

# 2021 Abeles Crazy Red

## Balatonmelléki & Somló, Hungary

**B**orn and raised along Lake Balaton, Imre Halász has had quite a number of past lives. He was once the head of a Soviet state run wine COOP where he “learned to make the best of the worst kind of wines.” He then moved onto being the head of the Hungarian Mint but it was not a job of purpose and passion. He felt like it was slowly killing him. As it turns out, it was literally killing him. He was soon after diagnosed with lung cancer at 43. He left everything, quit his job, gave away what money he had left to family and just kept enough to buy a small house, a few small plots of vineyards, and a cellar on Somló that had been abandoned since 1941. It was last owned by a Jewish man named Samuel Abeles [Ah-bell-ish] who was taken with his family to the concentration camps and murdered. Imre decided to honor this legacy and keep the name of Abeles alive. Perhaps it’s the quality of his new life but his cancer is now in remission and his energy is near child-like. Such excitement and enthusiasm coupled with a second chance outlook perhaps. Whatever it is, it’s infectious and permeates everything he does. Case in point, the Székelykáposzta (Sauerkraut stew) that Imre cooked us for lunch back in October. Topped with freshly ground paprika and thick and tart sour cream, this stew was a giant hug. It also mirrored his wines: good ingredients, simple and thoughtful execution, and delicious.



### VINEYARDS

Imre has 4 different vineyard locations: Aszófő and Szent György Hegy along the northern shore of Lake Balaton, Sümeg (a small but 100% certified organic appellation in between Somló and Balaton) and the vineyards around his home and cellar on Somló. Well versed on what went on during the Soviet era of quantity over quality, he prunes using the Simonit & Sirch Method. In short, this respects the vascular flow of sap, reduces cutting and crown damage, and protects against the desiccation of the wood. He also does his green work according to research from Keszthely Agricultural University which influences the different kinds of acids in ripe grapes. When asked about being organically certified, he thinks that being visited 3 times a year doesn’t make you organic. His main spraying is called BIOTOMAL, which he argues is more strict than organic and uses more purely natural agents. They only cultivate the vines outside of the growing season – it looks like a jungle. As climate becomes more erratic, he believes this is the best path to immunity and tolerance.

### WINE MAKING

In the cellar, the most important elements are co-fermentation, picking late, and micro-oxygenation. Imre believes that the wines are living substances from vine to bottle. They need to breathe, he doesn’t filter, never fines, and aging vessels must be porous. Nothing is hermetically sealed. The only addition is SO<sub>2</sub> when needed if at all.

### NOTES & PAIRINGS

Co-fermenting red and white grapes is currently illegal under Hungarian Wine Law. While historically commonplace and celebrated today in places like Vienna and Styria, Imre is bringing this back even though it must be exported. The red grapes are from the clay and limestone rich soils of Aszófő near Tihany on the northern shore of Lake Balaton. The Cabernet and Cab Franc ripen early here, but they wait until the sugar gets pretty high (230-250 g/rs). Due to this high sugar, they add in high acid and structured Furmint from Somló into the same vat. The basalt rich mineral water flows into his plots near the bottom of the volcano and saturates the clay, limestone and sand. Everything is left on the skins for 2 weeks, stirring by hand every morning, and then pressed with 100+ year old wooden basket press. Everything is moved by hand, no pumps, no SO<sub>2</sub> added, and no CO<sub>2</sub> or dry ice. Aged for a year in Speidel tanks (high micro-oxygenation) then bottled by gravity. This was not picked early for an easy glou-glou co-ferm, but is instead a lively and pungent wine that eventually will be re-recognized as something truly special by Hungarian Wine Law.

### ANALYTICS & PRONUNCIATION

APPELLATION: Balatonmelléki & Somló

GRAPE COMPOSITION: Cabernet Franc, Cabernet Sauvignon, Furmint

CLIMATE: Temperate & Cool continental

SOILS: Volcanic rocks, basalt

MACERATION & AGING: On the skins for 2 weeks, and then pressed with 100+ year old wooden basket press. Aged for a year in Speidel tanks.

ALCOHOL: 12.7%

RESIDUAL SUGAR: 1.1 g/l

ACIDITY: 6.9 g/l



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