



# FACT SHEETS ON HUNGARY

MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF THE REPUBLIC OF HUNGARY – [www.kum.hu](http://www.kum.hu)

## Hungaricum:

**all that is inimitable, unique, distinct – and Hungarian**

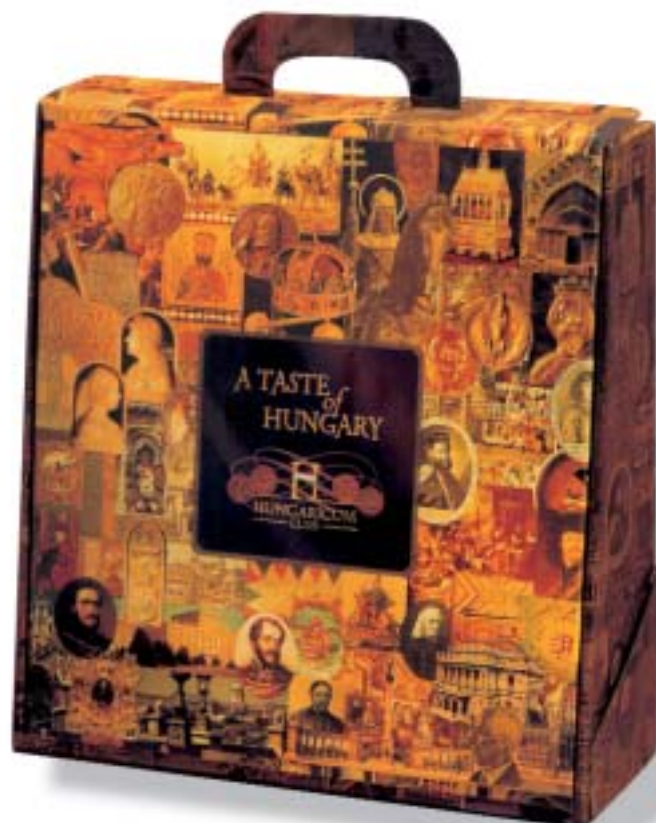
**Four companies of international repute founded the exclusive Hungaricum Club in 1999. The initiative, launched by Herend Porcelain Manufactory, Pick Szeged Co., Tokaj Trading House and Zwack Unicum, was joined by the Halas Lace Foundation of Kiskunhalas in 2003. The names of these illustrious representatives of Hungarian traditional dining are inextricably linked to the superlative products they manufacture: porcelain, salami, Aszu wine, Unicum digestive liqueur and sewn lace. Motivated by the desire to create a stylish “calling card” for Hungary, members of the Club have put together an attractive boxed set called A Taste of Hungary featuring selected samples of their tasteful products.**

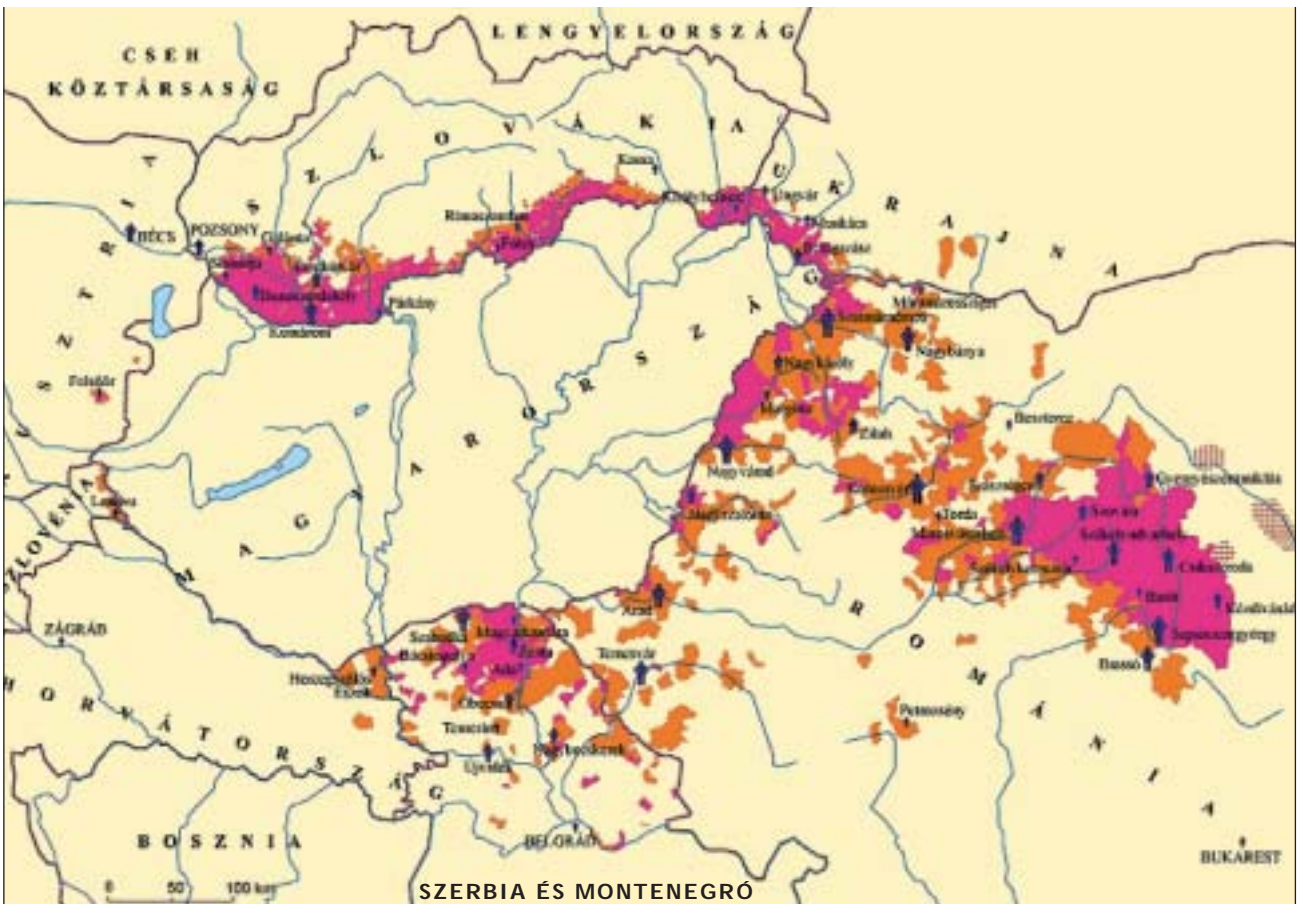
folklore, the intellectual and material cultural heritage of the Hungarians, the customs and traditions, the indigenous breeds, the matchless flavours of the local fruit and spices, the gastronomy, the wines and fruit brandies.

As you leaf through this publication you will discover many of these “hungaricums”. Naturally, we cannot claim to have covered everything, but still the picture we paint will surely be sufficient to enrich you with new knowledge and new impressions of Hungary. And this is our aim: to broaden and tint the image of Hungary you already hold.

The lands inhabited by Hungarian-speakers have been maintained, island-like, in the centre of Europe, ringed on all sides by peoples speaking Latin,

The Hungaricum Club is, without doubt, an inspired and constructive initiative with an efficient corporate marketing purpose and serving as an extremely effective way of focusing the attention of foreigners on some of the finest Hungarian values. Naturally, however, Hungary has much, much more to offer. These classical Hungarian values cannot be restricted solely to industrial, food industry or handicrafts products. After all, this diverse country nestling in the heart of Central Europe is also associated with an abundance of other inimitable, unique and distinct features that make up, if you like, the pure essence of Hungary. Such, for instance, are the truly unique language of the Hungarians, the land in which they live, the traditions and





Areas inhabited by Hungarian-speakers in neighbouring countries

Germanic and Slav tongues, for more than one thousand years. In fact, the deepest roots of the Hungarian language have been traced back 2500-2800 years when the forebears of today's Hungarians lived in the northwestern Urals region. This explains why philologists place Hungarian on the Ugric

branch of Finno-Ugric within the Uralic family of languages.

The earliest surviving record of written Hungarian – in total just six words – is in the founding deed (penned mostly in Latin in 1055) of the Benedictine Abbey at Tihany on Lake Balaton. Today, this deed of foundation is on display in

the library of one of Hungary's World Heritage monuments, the Benedictine Monastery of Pannonhalma.

The oldest extant manuscript written entirely in Hungarian – the Funeral Oration and Prayer comprising 190 words – dates from the last quarter of the 12<sup>th</sup> century. An extremely early poem, the Old-Hungarian Lament of Mary, has been dated to the middle of the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Just 37 lines long, it is the moving tale of Mary grieving for her crucified son, Jesus Christ. Both of these unique treasures are preserved in the National Széchényi Library in Budapest.

Hungarian uses the Latin alphabet; nouns are not gender-specific. The 17 different grammatical cases and complicated rules of conjugation represent some of the most difficult obstacles for foreigners interested in mastering the Hungarian language.

Over the course of time, the Hungarian language has picked up many words from other languages. Initially, as the Magyar tribes migrated from the Urals westward, Persian and Turkic tongues exercised an influence on the formation of the language. Once Hungarians had settled the Carpathian Basin, the

The first Bible printed in Hungarian, translated by Calvinist pastor Gáspár Károli and published in Vizsoly in 1590



Hungarian language borrowed more words, this time from German, Italian and neighbouring Slavic languages, French and even English.

Driven by Enlightenment principles, the goal of the late 18<sup>th</sup> century language reform movement was to replace the Latin and German languages dominant in intellectual life with a modern Hungarian language appropriate both for spoken, everyday usage and written literary works. This endeavour led directly to the remarkable flowering of Hungarian literature experienced in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Today, nearly 15 million people speak Hungarian. In addition to the 10 million who live in Hungary, several million ethnic Hungarians resident in neighbouring countries maintain Hungarian as their mother tongue. Furthermore, there is a considerable Hungarian diaspora living in West Europe, North and South America and Australia.

Thanks to the Carpathian Basin's extremely favourable natural endowments, cultivation and animal husbandry have been practiced in the area of Hungary since the earliest times. Numerous plant and domestic animal species indigenous to this area alone have been employed by Hungarians over the centuries, and indeed are still used to this day. For instance, Grey cattle, immediately recognizable because of their huge, curving horns, represented the single most important agricultural export of Hungary during the Middle Ages. As an indication of their hardiness, it is sufficient to mention that they were driven from the Puszta to markets in West Europe on journeys lasting days or perhaps weeks, and even after this gruelling trip they still arrived in prime condition having grazed along the way. Grey cattle are a robust breed, living outside summer and winter and withstanding all forms of harsh weather. They are immune to many diseases, and have proven resistance to "mad cow disease" (Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy – BSE) so dreaded in many parts of West Europe. This fact has played its role in the constantly increasing demand for Grey cattle meat products. They are fed natural fodder only,



*Grey cattle thrive in even the most severe conditions*

thus the meat products can, in effect, be classified as organic.

The Mangalica pig is, like Grey cattle, also enjoying something of a renaissance. In fact, this curly-haired, lop-eared breed of swine, for many years primarily favoured for its fat, was first bred around 200 years ago. It doesn't require much tending, and indeed in earlier days it used to be left to forage for itself, being particularly fond of acorns. Many farmers still rear them outside, although nat-

urally they fatten faster when supplied with good quality fodder. The fat and meat of the Mangalica is extremely low in cholesterol, and is particularly delicious when processed to make the famed Hungarian paprika sausage. Mangalica pork is proving to be a much sought-after delicacy abroad, too. Traditional Hungarian cuisine has long relied on the fat and bacon of the Mangalica in preparing meat dishes, and today this ancient Hungarian breed is back in fashion: increasingly, restaurant owners find they are being asked if they have Mangalica on the menu.

The Hungarian Racka is an unmistakable breed of sheep characteristic for its long, curly locks of black or white wool, V-form twisted horns and erect stance. This too is a hardy breed, able to survive in the toughest conditions while supplying man with milk, meat and wool. Grazing Hungarian Racka sheep are as much a part of the Hungarian Puszta scene as Grey cattle or thundering herds of horses.

By themselves, however, shepherds simply could not handle the vast flocks they tend on the Puszta. Since time immemorial their work has been assisted by "man's best friend", intelligent, faithful and biddable sheepdogs who also have a part to play in relieving the solitude of the Puszta grasslands. Thus



*Mangalica pigs  
(picture dated 1910)*



*Hortobágy scenes. The ornamented cloak is traditional wear of Hungarian shepherds*

when speaking of typical Hungarian breeds of dog it is necessary to mention first and foremost three types of sheepdog: the vigilant Puli, ideal for driving flocks, and the watchdog Kuvasz and Komondor breeds.

The Puli is a master sheepdog. There is a saying that they understand everything but they just can't speak. When properly trained, the Puli is able to sense exactly what the shepherd requires from just the slightest movements, and will carry out the instructions immediately. Today, this small- to medium-size, high-

ly energetic dog with its tangle of curly black, grey or white hair and sparkling, intelligent eyes makes a very effective watchdog around the house.

The Komondor and Kuvasz are also ancient Hungarian breeds much valued by shepherds. Both are used to watch over herds of cattle, sheep and horses, keeping them safe from wild animals and rustlers. The Komondor has a long coat of white hair, effective protection against the summer sun and winter snows and, indeed, tangles with predatory wolves. As a breed they are devot-

ed to their master, but do not take kindly to any infringement of their independence. They are capable of defending their given territory, whatever the conditions.

The Kuvasz has a dense coat, and is a large dog although active and extremely strong. It has a good nose, is quick to learn and quite fearless. These characteristics make it very popular today as a watchdog for larger houses and sites where it has plenty of space to move around. It is favoured as a watchdog because it does not require a great deal

of looking after and is particularly resistant to canine diseases.

Most shepherds move with their charges in search of new pastures. In fact, the word shepherd covers a whole host of jobs: the Hungarian language has a rich vocabulary with different titles (sometimes several) for shepherds who tend different animals. Thus pigs are placed in the care of a *kondás* or *kanász* (swineherd), cattle are herded by a *gulyás* or *csordás* (herdsman or cowboy), sheep by a *juhász* or *bacsó* (shepherd), and herds of horses by a *csikós* (horse-herder). All live out on the Puszta far from any settlement, most in temporary shelters sometimes no more than a simple reed shack.

The vast Hungarian Puszta has become a byword since it has remained largely unchanged by the passing centuries, successfully protected from the dangers of encroaching civilization. The Hortobágy is an 82,000-hectare plain, the largest continuous natural grassland in Europe and the common heritage of all mankind, where unequalled flora and fauna rarities are protected in a national park (1973) and by UNESCO which declared it a World Heritage site in 1999. The Ramsar Convention lists the Hortobágy wetlands as a Biosphere Reserve and as such affords them international protection.

For countless millennia the Hortobágy was the Tisza floodplain, regularly washed by successive floods which built up a vast, even layer of alluvial clay deposits across the surface. A large proportion of the plain then dried leaving alkaline grasslands dotted with lakes,



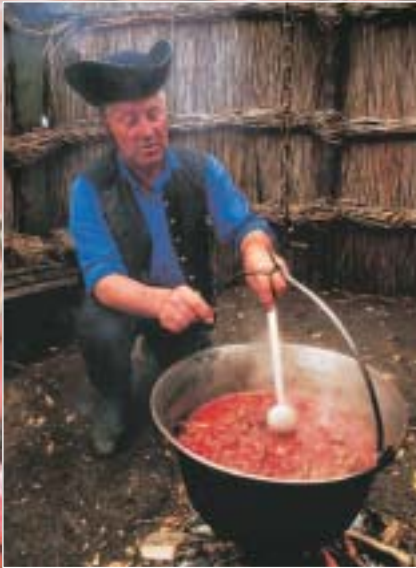
*Racka sheep*



*The ever-watchful Kuvasz*



*Today, the Puli and Komondor are mostly kept as watchdogs around the home*



bogs and shallow marshland offering the ideal environment for a rich plant life to break the – to the outsider's eye – apparent monotony of the area. The Hortobágy is nesting ground to several rare species, and many migratory birds break their long flights in autumn and spring to rest and feed here. During summer the highest temperatures in Hungary are recorded on the plain, and yet the diurnal temperature variation is great. Winters are cold, with bone-chilling winds sweeping unchecked across the Puszta.

Grazing animals, shepherds' huts, stables, sweep wells, the celebrated Nine-holed Bridge spanning Hortobágy river with the nearby csárda and Shepherd's Museum are all integral elements of the Puszta landscape. The Hortobágy csárda (inn) is one of the best-known restaurant types in Hungary. In olden days, the csárda (usually thatched with local

reeds) was sited in remote spots alongside the main roads crossing the Puszta, on the boundaries of estates or at river crossings, far from villages. They provided the weary traveller with food and accommodation, and most also had the characteristic sweep well outside where horses could be fed and watered. Naturally, the csárda served all the typical hearty Hungarian dishes, washed down by a selection of local wines, so often enough these solitary spots became raucous with merrymaking during the evening hours. Of course, the csárda has also been the inspiration for a good few Hungarian poets and authors. Notably, Sándor Petőfi, one of the greatest Hungarian poets, wrote with insight and love of the world of the Great Plain csárda of the 1840s.

These days the visitor will come across csárdas all over the country, most furnished in rustic Hungarian style and

servicing a range of typical Hungarian dishes. In order to meet the demands of the tourism industry, many csárda owners also arrange folklore programmes and have riding stables sited alongside so that the foreign visitor can enjoy the pleasures of equestrian life.

Returning to Hortobágy and the Nine-holed Bridge, the livestock fairs, crafts displays and equestrian days organized here are real spectacles which always attract large numbers of tourists. However, not all the brave horsemen attending are up to the greatest challenge in Hungarian equestrian showmanship: controlling between 5-10 galloping horses while maintaining balance on the backs of the two horses at the rear. Incidentally, Hungarian horse-herdsmen don't use a saddle, preferring instead to ride bareback and becoming virtually one with their mount.

Festivals soon pass and it is back to

the everyday work routine. After all, the needs of animals are the same holiday or not. Yet shepherds still find time to cook and whittle wooden sculptures. Many a Hungarian will swear that the very finest Hungarian food comes out of the shepherd's cauldron. Shepherds are actually famed for several different dishes, of which the following is a short description of two of the most famous, Hungarian stew (*pörkölt*) and goulash.

Meat stews are a very traditional Hungarian dish. They can be conjured up out of virtually any meat: pork, beef, veal, lamb, venison or even poultry. From this it is evident that the term Hungarian stew refers not to the ingredients but rather to the method of cooking i.e. stewing. In other words, all the different types of stew are basically cooked in the same way. Firstly, fry diced onions in fat or oil. When the onion has glazed, sprinkle over ground red paprika, stirring all the while. Warning: paprika can easily burn and become bitter, so it is best to remove the pot from the heat while adding the spice! These two simple but superb ingredients form the basis for the stew. Add the cubed meat and while stirring the meat will begin to fry, releasing its natural juices. The meat should thus be cooked in its own juices for a while, and other ingredients can go

into the pot according to taste: pepper, fresh tomatoes and green paprika. Once the juice has virtually evaporated, a small amount of water or dry wine – red or white depending on the meat – is added. The liquid must never cover the meat; instead, it can be topped up in the course of cooking. This avoids watering down the stew and preserves all the flavours of the meat. Although memorable stews can be cooked at home, the real thing only ever comes out of a cauldron cooked over an open fire. In short, making Hungarian stew is not complicated but it still requires considerable attention.

Goulash is a genuine Hungarian speciality, and features on the menus of restaurants around the world. Of course, all these foreign goulashes bear traces of local cooking styles and indeed the chef's own creativity, so the following is guidance on creating an "authentic" goulash (which, to set the record straight, is a soup and not a stew). In Hungarian, the name of the dish is the same as that of the person who tends the cattle herds, both being *gulyás*. Thus the goulash has made the move from Hungarian herdsman's provision originally cooked in a cauldron over an open fire to popular one-course meal consumed around the world. (And by the way, today it is not

considered sacrilege to make a pork goulash, nor to prepare it in a well-equipped kitchen instead of under the open sky!)

Like many other Hungarian dishes, goulash too is based on onion sautéed in fat or oil. Once the onion softens, tip in the meat chopped into small cubes and sprinkle liberally with red paprika and a little water. Add salt and pepper, a little cumin according to taste, but ground spice paprika is a must. Keep topping up with water as it evaporates. When the meat is half cooked it is time to add the vegetables, but not too many: carrots, parsnips, sliced tomatoes, green peppers and a few cloves of crushed garlic. Add more water and then, towards the end of the cooking, potatoes cut into cubes. The proportion of ingredients is very much a personal choice, but as a general rule of thumb one should have twice the quantity of potatoes to meat.

Virtually everyone coming to Hungary and finding themselves by the Danube, Tisza or Balaton shore will also come across the local fish soup. Although every region has its own way of making fish soup, each is a memorable culinary experience. Hungarian fish soup really is special.

True fish soup must be cooked in a cauldron. It can be made from one or



Two classic Hungarian desserts: dobos cake and Gundel pancake



Poster advertising Unicum (1910s)



Those 'in the know' rank Szatmár plum brandy as the best of its kind



several types of fish: some claim pure carp or catfish soup is unequalled, others are adamant it is tastier with a little bream, crucian carp or silver carp added to the pot. There are two ways of cooking the soup. The simpler method is to place the main fish "offcuts" – the head, tail plus additional tasty small fish – in the bottom of the cauldron, cover with finely sliced onion, tomato, green pepper and ground paprika, and pour water on top. Reckon on half a kilogram of fish and one and a half bowls of water per person. When the whole has come to the boil continue cooking for a further 15 minutes and then pass everything through a sieve, return the strained stock to the cauldron and add the lightly salted chunky fish cuts. Add spicy paprika to taste (no true Hungarian fish soup omits the paprika) and cook on a slow heat for a further 30-40 minutes before serving.

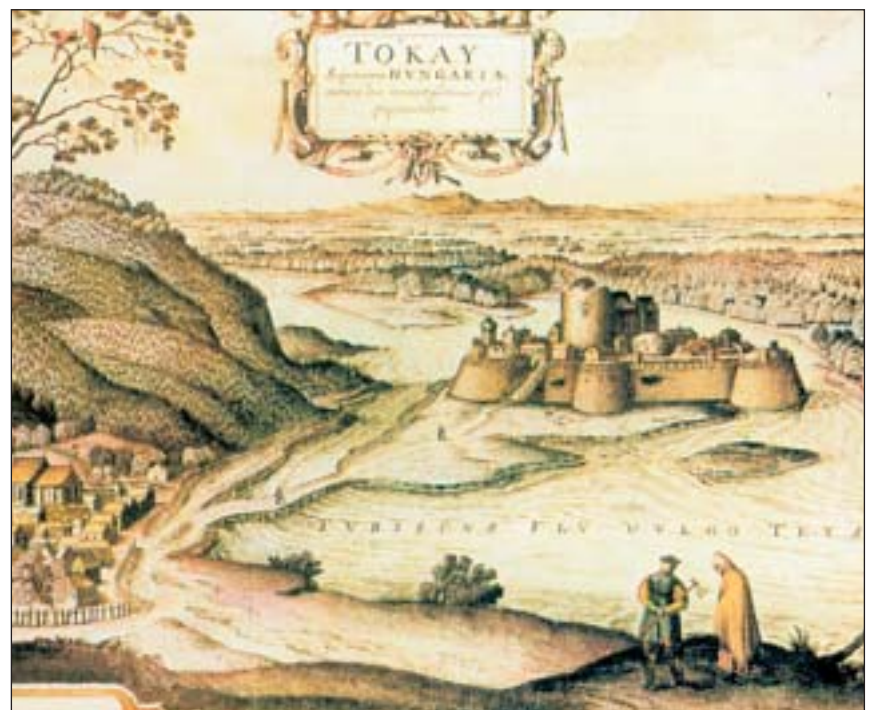
Of the various vegetables and spices mentioned above Makó onions and ground paprika from Kalocsa or Szeged must also be listed as genuine hungaricums. Their inimitable flavours go a long way to making the taste of Hungarian dishes so unique, while the eye is similar drawn to the deep crimson, appetizing colour given by Hungarian paprika, otherwise known as "red gold".

Hungarian salami is another product consumed around the world. In Budapest Herz salami, and in Szeged Pick salami are made only from the finest pork, with the greatest care and on the

basis of jealously guarded recipes. Salami meat is not ground but finely chopped, smoked over beech shavings and matured for 100 days under the watchful eye of the salami master. During this ripening procedure the suspended salami gradually becomes coated with a thin layer of mould which gives it an aroma and flavour unique to the Hungarian product. The technology used in making Pick salami, and thus the resulting flavour, has remained unchanged since 1869!

An aperitif is always a good way to start a meal, and Hungary has plenty of different drinks to fit the bill! Firstly, there are the various fruit brandies (*pálinka*), then it is important to mention the famed Unicum liqueur and dry Tokaj Szamorodni. The European Union has also granted exclusive rights to the use of the name palinka. Only pure spirits made from fermented fruit and double-distilled may bear the title palinka. In fact, fruit brandy can be extracted from virtually any fruit, but the most popular types in Hungary are plum, apricot, cherry, pear and strawberry, as well as fermented grape juice. Although the various fruit types are grown across the country, still some fruits maintain a particular association with one region or another. This is equally true of fruit brandy, so for instance Kecskemét is closely associated with apricot brandy, and Szatmár and Békés with plum brandy.

The fruit brandy glass is concave at the bottom and narrow at the lip. Serve



the essence at room temperature and slightly warmed by the hand, thereby releasing the delicious aroma and ensuring maximum enjoyment of the distilled fruit.

Joseph II, emperor of Austria and Hungary, unwittingly came up with the name for Hungary's most famous liqueur in 1790. "Das ist ein Unicum" he commented after sampling the tonic created by court physician Dr. Zwack to treat a stomach disorder troubling his majesty. Since that date the Zwack family has carefully guarded the secret of the concoction. Industrial-scale production of Unicom launched in 1840 when the Zwack company was established, and within just a few years it had become Central Europe's largest distillery enterprise. At its height the Zwack company was turning out more than 200 different liqueurs and brandies. Today, the company is being successfully managed by the fifth generation of the family.

So what exactly is Unicum? It is a finely blended, semi-bitter herbal liqueur placed somewhere between the sweeter amaros and the fortified digestifs. Thus it can be enjoyed both as an aperitif and digestive i.e. it sharpens the appetite and aids digestion. Unicum, treacle brown in colour and with an unmistakable aroma and taste, is derived from an infusion of over 40 medicinal plants. Some of the basic ingredients are macerated in alcohol for one month, while others are dis-

tilled (this is where the process differs from other similar liqueurs), and then the components are carefully blended. The liquor is matured in oak casks for a minimum six months and then bottled in the unique rounded Unicum bottles. The Unicum label is most noteworthy too: a gold cross on a red circular background. In this form the cross is a reference to Hungary's first king, St. Stephen, and European tradition. The four branches of the cross also represent the four elements and four points of the compass. Red symbolizes vitality, gold the precious and wonderful herbs used in creating the drink.

Unicum can be consumed chilled or at room temperature, depending on the occasion and taste. The joke goes that taken in small doses Unicum is a remedy, and in large doses a medicine. Of course, it doesn't hurt to take care for, as we know, all pharmacy products have their own side effects...

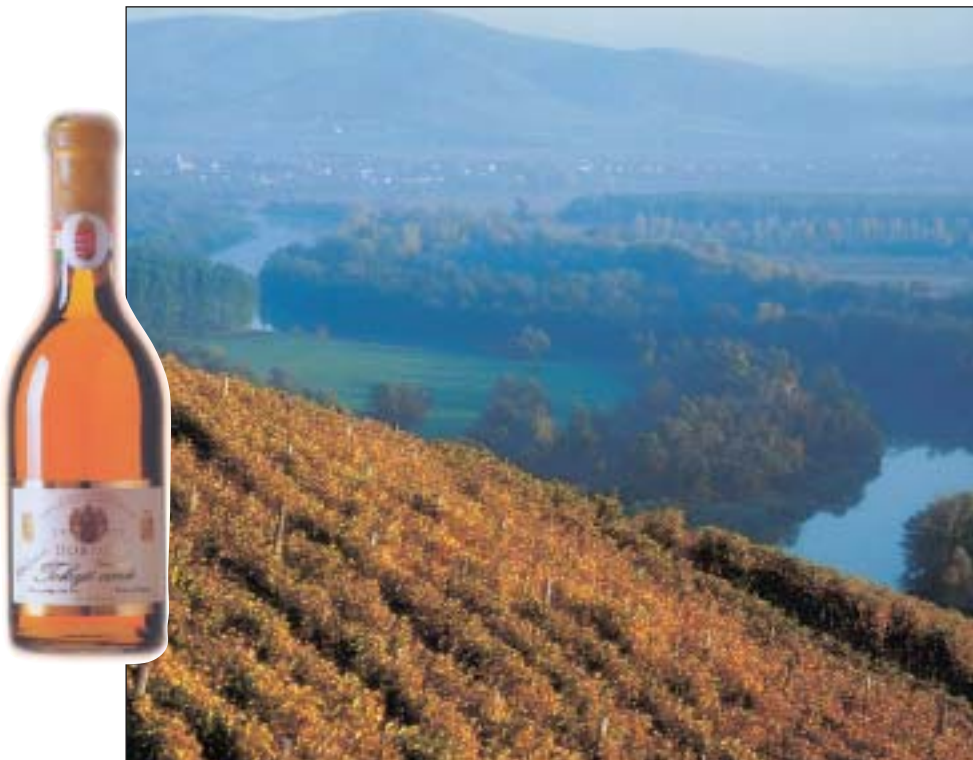
Tokaj Szamorodni is also a popular aperitif in Hungary. And with this statement, we have arrived in Tokaj. Alongside the capital, Budapest, the name of this distinguished small town in the northeast of the country on the confluence of the rivers Bodrog and Tisza is perhaps best known across the globe. What is absolutely certain is that Tokaj and around two dozen settlements nearby represent the homeland of this most famed wine which, over the past few

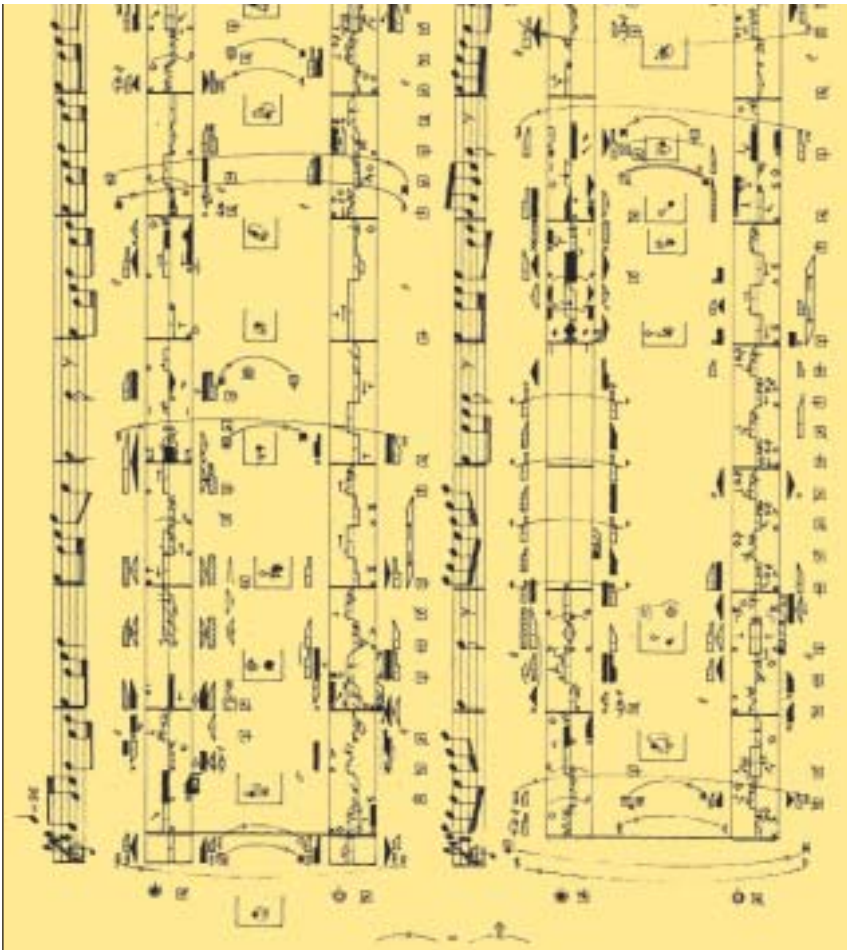


*Botrytis grapes*



*Vintage Tokaj wines*





*Csardas dance notation*



*Csardas steps*



*Csardas performed by dancers in Matyó costume*



*100-member Gypsy Orchestra*

years, has won gold medal after grand prix at top international wine competitions, and which continues to garner ever greater numbers of devotees both at home and abroad.

Outstanding wines have been produced in Tokaj and the surroundings since the Middle Ages. The first documentary mention of Aszu wines dates from 1571, and they regularly appeared on the tables of the nobility and rulers of the day. In 1703 Louis XIV, Sun King of France, pronounced thus about the great Tokaj wine: "Wine of Kings, King of Wines". Russian Tsar Peter the Great, Tsarina Catherine the Great and Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II were keen imbibers of Tokaj wines, while Voltaire, Goethe and Schubert are all reputed to have discovered inspiration in the golden nectar.

Tokaj is a specific wine region stretching in a strip about 80 km long and 3-5 km wide on the south, southeast and southwest slopes of the Zemplén Hills. The Hungarian Act on Wines and Winemaking regulates the strict procedures – natural and technological – applied hereabouts. For centuries, only three white grape varieties have been licensed for cultivation: the Furmint, Hárslevelű (linden leaf) and Yellow Muscat. The fact that no other wine in the world resembles Tokaj wine can be put down not only to the outstanding professionalism and care of wine growers



*Seamstresses from the lace house, Kiskunhalas*

but also the unique characteristics of the local soil. Other essential elements in this complex system are the sun-soaked south-facing slopes of volcanic origin covered in a layer of loess and clay, the remarkable microclimate generated by the influences of the rivers Bodrog and Tisza, and the local cellars cut into the hillsides ensuring – thanks to their steady approximately 12 °C temperature and 95% humidity – ideal conditions for the storage and maturing of wine.

Dry wines, Szamorodni and Aszu wines are all produced in Tokaj. The dry whites are excellent, but they are not what has put Tokaj on the map. Rather, this fame derives from the Szamorodni and, above all, Aszus. However, before going any further, a little more about the *Botrytis cinerea* fungus which, strange as it may sound, is actually the essential component in making Aszu wine. In vineyards anywhere else in the world this fungus is considered a dangerous blight leading to grey mould, and something to be eradicated. Not so in Tokaj, where amidst the local soil and climatic conditions it works its magical wonders. Perhaps it is sufficient to note that whereas elsewhere *Botrytis cinerea* is known as grey mould or grey rot, in Tokaj it is termed the noble mould.

During the process of botrytis, in early autumn the skin of the ripening grape first thins and then splits in the rainstorms, whereupon the *Botrytis cinerea* fungus is able to penetrate the fruit. If the autumn is long and warm, the grape shrivels as a combined result of the fungus and loss of water content, it dries and turns raisin-like. However, at the same

time the sugar concentration of the grape also increases. In the best years virtually every cluster on most stems withers, and these Aszu grapes are then carefully picked and kept separate during the harvest staged in late October. If, however, nature has not been so kind and the amount of Aszu grapes is limited, and therefore not worth selecting, then everything is picked together. The wine from such a harvest makes Szamorodni. (In fact the word Szamorodni is of Slav origin meaning “as it grew” or “as it comes”.)

Without doubt, Tokaj’s real speciality and Hungarian wine’s most famed representative is Aszu wine. The Aszu grapes are crushed and then soaked in fresh must or wine for two days in order to release the sugar content and bouquet and aromatic substances formed as a result of the noble rot. After pressing, the Aszu wine is left to mature in oak barrels for long years, lovingly cared for by the winemaker.

The quality of Aszu wine primarily depends on how many Aszu grapes are used in its preparation. Two measures are used in this assessment: the Gönc barrel and the basket or hod (*puttony*). The Gönc barrel is 136 litres and takes its name from the market town in which it is traditionally made. The 25-28-litre wooden basket is used when harvesting grapes: clusters of grapes are cut from the stem and thrown into the basket which is carried by the picker on his back. The designation “3, 4, 5 or 6 puttony” on the wine label indicates how many baskets of Aszu grapes were soaked in one Gönc barrel of must or

wine. Another strict regulation states that Aszu wine has to mature in wooden barrels for as many years as the number of baskets it is, plus two years. So, for example, a 3-puttony Aszu created in 2004 may only be bottled and sold in 2009, and a 6-puttony Aszu at the earliest in 2012.

Aszu wine is, quite simply, superb. Almost defying description, it certainly ranks among the very greatest dessert wines in the world. After enjoying the nose and taking a sip, even the most inexperienced taster will discover a new world in the bouquet and flavour of Tokaj Aszu. Since the fragrance hinting of delicate green walnut, honey-sweet caramel, dried fruits, orange peel and almond are mixed together, one taste can be likened to an assault on all the senses, a storm of heady impressions. Every softly spoken, reverential word in praise of the wine echoes through the local cellars coated in a thick layer of almost fur-like noble mould. The passage of eons appears before the taster as the candlelight glimmers through the deep golden, amber nectar with a consistency approaching that of fine olive oil. This is a true gift of the gods, grown on the sides of long-extinct volcanoes.

Well, having waxed lyrical on the deliciously sweet Tokaj Aszu, it is now time to speak of two Hungarian desserts. One is dobos cake, which although very much in the form of a drum (*dobos* meaning drummer) actually takes its name from its maker, master confectioner József C. Dobos. The creator came up with the idea in 1884 when he spread vanilla and chocolate butter cream

between thin layers of sponge and finished off with a hard caramel top. It was an instant hit. Dobos cake was one of Queen Elizabeth's (wife of Emperor Franz Joseph) favourites; the sweet-toothed royal personage is reported to have been unable to resist it, and she really tried to watch her figure. The Pest confectionery found itself with a considerable export triumph on its hands, despatching countless numbers of József C. Dobos cakes to neighbouring countries in wooden boxes specially made for the purpose.

The other dessert, Gundel pancake, began its triumphant progress around a century ago. The creation of Károly Gundel, eponymous owner of the famed restaurant and himself a talented chef and confectioner, has become a virtual standard on the menus of restaurants in Hungary. Naturally, not purely out of respect but because it is a huge favourite among diners. And how to let anyone unfortunate enough never to have sampled the great Gundel pancake get a "taste" of this hungaricum? Perhaps all that is needed is a list of the ingredients and a little imagination... Fill the pancake with cottage cheese mixed with rum-soaked raisins, lemon peel and ground walnuts, and then pour a generous amount of warm vanilla chocolate sauce over the top. To further enhance the flavours (and the drama), the pancake may be flambéed before serving.

Gundel restaurant, home of the Gundel pancake and many other sublime dishes, celebrates its 110<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2004. In fact, the grand old restaurant operates in a delightful historical building in Budapest's City Park, serving an elegant range of dishes built on the values of traditional Hungarian cuisine while also fulfilling modern international culinary trends to the very highest degree. The sommelier is always on hand to recommend the perfect wine for any meal, including prize-winning house wines from the restaurant's own cellars in Tokaj-Hegyalja and Eger. Paintings by several great Hungarian artists adorn the walls, and a virtuoso Gypsy orchestra performing in the evening complements the "Gundel experience".



*Easter "sprinkling" in Hollókő*



*Nativity scene with figures fashioned from corn husks*

Gypsy music is an integral part of Hungarian culture. Just fifteen years ago, no self-respecting restaurant would consider being in business without a Gypsy orchestra. However, since then the number of Roma ensembles has dropped considerably, first and foremost because of shifts in the profile and styles of restaurants. Of course, the function of Gypsy music is not restricted solely to restaurant entertainment; amongst the exponents of the art there exists a whole line of distinguished musical dynasties who have honed their innate talent with musical training at the very highest levels. Gypsy music regularly features on concert programmes and at folklore displays of summer open-air gatherings. The uniqueness and high standard of the 100-member Gypsy Orchestra has won it prolonged applause at concerts held around the world.

Talking of folklore, this is the ideal

place to mention the dance that perhaps most foreigners associate with Hungary: the csardas (also spelt czardas). As is obvious, the name derives from the word csárda or inn, a reference to the old days when Great Plain inns also served as a platform for dancers. In common parlance, the csardas is synonymous with any Hungarian folk dance, although the truth is that this blanket term is not appropriate to all Hungarian folk dances. Instead, individual dances take their titles first and foremost from their own particular region and characteristic movements or particular rhythms.

The roots of the csardas date back to the late 18<sup>th</sup> century; its present-day form was assumed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It is a bi-metric, freely structured (semi-improvisational) dance with characteristic base motifs: single and double side-steps and then close, release the partner and approach, and then both partners

whirling round each other. For the most part it consists of a slow section and an exhilarating fast section, but some regions favour the three-structure, gradually increasing csardas form which adds a medium-fast section. A small band accompanies the dancers who often also sing themselves, thereby intensifying the emotional impact of the display.

Hungarian folk dance can be considered unique in the world in that there exists virtually complete documentation of the authentic musical material and choreographies. For this we have to thank the painstaking folk music research of Béla Bartók and Zoltán Kodály, Béla Vikár, László Lajtha and others who assiduously collected and recorded almost the entire treasury of Hungarian folk songs, and indeed a part of those of the peoples living alongside Hungarians, for example Romanians and Slovaks. The preservation of traditional dance choreographies was carried out with equal precision by, for instance, Sándor Gönyei and Péter Morvai who travelled the country during the 1920s filming 50-60-year-olds dancing in the

Folk art and folk traditions are very much alive and well in Hungary today. This is particularly true of folk dancing. In addition to the several globetrotting professional folk dance ensembles who do so much to promote the values of Hungarian folk dance and music there are innumerable amateur folk dance groups in towns and villages around the country. The dance house movement is a most singular institution which has enjoyed an unbroken run of success for some 35 years now. As proof of the vitality of Hungarian folk dancing one need go no further than urban cultural houses and sports arenas which are filled each weekend by local young people dancing together, just as in bygone days they were to be found in village halls. The leader couple (the dance house callers) take novices through the steps, then the band strikes up and anyone can have a go, either strictly following the form or in a more "liberal" interpretation, if that's what they like. National dance house meetings, summer folk dance camps, festivals and competitions are always well attended.

ties, affirmation that through the acceptance and respect of each other's cultures we are all enriched.

Naturally, young people attending urban dance houses come dressed in modern clothing, while the "real" folk dancers will always wear the costume appropriate to the region from whence the dance originates. Formal dancing is held on special occasions, so the costumes are more colourful and decorative than everyday wear, especially those of the girls and women. And it is not only the larger regions that have their own characteristic style of dress, but within this two or three neighbouring villages, or even individual villages, often proudly display their own special costume culture. Thanks to the enormous wealth of stitch forms and decorations, materials and motifs, Hungarian embroidery and woven fabrics can be compared to the endless pattern variations apparent when looking through a kaleidoscope. It would be impossible to highlight one from the many since each is unique, and anyway beauty is in the eye of the beholder! Local decorative motifs and



*Traditional soda water siphons*



*Soda siphon made for a Guinness World Record*

traditions of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Olga Szentpál, Mária Szentpál, Emma Lugossy and Ágoston Lányi documented folk dance using dance notation (choreography). Using methods they developed it was possible to describe the very slightest movements and shifts of the dancers, and of course later to reproduce them thus preserving dances that might otherwise have been lost.

It is particularly noteworthy that this love of folk dance awakens in Hungarian young people an interest in the music and dance of other cultures too. Romanian, Slovak, German, Bulgarian, Serbian, Greek (and indeed Irish) dance houses function in Budapest and several other towns, in other words not only in settlements inhabited by Hungary's national minori-

colours find their way not only onto clothing but also furniture, pottery and other everyday objects around the house. The following are just a few of the regions or towns famed for their folk art: Sárköz, Buzsák, Szatmár, Mezőkövesd, Kalocsa and Hódmezővásárhely.

Folk craft is always the fruit of manual work, as is Halas (Kiskunhalas) lace, the world-famous Hungarian handicraft

product. These delicate, extraordinarily beautiful creations are the precious treasures of fewer than a dozen nimble-fingered laceworkers living in Kiskunhalas, southern Hungary. Lace sewing is a most time-consuming occupation demanding incredible precision and attention to detail. The result of all this labour is that the per gram cost of

three grand prix at World Exhibitions: St. Louis in 1904, Paris in 1937, and Brussels in 1958. From 1935 the Halas lace logo has been three fish lying crosswise (the use of fish is a reference to Halas, *hal* being the word for fish in Hungarian). Each genuine Halas lacework features this trademark. Pope John Paul II was presented with a sample of Halas lace by

many folk traditions associated with Christmas and the New Year, among these the typically Hungarian Nativity custom. Hundreds of years ago, mystery plays were enacted in churches in order to reveal and retell the story of the birth of Christ, but later they were banned because of their pagan associations. The special thing about the still active tradition is that the Bethlehem story is played out within the framework of a pastoral play. Players, accompanied by a miniature Bethlehem stable complete with model baby Jesus, Mary, Joseph, three wise kings and animals, knock on doors around the village and re-enact – through prose, song and dance – the story of the birth of Christ. The actors are “rewarded” for their efforts with food, drink and money.

Easter in Hungary is the time for egg painting and “sprinkling”. It is also a moment for rejoicing since the festival of the Resurrection coincides almost exactly with the onset of spring and the rebirth of nature. In times gone by, on Easter morning the lads of the village would take the screaming girls to the nearby stream or courtyard well and dump a bucket of water over them. Over time the concept of “sprinkling” as an ancient fertility and cleansing rite changed although its sense of promoting fertility and renewal still exists. Christianity linked the cleansing power of water and sprinkling to the rite of baptism. Today, sprinkling in this traditional (and very wet) form is mostly staged for the sake of tourists. Amongst most families the whole process is more genteel with fathers and sons visiting all their female relatives in turn and discreetly sprinkling eau de cologne while reciting a humorous verse. In return, guests are offered smoked ham with horseradish, cakes and drinks, as well as painted eggs, chocolate Easter eggs and perhaps a few coins to the young lads “for their efforts”.

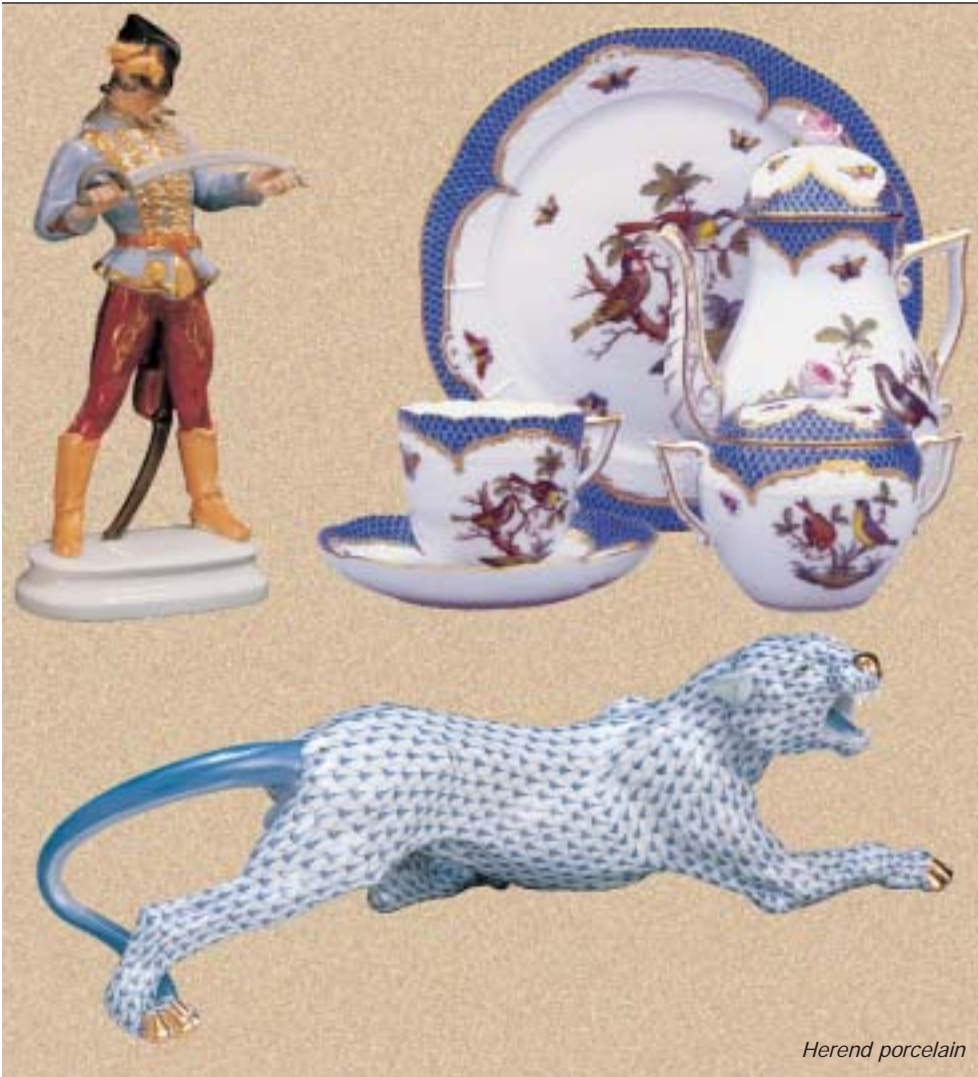
However, there exists a halfway house at Easter between the bucket of water and eau de cologne, and this is using a soda siphon to sprinkle the shrieking girls and women. So this too is one more side to the manifold uses soda water can be put to. People have become accustomed to soda water, and although

finished Halas lacework can match that of gold!

Around the turn of the century, seamstress Mária Markovits brought to life the first lace designs of local art teacher Árpád Dékányi and the resulting lace marvels were first displayed to the public in 1902. Over the past century Kiskunhalas lacework, which preserves the original motifs and utilizes 60 different stitches sewn from the world’s finest linen thread, has grown to rival Brussels and Venetian lace. So far Halas lace has taken

the Hungarian state, and other recipients include the Japanese imperial couple as well as heads of state and first ladies.

Folk art and folk customs are inseparably intertwined. In Hungary, folk customs (often going back many centuries) are associated with the major Christian festivals and red-letter days throughout the year, most importantly namedays. One typical feature is that although many customs are closely linked to the Christian faith they still retain within them some pagan elements. Of course, there are

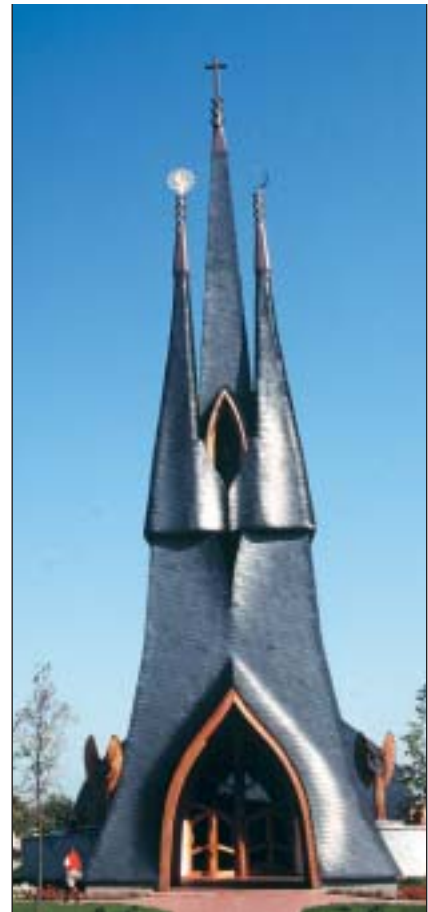
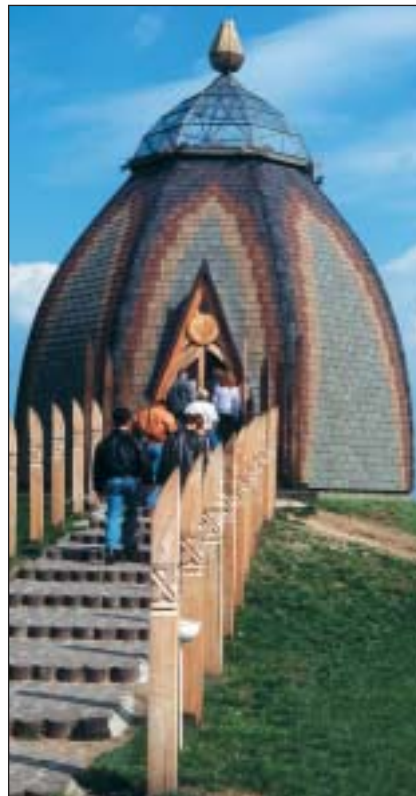


*Herend porcelain*

the shops are stocked with an ever increasing variety of mineral waters, and although ever higher budgets are allocated to marketing one brand or another, soda water keeps on selling to its happy customers without any advertising whatsoever. In fact, there are some things that are only good with soda water, for instance the cooling, refreshing spritzer (*fröccs*), a mixture of wine and sparkling soda water in a proportion according to taste.

Industrial-scale soda water production was developed by Benedictine science teacher, physicist and inventor Ányos Jedlik in 1829. (Jedlik also designed the first electric motor operated purely by electromagnetic impulse, discovered the principle of the dynamo, developed a variety of early condensers, and is associated with numerous other ground-breaking developments.) At one time, the mild acidity of the water aerated with carbon dioxide was thought to have healing powers. While not going that far, however, there is no doubt that a glass or two during and after a substantial lunch or dinner has a stimulatory effect on digestion. Around 1500 small-scale soda water plants operate in Hungary today. The professional association representing the interests of bottlers aims to have the European Union recognize the exclusive rights of Hungarian soda water.

About the time Ányos Jedlik was putting together the first soda water plant machinery, ceramist Vince Stingl was founding a small works in the town of Herend manufacturing stoneware and experimenting with porcelain produc-



*Buildings in the organic style by György Csete and Imre Makovecz*

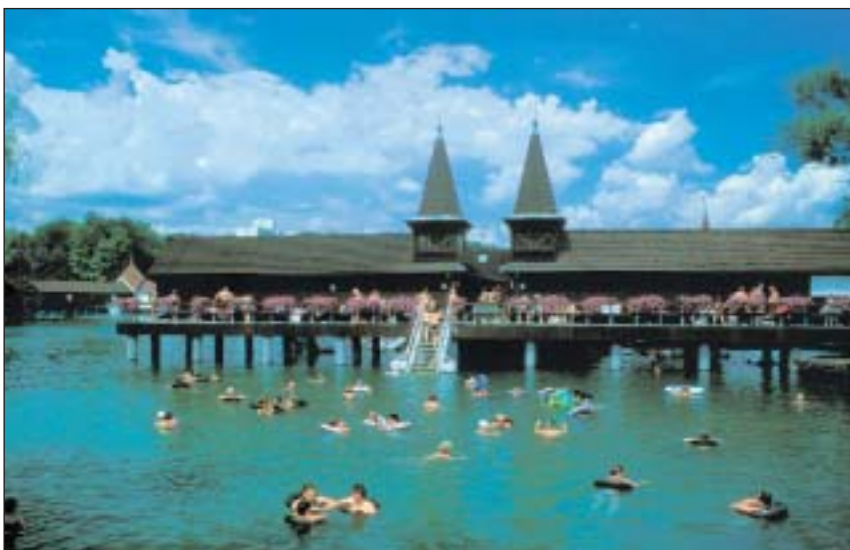
tion. From these modest beginnings arose today's Herend Porcelain Manufactory. The path to world fame was achieved by Mór Fischer who bought out the factory in 1839, and set about grandiose plans to produce the finest porcelain tableware. The high quality and original patterns of Herend porcelain soon caught the eye of experts, collectors and the aristocracy. Hungarian pieces received laudatory reviews at the World Exhibitions in London in 1851, New York in 1853 and Paris in 1855. Among the rulers who placed commissions for Herend dinner services were Queen

Victoria, Emperor Franz Joseph I and Tsar Alexander II. Other orders came from the aristocratic Esterházy, Batthyány, Rothschild and Apponyi families. As a mark of respect, the factory named patterns after these important clients.

In the 175 years since its foundation Herend Porcelain Manufactory has maintained and burnished its eminent international reputation amongst luxury porcelain manufacturers and, most importantly, among its clientele. The skills of hand-painting are passed down from one generation of artists to the next. While remaining faithful to its applied art traditions the factory, under the management of Imre Schrammel, has successfully introduced new forms and new patterns, thereby ensuring that Herend products remain at the forefront of development in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Foreigners travelling through Hungary often comment on the uniquely designed and exciting buildings to be seen here. It is immediately apparent that the architects of these structures really respect and have a feeling for nature, something reflected in the forms of the buildings and in the materials used in

*Bathers in Lake Hévíz*





Footballing phenomenon Ferenc Puskás



their construction. Imre Makovecz, György Csete and Lőrinc Csernus are the most outstanding representatives of the organic architectural style, which they have employed in churches, schools, community centres, cultural institutions and private houses alike.

Lake Hévíz – at 5 hectares Europe's largest medicinal thermal lake – is one of the natural wonders of Hungary. In summer the water is a steady 35 °C, but cools somewhat to around 30 °C in winter. Natural springs pump 35 million litres of water each day, meaning that the entire water content of the lake is changed every three days or so. With full justification is Hévíz dubbed the Mecca of rheumatics, since the sulphurous, alkaline hydro-carbonate and mildly radioactive water and healing mud from the lake bottom have proved most efficacious in treating locomotor diseases. Hungary's largest balneology centre sited alongside the lake treats patients with inflammatory articular and spinal diseases, muscular complaints and tendonitis, plus it is attended by patients either preparing for or recovering from surgery.

Every survey shows that Ferenc Puskás is the Hungarian most recognized by foreigners. For half a century now the footballing phenomenon has maintained a reputation the envy of many of his fellow sportsmen. Born in 1927, his talent became apparent at a very early age: leg-

ends aplenty surround his fiendish dribbling of the ball and goals scored with the left foot. One of his most memorable matches came in 1953 when the underrated Hungarian team crushed the "invincible" English squad 6-3 at Wembley Stadium. However, his greatest disappointment came in the following year during the world championship in Berne. Captained by Puskás, the Hungarian 11 arrived in Switzerland clear favourites, and yet they went down in the final 3-2 against West Germany. Hungarians were traumatized by one of the greatest footballing upsets of the century, and the scar it left has still not healed in many souls.

In 1956 Puskás emigrated to Spain where he built himself a successful career playing for Real Madrid. He holds dozens of Hungarian and foreign state honours as well as the Olympic Order of the International Olympic Committee, he was voted greatest Hungarian sportsman of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, appointed honorary ambassador for Hungarian sport, and the national stadium of Hungary is named after him.

Hungary is a "playful" nation, too.

Traditional folk toys and games are ingenious and often designed to stimulate creativity. This highly original creativity is perhaps most apparent in the Rubik's Cube which set out on its conquest of the world in 1975. Invented by architect

and designer Ernő Rubik (born: 1944) who was working as professor at the College of Applied Art and Design in Budapest at the time, the Cube was the result of Rubik's efforts to resolve a structural problem. It remains today the world's most widely distributed puzzle. The Rubik's Cube was named World Game of the Year in 1980, and it has been admitted to the collection of the Museum of Modern Art in New York.

Each face of the Cube, made up of nine interlocking cubelets in a 3x3 formation, is a different colour. The whole Cube, therefore, comprises 26 smaller cubes, the faces of which can be moved independently of each other, rotating around a central core. Thus movement of the layers occurs across three axes giving a total 43 billion potential permutations! The aim of the game is to return all the faces of the larger Cube to their original configuration i.e. a single colour on each face. Many find the whole thing so fiendishly difficult they give up, while others can spend hours or even days twisting the Cube until they crack the code. Interestingly, children and young people are generally quickest at puzzling out the answer to the Rubik's Cube, which demands a logical approach and the ability to think spatially. At the Rubik's Cube World Championship held in Budapest in 1982, a world record was set for unscrambling the Cube: an astonishing 23 seconds.

Ernő Rubik has patented several dozen other games of logic including the Magic Snake and Magic Square.

