-rak," which means, "distilled." Quality Rakija is simply two ingredients: fruit and water and served crystal clear. Quality Rakija is almost always Domace, aka homemade. The general sentiment is that the best stuff never comes with a label. The chasm between what's at the gas station or supermarket and what's made on the family boiler is staggering. Serbian novelist and painter Momčilo "Momo" Kapor famously noted that, "In Rakija is the essence of the Serbian being - first joy, then celebration of taste, then anger, compassion, the feeling that the world is good and that all those who drink it are friends." To be fair, he's also quoted as saying that Rakija is "A drink that simultaneously evokes endless fury, sorrow and belligerence." We like to think that he's first addressing the good stuff and then the mass-produced additive heavy stuff thereafter. There's also been a rejuvenation of Rakija in the Balkans in the past few years. Rakija bars have popped up in Belgrade, it's showing up on fine dining tasting menus, long barrel *élevage* versions are being sought after, and much like wine, there's an emphasis on organic agriculture and low intervention as well. The aforementioned staggering delineation between industrial and homemade is becoming blurred with producers like Volos Natura. Dejan Stojanović founded Volos Natura inspired by spending time around the boiler with his family as they distilled plums from their orchard. Taking stock of the year, the harvest, and then watching the magic of distillation with family was something that he could never let go of. He's also adamant about organic farming, building up soil immunity, harvesting by hand, zero processing machinery, spontaneous fermentations, and zero additions other than water. Similar to wine, the multiple pick dates are equally crucial to a healthy fermentation and distillation. The average production is around 400-600 liters per fruit per year.



VINEYARDS

Located in the Pomoravlje region about 1.5 hours south of Belgrade, the orchards overlook the Jezava tributary that flows into the Great Morava River that ultimately connects to the Danube. As part of the 8 districts of Šumadija, this continental area is ground zero for plums and the best fruit in Serbia. It was also the home to rebels and guerilla fighters in the 18th century battling the Ottoman Turks. Not surprisingly, it's the same area that witnessed the first Serbian uprising against said Ottomans in 1804 under the leadership of Šumadijan-born Karadorđe, the national hero of Serbia. In other words, even where these fruits and grapes are grown is tightly linked to Serbian identity.

NOTES & PAIRINGS

This is made from the local Šumadinka variety that's extremely frost and drought resistant and with strong immunity to diseases and pests. While not as ancient as the Plum, apricots date back to the 3rd millennia BC via the Silk Road. Romans continued to spread the fruit all over the region around 70 BC. After just smelling this for the first time, it had to be a part of the lineup. There's such a fine line between the extract and or essence of Apricot and the real deal. I grew up with two apricot trees in my backyard, and my olfactory memory has never been so aggressively triggered. It's ripe without being candied or synthetically perfumed and doesn't have that aromatic yeast quality we often find hiding in wines. Hand picked and spontaneously fermented, it's then distilled once, distilled again at ~60% alcohol, and the second distillation is blended with demineralized water resulting in ~40% alcohol. There are no other additives.



ANALYTICS & PRONUNCIATION

APPELLATION: Pomoravlje

GRAPE COMPOSITION: Šumadinka Apricot

CLIMATE: Continental with warm summers

ALCOHOL: 40%

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