

APRIL 2018 • \$6.95

# THE **tastina** panel

NE

## **TOKAJI ASZÚ**

Hungary's Elixir is  
**SWOON-WORTHY**  
by the Spoon



Daniel Mahdavian serves Aszú and Essencia by the crystal spoon as Director of Food and Beverage at the Trump International Hotel in Washington, D.C.

# *Natural Treasures:*

# Tasting Tokaji Aszú Wines and Essencia



Pictured at the Benjamin Bar and Lounge in the Trump International Hotel in D.C., Daniel Mahdavian and Péter Molnár, Ph.D., General Manager at Patricius Winery and Member of the Board of the National Council of Hungarian Wine Communities, discuss the potential for introducing Hungarian museum wines into high-end wine programs across the country.

Essencia is the richest and rarest of all Tokaji wines. At the Benjamin Bar and Lounge, crystal spoons of the Royal Tokaji 2007 Essencia go for \$140 a serving. "Once the guests taste it, it sells itself," says Director of Food and Beverage Daniel Mahdavian.

**D**aniel Mahdavian first fell in love with Tokaji Essencia in 2000 during his tenure as the Director of Restaurants and Wine at the Ritz-Carlton, Washington, D.C. The price of Sauternes had skyrocketed, and Mahdavian needed an alternative for his wine list. “What attracted me most was the story of Tokaj and the terroir and history of Hungary,” says Mahdavian, who now serves as the Director of Food and Beverage at the Trump International Hotel in D.C. “I remember tasting Tokaji Aszú and Essencia for the first time from a crystal spoon. It was the most delicious and amazing thing!”

When Mahdavian began developing the wine program at the hotel in 2016, he knew the Tokaji Aszú and especially the Essencia would be a perfect match for the venue’s clientele and menu. “We wanted to come up with an original wine program through ideas that were luxurious and different, something truly unique that people had never before seen,” he explains. “The Tokaji Aszú and Essencia offered me the opportunity to provide a taste of nobility—the ‘Wine of Kings and the King of Wines’—for an accessible price. A taste of rare Tokaji from a crystal spoon awakens a sense of luxury unlike anything people have previously experienced, and with 48 wines and 18 Champagnes by the glass, it was only appropriate to offer Royal Tokaji wines from four different vineyards and four different terroirs by the crystal spoon.”

Mahdavian’s guests can currently sample four Aszú wines: the 2009 5 Puttonyos at \$15 a glass; the 2008 6 Puttonyos Betsek Vineyard at \$20 a glass; the 2009 6 Puttonyos Mézes Mály Vineyard at \$29 a glass; and the 2007 Essencia at \$140 a spoon. “When you taste these four Tokaji wines side by side, a light goes on in your head, and you think, ‘Wow! I didn’t know a vineyard, a terroir, or a vintage could change how a wine produced from the same grapes can taste,’” Mahdavian says.

### The Process Behind the Pour

Stemming from a painstaking process dating back to 1641, Tokaji Essencia is traditionally produced from Furmint, Hárslevelű, and Yellow Muscat grapes desiccated by *Botrytis cinerea*, or noble rot. That process can be cumbersome, to say the least: The dried and mold-covered grapes are hand-harvested one berry at a time,

and approximately 20 kilograms of dried berries are required to produce one 375-milliliter bottle.

Once they’re manually selected, the berries are placed into vats without pressing to await fermentation. The pressure from the weight of the mound causes a small amount of free-run nectar to seep out; these drops are collected and set aside to ferment in 50-liter glass vessels, and the resulting must is so sweet that fermentation can take as long as eight years to complete. Alcohol levels linger as low as 1.65 percent and rarely

chalantly the acidity counterbalances the 560 grams of residual sugar and avoids any notion of being cloying.”

### A Bright Future for Aszú

Referring to Hungarian Aszú wines as a “national treasure,” Mahdavian says they also tout a dexterous ability to pair with various, diverse types of cuisine—from Asian to Indian to traditional Hungarian and Mediterranean specialties. “When I first discovered the Tokaji Aszú, I realized it was a perfect complement to almost all breakfast foods, but I could drink it with my goat



**In addition to celebrating the “Year of Aszú,” Daniel Mahdavian, pictured with Wines of Excellence Project Director Enikő Magyar and Vinum Tokaj International President/CEO Attila Balla, looks forward to further incorporating Tokaji wine specialties into his wine program.**

exceed 3 percent, while Essencia’s residual sugar content typically ranges between 450–700 grams per liter (in some vintages, it has even reached an astonishing 900 grams).

Essencia can age for 200 years in exceptional conditions, but the wine can show its full potential even in its early years. Wine critic Neil Martin, who reviews wines for Robert Parker’s newsletter *The Wine Advocate*, awarded Royal Tokaji Essencia’s 2007 vintage a perfect 100-point score. “You cannot help but laugh at the sheer audacity of its syrupy pour . . . Once you have recovered from its texture, the bouquet leaves you giddy with honey, stewed apricots, Japanese plum, and clementine,” he wrote. “Pure and hedonistic, what is magical about this Essencia is how effortlessly, how non-

salad for lunch, I could drink it at night with a foie gras, or I could drink it with dessert as well,” he continues.

In regards to the “Year of Aszú” initiative, Mahdavian thinks it’s exciting to see such abundant proof that “the future is bright for the Hungarian wines.” “I think this is the first time I see such an incredible effort from a country from an agricultural and economical point of view, as well as such a high level of engagement and effort from the wine industry players in this field,” he says.

Royalty are oft described as being born with silver spoons in their mouths—a status few wine enthusiasts can claim no matter how lofty their taste. Yet with a crystal spoon filled with Tokaji Aszú or Essencia, we can all be kings and queens for a day. ■■

# THE tastingpanel MAGAZINE

April 2018 • Vol. 76 No. 3

editor in chief

**Anthony Dias Blue**

[ablue@tastingpanelmag.com](mailto:ablue@tastingpanelmag.com)

publisher / editorial director

**Meridith May**

[mmay@tastingpanelmag.com](mailto:mmay@tastingpanelmag.com)  
818-990-0350

vp / associate publisher

**Rachel Burkons**

[rburkons@tastingpanelmag.com](mailto:rburkons@tastingpanelmag.com)

managing editor

**Jesse Hom-Dawson**

[jesse@tastingpanelmag.com](mailto:jesse@tastingpanelmag.com)

senior design director

Michael Viggiano [design@tastingpanelmag.com](mailto:design@tastingpanelmag.com)

vp, sales and marketing

Bill Brandel [bill@tastingpanelmag.com](mailto:bill@tastingpanelmag.com)

## CONTRIBUTORS

Jeremy Ball, Cal Bingham, Julia Coney, John Curley, Diane Denham, Vicki Denig, Nick Klein, Jennifer Olson, Melissa Marrapese, Timothy Murray, Felicia Perretti, Rick Poon, Greg Powers, Alexander Rubin, Benjamin Rusnak, Hanna-Lee Sedgwick, Rob Stark, Izzy Watson, Todd Westphal, Hardy Wilson

[www.Facebook.com/TastingPanelMagazine](http://www.Facebook.com/TastingPanelMagazine)  
[@TastingPanel](#) on Twitter and Instagram



Published eleven times a year  
ISSN# 2153-0122 USPS 476-430

Chairman/CEO: Anthony Dias Blue  
President/COO: Meridith May

Subscription Rate: \$36 One Year; \$60 Two Years; Single Copy: \$6.95  
For all subscriptions, email: [subscriptions@tastingpanelmag.com](mailto:subscriptions@tastingpanelmag.com)  
Periodicals Postage Paid at Van Nuys and at additional mailing offices

Devoted to the interests and welfare of United States  
restaurant and retail store licensees, wholesalers,  
importers and manufacturers in the beverage industry.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to:  
The Tasting Panel Magazine  
6345 Balboa Blvd; Ste 111, Encino, California 91316,  
818-990-0350

©2018 The Tasting Panel Magazine. All rights reserved.  
Reproduction in whole or part without written permission is prohibited.

senior wine editor

Jessie Birschbach [jabs@sommjournal.com](mailto:jabs@sommjournal.com)

senior editor

Kate Newton [kate@tastingpanelmag.com](mailto:kate@tastingpanelmag.com)

special projects editor

David Gadd [dgadd@tastingpanelmag.com](mailto:dgadd@tastingpanelmag.com)

east coast editor

David Ransom

rocky mountain editor

Ruth Tobias

editor-at-large

Cliff Rames

vp / finance director

Anna Russell [anna@tastingpanelmag.com](mailto:anna@tastingpanelmag.com)

associate editor

Mara Marski [mara@tastingpanelmag.com](mailto:mara@tastingpanelmag.com)

administrative assistant

Sierra Doxey

contributing editors

Mitch Bechard, Ian Buxton, Emily Coleman,  
Richard Carleton Hacker, Matt Jackson, Kelly Magyarics,  
Karen Moneymaker, Cliff Rames, Merrill Shindler,  
Xania V. Woodman