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HUNGARY IS TRENDING



Film, literature, music, medicine and tourism are bringing crowds and delivering kudos for Hungarian excellence across several disciplines as Andrew L. Urban reports.

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Singapore

Although far away geographically, Singapore and Hungary have at least one thing in common: both want growth and stability' - says the Speaker of the Parliament of Singapore, Halimah Yacob in an exclusive interview with Diplomacy&Trade.

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country FOCUS



HIROSHIMA 70 years

The nuclear attack on Hiroshima and Nagasaki 70 years ago shocked the world and opened a new chapter in history. D&T had the opportunity to talk with Jesuit priests about their experiences during those tragic days.

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american focus

HUNGARY? WINE? REALLY?

INTERVIEW WITH NIMRÓD KOVÁCS

BY RÉKA A. FRANCISCK

“How does a country that up until 25 years ago did not even know what the global market was, make a hit internationally in the wine business?” the question bursts out of me the moment I meet Nimród Kovács, whose great mission is to put Hungarian wines on the world stage.

“Hungarian wines express national pride. Many Hungarians refer to the ‘world famous Hungarian wines’ without any real experience of tasting what the world has to offer. The truth is that the international arena is brutally professional. Hungary, when promoting its wines, has to view and re-view quality and put things in an international context,” the answer comes promptly from the person, whose winery ships wine to 18 states in America, and also exports to Austria, China, Germany, Japan, Poland, Scandinavia and Switzerland.

“I am delighted to see that my wines are being well received abroad, as well as in the Hungarian market. This is a result of hard work that is still in progress. This is a result of hard work that is still in progress.” Hard work and making progress is somewhat natural to Kovács. The phrase ‘dream big and make it happen’ coming from him, are not just empty words, considering that he had the strength, at the age of 21, to leave his native Hungary, and start a new life as a dishwasher in the U.S.A. He did so by swimming the Adriatic to Trieste, spending months in various refugee camps in Italy, finally, ending up in Colorado.

In his credo that you can read at his website, Kovács says he is a “retired international business guy.” That is a short and humble statement of a former advertising and telecommunications executive, who was the Executive Chairman of UPC Central Europe Group and who introduced, among other channels, HBO to Hungary. Kovács has worked in many locations around the world, and spent half of his life in the U.S. In 2009 he retired from the corporate world to focus on his long time passion, wines. “Life has been very good to me; I’ve been able to travel the world and behold its wonders, including dining in fine restaurants and drinking great wines. I developed a love for wine,” he explains, adding that he mastered this talent at Budapest’s Wine College (Borkollégium). “And, most recently, I’ve become a peasant, officially,” he adds, to my great surprise and amusement. Also laughing, he



reaches for a certificate that reads ‘Aranykalászos gazda’- something we agree to translate as ‘gentleman farmer’. “You see, my interest in agriculture is not limited to wine-making,” he concludes.

Undiscovered Hungarian Wine

In Hungary, Kovács first invested in the wine-merchant company Monarchia. He is also a 33% partner in Starry Night Winery, based in San Rafael, California that initially helped in the distribution of Kovács Nimród Wines in the USA. Now, it is Nimrod Wines LLC, that promotes Hungarian wines in the U.S. “Promoting Hungarian wines abroad became a pet-project of mine,” Kovács says. “The idea was to seek out second-tier Hungarian winemakers who were making high quality wine but lacked the marketing means. A few difficulties we faced at the time we started the business included the fact that Europeans remembered the nearly undrinkable Bull’s Blood blends that were mass produced for decades,

during the Communist era. It is a bad heritage. So, in the European market, there were lots of preconceptions to battle with, while in the U.S., there were none – because they didn’t really care about Hungarian wine.

Based on our experiences, cheap was not cheap enough; expensive was not good enough for them. This is still a general view on Hungarian wines that needs to change,” Kovács acknowledges. “A 5 USD Chilean wine is way better than a 5 USD Hungarian wine, for sure. So, we need to conquer the world with quality. Both with the wines Nimrod Wines LLC distributes, and those that Kovács Nimród Winery (KNW) produces in Eger.”

According to Kovács, when the right quality is at hand, a few marketing tricks are also needed to trigger the emotions of those who haven’t heard of Hungarian wines before. “Giving pronounceable names to the wines is definitely a winning idea, concerning the American market.”



Why Eger

“As I have been spending more time in Hungary, I became intrigued with the region of Eger,” says Kovács, who today divides his time between Budapest and this North-Hungarian town that, as he put it, was a Sleeping Beauty for a long time. “Since this is a cool climate region, similar to Burgundy or cooler climates of California, we planted varieties that feel very much at home, and are capable of producing world class wines. In addition to these international varieties which include Chardonnay, Pinot Noir, Syrah, Merlot and Cabernet Franc, we also proudly feature traditional Hungarian varieties, such as Furmint and Kékfrankos.

“I have discovered great potential of these two local varieties, both of which are capable of producing world class wines,” he notes, adding that since Eger is the home of Bikavér (Bull’s blood) and Cuvees, blending

international varieties with local ones can create intriguing wines. So, the Kovács Nimród Winery features both single varieties such as; Battonage Chardonnay, Pinot Noir, Syrah, Pinot Gris, Furmint and Kékfrankos and blends such as; Egri Csillag, Rhapsody, Superior Bikavér and NJK.

“In carefully selecting which varieties the winery will use, the objective is to create wines that represent the best aspects of the region as well as hold their own in a very competitive international market.” Kovács has three tracts of land in the region: 10 hectares in Nagy Eged (Eger), 8 hectares in Nyilasmár (Noszvaj) and 12 hectares in Nagyfai (also in Noszvaj). “I’m trying to build KNW into a world-class winery,” Kovács says, knowing that things don’t happen overnight. “We are still refining our wines and moving to the next phase of quality. I think Hungary also has to try harder and harder to show what she can do in the world of wine. I’m certainly trying my best in Eger.” **DT**

KOVÁCS NIMRÓD WINERY

Situated on the historic Verőszala Street in Eger Hungary, KNW is nestled among the oldest cellars in the city, dating back to the 18th century. At that time, cellars existed all around the city of Eger, protected by the city’s fortress. Traditionally, wine-press houses were erected above their respective cellars to facilitate on-site processing of the grapes, as is with KNW. The winery currently produces approximately 80,000 bottles annually, in 3 product lines. At the top of the pyramid, is the Nagy Eged hill with its Grand Cru characteristics where high quality, haute couture, unique, not mass market wines come from, targeting collectors. In the middle of the pyramid are the Estate Selection wines while they also make everyday wines called EGRI for the bottom of the pyramid with purchased grapes that will sell at supermarkets and large retail outlets. In Budapest, up to 30 restaurants sell Kovács Nimród Wines, including the Michelin star Onyx and Costes.

www.nimrodwines.com | www.kovacsnimrodwinery.hu

