

# Sommelier News

## Inside Feature: The Phylloxera of Politics

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Hungary's return from  
devastation worse  
than the Aphid!

by Roger Morris

**REGISTRATION FOR FALL  
COURSES UNDER WAY**  
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## *International Sommelier Guild*

### ISG to Implement World Wide Teacher's Conferences

A superior level of wine education is what sets the ISG's wine courses apart. Always looking to enhance this standing, the ISG unveiled plans late last month to hold a bi annual global teacher's conference, starting in August of 2005. The conference expands on previous department head conferences taking place for the past several years. The venue selected for this inaugural event is none other than Niagara Falls, Canada, one of the natural wonders of the world.

The 6 day seminar will welcome 60 internationally acclaimed educators from four continents. Planned events include visits to some of Ontario's finest wineries, discovery of Niagara's emerging culinary identity and of course the beauty which is the Falls and the Niagara region.

Already in place is the Instructor Recruitment Conference, which this year is being hosted in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina. This conference which helps train new instructors will continue to run opposite the newly established Global conference.

If becoming an instructor interests you, please have a look at the ISG website at [www.internationalsommelier.com](http://www.internationalsommelier.com).

## Rev-eau-lution

*With more restaurants pushing bottled water, is water becoming  
the new wine?*

By Natalie MacLean

Meet Filip Wretman, who will be your Sommelier tonight.

Would you like to look at the list, the 26-year-old Swede inquires, or might he suggest a coy little sipper with some mineral notes, a velvet texture and a long finish? Oh, and while you're deciding, would you also like some wine with your meal?

Wretman's eyes have the blue serenity of mountain lakes as he talks about being the first water Sommelier at the lush Ritz-Carlton Hotel in New York City. "Water is the essence of life," he effervesces. "Bottled water has been neglected too long."

He shakes his head and, with a bemused chuckle, recalls the days when he too drank tap water—which, he shudders, can be recycled as many as seven times before it flushes from your faucet. Drinking it is the kind of mistake we all make when we're young.

Of course, the Ritz-Carlton isn't the only place where water is the new wine. At Alain Ducasse, the French restaurant awarded four stars by the *New York Times*, first they lure

you Périgord Piper-style by wafting the tray of black truffles under your nose. Then they bring around a silver basket with six bottles of the restaurant's best waters in elegant repose.

Across the pond in Paris, many stylish restaurants now offer a *carte des eaux*. The chic department store in Colette, on the fashionable Rue St-Honoré, has a water bar with some 90 selections. *Mon cher*, it's no longer enough to be a wine snob; now you must also be an aqua expert.

Wasn't water once that wet stuff that fell from the sky, rushed down the river and ran from the tap? And wasn't it free, or just pennies a glass? Oh darling, that's so nineties: In cities like New York and Paris, water is not just water any more. With more than 700 brands of bottled H<sub>2</sub>O now produced worldwide, *eau de bouteille* has reached a high-water mark.

The trend is just a fact of life in Europe, where 90 per cent of the French and Italians have been drinking bottled water for years. In North America, only 70 per cent of us drink it (more than 13 billion liters every year); but sales have been growing by about 10 per cent a year for a decade, faster than any other beverage. The industry is now worth nearly \$7 billion in North America alone, which makes it the largest market in the world—but there's still room for enormous growth, given that, since on average, we drink only about five of the recommended eight glasses per day. But we're catching up. In three years, market analysts expect bottled water to overtake coffee to become the second-most-consumed beverage after tap water (filtered and *au naturel*).

There are several reasons why people are hitting the water bottle. The most serious is safety, no longer a trivial issue after September 11 and threats of bio-terrorism. (Though even bottled water isn't immune to contamination: In 1990, traces of benzene were discovered in Perrier, resulting in a worldwide recall that cost the company \$43 million.) Still, bottled water is classified as a food product, and must therefore meet the quality standards of the Canadian Food Inspection Agency; and many bottled water companies also follow voluntary guidelines set by the International Bottled Water Association.

Then there are the health benefits of bottled water, of which people are now more aware. In fact, business people who want to impress clients with their dedication now pull a reverse-Cana miracle at lunch and dinner meetings, substituting water for wine.

Bottled water is also a calorie-free indulgence, whereas a five-ounce glass of wine has 100 calories. And it's perceived as more nutritive: "enhanced waters" now offer such trimmings as calcium (popular with pregnant women), soy, vitamins, vegetable extract (Coca-Cola makes "Water Salad"), ginkgo biloba and echinacea—and even a high-octane blend of potassium, calcium and magnesium called Glaceau Smartwater. (There's even high-oxygen water, but don't hold your breath: so far it has proven beneficial only to fish. We sub-optimized humans must take our oxygen from the air.)

Do any of these waters offer real health benefits? None has yet been scientifically proven; but that doesn't stop people from drinking them as though they are filled at the fountain of youth.

The idea for a water Sommelier first came to Nikheel Advani, the Ritz-Carlton's food and beverage manager, about a year ago, before the hotel opened. While dining with several bankers from Goldman Sachs at a downtown restaurant, Advani noticed that the Wall Street boys all ordered sparkling water. It occurred to him that although the sale of water in the hotel chain was growing by about 5 per cent per year, it might be possible to increase that figure to as much as 20 per cent—especially in Battery Park, near the financial district.

Meanwhile, Filip Wretman knew from the moment he first heard of plans to open the hotel that he wanted to be part of it. The son of one of Stockholm's leading chefs, Wretman had attended Les Roches hotel school in Switzerland, and had worked in resorts in the Swiss Alps, Manila and St. Bart's before becoming the first bar manager at the horrendously hip Hudson Hotel in New York. Wretman started as the bar manager when the Ritz-Carlton opened in January 2002. (The opening was delayed several months due to September 11. Most of the hotel windows open up to sun-flecked views of the New York Harbor, with a burnished Verrazano Bridge and the silhouetted Statue of Liberty. At the back, though, a few windows look down on the gaping wound in the ground where the World Trade Towers used to stand.)

Advani appointed Wretman the first water Sommelier; and in February, the two men assembled and tasted 1,800 still and sparkling waters from around the world. They selected three cultivated still waters—Voss, Fiji, Evian—and three -

distinguished sparkling waters—San Pellegrino, Perrier, Aqua della Madonna. But give them 48 hours notice, says Advani, and they can tap any of 50 waters. (That should please Michael Jackson, who orders 32 cases of Evian at a time: he bathes in it.)

In a hotel where rooms cost as much as \$7,000 per night, it's a rounding error on the bill to pay \$15 for a bottle of water. So you go with the flow and peruse the restaurant's list of still and sparkling waters. Each comes from an exceptionally good month, and Wretman can reel off their mineral, sodium and calcium levels as well as their elusive aromas (which don't include hints of rusting pipes or swimming pools). There are no offerings by the glass unless you want tap water, referred to here as, *ugh*, Château Bloomberg.

Make a good choice, and Wretman will share some water gossip with you. Among the purest waters in the world, for instance, is the Norwegian artesian water Voss. It's taken from a virgin aquifer (translation: a very clean underground well) and bottled before it's sullied by exposure to the air. Voss is the number one non-alcoholic pick of Madonna (she won't stay in hotels that don't stock it), as well as U2's Bono and lesser-known folks who also don't mind getting soaked. Even the bottle, designed by the former creative director at Calvin Klein, quietly suggests how much more evolved you are than the amateurs at the next table swigging from the tap: It's a pastiche of a cologne bottle, time capsule and household cleaner. (Diners often tuck the bottle into a briefcase or newspaper to take it away with them.)

On this late spring evening, Wretman suggests starting with a pre-prandial sparkling water: a slightly-chilled San Pellegrino, with graceful bubbles that aren't too bloating. (And for goodness sake, don't ask for ice cubes in it, or you may as well drink from a dirty glass.) Then perhaps you can progress to a still water that won't cloud your taste buds. Fiji water comes from rain that fell 450 years ago on the pristine South Pacific island. (It promises that with every sip, you'll "sense the soft air and the gentle rain of the islands.") To finish, try Perrier with your cheese or chocolate soufflé: You'll need "aggressive" bubbles to cleanse your palate. Whatever you choose, Wretman suggests that you skip the Evian, which he finds overpowering and metallic and dislikes the way some oenophiles dislike Retsina. (Nonetheless, the hotel offers it: it is, after all, the top-selling still water in the world.)

The Ritz's waters are tame compared to the choices on the market today. Cloud Juice guarantees 800 drops of Tasmanian rainwater per bottle; and Lurisia is melted Italian snow water that seeps up through a volcanic rock grotto that Marie Curie discovered in 1918 when she was searching for uranium. She called it "a miracle of purity." (Today the company president would no doubt call it "a miracle of profitability.") Chatledon, one of the oldest and most exclusive *eaux minérales*, from a village in Auvergne, is coveted because it has no taste. Back in 1650, the court doctor at Versailles presented the water to the Sun King Louis XIV, promising that it would "cure His Majesty sometimes, often alleviate his distress, and comfort him always."

Here in North America, Iceberg Water is reaching new peaks of popularity. It's harvested from "stray bergy bits" that break off icebergs around the coast of Newfoundland. Canada, in fact, is a champion in the bottled water Olympics. At last year's International Water Tasting Awards, Blue Moon Water Systems from Brandon, Manitoba won the gold in the purified drinking water category; in the non-carbonated bottled water category, Canadian Mountain came second and Whistler Water Pure Glacial Spring Water placed fourth; and in the municipal tap water category, the Quebec towns of Barraute and Senneterre placed first and second respectively.

Some people think that these waters, dubbed "white petrol" by their gleeful marketers, actually taste different. Arthur von Wiesenberger, who carries the title Water Master, is

## Upcoming Events

August 5 – 8, 2004  
**Taste of Calgary**  
 Calgary, Alberta, Canada  
<http://www.tasteofcalgary.com>

August 7, 2004  
**Seattle Wine Society 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Northwest Wine & Food Festival**  
 Seattle, WA, USA  
<http://www.enosoc.org>

August 14, 2004  
**23<sup>rd</sup> Annual Macarthur Park Wine Festival**  
 Palo Alto, CA, USA  
 (650) 688-0438

August 22 – 24, 2004  
**Wine New Zealand Auckland, NZ**  
<http://www.nationalhospitality.co.nz>

August 24, 2004  
**"The Sip" – Quail Distributing 6<sup>th</sup> Annual Portfolio Tasting**  
 Scottsdale, Arizona, USA  
<http://www.quaildistributing.com>

August 28 –29, 2004  
**Sunbury Region Wine Tasting**  
 Sunbury, Queensland, Australia  
<http://www.macedonandsp.com>

September 17-26, 2004  
**Niagara Grape and Wine Festival**  
 Niagara, Ontario  
<http://grapeandwine.com/media/index.cfm>

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one of the few water critics in North America and the author of four books, including *Oasis: The Complete Guide to Bottled Water*. He believes that, with practice, most people can develop the palate to differentiate between waters. "Each one is unique," he says. "Badoit has a very gentle level of carbonation—natural and excellent with food. Volvic is light and almost sweet in taste—very refreshing and great to drink, even at room temperature. Trinity is a very interesting water with a silky texture. I feel healthy drinking it."

As a boy, Wiesenberger, whose father was an investment banker, spent time in the larger cities of Italy, France and Switzerland, where bottled water is consumed daily. Even then, he kept a water journal, noting the brands he liked best. "Heck, my Dalmatian could tell the difference between bottled and tap water—as a kid, I'd switch them in different bowls for him," he says. "And Dalmatians aren't that smart—they're the dogs that run toward a fire when everyone else is running the other way."

But is plain old tap water all that bad? Not at all. In fact, New York City's own municipal water is dubbed the champagne of tap water, and is considered among the best in world in terms of both taste and purity. Similarly, in London, England, the British magazine called *Health Which?* found that tap water from the Thames River tasted better and was cleaner than several leading brands of bottled water that were 400 times more expensive.

Nevertheless, soft-drink companies view bottled water as the next battleground for market share—and a way to pump up their dehydrated soda business. This is despite the fact that 25 per cent of bottled water is conditioned urban water: PepsiCo's Aquafina and Coca-Cola's Dasani are both purified tap water rather than spring water.

Most of the best-selling bottled waters are owned by a few companies. Danone International's stable includes Dannon, Evian, Ferrarelle, Volvic, Crystal Springs, Badoit and Naya. The biggest player is the European packaged-food giant Nestlé: it owns about 16 per cent of the market worldwide, and 33 per cent in America, with such brands as Perrier, San Pellegrino, Aqua Panna, Calistoga, Arrowhead, Deer Park, Zephyrhills, Buxton, Poland Spring and Vittel.

As diners thirst for these brands, bottlers and restaurateurs salivate over the profits. A restaurant's typical mark-up on wine is 100-150 per cent, whereas on bottled water it's often 300-500 per cent. But since water is much cheaper than wine, and many of the fancier brands aren't available in stores, most diners don't notice or care. As a result, some restaurants are turning up the pressure to sell bottled water. According to a recent report in the *Wall Street Journal*, some of the more shameless tactics include placing attractive bottles on the table for a visual sell; listing the water brands on the menu without prices; urging diners to buy both a sparkling and a still water at dinner; serving water in crystal goblets as if it were fine wine; refilling glasses after just after a few sips (something most servers wouldn't do with alcohol); and pouring bottled water without even asking the diners if they want it.

The manufacturers also suggest some subtle approaches. Perrier's training material, for example, advises wait-staff that they stand to earn an extra \$100 per month in tips just by switching twenty guests per shift from tap to bottled water. Similarly, San Pellegrino's training video encourages waiters to "own the water glass." Nestlé hopes to own the sippy cup, too: building on its strength in marketing to parents and children, this spring, in the U.K. the company launched a water brand called Billy Buxton—aimed at "young users" (aka nursery-school children). Billy Buxton, "an active little fellow," will compete with Highland Spring's Looney Tunes water.

Not everyone is on board, though. At the New York City restaurant Eleven Madison Park, sommelier Steve Beckta spares his guests the ignominy of saying "tap water" by asking them if they'd prefer mineral or iced water. "Most servers don't go home to their apartment

in Queens and throw back a liter of Badoit, so who are we trying to kid?" he says.

But the bigger complaint against the trend toward bottled water is environmental: Even though the bottles can be recycled, the new fad creates enormous waste. According to the World Wildlife Fund, only a fraction of the 1.5 million tons of plastic water bottles produced are recycled—and we pay more for the bottles and their transportation than for the water itself.

Then there's the political angle: Some wet blankets insist on pointing out the travesty of the Western world paying billions for designer water, while more than a billion people in underdeveloped countries have no access to clean water at all.

But in Canada, land of the clean river and clear conscience, the popularity of bottled water taps into the desire for better health, our wish to appear cultivated, and even a longing for lost purity. And while we may feel like using a *tastevin* to strangle the very concept of a water sommelier, it draws from a wellspring of capitalism whose source is deep in our culture.

Spend a long evening sampling the waters, though, and such thoughts are washed away by a far more pressing fluid-related problem.

*Natalie MacLean was recently named the World's Best Drink Writer for articles in her free wine newsletter at [www.nataliemaclean.com](http://www.nataliemaclean.com).*

## Gewürztraminer – The White Wine Extrovert

By Alex Good

Of all the grapes used to make white wine, Gewürztraminer has the most problematic reputation. Virtually every time a novice is introduced to it, there is always a caveat or warning that comes with it: 'you may not like this'. Most wine drinkers are evenly divided into two camps when asked about Gewürztraminer. Because it is a voluptuous, up-front wine it appeals to many, but it is by no means appreciated by all, and some people even detest it.

Classically speaking, most examples of Gewürztraminer are extremely aromatic, and somewhat corpulent on the palate. Gewürztraminer generally starts out life having an aroma of banana, which then evolves into two basic styles; either full-blown and spicy, or very floral with a heady perfume. Common descriptors for Gewürztraminer include rose water, lychee, cinnamon, gingerbread, smoke, vanilla, grapefruit, peach, and honey. Not only are these aromas and flavors rather obvious, but also they are extremely intense. The shock of a wine with such pungency is sometimes perturbing for those who are uninitiated, especially when you consider the naturally high level of alcohol, which is sometimes upwards of fourteen percent. Shy is not a term used for this wine, even in the most restrained examples.

Most white wines rely on acid for balance, but Gewürztraminer has an intrinsically low level of acidity. Instead, the intensity of flavour, degree of spiciness and a bit of tannic bitterness imparted from its pink skin help to offset the top-heaviness. As a wine, Gewürztraminer can be almost ageless, which may seem impossible for a white wine with such low acidity, but in general we tend to think too simplistically about the ageing capacity of white wine. Most people think that acidity is the only preservative, yet it is the high level of alcohol that generally sustains Gewürztraminer over a decade for the better wines, and great examples can last for 20 or 30 years.

Gewürztraminer is actually an offshoot of a grape called Traminer, which has much less perfume, and frankly, interest. Traminer is most likely the same grape as Savagnin Rosé, which is rather important in the Jura region of France, and Gewürztraminer is thought to have mutated from it.

Most of the cognoscenti consider Alsace to be the home base of Gewürztraminer. It used to be that Gewürztraminer was the first Alsatian wine many people encountered, no doubt a reason for the region's struggle in the international marketplace. Many wine drinkers find it too extroverted, which is probably why the generally inoffensive Pinot Blanc serves as a better vanguard for newcomers to Alsatian wines. Nonetheless, Alsatian Gewürztraminer can be among the greatest white wines of France, and for those who love this grape its appeal is difficult to ignore.

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Traditionally speaking, most Alsatian wines are dry, some more than others are, with Gewürztraminer being the least dry of all. Gewürztraminer is also the biggest of all Alsatian whites. Certainly power takes precedence over intellectual nuance, although many of the better wines have an astonishing amount of complexity and finesse. The finest examples like Trimbach's mythical 'Seigneurs de Ribeaupierre', Weinbach's 'Cuvée Laurence' and Kuentz-Bas 'Eichberg' are timeless, often needing a decade to reveal the true pungency of their spice-shocking quality.

In Germany and Austria, Gewürztraminer plays an important role in the vineyard, where it can produce wines with an exciting blend of race and aroma that develops interestingly in the bottle after a few years.

For Canada it is the provinces of Ontario and B.C which grow Gewürztraminer, ultimately making some world class examples outside of Alsace.

On the West Coast of the United States, Gewürztraminer is grown in respectable quantity in California, especially in the cooler areas of Sonoma's Russian River Valley, and Monterey. Californian Gewürztraminer is generally off dry, with a good bit of residual sweetness that has lead many American consumers to mistakenly assume that all Gewürztraminer is sweet. While they lack the complexity and nuance of Alsatian types, they are extremely powerful, broad, and irresistible. Let's face it, Gewürztraminer is a tart.

It seems likely that serious Gewürztraminer will remain a specialty of Alsace for some years yet, although Niagara is coming on strong as vintners and growers gain experience. The best and worst part of Gewürztraminer is that it is unlike anything else, and admittedly a wine with such a pronounced character can become rather cumbersome. Even so, fans of Gewürztraminer can never forget the pleasure it provides, and like many of us, happily accept a glass whenever the opportunity arises.

*Alexander Good is the Sommelier at Langdon Hall Relais & Chateau in Cambridge, and is the author of a weekly newspaper column called VineLines. You can reach him at [dgood@orc.ca](mailto:dgood@orc.ca).*

## Keen on Keens

By J. Herbert Silverman

When David King arrives on a visit to New York from London one of his first stops may well be Keen's Steak House in Manhattan. Grant is a top executive with Cutty Sark Whisky and Keen has listed his top selling spirit ever since 1935 when the brand was first introduced to the U.S. market." Milton Esterow the highly esteemed editor of ARTnews located just around the corner and a "regular" says humorously that his editors refer to Keens as the posh magazine's "cuisinart" or staff dining room.

Keens has achieved a fame of unusual sort. The turn-of-the-century restaurant housed in three aged brownstones, arguably has the largest collection (more than 150 labels from the Highlands, Lowlands and Isles) of single malts in this country including Cutty's sibling the most impressive Glen Rothes, a Highland malt of note.

Its collection is nothing short of spectacular with such stars as Glenfiddich 30-year-old, Glenmorangie Limited Edition, Glen Farclas cask strength, Balvenie's Founder's Reserve, Auchentoshan Three Wood, Bowmore Darkest and Rosebank Cask Strength 11-year-old.

For experimenting, diners are helpfully offered dinner flights such as Tobermory 10-year-old Island of Mull, Springbank 10-year old Campbeltown, Glenlivet 8-year-old Speyside and a Balvenie Port Wood 21-year-old Highlands for an “economical \$24 But it’s collection of blends such as Cutty is also extensive

Keen’s is possibly one of the last remaining steakhouses of historic note in New York having been founded in 1878. It’s only three blocks from the Empire State building and convenient for well-heeled tourists en route to shopping at Lord & Taylor or a night’s attendance at the theatre.

Not to be overlooked is a distinguished wine list created by the critical palate of John McClement wine and spirits director for All Weather Management Group (that also includes New York’s Temple Bar and Elephant & Castle in Dublin). The list is equally impressive with such choices as Château Cheval Blanc 1982 Saint Emilion, Chianti Clasico Riserva 1987 Castello di Cacchiano, or a Chateau St. Jean 2001 Sonoma.

Of course, it’s the restaurant menu that is the main attraction. The food is also rooted in the 19th century. The house is noted not only for its mutton chop entrée but also its massive sirloin steak accompanied by creamed spinach and baked potatoes. Seafood is not ignored with such pairings as filet mignon with scallops along with Maine lobster as a showpiece and then for closure there’s a distinguished cheese selection and dessert tray.

As Regina Schrambling, a highly regarded food writer for the august New York Times, wrote, “The creamy dressing on the ‘three leaf’ house salad like the polished room itself made me realize why classics become classics.” For trivia collectors, a millionth chop was served in 1936 and went to a long-forgotten but obviously delighted diner named Warren T. Godfroy.

Forgive the cliché but dining at Keen’s, named for its London founder, Albert Keen, is a step back into Americana with an English accent. It’s possible he would not understand that mandatory reservations can now be made on line but that’s a tribute to technological change

Prior to 1885 Keen’s was part of the Lambs Club, the famous theater and literary group founded in London. In that year Keens opened independently in New York’s Herald Square Theater district and became the rendezvous of the “well known.”

A detailed history of the chophouse recalls that actors in full stage makeup hurried through the rear door to ‘fortify’ themselves between acts of the neighboring Garrick Theater in a room full of producers, playwrights, publishers and newspapermen.

The ceiling of Keen’s is decorated in a memorable British fashion with long stemmed pipes. A tradition of checking one’s pipe had its origins in 17th century England where a customer would keep his clay or favorite stemmed pipe at an inn since it was too fragile to be carried away.

The Keen’s pipe club originated at the Men’s Grill of the Lambs Club where a pipe warden was employed to catalogue the collection of pipes delivered to members (who paid \$5 for a life membership) after dinner. The register includes the signatures of Teddy Roosevelt, Albert Einstein, John Barrymore, Babe Ruth, General Douglas MacArthur, Adlai Stevenson and George M. Cohen in no particular order. Contemporary celebrities include such notables as Ted Turner, Glenda Jackson and Isaac Asimov. When a member died, the stem of his pipe was broken and the pipe restored to its customary place among 90,000 other such treasures.

## CAREER OPPORTUNITIES

**Sheraton Cavalier Hotel**  
[www.sheraton-calgary.com](http://www.sheraton-calgary.com)

The **Sheraton Cavalier Hotel** is seeking a recently graduated **Sommelier** to take over the hotel's wine program and enhance Carver's. Carver's is Alberta's finest steakhouse featuring AAA Alberta beef and unparalleled service. Thank you for your interest but only candidates with legal permission to work in Canada will be considered. Please contact Kamal Fakhoury at [kamalf@sheraton-calgary.com](mailto:kamalf@sheraton-calgary.com) or Telephone. 403-250-6322.

Ladies were not allowed in Keens Chophouse until Lillie Langtry, the enchanting British actress, and close friend of King Edward VII, entered the restaurant in 1901. Dressed in a satin gown and a feather boa, Langtry asked to be served a mutton chop. The waiter refused. Lillie sued and won. Keens is said to have taken the defeat gracefully and installed the following sign, "Ladies are in luck and they can dine at Keens."

More like a private club than a traditional restaurant, Keens has four private rooms. The Bullmoose Room, named in honor of President Theodore Roosevelt, has a cozy ambiance and a working fireplace. The Lincoln Room contains the original theater program of "Our American Cousin" which President Lincoln was holding when he was shot by John Wilkes Booth. A large painting by Alexander Pope dominates a third space in The Lambs' Room and finally and somewhat ironically, the Lillie Langtry Room remembers the first lady to be seated at a table. One wall is decorated with a poster for the Broadway show, "Peck's Bad Boy" one of the largest and earliest surviving American color lithographs.

The bar at Keens is also 19th century and certainly in true saloon tradition although its patrons have changed over the years. Today it's three abreast from noon on and crowded to the hilt with young executives from nearby ad agencies, financial establishments and just plain "singles." Martinis are in vogue but so is beer. The tradition lingers albeit somewhat modernized and attire is casual, not tie and jacket.

*Veteran journalist J. Herbert Silverman is currently writing a history of memorable wine and spirits personalities who have left their marque on great labels throughout the centuries.*

## The Phylloxera of Politics

### *Tokaji and Egri Bikaver Rebuild Their Brands*

By Roger Morris

Not all diseases of the vine come from molds and insects. Like the deadly Phylloxera, politics can decimate vineyards and ruin the production of wine as well.

Such was the case in Hungary when it was occupied by the Soviet Union after World War II until freedom came in 1990. Ask Istvan Szepsy, who managed a 900 hectare property, the largest producer of Tokaji Aszu, when Hungary was part of the Soviet empire or Tamas Pok, who studied winegrowing in Budapest, interned at Chappellet in Napa Valley, then returned to his native Eger in the mid-1980s to make wine. Both have experienced the "before" and are now helping lead the "after."

The litany: In World War II, Hungary fought on the German or Axis side until it became apparent they would lose the day – then it tried to switch. For its efforts, it was first ravaged by its former ally, then by the Soviet Union when it occupied the country. One of the first blows to the wine industry came when Russia sent back to Germany many families who had settled in Hungary but still considered themselves "German." This included hundreds of grape farmers and wine makers. Next came the breakup of large estates into small plots averaging only three hectares or about eight acres; hardly ideal for commercial winemaking. Many newly landed small farmers formed cooperatives, which aided the economies of winemaking. However, the quality of wine decreased, as good cuvees were used to bring up the quality of the bad.

Other changes were made in the vineyards. Soviet tractors were too wide for the vine rows, so vines were ripped up and rows widened – another blow to quality and production. Hungary's signature red grape – the hearty but complex Kadarka – was replaced by varieties such as Kékfrankos, not a bad grape when properly controlled in the vineyard, but a prodigious producer when it is not. At 47,000 hectares in 1960, Kadarka was at only about 1,000 hectares when the Soviets left. Still, its successors did their quantity job. At the height of the wine export boom, Hungary was pumping 2.4 million hectoliters into the Soviet Union, mostly 17% alcohol, fortified wine. But disaster struck in the late 1980s as the monolith started to topple. The barter economy between states was abolished for non-existent cash, and Gorbachev launched an anti-drinking campaign. Between the two, exports of bad – and the few good – wines slowed to a trickle. For the winegrowers of a free Hungary, it was a gloomy road to quality and prosperity.

Today, Szepsy, who looks like a self-effacing scholar from a Bergman film, stands at the front of a room, holding a handful of stones, in his beautifully renovated Kiralyudavar winery in the small, tree-lined town of Tarcal. “There were once almost 400 small volcanic hills in the Tokaji-Hegyalja region and a large lake” he explains, passing the stones to visitors sitting at a large table. When the volcanoes erupted, they boiled the stones and transformed them into zeolite, which is the basis of Tokaji quality.” Szepsy is the first producer in post-Communist Tokaji to form an international joint venture, trying to make the best wines and to get the prices they merit.

Szepsy’s winery sits at the foot of a string of verdant, volcanic hills that cradle the small towns and hundreds of small vineyards that make up the Tokaji region. Located in Hungary’s northeast corner, the hills look south over the vast, largely unpopulated Hungarian plain. Two rivers, the Bodrog and the Tisza, converge at the region’s namesake village, Tokaji, and provide the source of the mists that cause the noble fungus, or botrytis, to form on the grapes, sucking water from them and concentrating sugars.

The best sweet wines (and there are some very nice dry white wines made here as well) are called Tokay Aszu. Their sweetness, and rareness, is classified from three to six Puttonyos according to how many of the traditional picking baskets of shriveled grapes are added to the base wine. A higher rank is Essencia. Grape mixtures vary, primarily Furmint, with Harslevelu and Muscat.

Later, in his wine cave, Szepsy is asked to describe the flavors of his 1999 six Puttonyos. “It’s more waxy and cheesy without Muscat, which we only use in the Cuvee Noble [one of the newer designations] but not the Aszu,” he says on the golden liquid. “The flavor is still fresh fruits like apricot, peach, some quince and of raisins. The aromas are like mushroom, light tobacco, a little caramel. Its minerality and acidity will eventually cause it to lose some of the fruity aromas.”

While embracing the basics of tradition, Szepsy is a leader among Tokaji winemakers who are modernizing the wine by making it cleaner, crisper and even more complex. This requires using less Muscat, planting denser and higher vineyards, employing stainless steel and traditional oak, and label designating best vineyards instead of blending. The result is many stunning wines that have gained the attention – and purses – of collectors worldwide. There is also a political angle, which favors Hungary. When it recently joined the European Union, other member states agreed not to call a white grape, which has nothing to do with the historic region, “Tokay.”

## ISG Newsletter Mission Statement

The International Sommelier Guild newsletter currently reaches more than 12 000 readers sharing a similar thirst – for wine! Wine knowledge is also a satisfying element to be shared amongst industry professionals and consumers alike. We hope to please your palate by covering all of the liquid arts, using a diverse range of content spanning an international focus. It is also exciting to note our continued growth as 50 new members subscribe every day!

With such a wide circulation, an excellent opportunity presents itself for journalists, wine lovers and photographers worldwide. We are always looking for new materials, especially in the areas of beer, spirits, unique appellations and grapes, wine and food and technical wine making. Of course this does not preclude submissions of other related food and beverage stories. So please feel free to send to us your works.

**Editorial Team:** Evan Saviolidis & Wendy Boyle

### Evan Saviolidis

Evan has over 20 years of experience in the food and beverage industry. Graduating from the Certificate program in 1997 he now writes and rates wines for *WineTidings*, Canada’s leading publication as well as teaching for the ISG. In 1999 he started *Winesavvy Consultants*, a Niagara based wine consulting/education center. Have a look at his website at [www.winesavvy.ca](http://www.winesavvy.ca).

### Wendy Boyle

Wendy Boyle brings to the International Sommelier Guild a diverse range of hospitality, wine and writing experience spanning over a decade, including graduating from the Certificate Program in 2002. A recent move from Toronto to Kelowna in British Columbia’s Okanagan Valley affords her enjoyable exposure to the heart of the BC wine industry. She is currently focusing on local sales and marketing, as well as event and restaurant reviews.

Press releases and industry announcements may also be submitted for inclusion in the Newsletter. Authors are responsible for accuracy and their opinions may not represent those of the International Sommelier Guild.

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Like Szepsy, Tamas Pok thinks and acts internationally. He is now chief winemaker for Monarchia and has his own label in Eger. Monarchia, a Hungarian-American firm led by cable TV magnate Nimrod Kovacs, makes wine and distributes these and other wines internationally. It has purchased land in the village of Noszvaj in the Eger region for vineyards, winery, and a spa.

Standing at the top of Eger Mountain (Eged-hegy), Pok looks down at the acres of grapes planted on the extremely steep slope and then up and across the rolling Eger hills. The region, southwest of Tokaj along the road to Budapest, sits on the northern fringe of the plain.

“This is the best place in Middle Europe for grape growing because of soil and the micro-climate,” says Pok, a thin, curly-haired man. Behind him, the mountain – or rather large hill – is capped by a copse of trees, a common practice in European hillside vineyards. The slope is full of small stones and an occasional fossil. The top planting, where we stand, is Kékfrankos, along with plots of other varieties, including Syrah and the white Furmint. Pok explains that Bikaver or Bull’s Blood is legally a blend of three or more red grapes, usually native ones like Kékfrankos, Bordeaux varietals and even Pinot Noir.

In downtown Eger, facilities manager Eva Barta glides to the curb on her motor scooter outside the Tibor Gal cellars to host visitors on a tour and tasting. She takes off her helmet, runs her fingers through her short-cropped blonde hair, and explains that across the street is a huge former state-owned winery. Gal himself was employed at Eurovin before going to Italy to work for Antinori. Now, he has his own winery, co-owned by American importer Kobrand.

The well-known caves of Eger, which some firms own and others rent, run for miles under the city. Like the origins of the name Bull’s Blood, the tunnels are the stuff of history and legend. “They are carved out of tufa, and some are 200 years old,” Bartok explains. Gal’s barrels – about 2,200 of them – occupy over a half-mile of winding, dank labyrinth. Among many other wines, Gal makes three Bikavers, including a reserve and a vineyard-designated wine.

But unlike in Tokaji, where the name is everything, there is debate in Eger about whether to use the Bikaver and/or Bull’s Blood names in export markets. Monika Elling, whose family emigrated from Hungary to New Jersey, heads marketing for Monarchia and speaks fluent Hungarian. “I’m afraid that in the United States, the names mean cheap, inferior wine,” she says. “Some winemakers in Eger and Szekszard [an area south along the Danube that also uses the Bikaver name] want to show that they can make the name great again, but I don’t know.” For now, Pok’s own delicious Eger Bikaver is sold by Monarchia in the U.S. under the “Rhapsody in Red” label.

But whatever the marketing strategy, quality has returned. The wine brands of Hungary are back.

*Roger Morris contributes wine and food articles to **Saveur** magazine and other publications and is weekly wine columnist for **The NewsJournal** in Wilmington, DE.*

## Virginia Uncorked as a Wine Center

By David Wilkening

Founding father Thomas Jefferson is sometimes depicted as the father of American wine. He was a wine advisor to several American presidents and selected the first wines to be stocked at the White House.

Now, centuries later, Virginia wines have come of age. Or to put it another way: The state’s wine industry, which has seen more than a 1,000 percent increase in the past two decades, has ripened with growth.

“Virginia wines continue to get some good press, but nationwide, they have yet to receive the recognition they deserve,” said Richard Hewitt, beverage manager/sommelier at Keswick Hall in Charlottesville, VA.

His 48-room luxury resort may not have more wines than anywhere else, but it does have the most Virginia wines served in one place -- 55 of them.

Hewitt points out that Virginia is about to surpass the US's No. four wine making state, New York. "New York has 94 wineries. We now have 88, but several more are coming on line in a few months," he said. As recently as 1979, the state had only just six wineries. Today, there are 1,800 acres of wineries producing 4,600 tons.

Quoting industry followers, *Virginia Business* reported last year: "Virginia is on the verge of a breakthrough, with enough critical mass and talent to establish the Old Dominion as a premier wine country destination."

But while the newspaper reported some are seeing Virginia as the next Napa Valley, that's not the goal. "For one thing, California's sunny climate is unmatched in America for growing grapes, while Virginia's seasonal weather and terrain is more comparable to European vineyards," said *Virginia Business*.

An endorsement of Virginia's growing respect among wine producers came from the fifth edition of the *World Atlas of Wine*, where Hugh Johnson wrote: "The eastern state that, after New York, offers the most excitement today is unquestionably Virginia...with Merlots and Cabernets being particularly successful."

Virginia state enologist Bruce Zoenckien says that while the quality of state wines remains spotty overall, they are already at a plateau where some producers make wines that hold their own against California and foreign competitors. "If you define the big leagues as making wine that's as high in quality as anywhere else, I'd say we're already there....We make some outstanding Cabernet Francs and some good Viogniers."

Perhaps it's no wonder Virginia has come such a long ways. Its governor, Mark R. Warner, owns a small vineyard in King George County. He has evolved into the state's most prominent advocate since Thomas Jefferson. And state support and new laws have helped promote the state from a small-time player into a significant wine participant.

"The quality of the winemaking in Virginia has really gone up exponentially, particularly over the last three to five years," he said. He attributed the success to better winemakers and to the transformation of vineyard owners from hobbyists to serious proprietors.

Governor Warner in June announced the first-ever strategic plan for the state's wine industry, following the formation of the Virginia Wine Study Work Group two years ago. "The goal of this plan is simple: by the year 2015, the Virginia wine industry will double its market share within the commonwealth, and reach measurable sales on a national level," he said.

The plan was patterned, in part, after the Australian wine industry's own "Vision 2015." Among its objectives: improve the quality and uniqueness of state wines; enhance the image of reputation of Virginia grapes; boost wine and vineyard research and production.

Virginia's wine development has been promoted by other governmental moves. A Farm Wineries Act, for example, was enacted to tax wineries as farms rather than businesses.

The state also spends nearly half a million dollars a year on wine industry research, marketing and educational efforts. It also pays the salaries of a state enologist and a viticulturist at Virginia Tech, where would be wine-makers can go for advice.

While wine grapes can grow throughout the state under certain soil and weather conditions, Virginia has specially designated viticultural regions where grapes thrive. They include the North fork of Roanoke, Rocky Knox, Shenandoah, Monticello, the Northern Neck and the Eastern Shore.

Typically, it costs \$10,000 to \$15,000 an acre for wineries in Virginia, according to *Virginia Business*. Oak aging barrels can run \$700 each, and a crusher costs around \$18,000. Most owners, the newspaper said, don't expect to break even until they have been in business for five to seven years.

Those interested in more information can visit [www.virginiawines.org](http://www.virginiawines.org), or call 800-828-4637.