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BY THE GLASS

Slovenian, Hungarian whites for hearty fare

By Ellen Bhang | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT JANUARY 28, 2014

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ELLEN BHANG FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

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It's an outdated notion that you should only drink red wines in winter. Slovenian and Hungarian whites, many offering zip and heft, are substantial enough to be served alongside cold weather fare.

Slovenia — bordered by Austria, Italy, Hungary, and Croatia — offers a landscape that includes the Alps in the country's north, and access to the rugged Dalmatian coast through its southern neighbor Croatia. Three-fourths of the country's wine production is white. After a period of producing quantity over quality post World War II, Slovenia was the first republic of Yugoslavia to declare independence in 1991. The wine industry refined its winemaking for international markets and joined the European Union in 2004. Slowly but surely, we're seeing more of these bottles come our way.

The same is the case with Hungary, its neighbor to the east, which has a storied wine history. When Magyar tribes (the ancestors of many Hungarians) arrived in the region at the end of the ninth century, they found flourishing vineyards and winemaking. The country became famous for Tokay Aszu, the golden late-harvest sweet wine, a favorite of the French court in the 18th century. Hungary's wine industry stagnated under Communist rule, but revival began in the 1980s with the return of free markets. Similar to Slovenia, 70 percent of Hungary's wines are white. But there are some lovely reds, including those made with the large-berried, thin-skinned kadarka grape.

We found a winsome Hungarian red from the producer Eszterbauer, located south of Budapest, sporting a 1930s-era photo of the winemaker's grandfather on the label. He stands in a work apron, contentedly sipping a glass of red.

We'll have what he's having.

Verus Dry Furmint 2012 After an initial whiff of petrol blows off, aromas of pear, white flowers, and baked pineapple emerge from this dry Slovenian white, bright with juicy sweet citrus and white peach. A splendid pairing with pad Thai or the savory Vietnamese crepe, banh xeo. Around \$20. At Bee's Knees Supply Co., Fort Point, 617-292-2337; Medfield Wine Shoppe, Medfield, 508-359-4097.

Burja "Petite Burja" Malvasija 2011 Aromas of this Slovenian white, shy at first, convey sea spray, mineral, and green apple after a few swirls of the glass. A fresh, balanced palate with hints of citrus-skin tartness and clean grassy notes. A wedge of creamy brie with crisp rosemary flatbread is just the ticket here. Around \$22. At Bin Ends, Needham, 781-400-2086; Social Wines, South Boston, 617-268-2974.

Eszterbauer "Nagyapam" Kadarka 2011 An aromatic Hungarian red, pretty with berries, blue flowers, and freshly dug soil on the nose. Winsome in weight and texture, tangy raspberry is balanced by peppery bitterness, smooth tannins, and baking spices on the finish. Equally good with a hearty lentil soup or leg of lamb. Around \$25. Berman's Wine & Spirits, Lexington, 781-862-0515; West Concord Liquors, Concord, 978-369-3872.

Szoke Matyas Irsai Oliver 2012 A first sniff of this Hungarian white suggests a whiff of lanolin, then meadow flowers, mineral stoniness, and stone fruit. Made from the muscat-like white grape irsai oliver (pronounced "Ir-sha-y O-lee-vair"). Acid is soft, with peachiness and earthy-herbal components. Saline on the finish makes us think of crab bisque or creamy shellfish stew. Around \$18. At Berman's Wine & Spirits; Marty's Fine Wines, Newton, 617-332-1230.

Simcic "Teodor Belo" Selekcija 2010 A compelling Slovenian white that evolves days after opening. White grapes ribolla, sauvignonasse, and pinot gris, each macerated separately on their skins, aged in oak, then blended, produce intense mineral and earth aromas. One of the most texturally interesting whites we've tried to date, this pour is perfectly at home with poultry, game, or roasted root vegetables. Around \$30. At Ball Square Fine Wines, Somerville, 617-623-9500; The Urban Grape, South End, 857-250-2509.

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