

Chateau Pajzos Tokaji

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Special Report: Hungarian Tokay

Perhaps no other wine has experienced the rise and fall and renaissance of Tokaj, Hungary's legendary sweet wine. Reputed to be the first wine to use botrytized grapes, Tokaj became the darling of royalty throughout Europe in the 17th and 18th centuries. However, during the Communist era the vineyards and cellars were neglected. All that changed when the Soviet-backed regime fell in 1989. Since then, foreign investment by French, Spanish and other interests have revived the region's vines and wines.

The majority of vineyards in Tokaj (the English version of Tokaj), from the town of Tokaj) are planted with Furmint and Hárslevelű grapes. Furmint especially is susceptible to botrytis, desirable for what the Hungarians call *aszú*, or botrytis-affected, grapes.

Healthy grapes are harvested for dry wines and to make a must to which the *aszú* berries are later added. The amount of *aszú* grapes that go into the must, traditionally measured by *puttonyos* (one *puttonyos* equals about 55 pounds), determines the sweetness of the resulting Tokaj. Typically, the levels are three to six *puttonyos*. There is also a "super" *aszú* wine (think 7–8 *puttonyos*) that is even sweeter, called *Aszú Eszencia*.

The most famous Tokaj of all is *Eszencia*. Simply the free-run juice that flows from under the weight of the berries harvested, this thick nectar ferments very slowly in glass containers. Over a period of years, it reaches at most five percent or six percent alcohol by volume, with a minimum residual sugar content of 250 grams per liter. Unlike the *aszú* wines, this is not fermented with the must made from healthy grapes.

The best recent vintages are 1993, 1999 and 2000. See also the Hot Wines, page 4.—Bruce Sandeman

Château Pajzos

Tokaj Aszú 5 Puttonyos 1999

95 points | \$45/500ml | NA cases made

Racy and focused, showing lemon, orange and vanilla aromas and flavors underscored by a hint of earth and mineral. Light-bodied, with an intensity on the finish that almost makes it seem dry. Terrific finish. Best from 2005 through 2025.—B.S.