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ZULAL ARENI RESERVE 2021

Zulal is the Armenian word for pure, and this sense of authenticity permeates the winery. Zulal was founded in 2017 by Aimee Keushguerian, who learned enology while working for her father at Keush. Fascinated with the viticultural diversity in Armenia, Aimee created Zulal with the goal of showcasing her country's indigenous varieties through monovarietal bottlings unadorned by excessive winemaking.

When Armenia was absorbed into the Soviet Union in 1921, the identity of many Armenian varieties was obscured and eventually forgotten. Due to the Soviet demand for brandy, fermented fruit juice gained anonymity, and many vineyards were replanted to maximize yields. The fruit for the Areni Reserve comes from Aghasafi, a small village in the Arpa River Valley. Coming from a single south-facing plot, the fruit is hand-harvested and fermented in stainless steel before spending 12 months in neutral French and Caucasian oak barrels. Caucasian oak trees are the same genetic material as French and Hungarian oak (predominately Quercus Petrea, with some quercus robur), but due to Armenia's elevation, the trees grow even more slowly – resulting in a tighter wood grain and higher level of oak tannin.

Likely due to the mountainous climate and exposure to UV light, Areni is a thick-skinned variety that grows in tight bunches. Aimee and winemaker Arman Manoukian use neutral oak to concentrate Areni's brambly fruit aromas and herbal undernotes. More dark-fruited than the Classic, the Areni Reserve has the structure of a Burgenland Blaufrankisch or Côte-Rôtie Syrah.

The Keushguerian family suggests buying a case – drinking half the bottles young with Khorovats (grilled Armenian kebabs) and aging the other six bottles for a decade.

LIMITED TO 300 CASES / YEAR

WINERY: ZULAL

FOUNDED: 2017

VINTAGE: 2021

PRODUCER: AIMEE KEUSHGUERIAN

REGION: VAYOTS DZOR

VILLAGE: AGHASAFI

SOIL: ALLUVIAL ROCKS, VOLCANIC MATERIAL

ELEVATION: 1200 METERS

RATINGS: W&S: 93

VARIETY: 100% ARENI

AGING: 12 MO NEUTRAL FRENCH & LOCAL OAK

ALCOHOL: 15%

PRUNING: HEAD-TRAINED, TRELLISED MIX

FARMING: HAND-HARVESTED, SUSTAINABLE

VINE AGE: 50-100 YEARS, OWN-ROOTED