



DIRECT PRESS

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VOLCANIC WINES

Where does flavor come from in wine?

All of us are curious about this question. Grape varieties and winemaking certainly account for a lot, but since our favorite wines are not made in hydroponic greenhouses we know there is more to it. There is no direct empirical line from the soil to the flavor of a wine, despite the experience many of us have tasting mineral flavors in a wine. I'm not willing to write off the possibility, though. I'm more of a mind that the research hasn't quite caught up. After all, taste and smell are less understood than the other senses despite being vital to our existence — anyone who lost those senses recently is unlikely to take them for granted again. The complexity of human taste buds is a lot to tackle on its own, but in wine we also have to face the wildly intricate networks that enable roots to absorb nutrients from the soil, which is also in early days of empirical research. Vine roots can go 50–60 feet into the earth, and the type of earth is absolutely of consequence to the wine. While waiting for science to catch up, I'll hold onto the romantic belief in our ability to taste

minerals in wine. Or if not minerals, then at least the effects of nutrients and minerals on how the grapes develop. Tasting wines from volcanic soils this month actually made me even more forthright in this. I was not expecting to see so much similarity in wines from all over the world, but now I am, if not convinced of the volcanic influence, at least enraptured by the concept and the flavors we kept coming across: salt, iron, umami.

Explosive volcanic eruptions are about as common as being attacked by a chimpanzee: hard to forget, but not even close to statistically common as a natural disaster. Volcanoes have always been a terrifying symbol of destruction in humanity's imagination but they are more accurately a source of life — not only as primeval fountains spewing forth the building blocks of our planet after the Big Bang but as more mild affairs that continually release lavas through 'effusive' eruptions. Of these lava types, basalt, especially, is full of magnesium and iron. Coffee and wine both thrive on these soils, and though it only makes up for 1% of the soil in the world, a lot of that is occupied by grape vines. Grape vines need to struggle to produce

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the best quality fruit — a result of evolution telling the vine to devote its energy into making sure its fruit is tasty enough to be eaten by an animal that can deposit its seeds somewhere less stressful. While older volcanic soil in subtropical areas is as potent and rich as soil can get, it's better for wine if the soil is younger volcanic soil. In that case, the nutrients in the lava have not fully integrated in the earth, making the vine struggle *just* enough. These younger volcanic soils are found where there is recent activity, like Mount Etna, Santorini, or 'El Teide' on the Canary Island of Tenerife. More weathered, ancient volcanic soil is found in the Willamette Valley and France's Auvergne region; or in Hungary's Somló region, where vines are planted on an ancient, underwater volcano.



Those are only a few distinctions in the many types of soil in the world that originate from volcanoes. Even still, I swear I can pick up on a similarity between the wines of Mount Etna, Santorini, the Canary Islands, and even Hungary. Is it the iron and magnesium that's causing the sensation of savory saltiness? Is it

the way the vines struggle? The potassium in the soils? The culture and attitude of those who live under the lurking threat of fire and brimstone? Is it all in my head? I know I'm not alone but I am still curious to see how many others pick up on these volcanic flavors this month: it may just blow your mind.

BOOM!

Jonathan Kemp

Bruno Sant'Anna



[1] Mount Etna is actively effusing lava right now [2] Calabretta's vines on Etna [3] El Teide on Tenerife last erupted in 1909 [4] Viñátigo's younger vines planted in El Teide's shadow and its basalt soils

[Fekéte Bela Hárslevelű 2013](#)

Somló • Hungary

[Press 4 Mix + Press 4 White]

Sometimes we come across wines that seem to good to be true, and this is one of them: the last vintage of Hárslevelű from Bela Fekéte, aka ‘the grand old man of Somló.’ Bela is a nonagenarian who is respected as one of the finest winemakers in this region of Hungary. Somló is the site of an ancient underwater volcano, vines planted around its dome, rising out of the surrounding plain like some kind of destination for heroes in a Tolkein fantasy. It has been home to viticulture for 2000 years and it is Hungary’s smallest but most serious appellation for dry white wine. The wines from Somló are quite distinctive, due in no small part to the unique volcano they come from.



Fekéte’s 100% Hárslevelű delivers on all of these regional peculiarities: fresh sun tea, tangerine, and birch beer notes are matched with an umami that is reminiscent of dashi and chicken stock. This is a complicated, salty, savory wine to be sure, but somehow it remains lifted and refreshing; that is the secret that makes Fekéte’s wines so exceptional. His vineyards are said to have a ‘secret garden’ quality that is messier than his neighbors and yet informed by experience. Long, slow aging in 1200L Hungarian oak also helps with longevity. This wine is from the 2013 vintage, after all, and the fact that it still seems

so alive is downright magical. Pair it with anything salty and savory, like Thai peanut sauce, hummus, or pan-fried pork chops.

Jonathan Kemp

[Terre Stregate ‘Svelato’ Falanghina del Sannio 2021](#)

Campania • Italy

[Press 4 Mix + Press 4 White]

Campania is home to one of the most famous volcanoes in history: Mount Vesuvius. It, and a series of other volcanoes has dusted the surrounding provinces with yellow-gray

volcanic *tuffa* for eons, a lava-derived substance between granite and basalt, made up of silica and rhyolite.

Terre Stregate, in the Guardiesi hills, also has limestone in their soils, giving their Falanghina a

bewitching (more on that later) combination of minerals to behold. There’s a subtle smoky character with notes of cantaloupe and radish, all held upright with a spicy salinity. Falanghina is often a simple table wine but this is a far more elegant, structured affair with beautiful balance and edgy acidity. The name ‘Terre Stregate’ means haunted land and the legend is that witches still gather around their cauldron on the banks of the Calore River under a walnut tree. So pair this wine with fresh pasta with capers and lemon — and your favorite slowcore goth soundtrack. *Jonathan Kemp*

Above: the dramatic, flattened volcanic cone of Somló. Wines from Somló were said to help give birth to boys and they were consumed by Hapsburg rulers to keep their dynasty going. Weirdly enough the region today has an assigned birthrate of 25% more males than the rest of Hungary.

[Domaine des Trouillières 'Montagne de Strass'](#)
2020

Auvergne • France

[Press 4 Mix + Press 4 Red]

The Auvergne, right smack in the middle of France, is home to a UNESCO World Heritage site that covers a string of dormant volcanoes, the Puy de Dôme being the most famous. According to volcanologist Patrick Marcel, 'three million years ago, molten magma flowed through a valley and then solidified. Over time, the surrounding clay-limestone peaks eroded away, leaving the tougher basaltic remnants of that flow to become the highest features in local terrain.'

Wine is very well suited to this region and it used to be one of France's biggest, supplying most of Paris' bistro wine from the 1860s to the 1890s. Around the turn of the century, it was devastated by the infestation of *phylloxera*, an insect that feeds on grape vines. The Auvergne never recovered after World War I and the growth of alternate industries that took locals away from winemaking traditions.

Though there's not a lot of wine being made there today, it's one of my new favorite regions because of the elegance and understated nature of the wines I've had from producers like Trouillières, where Camille and Mikael Hyvert work six hectares organically. They only began in 2015 but everything I've had from them so far has been lovely: but the 'Montagne de Strass' may be my favorite. One thing I like about volcanic soils is the ability to impart savory complexity, dialing down the fruity components without adding too much heft. This Pinot Noir and Gamay blend is a great example of that, and though the difference between this and a similar blend from the Loire is subtle, it makes all the difference. It hits some of the same notes

as Oregon Pinot Noir. They lean away from big fruit into the more textural side of things, without sacrificing anything in terms of clarity or thirst-quenching quaffability. Silky cherry, red plum, and a blend of herbaceous flavors like basil, thyme, and pine creates a tension that is invigorating and deliciously finessed. Definitely a great one with a chill, but not too cold or you might miss the delicate details that make this so delectable. *Jonathan Kemp*



[Erde Wines 'Tear In Your Hand' 2021](#)

Willamette Valley • Oregon

[Press 4 Mix + Press 4 Red]

Jory is the Willamette Valley's most prominent volcanic soil. Many millions of years ago, fissures near what is now the Washington-Idaho border released unimaginably massive lava eruptions that blanketed huge portions of Washington and Oregon with basalt. Between approximately 15 million and 6 million years ago, these flows spread through the northern Willamette Valley, leaving basalt that would later be exposed on hillsides, and serve as the hallmark for the wines grown in these parts. This nutrient rich soil also retains water very effectively — and a key element for growing grapes without irrigation (dry farming).

“Tear in your Hand” takes its name from Tori Amos’ song in “Little Earthquakes” (if you’re not familiar, [click here for a great live performance](#)), and it is Kirk’s take on a breezy, chillable *vin de soif*. Co-fermented Gamay (Owen’s Vineyard), Pinot Blanc (Cooper Mountain), Pinot Noir (Johan Vineyard) bottled without any sulfur additions. If you’re reading this, it’s likely you’re familiar with Kirk’s incredible taste level (on full display in July’s Direct Press), and it shows here too. The wine is pure and bright with wild red fruit and a cool, minty, herbal tinge. A very light and delicate fizz gives it a playful snap on the palate.

Bruno Sant’Anna



[Calabretta ‘Cala Cala’ Rosso NV](#)

Mt. Etna • Sicily • Italy

[Press 4 Red]

Calabretta, on the northern slope of Mt Etna, is one of our favorite estates, and though it is a regular presence on our shelves, we couldn’t do a whole month of Etna wines without including at least one of their offerings. The winery is 100

years-old but has only been bottling their wines for about 25 years. Before that, they sold entire barrels to restaurants or private customers. Now they really advocate for long aging in big, older botti, and have some of the best examples of aged Etna wines. All of their wines, even this inexpensive everyday red, see a degree of barrel aging that is not typical, especially given their affordable prices. They are also refreshingly loose and wild in their approach, hardly a stuffy old winery, more like a quirky, rustic throwback.

The Cala Cala Rosso is a non-vintage wine, which allows them to offer an inexpensive red with 6-7 years of aging in huge, old barrels. It’s a blend of Nerello Mascalese and Nerello Cappuccio. I love how this is so easy to drink yet has a spicy, smoky complexity from Etna’s effusive lava flow. It is always one of my favorites to have on hand since it can go with almost anything you are cooking for dinner.

Jonathan Kemp

[Azienda Masiero ‘Urban’ Rosso 2017](#)

Veneto • Italy

[Press 4 Red Wines]

There are volcanic terroirs all over Italy, I mean, the whole country was shaped by volcanic activity. The Venetian basaltic soils are rarely top of mind in the wine context. Father and daughter team, Giulia and Franco run the Masiero family farm situated in the Trinté hills, between the Dolomites and Venetian plains. It’s a region known for its steep natural amphitheater, rich calcareous and volcanic soils. This unique place gives a voice to their wines that goes beyond what one might expect from the grape varieties they grow. In this part of the Veneto region, Bordeaux grape varieties are considered to be traditional. They were first

Above: Kirk Sutherland, our friend and former colleague, pruning in the shadow of Underwood Mountain in the Columbia Gorge. It last erupted somewhere between 20,000 and 80,000 years ago

planted in the 1830s and took on greater importance after phylloxera struck. Nowadays, some of the oldest vines in the area are varieties like Merlot and Cabernet.

“Urban” is made from the Masiero’s oldest vines and is a blend of Merlot and Cabernet Franc, The wine ferments in neutral wood, then ages in concrete tanks before resting in the bottle for at least 6 months prior to release. The intention is clear: highlight complexity through purity. Merlot’s edgy blue fruit is on display here with tomato leaf and a sweet, palo santo-like smoke note. Firm tannins are fine grained, giving this medium bodied wine texture and structure. I’d recommend letting this breathe for 30 minutes or so. *Bruno Sant’Anna*

Meinklang ‘Vulkan’

2019

**Somló • Hungary
[Press 4 White]**

We really couldn’t get enough of Somló this month, and apparently Meinklang, an Austrian producer on the Hungarian border,

couldn’t help themselves, either. They started working 2 hectares of 40-60 year-old vines there, of course with Biodynamic farming — they are known for their large Biodynamic mixed working farm and vineyard in Austria — and 2019 is the first vintage of this project. Meinklang has combined Hárslevelű with Juhfark, another local grape that is more powerful. Juhfark was even called the ‘throne successor’ because of its supposed ability to help produce a male heir to the throne, and so generations of Hapsburg emperors drank up Somló Juhfark to keep their dynasties going.

Weirdly enough the rate of males assigned at birth in Somló is 25% higher than the rest of Hungary today.

Luckily there are plenty of other reasons to drink this wine, namely that it is delicious and engaging. Nutmeg, gingersnap, preserved lemon, and a spicy bite of acid on the finish. Really great tension between the ripe body and the snappy cut, this is a savory, textural wine, a familiar volcanic hallmark, but it is giving and versatile as well. I really enjoy wines like this on their own before dinner, it’s got enough to sink your teeth into but still feels refreshing. This will match up with a lot of different food, too,

but I have a dish I make with sardines, soba noodles, capers, lemon zest that is just perfect with this wine. *Jonathan Kemp*

**Bodegas Viñátigos
Listán Blanco 2021**

**Tenereife • Canary
Islands • Spain
[Press 4 White]**

A sub-tropical climate,

phyloxera-free old vines and the most striking and spectacular landscapes make the Canary Islands one of the “must see” regions when it comes to showcasing volcanic soils. Despite the low latitude (28 degrees, similar to Southern Morocco), wines from here are generally marked by that unmistakable volcanic energy, along with fresh, saline notes that speak clearly of the vineyards’ proximity to the Atlantic Ocean.

Juan Jesús founded Vinatigo in 1990 and truly is one of the growers who’ve committed a lot of



Above: Giulia Masiero and her dog Mario haul a big volcanic rock on their ATV

time to understanding and re-establishing the native grapes of the “Canarias.” The wine featured this month is Vinatigo’s Listán Blanco, harvested from centenarian ungrafted vines, planted at nearly 3000 feet above sea-level. Fermentation and aging are done in stainless steel tanks, allowing the wine to showcase its fresh pallet with fruit leaning toward green white guava and herbal suggestions reminiscent of fennel-fronds. All of it with a zap of salty minerality keeping it firm and light. Definitely have this in the fridge next time you make your way to Mermaid’s Garden. *Bruno Sant’Anna*

Hatzidakis ‘Skitali’

2019

Santorini • Greece

[Press 2]

I’m always looking for an excuse to drink more of the wines from Hatzidakis, and they are easily some of the best examples of Greek island wine, and of course, wines from volcanic soils. Santorini was already a winemaking island in the 1617 BCE when it was completely reshaped by an explosion that covered the Bronze Age city of Akrotiri — and preserved it in ash for history. 400 years later winemaking resumed, possibly better than ever. Not much else besides grapes, tomatoes, capers, and fava beans can grow in the harsh, windy conditions on Santorini but all of those things are infused with a palpable intensity due to the vitality



required to survive in the rugged ash, rock, and pumice that they are planted in.

Hatzidakis is the first and only certified organic producer (in the modern sense) on the island. In 1997, Haridimos Hatzidakis and his wife Konstantina Chryssou began working vineyards abandoned by her family in 1956 when they fled the island’s most recent eruption. After Haridimos passed away suddenly in 2017, his daughter Stella has taken the lead of an all-female team including oenologists Stella Papadimitriou and Helena Alevra. The wines are

as thrilling and age worthy as ever. ‘Skitali’ is made from 100% Assyrtiko, with 12 months on the lees in steel tank and two more years in bottle before release. It’s powerful but filigreed, with a healthy helping of mineral texture, lemon pith, and racy energy. The chalky, oceanic feeling is unmistakable and it walks a tightrope between baroque

opulence and fine-tuned elegance. It will age beautifully but is drinking well now, too. ‘Skitali’ means baton and it refers to the passing of the baton from Haridimos to his children.

Jonathan Kemp

Above: At Hatzidakis on the Greek island of Santorini, vines are planted in this unique wreath method called ‘kouloura’. This helps protect them from harsh winds and gritty volcanic sands. Haridimos Hatzidakis was one of the few who learned and helped preserve this unique method

[Pivnica Čajkov 'Empress'](#)

[2017](#)

Nitrianska • Slovakia

[Press 2]

Located in the foothills of Slovakia's remote Štiavnica Mountains, Pivnica Čajkov has cellars carved out of the volcanic *tuffa* formed from the eruption of Sitno, the highest peak in the range. These cellars are from the 1600s and are now UNESCO protected. Winemaker Marek Uhnák's 'Empress' is made from Frankovka, aka

Blafränkisch, and it's a much more refined and textural expression than versions from Austria. This is definitely due to the volcanic soils, but also to the colder climate at the limits of where grapes can ripen in Europe. Marek is trying, above all, to reach harmony and coexistence with the unique volcanic material underfoot, and using preindustrial techniques and little intervention in the cellar to fully let the terroir come through. Subtle aromatics with clove and soy sauce are matched with blueberry skins, sour cherry, and rhubarb on the palate. The salty volcanic savory notes draw you in, while the lifted, crunchy, rocky mineral sensations give it freshness and lift. It's already had some bottle aging and will continue to develop nicely. *Jonathan Kemp*



Above: Outside and inside the UNESCO-protected cellar of Marek Uhnák, whose family's 16-century winery is carved out of volcanic tuffa from the Sitno Mountain