



WINE ENTHUSIAST[®]

MAGAZINE

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Q&A WITH IZABELLA ZWACK, HUNGARIAN WINEMAKER & BRAND AMBASSADOR FOR ZWACK

Izabella Zwack is a winemaker and sixth generation descendant of the Royal Habsburg physician who developed Unicum, an herbal digestif whose mysterious recipe is still protected by the Zwack family. Founded by József Zwack in 1790, Zwack Unicum Company (zwack.hu) produces a variety of traditional Hungarian liqueurs, and wine under the Dobogo label. The energetic vintner and Zwack brand ambassador chatted with *Wine Enthusiast* while on the road between her homes in Budapest and Bolgheri, discussing her passion for wine in her home countries of Hungary and Italy.

Wine Enthusiast: How did you become interested in making wine?

Izabella Zwack: I was raised in the town of Bolgheri in the Tuscany region of Italy. We were surrounded by vines and vineyards. It was hard to not be interested in wine while I was growing up. As you know, Bolgheri is in the Maremma, near the Mediterranean. Many of the vineyards are only a few kilometers from the sea. This unique climate and position are what makes the wines from this area so special.

WE: Are you the first winemaker in your family?

"[UNICUM] IS A WELL GUARDED FAMILY SECRET. ONLY MY MOTHER AND I KNOW THE INGREDIENTS. YOU'RE VERY NICE BUT I'M SORRY. I REALLY CAN'T TELL YOU."



AB: It must be in my blood. My sixth generation great-grandfather was the Royal Physician to the Habsburg Emperor in 1790. He formulated a tonic to help with the Emperor's upset stomach. With his first taste the Emperor declared, "Das ist ein Unikum" or "this is unique" and the Zwack family's Unicum herbal liquor was born.

WE: Tell us about Unicum.

IZ: It's a bitter, or digestif, that is comprised of over 40 different herbs.

We sell it in the U.S. market under our family name—Zwack. It's really quite lovely, it has a very complex aroma and taste.

WE: It's delicious; can you tell us what is in it?

IZ: (Laughing) It's a well-guarded family secret. Only my mother, Anne and I know the ingredients and the proportions. You're both very nice but I'm sorry, I really can't tell you.

WE: You own a winery in the Tokaj region of Hungary. It's called Dobogo; can you tell us what this word means?

IZ: It's an onomatopoeic word that resembles the sound that horse hoofs make on cobblestone streets. I bought the winery a few years ago and brought in a Hungarian winemaker named Atilla

Domokos. We make traditional Tokaj Aszu wines as well as some other dry and sweet wines. We're right off the main square in the town of Tokaj. It's a wonderful location.

WE: What other wines besides the traditional Tokaj Aszu are you making at Dobogo?

IZ: We're making a dry white wine from Furmint grapes and some "late harvest" style wines we call Mylitta and Alma. They are both sweet wines made with botrytised grapes. We've also just started making a wine from Pinot Noir grapes. I had to get special permission from the regional authorities to plant vines to grow red grapes.

WE: Your family has just purchased a café in the town of Bolgheri. Can you tell us about that?

IZ: Yes, It's called Caffé della Posta and it's in the center of the village. It's a lovely spot where the locals and visitors meet for a coffee, a glass of wine, a snack, a meal or even an ice cream cone. It's really quite special—it's almost like Rick's Caffé Americain in that famous movie with

Humphrey Bogart—you know, *Casablanca*.

WE: What's next for Izabella Zwack?

IZ: Oh, let me see, quite a lot. Besides running the winery, my father has entrusted my brother Sandor and I with more and more of the day-to-day running of the family business in Budapest. We're both very happy to do that. It takes up a lot of my time, but I love it.

—MIKE DESIMONE AND JEFF JENSSON