

Bencze 'Autochthon' 2019

Producer: István Bencze

Provenance: Lake Balaton, Western Hungary

Farming: Biodynamic (Demeter certified)

Grape(s): Furmint (35%), Hárlevelű (49%) and Kéknyelű (16%) harvested at three different times to capture the optimum ripeness

Vineyard: Templomdombi vineyard - 200+ m altitude, very rocky soils with lots of basalt and sandstone with lower moisture.

Fermentation/ Aging: whole cluster pressed into amphorae of varying sizes. Half the Hárlevelű was destemmed and fermented on the skins for 8 days.

Aged without battonage or racking. Lots were blended in June for July bottling.

Fining/ Filtration: none

Sulfite: none added



The Producer:

Educated in computer sciences and mathematics, IT entrepreneur István Bencze is a surprising choice for Hungary's biodynamic, zero zero (zero added sulfite) rockstar but it is a strange world after all. During a formative period in Florence, he worked remotely for the Budapest-based IT company he founded all while exploring the riches of Italian gastronomy. The pleasure of discovering new foods and wine rekindled a passion for plants left dormant since a childhood helping his grandmother tend her vegetable garden and the 5 or 6 grape vines that grew there. He decided he wanted to reimagine Hungarian wine and though he had originally thought to settle in Tokaj or Somlo, the stillness of Lake Balaton captured his imagination. He purchased and renovated an early 19th century estate with historic vineyards that had been left in a state of disrepair. His goal was to grow holistically from the beginning but his wines, though spontaneously fermented, were sulfured and filtered until he met fellow Hungarian Zsolt Suto of Strekov 1075 located across the border in Slovakia. Zsolt convinced him to step away from sulfite and filtration and by the end of 2017, István knew he couldn't have it any other way.

The Vineyard

The grapes for 'Autochthon' come from the Templomdombi Vineyard, also called "Hétésfél," a 7 hectare vineyard whose name means 'temple hill' for the nearby Lengyel-kápolna chapel where István and Klaudia married. Resting at an elevation of 200+ meters, the vineyard is protected from Spring frosts and the soils are rich in basalt and sandstone with less clay and better drainage. Huge rocks and basalt stones in the

soil call for tractors for cultivation. István favors this vineyard because he believes it creates “more elegant structure in the wine.” Although the vineyard was established when István purchased the farm in 2012 many of the old vines were in terrible shape or had already been removed. 2.5 ha of 45 year old Rhein Riesling had survived but starting in 2015 they began replanting the rest to Furmint, Háslevelű, Rhein Riesling and Kéknyelű. “This is our most talented and interesting plot,” István writes, “we believe that in time this vineyard will make our best wines.” The grapes are the three autochthonous varieties of the Carpathian Basin (hence the name of the wine), Furmint (35%), Háslevelű (49%) and Kéknyelű (16%) hand harvested in three passes to capture the best maturity of each cluster rather than simply targeting entire blocks.

The Cellar

Most of the grapes for ‘Autochthon’ are whole cluster pressed using a pneumatic Scharfenberger press into different kinds of amphorae for fermentation and lees aging without battonage or racking. Half of the Háslevelű is destemmed and macerated for 8 days with as little mechanical extraction as possible resulting in an almost carbonic technique with gentle pumpovers or very light punch downs with hands or feet when deemed necessary. The base wines were blended in June and bottled in July without fining, filtration or added sulfite.

The Bencze cellar has amphorae of many sizes from three different artisans. From Beliveau in southern France near Touloouse, they get two kinds of low-temp fired (more porous), one unglazed and smaller format (160L) and a larger format (330L), lined pot that is more conducive to macerations. From Clayver, they get ceramic vessels made from highly consistent sandstone from Savona, Italy. The quality of the vessels is almost like granite with very low porosity and István has 250L, 350L and 400L vessels to work with. The last producer, TAVA in northern Italy sends them 750L terracotta pots which are the largest size they can use in their cellar. Of the range of amphorae István writes “The shape, size and the material of these three different vats are so different which result in different characteristics and behaviour regarding the fermentation and ageing. So we usually combine these vats when we try to create a cuvée, even in case of a single variety to have more layers, different voices, harmonics in the wine.”

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