



The secret book of
**MATCHING TOKAJI ASZÚ
WITH CHINESE CUISINE**

#ASZUDAY 10.12.2017.



IS TOKAJ ASZÚ THE GREATEST SWEET WINE?

In today's fast-changing world there is an ever growing interest in competitions and lists, people want to know who is the best tennis player or which is the best restaurant in the world. The world of wine is not exempt from these tendencies either, the number of customers interested only in buying „the best” is on the rise. I don't think it makes much sense to talk of the best in the world of wine



where diversity, variation and continuous development all count as major assets. However if you take a closer look at the often neglected category of sweet wines and for a moment give up your misgivings about competitions then to my mind there can only be one outcome as far as the winner is concerned. Tokaj wines have been the focus of my interest for 15 years now, I have tasted them alongside their major international rivals and Tokaj Aszús have always been among the leaders of the pack often finishing head and shoulders above the rest. You might say I am biased but I

am convinced that it would be a hell of a task to refute me. So the time has come to say out loud that Tokaj Aszú is the greatest sweet wine in the world. Have you tasted it recently?

Dániel Kézdy, founder of Aszu Day



TOKAJ

The Tokaj wine region is situated in North East Hungary at the foothills of the Zemplén Mountains, along the rivers Bodrog and Tisza. The world's first delimited wine region since 1737, the regulations were designed to protect local values and they prohibited the import of grapes, must or wine to the region. The soil is of volcanic origin (andesite, liparite, quartz) and this is reflected in the wines which show a certain minerality and tightness. The climate is continental with long and dry autumns. One of the defining features of the wine region is the multitude of microclimates and soils in the various vineyards resulting in wines of great variety and distinct characters. There are six permitted grape varieties: furmint, hárslevelű, sárga muskotály, kabar, zéta and kövérszőlő. The birth of the sweet wines of Tokaj, Szamorodni and Aszú can be attributed to two main factors: the effects of *Botrytis cinerea* or noble rot on ripe berries and the special climate of the region. Tokaj was enlisted as a World Heritage Site in 2002 by the UNESCO World Heritage Committee.

TOKAJ ASZÚ

Thanks to the special microclimate of the wine region the onset of *Botrytis cinerea* or noble rot responsible for the shrivelling of berries is an almost certain occurrence each year though admittedly with varying degrees of intensity. In autumn the diurnal alternation of morning fog created by the rivers and dry sunny days is conducive to the production of aszú berries. *Botrytis* punctures the grape skins thereby assisting the evaporation of liquid matter and by doing so increasing the concentration of sugar, acidity and flavour compounds. However this is not a uniform process so the shrivelled berries have to be picked one by one over a prolonged period. This is an extremely labour-intensive process; even experienced pickers can gather only 6-7 kilograms a day and the same vine might have to be revisited 4-5 times in one harvest period. Once the liquid matter has evaporated the aszú berries are macerated in the fermenting juice or base wine of the same vintage for 24-48 hours with regular stirring for proper extraction. Once the maceration is done the aszú paste is removed, pressed and the resulting must is fermented to arrive at Tokaj Aszú. The wines age for at least 18 months in barrels and 12 months in bottle before they are ready to be sold. The post-fermentation residual sugar content is at least 120 gramm/liter. Properly stored Tokaj Aszús can be enjoyed for several decades. High sugar content and acidity guarantee long life and slow ageing. A properly stored 20 year old Aszú is still magnificent with slightly transformed flavours, added complexity; it's easy to see why they are so highly regarded by connoisseurs. However tasting younger Aszús with their more springlike, fresher and brighter profile provides just as much pleasure.





ASZÚ DAY

Every year the 10th of December is International Tokaj Aszú Day dedicated to turning the spotlight on this great Hungarian natural sweet wine. Tokaj Aszú is one of the very few instantly recognizable, truly distinctive wines. Terroir, centuries old tradition, local grape varieties and the current generation of winemakers have all contributed to a matrix with the ability to stun both the average wine consumer and the professional sommelier. Taste some Tokaj Aszú on the 10th of December, 2017 to celebrate the first ever Aszú Day, buy a bottle of Tokaj Aszú, ask for it in your favourite restaurant, share a bottle with friends or cook something matching its rich flavours and share the experience with others, show them what you have tasted.

#aszuday

TOKAJ ASZÚ AND CHINESE CUISINE

The diversity of Tokaj Aszús opens up endlessly exciting possibilities in matching food and wine. The combination of low alcohol and marked acidity in sweet wines makes them the perfect match to many Chinese dishes. Considering the basic rules of food and wine matching one can find several reasons why Tokaj Aszús go well with Asian dishes.

Chinese dishes can be spicy, hot, sweet and sour and often a combination of these basic flavours. Therefore finding the right wine match requires the consideration of several factors. Chinese dishes are typically intense so the right wine needs to have a similar intensity. To match a sweet dish one needs a wine even sweeter, for a sour dish a wine that is higher in acidity. The heat of a hot dish is alleviated by residual sugar and by the same token sweetness intensifies spiciness. All these factors married to the unique acidity-sweetness balance and richness of flavours of Tokaj Aszús make them excellent choices to accompany Asian dishes. The fruitiness of younger Aszús and the more profound, richer aromas of mature examples coupled with the diversity of different terroirs and vintages provides us with a wide range of options to find the right wine for our favourite dishes.

Now let's take a look at six Chinese dishes and their matches with Tokaj Aszús. For ease of use Aszús are divided into two subclasses. A young Aszú is a wine that is less than ten years old with aromas mainly derived from the grapes and barrel ageing and they offer rich, fresh flavours of yellow stone fruits. In contrast an aged Aszú, one that is older than ten years begins to show the effects of bottle ageing, so there is a shift towards dried fruits, with hints of cigar box and more prominent spice aromas.



PEKING DUCK WITH YOUNG ASZÚ

This classic dish has been mentioned as early as 1330 in a Chinese collection of recipes. Today's version became popular during the 19th century. The essence of a Peking Duck is the combination of thin and crisp skin with juicy and tender meat. To make the perfect Peking Duck a special oven is needed to roast the Nanjing ducks. Nanjing ducks are raised in a free-range environment and are regularly force-fed. Before cooking the duck goes through a 24 hour process of soaking, seasoning and drying. After cooking it is cut only at the table in order to minimize heat loss. The dish contains mostly skin and some meat. It is served with thin slices of spring onion and cucumber, sweet bean sauce and pancakes. It is one of the most loved and best known Asian dishes.

Besides the relatively neutral tasting meat, the raw vegetables and the pancake the explosive flavours are provided by the sweet and spicy, slightly hot sauce. A young Tokaj Aszú's is a great match with its fruity and vibrant character which beautifully complements the dish.



KUNG PAO SHRIMPS WITH YOUNG ASZÚ

One of the best known Chinese stir-fry dishes it is traditionally made with chicken in a wok. However it is just as good made with the slightly sweet flavoured tiger shrimps and served with crunchy vegetables and roasted peanuts. The dish originates from Guizhou Province but is just as popular in the neighbouring Sichuan Province and today it is known all over the world in different formats. The traditional recipe did not include peanuts but it has become an integral part of most modern versions. The essential ingredients of the Kung Pao sauce are Sichuan Peppercorns and Sichuan-style chili peppers. The peppercorns, the chili peppers, the soy sauce and rice vinager are added to the ginger and the scallions in a pre-heated wok and the shrimps are fried over them.

An older Aszú would crash with a sauce that is hot, intense and thick and the shrimp which is slightly sweet. However a young Aszú is a great match, the sweet spices accentuate the aromas instead of overbearing them. The creamy, silken texture of the Aszú tones down the heat of the Sichuan Peppercorns and accentuates the delicate sweetness of the shrimp flesh.



BAMBOO SHOOTS WITH SOY SAUCE AND YOUNG ASZÚ

A native of Asia and Northern Australia bamboo is the fastest growing and largest member of the grass family. It has been on the menu in Asian cultures for thousands of years. In cooking tender shoots of 3-10 cm width are used which can be harvested almost all year round due to the climate. Spring shoots are considered the best as they are the crunchiest and sappiest. Fresh, raw bamboo shoots – not easy to come by – are best used as quickly as possible to prevent dehydration. They can be used in almost any Asian dish however in restaurants it is also offered as a dish in itself stir-fried with some soy sauce. Preparation is really easy: cut the peeled bamboo shoots into thin strips, heat some oil in a pan and cook with soy sauce and some sugar at a high temperature. It is paramount not to overcook because the shoots would lose their crunchiness. Even with the slightly sweet flavour of the sauce the dish remains fresh so the right match is a young Aszú; the nutty aromas complement the saline taste of the soy sauce, while the oaky notes go well with Asian spices.



PEKING PORK WITH SWEET-AND-SOUR SAUCE SERVED WITH AGED ASZÚ

The cuisine of South East China is extremely varied, using sea food and every edible bit of animals. With the huge variety of available dry land and sea ingredients spices are less prominently used in this region with garlic and five-spice powder being the most typical. There is an emphasis on preserving the original taste of ingredients so steaming and stir-frying is preferred, overcooking is definitely to be avoided. The dishes are complemented by aromatic and richly flavoursome sauces. Pork with sweet-and-sour sauce is a recipe dating back to the 18th century. The pork cubes are marinated in a mixture of sugar, vinegar, soy sauce and rice wine then deep-fried.

The meat is covered by an almost caramel-like, honeyed and sticky sweet glaze therefore aged Aszús with their profound aromas are a perfect match.



CANTONESE BEEF SHORT RIBS WITH BLACK PEPPER WITH AGED ASZÚ

Cantonese cuisine is one of the Eight Culinary Traditions of Chinese cooking. The capital of the province was also a commercial port so imported ingredients and sea food were all available and widely used for a long time. Most dishes are made by steaming and cooking not only because they are fast and convenient ways of cooking but also because they help to preserve the original taste of the ingredients. For the same reason fresh and high quality ingredients are preferred and spices are sparingly used. Dishes are usually served with plain white rice. In Cantonese cuisine the main ingredients of sauces are sugar, soy sauce, Shaoxing wine, vinegar, garlic and chili.

These are the ingredients for the Cantonese Beef Short Ribs as well. To accompany the cracked black pepper, the chili strips, the five-spice powder and the sweet sauce an aged Aszú is the right choice. The aszú's honeyed, spicy aromas accentuate the intense flavours of the dish and at the same time alleviate the heat of the chili.



CHAIRMAN MAO'S RED BRAISED PORK BELLY WITH AGED ASZÚ

Originally called hong shao rou, meaning red braised pork belly it is also known as Chairman Mao's Favourite and Shanghai-Style Pork Belly. It is made of pork belly slowly caramelized with Shaoxing wine, soy sauce and stock. Other types of pork can also be used but it is essential to have fatty chunks as well because without them the gel-like, tender texture so unique to this dish can not be achieved. The spicy sauce contains ginger, star anise, cinnamon, chili, sichuan peppercorns and garlic among others. It is braised with these spices until it becomes tender. The birthplace of Chairman Mao's, Hunan Province is taking steps to unify the recipe so that restaurants all over the world would make just one version of this dish but their efforts so far have been in vain.

The deep aromas of the sweet and hot dark and caramelized sauce requires an aged Aszú. The dish is characterized by intense spiciness and almost syrupy consistency that demands a wine of similar intensity. The softness of the Aszú accentuates the tender texture of the meat.



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