



MILAN RADULOVIĆ,
OWNER OF FAMILY CELLAR RADULOVIĆ LTD.

Top Barrique Fruit Rakija From The Radulović Family Cellar



In the quarter of a century of its existence, the Radulović cellar has succeeded in setting high standards in the production of barrique fruit rakija. "Dukat" Quince Rakija has won numerous awards at fairs, but, more importantly, it has won over the hearts and palates of lovers of quality, strong spirits. For its devotees it also has barrique raspberry rakija, and to mark the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the existence of the cellar, Mr Milan Radulović announces a new product: rakija from wild pear.

Technologist and military officer Milan Radulović planted a small orchard of 100 quince trees almost three and a half decades ago in the village of Čitluk near Kruševac. The number of trees has been increased steadily, so that Radulović's estate now has 2,500 of the highest quality quince trees, from which he produces the highest quality rakija. And it all started almost by accident...

• **The Radulović family cellar was built at the end of the last century, when the production of quince rakija was almost completely unknown. What was the motive for launching the production of quince rakija?**

- I launched production in 1991, so this year we celebrate 25 years, which is a great success for a small, family business, where working with me now are my daughters Ivana, a Master of Technology, and Jovana, a Master of Agro-Economics.

I had a quince plantation of 100 trees which I planted in 1982. In the meantime, I moved to Belgrade, and in 1991 the quince harvest was extraordinary. I picked 13 tonnes from 100 trees. I inquired as to what the bulk purchase price was at "Vino Župa", which produced high-quality quince juice, but it was bargain cheap.

Coincidentally, in daily newspaper

"Politika" I read a small article saying that quince rakija is great. As a technologist, I knew the technology for the production of rakija very well. I decided to launch experimental production of quince rakija. In the neighbourhood they were amazed, because nobody had even heard that rakija could be produced from quince.

I was lucky and in that first year I produced 600 to 700 litres of high-quality rakija. That was my impetus. At that time, quince rakija was produced only by "Vino Župa" and one producer from Tavankut.

The following year, I began to buy up quince, and from year to year the rakija has become increasingly better. Under the influence of Calvados (French apple brandy), I embarked on an experiment to see how the quince rakija would

react to wood, to produce in that way. After six months, I noticed that its quality had improved compared to young rakija. I produced rakija from 1991 to 2000, but it did not sell it, in order that I could unify the quality and create a reserve. In the meantime, I worked on the selection of bottles, designing labels and other supporting jobs.

• **How did the market react to "Dukat" quince rakija?**

- "Dukat" rakija is a protected brand at the Intellectual Property Office. When we ap-

peared on the market in 2001, both me and the product were anonymous. The previous year I received a championship medal in competition among 13 manufacturers of quince rakija at the Novi Sad Fair. That provided additional motivation for me to keep working.

For four consecutive years I was the champion of the international Novi Sad Fair, which has only ever been managed by Rubin's "Vinjak 5". The quality was proven there, but the best test was entering the market. "Dukat" quince brandy began to be sold modestly, but the owners and managers of the best restaurants and raft bars in Belgrade recognised the quality and began to order it. One should bear in mind that "Dukat" is an expensive product, but it quickly found its consumers. With serious work, by 2003 my quince rakija had already become a brand in Belgrade.

• **What kinds of rakija do you produce and what makes them unique?**

- As a young man, my father is from Toplica, from Radan Mountain, I tried wild pear rakija, which has a century-long tradition in that area. I liked it and it stayed in my memory, such that I often considered what it would be like to launch production.

Finally, six years ago, I started producing rakija from wild pears and I got a great product. This is also barrique barrel rakija, as it showed that the wood enriches.

I didn't want to release it on the market until I secured sufficient quantities. In less than a month from now, on the occasion of 25 years since the launch of production at the Radulović cellar, I will offer the market some 2,000 litres of wild pear rakija. Only restaurants and hotels that already buy our quince brandy will have the opportunity to buy it.

The difference between William's pear rakija and wild pear rakija is huge. This rakija leaves a stronger impression in the mouth, on the palate. It is more harmonious, fuller, slightly more robust, shaper. It has a mild bitterness, like quince, and is very specific. Comparisons between William's pear rakija and wild pear rakija are almost impossible, because the former cannot handle barrique barrels.

The wild pear trees I use are harvested at an altitude of 1,000 metres above sea-level, the fruits are gathered in the forest after falling from the trees on their own. The leaf and fruit of wild pear are very healthy, because they increase the immunity and reduce sugar levels.

What is interesting is that other manufacturers carry out "aging" in a barrel made of one type of wood. I use barrels made of two kinds of wood and then I carry out blending to certain degrees. I think the wild pear rakija will be fantastically received.

• **Where can your rakija be bought?**

- The greatest share, almost 90 per cent, is sold in Belgrade, Novi Sad and on Mount Kopaonik. The peak was reached in 2013. I had an offer from "Idea" for "Dukat" to go on the shelves in retail outlets, but I declined that. This is a premium product, and if it had gone onto the shelves there wouldn't have been enough for regular customers, restaurants and raft bars.

I wanted to produce a few thousand litres per year when I started, but the market was such that I increased production. Now the annual production capacity is up to 15,000 litres, but we don't insist on that at all costs. Quality is very important to us.

• **Since the year 2000, the Radulović cellar has also been producing raspberry rakija and maturing it in barrique barrels. What challenges did you meet when storing raspberry rakija in barriques?**

- Barrique raspberry has been made for 15 years already and is well received by the market, but the problem is that the majority of people in Serbia don't know that rakija can also be produced from raspberry. Everybody associates raspberry with a liquor. Raspberry rakija sells well, but nevertheless significantly less than quince rakija.

Our raspberries are the highest quality in the world. Hits on the price of raspberries disappoint producers. Raspberry growers could organise themselves and connect with rakija producers. Raspberry rakija is highly valued in Europe. One bottle is sold for as much as 100 euros, and that is a great opportunity for everyone.

• **How important is packaging for placing rakija on the market?**

- "Dukat" quince rakija has its standard commercial packaging, with which it is supplied to restaurants, but also exclu-

sive packaging for which the bottle was designed by Aca Portnoj of the Serbian glass factory in Paraćin. That design solution is protected. This unique bottle is very interesting and more of them were sold in the beginning. People first buy due to the beautiful shape, the label, but it is important that there is a quality product inside.

The marketing and commercial sides are very important. The new product must reach the eyes and ears of the customer. The first years are especially important, and during that time aggression is a necessity. Later, a good product sells itself. The peak for every product is when demand is higher than supply. ■

