

Kádár Hungary: Adventures in Coopering

OBSIDIAN
— WINE CO. —

The unique terroir of Hungarian Oak and how it influences a wine's flavor and character



TOKAJ: AN ANCIENT WINE REGION, REAWAKENED

Of the hundreds of species of oak throughout the world, only three embody the characteristics that contribute to the making of great wine, and these are found in very specific climates and geologies. The forests of Tokaj, Hungary comprise one such region, producing some of the densest and tightest-grained oak in all of Europe. Steep, rocky, and cold, with only a thin layer of volcanic soil, it is here that *Quercus petraea*, a rare oak species highly prized for its enticing aromas and subtle influence, is found.

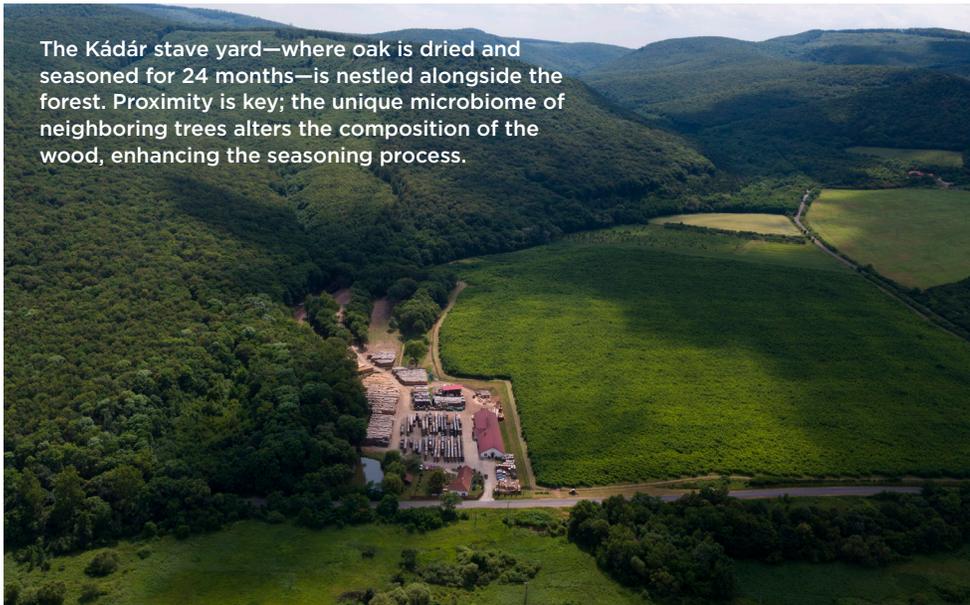
Central European oak—essentially the myriad of old oak forests in the Carpathian Basin—was prized for centuries by winemakers throughout Europe, especially in Bordeaux. Wars and dislocation stopped the trade, and for nearly half a century these forests were shaded by the Iron Curtain.

The opportunity to rediscover this long-dormant wine region came when the Iron Curtain lifted in 1989. We found our way back to the land of our forefathers, working in partnership with the World Bank on USAID funded projects to help revive Hungary's wine industry. On the weekends, we would travel with our uncle to the

homes of families making fine wines in small villages throughout the countryside. Over the next four years, we witnessed and participated in the reawakening of this ancient winemaking region that had been preserved in amber for half a century.

The Spring of 1992 was the beginning of an adventure that continues to this day. We were introduced to Federico Staderini, the first winemaker at Antinori's renowned Ornellia winery. Like us, Federico had come to Hungary to explore the history and potential of the country's wine and barrel-making heritage. He invited us to help evaluate the influence of oak on wine that he had vinified the previous year in barrels from five different regions around the world. As we sampled them together, we were struck by the elegant taste profile of the wine in the barrels made from Tokaj oak.

Shortly thereafter, we located the source of this oak near the town of Tokaj in Hungary's northern forests, and were amazed by the long-term vision that is required to make a truly great barrel. Oak trees in this area are grown on a ridge looking down on the Kádárok Völgye (Valley of the Coopers), a settlement with a written history of over one



The Kádár stave yard—where oak is dried and seasoned for 24 months—is nestled alongside the forest. Proximity is key; the unique microbiome of neighboring trees alters the composition of the wood, enhancing the seasoning process.

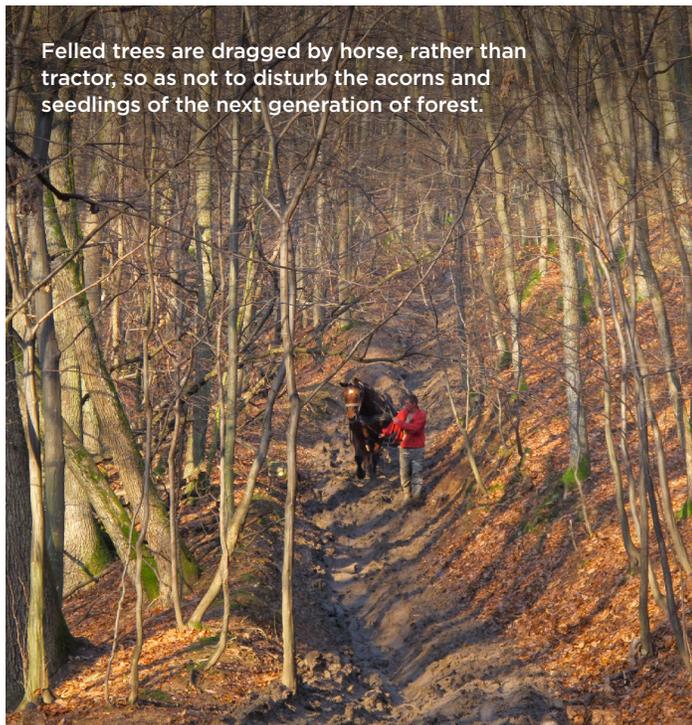


Obsidian Ridge Estate Cabernet Sauvignon, aged in Kádár oak

thousand years of coopering (the craft of barrel making). Every finished wine barrel is a testament to the incredibly complex stewardship and cultivation of an oak forest: new seedlings are nurtured and weeded yearly like a garden, thinned of twisted and diseased trees after twenty and forty years, pruned and shaped at seventy years, and finally harvested for oak staves, the narrow lengths of wood used to make wine barrels, at one hundred years. The foresters follow sustainable practices first codified by the Austro-Hungarian Empress Maria Teresa in 1769. We were stunned

that it took three generations to care for one tree—and that one tree would produce only two barrels, at most.

The heritage of the Kádár region and cooperage was irresistible. Our family envisioned connecting this respected tradition in Hungary with the growing wine industry in California. We worked closely with the coopers to refine seasoning and toasting, and eventually became partners with this cadre of the most experienced coopers in Central Europe. We purchased the cooperage in the late 1990's and today, in collaboration with the prestigious Taransaud cooperage of France, Kádár crafts barrels for over five hundred wineries in every major winemaking region of the world. Over the past three decades, the oak and barrels of the Tokaj region have regained their rightful position in the world of wines.



Felled trees are dragged by horse, rather than tractor, so as not to disturb the acorns and seedlings of the next generation of forest.

HOW TOKAJ OAK INFLUENCES THE FLAVOR AND CHARACTER OF OUR WINES

The terroir of oak is as important as the terroir of wine. The more we learn about the complexity of oak, the more we recognize the uniqueness of the terroir of Tokaj.

Lightly floral, Tokaj oak serves to lift the aromatics and highlight the fruit and spice of wine, providing a balanced texture, delicate roundness, and warm undertones of cinnamon, nutmeg and clove.

It is in the service of bringing out the very best aromas and flavors of our wines, true to the terroir of our mountain and seaside vineyards, that we find ourselves deeply involved in the craft of coopering. We believe that every aspect of winemaking influences the final result, and welcome you to discover the proof in the glass.