



20 | TERRY THEISE
17 | ESTATE SELECTIONS

AUSTRIA



THEISE MANIFESTO

Beauty is more important than impact.

Harmony is more important than intensity.

*The whole of any wine must always
be more than the sum of its parts.*

*Distinctiveness is more important
than conventional prettiness.*

*Soul is more important than anything,
and soul is expressed as a trinity of
family, soil and artisanality.*

*Lots of wines, many of them good wines,
let you taste the noise. But only the
best let you taste the silence.*

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AUSTRIA

INTRODUCTION | 1

STYRIA

Hirschmann 7

LEITHABERG “DAC”

Prieler 8

NEUSIEDLERSEE-HÜGELLAND

Heidi Schröck 11

NEUSIEDLERSEE

Sattler 14

SÜDBURGENLAND | 16

Wallner 17

Krutzler 19

CARNUNTUM

Glatzer 21

WEINVIERTEL | 24

Sektkellerei Christian Madl 25

Schwarzböck 27

H.u.M. Hofer 29

Setzer 31

WAGRAM | 33

Ecker 34

Ott 37

KREMSTAL & KAMPTAL | 40

Berger 41

Nigl 44

Bründlmayer 47

Schloss Gobelsburg 52

Hiedler 57

Hirsch 60

WACHAU | 62

Alzinger 63

Nikolaihof-Wachau 66

HANS REISETBAUER | 70

REFERENCE | 71

INTRODUCTION



Austria has taken a firm place in the market, but this is a double-edged sword. Its stature is seemingly durable, but it is small, it is minor, and it can safely be disregarded. It often suffices to include “Austria” by dint of a token selection of wines that don’t begin to exploit the very large gifts this wine culture has to bestow on us. This makes me a little crazy. Not long ago I was in a restaurant while the staff were gathered to taste a new wine they’d just received. I’m a friend-of-the-house, and was offered a taste. It was a decent, solid European wine, I wouldn’t have minded drinking it but wouldn’t have had a second thought for it. On the way home it struck me, powerfully, that I can offer twenty or thirty wines of greater quality for that price, from this “Austria” place that so many of us merely glance at. Those wines would have been actively delightful and memorable, yet they live in the unlaut-ghetto and have to cede space to lesser wines from “hipper” places.

This is also true of Germany—and by the way, the restaurant I spoke about is a great supporter of both categories, lovely people whom I wish I could clone – but Austria is considerably simpler than Ger-

many. In Germany you have to deal with a theological degree of obscurity and confusion about what it actually is as a wine culture. Not so in Austria.

In Austria, the overwhelming majority of white wines are entirely dry, and those that are not dry are nearly always dessert-wine sweet. In Austria, the overwhelming majority of red wines are ripe and “viable” by international standards—not cool-climate curious—and they comprise a vitally healthy community of warm, dark-colored, medium-weight fruit-and-mineral-driven *food* wines.

You’ll have heard of most of the grape varieties, but what’s the point of the ones you’ve heard of? What makes Austria cool are her own grapes: Grüner Veltliner, Blaufränkisch (those two above all), Zweigelt, St. Laurent, alongside some of the greatest Rieslings on the face of the earth and excellent Pinot Blanc, Muscat and (even) Sauvignon Blanc. I often think, if we were only *now* introducing these wines to the market, y’all would fall upon them like salivating wolves. That they have been here for a generation (plus) makes them wines you suppose you can safely disregard.

That is a fatal mistake. If you care about offering your customers the best wines you can find, excellent values, quirky individual characters, compelling complexities, great wines cheaper than any other great wines in the world, you are derelict in your duties if you don’t dive into these wines in a very big way.

Grumpy old fucker, ain’t I!

Austria’s greatest contribution to the wine world is its native and signature grape variety, Grüner Veltliner. Most of you know it exists, yet there’s a kind of stink to it, as in something that “used to be trendy.” Think of the way you’re discovering all these hitherto-unknown cool things from all over the place, and how much fun it is. That was Grüner Veltliner in the late 90s and early “aughts.” And you don’t want to repeat what those guys did; you want to do new things. Got it, and sympathize.

The problem is, what should have happened was to recognize GV as a classic, whereas what did (too often) happen was it got swept into the rubbish pile of the previously fashionable.

You’re not gonna like what I’m about to say, but in the service of truth I have

to say it. Not one single thing that's since been discovered, trumped, lionized, promulgated, put on wine lists and talked about with giddy delight, not ONE. DAMN. THING. has been nearly as excellent as Grüner Veltliner. Put any of them in my face, and I'll just keep annoying you; Jura? Love them, not as good as GV. Timorosso? Very cool and interesting, not as good as GV. Doesn't matter what you push upon me; you are ignoring *much* sweeter and lower-hanging fruit in order to clamber to the top of the tree and pluck inferior material.

So I'm asking you to look again. Taste seriously and see what your dollars (or your boss's) are actually buying, and then really, please, *do* make the best case you can that there's better wine for the money than GV will give. I want to hear it; it will help me. If you're right, it will humble my sad smug ass, which anyone will tell you is a good thing.

But I don't think you can. No one can.

The "marketing" of this point can seem a little needy, and I suppose it is, because we've been saying for twenty years that Grüner Veltliner ages fabulously, and ability to age is how we know to take a wine seriously, or so I've been told. An august panel was convened one October in New York, to taste a bunch of mature GVs; Aldo Sohm was on it, David Schildknecht, Jancis Robinson, Willi Klinger, and for some reason, me. My guys at Skurnik staged another tasting in January, of Rieslings and GVs from the Kamptal going back to 1969. I thought the point was made, but I was already sold. The only way to know how the tasters felt is to see what they do, whether they decide to take GV seriously as opposed to ensuring the few token wines are duly stocked.

Austria is also a markedly good producer of red wines, from three native varieties I'll describe in a few pages. These wines are not simple, but neither are they routinely grandiose and complex. They are wonderful medium-weight food-friendly fruit-driven wines. They are distinctive and individual. They get what wine's supposed to do at the table and in our lives. They're not afraid to be delicious. If you're someone who likes Foradori's basic Teroldego more than the Granato, your mind is ready for Austrian red. (And speaking of which: Lagrein? *Love Lagrein!* Blaufränkisch is better.)

This doesn't even address the Rieslings, which stand with the world's best *dry* examples of the variety. They have more body, somewhat less acidity, more succulence and more "exotic" flavors than the good Trocken Germans. (Those

in turn have perhaps greater precision, more digital focus, and a "cooler" feel, but the two are more alike than they are different.) And while there's still a distressing proportion of severely gnarly rasping dry German Rieslings—fewer than before, but *not none*—this is not the case in Austria. The worst you can say about an Austrian Riesling is that it's nondescript, whereas the worst of the Germans are painfully shrill.

AN INSIDER-Y RANT YOU CAN FEEL FREE TO IGNORE (THOUGH IT'S KINDA DELICIOUS...)

One symptom of Austria's maturing as a wine culture is they're starting to fart around with committees and rules. But before I go further, a disclosure; I am innately suspicious of collective action, because it very often devolves into "politics" and even when it doesn't, a group enterprise is too often dictated by its least smart members, and even when *that* doesn't happen, the group becomes a self-perpetuating mechanism. It exists in order to demonstrate its need to exist. It does that by taking actions. Often those actions are useful at the beginning, but having produced a bunch of useful actions, most groups keep going instead of disbanding while they were ahead. And the actions they take become more and more obscure, metaphysical and abstruse. They start to do harm.

Clearly my wariness arises from a quirk of my particular temperament. Yet it's also, let's say, not inaccurate. I prefer to contemplate a world in which individual persons are doing the finest most beautiful work they can, and to observe the aggregation of all that personal passion into a pattern and a current. It makes for a kind of *de facto* movement, but each single person's work is unsullied. Gather those individuals into a conference over some weekend, give the movement a name and a platform, print brochures and business cards and start planning the next conference, and I don't think you've improved things very much. "Being a movement with a name" takes time away from doing the actual work, it often seems. But, yes, I am skeptical of collective enterprise (except of course in the realm of the body-politic). So take what I'm about to say with that in mind.

The otherwise sensible and laudable *Traditionsweingüter*, a group consisting of growers in the Kremstal, Kamptal, Wagram and Traisental, has been diddling

with rules, regs and proscriptions regarding members' top single-site "reserve" bottlings. It was fine, in my opinion, to have classified vineyards, they've done as defensible job as can be done, and I support the idea in principle. I support this group in general, actually, and only take issue with their latest shenanigans. To wit: they want to forbid their members from selling the top tier of wines—so-called "DAC Reserve" wines from *Erste Lage* (first growth) sites before September of the year after the vintage. They also wish to forbid those wines from being tasted *at all* by anyone except visitors to the wineries, until they are bottled and offered for sale. That means you, cutie.

Let's delve into the thinking here. I suppose the overriding goal is to discourage these wines from being vinified to be presentable too early. *But why?* We are supposed to accept the absolute value of these "important" wines needing a pre-determined amount of time before they are ready to be sold. I do not accept that value as a one-size-fits-all proposition. Some growers' wines need more time than others, and the idea that one can mandate a minimum plays into two unattractive tendencies. One, to wrap these wines in an effulgent aura of Great And Serious Intent, and two, to encourage a weird sort of machismo I have noticed, whereby some growers are proud of how long their wines need, as though this was ipso-facto preferable to them being drinkable sooner. Well maybe it is, maybe it isn't, but I reject the idea as a *diktat* or a holy writ.

Perhaps it's a question of marketing or of leveling the playing field. That is, if grower-A's big-deal wines are being sold in May, it puts grower-B at a disadvantage if his wines aren't ready until September. But does it? Here's another assumption you can't take at face value. Are consumers really that helpless? Can't they suss that some guy's wine takes longer than his neighbor's? So what if a given grower's "first-growth" wine happens to taste good and be ready to sell after seven or eight months? If he has damaged that wine's aging capacity, isn't that ultimately his problem? Eventually observers will observe—this dude's wines don't go the distance. In essence—"Big wines that are presentable young: are you being *cheated*?" Film at eleven.

Why does any of this matter? Because the poo-bahs don't even want the wines to be shown off-site, except to professionals under strictly curtailed conditions. That means I can't let you taste them when we make our rounds in June. And that

in turn means I am in effect asking you to decide to buy these not-inexpensive wines *sight-unseen*. I know how accurate and enticing my tasting notes are, hee-hee-hee, but come on, really? They will ask, what's the fuss? You make another offer in January, show them then. Yes, if they're still available!

One can always disregard the rule, I guess, if one has an outlaw's disposition. But in that case why be a member of an organization in the first place? Or maybe you just flout the regs and the devil take the hindmost, except that they *fine* you if they catch you, and the fine is big enough to sting. You could, I guess, refuse to pay it, and then they boot you out. In my option you'd be better off, but that's just weird old me.

I proposed, only somewhat in jest, that the committee charter an Airbus A-380 to fly 500-600 of us over to Austria, since we're only *permitted* to taste these wines there. Hey, I didn't make the rules. I just want you to be able to taste at least some of these wines before you hand over your coin. See *unintended consequences, law of*. In any case, we have proposed a modification of the prohibition and asked for dispensation to show you the wines pending a final decision.

So, sigh....it was nice while it lasted. Twenty three years ago when I first offered Austrian wines, the culture was so stirring, so fresh, idealistic, oxygenated; it was heady and thrilling. Sure they experimented with "international" style reds, and with over-endowed behemoth whites, but they retreated from both those things (a few of the whites can still use some work...) and right now, looking at the wines alone, there is no healthier wine culture in the world. None. Thus it is dispiriting to see them groping for evidence of lofty intent by repeating all the mistakes of neighboring wine cultures throughout Europe; strait-jacketing appellation laws, and systems superimposed over the existing (and sufficient) truths of the actual wines, systems which must now be explained alongside the wines. None of it is necessary and none of it is helpful, and this mischief with the first-growth wines is only the latest in a sorry chain of well-intended postures whereby Austria seeks to demonstrate that She Belongs. Guess what? She belonged already.

* THE 2016 VINTAGE *

In style it is not dissimilar to the vintage in Germany. But conditions were

different in the latter part of the growing season. The Austrians suffered the same appalling weather everyone in Europe suffered, unremitting rain before flowering, during flowering and into the middle of the summer. Downy and powdery mildews abounded and growers were in their vineyards nonstop. But in Germany it grew sunny and dry by mid-August and by harvest they were concerned about *drought*, whereas in Austria it wasn't so clement.

Yet the wines are mostly lovely. There's a word that kept cropping up—*sapid*—which it turned out I was using incorrectly. It means merely to have a "strong and agreeable taste," yet what I was fruitlessly trying to convey was a liquid quality whereby the wines felt moist, flowing, and almost innocent. Everything tasted like Styrian wine, actually, but that isn't helpful because few of you know what those wines are like. It is a quality of charm relating to dew. The cool hours at the start of a warm day. The first fresh green when the trees leaf out, it feels like you could grab them and squeeze out a fragrant green juice. It's more of a feel than a flavor, or a set of flavors. That said, the vintage has identifiable components.

One is high(er) acidity than the recent norm. It's not enough to even notice in Grüner Veltliner except to the extent you approve of it, but for some Rieslings it tends to clip them, so that they smell good and enter the palate attractively only to finish with an abrupt drop-off of fruit. But don't go thinking it's a GV-vintage but not a Riesling vintage, because in truth it depended on the individual grower.

Also, there is a fairly narrow span between bottom and top in 2016. That is, the bottom level is higher than one would have expected—than I myself did at any rate—and the summits are seldom knockouts. There are incisive wines in 2016; there are intense wines, fascinating wines, quivering beautiful wines, but there are few if any big wines. I heard the phrase "After 2015 it's back to reality," but really, *what* reality? In this case the reality is, Austrian Rieslings and GVs are generally so outstanding that they shine even in (so-called) normal vintages.

Botrytis doesn't seem to have been a problem. This isn't another 2014. To the degree the 16s have anything you could call a common problem, it is that a few of them can taste incomplete. There are some small wines. I didn't select them, obviously, but the vintage entails them. It's also a year of tangible contrasts between good, excellent and superb land and growers. And also a year of surpris-

es; where did that **Schwarzböck** vintage come from??? What on earth took over Erich **Berger**!?

The growers were also surprised by their reds. They anticipated slimmer wines, but these reds—at least the "basic" ones—were delicious and anything but slight or aloof.

Assume a white wine is a *mélange* of flavors, among them flowers, fruits, minerals/rocks/whatever, veggies, herbs and spices, and assume different vintages combine these flavors in varying proportions. If I say that 2016 places flowers in the foreground, it doesn't mean there aren't other flavors, just that they're behind flowers in the framework. I'd actually say that '16 goes like this: flowers-herbs-minerals-fruits-veggies. As far as texture – cold, quick-running stream...sleek, not scrawny, long but a slim line of length, not a big strong beam. As far as structure—high cheekbones, penetrating blue eyes, good looking polymorphs.

As far as the must-buy index, I told you that 2013 and 2015 were both have-to-have vintages, and to a large extent you ignored me, because people don't really "buy vintages" here the way they do in places they take more seriously. Too bad, but more great wine for the few and the proud (and the smug!). For people who like Austrian wine, who buy some each year, who drink the wines regularly, these wines will please you and charm you and you'll be happy to have them. A good many of them are superb, some may be great, and a small number may be profound, but this isn't what one would insist is a "great" vintage; it simply shows how good *good* can be in a wine culture with such a high baseline.

Lovers of Gelber Muskateller will perhaps share my surprise at how good the '16s are. In such a vintage I feared they'd be too skinny and miss the elderflower aroma, but no; they're really lovely, especially if you don't mind a salivating acidity.

There aren't many 2015s left, but they still look good. I wondered if '16 would make them seem corpulent, but no. I think '15 will be all I hoped it would be, and right now my sense is it will ultimately exceed 2013, though both are outstanding vintages.

HIGHLIGHTS AND SUPERLATIVES

The **winery of the vintage** is always a tough call. If I only look at the number of wonderful wines then it tends to go to the usual suspects, and we know who they

are. There are also collections that included late-released 2015s, which ought not to be in play. Best perhaps to consider the grower I haven't stopped thinking about, the wines that cut deepest, the collection that accumulated into the greatest sense of wonder and otherworldliness. It was a fast-paced tasting on a busy Sunday morning, and the poor proprietor was clearly in some stress with everywhere he had to be and everyone he had to greet. Yet those were the wines by which I am now haunted.

And so, the winery of the vintage, is **NIGL**. Martin's wines are seldom sensual hedonists, but when they play their hypnotic eerie music like this, you feel like your cells are rearranging, your IQ is increasing, and your fingertips are forming new patterns.

RUNNERS UP include, Alzinger, Ott, Hiedler (those Rieslings!).

The **collection of the offering**, taking multiple vintages into account, is **NIKOLAIHOF**, followed closely behind by **BRUNDMAYER**.

The wine of the vintage (2016) will be divided between Grüner Veltliner and Riesling. And so:

GV: the nominees are **OTT** Rosenberg, **GOBELSBURG** Renner, and **NIGL** Alte Reben. **The winner is OTT**. That wine is crazed.

RIESLING: The nominees are **ALZINGER** Hollerin Smaragd, **HIEDLER** Steinhaus, **BERGER** Steingraben, **BRUNDMAYER** Heiligenstein Lyra, and **NIGL** Hochäcker. **The winner is NIGL**. That wine made me cry. (No one saw me.)

The **greatest wines in the offering, regardless of vintage**, are **GOBELSBURG** GV TRADITION 2015, and **NIKOLAIHOF** RIESLING STEINER HUND "JUNGFERNLESE" 2005. There's also a supernal 2009 GV Smaragd from **NIKOLAIHOF** that's only available as one in a mixed-case vertical.

The **overachiever of the vintage** (as opposed to the "best value" which is coming up), is **BRUNDMAYER** GV **Vogelsang**.

The **best value among the 2016s is/are GOBELSBURG'S basic GV** (which will surprise exactly no one), but also **HIRSCH's basic GV**, **GLATZER'S GV "Dornenvogel"**, and **SCHWARZBOCK'S GV Bisamberg-Kreuzstein**.

The **best value regardless of vintage or color** is **GLATZER'S 2015 Blaufränkisch Reserve**.

The **top Rosé** is, by far and without any doubt, **HEIDI SCHROCK'S Rosé Biscaya**. It is closely trailed by **PRIELER**.

The **best Muscat** of the vintage is **NIGL**

for precision and minerality and **BERGER** for, not to put too fine a point on it, fucking deliciousness.

The **most noteworthy reds**, regardless of variety and price-point, i.e. the ones I want for myself at home, are **GLATZER** as mentioned above, **WALLNER 2015 Blaufränkisch Eisenberg DAC**, **PRIELER** (see below), **HOFFER 2015 St Laurent**, and **BRUNDMAYER 2015 Zweigelt Reserve**.

The **one single wine** that most astonished me, that may never be repeated, that has no precedent nor any cause to suppose it would ever exist, is **PRIELER'S 2015 Pinot Noir Ried Satz**, which you could have poured me as Echèzeaux and I would have believed you.

It was a good year!

A SMALL NOMENCLATURE UPDATE

The wise elders of Austria have decided that every actual *vineyard* name appearing on a label must be preceded by the word **Ried**, which means "site" and which seeks to distinguish these names from any-old word a label might throw at you. Generally I frown at word-proliferation on labels, but this makes sense. So if you see the word "Schnitzel" on the label, you may now be sure this is not from a vineyard named Schnitzel—nice though that would be—but from a grower who thinks his wine goes well with Schnitzel, or who just likes to eat Schnitzel, or who likes the sound of "Schnitzel" and wants to hear you ask for it.

A SHORT NOTE FOR ARTISAN AND SMALL-BATCH LOVING HIPSTERS

The production culture of Austrian wine is perfectly aligned with your (and my) values.

A contrast with the "other-A country" i.e., Australia, is telling. Australia has 164,000 hectares under vine, and roughly 2,000 bottlers, divided among producers and négociants. In contrast Austria is far smaller, with 46,000 hectares, yet in Austria there are over 4,300 bottlers.

Among these bottlers the largest proportion consists of people who bottle fewer than 300 cases annually. Only 17 producers bottle more than 10,000 cases per year, a number that has fallen slightly since 2009. The largest bulge in the stats consists of people bottling between 300

and 5,000 cases annually.

That is an incredibly high proportion of small growers. I doubt very much whether Italy, France or Spain can make remotely similar claims. To the extent you support these wines you are also supporting the ongoing existence of one of the world's most robust small-batch wine cultures.

CERTAIN QUIRKY TASTING WORDS I USE, AND WHAT (I THINK) THEY MEAN...

I'll say **ore** if I think I'm tasting a minerality that seems ancient, carbonized, and that feels like it contains iron.

I'll say **physio-sweet** a bit reluctantly because I don't want you to think I mean "sugar." There is a sense of sweetness that comes from physiological (or "phenolic") ripeness, and you will sense it quite vividly. I used to call it "secret" sweetness but that could be misleading. Think of it this way: you know, I'm sure, at least one really *funny* person, who is so amusing that you're always at the edge of laughing even when (s)he isn't saying or doing funny things. That's the "sweetness" I mean; it's an aura of wonderful fruit that has nothing to do with "sugar."

I'll say **flowering fields** when there's a dispersed fecund aroma that's flowery but also a little feral, not the "sweet" floweriness of violets and wisteria and lilacs. Other tasters use "meadow-flowers" to describe similar impressions.

I'll say **vetiver**, but this is a true cognate. Google it. My own template for it is the Guerlain fragrance, a great favorite.

FIRST AMONG EQUALS

Once again I will highlight special favorites by use of one, two and three pluses (+, ++, +++). Call it my subjective short-list. It has to do with a quality of being stunned by a wine, and it can happen with "small" wines or big ones; it has to do with quality of flavor as much as with rendering of flavor.

One plus means something like one Michelin star. Pay particular attention to this wine. Try not to miss it.

Two pluses is like two Michelin stars, getting close to as-good-as-it-gets now, no home should be without it. It's indispensable.

Three pluses almost never appear, because these are the wines that go where

you simply cannot imagine anything better. Like three Michelin stars. There are rarely more than a wine or two per year that reach this level, 'cause your intrepid taster has to be virtually flattened with ecstasy.

There is sentiment to the effect that using any form of highlighting is invidious, since it damns the wines without plusses as also-rans. Obviously that's not the case, but I agree there's a danger whenever one establishes a hierarchy based on scores, even in such a primitive system as mine. But there's also a pragmatic consideration at play; you can't buy every wine in this offering, and my plusses try to answer the implied question *What should I not miss no matter what?* And of course you'll still pore through the prose for my many jokes and puns, and the Masonic messages I've cannily embedded within it. I'm also aware there can be political ramifications at play, and I ask you to believe I do my best to ignore them. A grower might feel slighted if he doesn't get enough plusses. A guy who luvved me for all the plusses I gave him last year might wonder what happened if he got fewer or none this year. The pressure's on—and at the moment of tasting, I don't care. Nothing matters but the wine.

WHEN TO DRINK THE WINES

You can drink GrüVe either very young if you enjoy its primary fruit, or very old if you like mature flavors. GrüVe seems to age in a steady climb. Naturally the ripper it is the longer it goes, but in general it doesn't start showing true tertiary flavors till it's about 12 years old. Even then it's just a patina. Around 20-25 it starts tasting like grown-up mature wine—but still *not old*. Wait a little longer.

Riesling, amazingly, ages faster. In certain vintages it takes on the flavor-known-as “petrol,” which it later sheds. Great Austrian Riesling will certainly make old bones—30-40 years for the best wines—but all things being equal GrüVe tastes younger at every point along the way. So: young is always good. If you want mature overtones wait about ten years. If you want a completely mature wine, wait about twenty.

Even more improbable; Pinot Blanc can make it to fifteen or even twenty years quite easily. If you want to wait, you'll end up with something recalling a somewhat rustic white Burgundy. Mr. Hiedler has shown me more than a few striking old masterpieces, but then, he has The Touch with this variety.

A NOTE ON MY USE OF THE WORD “URGESTEIN”

I have tended to use this term as the Austrians do, to refer to a family of metamorphic soils based on primary rock. While it's a useful word, you should bear in mind Urgestein isn't a single soil but a general group of soils. There are important distinctions among it: some soils have more mica, silica, others are schistuous (fractured granite), still others contain more gneiss. Hirsch's twin-peaks of Gaisberg and Heiligenstain are both classed as Urgestein sites, yet they're quite different in flavor.

THE QUESTIONS OF ORGANICS

First, I'm not going to politicize this issue, because I don't grow grapes or make wine for a living, and thus it would be fatuous of me to preach to people who *do*, about living up to my precious standards. What I'll do instead is say what I see on the ground, and suggest what I hope will be useful positions.

The consensus among serious growers is to go as far as prudence will allow toward organic growing. Few of them use chemical fertilizers, or pesticides or herbicides, but many of them either use or *reserve the right* to use fungicides. Nearly every grower I know (or with whom I've discussed these issues) is mindful of the need for sustainability. Some of them just do their thing and answer only to their own conscience. Others belong to various organizations certifying and controlling what's called “Integrated” growing, wherein the allowable spraying compounds are detailed and enforced. There are two ways to look at this. One says these growers are just lazy or risk-averse and “integrated” growing is just a green-wash for something not much better than conventional/ chemical. I doubt many people who hold that opinion have ever had to support a family as winery proprietors, but their ferocity is at least well meant. The other opinion—the one I myself hold—is that any step in the right direction is to be encouraged, and it's very likely the world is more improved if most people are taking those steps than if only a few are, because when forced to choose between all or nothing, they choose nothing.

The truly organic or biodynamic estates can choose whether to certify by various means, and most of them do. I have one certified-organic and two bio-

dynamic estates in this assortment. The political issues around certification can be thorny, especially if one's a lone wolf by nature. But what's the alternative? If you won't certify, do you really have a right to the claim of “organic” or “biodynamic?” After all, anyone can *talk* whatever he pleases, but the ones who endure the paperwork and the politics ought to be the only ones with rights to the power of the organic “brand.”

My position is to encourage the growers with whom I work to take whatever steps they can in an organic direction. I don't think it improves their wines in ways you can taste discretely, though conscientiousness in one thing often implies conscientiousness in all things. Most important, I don't subject my growers to any sort of purity test with only pass/fail as options. There are reasonable approaches other than mine, and I respect them, but this one works for me.

AUSTRIAN RED WINES

Well, they tried, and then bless them, they stopped. They wanted to show they could compete in the world of big oaky dull reds and so they planted the usual grapes and bought the usual barriques and made a few plausible wines. And then one day they woke up and realized they were far too eager to give the world a type of wine the world was already drowning in. They looked a little silly. The wines were paint-by-numbers.

And so they looked around and asked the true, salient questions. What do we have? What unique thing can we contribute? How do we add to the sum of distinctive interesting wine in the world?

Here is how those questions are being answered. Not “have been” answered, but *are being* answered, because this is a culture in motion, and one that learns each year.

What seems to be true is, Austrian red wines straddle a line between “warm” and “cool” styles. They are rich and ripe—most of them make 13.5% alc without chaptalization. Most are dark in color. Most have the physiological “sweetness” of fully ripe fruit. Most are glossy and polished. But *most are fruit-driven*, medium in weight and *FOOD FRIENDLY*. Partly by dint of geography and partly by choice of grape variety, these are structured wines that seldom carry the stewy heat of hot-climate reds. Finally, most use wood as a seasoning and a nuance, because they got bored with overtly woody wines that taste the same as everyone else's in the world.

And most important, Austria's reds are delicious. There's that word again. I see tasters finding (or dreaming) all kinds of virtues in the hipster wine-of-the-week, whatever quirky little beast comes from some obscure place that gives people bragging rights for "discovering" something previously—and often deservedly—unknown. Because if we are really honest, we have to acknowledge that some wines are obscure for very good reasons; they aren't that good. "We make this wine as it's been made for 1100 years, by passing the juice back over grape seeds that have been eaten and shit back out by a ferret," and while that may be an interesting story, it's probably a lousy glass of wine.

With even a modicum of selectivity, which is where I come in, it is almost always a yummy, helpful, substantive and yet charming glass of wine from Austria. They're made from three native grape varieties that barely grow anywhere else. At least one of them offers all the angular quirks you could ever crave, but it won't insult your intelligence or your palate. Another is absurdly delicious. Yet another is entirely compelling and fiendishly hard to grow. Here they are.

Blafränkisch is the one with the highest up side, making nearly all of Austria's most important reds. The best of these are among the world's great red wines—not, perhaps, the greatest, but certainly the great. That echelon is represented here by PRIELER'S Goldberg and Marienthal single-vineyards, and by KRUTZLER'S iconic Perwölff.

Blafränkisch is essentially the wine Sauvignon Blanc would be if it were red. It rarely has a lot of "fruit" but it seems to have every possible berry and cherry, and if you taste bilberry, juniper, huckleberry, blackberry, black raspberry, black cherry, regular old cherry, I won't argue. BF also seems to have every herb under the sun, and I mean *under the sun*, as it tastes as though the herbs were hot when you plucked them. If you're an imaginative type and you write "weeds" or "garrigue" you're also getting the signal. If you smell and taste cracked black peppercorns, you're in. BF will appeal to the lover of Cabernet Franc, and if you're a habitué of Old-World Malbec or Tannat, you're also in the ballpark. It also feints toward Cabernet Sauvignon though in Austria it is far more interesting.

Its flavors are highly focused because it has the highest acidity of any important red wine—as high as Champagne. When it's ripe enough it brings a lavish and satisfying juiciness to its precision and clarity, and for a wine as un-seductive as

this one is, it gives a great keen pleasure and scratches an itch few other reds can reach. It is a "vertical" red, not opulent; nor does it murmur or soothe. It's exciting and dynamic. It is also sensitive to soil, and is a reciter-of-terroir in a way I think can only be equaled by Pinot Noir. (Curiously, certain BFs start to resemble certain Burgundies when they're about 6-9 years old.)

BF has the widest quality spread of Austria's big-3 red grapes, reaching the greatest heights but also – when it's poorly vinified or wasn't ripe enough—giving gnarly unhappy wines that aren't very nice. But anyone who loves *Riesling* should be making a beeline for BF, and I am baffled by any curious wine nerd who looks past this variety in order to alight upon manifestly inferior stuff. (Jura reds? Really?)

Sankt Laurent is Burgundy-plus. It resembles a Burgundy that was cut with 10-15% Mourvèdre (or in other words, pre-war Burgundy...), offering the sweet roundness of Pinot with the darker barkier flavors of southern Rhônes. The basic wine from SATTLER will show you the pure fruit with no wood at all.

You say it the German way; it sounds like "zonked cow rent." Though it resembles Pinot, it's not genetically related. But like Pinot, it is hard to grow; indeed a lot harder. It's a vineyard prima-donna that won't flower if it's the least bit miffed, and which gives a tight cluster of thin-skinned berries liable to rot, and so it needs a lot of canopy management and yield control and bunch thinning. No grower makes a lot, and the only reason anyone makes any is because it tastes amazing. When you get a good one it will cover you in hugs and kisses, and you will gloat inwardly at the money you saved over the Burgundy you were gonna buy. If you think along lines of smoky, "blackened" Burgundy, you'll know what to expect.

Last there is **Zweigelt**, which is a 1933 crossing of BF and SL named after the man who created it. Zweigelt is both blessed and cursed by its insane attractiveness, and is sometimes relegated to beautiful-airhead status. If you skimmed the sweet top-notes off of Syrah, and left the earthy/animal stuff behind, you'd have Zweigelt. Considered a "workhorse" grape, if it yields too generously you get a sweet-scented St Amour or Regnie sort of wine, but if you crop it too thin you get a kind of opacity. It's tempting to just render it thoughtlessly because it is so tempting, but I'm seeing a lot of people asking "Just how good can this variety be if we really probe into it and see what potential it has?"

I can show it to you in many idioms, from all-steel to full-on "serious" wine vinification, but what you can *always* expect is a wine that smells gorgeous and enticing, sometimes feinting toward its BF parent and other times toward its SL parent, and almost always growing rounder and more plummy with air. It seems to exist only to give joy, but many examples don't stop at joy, but offer several dimensions of dustiness and complexity, always staying fruity and seeming to always be hale.

You could say Zweigelt is like Schiava, Blafränkisch is like Lagrein and St. Laurent is like Corvino, if that helps. I'll throw in the umlauts for free.

Below the echelon in which red wine is Earnestly Great, I need it to be delicious. It bores me when it affects the attributes of "greatness" (which usually means overextraction, overoaking and too much alcohol) and does not deliver. Just because you wear a muscle shirt don't mean you got muscles. I am a great lover of tasty reds, which usually fall at or below 13% alc and which just seem to *drain* out of the bottle, you drink them so fast. For me, a red wine is truly great when it gladdens the senses and flatters the food. That's the baseline. You can add mystery and complexity and atmosphere, you can add length, power and concentration, but you reach a point where an excess of pleasure becomes a kind of soreness.

There's a developing story that concerns the remarkable improvement of the red wines from regions once thought to be white-wine only. Maybe it's climate change. But after the whole French Paradox thing broke, lots of growers felt they had to make a token red wine or two, just so the customer wouldn't have to go elsewhere for them. Most of those wines were pretty anemic, and a few of them are still pretty clunky. But more and more of them are viable, attractive and very tasty beings. We don't sell them very much, because (I think) you prefer to spend your red-wine Dollar on a grower who specializes in reds. Makes sense. But you're missing out on some very tasty numbers.

Herewith a list of reds-from-white-wine growers, which I plead with you not to ignore:

HOFER
ECKER
SCHLOSS GOBELSBURG
BERGER
SETZER
BRÜNDLMAYER

HIRSCHMANN



REGION / PRODUCT

Styria / Roasted Pumpkin Seed Oil

It was on my first trip to Austria. In the achingly beautiful region of South Styria, I was sitting in a sweet little country restaurant waiting for my food to arrive. Bread was brought, dark and sweet, and then a little bowl of the most unctuous looking oil I'd ever seen was placed before me, clearly for dunking, but this stuff looked **serious**, and I wasn't going to attempt it till I knew what it was. Assured by my companion that it wouldn't grow hair on my palms, I slipped a corner of bread into it and tasted.

And my culinary life was forever changed.

Since then everyone, without exception, who has visited Austria has come back raving about this food. It's like a sweet, sexy secret a few of us share. Once you taste it, you can barely imagine how you ever did without it. I wonder if there's another foodstuff in the world as little-known and as intrinsically spectacular as this one.

WHAT IT TASTES LIKE AND HOW IT'S USED

At its best, it tastes like an ethereal essence of the seed. It is dark, intense, viscous; a little goes a long way. In Austria it is used as a condiment; you dunk bread in it, drizzle it over salads, potatoes, eggs, mushrooms, even soups; you can use it in salad dressings (in which case you may *cut* it with extra-virgin olive oil, lest it become *too* dominant!); there are doubtless many other uses which I am too big a food clod to have gleaned. If you develop any hip ideas and don't mind sharing them —attributed of course—I'd be glad to hear from you. THE FACTS: this oil is the product of a particular kind of

pumpkin, smaller than ours, and green with yellow stripes rather than orange. The main factor in the quality of the oil is, not surprisingly, the **QUALITY OF THE SEEDS THEMSELVES**. Accordingly, they are hand-scooped out of the pumpkin at harvest time; it's quite picturesque to see the women sitting in the pumpkin patches at their work—though the work is said to be arduous.

OTHER DECISIVE FACTORS FOR QUALITY ARE:

1. Seeds of local origin. Imported seeds produce an inferior oil.
2. Hand-sorting. No machine can do this job as well as attentive human eyes and hands.
3. Hand-washing of the seeds. Machine-washed seeds, while technically clean, lose a fine silvery-green bloom that gives the oils its incomparable flavor.
4. Temperature of roasting. The lower the temperature, the nuttier the flavor. Higher temperatures give a more roasted taste. Too high gives a coarse, scorched flavor.
5. Relative gentleness or roughness of mashing. The seeds are mashed as they roast, and the more tender the mashing, the more polished the final flavor.

To make a quick judgment on the quality of the oil, look at the color of the "rim" if you pour the oil into a shallow bowl. It should be virtually opaque at the center, but vivid green at the rim. If it's too brown, it was roasted too long.

After roasting and mashing, the seeds are pressed and the oil emerges. And that's all. It cools off and gets bottled. And tastes miraculous.

STORING AND HANDLING

The oils are natural products and therefore need attentive treatment. Store them in a cool place; if the oil is overheated it goes rancid. Guaranteed shelf-life if stored properly is twelve to eighteen months from bottling. Bottling dates are indicated on the label.

THE ASSORTMENT

In the early days I tasted a wide variety of oils and selected the three millers whose oils I liked best. Typical wine-geek, eh! I couldn't confine it to just one; oh no, there were too many *interesting* distinctions between them. Well, time passed by and I began to see the sustainable level of business the oils would bring. If we were in the fancy-food matrix we'd be selling a ton of these oils (they really are that good and that unique) but we're wine merchants and we don't have the networks or contacts. So I'm reducing the assortment to just one producer, my very favorite: HIRSCHMANN.

Leo Hirschmann makes the La Tâche of pumpkin seed oil. It has amazing polish and complexity.

BOTTLE SIZES

The basic size is 500 ml. Liter bottles are also available, which might be useful for restaurants who'd like to lower the per-ounce cost. Finally we offer **250ml** bottles, ideal for retailers who'd like to get the experimental impulse sale; the oil can be priced below \$20 in the lil' bottle.

OAT-003 (12/250ml)

OAT-007 (12/500ml)

OAT-010 (6/1.0L)

PRIELER



REGION / SUB REGION

Leithaberg "DAC" / Schützen

VINEYARD AREA

20 hectares

ANNUAL PRODUCTION

8,000 cases

TOP SITES AND SOIL TYPES

Goldberg
(slate) ;
Seeberg,
Sinner
(limestone, mica schist) ;
Ungerbergen
(limestone with pebbles) ;
Mariantal
(limestone)

GRAPE VARIETIES

30% Blaufränkisch
15% Cabernet Sauvignon
14% Pinot Noir
10% Chardonnay
10% Merlot
10% Pinot Blanc
8% St. Laurent
3% Welschriesling

Under Georg Prieler this is becoming one of Burgenland's (why stop there? One of *Austria's*) most interesting and compelling producers. They are now CERTIFIED ORGANIC (by Lacon) and are contemplating a look at bio-dynamics. To a large extent this is/was already being done, as Georg's father—the ever-laughing "Bert'l"—has long been a vine-whisperer, and now that he's in the vineyards full-time his vines are even giddier. (In some cases the organic conversion entails little more than codifying existing practices, at least in happy cases like this one.)

It was the Pinot Blancs that led me here, lo those many years ago. The reds in those days were pretty gravelly beasts, led by the clearly profound single-vineyard *Goldberg* Blaufränkisch, but you had to wait the better part of a decade to approach its ferrous mineral secrets. This is changing now, or has changed, but

Prieler's reds will always be charged and mouthfilling, and when they're on target they give the depth and the fervid spice of the best Brunellos. That's right—the *best* Brunellos.

Because the family is hearty and loves to laugh and kibbitz, it's easy to lose sight of how serious the wines are. Even the Rosé, normally a grower's cash-flow afterthought, is an earnest and complex being.

The two great flagship wines are the Blaufränkisch from *Mariantal* and *Goldberg*, and alas we have to wait another year for them. The reason is, integrity. Georg didn't bottle any 2014—the wines were declassified into the *Leithaberg* red—and the '15s aren't ready yet. There is a consolation prize, though: a miracle-red I never expected, for which there is no precedent, and which I still can't quite believe.

2016 Rosé Vom Stein

+

12/750ml | AEP-130

After a zillion years of this being the most complex and vinous Rosé in my portfolio, I'm finally committing mercantile hari-kari and insisting we stock it (core-list) year round.

That is because it is a *year-round wine*, a fine, interesting, rewarding wine that happens to be pink, and that supersedes the genre or template of "rosé" if by that we mean pretty and forgettable. This isn't really a "pretty" wine at all—it is beautiful, but that's different. This '16 is 96% Blaufränkisch and 4% St Laurent, and it's the best vintage I've tasted; fantastic texture and length. "I want a little more wildness in my Rosé," says Georg. It's herbal and exotic; wild raspberries, almost dusty, with impressive persistence; it's jammed with fruit but not *fruity*.

I will gladly stand this next to *anything* from Provence, and when it prevails you will also save a lot of money.

2015 Blaufränkisch Ried Johanneshöhe

12/750ml | AEP-132

Only just bottled but it's a sweetie, just what this "starter" wine should be. A core of sweet fruit is a little blanketed by young gravelly extract but on the finish both things recede and there's a *delicious* tertiary terroir and summer-truffle savor; tar and tobacco and the demi-glaze from a venison roast. With air the mineral and the weeds emerge. Not too brooding, not too ingratiating—just right.

2015 Blaufränkisch "Leithaberg"

+ (+)

6/750ml | AEP-135

Leithaberg is the name of the little massif of hill that's the border between Burgenland (to the south) and Carnuntum. The south-facing slope is decently steep and the soils are limestony. Some years ago a group of growers set about to use the name to denote "reserve" quality cuvées that would demonstrate as much mineral flavor as possible. Oak wasn't forbidden but its *flavor* was. The idea was the variety *in its soil*. Both reds and whites were made.

The program seemed to shape-shift, and the name "Leithaberg" was affixed to the (dreaded) "DAC," and so now it's used by everyone. I don't know about the other growers, but for Prieler it constitutes a classic mid-range wine, which paradoxically is over-endowed in "poor" vintages when the top Crus aren't bottled.

In '15 it's an immensely seductive wine, with as much glowy energy as the variety can show; long, truffley, salty and replete with ore and spice; the finish is dark chocolate and skirt steak. From the two sites *Pratscher* and *Breiter*.

2015 Pinot Noir Ried Satz

+ +

6/750ml | AEP-136

The best Austrian PN I've ever tasted, and something of a family joke of sibling rivalry. Before Georg assumed control, his older sister Silvia was at the helm, until she returned to her first love of scientific research. Silvia had *staged* at Dujac, and was determined to tame the Pinot Noir her father had planted. Often she won the battle, sometimes not, but she did the R&D, and when kid-brother Georgie spun out this gorgeous PN, his sister regarded it ruefully and with loving admiration and with no small envy.

One hesitates to make claims for anyone's PN as it's such a shape-shifter, and who knows how the next bottle will "show?" But this one was wonderfully rich and sweet and yet still cool; it has the weight (and style and flavors) of Vosne-Romanée (it could be Beaux Monts) with amazing length and texture; not a full body but a *rich* body, sweet tannin and exquisite poised glamorous complexity.

I can't wait to taste it again.

2016 Chardonnay Sinner

12/750ml | AEP-129

They make two, and this is the un-oaked one. And the '16 is nice! Zippy, stony, straw & hay; super-clear and expressive, and about as flavory as this linear vintage can be. 2016 isn't plump. Valerie Masten said "crushed silver," beautifully.



2016 Pinot Blanc *Ried Seeberg*

+

12/750ml | AEP-131

Usually this is a PB of yellow fruits and brioche and roasted corn, but in '16 it's all mineral and iodine and smashed oyster shells; charmingly leesy and salty with hints of mirabelle and sorrel; less a big hug—that was '15—than a firm handshake.

2016 Pinot Blanc "Leithaberg"

6/750ml | AEP-133

This is often impressive in cask and then ends up more alcoholic than I like in bottle, when it's more stark and exposed. I doubt this '16 will be over-endowed – it's not that kind of vintage—but right now it's like a Chablis from Wm Fevre; toast, lees and flint and salt; has potential if it absorbs its wood. Length and spice are there in spades.

HEIDI SCHRÖCK



REGION / SUB REGION

Neusiedlersee-Hügelland / Rust

VINEYARD AREA

10 hectares

ANNUAL PRODUCTION

3,300 cases

TOP SITES AND SOIL TYPES

Vogelsang,
Turner
(eroded primary rock, mica slate,
limestone and sandy loam)

GRAPE VARIETIES

25% Weissburgunder
25% Welschriesling
10% Blaufränkisch
10% Furmint
10% Grauburgunder
10% Zweigelt
5% Gelber Muskateller
5% Sauvignon Blanc

It's been a momentous couple of years for my friend Heidi. Some souls have gone and some have returned. She gives the appearance of a woman comfortable with life at its most consequential, and in any case Heidi, whom I have known for twenty five years now, is in the breathing center of her life, and is flourishing. If you've met her, you remember her; if you've spent more than an hour together, you're probably friends. That's the way she is. I'd been having a fraught sort of week, for any number of trivial but annoying reasons, and when I got to Heidi it was like a balm to be together. I felt like I could breathe. We had so much to talk about that the next morning when I stopped by to fill out some paperwork she said "I never asked you if you liked the wines!" and I said "Oh yeah, right; were there wines?"

Oh baby, there were wines. Heidi isn't obsessive about sulfur, as far as I can see. She doesn't seem preoccupied with yeast. And yet after more than twenty years tasting and drinking her wines, I find they fit very neatly into the flavor-aesthetic of "natural" wines. They're inferential, sometimes roundabout; they're often a little gauzy, they aren't micro-focused, they have "space" in them, they inhale and exhale. They are warm, honest and grounded, like the woman who makes them. Or rather, the woman who follows along as they make themselves.

For Heidi's wines actually do what other wines only purport to do; they go their own ways. For some tasters they're moving targets, and this frustrates a person who craves consistency. For me they're as unpredictable as all of us are

unpredictable—not capricious, just animate, mutable.

What they have in common is a kind of tenderness. Burgenland whites are more "horizontal" than the GV's and Rieslings of the Kamptal and its neighbors. They don't have a finicky precision. They're like a really good storyteller who carries you along the narrative even when you wished he'd get to the point, and now you're captured and having fun. If the 2014s are any indicator, Heidi seems to be ever-more comfortable with wine-as-fellow-being instead of wine-as-object-to-"evaluate." But you need time for those kinds of wines. It helps to be able to daydream. Say you go to the coffee shop and you're gonna finish your project, so you get your booze and set up your laptop, and the next thing you know you're looking out the window at the world going by, and a half hour passes. To me these are *crucial* moments. They are how we relax enough to let the world in. The project can wait. Even if it can't wait, it can just fucking wait. You *needed* to daydream. And you need a kind of wine that lives right exactly there, in that very consciousness, not a wine that galvanizes your attention so you can "nail" it or score it or tweet about it.

There are ways to make such wines, things you can do in the cellar, but you have to have an ideal and steer toward it. Creamy texture is helpful. Leesiness is a reassuring flavor, I've always felt. The *breath* of cask (as opposed to the "taste" of wood) is often a soulful thing. The larger point is, it's lovely when wines can address our calmer selves, but we can't hear them if we aren't cultivating (or tolerating)

our calmer selves, in which case we are I think a little starved.

Her son Georg has returned to assume his place as heir-apparent. When

I first met him he was in a death-metal band with an ominous name I can never remember; something like *Scabies Grunt Wallow*, but don't hold me to that. It's nice

to see them together, and it has grounded Heidi in a really stirring way.

2016 Gelber Muskateller

12/750ml | AHS-176

Unlike any other Muscat I offer, this tastes like Muscat whose neck had been bitten by a white witch, causing it to fall into a swoon. It has a mere (and welcome) 12.5% alc and a little "natural wine" flavor; it's juicy, leesy and dry, more the linden and chamomile aspects of Muscat and less of the orange blossom. It actually tastes more like *Savignin* than like Muscat, fluffy and sort of tightly rich, like bright colors on an overcast day; intense fennel and physalis. Soulful, original, and please don't drink it too cold.

2016 Weissburgunder

12/750ml | AHS-182

No wine of Heidi's changes more from year to year than this one. The '16 is markedly leesy and talc-y; white tea, oyster shells, more mineral... and really this has very little to do with anything we know as "Pinot Blanc." Opens up with air into something like a puree of sweet green peas. Another original that benefits from a tip Heidi received once upon a time from the greatest living German cellar master Hans-Günter Schwarz. *PSSSST! There's still a little of the more buxom 2015, if you want something more overt and less "iodé."*

2016 Furmint

12/750ml | AHS-184

"2016 was excellent for Furmint because it's not a vine for the sun. It likes gray days, miserable depressing weather!" Somehow I always intuited that. Furmint expresses the ancient suffering of the peoples of austere and lonely fields and stones. You can try to make it "flowery" and modern, cold-ferments, lots of CO₂, but it's like putting a little wild child in a silly suit; he looks wrong.

Heidi's Furmint is like taking your dog for a walk and following her wherever she wants to go. Seeing the world as she sees it, letting her vamp and wander. Furmint is an introvert, and '16 is an introverted vintage for it, bearing in mind I saw it after just three weeks in bottle (the worst possible moment); there's an emerging mineral and sorrel and pea-shoot thing; we decanted it and returned but by then we were eating schnitzels and Furmint isn't quite a schnitzel wine.

But what kind of wine is it? It's analog like Chenin but belongs in the family of floral whites, like Riesling and Petit Manseng and Amigne. It has high acidity and ripens very late. Signature flavors touch on chamomile, linden, rosewater, blown-out candle. It is gentle but unruly. You can't predict it, even from bottle to bottle. It is soulful and elusive and beautifully enigmatic, at least in Heidi's tender hands.

2016 "Phoenix...aus der Flasche"

12/750ml | AHS-185

This is a *Gemischter Satz* that was known as "Vogelsang" but which had to change its name because of some marketing functionary's idea of categorization. There's now an actual phoenix on the label. The wine is a wild party, ripe and toasty, "chocolate bananas," cheerful and rowdy and fuzzle to guzzle.

2015 Grauburgunder

12/750ml | AHS-186

She makes it like old-school white Burgundy, which it often resembles; this one smells like masa harina (the corn flour used for tacos) and seems moderate in alc; it's robust but not really round; it's focused and even shows some grip. Perfect king-salmon wine.

2016 Rosé “Biscaya”

+ +

12/750ml | AHS-177

It's our polyglot friend! Lagrein, Teroldego, Petit Verdot, Syrah, Merlot, Pinot Noir and Cab-Sauv comprise the cuvée, and the wine is richer than many Jura reds (and less icky than most of them), and this vintage is *da bomb*. It's already flowing through our markets, but notwithstanding its “season” passing rapidly, I reserved every last bit I could and we'll sell it to the smart kids who know that rosé doesn't have to be a ticking bomb that curdles the day after Labor Day.

It's as exotic as it always is, but the '16 shows more flower and berry and less beet and rose-hip. Less earthy. It's almost mineral, this crazy beast; like a crushed powder of violets; hints of spring-onions, dried iris petals; firm and structured, even some black truffle in there. Has there ever been a rosé like it?

SWEET WINES

Heidi is making it a project to widen the audience for wines avec du sucre. I'd love her to succeed, if for no other reason that to redeem my abject failure to have done the same. Certainly the sweet wines from these parts are more voluminous and savory than German Rieslings are. They belong in the context of rich food, just as the Germans belong with refined and delicate dishes. Or so it seems to me. The good news is, we have supernal vintages to consider now, which has given a few of the greatest sweet wines Heidi has ever made. And her wines are much less goopy and fat than those of her neighbors, expressly including some wines of great renown and strangely high “scores...”

2016 Spätlese

6/375ml | AHS-188H

It's 20% Sauv-BI, 40% Welschriesling and 40% Furmint, and it's a pretty zingy critter for a Burgenland sweet wine, with fine spice, wildness and snap; lemon-drop confers a useful counterpoint of “sourness,” there's a tarragon-like penetration, cherry blossom and spearmint. Not terribly sweet for all that.

2015 Beerenauslese

6/375ml | AHS-178H

I recall thinking this was the best vintage I'd tasted of this wine, yet for some obscure reason I never took a note for it. Mea culpa.

2015 Ruster Ausbruch “On The Wings Of Dawn”

+

6/375ml | AHS-189H

After last year's “best-ever” edition of this quintessential Ausbruch, this '15 isn't far behind—if behind at all. I have all kinds of trouble putting young sweet wines into words, but this one's creamy and typical, a crème of papaya, mango, overripe peach and banana.

2014 Ruster Ausbruch Turner

+ + (+)

6/375ml | AHS-175H

The cuvée is half-half Furmint and Sauvignon Blanc. Absolutely sensational aromas—a dream. Botrytis at its noblest. The palate is sublime. Fresh in a form of fantastic weightless intensity. While such wines are often (to me) over-rich, this is like a soufflé of comice pears. Luxury and snap and delicacy; truly a miracle wine. The “Wings” is corporeal, but this wine is half human, half ghost. Skims the senses like a little waving scarf.

A FINAL LITTLE TREAT

We have a few mixed cases—really just a few—consisting of three half-bottles each of **1998 Chardonnay Ausbruch** and **2004 Welschriesling Ausbruch**, quite along Tokay lines in both cases, the '98 more caramelly (and with higher acidity) and the '04 brighter, sweeter and more white-raisin, more lacquered. The '98 is a burned salted caramel and the '04 a white raisin pudding.

SATTLER



REGION / SUB REGION

Neusiedlersee / Tadten

VINEYARD AREA

15 hectares

ANNUAL PRODUCTION

5,800 cases

SOIL TYPES

Gravel with brown earth and sand

GRAPE VARIETIES

60% Zweigelt
30% St. Laurent
10% Syrah,
Cabernet Sauvignon,
Weißburgunder (Pinot Blanc),
Welschriesling

It was Erich's lady-friend who drove over with the wines to meet me a couple weeks ago. That's because Erich was in his vineyards, inspecting the damages from the frost of the night before. He'd already lost the entire 2016 crop to frost and a lot of his '14s to hail. He has not been a lucky guy; I wouldn't ask him to pick your lottery numbers any time soon.

The reds are all '15s, and it is hoped they can make them last long enough to bridge to the 2017s—assuming there are any.

Everything about this estate is candid and getting more so all the time. There aren't many wines. He knows what he wants to do, and does it. The wines are getting less oaky as he trusts his fruit more. The Austrian wine press is also noticing, and the wines are prominent among the top performers.

When you start out you have certain wines against which you model your own. You reassure your customers (and yourself) that you can compete with viable wines in the familiar idioms. You are, in other words, guided by a certain timorousness and insecurity. If you can demonstrate your competence at the pre-

vailing style, you comfort yourself, please your customers, and sell some wine.

A lot of growers stop there. They know the right things to say, and they can create a plausible facsimile of a serious wine estate, and the wines are often tasty. But in the end they are dull. Because they have no way to answer the crucial questions: why do you exist? What is yours to say?

Growers who are capable and curious, who actually want to develop, will often find after a few years that they can trust the essential taste of their fruit. And so they adjust their cellar work to favor things that are inherent and downplay that which is applied later. Oak goes from being a bad master to being a good servant. I think this is exactly what's happening at Erich Sattler's tidy little winery.

Sattler is one of the few young growers I know who isn't out to get your attention but instead seeks merely to bring you pleasure. I love these kinds of wines, as you know. You take the first sip and think "Well sure, O.K., it's clean and pleasant and all, but..." and then the glass is suddenly empty and you barely know why. I could tell you why: it's because the wine *tastes* good and invites you to keep sipping.

2016 Zweigelt Rosé

12/750ml | AST-064

As always this is a fruit explosion with substance, showing more tomato water than strawberry; dry and luscious.

2015 St Laurent

12/750ml | AST-062

Sattler's "basic" wines are almost always made in steel. It's fun to give them to tasters who remark on their "deft use of oak" because then I get to say "That's exactly right: there is no oak, which is probably the deftest way to use it." So if you wanna see how much flavor can come from *only the grape*, open, pour, repeat.

The round ripe 2015 gave the best-ever vintage of this wine, a seductive charmer, with dark plum and marjoram and smoke and even a little tar, but overall it's a big old golden sunset of giddy fruit.

2015 Zweigelt

12/750ml | AST-063

It's cooler and fresher now but just as pretty; a classic adorable Zweigelt without any peppery edge (which can show when a Zweigelt expresses its Blaufränkisch parent more than its ST-L parent). It was best in a wider glass—in this case the often-dreaded Zalto "Universal"—and it straddles the line between structure, texture and hedonism.

2015 St Laurent Reserve

12/750ml | AST-067

It's the usual: older vines, riper fruit, more wood (or in this case, wood) and more sex-appeal. Nothing wrong with that, and I love these wines in less opulent vintages, such as the gorgeous 2010 I drank just last night. 99 out of 100 tasters will find this 2015 to be a far better wine than my beloved 2010, and I'll just slink off into my contrarian cave. Credit where it's due: this is a big swashbuckling heroic sybaritic wine, and the 14% alc that spooks little me doesn't actually obtrude. Reasonable tannin, and for a big wine it isn't massive. The finish shows varietal echoes of herbs and smoke.

2015 Zweigelt Reserve

12/750ml | AST-066

This is tannic, but it too manages its high (14% again) alc. These are atypical for Erich, but the longer I sat with it the more I felt the vertical elegance and sweetness of the Cantenac Margaux, and for all its intensity it is actually somewhat winsome.

SÜDBURGENLAND

A benefit to my working life is that I get to visit people and places I've grown very fond of. I wake up each morning, usually someplace I like, and think "I get to see Heidi today," or "I get to see Ludwig today," and so each morning is full of pleasant anticipation.

And yet as I made the entirely new drive to an entirely new place, I realized the other kind of excitement, the edgier kind, when you view a foreign place with those keen wondering eyes. What drew me to Südburgenland was of course the promise of the wines, the special Blaufränkisch that comes from those iron-rich volcanic often schisty soils. Nothing else tastes like they do. It was an added bonus that the tiny region entailed a bit of a schlep no matter where you started from. From Vienna, or from Rust where my colleague and I started, you pass through a lovely chaos of verdant hills called the *Bucklinger Welt*, and then through another few folds of deeply wooded ridges. You can't drive fast. You curve and curve and curve some more. And then suddenly you emerge with the crazily steep Eisenberg hill in front of you, as if someone carved off a slice of the Mosel and plopped it down in a little winky corner right on the border to Hungary. It feels "like a lost world," as Giles MacDonogh wrote.

We sat in the tasting room with Reinhold Krutzler and looked across the valley. "The village you see in the foreground, that's in Austria," he said. "The one behind it is in Hungary. When we were kids we'd see the lights from the guard towers, and our parents told us not to play too close to the border because there might be land-mines." The road signs are in both languages. You feel like you could go aground there, if you wanted to hide.

There's a sort of sub-village on the hill above the sleepy village of Deutsch Schützen, called *Weinberg*, which contains all the winery cellars and Heurigen, dotted over the gentle upward roll. Only

the Eisenberg itself is dramatic; the rest of the region is gentle and pretty.

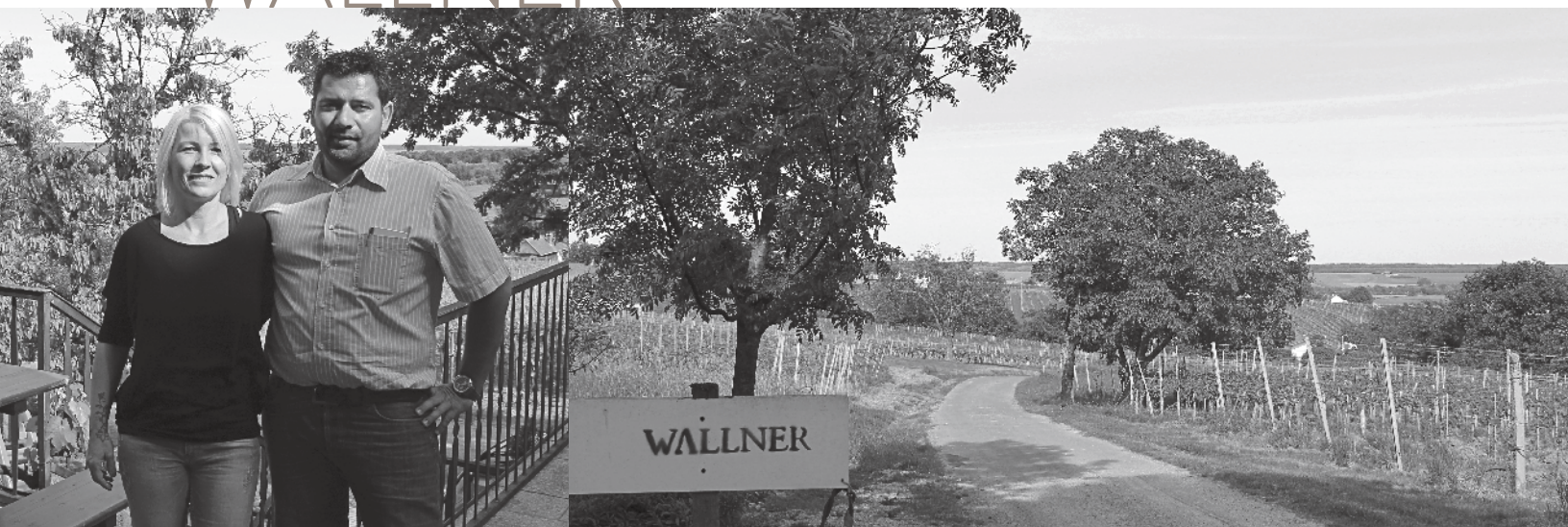
There's a local wine specialty called *Uhudler*, which is actually made from vitis Labrusca, but it's the remarkable Blaufränkisch that concerns us here. There are three acknowledged elite growers: Szemes, Uwe Schiefer, and Krutzler, and supporting them are a host of fine country wine estates, at least one of which—Waller—is very fine indeed.

As a rule Blaufränkisch likes a heavy soil that holds water and warms slowly. In Mittelburgenland it often grows on loam and clay. Here in Südburgenland there's also loam, but also the unique configuration of iron and schist that gives the wines an almost blatant minerality and a compelling pointed spiciness. Most Blaufränkisch can be called "peppery," but these wines show an abundance of *nuanced* pepper, as though you were conducting tasting of various peppercorns from Indonesia and Sumatra and Madagascar. It's the closest red wine comes to the particular experience of tasting *white* wine, especially if you prize minerality highest among flavors. If really fervid Wachau Grüner Veltliner were red, it would be Eisenberg Blaufränkisch.

I could have fastened myself to the "top" guy and strutted my pride of association. But I wanted to also offer you something hearty and affordable so that you'd have an easier wedge into this region. Krutzler is indeed elite, but such things are appreciated best when they're predicated on a basis. Which makes us ask a new question: how good is that basis, at its best? How good can "good" be?

Thus I overcome my desire to shape this portfolio in the tidiest possible way, and rather than choose between two excellent estates, I offer them both. Ha ha; that sounds so cerebral! In fact I'm just a helpless promiscuous wine slut who can't say no to anything exciting.

WALLNER



REGION / SUB REGION

Südburgenland / Deutsch-Schützen

VINEYARD AREA

8 hectares

ANNUAL PRODUCTION

2,500 cases

TOP SITES AND SOIL TYPES

Deutsch-Schützen Weinberg
(*profound, medium-weight to heavy loam over slate in deeper layers, some iron oxide*);
Eisenberg
(*light to medium-weight loam and sand mixed with slate and iron oxide*)

GRAPE VARIETIES

70% Blaufränkisch
13% white grapes
7% Zweigelt
5% Cabernet Sauvignon (cuvée only)
3% Merlot (cuvée only)
2% St. Laurent

His little brochure has the emblem “echt—typisch—erdig” Genuine, typical, earthy. Sums it right up.

Gerhard Wallner assumed the estate from his father in 2002, and is up to “a good 7 hectares,” making honest yet polished wine. If you’re tempted to suppose the wines are rustic, believe me they aren’t. Nor are they rough-cut, foursquare or heavy-footed. They’re delicious, extroverted, hearty wines that also convey a lot of finesse. They show all the uniquely spicy character and clarity of the best wines of the region.

Though Wallner grows Zweigelt and St. Laurent (as well as a little Cab and Merlot), the Blaufränkisch is obviously front and center, and it’s the wine I’ll concentrate on.

Wallner will make you smile. Wallner will make you very nearly laugh out loud. But Wallner will also make you pause at times, because these wines, as happy as they are, are not *jolly* or boisterous.

Gerhard believes in keeping back-vintages around as long as possible, to show what Blaufränkisch is like when out of its infancy. I like his young wines, but I’m going to show you these vintages as long as I possibly can.

This year I tasted Wallner and Krutzler cheek-by-jowl and off-site, as I’d been trying to get at my respective visions of the two estates. Though Krutzler is counted among the “nobility” of the region, he himself is unpretentious—no one preens in this little hidden corner—and everyone seems collegial and neighborly. Yet it is clear when tasting the two estates that Wallner is more yummy and Krutzler is more polished. Put another way, Krutzler is admirable and Wallner adorable. Krutzler’s wines impress my cerebral probing palate, which responds to their finesse, craftsmanship and intelligence. They are of course also tasty wines, but for the nth degree of tastiness we plop ourselves down in front of a glass, or preferably a *bucket* of Wallner. Not that those wines lack finesse or craftsmanship; just that they deliver a more overtly sensual joy, which I think is valuable in the context of the very *particular* Blaufränkisch.

Wallner is also rather below-the-radar, which actually makes me happy. I’m not as a rule a “proud” guy, but I *am* proud of this selection, because this man is the real deal and his wines return jaded old me to some primordial bliss of just smacking my damn lips over a glass of wine.

2013 St Laurent

12/750ml | AWL-031

Gerhard had just blown my mind with his *white* Blaufränkisch (not enough wine to justify shipping, alas!), and then he goes and charms me with this fetching St. L. How does anyone walk away from a wine like this? Great roasty aromas, earthy in the best way; super primary fruit and an iron twang below. Generous and hearty but not remotely rustic. Grillin' some burgers? Upgrade the dreck you drink on your deck!

2015 Blaufränkisch

12/750ml | AWL-038

This is as charming as Blaufränkisch **ever** gets, with the dark-bread savor typical for Wallner and the sweet berries of BF; great length and varietal spice; it's still angular as BF is yet it's cuddly and glad, it's a glad, flowing wine.

2015 Blaufränkisch ("Eisenberg DAC")

+

12/750ml | AWL-039

First to the glorious wine, which is the exact benchmark wine you'd use in a seminar to show the variety. THIS! IS! BLAUFRANKISCH!

There's more iron and mineral twang now, with loads of "sweet" fruit and crazy pepper, hugely impressive; powdery tannin, violets and spearmint; it's like the moment on a day that started cool, where you shrug off your jacket as you stand in the warming sun.

Then to the... curious labeling. In the old pre-DAC days, "Eisenberg" was the name of the big steep hill you see when you drive in from the north, the one in our picture. It was the top site. Now it gives its name to the whole "DAC," which is like the entire Mittelmosel having the appellation *Wehlener Sonnenuhr*. So a wine that says "DAC Eisenberg" doesn't actually have to come from the Eisenberg hill. Can anyone say *bullshit German wine law of 1971 with its garbagey and misleading "Grosslages?"* I mean really! Down the TOILET with this nonsense.

2013 Blaufränkisch ("Eisenberg DAC")

+

20/375ml | AWL-032H

The basic-BF shows refined pepper aromas (Tasmanian above all, though you have to take my word for that); dusty tannin though with a juicy texture that's *almost* elegant. A fascinating deep floral aspect arrives with air and echoes into the tertiary finish. The wine has character and a rustic charm; it isn't glossy or "sophisticated," which is fine with me. I cleaned him out of all the remaining halves; the wine is killer.

2013 Blaufränkisch Eisenberg ("DAC Reserve")

+

12/750ml | AWL-034

Sensational aroma, as hedonistic as BF can smell; but the palate is pure peppery BF, albeit with an interior sweetness and round tannin; a mizuna snap also arrives.

2013 Blaufränkisch "Namenlos"

+ (+)

12/750ml | AWL-035

His best cuvée of BF, old vines (40 to 90) and done in hogsheads, some vintages are too much of too-muchness, but the good ones—wow. The '13 is a big leap up from the Reserve; entirely denser, more chocolatey, as if there were Merlot involved (which there isn't); aromas are super-plummy; it's the *Vino Nobile* type, with minerality embedded below a molten swell of richness. True noble-cuvée here.

KRUTZLER



REGION / SUB REGION

Südburgenland / Deutsch-Schützen

VINEYARD AREA

10 hectares

ANNUAL PRODUCTION

5,833 cases

TOP SITES AND SOIL TYPES

Deutsch-Schützen Weinberg
and Bründlgfangen
(*profound, medium-weight to heavy
loam over slate in deeper layers,
some ironoxide*) ;
Eisenberg
(*light to medium-weight loam and
sand mixed with slate and ironoxide*)

GRAPE VARIETIES

84% Blaufränkisch
8% Zweigelt
3% Merlot
3% white grapes
2% Cabernet Sauvignon (cuvée only)

Two years ago I had a moment of euphoria while tasting what seemed like the dawn of a new “era” at Krutzler, less broody more fruit-forward wines, friendlier wines, more comradely. I thought he showed *cojones* to walk away from the Affect Of Significance and concentrate instead on deliciousness. I asked Reinhold Krutzler if my impression was correct, if this was a deliberate course-correction of his, and he confirmed that it was.

Last year the wines had reverted, mostly, to the way they were. I wondered about this. The wines were mostly just bottled—were they bottled earlier last year? I don’t know. What I think I know is, when I see the wines it is either too soon after bottling, or at big tastings when my palate is over-stimulated and distorted. Perhaps I receive a false impression? Maybe I like them better in cooler vintages,

when they’re more transparent and graceful? I do think these are wines of a type wherein I’m a minority, someone who doesn’t “get” them. I see other tasters full of admiration, and suppose I am at fault.

But maybe not. I feel as much *admiration* as anyone does, and I felt it again this year. These are wines of a very high class, and while I often find them opaque, that could easily be my own fault and not the wines’.

The splendid stature of the “Perwolff” is easy to grok, even when the wine’s young. It’s the everyday wines I want to feel chummier toward. Because this is legitimately an Icon-domain in Austria, and I wonder at my adequacy when I’m cool toward what should be the most approachable wines on the table. I tasted them skeptically this year, and yet they overcame me. Or some did...



2016 Blaufränkisch

+

12/750ml | AKR-031

In contrast to Wallner, Krutzler bottles early, so his '16 is already on the market. It's superb. I was almost sad to admit it! It's pungent and polished, beef-bacon; exotic for BF especially on the finish, which is almost like fresh ground nutmeg.

2016 Blaufränkisch ("Eisenberg DAC")

12/750ml | AKR-032

This cask-sample is really crammed with black-cherry and hyacinth. It shows intelligence and polish.

2015 Blaufränkisch Eisenberg ("DAC Reserve")

+

12/750ml | AKR-033

Gotta give it up: this is polished and sweet, glossy and sumptuous, cigar-boxy and classy.

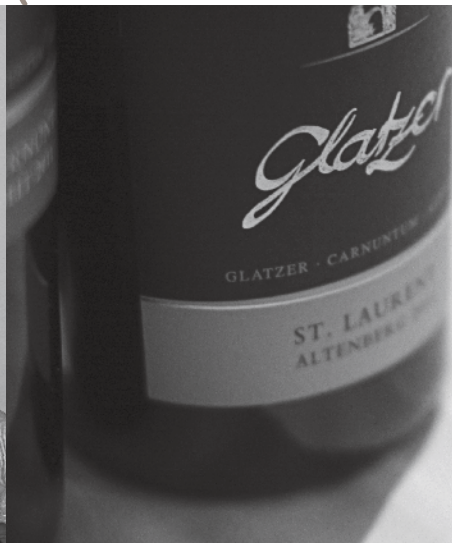
2015 Blaufränkisch Perwolff

+ (+)

6/750ml | AKR-034

In good vintages and with enough bottle-age, this can be strikingly flowery BF, but it's my particular challenge to always taste inky turbulent cask samples from which I can only infer potential from their power and incipient detail. The 1999 was the best Austrian red I'd ever tasted, and is to this day.

GLATZER



REGION / SUB REGION

Carnuntum / Göttlesbrunn

VINEYARD AREA

54 hectares

ANNUAL PRODUCTION

25,000 cases

TOP SITES AND SOIL TYPES

Rosenberg,
Kräften
(calcerous clay) ;
Haidacker
(gravel, loam and clay) ;
Altenberg
(gravel and clay, with high lime content) ;
Schüttenberg
(sandy loam and gravel) ;
Bärenreise
(sandy loam and clay)

GRAPE VARIETIES

37% Zweigelt
17% Blaufränkisch
12% Grüner Veltliner
10% Merlot
8% Cabernet Sauvignon
5% Weissburgunder
3% Sauvignon Blanc
2% St. Laurent
2% Pinot Noir
2% Syrah
2% other

The world's warmest most unpretentious guy making the world's warmest most unpretentious wines—one is tempted to say. Because it is mostly true, yet not the entire truth.

I've known Walter Glatzer, sheesh, since I started with Austria; even before, as he was one of the first growers I met while I was forming the first portfolio. He's a hearty kind of fellow, and his wines are nothing if not extremely friendly, but this doesn't arise from a *choice* to be "unpretentious." Glatzer seems to be missing whatever DNA-strand is responsible for high solemnity, or whatever it is that tempts people to *strut*. Given his cheerful openness to the world, his wines have grown as "serious" as they *can* be, and I'm no longer surprised when I see them arrayed among the winners in top-wines-of-the-vintage tastings in one journal or another. Perhaps the world is catching up with Mr. Glatzer and his delicious wines. I'd be happy to think so.

At one point I might also have seen them as charming "little" wines, and defended their virtues—as I still would. But today I think they have a richer claim to stake. Far from being "little" wines, I believe Glatzer's wines show that substance is certainly compatible with delicious-

ness, and that too many growers have ventured too far from basic sensuality when they form their wines.

You could erase 90% of the so-called "serious" red wines from the earth and I wouldn't even sigh. But a world without these cooing beauties? That would be poverty.

Walter's whites are similarly forthright. I don't think great or mighty wines are written into the land in Carnuntum, and lower production costs are reflected in outstanding quality/price relationships. Walter and I have never discussed his yields, but I imagine they are not ungenerous, and that's *fine*; the wines are every bit as concentrated as I need them to be.

This is especially true of the unprecedented 2015 Zweigelt "Dornenvogel," which despite showing the massive concentration typical of Walter's top Zweigelt, is somehow almost weightless. I don't recall a more impressive group of wines here, but I've said the same thing several years in a row. Either Mr. Glatzer's wines are moving inexorably forward or I am getting gradually less stupid, but whatever the reason, I don't know any other grower whose wines are at once so adorable and also so fine.

2016 Grüner Veltliner

12/750ml | AGL-213

After the three-class upgrade offered by the impressively concentrated 2015, we return to the benchmark, and this wine is bright and snappy but not at all “lean,” just vibrating and bracing, with spring-water brilliance yet also with the fluid green savor of the ‘16s.

2016 Grüner Veltliner “Dornenvogel”

+

12/750ml | AGL-217

It means “thorn-bird,” named after the avian marauders who eat the ripest grapes, because they are smart and hungry birds. It signifies the top reserve wine in its category. The two GVs differ more in style of flavor than in concentration or density, as a rule, but in 2016 there’s quite a leap in quality to this, the best ever GV from Glatzer. It starts with this being 100% *sponti* (spontaneous fermentation), which adds to the typical aroma of Tuscan extra-virgin olive oil. It was on its gross lees until the end of April and then bottled. It might be the dawn of a new era at Glatzer, for this wine could easily stand comparison with Bründlmayer (until you look at the price); refined, focused, almost creamy, jasmine and an almost Chablis-like brothiness, into a peppery finale.

It’s a staggering **VALUE**, and to the many distributors working with the regular GV, consider striking while the iron’s hot and bringing this bad boy home.

2016 Weissburgunder

12/750ml | AGL-218

This has usually been a correct, vigorous and somewhat neutral dry white, but in ‘16 it’s something else again. The connection to Styria is tangible here—and I’d tasted a lot of Styrian wine a couple days prior, so they were fresh in my mind—and the yellow-fruits, wet cereal and acacia blossom aromas are part-way to Prieler. An exceptionally attractive vintage, and I hope it’s a herald of things to come.

2016 Sauvignon Blanc Schüttenberg

+

12/750ml | AGL-219

The best of two SBs, and worth the trade-up. It’s a fine, leesy, flinty and serious Sauv-BI, with focus and weight and backbone. We talked about the somewhat abrupt finish and Walter agreed the acidity was too prominent at the end, and the (still in cask) wine will be mitigated with judicious blending. It’s full of red peppers but not vegetal. I have faith.

2015 Zweigelt “Rebencuvée”

12/750ml | AGL-209

A new name for what used to be called “Riedencuvée,” which the authorities thought sounded too much like a single-vineyard wine. Good to know they’re looking out for us. Who’s looking out for *them*, I wonder?

The wine is entirely back in form after an atypically gritty 2014; it’s spicy and positively gurgles with fruit; it’s creamy in a tulip glass and brash in the Zalto “Universal” but lovely in both. This wine is pure Glatzer, gorgeous, lovable, yummy.

2016 Zweigelt “Rebencuvée”

12/750ml | AGL-220

Adorable, sleek and yummy. Perfect to move into when the more opulent ‘15 is gone. This is a lovely, typical vintage. And yes, I’m over-using “yummy,” but it’s the best possible word!

2016 Blaufränkisch

12/750ml | AGL-221

Kind of a perfect entrée into the peppery wilds of BF because it has the Glatzer creaminess with the pointedness of the variety. If you’re a scaredy-cat. This ‘16 is a *remarkably* successful vintage, seriously *yummy* stuff, and for its lightness it is even complex, focused and digital, yet with the aura of deliciousness of all Walter’s reds.

2015 St Laurent Altenberg

12/750ml | AGL-222

Light-footed for a ‘15, a juice-bomb that walks into the room demanding “Where them damn burgers at??” It echoes both the beef and the grill-smoke, yet also shows a certain minerality. Long yet aerial. A super tasty intro to the arcane world of ST-L.

2015 Zweigelt “Dornenvogel”

12/750ml | AGL-223

There is a wine between the basic Zweigelt and this one, and it was delicious, and I knew it would suffer the fate of so many in-between wines: everyone wants either the “best” one or the “cheapest” one, and the luckless one in the middle is forlorn and neglected. It was gorgeous, though, and somebody will love it.

And yet, this. It is the most transparent and elegant of all the *ripe* vintages of this wine, even more so than the ‘13, and it is dripping with class; like a super-refined chocolate with violet petals, rare duck in a clove-scented jus, and sweetheart tannin gives it a tactile texture.

2015 Blaufränkisch Reserve

12/750ml | AGL-224

His best BF since the 2009 single-vineyard *Bernreiser*. It’s as glissy and slippery as BF can be; if the variety has an enticing face, this is it. Yet with every bit of the varietal focus and all the purple flowers, only less of the weeds and gorse. The finish is irresistible! Out on a limb: ***IF YOU ONLY BUY ONE BF FROM THIS OFFERING, BUY THIS ONE.***

WEINVIERTEL

The “Wine-Quarter” is in fact a disparate region containing more-or-less everything northeast, north or northwest of Vienna that doesn’t fit in to any other region. You can drive a half-hour and not see a single vine, then suddenly be in vineyard land for fifteen minutes before returning to farms and fields again.

Vines occur wherever conditions favor them; good soils, exposures and micro-climates, but it’s anything but what we’d call “wine country.” Which is in fact rather charming, since it doesn’t attract the usual glom of wine-people.

I don’t seem to be much of a pack animal. I tend away from the crowd, even when I appreciate what that crowd is crowding toward. It’s easy to go to the established regions and find excellent wine if you have a fat wallet. It’s too easy. I find I enjoy going somewhere alone and finding diamonds in the rough. Alas, Austria is a wine culture in which one is hardly ever alone. The entire Weinviertel is known, as Germany’s Rheinhessen is known—as the up and coming new region, DACs and related nonsense notwithstanding.

This started maybe 20 years ago, when the first wave of young growers applied modern methods and made far better wines than the innocuous plonk which came before. Attention was duly paid. But with repeated exposure one began to want something the wines weren’t giving. They were certainly “contemporary” enough, all cold-fermented stainless-steel yada yada, but most of them were lacking animus and soul. With the entrance of another wave of young vintners, it began to change.

It needs a certain drive, a kind of urgency to want to endow one’s wines with something more than simple competence. The formula for that is unexceptional, and lots of C-students can do it.

And make perfectly decent wine. But certain people ask certain questions: How can I unlock what’s in this land? How do I make imprinted wines that people will remember? Why do it at all if it won’t be wonderful? For someone like this, wine isn’t just a formula or recipe; it’s a matter of anguish and relief and mystery and frustration and delight, it is so dimensional as to be virtually human. The more you live with it, the less you need what you “learned” and the better you hone and hear your intuitions. You can always spot such people because they’re much happier in the vineyards than in the cellar. After all, the cellar is full of machines, but the vineyard is full of life. Surprises are few in the cellar but constant in the vineyard. Talk to your land and your vines for long enough and soon you will know when they answer you back. Every grower like this will tell you he was taught all wrong. “They teach you to act before they show you how to listen.” And in the end their wines become like they themselves are; alive, alert, attuned, questing.

The region has been, let’s say, detected, by intrepid writers on the scent of a story, and the story they’re tempted to tell is about the mavericks and innovators, the growers with an “angle.” That’s cool; everyone likes folks who stir things up. I myself have been drawn to what I’d call the deep classicists, that’s just the way I am, because it is clear to me when the wheel does *not* need reinvention.

And yet—the producer whom we added to the portfolio this year is unique and in his own way groundbreaking. He is, as far as I can tell, the only grower specializing in *SPARKLING WINE* in all of Austria. (*Drum roll.....trumpets clanging, cheerleaders waiting to leap and twirl.....*) And so, let me introduce.....

SEKTKELLEREI CHRISTIAN MADL



Here is a young man who's a friendly *freak* for fizz. A bunch of my growers know him, and all of them were ticked to hear we'd work together.

He's located in Poysdorf, northeast of Vienna almost at the Czech border. He began in 2003, after apprenticeships in Champagne, Germany and Luxembourg. He picks everything by hand in small cases, and only the free-run juice is used for the MADL Sekt. (A second label makes use of the *taille*.) He does all the cellar work himself, by hand, and strives for the longest possible *tirage*. As is often the case in such instances, the wines are concussed after disgorgement and need 6-9 months on the cork before they re-emerge. He makes his own *dosage*, using cane (not beet) sugar.

The wines age beautifully.

He prints disgorgement dates on the label. We didn't even have to ask him to.

It's a teensy operation, a twig over 3 hectares, growing Welschriesling, Chardonnay, Pinot Blanc, Pinot Noir, GrüVe, Zweigelt and Riesling. A small amount of still wine is made, which I hope to taste soon, but we came in search of bubbles this time. If you go to this page—<http://www.sektkellereimadl.at/Neues.htm>—you can see his many awards and accolades, which you can glean even if you don't read German. In a recent VINARIA tasting of Sekt, Madl took three of the top-5 places, including nos. 1 and 2.

We're off to a rather breathless start, but we'll focus and refine as we proceed. These wines will **not be in great supply**, so don't hesitate to jump into the foamy stream.

Welschriesling Brut, 2012

12/750ml | AMD-001

Deg 1.19.2017, so 3.5 years *tirage*, it's was markedly classy and very good. In fact as good as middling Champagne e.g. Marne Valley, and curious how a BdB from Welschriesling can seem to echo a Meunier Champagne. We also tasted a 2008 vintage which was *excellent*, creamy and stylish.

Cuvée Special Brut, N.V.

12/750ml | AMD-002!

A more "classic" profile now, with 53%CH and 47% PN, blend of 2011-2012 and very fresh disgorged (4.19.2017), this was hard to approach, but an older vintage ('07) was *wonderful*, tasting like Jannison-Baradon (from Epernay) from a good year—OK, at least grant me *Coteaux Sud*. Christian says the new wine is better and only needs to recover—which I believe.

Blanc de Noirs Brut, 2010

12/750ml | AMD-003

All PN, 4.5 years *en tirage*, and deg 1/2017; the wine showed lots of vinosity and tasted *yummy*. In future offerings I hope to show you his Rosé as well as a potentially fine *Blanc de Blancs*.

SCHWARZBÖCK



REGION / SUB REGION

Weinviertel / Hagenbrunn

VINEYARD AREA

24 hectares

ANNUAL PRODUCTION

15,000 cases

TOP SITES AND SOIL TYPES

Kirchberg,
Sätzen
(*löss*) ;
Aichleiten
(*flyschgestein with löss*) ;
Hölle
(*flysch*)

GRAPE VARIETIES

50% Grüner Veltliner
15% Zweigelt
10% Gelber Muskateller
10% Riesling
5% Merlot
10% other

The estate straddles the line between the “DACs” of Wien (Vienna) and Weinviertel, which makes for some, let’s say, whimsical labeling issues, but the home village of Hagenbrunn is at the edge of Wien in any case—over here it would be an exurb or even a far-suburb. It’s warmer than most of the Weinviertel, and there’s an unusual soil called *flysch*—“Deposits of dark, fine-grained, thinly bedded sandstone shales and of clay, thought to be deposited by turbidity currents and originally defined as rock formations on the northern and southern borders of the Alps,” according to the Free Dictionary.

Schwarzböck is a successful and well-regarded estate within Austria, and over the years I have liked and even loved many of the wines. Two “situations” have arisen; one, that I haven’t known from year to year *which* wines I’ll like, and two, that many of the “important” wines have crept north of 14% alc, which is bothersome to me.

But just as I wondered what the future might hold here, Rudi and Anita have out-performed the 2016 vintage in dramatic fashion. Outside the great terroirs of the Kamptal/Kremstal/Wachau (and Ott, who’s kind of *sui generis*) this was the most solid, rich and impressive lineup of wines I tasted.

2016 Grüner Veltliner

12/1000ml | ASB-081L

Rather to my surprise, this turns out to be the best among the Liters of GV I offer this year. I'm sure I shouldn't say that. But it smells great! I was struck by how expressive it is, and it tastes entirely realized and full. (One can forgive a Liter wine for tasting merely "fresh and correct," though of course I hope for more.)

2016 Grüner Veltliner "Vier Gärten"

12/750ml | ASB-083

Of course it means "garter of fear" as you already guessed. This is actually better than the '15, juicier and richer, which makes no sense. It's sorrelly and cressy only on the finish, but the palate is like the "soft" arugula. It's markedly long, and not at all slight. I've tasted a lot of thinner wines this week, from "better" land and "bigger" names...

2016 Grüner Veltliner *Bisamberg-Kreuzenstein* ("Weinviertel DAC")

12/750ml | ASB-084

This is one of the best medium-weight GrüVes ever made here; salty, smoked hay, lots of nettle-y spice and just crazy chatter among its sweet lime-zest and wild herb and plum blossom and wisteria.

2016 Grüner Veltliner Reid Sätzen ("Weinviertel DAC")

12/750ml | ASB-077

Tastes for all the world like an *urgestein* wine—even a Nigl Piri—though it grows on sandy loam; it shows ore and boxwood and the dark peppery side of GV, but not only "dark;" it's puristic GV with all that implies, a sort of liquid portrait of Tasmanian pepper and nettle I find impressive and delicious.

2014 Riesling Brut SEKT

12/750ml | ASB-080

Schwarzböcks make this themselves but it's disgorged by our mutual friend MADL, most recently in November 2016. It's really rich and *yummy*, and again oddly like a Meunier Champagne; pumpernickel and iris; stylish and creamy and markedly long, with a finish like yeast and kiwi.

2016 Gelber Muskateller

12/750ml | ASB-082

Always excellent, this '16 goes in the basil direction, with the usual elderflower notes retreated into a discreet background. It's really juicy and not unripe; a classic in its way. You should slop it down next time you're whipping together a pesto.

H·u·M·HOFER



REGION / SUB REGION

Weinviertel / Auersthal

VINEYARD AREA

20 hectares

ANNUAL PRODUCTION

16,600 cases

TOP SITES AND SOIL TYPES

Freiberg
(löss with loam) ;
Kirchlissen
(löss with clay)

GRAPE VARIETIES

53% Grüner Veltliner
13% Zweigelt
9% Riesling
8% Welschriesling
4% St. Laurent
3% Weissburgunder
2% Gelber Muskateller
8% other

FARMING PRACTICES

Bio-Ernte Certified Organic

Auersthal is just barely beyond Vienna's northern suburbs, in a dead-still little wine village.

It's rather odd to drive there and see lots of wee little oil derricks, but such little oil as Austria produces comes from these parts, deep below the löss. I had either forgotten or had never known the estate was organic; they belong to a group called Bio-Ernte which has standards above the EU guidelines. In speech, by the way, "bio" is pronounced to rhyme with "B.O." which can lead to some drollery as you hear references to "B.O. wine" unless, unlike me, you have left behind your adolescence.

The vineyards lie in a rain-shadow and have to endure hot summers. In fact Hofer plants his Riesling in a fog-pocket as he gets so little rain. The wines are pressed conventionally (no whole-cluster) with skin contact, and all whites are done in stainless steel.

The wines are what I sometimes call scrupulous. They're not as sweet-natured as Setzer, not as creamy as Schwarzböck, not as brilliant as Ecker, but they are some parts of all those things, right down the middle. They're articulate and expressive. And they tend not to sell out within a year of the vintage, which is wonderful when Hans has great vintages like 2015, though his '16s were remarkably rich and full for that vintage.

Most of you know this grower from his GV Liters, but while he's too nice a guy ever to kvetch *What about my other wines?* I'm not that nice and I don't mind kvetching. **You need to see how good this grower is!**

2016 Grüner Veltliner

12/1000ml | AHF-085L

This and Schwarzböck are the *LITERS OF THE PACK* in 2016. I don't know why but they just are. This one's round, juicy and riper than almost any other previous vintage. By the way, he will move from crown cap to screw cap, for a very good reason: the screw-cap bottle *weighs less, which means it costs less energy to produce and to ship*.

How nice to see this humble producer of a cheap Liter caring about his environmental impact, while the Great And Lofty gods of Germany's VDP are still allowing **STUPID HEAVY PRETENTIOUS BOTTLES** to be used for their Grosses Gewächse.

2016 Grüner Veltliner *Freiberg*

12/750ml | AHF-090

This is Hofer's biggest most apricot-y GV and it's often best in "normal" vintages—like this one. Wet cereal aromas are racy and wonderful and inviting; the palate has a lovely dialogue of green and yellow, aloe and wintergreen conversing with mirabelle and cox-orange apples. More detailed and spicy than in bigger vintages.

2015 Grüner Veltliner *Kirchlissen*

12/750ml | AHF-084

This is the best wine Hofer has ever made; chervil, anise-hyssop aromas; highly refined palate shows a balsam sweetness; the whole herb garden is grinning and beaming. *Dicht*, clarity, length, comparing favorably to Nigl's loess GV's—yes, even the Alte Reben, amazingly. I have it in my cellar and have drunk it several times, each time wondering whether I'd find my early praise too fulsome, but no: this is superb GV by any standards, and also a **RIDICULOUS VALUE**.

2016 Riesling

12/750ml | AHF-091

I have several producers who focus mostly on GrüVe, but all of them make at least one Riesling; there's Setzer, Ott, Ecker among others. These are mostly nice down-the-middle Rieslings, nothing too precious, no single-vineyards or grand statements of terroir.

In 2016 this Hofer was the best among the "unexceptional" Rieslings, and I found I was moved by it. Apricot and tilleul and aloe, the perfect blank-slate Austrian Riesling; this is what it does in its *ordinary* iteration, and why it is so perfect and so precious. This is why, when you taste it, you know—*Riesling belongs here in Austria*. The wine is all lime-parfait and apricot gelée and leafy green oolong.

2014 Zweigelt

12/1000ml | AHF-080L

Round, seductive, generous, really excellent in this (or any) echelon; a truly hospitable and delicious wine.

2015 St. Laurent

12/750ml | AHF-088

This is as gorgeously seductive as ST-L ever gets, and even tasting it at room temperature (73°) doesn't compromise it, warp its structure, intrude on its freshness or create that spirit-y thing over-warm reds can do. It's a perfect mélange of fruit and wood, in this case 2nd-use barrique.

2016 Zweigelt Rosé

12/750ml | AHF-087

Another Rosé you can drink year-round, though...< sigh >... I suspect that battle is lost before it can begin. I have several wee gossamer rosés for spring/summer guzzling and I love that style. But this isn't that style; it has lots of volume but also lots of zing, with the weight of Provence but the fruit of a cool Burgundy morning. Focused, fine, vinous, strong, and yet—floating.

2013 Zweigelt "Klassik"

12/750ml | AHF-089

Round and berried, velvety and typical, loving and enveloping, with a warmly earthy touch.

SETZER



REGION / SUB REGION

Weinviertel / Hohenwarth

VINEYARD AREA

30 hectares

ANNUAL PRODUCTION

16,700 cases

TOP SITES AND SOIL TYPES

Laa,
Eichholz
(löss over alluvial gravel and limestone)

GRAPE VARIETIES

50% Grüner Veltliner
30% Roter Veltliner
20% Riesling,
Pinot Blanc,
Chardonnay,
Sauvignon Blanc,
Zweigelt,
Merlot

What *does* happen with the wines in the middle? The ones that aren't rowdy and galvanic, but also not cerebral or arcane? I often call such wines humane, or gracious, or civilized, but that makes it sound like the way you have to act during the first dinner at your girlfriend's parents' house. I receive an actual tactile sense of pleasure from cordial, charming wines, but that's because I insist on having the time to pause and appreciate them. It does come down to time. Charm is a thing we cultivate.

Hans and Uli Setzer are a husband-wife team of wine-school grads maintaining a winery imbued with intelligence and purpose. I was surprised how close they were to the Kamptal and Kremstal (15 minutes from Berger or Gobelsburg) and wondered why Hohenwarth was banished to the lowly Weinviertel. Hans pointed out to me Hohenwarth sits at the same altitude as the summit of the Heiligenstein, thus essentially different from the

more sheltered Kamptal. Nor does it have the pure löss terraces of the Kremstal or even the neighboring Wagram.

Though Setzer was a discovery for me, the estate is conspicuously successful, exporting to three continents and showing up on many of the top wine lists inside Austria, not to mention being a sort of house-estate for the Vienna Symphoniker orchestra.

The question is whether craftsmanship, intelligence and charm are things we value enough to pay for—to pay anything for. We pay for “greatness” and we pay for “value” but when we buy a Setzer wine I would argue we're paying for a kind of humanity and civility. Do you value good conversation? Then what would you say if someone observed *What's the fuss? All you did was sit and talk?* You'd say, “You don't understand, clearly,” and you'd be correct. And you'd start to know why I feel these lovely wines are less cherished than they ought to be.

2016 Grüner Veltliner

12/1000ml | ASZ-089L

It's lentilly and juicy, with a nice cressy snap. Just what it should be.

2016 Grüner Veltliner "Vesper"

12/750ml | ASZ-092

This wine was really warped by the (dreaded) Zalto "Universal" stem, so I asked for a tulip-shape and there were a few old Riedels still in the cupboard. The wine was infinitely better now, with much more *present* fruit, though the finish was sharp from either glass. Worth it to trade up to the next wine IMO!

2016 Grüner Veltliner "Ausstich" (DAC)

12/750ml | ASZ-090

This for me is Setzer at their best. Not, mind you, invariably the "best" wine, but the one that best expresses the welcoming charming spirit of the domain. And again, if I (or anyone) wanted to use just one wine to demonstrate why Grüner Veltliner belongs among the *classics* of the wine world, I'd take this one and say—"Here is the variety in a normal, unexceptional form; medium weight, nothing too showy, just pure flavor and typicity."

This '16 is lentilly and sorrel-y and discreetly peppery; it has charm, texture and substance, and is genial yet firm. And shows a truly adorable flavor!

2016 Grüner Veltliner "Die Lage" +

6/750ml | ASZ-091

The actual name of the site is *Eichholz*, which means "oak-wood," and which might then confuse buyers into supposing this wine will be oaky. It isn't; hence it is simply called "The Site."

In most years this is Setzer's best GV. Hans will not agree, because he is faithful to his big-boy the "8000," but I find that wine, not always but often, to be too musclebound, whereas this one is always intense but graceful and balanced. It is also the most mineral wine in the collection.

And the '16 is indeed a rich, solid beauty, sweet blood-orange against the stony GV extract; a fennel-y spicy mass, sometimes fennel seed and sometimes a powdery mineral and sometimes a crunchy rusk. In each of the three different glasses I used there was something to like.

2016 Roter Veltliner "Wiener Symphoniker"

12/750ml | ASZ-094

This will explain it: <http://www.austrianwine.com/our-wine/grape-varieties/white-wine/roter-veltliner/>.

It isn't a mutated Grüner, though it tastes like an *aspect* of GV, the shiitake and roasted pepper side, without the citrics and leaves. The vine requires a dedicated grower, and its proponents are more like "protectors" than just vintners. I didn't go in search of it but it kind of found me, via Setzer (and Ecker), and when I like it I offer it to you.

The '16 is exotic and roasty, like a capon roasted with chiogga beets and yellow peppers. The nearest cognate may be earthy white Rhône; some beeswax, some old-school Rioja, some leafy minty spice; a swashbuckling, flourishing wine that plays by its own rules.

2016 Riesling

6/750ml | ASZ-093

Bearing in mind this was in bottle three weeks.....it seemed like a lean, green and racy wine, showing a certain length and an aloe and wintergreen and leafy texture, more than pear or peach. But patience...

2015 Zweigelt

12/750ml | ASZ-095

A superb vintage of a perennial favorite; it's really like adding a little Syrah to a right-bank Bordeaux; currant leaf and violets and dark chocolate; a wine of civility and affection. What used to be called "Claret," really, and each time I drink it I think *Bless the person who made this wine.*

WAGRAM

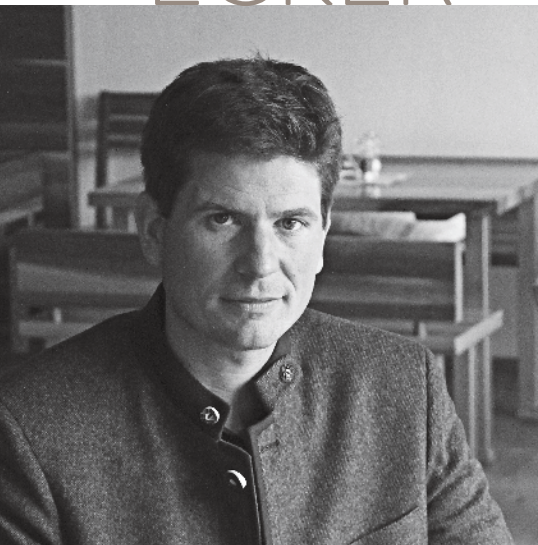
18 89.

The road from Vienna northwest to Krems is probably the only boring country road in all of Austria. It follows the flood plain of the Danube, and is dead-flat. About half way along, you notice little hills to your right about 5 miles in the distance. These are the löss terraces of the WAGRAM. Nearing Krems, the terraces draw closer and you're in the Kremstal, while directly ahead the dramatic hills of the Wachau beckon.

The löss hills of the Wagram are said to be unique in Europe for their depth, up to twenty meters (65 feet) in places. Wagram's the löss leader har har har. But the sandy-loamy ground is so thick that vintners can dig cellars in it without joists, yet this same soil is amazingly porous. This is ideal soil for GrüVe, and where it changes to red gravel or primary rock the vine changes to Riesling or Sauvignon Blanc. Vineyards are mostly on terraces or gentle slopes, facing south, far enough from the river to avoid botrytis in most years.

Can you taste it? I can't, at any rate. I am certain I couldn't identify any flavor markers for "Wagram" per se. The wines resemble Kremstal wines to me, at least those nearer the Danube and also grown on löss. Still, they had to call it something, and "Wagram" does sound like one of the bad-guys from Lord Of The Rings.

ECKER



REGION / SUB REGION

Wagram / Kirchberg-Mitterstockstall

VINEYARD AREA

20 hectares

ANNUAL PRODUCTION

11,600 cases

TOP SITES AND SOIL TYPES

Steinberg
(*weathered primary rock*) ;
Schloßberg,
Im Wasn,
Mitterberg
(*löss*) ;
Mordthal
(*löss with high lime content*)

GRAPE VARIETIES

50% Grüner Veltliner
15% Zweigelt
12% Roter Veltliner
5% Riesling
5% St. Laurent
5% Weißburgunder
4% Sauvignon Blanc
4% Gelber Muskateller

Please read this slightly longer-than-usual text, because in the course of talking about Bernhard Ecker and his remarkably lovely wines, I find I need to say something about this “dialect” of wine, and it’s something I think you need to hear, as a counterpoint to what you’re hearing from the naturalistas.

Not an argument *against* them, but the other side of the yin-yang.

This is “modern” wine at its very best. And I’m willing to understand feeling defensive about deploying a word like “modern,” because I agree we should be wary; too many times modern wines are simply denuded and clinical. Yet we should also be wary of being too precious about what we’d call “traditional” wines. It takes a degree of discernment to distinguish their true virtues from the ones we ourselves *like* to make out of their flaws.

I like every single wine I taste here. I like their exceptional clarity, their incisive detail, their high-definition obsessive nuance, their fresh vitality, and most of all I love their charm and deliciousness. It’s not the same sort of charm we see in Setzer, whose wines are more cashmere-textured, but it is something of great good humor that elevates the wines from mere correctness. I don’t want all wines to be modern as these are, but I want all *MODERN* wines to have the animation and soul I taste here.

“Soul” may seem like an odd word to use to talk about cultured-yeast cold-fermented stainless-steel wines, especially if you’re into “natural” wines where you’ve come to equate soul with something else.

But soul is more complex than that. And it lives where it lives, not where we assume it lives.

I sit tasting the wines, suffused with pleasure, and find myself wondering “Who would reject these wines out of hand, on what principle, and to what end?” I feel acutely sad that a person would exclude himself from this form of happiness. There is *no* dichotomy between wines like these and the special syntax of “natural” wines unless we insist there is. And if we do, we’re excluding another valid species of beauty for reasons I don’t think stand up. Either that, or I’m greedy and I don’t *want* to have to choose. I want them both.

I find soul in these wines because something in them ignites something in me. I taste plenty of modern, competent wine that does the “job” and leaves nothing behind. Not these. Delight lives in these. Clarity I think is a positive value. Clear pure fruit and mineral density and thirst-inducing fragrance are all positive values. There’s nothing contrived or plausible about such wines, and even the phrase “such wines” is misleading because there are *very* few such wines.

I think it boils down to this: it’s not smart to think that only tertiary, vinous wines can ever be “natural” or have animus. They breathe their particular breath, those wines, and I love them just as you do. But I also love the primary, because I think it takes a special kind of passion to want the drinker to see virginal fruit and terroir so brilliantly. Apart from which, soul is a thing that opens and dilates, and if we ourselves insist that wines like Ecker’s are

clinical, then we're closing off an avenue of bliss, and our souls are wounded.

Don't be misled by the paucity of

plusses. Every single one of these wines will offer you such delight as you rarely taste, at astonishingly gentle prices, and

they are honest gleaming thirsty-for-more wines, the kind you can't believe the bottle is empty *already*.

2016 Grüner Veltliner

12/1000ml | AEC-102L

Though I show it first we actually taste it last, after the big guys that precede it, not as a palate-reset but to show how it holds up. The '16 continued a counterintuitive pattern whereby the Litter wines were richer than the least of the others; this was snappy, lentilly and tasty, flow-y as the '16s are.

2016 Grüner Veltliner Reide Steinberg

12/750ml | AEC-108

The lighter GVs showed more gooseberry than I'm jiggy with, but with the single-site wines things started getting interesting. This *urgestein* wine is all mineral and ore and mizuna; no quarter given in its style but a compelling twang, especially if you like Sicilian white and wouldn't mind more brilliance and lift. Which, um, would be me...

2016 Grüner Veltliner Riede Schlossberg

12/750ml | AEC-105

This is the Wagram-loess classic, and even with 12.6 alc it feels light and evanescent. Salty! The loessy charm is there along with a crisp slender snap; has a richness like buttermilk or crème fraîche.

2016 Grüner Veltliner Mordthal

12/750ml | AEC-109

His oldest (well over 50) vineyard, on clay and loess, it often makes his most impressive GV. This is salty and strong with some of the smoky paprika notes of Hiedler's Thal. We tasted both a bottled wine and a cask sample—he didn't bottle it all in one go—and the cask wine had more veitiver and angularity, whereas the bottled wine had more mineral and backbone, oleander and pie crust.

2016 Gelber Muskateller

12/750ml | AEC-103

Snappy, spicy, opal basil, elderflower and mineral; a tic of pyrazine, but I love Muscat and am happy, gooseberry notwithstanding.

2016 Roter Veltliner

12/750ml | AEC-XXX

Clear structure and mineral, plus varietal savor, animated and with a rocky mid-palate solidity.

2016 Riesling

12/750ml | AEC-111

Classic Riesling-template wine, the lime-zest cressy-leafy side of Riesling before terroir is expressed. But read on...

2016 Riesling Steinberg

12/750ml | AEC-106

As far as I know this is Ecker's maiden-voyage with single-site Riesling, and this *urgestein* vineyard would seem to be perfect. Again I was brought back to Nigl's Piri wines, the ivy and ore and mizuna, plus the neon clarity and saltiness. A new era for Ecker Riesling?



2015 Zweigelt

12/1000ml | AEC-101L

Spicy, dusty with a little char. Leans toward Blaufränkisch. On the money.

2016 Zweigelt “Brillant”

12/750ml | AEC-107

In bottle three days, so apart from being shockingly young and closed it's the usual snuggly Zweigelt, an addictively tasty summertime red.



REGION / SUB REGION

Wagram / Feuersbrunn

VINEYARD AREA

28 hectares

ANNUAL PRODUCTION

25,000 cases

TOP SITES AND SOIL TYPES

Feuersbrunner Spiegel,
Feuresbrunner Rosenberg,
Engabrunner Stein
(loess, Gföhler gneiss, sand,
chalk, and red gravel)

GRAPE VARIETIES

90% Grüner Veltliner
10% Riesling

FARMING PRACTICES

Respekt certified Biodynamic

Bernhard Ott's wines join the wines of Heidi Schröck, Ludwig Hiedler and Nikolaihof (in this portfolio at least) as being what I call "analog," that is, marked by a certain warmth in contrast to the chiseled surgical clarity of other kinds of wines. Analog wines take longer to understand because they're not explaining everything to you. They articulate in different ways. You need to let them build up over several years before they accumulate into a narrative you can repeat. In the interim you call them "rich" or "creamy" or, in Ott's case, corpulent, capacious and generous. Dionysian, not Apollonian.

Being with Bernhard at his estate in Feuersbrunn is a little like being with the Saahs' at Nikolaihof, in that it isn't just another "winery-visit," but rather an immersion into an entire environment that has a larger context than you expected, seeming to encompass not only the human world, but all of the world. You're invited to participate, not only to observe, and certainly not only to act as an audience.

Instead you walk into a family's vision of life, a microcosm of the world they desire and have made for themselves.

He is now fermenting 100% *sponti*, which makes sense. Otherwise the 2016 vintage seems like a tangible step forward, or perhaps its sleek lines suited Ott's endomorphic style. I think we still don't really grok these wines over here, though they're selling very well. Of course the basic GV (Am Berg) is laudable, but to really "get" these wines you have to move up toward the Crus, and ideally into the Crus. Ott, most vitally and purely, is Rosenberg; it isn't only his icon-wine, it's also the man himself in the form of Grüner Veltliner, among which it occupies a unique place.

We did make time for a visit to the compost piles, which were steamy and sweet-smelling. It was also curious to have Ott as our first stop, to taste these wines before a vintage context had been formed. Yet I still think it's a markedly excellent crop, both typical '16 and typical Ott.

2016 Grüner Veltliner “Am Berg”

12/750ml | AOT-055

As before it's mostly Ott's own fruit plus some (organic) fruit he buys from colleagues whose vineyards are *worked and harvested* by Ott's team. From the Zalto it's generous and mineral, weedier (he says this results from bio-dynamics) and wilder (all *sponti*); straw and toasted herbs, lots of cling. From a Riedel tulip the texture is creamier and the flavors more limey and salty, though less direct than from the Zalto. Fine in any case.

I love you for so handsomely supporting this wine, but with just a wee stretch upward you'll receive a big jump upward if you'll also consider....

2016 Grüner Veltliner “Fass 4”

12/750ml | AOT-056

...This is considered by Ott to be his first “serious” GV for the table, and it is masterly in 2016. It smells great from both glasses but tastes better from the Zalto (credit where it's due), more animated and winsome, sorrely and intricate; no great shakes in terms of sheer impact but the loveliest possible flavor and delicacy.

2016 Grüner Veltliner “Der Ott”

12/750ml | AOT-058

This wine is made from young vines in the three Grand Crus, and if those wines are too spendy you can get a lot of their mojo here. Or if you happen to like intense wine but not *big* wine.

In 2016 it is entirely outstanding, some of it picked *after* the Crus. It made me think of Schlossgut Diel's *Schlossberg*, the perfect expression of character and clarity without the lofty-and-noble standing of the GG type. It's companionable, articulate, salty, doesn't hog the conversation; the kind of wine you want to use, not stand in awe of; finish of nettles and mizuna. And 12.5% *alc*.

2016 Grüner Veltliner Spiegel

12/750ml | AOT-059

And so to the Crus, starting with the highest-elevation vineyard in the Wagram; the wine itself is high-toned, with fennel chervil and mint aromas; spicy and adamant, full of tat-soi and ore, and it was transformed in the Riedel—total wild herb and lovage and savory with a minty bite on its penetrating finish.

2016 Grüner Veltliner Stein

6/750ml | AOT-060

The site is in Engabrunn, just over the border in the Kamptal, and it sits on (mostly) the so-called Gföhler gneiss, and will remind you more of Kamptal GVs than of Ott's expected style. Which compels me to wonder... how much of what I infer and (perhaps glibly) conclude about Bernhard's style has to do with his particular soils? Because this wine really wouldn't be out of place at, say, Bründlmayer.

Ask me to tell you the story of how Bernhard came to own in this vineyard; it's quite moving.

The stunning '16 could pass for (the Wachau's) *Achleiten*; rye-dough and caraway; from the Riedel it's all swollen mineral, sun on rocks, salty nuances, compelling and translucent; it has elements still in reserve; wonderful authority and complexity and a great rich bellow of flavor, without anything like discrete “fruit.”

2016 Grüner Veltliner Rosenberg

6/750ml | AOT-061

It's the icon-wine of Ott, and widely considered among the few greatest GVs in Austria. And I *love* it in cool vintages. It smells astonishing from both glasses; magnificent and entirely overwhelming, stern and loessy and old-vines density (60 years); he got 5,000 liters from 7 hectares. Soy and hon-shimeijis feature in an ever more intricate mélange; I don't know when I've tasted better from Ott.



2016 Gemischter Satz

12/750ml | AOT-054

Eight varieties, picked and vinified over a 2-day span; a pretty wine with walnut and sweet straw, lovely anti-varietal vinosity, it has more density and authority from the tulip shape.

2016 Riesling Feuersbrunn

12/750ml | AOT-057

Well! This is fine, fresh, giddy with lime blossom and balsam; a firm high-stepping wine that reminded me of Dönnhoff's *Höllenpfad* in its friendlier editions. Actually this is kin to the '16 Germans, all the way to the slightly phenolic farewell.



KREMSTAL & KAMPTAL

Austria's best values are coming from the Kamp and Kremstals. This doesn't mean the cheapest wines; it means the lowest available prices for *stellar* wines. Austria is often paradoxical in that the more you pay the better the value, e.g., the top Kremstal/Kamptal Grüner Veltliners seem to provide more quality than any other white wine the same money would buy. This may be partly due to the giant shadow cast by the neighboring Wachau, and the determination of the best Kampers and Kremsters to strut their stuff. For the price of really middling Federspiel from a "name" estate in the Wachau you can get nearly stellar quality in Kammern or Langenlois, and the absolute best from a Nigl or a Gobelsburg is substantially less expensive than their Wachau counterparts. And, every single bit as good. Other than the profound individuality of certain sites (Heiligenstein comes first to mind) there's little of regional "style" to distinguish these wines from Wachau wines. In fact Willi Bründlmayer told me all three regions were once one big region called WACHAU. Ludwig Hiedler points out Langenlois is warmer than anywhere in the Wachau, and he believes his wines need even more time than theirs do.

I had a rather subversive conversation with a Kremstal grower one year, as part of our mutual lamenting of the "DAC" silliness. He said "I'm not really all that sure why we need all these regions at all; Kremstal, Kamptal, Traisental, Wagram... are they really so different?" Well wow. I don't often hear growers speaking so blasphemously. It sort of made my mind reel. *You know*, I said, *even the Kremstal is senseless as a single region; the valley itself is one thing but it's very different from the löss terraces along the Danube in terms of exposure and microclimate*, to which he

agreed. You can make a case for the Wachau between Dürnstein and Spitz, i.e., the gorge, because that area has singular characteristics. But I'm not entirely sure how the consumer benefits from having so many different regions whose wines aren't that different from one another. I rather think these things are done by bureaucrats and marketing folks, because they get a kick out of categorizing. Yet a *true* breakdown of these places based on soil, exposure and microclimate would look very different than the currently demarcated regions.

NOTES ON GAISBERG AND HEILIGENSTEIN

We get to see Heiligenstein from Bründlmayer, and then we'll consider it again along with its next-door neighbor Gaisberg from Schloss Gobelsburg, Ludwig Hiedler and Johannes Hirsch. That might look redundant, but these are two sites equivalent to Chambertin and Clos de Bèze and if *you* had three suppliers with parcels in *both* sites, you *wouldn't* offer them? C'mon now!

These are the preeminent Riesling Grand Crus of the Kamptal, and they stand among the greatest land on earth in which Riesling is planted. They're contiguous hillsides, each the lower slopes of the Mannhart-hills, but they're dissimilar in crucial ways. Heiligenstein is higher and broader-shouldered (thanks to Peter Schleimer for that image), and probably just the slightest bit warmer. Soils differ also—Gaisberg is crystalline, a soil type the Austrians call "Gföhler Gneiss" which you'll hear the Wachauers talk about also. It's granitic in origin, containing the so-called *Glimmerschiefer* ("gleaming slate") which is essentially fractured granite or

schist containing little flecks of silica or mica which sparkle in the sun.

Gaisberg is the type of site wherein Riesling feels inherent, as if neither culminates without the voice of the other. It gives highly *Rieslingy* Rieslings. Slim in body, brilliant in berried and mineral nuance, on the "cool" side of the spectrum.

Heiligenstein's soil is said to be unique; so-called Zöbinger Perm, a sedimentary sandstone-conglomerate from the late Paleozoic Age, also containing fine sand and gleaming slaty clays. The site is too steep to have collected löss. The wines of this astounding vineyard are clearly profound, though more "difficult" and temperamental than Gaisberg's. Great Heiligenstein contains an improbable conciliation of ostensibly disparate elements: citrus-tart against citrus-sweet (lime against papaya), herbal against pitted fruit (woodruff against nectarine), cool against warm (green tea against roasted beets). The wines are more capacious than Gaisberg's, yet not as entirely brilliant; they have more stomach, they are tenors or altos when Gaisberg are sopranos.

Which is the better vineyard, you ask? Yes, I answer.

Indeed if Riesling got the respect it deserved, both sites would be studied as obsessively and in such detail as great vineyards in the Côte d'Or. And if the sky fell we would all catch sparrows. But two things bear mentioning. First, both vineyards (but especially Heiligenstein) have different exposures as they follow the mountainside, and there are distinctions between, say, Zöbinger Heiligenstein and Kammerner Heiligenstein. Second, these sites have many proprietors, and while you can't make mundane wine from either of them, there's unexceptional stuff to be found. Of course, in pages other than these...

BERGER



REGION / SUB REGION

Kremstal / Gedersdorf

VINEYARD AREA

18 hectares

ANNUAL PRODUCTION

20,000 cases

TOP SITES AND SOIL TYPES

Gebling
(löss and gravelly löss) ;
Steingraben
(clay-marl-löss rock) ;
Leithen
(löss and rock) ;
Haid
(deep brown earth)

GRAPE VARIETIES

70% Grüner Veltliner
15% Zweigelt
9% Riesling
5% Chardonnay,
Malvasier,
Cabernet Franc,
Welschriesling
1% Gelber Muskateller

Erich has been accepted into *Fair 'N Green*, joining such wine luminaries as Clemens Busch, Georg Breuer, Dönnhoff, Leitz, Melanie Pfister (in Alsace), Theo Haart and Karthäuserhof, among others. The organization certifies based on admirably holistic criteria, and not only in the vineyards. They set standards for fair wages and contracts, decent housing for workers, advanced safety training, water and power usage, waste management, carbon footprint, even transport. All of this seems to me to be much more helpful than the fussy preoccupation with yeasts and sulfur prevailing in some of the *Naturalista* community.

And I'm proud of Erich Berger. He's an unpretentious man, and most of you know him from his most unpretentious wine (The GV Liters), but his wines and he are more serious than we seem to give him credit for. Sure, the Liters "sell themselves," and yet I can't fathom Erich ever taking it for granted.

It isn't in his makeup. I can see each year how serious he is to ensure this wine is still performing for me. I mean, it's a modest wine he can't make more than pennies on, yet he cares about it because he's made of caring. I'm moved by the humble decency of taking care that this little wine is still good, is always still good. It takes just as much caring as it does to ensure a great wine is indeed great. But the difference is that everyone notices the great wines; you get trophies and awards and 'tout le monde' wants to buy you a beer. Here your caring goes un-remarked upon. I suddenly remembered a thing I hadn't thought of in years. Once I was at a carwash that

did some detailing of the outsides and insides, and as I was waiting for my decidedly cheap-ass car, I observed all the very nice expensive cars the guys were working on. But they took the same care with my funky beat up Accord hatchback as they did with the Caddies and BMWs, and I was extremely impressed. "Thanks for respecting even my crappy car," I said. "Just doin' it right," they said. That's it: just doin' it right. So while I am very proud and happy to offer and sell this Liter wine, I have to wonder why so few of its customers are curious to see what else Erich can do. "If this wine is this good then how must the better wines be? They don't cost all that much more..."

Berger is the last in what I'm starting to think of as my Trilogy Of Charm—which would include Setzer and Ecker—and I suppose I'll just spend my cranky old-coot years fussing and foaming at how little we appreciate wines like these. This isn't such an issue with "civilians," normal wine drinkers, but the closer you get to the profession the more we seem to detach from our instinctual pleasure centers. To be sure, great wines warrant all the attention we can spare and all the words we can offer. But there are wines for which words are irrelevant; they just taste good and we love them. A classic example is Berger's Loess-terassen GV. It's in the middle of his range—the accursed middle—and all it does is taste addictively wonderful. It could be a proverbial desert-island wine because you would never get tired of it. While we rise to the demands of great wines, and are happy to, the companionably tasty wine asks nothing from us. We can relax with it. It is hale, easy-going, and it keeps us company.

2016 Grüner Veltliner

12/1000ml | ABG-163L

It's slimmer than last year, as many wines were. Lentily and leafy and taut. More fresh and bracing.

2016 Grüner Veltliner "Loessterassen"

12/750ml | ABG-166

In my fantasy I've been asked to present one wine with which to affirm the existence of GrüVe. I have my choice of many dozens of mighty and profound examples, whereby I can demonstrate that GV can also be "great." But that's almost too easy. To affirm that GV belongs among the finest grapes from which white wine is made, and that it should be uniquely cherished for its particular gifts, I'd prefer to present this *average* wine, the kind of wine a careful caring grower can make in any good vintage and that sells for the price of hamburger, not filet mignon.

One swirl, one sniff, one taste, and the doors swing open, and GV is welcomed into the elite. Even this simple wine? *Especiallly* this simple wine.

I'm delighted to see we're starting to gain traction with it. I tasted the '16 with ten days in bottle and can't really appraise it. It has 12.9% alc so it's riper than usual, and I think bottling distorted it, whereby its peppery sternness and impressive length obscured the usual wet-cereal charm. So details deferred.

2014 Grüner Veltliner Wieland

+ +

12/750ml | ABG-154

Clearly the best GV Erich has ever made—or yet made—and only a few cases remain, after the additional case I'm buying for my own cellar. Toasted brioche and malt aromas; cask influence is present but not obtrusive; oleander and saffron, langoustines and satsumas, *very* sweet mid-summer squash and hugely expressive balsam. It's like a curious marriage between Aÿ Champagne and French toast.

The soil is a calcerous sandy loess, and the Grand Cru is new to Berger's stable starting with this wine. *VERY* impressive.

2016 Grüner Veltliner Reischenthal

+

12/750ml | ABG-167

Another new site for Berger, it's on deep loess and makes a big impressive GV along lines of Nigl's Alte Reben; big, smoky, like a demi-glace of lentil with focus and character; stovetop-roasted yellow pepper, both the charred skin and the flesh sweetness; zucchini and oyster mushrooms. And this was also just bottled!

2015 Grüner Veltliner Wieland

+

12/750ml | ABG-168

Totally exotic, all the way to the gold color; like a corn bisque with roasted pumpkin seeds and buttery croutons; massively rich and sweet-salty, it even wears its high alcohol well. Not my "type" of wine but I can't deny its voluptuous power, and the hedonists get their way once in a while...

2016 Gelber Muskateller

+

12/750ml | ABG-164

Consistently the friendliest Muscat in this offering, it's been so good for so long we added it to the CORE-LIST—our first Muscat! So you can buy it all the time, and ought to. This is a beautiful vintage, a classic Berger Muscat.



2016 Riesling Steingraben

+ +

12/750ml | ABG-169

A classified site, loess over calcerous deposits from the Alps, the vineyard is steep and warm. Often Erich's Rieslings from here have (in my view) succumbed to rather more botrytis and alcohol than was good for them, but this '16 may be the best Riesling in the modern history of this estate.

It soars into another whole orbit, and can easily play among the top Rieslings of the Krems and Kamptal. Lavish green aromas (balsam, lime zest, wintergreen); solid structure—the fit and finish are tight; juicy flavor but firm texture, with nuances of anise hyssop. What an achievement! And all for the price of a *Federspiel* from the Wachau.

2015 Zweigelt

12/1000ml | ABG-165L

Rose-hippy and more delicate than I anticipated from '15. The tertiary fruit is ample but the attack is less round than usual; about the weight of many Jura reds but without smelling like dirty sneakers and worms.

NIGL



REGION / SUB REGION

Kremstal / Senftenberg

VINEYARD AREA

25 hectares

ANNUAL PRODUCTION

25,000 - 30,000 cases

TOP SITES AND SOIL TYPES

Senftenberger Pellingen,
Hochäcker
(mica slate, slate)

GRAPE VARIETIES

40% Grüner Veltliner
40% Riesling
5% Sauvignon Blanc
5% Gelber Muskateller
10% other varieties

If Nigl had a “golden age” it was probably the decade of the 90s, when each vintage felt guided by a steady hand, and difficult years (96, 98) were easily surmounted. Nigl’s the guy you’d have wanted to do your brain surgery, his wines were always so incisive and scalpel-fine.

And great vintages were abundant; 90 itself, and also 93, 95 (when he was among the very best in all of Austria), 97 and 99.

It’s not that things went kaput in 2000. They just changed. The estate added land, they started building the hotel and restaurant, and a few of the wines went a little rogue. In hot vintages (03, 06) one started to encounter alcohol-bombs, which seemed at odds with Martin Nigl’s keen chiseled style. I continued selecting to find “his” kinds of wines, which always were there to be found, but I had to audition them now.

In 2016 we taste the fourth consecutive superb vintage here, and this means it isn’t just-so-happening; it is deliberate. We were there on a busy Sunday morning

and Martin was clearly besieged, so we dispatched the wines just a little faster than I’d have preferred. Nigl’s wines are too complex to taste quickly, unless you don’t need to write notes. So if I say “complex” it means I didn’t have time to write the 483 words warranted by the intricacies of these beings.

Martin also defeated my pitiable attempt to rein in the offering. The wines were just too good. I know it means *too many choices* and I know that’s bothersome, but I haven’t outgrown a doomed idealism that says “If a wine is beautiful then you should have access to it, and it doesn’t matter if there are two beautiful wines or eight of them—nothing of beauty is left behind.”

A year like 2016 is ideal to show the astonishing transparency of Nigl’s best wines, which are clearer than clarity, and so microsurgically detailed it’s like he arranged the flavors with little chef’s tweezers, just-so in the glass.

Let’s start with the classics.

2016 Grüner Veltliner Kremser Freiheit

12/750ml | AFN-293

An excellent moderate vintage of this; mineral and detailed with a doughy loess profile. It's (of course) less rich than '15 but also *much* richer than '14.

2016 Grüner Veltliner Senftenberger Piri

12/750ml | AFN-294

I didn't get a proper look at this; it was in bottle just two weeks.

2016 Grüner Veltliner Alte Reben

12/750ml | AFN-298

+ +

The loessy terraces down-valley near the Danube, where this wine comes from, usually give it a certain gracious fruitiness combined with old-vines intensity and strength.

This '16 is actually *better* than the '15; it has just 13% alc (yay!) and a fantastic fragrance leading into a gorgeous wine, an essence of loess with detail and charm and multi-layered complexity; stylish, firm yet amenable and just as "intense" as it needs to be. Pause a moment, taste it and then let it **wow** you—but don't rush by it.

2016 Grüner Veltliner Rehberger Zwettl

12/750ml | AFN-297

+

From an amphibolite vineyard mid-valley, and this wine is sensational. There are two lots, the second of which I selected; it was livelier and higher-toned; salt and fennel and a charmingly juicy sweet-savor, an entirely fascinating mélange of wet cereal and caraway.

2016 Grüner Veltliner Herzstück vom Kirchberg

12/750ml | AFN-299

+

Staring in the 2010 vintage Martin has bottled this wine separately when its volume warrants; otherwise it goes into the "Privat." From the hotel's parking lot a pathway goes toward a small terraced hill with a church at its prow, and this wine hails from those terraces. There's never a lot of it.

This '16 is impressive! Sweated fennel and fennel crackers; bready but not "doughy," formed to a high degree of gloss and precision on the herbal-grassy spectrum, with notes of Sarawak black pepper. The finish is vaporous and refined.

2016 Grüner Veltliner "Privat" Senftenberger Pellingen

6/750ml | AFN-302

+ (+)

(*from a cask sample*) the wine is rich and stern, rocks and herbs, a minty shimmer. Bottling will temporarily suppress its juiciness. Mizuna and arugula, Argan oil, black salt and a rich physio-sweet texture; virtuosic stuff. Basmati, lemon and mint, and a dustier crushed rock texture from the lower (colder) part of the bottle.

A NOTE: I often watch the pouring sequence, and if I'm poured first I always ask for another pour from deeper down the bottle. Sometimes the difference is dramatic.

From the lower part of a steeply terraced hillside, the soils run to amphibolite, marble, gravel and loam over a bedrock of mica-schist.

2016 Riesling Dornleiten

12/750ml | AFN-288

Nice, cool green skipping little-kid Riesling; lime zest, tarragon, wintergreen, Sencha and Dragonwell; a winsome yet definitely dry Riesling.

2016 Riesling Senftenberger Piri

12/750ml | AFN-295

+

This may be the best Piri in years, an impressive concentrate, like a dense smoothie of three dozen herbs and flowers.

2016 Riesling *Rehberger Goldberg*

+

6/750ml | AFN-300

Amphibolite seems to give a kind of Sauv-Blanc twang to its Rieslings; we see it again in Hiedler's *Steinhaus*. This wine is lovely; juicy and mineral and the apparently typical caraway-seed thing; it has a sort of thrilling dryness, racy and resinous and a brisk finish as though minerals are imploding in your mouth.

2016 Riesling “Privat” *Senftenberger Pellingen*

+ + (+)

6/750ml | AFN-302

This is near-great Austrian Riesling; iris and dark lilac and mint and verbena; a greenly sweet and masterly wine, complex and gorgeous and even in Austria it is 1-of-a-kind.

2016 Riesling *Hochäcker*

+ + +

6/750ml | AFN-301

Martin will get a chuckle when he sees I love this even more than the *Pellingen*. “Terry always prefers the wines with a few grams of residual sugar,” he’ll think. And yes, that’s part of it. *Part*.

In great vintages this is one of the world’s best Rieslings. Yes, you read it right—one of the world’s best.

It’s a plateau above the *Pellingen*, on a complex soil in which the original loess eroded and exposed the bedrock of marble, amphibolite, paragneiss and mica schist. Because it is flat it stores water, and because of *that* it is stunning in dry vintages. I cannot, honestly, drink the 2013 without weeping. (Even if I’m also watching wrestling!) And this ’16? All the mythos of this great vineyard comes to life in a complex explosion of mineral, fruit, herb and citrus, a gorgeous flavor rendered with shimmering brilliance and detail. Ravishing fruit and steely brilliance; can’t ask for more.

OUTLIERS AND EXTRAS

2016 Gelber Muskateller

+

12/750ml | AFN-287

Now that I know Martin’s a fan of Müller-Catoir’s Muscats, I hold him to a higher standard, which is unfair but Muscat lovers don’t fart around. This vintage is *dicht* and mineral along with its elderflower, almost as though it were a *Goldert* from ZH, or in any case a mineral-dust backdrop for all the varietal yammer. 11.5 alc distinguishes it from the more...um, “endowed” Alsace wine.

SEKT Brut de Brut, N.V.

6/750ml | AFN-303

In fact it’s 2013 CH-GV and 2014 PN-Zweigelt. I don’t know how he does it, but this is always seemingly effortless and perfect, crackery and snappy, balanced and easy-drinking. But it doesn’t taste mundane or “cheap!” Honestly it’s a HIDDEN GEM in this portfolio.

2013 SEKT Rosé Brut

6/750ml | AFN-304

Smart and bright; very dry but loaded with rose-hippy fruit; slim and racy and drinks all too easily.

2016 Zweigelt Rosé

12/750ml | AFN-289

Again a year-round Rosé, rather surprisingly in Nigl’s case as I’d have expected him to make a light wine. Rich color and *lots* of substance, richness, fruit and vigor.

BRÜNDLMAYER



REGION / SUB REGION

Kamptal / Langenlois

VINEYARD AREA

80 hectares

ANNUAL PRODUCTION

33,000 cases

TOP SITES AND SOIL TYPES

Berg Vogelsang,
Loiser Berg,
Steinmassel
(primary rock) ;
Käferberg
(marine sediments on primary rock) ;
Heiligenstein
(Permian rock) ;
Lamm
(Loam on Permian rock)

GRAPE VARIETIES

38% Grüner Veltliner
19% Riesling,
43% Pinot Noir,
St. Laurent,
Chardonnay
and other varieties

FARMING PRACTICES

ISO 22000 Sustainable

I often talk about things like “class” and “timbre” when I write about Bründlmayer.

Class is indefinable. It bears upon a certain simplicity, but it isn't simple. It feels effortless but it isn't. It's richly satisfying but it's hard to say why. It may seem to have little to do with the reasons you buy this wine and not the other one, or with what you choose to drink, but at last you stumble upon it and find you can't resist any more. Class will give you pleasure deeper than joy or amusement.

Timbre is the way an instrument sounds, or more accurately, the way a given player makes it sound. The great players seem to release an almost fluid sonorousness from an instrument. It purrs for them. I often receive this image spontaneously when I taste Willi's wines. And I think if you put these things together you arrive at elegance, which is another wine-word you can't deconstruct. When you taste them, you'll find you respond from the richest aspect of your temperament, or else you'll barely respond at all. These wines won't put on a show for you, but they will deliver a calm grace and a genial loveliness.

There are a lot of wines, but there are a lot of *back-vintages*, which is exceedingly

rare in Austria, and I join Willi in our quixotically doomed attempt to wean buyers away from latest-vintage mania.

I write about Willi, because we're contemporaries, but mostly it's his son Vincent who's the face of the estate for you. (And what a face...) Vincent affords me the deference appropriate to a Great-Friend-O-Dad's, not to mention a big-market importer, but sooner or later this will all be his, and we'll see what that means. His own wine—the GV from Spiegel—is superb, and he has time to grow into the legacy.

It is stirring to observe the way this estate has soared the last 3-4 years, as if to issue the gentlest yet most confident reminders that they are indeed stellar. The “competition” between them and Gobelsburg, in which Bründlmayer is an investor, is loving and mutually admiring, but at one point it began to seem as if Willi were being eclipsed, and his estate seems to have been spurred on, and is making the best wines I have ever seen in twenty years of tasting and representing them. It's an exciting, exhausting visit. There are a *lot* of wines, and a lot of demanding wines, not because they are “difficult,” but because they are majestic, searching and insanely complex.

REDS

Willi-reds have tended to be exceptionally fragrant and markedly “cool,” as if Willi is insisting on a certain freshness attendant to northern-latitude reds. In any case he doesn’t seem to be looking for warmth. I’m glad he indulges my making selections that are often disparate from year to year. These are important wines because the estate is important, and this year’s duo is markedly enticing.

2015 Zweigelt Reserve

6/750ml | ABY-413

With last year’s ST-L I am wondering whether a new era is suggested, as I can’t recall a more seductive pair of reds from here. This one is classy, silky, refined and smart, with a deft balance of fruit, concentration and wood. Really splits the difference between aristocratic and *yummy*.

2015 Pinot Noir Reserve

6/750ml | ABY-414

There was a regular PN that had rather more cool green-pepper notes than I appreciated, but this wine is truly rich, not merely assertive or show-offy with barrels; sweet fruit, a little dusty, silky tannin, a real slip-and-slide PN, classy and not affected.

GRÜNER VELTLINERS

These divide into 3-4 layers or echelons. There’s the very light ones Willi prefers not to send abroad. There’s the everyday Kamptal Terrassen. There are two mid-weight single-vineyard wines, and then there are the big wines, starting with Alte Reben and moving to the blockbusters of Spiegel, Käferberg and Lamm. I try to cull a selection that isn’t unruly, but it isn’t always easy. When multiple vintages are available I often take the newbie and either the oldest or the best-drinking among the bottle-aged. You’d be forgiven for thinking it’s all a Teutonic chaos but in fact there’s a striving for pattern and form. And merciful heavens—the wines are good!

2016 Grüner Veltliner Kamptal Terrassen

12/750ml | ABY-400

Always a mélange of young vines in top sites alongside wines from little scrips and scraps of small parcels it’d be senseless to vinify separately. The ’16 is surprisingly rich and fine; sorrel and lentil aromas lead to one of the wet-cereal yellow-fruit white tea and jasmine rice editions of this, a wine that straddles the line between sweet-grass and balsam and ripe fruit elements.

2016 Grüner Veltliner Ried Berg Vogelsang

12/750ml | ABY-402

No more HALVES of this, alas; the above will now be offered in half-bottles. Assuming the estate will tolerate me, I will toggle between this wine and the *Loiser Berg* GV according to what I prefer, and I’ll offer both if they’re lovely and I’m helpless.

This ’16 is as fine a wine as I’ve ever tasted from *Vogelsang*. Spicy but not spiky, the wine is almost creamy and it’s completely delicious; mineral and silk, clear and caressing.

2015 Grüner Veltliner Alte Reben

6/750ml | ABY-407

2014 Grüner Veltliner Alte Reben

6/750ml | ABY-368

The ’16 is graceful and classy, with the silky flow of the vintage, delicious as opposed to powerful.

Tasting ’15 and ’14, and assuming I’d prefer the ’15, I was delighted to be wrong. Forget whatever “dubious” reputation 2014’s supposed to have—this wine is excellent. It’s gorgeous, delineated, animated and rich, salty and long, GV at its brassica best.



2015 Grüner Veltliner “Vincent’s Spiegel”

+

6/750ml | ABY-383

The flat vineyard is basically gravels over a loess bedrock, tending to give solid stony wines. This wine is certainly impressive, massive and solid, almost not “GV” any more. I wonder whether Vincent isn’t “forcing” it into a power and density it doesn’t want to contain. A thicker mid-palate would have joined the somewhat monolithic solidity to the varietal vetiver. In the end there’s an herbal saltiness and chili-thread warmth, and all of it is brilliant, strong and intense, yet curiously not *rich*.

2016 Grüner Veltliner Ried Lamm

+ + (+)

6/750ml | ABY-417

One of the very few most important GVs in Austria. Most vintages turn out to boggle the mind after about 12-15 years. A couple of them are (for my taste) a little too woody. Willi’s Lamm is also rather more obscure in its youth than, say, Gobelsburg’s, which is more scrutable and evident. A comparison vertical would be both instructive and would waste everyone from getting any work done the rest of the day. In any case, if Austria has a “Montrachet,” this is it.

I was surprised to even see the ’16, and even more surprised to find it quite approachable. It’s a wine of rich raw dark dough—Lamm is always bready, herbal (especially rosemary) and oddly lamb-like. (The name doesn’t refer to lamb meat but actually derives from a dialect pronunciation of the word “Lehm,” which means *loam*). It has gigantic potential if it absorbs its wood flavors; it is wonderfully salty and dense, yet not remotely heavy. 2016 is never heavy.

RIESLINGS

For sustained profundity over a wide range and over decades, these could well be the greatest Rieslings in Austria, and among the most supernal examples of dry Riesling to be found anyplace

2016 Riesling “Kamptal Terrassen”

12/750ml | ABY-403

As generous as the K-T GrüVe is in '16, the Riesling is rather more Calvinist. It's zingy and focused, with the flowy juiciness of the year; tarragon and spearmint and salts; not acid-driven as such, but *neon* buzzing high tones; Riesling for those who relish a little Altoid sting.

2016 Riesling Ried Zöbinger Heiligenstein

12/750ml | ABY-419

The entry to a lofty world of greatness, this “basic” wine from a truly great Riesling vineyard. (It's sort of like going to the best concert ever but sitting in the back...) In any case, I buy it for my own cellar and find all that I need for rejoicing. The '16 emphasizes a mid-range, toasted nutmeg and cinnamon, trumpet mushrooms just as they start to caramelize in the pan; the top notes are a bit nebulous but the mineral is more tangible. Lovely now, this wine is very much *en-route*.

2016 Riesling Ried Zöbinger Heiligenstein “Lyra”

6/750ml | ABY-424

2015 Riesling Ried Zöbinger Heiligenstein “Lyra”

6/750ml | ABY-390

2014 Riesling Ried Zöbinger Heiligenstein “Lyra”

6/750ml | ABY-359

A special cuvée from only lyre-trained vines, showing in Willi's words that “You don't need old vines to give great Riesling.” He adds, “The greater leaf surface gives increased photosynthesis, protects the grapes, and besides, it looks like the vine is throwing its arms up toward the sun.”

Comparing Lyra with Alte Reben is an abidingly fascinating exercise. In hot years Lyra often prevails, when A.R. gets too ripe. In most years it's lovely to look at what I call “above ground flavors” (in Lyra) versus “below ground flavors” (in A.R.), but this doesn't always mean the Lyra is *fruity*. Often it is quite herbal—this is, after all, Heiligenstein.

Indeed Lyra has gotten deeper as the vines age, and the distinction between the two siblings is sometimes ambiguous or wooly – at least until you taste the Alte Reben!

I'm offering three vintages and you ought to buy them all, especially if you're a somm, because the relative extroversion of Lyra will better prevail over the distractions of resto dining. (Alte Reben is for meditation, or just sitting there weeping.) The **2016** is atypically *green*, herbal, but scintillating. This facet has always existed but here it's front & center; a penetrating intensity of herbal, silvery mineral notes, reminding me of an Alzinger *Steinertal*. The **2015** is rapturously seductive, lavish, erotic, enveloping; the blinds are drawn, the candles lit, the bodies anointed with fragrant potions....party's on. The **2014** is god help me even better, albeit much less voluminous, yet its inner sweetness has the promise, not of a wild night, but of life-long love.

2016 Riesling Ried Zöbinger Heiligenstein Alte Reben

6/750ml | ABY-423

2015 Riesling Ried Zöbinger Heiligenstein Alte Reben

6/750ml | ABY-398

Compared with the '16 Lyra this is, as usual, deeper, more inferential, certainly more inscrutable and complex and interior, and more visibly profound, more analog and loaded, but what it's loaded *with* is still to be seen and known. It's an older soul, more searching, less chatty.

The '15 has a stop-you-in-your-tracks aroma, entirely without “fruit,” but full of spices and dough at every stage of baking, bacon just as it warms in the pan, cherry blossoms at a peak of pungency. The palate is a compound-chord, part spice, part grains and straw, part mint and mineral. A truly grand wine, regardless of color or grape or vintage.

LIBRARY-CASE

2014 Riesling Ried Zöbinger Heiligenstein Alte Reben

+ +

2012 Riesling Ried Zöbinger Heiligenstein Alte Reben

+ + +

2011 Riesling Ried Zöbinger Heiligenstein Alte Reben

+ +

Enjoy! The '14 remains a delicate intricate masterpiece, the great Riesling of its vintage. The '12 is ridiculous! The '11 is silkier and more herbal.

<WHEW!> THE “OTHER” WINES

2015 Gelber Muskateller

+

12/750ml | ABY-391

A candidate for the best Austrian Muscat ever tasted, this is deep into Catoir territory and is lavishly gorgeous and shouldn't be missed.

Sekt Brut Rosé, N.V.

6/750ml | ABY-273

Super attractive! Deg. 12/2016, base vintage 2014, berried and spicy and yummy, wild raspberries and altogether lovely almost profligate fruit. Really aerial for a Blanc de Noirs.

Sekt Brut, N.V.

+

6/750ml | ABY-336

2013 base, it's CH-PBlanc-PGris-GV; the closest to a “Champagne aroma” among these; malt, whole wheat toast; classy texture; the palate is a bit like Geoffroy's “Expression” in its mirabelle-jam; it's a very *drinky* wine.

Sekt Extra Brut, N.V.

6/750ml | ABY-272

Deg 4/2016, 2013 base, CH-PN, it's again excellent and snappy, straw and brioche and tautly balanced.

SCHLOSS GOBELSBURG



REGION / SUB REGION

Kamptal / Gobelsburg

VINEYARD AREA

49 hectares

ANNUAL PRODUCTION

20,000 cases

TOP SITES AND SOIL TYPES

Steinsetz
(*alpine gravel and löss*) ;
Gaisberg,
Renner
(*primary rock with mica slate*) ;
Grub
(*löss*) ;
Lamm
(*calcareous loam*) ;
Heiligenstein
(*gneiss desert sandstone
with volcanic particles*)

GRAPE VARIETIES

55% Grüner Veltliner
25% Riesling
7% Pinot Noir
7% St. Laurent
7% Zweigelt
2% Merlot

FARMING PRACTICES

ISO 22000 Sustainable

I can't write this into a little capsule. It won't let itself be written that way. So again I beg your patience, and ask for 2-3 minutes to tell you a story I know you should hear.

Peter Schleimer and I were having dinner one night, and we ordered Gobelsburg's 2005 Grüner Veltliner "Tradition," and it was lovely, and got us talking.

Peter loves it too, as do many of his colleagues at VINARIA (the excellent wine magazine he heads up), and so we wondered why the idea hadn't seemed to spread to other estates. A few days later Johannes Hirsch was thinking out loud, wondering what it might be like to return to the old cellar instead of the brand-new one he built a few years ago, and there's a general sense somewhere between curiosity and yearning about the old ways—or the Old Ways—but best I can tell "Michi" Moosbrugger's the only man to actually make a wine along those lines. (Except of course for Nikolaihof, all of whose wines are this way.)

It's important to say the *Tradition* bottling is neither a pastiche nor even really a tribute. It arises from a wish to enter the spirit of the vintners of 100 years ago, before the possibilities of technology created choices they couldn't have imagined. What was their relationship to their land, to their grapes? And how did they conceive of wine?

"The prime motivator for these thoughts arose during the tasting of the old wines in the estate's cellar," Michi begins. Though this was done in order to determine what these old wines might be worth, the experience set a

range of thoughts in motion. "Afterward I grew curious about the winemaking practices of the '50s and '60s, and spoke with Father Bertrand as well as the cellar-master of those days. I felt that to understand those practices would help me better to understand what we're doing today." "I began to form the theory that, as more technological possibilities existed and were used, the wines became more uniform. The opposite possibility was also to be considered; less technology meant more variable wines. But these were just my starting-out hypotheses, and I'm not at all certain absolute answers are to be found. I think in order to begin to understand the wines of the pre-technological era, you have to try and understand the ideas behind them.

"The purpose in those days was to "school" the wines, what the French still call *elevage*, to raise the wines, or bring them up. It thus followed that for each wine there was an Ideal, and the job of the cellar-master was to realize these Ideals in the pure Platonic sense. Only when the Ideal is reached is the wine ready to be appreciated and sold. Naturally there was no recipe, but there was a sense of finding the proper moment in time and in the wine's natural oxidation, and these things were determined empirically and by feel. It's a highly dynamic system, with differences from cask to cask, vintage to vintage, grape to grape. Those people presumed that wine had to develop and expand in oxygen, entirely contrary to what we think today, that we have to protect it from oxygen at all costs."

But what is this Ideal? And is it some-



thing *a priori*, or is it of necessity limited by the contingencies of possibility? In order to go deeper into these questions, Michi set about to make a wine as it would have been made between the end of the Franco-Prussian war and the start of World War 1. The results are offered below.

It's quite different from drinking the normal GrüVe *Renner*—the Tradition comes from that vineyard. I adore the Renner; it's one of my favorite GrüVes, but in its modern way it seems to stride right at you, outstretched hand, big smile, saying "I'm having a great day; let me tell you why!"

But drinking the Tradition is like walking in your front door, and your beloved is listening to music, and she looks at you and you see she's been crying. She doesn't have to say a word. But something has happened, and it saturates the room, and then her, and then you.

There's a diligence and a curiosity about Michi that I admire very much. His wines don't just happen. He has a guiding idea for all of them, and his approach is deeply craftsmanlike. He also seems to think in what I might call Monk-time (and I don't mean Thelonious, though that's in the mix also) in that his vision includes a tactile connection to the past and future, and he's not making "items" to obtain *this* score *this* year.

His "contemporary" wines are hued a little differently than those of Bründlmayer, the style to which he's most closely related. Both families of wines are detailed and pixilated, but Willi's are more silvery and Michi's are more color-saturated, and specifically more *green*. They radiate clarity, candor and vitality, and they'll flirt with you a little. The old-school wines—what I'd call the *ancient* wines—are not entirely under the control of their host. They began more redolent and studiously

woody, but they've probed deeper layers of late, and I have the sense they are gradually unlocking mysteries so obscure that none of us knew they were there.

All of this is to say that I am *moved* by the sight of a serious conscientious man who is making the world more beautiful. It is always stirring to witness such care. And of course, the ordinary concerns of the world are duly dispatched, and we spend time talking about numbers and labels and the needs of the day. But I wonder, after I leave, what goes through Michi's mind about the wines. He tastes them all along with us. I taste and say what I have to say. I always drive away in a kind of thrill, and a little guilty; I alight upon a year's work like a migrating bird, I sit on my branch and sing and preen and then I fly off again. He puts the bottles back in the fridge, he knows I loved them (I couldn't hide it even if I wanted to), and there it was: his work.

BUBBLES

Brut Reserve, N.V.

12/750ml | AZZ-070

Deg 1/2017, based on 2013 with 15% reserve wine; a marvelous edition of this; herbs, green citrus, sorrel, vetiver; smalls like Marne Valley NV from a smart producer. May be the best one yet. Cuvée of GV-R-PN

Blanc de Blancs, Brut N.V.

6/750ml | AZZ-315

My first real taste of this. All 2012, deg 2/20/2017, 15% CH, 30% Welschriesling and 55% GV. Probably distorted from disgorgement, I had the sense of a wine with more angles and features, and the elegance and serenity of the NV are probably hidden behind disgorgement issues.

2004 Brut “R.D.”

6/750ml | AZZ-291

+ +

I have this in my cellar now and can drink through a bottle thoughtfully, and I’m here to tell you: this is the best sparkling wine I’ve ever had apart from Champagne. It’s a new disgorgement 7/2016—so *ten years* of tirage—no dosage but the usual modicum of RS after tirage (which no one ever talks about, especially not the *zero-dosage* crowd); this has outstanding character, articulation and complexity. It has all the 2004 wet forest leafy flavors, with lime and woodruff; it’s less “antique” in flavor than the ’01 was; it’s fresh and thready, complex and salty, crunchy yet with a deep green verbena sweetness. Just when I thought my mind was anchored, there it went boggling again. (The next vintage will be 2008, arriving next year.)

REDS

2015 Zweigelt Schlosskellerei Gobelsburg

12/750ml | AZZ-326

As always this wine is civil, genial, smart and delicious; the ’15 shows less dust and more sweet fruit than some vintages.

2015 Pinot Noir Reserve

12/750ml | AZZ-347

Herbal and savory; the oak is somewhat prominent but the texture is seductive and velvety. More rose-hips than violets, more tomato than cherry. More Garnacia or even Mencia than Tempranillo. Just an elegant and singular PN.

2015 St Laurent Reserve

6/750ml | AZZ-338

This isn’t so much “Burgundy-plus” as it is “Chateaufort-minus.” Minus the high alcohol, minus the feral and the sweat, but decidedly like an ethereally delicate southern Rhône, or even St. Joseph. More grace and less char than usual.

2015 Zweigelt Reserve

6/750ml | AZZ-348

+

Michi is one of the people wondering how good Zweigelt can be if it’s given some respect. And man, this wine is thoroughly dazzling—it’s the *Alto Adige* red you dream of and can never find, like a *Schiava* that isn’t only insanely yummy but also focused, refined and interesting. And balanced! (None of this 15% alc stuff you find in far too many of those “Alpine” reds...)

“GROONERS”

2016 Grüner Veltliner Schlosskellerei Gobelsburg

+

12/750ml | AZZ-323

Yup, a plus. It shouldn't be this good, and yet! It's a parfait of lilacs, wisteria and tarragon, it has energy, focus and flow, the wine is almost creamy yet it's lavish and light, cheerful and accommodating, a wine in high spirits, up for anything. It is, honestly, impossible to imagine anything better for this price.

2016 Grüner Veltliner Langenlois

+

6/750ml | AZZ-332

I was wary. Yet another wine? Sure, I understand this is a “village” wine to lead in to the Crus coming up, and I appreciate how Michi didn't want to jump from the negoç wine directly to *Steinsetz*. But whew, we got a lot of skus as it is...

The first sip demolished my concerns. It contains young-vines juice from the sites *Redling*, *Thal*, *Lamm* (!), *Renner* and *Grub*, which makes those wines even better.

This is more “physical” and earthy than the above—“like an AOC chicken” I wrote—plus wild lavender and other dark flavors, boxwood, balsam, Timut peppers and guava. Yet as it feints toward sternness it finishes with a giggle of freshness (and a chortle of charm); a perfect mid-weight GV prototype.

2016 Grüner Veltliner Ried Steinsetz

++

12/750ml | AZZ-329

It grows ever more gracious and complex as the vineyard ages; the old radishy-minty briskness is still present but now aligned to a new juiciness and starchy jasmine-rice flavors. This rippling flow of the '16s is almost poignantly lovely in the context of the peppery snap of a wine like this.

2016 Grüner Veltliner Ried Renner

++

6/750ml | AZZ-333

The vineyard lies at the foot of the Gaisberg, on eroded gneiss with a lot of paragneiss, mica and amphibolite, all under a blanket of loess. Its wines are as good as the *Lamm*, which is a warmer site giving wines of greater amplitude and stature. Yet Renner's quality of flavor and complexity of nuance are incomparable, and I often have it next to the *Lamm* just to make sure I'm not being diddled by my subjective preference for minerality.

This '16 smells glorious. Big surprise! It's completely stunning, and it leads to a palate that's fervidly spicy and texturally lush; the minerality is swollen and the wine is as peppery as I can remember.

2016 Grüner Veltliner Ried Lamm

++

6/750ml | AZZ-334

Lamm as a rule is buckwheat-y, rusky, savory but not thick, like a vegetable-veal stock with barley, yet oddly also like lamb itself. (“*Lamm*” doesn't mean lamb, but is rather a dialect word for “loam.”) It is a great wine though virtually without fruit per se. Its poise of gloss and power, intensity and outline, mass and transparency are emblems of the paradox without which no wine is truly great.

In 2016 it's a focused powerhouse of almost eucalyptus penetration. If Renner commences the birds to sing, *Lamm* commences the wolves to howl. More sheer assertion here, a determined affect, whereas Renner wants merely to sing.

2015 Grüner Veltliner “Tradition”

+++

6/750ml | AZZ-339

After the *Lamm* this takes us back to a contralto murmur, a mellow bronze roastiness, and a kind of limitless friendliness. Possibly the outer limits of complexity are embedded in here somewhere, but right now my heart is melted by the enveloping embrace. As the wine exhales in the glass it gets saltier and grainier, but it never stops glowing. You never knew that affirmation could be so tender, or tenderness be so affirming.

RIESLINGS

2016 Riesling Schlosskellerei Gobelsburg

12/750ml | AZZ-325

As always, this is stiffer and more pointed than the sibling GV; correct and scrupulous but with a phenolic nip that *real* dry-wine lovers will relish.

2016 Riesling Zöbing

6/750ml | AZZ-331

This is racy and herbal, but not exactly juicy; more of a stretched stony-fennelly tautness, ore and nettle; brisk but not brusque, with a mizuna snap on the finish.

2016 Riesling Ried Gaisberg

6/750ml | AZZ-341

Gaisberg for me is always a moonlight wine, as if somehow the grapes ripened at night when the moon is waxing. The '16 is piquant, "white" and cool and silvery, yet also with a certain creaminess, leading, again, to a firm adamant finish. These don't yield.

+

2016 Riesling Ried Heiligenstein

6/750ml | AZZ-342

Also quite obdurately *young*, with primary fruit (and fermentation) aromas still tangible. It seems to be the ground Moroccan spices side of Heiligenstein, less smoke and "fruit" but more sand and dark-meat chicken. But this could change completely in the next few months.

++

2015 Riesling "Tradition"

6/750ml | AZZ-337

Again like its brother GV, this has a *loving* aroma, and wow—this is really a masterly wine, higher relief and more angles than the GV but similarly kind and affectionate; salty and mineral. Drink it with someone you love; otherwise you will miss her and all you'll feel is triste

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HIEDLER



REGION / SUB REGION

Kamptal / Langenlois

VINEYARD AREA

28 hectares

ANNUAL PRODUCTION

16,500 cases

TOP SITES AND SOIL TYPES

Thal
(sandy löss and loam) ;
Kittmannsberg,
Spiegel
(löss) ;
Steinhaus
(gneiss with amphibolite) ;
Heiligenstein,
Gaisberg
(sandy weathered soils)

GRAPE VARIETIES

63% Grüner Veltliner
15% Riesling
6% Chardonnay
6% Weissburgunder,
Pinot Blanc
2% Sauvignon Blanc
8% Zweigelt,
Blauburgunder,
St. Laurent,
Sangiovese

It is a momentous time in the life of my old friend Ludwig Hiedler. The good news is that his son—Ludwig Jr.—is now at the winery full-time, his *wanderjahren* complete, and so father and son are establishing their tandem. The bad news is there's an illness in the family that is worrisome and dark. Ludwig and I are never guarded with each other, but this year there wasn't even the slightest membrane between us. I think of him now every day, and am beaming such love and courage as I can from far over the waters.

Young Ludwig Jr. doesn't seem to wish to enact a revolution, only to create new accents here and there. He is a *Hiedler*, bless him! He may stop short of Dad's outsized thirst for hugely juicy and exotic wines, but I doubt the generations will suffer more than the occasional benign skirmish.

It wouldn't be right to suggest it's anything-goes at Hiedler; in fact the wines and the man are entirely disciplined within the context in which he prefers to operate. Which is different than the others. And when you hear about it you might expect the wines to be much more untamed and atavistic than in fact they are. In fact what's striking here is how clear, refined and focused they are, while emphasizing a round rich vinosity in place of chiseled primary fruit. (It also suggests we are sometimes perhaps too forgiving of the flaws in some "natural" wines, as Hiedler's are as "natural" as they come, and they are not flawed...)

At some point with his wine in my glass I had a flickering thought that this was precisely the kind of wine I most

loved to drink, and that most people ought to love to drink; vivid and forthright, frisky and yet with substance, solid and strong yet still drinkable. And not so digitally detailed that you feel you have to study its every nuance with each and every sip. There is something incredibly hale about Hiedler's wines. They seem to glow with health and vitality.

The first organic experiments are happening, in the sites Thal and Kittmannsberg. And for the past several years now Ludwig has done only spontaneous fermentations without enzymes or even SO₂, and without temperature control. Part of this is Ludwig's innate restlessness, and another part is his desire to eschew the established orthodoxies.

"I am a restless spirit," said Ludwig Hiedler; "I always want another angle to improve the wines." Hiedler likes extract most of all. "It's the single most important facet of wine," he says. "That's why I don't believe in the whole-cluster pressing, because you lose too much extract." "Plus," he added with a merry gleam, "I like to be different from the others!"

I've been with Hiedler since the beginning, always happily and always with outsized pride of association. I *like* that the wines speak a radically different dialect than the colleagues' wines do. I love how almost "opulent" these are, and most of all I adore how clear and shapely they are, even with their effusive richness and oleaginous textures. We can easily surmise how the other growers' wines work – we know that language—but it's much harder to fathom how wines as plush as these can also be so refreshing and so palpably structured.

The wines are riddled and jammed with soul and personality, there are no other wines like them, and you know what? We underrate them, you, me, all of us. And so I am going to do a little shape-shifting myself, and begin the offering with...

RIESLING

And that is because Ludwig's Rieslings are entirely unlike any other Rieslings in Austria. They are as RIESLING-Y as they can be, yet they are seldom spritzy, rarely "crisp" and never squeaky-clean. Not quite as proper as Alzinger, but texturally similar; not quite as "antique" as Nikolaihof but also analog. I promise you this: IF YOU LOVE RIESLING AND DON'T KNOW THESE WINES, YOUR VISION OF RIESLING IS ABOUT TO BE RADICALLY EXPANDED.

2016 Riesling Langenlois

+

12/750ml | AHL-231

The name has shifted from *Urgestein* to the village-designation, but the wine is the same as before. The '16 is a total sweet-heart; iris and white lilac, lacy and winsome yet spicy and herbal; companionable and articulate and abidingly flavory, gliding between marjoram-sorrel and iris and other spring flowers.

2016 Riesling Ried Steinhaus

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12/750ml | AHL-232

WTF is it with this site? Is there a more remarkable Riesling *anywhere in the world??*

The wines are like some hybrid of Albariño, Chenin and Sauv-Blanc, herbal, limey, sorrel, aloe vera, hyacinth and herbs. It is my subjective fave among Ludwig's Rieslings. The site is steep with myriad little terraces, amphibolite and gneiss higher up, loess lower down, giving a Riesling for people who love Scheurebe, or you might say it's Riesling having *birthday sex*. For me this is a **not-to-be-missed** wine in this offering because it gives you all its warm-hearted kinky generosity for a reasonable price. Fragrances are refined, lime and verbena, but the palate is explosive, completely delicious and almost shatteringly complex; hyperactive interplay of herbs, ripe citrus, exotic fruit all blasted together in a Hadron-collider buzz of life-force, a twitching spazzy dance of herbal ripeness.

No one—*no damn one* on earth could have made a Riesling like this. Give it up for individuality! And take a deep bow Mr. Hiedler.

2016 Riesling Ried Kogelberg

+

6/750ml | AHL-234

A relatively high-elevation site on mica-schist and amphibolite, the wine is firm and aristocratic, standing at attention. It reminded me of Rüdesheimer Berg, actually. Not so much minerals as rocks and not so much rocks as *BOULDERS*. It isn't in the least austere—it has a ton of flavor, grill-marks and shoe-polish and physalis, and for all it's an upstanding-citizen it is also generous.

2016 Riesling Ried Gaisberg

++

6/750ml | AHL-233

For me the class of the '16 Hiedler Rieslings – a Heiligenstein was in some trough, though the "cannabis" aroma Ludwig Jr. noted was certainly "interesting..."

But this Gaisberg is a riot of white flowers and honeysuckle, leading into a juicy minty palate, replete with mineral as a side-note in a stream of lavish yet focused fruit; Asian pear, mirabelle, strawberry. You can call it exquisite; I won't argue.

2015 Riesling "Maximum"

6/750ml | AHL-235

These are just what they say: the furthest limits of ripeness and power, and unafraid of a little botrytis. This '15 is like a Condrieu of Riesling, a big cream-bomb, even a little like Marsanne or Gros Manseng. Like a Breton butter-cake with jasmine ice cream. For such a behemoth it has amazing focus.

2015 Weissburgunder “Maximum”

6/750ml | AHL-236

In the olden days, later than the Punic Wars but before you reached puberty, this was one of the world's greatest Pinot Blancs, as far as the grape could be taken, resplendent, *strong*, ageworthy, and tasting like no other PB in the world. Then in the climate-change era it succumbed to alcoholic excess more often than not. Ludwig still loved it—he's a hot-blooded guy—but I shrank from its scorching intensity. I adored the 2014, which harkened back to that rich-but-contained old style, but that couldn't have been expected from the big ripe 2015.

Still, this is probably the best 14% alc wine I've had in a long time, as it has the mojo to manage. Roasty, toasted brioche, roasted corn, taco shells, and not like any other Pinot Blanc on earth.

VELTLINERS

2016 Grüner Veltliner “Loess”

12/750ml | AHL-225

Among the starter-GVs I offer, this one is the creamiest, and I'd suggest it for the taster who isn't sure he “likes Veltliner.” The '16 is charming and fluid, lentilly and savory, not as opulent as the '15 but much richer than the '14.

2016 Grüner Veltliner *Ried Thal*

12/750ml | AHL-226

A superb vintage for this! Swollen, exotic aromas suggest Semillon or Viognier as much as GV, but the palate is markedly focused, even more vertical than usual though still luscious; like a semi-freddo of vinosity, as fluid as a Styrian wine and as spicy as a Gumbo. Lissome and rippling.

+

2016 Grüner Veltliner *Ried Kittmannsberg*

6/750ml | AHL-229

It's always been the blue-eyed child in a family of brown eyes, a kind of neo-classical structure with Delphic columns and strong muscular lines. This vintage is also stern and serious and powerful, nettle-y and peppery, but right now it's all *yin*, and I'm waiting to see if a sweet fruit develops.

(+)

2016 Grüner Veltliner *Ried Schenkenbichl*

6/750ml | AHL-230

Ludwig says it's “pure gneiss” but the standard reference says otherwise—amphibolite with “siliceous material”—and in any case these are the first vintages where this vineyard's wine is being bottled by itself. With the '16 we find a contained but massive opulence, more baroque now; wet cereal and ore, nettles and mustard and quite Wachau-like. Forthcoming and easy to grab but also with unfolding layers of complexity.

+

HIRSCH



REGION / SUB REGION

Kamptal / Kammern

VINEYARD AREA

31 hectares

ANNUAL PRODUCTION

12,500 cases

TOP SITES AND SOIL TYPES

Kammerner Lamm,
Zöbinger Gaisberg,
Zöbinger Heiligenstein
(*löss, eroded mica slate topped
with brown soil, eroded primary
rock with desert sands and
volcanic particles*)

GRAPE VARIETIES

65% Grüner Veltliner
35% Riesling

FARMING PRACTICES

Respekt certified Biodynamic

Among my Kamptal producers, 'Hannes Hirsch is the one with the least fixed identity. Or perhaps his identity is not to have an identity, his wine style is not to have a "style" and he doesn't wish to be pigeonholed. He falls somewhere in the nexus among Bründlmayer's and Gobelsbugr's glossy gleam and Hiedler's juicy sensuality, but there's no point you can affix him to. I suspect he likes it that way, as my friend is the best kind of lone wolf and contrarian.

His entry-level wines are *superb*, consistently so. They're tasty and soulful and generous. It's when you climb to the levels of the Grand Cru wines that they often lay below a shroud of leesiness. This, again, is probably deliberate. That is, he wants his wines to be this way. He could make them some other way—he certainly knows how to—and moreover I think 'Hannes really wants his wines to lead the way. Early ones can be early and tardy ones can arrive when they're ready. I certainly don't mind when a wine needs a few years to reveal itself, but the risk is not trivial; we receive a wine that's a few vintages old, by which time we've moved on to the new vintage. It means we have to be *wine* merchants and not *vintage* merchants, but this is a gigantic and intractable habit and one I won't break by

raining my teeny little blows against it.

It's tempting to ascribe Hirsch's shape-shifting nature to his bio-dynamic conversion, but I think it's inaccurate. His wines have been this way for some years now, and the only tangible effects of bio-dynamics are the usual ones of lower alcohol (which I applaud) and more emphasis on tertiary flavors. 'Hannes himself is so quick-witted and such a fast talker that you suppose his wines ought to be like everyone else's, quick critters you see in second-hand time units. In fact 'Hannes seems to see them in hour-hand swaths of time, longer and more deliberate, wines that let themselves be known when *they* are ready, not when they are summoned.

Accordingly my tasting notes for some of the young wines are provisional, tentative. Yet if I am patient—if we all are—we'll often be stunned by wines that have a blazing deliciousness and an almost inscrutable complexity, and that refuse to "add up" in any of the ways we've come to anticipate. I want to lead you to them, but it's a curving path through dense woods, so join the adventure if you please.

Again—no "adventure" entailed with the basic wines, which are among the best in all of Austria.

2016 Grüner Veltliner

12/750ml | AWH-163

+

I think we're calling it "Hirschvergnügen" now. It used to be called "Veltliner #1" and the label was comical and changed each year. Now we're naming it after an ad campaign from a car company that's guilty of committing massive-scale fraud—but hey, they didn't ask my opinion!

Yet the wine is sensational. Racy, thready open texture, elegant and silky; not creamy but precise, animated and classy.

Please note that we will be shipping the excellent 2015 vintage of this wine for the next three or four months.

2015 Grüner Veltliner Kammern

12/750ml | AHS-146

+

This replaces what used to be called "Heiligenstein," which was confusing because there is also a Grosslage with that name. Our newly named fella is the bleed-off from Lamm, Grub and Renner, and this is among the best iterations of this wine ever. It's silky again—this seems to be a facet of Hirsch—plus spritzy and leesy and nubby; straw and hay and brown rice, pointed and thready, sweet grain and grasses. A wine of the open air, one of those days it just smells good out. Rusky finish to an expressive wine.

2016 Grüner Veltliner Ried Strasser Gaisberg

12/750ml | Not offered until late fall 2017

+ (+)

The Gaisberg hill makes a turn to the southeast, overlooking the village of Strass (and the valley that bears its name), and is thus distinct from the Kammerner Gaisberg, from which so many outstanding Rieslings come. Depending where you are on the hill, the soil could be paragneiss, mica-schist and amphibolite or else a deep layer of loess. It's 'Hannes' first bottling from this site, and right away the wine has a stunning aroma. A classic gneiss fragrance. The palate feints away from the high "sweet" notes and squirms into the middle where it's minty, granular and leafy (mizuna and nettle); penetrating and suggestive. What will it become?

2015 Grüner Veltliner Ried Kammerner Renner

12/750ml | AWH-147

+ +

Now we're talking. Wonderful aroma, pure vetiver; as primordial as spring-water, rich and densely textured, a lovely complex wine that's almost fluffy; a swirl of infinitely fine pieces of flavor, all seen from the corner of your palate's eye, and snuggling beneath a virtually tactile blanket of texture and mineral richness.

2016 Grüner Veltliner Ried Kammerner Lamm

12/750ml | code | SOS : ? | Not offered until late fall 2017

+ (+)

Hirsch's Lamm is seldom showy; it's inferential, and for its mass it's analog and evanescent. As it emerges it's game and weed, garrigue and earth, an old-century wine that doesn't explicate itself for you.

2015 Riesling Zöbing

12/750ml | AWH-150

The structure is what I call "horizontal," but if you accept a wine that doesn't jab at you, this has regions of herbs, smoke and irises, and a suggestive and fine, smoky finish.

2015 Riesling Ried Zöbinger Heiligenstein

12/750ml | AWH-151

+ +

The wine is ecstatic, a clamor of gray and green; smoky, candle-wicky, chamomile and lavishly balsam; it taps into some ur-current of Riesling and is astonishing wine.

2015 Riesling Ried Kammerner Gaisberg

12/750ml | AWH-148

+ (+)

Spices, salt and mineral, even with a little scorch, not exactly impolite but a feral cat.

WACHAU

There's some chatter about the Wachau retreating from the scorched-earth bellicose wines of the past decades. I'd like to think it's true, because I hated those wines. They were (and still are) the opposite of "drinky;" they were, one might say, *Trump-y*, powerful and maladroit and really, let's be honest—useless. For what imaginable purpose does one seek a gargantuan wine with well above 14% alcohol, made even more egregious by bitter botrytis flavors? Nor is this queasy idiom needed; the genius of the Wachau is (or was) to give wines with a thrilling alignment of strength and precision, together with vehement terroir.

The greatest Wachau wine will distinguish itself from its neighbors in the Kamptal or Kremstal the way great Côte de Nuits does from Côte de Beaune; all things being equal, Wachau wines are simply weightier. The best of them, though, are distressingly scarce, and prone to be pricey, especially at lesser levels of ripeness. The great wines are worth whatever one can afford to pay for them, but the smaller wines often strike me as dubious values. And one must be quite selective. There's a large disparity between a few superb properties and the general run of rather ordinary vintners who seem content to coast in the slipstream of the region's renown.

A subversive thought came to me. Since the problem with most Federspiels are that they're too flaccid and taste incomplete, and the concomitant problem with many Smaragds is that they're annoyingly over-ripe and brutishly heavy, *why separate them into two unsatisfactory categories*, but instead, why not just make one wine of say 13% alc instead of one with 12% and the other with 14.5%? You could average the price, and if you absolutely had to, you could make a few body-builder types just to appease your throbbing manhood. I say this semi-facetiously, but it's actually not a bad idea. Perhaps it could be applied only to the top Crus, and the lesser sites can go on making the lesser wines they're making now.

Not that any of this could ever happen, but I'm just the idiot to propose it! We can attack it just as soon as we've rid the world of "DAC."

The Danube cuts a gorge through a range of hills that can truly be called rugged. Vineyards are everywhere the sun shines, along valley floors on loamy sand soils, gradually sloping upward over löss deposits and finally climbing steep horizontal terraces of Urgestein once again, the primary rock soil containing gneiss, schist and granite, often ferrous (which may account for the "ore" thing I often use in tasting notes).

ALZINGER



REGION / SUB REGION

Wachau / Unterloiben

VINEYARD AREA

10 hectares

ANNUAL PRODUCTION

6,250 cases

TOP SITES AND SOIL TYPES

Mühlpoint
(clay mixed with gneiss) ;
Liebenberg
(mica schist) ;
Hollerin
(gneiss mixed with löss and loam) ;
Loibenberg,
Steinertal
(weathered gneiss)

GRAPE VARIETIES

55% Grüner Veltliner
45% Riesling

I suspect that if you wait long enough, things take the shapes they're meant to take. In my early days with Austrian wines I imported Hirtzberger and FX. Pichler (both of whom were enticed away from me by an opportunistic competitor. It ended badly.) and with great respect to both of these outstanding producers, I don't miss them. I think that among the greats of the Wachau there are a few estates whose wines we don't merely admire, we love them. And among those, I have half of them, and that's fine by me.

I see Alzinger as spirit-kin to people such as Dönnhoff and Raveneau, wines that are endlessly complex and mysterious but seldom explicit. You'd almost prefer to describe them with music rather than words. It has to do with texture, but not texture alone. It enacts a quality of evanescence, as though some divinity was floating in the air around you, which laughed and gleamed when you tried to grasp it. I have to wrench myself out of reveries to "describe" the wines. It's why my language gets so silly.

But in essence, there are wines that explain themselves and wines that reveal themselves. Explanation is wonderful, of course, especially if we're curious, but revelation is deeper. And more unsettling, as we're seldom prepared for it, and it seems to come in moments that don't seem exactly apt. I can't imagine what it must be like to suddenly taste, say, a Hollerin Riesling from Alzinger in the thrum and cacophony of a trade tasting. We need to build an immersion chamber where a few tasters at a time can retreat into silence and let the wines absorb them.

Of course we don't often show the top wines from Alzinger, because we get so little of them, and we don't want to frustrate you with samples of wines we don't have to sell. But we talked about that with Leo. As some of you know, he's come over, not because he "needed" to move cases, but because he was interested to see who y'all were and how his wines fit into the total context. In that spirit we wondered whether it made sense to show his top wines, not everywhere and not all of them but just a few here and there, just so you'd get to see them.

I don't know how long I've worked with Alzinger, but I sense I've been accepted into a nexus of close associates. I'm "OK." I get a little more wine. Clearly I love the wines quite particularly. (Wait till they read my new book... they'll buy me a lifetime of Schnitzels!)

The two top sites are among the greatest Grand Crus of the Wachau, and they are polar opposites in style.

The **LOIBENBERG** is as mighty in the glass as it looks on the huge terraced hillside, and yet for a powerwine it isn't at all brutish. The wines, whether Riesling or GrüVe, are tropical and exotic, yet they manage an uncanny light-footedness and refinement. I suspect a synesthesis would taste yellows and oranges in the wines. Loibenberg is a summer day with peaches ripening on the tree, but it's breezy and fresh, not sultry and thick.

STEINERTAL is the coolest among the Loiben Crus, both actually and metaphorically. It's small and hidden back—5.5 hectares, divided in three sections, with only four proprietors I know of (one of whom

has Muskateller planted; someone get me that to taste), of whom Alzinger owns the largest share. It's more or less the first ter-races you see if you're driving in from the east and the Kremstal; indeed it's sheltered by the craggy cliff of the Pfaffenberg. Stein-

ertal makes marked wine, "green" flavors, as estoteric as Loibenberg but in another register of nuances; green teas, herbs, limes, heirloom apples, often a naked minerality. It seems predestined for Ries-ling, and even Alzinger's splendid GrüVe

can be mistaken for Riesling (at least until you taste the actual Riesling alongside). You could construct a fanciful vision of Steinertal taking a trip to the Saar and re-turning with the thought "I want to make wines like those wines.

2016 Grüner Veltliner *Frauenweingarten* Federspiel

+

12/750ml | ALA-166

This is the best vintage I can remember for this wine. And it introduces a curious facet of '16 here, a compression of the quality-span whereby the "lesser" wines and the "top" wines aren't as far distant from one another. This wine is forthright and direct for an Alzinger Federspiel; firm and spicy with lots of snap but still with the fluid flow of the '16s; focused and long, chervil, dill and cucumber.

2016 Grüner Veltliner *Mühlpoint* Federspiel

12/750ml | ALA-167

? Also livelier than usual. I like these! They're frisky, almost jittery, they have puppy-energy, and this one shows a certain gravelly mineral below its green bean generosity.

2016 Grüner Veltliner *Mühlpoint* Smaragd

+

6/750ml | ALA-168

Bigger of course, and smokier; like a sautee of green beans in the pan with the mushrooms, marjoram and broad-leaf parsley, Spanish olive oil, and the meat crispies at the end-piece of the roast. I must have been hungry....

2016 Grüner Veltliner *Loibenberg* Smaragd

(+)

6/750ml | ALA-175

Exceptionally spicy and mineral; oddly it reminded me of Forster Jesuitengarten in its savory rusk-like crunch; it has some chile-thread heat and a little char on the finish. It isn't deft nor entirely sanguine, though bottling may contain its commanding power.

2016 Grüner Veltliner *Steinertal* Smaragd

+ +

6/750ml | ALA-169

Beautifully angular, and sizzles like those special cymbals, the wine croons with a rasping sexy voice; pungent green mostly balsam, less tarragon and lime; starkly exposed minerality. An outstanding and remarkable wine, if unpredictable.

2016 Dürnsteiner Riesling Federspiel

(+)

12/750ml | ALA-171

Bottle-shocked, and so my noting it as "restrained" is probably misleading. It seemed shade-like, mineral and Sencha and lime and herbs. Potentially exceptional.

2016 Riesling *Hollerin* Smaragd

+ +

6/750ml | ALA-177

This is usually the *charmeur* among the Rieslings, and this '16 shows its typical apricot and passion fruit but this is quickly submerged below the most lavish lime-zest and wintergreen and gray salt and opal basil; not as seductive as usual but exponentially more intricate and multi-layered—and *extremely* salty. In bottle two weeks...

2016 Riesling *Höhereck* Smaragd

+ + (+)

6/750ml | ALA-178

How inconvenient that my usual-favorite of Alzinger's Rieslings is the one they barely make. It's a tiny plot and they get "around 800 bottles" in a good year. Yes—*bottles*.

All I can say, after all these years, is—from this tiny place comes one of the earth's great wines, the terminus of every great facet of Wachau Riesling, the herbs from this, the peaches and plums from that, the mangoes from another, the smoke from yet another—all there. The '16 is greener and grayer; smoke and broth and spices and blown-out candle and veggies on the grill, smoky and sweet.

2016 Riesling *Loibenberg* Smaragd

+

6/750ml | ALA-170

Impressively generous; at first it's almost cloves and pancetta and only later does it show the fluid Spring green of the year. With air it gets, not "grassy" but *grasses*, as though the very smell of waving grasses were in your glass, yet it's also solid and earthy as burdock, with a hint of pink peppercorns.

2016 Riesling *Steinertal* Smaragd

+ +

6/750ml | ALA-179

Juicy and mineral and lavishly animated, neither herbal nor especially "mystic," just wolfishly good and enticingly mineral, as if terroir were ground to dust. Spicy and just stupidly delicious.

NIKOLAIHOF-WACHAU



REGION / SUB REGION

Wachau / Mautern

VINEYARD AREA

22 hectares

ANNUAL PRODUCTION

8,300 cases

TOP SITES AND SOIL TYPES

Steiner Hund,
Klausberg,
Im Weingebirge,
Vom Stein,
Süßenberg
(primary rock topped with humus or
gravel, and eroded primary rock)

GRAPE VARIETIES

55% Riesling
35% Grüner Veltliner
10% Neuburger,
Gelber Muskateller,
Gewürztraminer,
Frühroter Veltliner,
Chardonnay

FARMING PRACTICES

Demeter Certified Biodynamic

We are determined to make these catalogues shorter, yet the sad truth is you can't write in brief about this estate, because as soon as you start you end up writing about all of life. The "headlines," if one can even glean such things, are that all is well but one mustn't presume. That is, with an estate like this one, you're not surprised to encounter a few quirks along the way. As a rule the wines are atmospheric of antiquity, and most of the time this is stirring and beautiful. If any given cork isn't perfect you get bottle variation showing as just-plain oxidation. And the occasional cask comes close to a kind of *sous-voile* thing which one either appreciates or doesn't. But the overall effect of these wines as a group is to return you to a kind of holy innocence. You can feel like, "This is the way wine (among other things) used to be before it got all fucked up an' stuff..."

Most of you already know the story and love the wines. Bio-dynamic since 1971, first Demeter-certified wine estate in the world, all those things. The wines and the family convey a seamless unity, radiantly good humor, and an unfussy gratitude. And yet still, in their context they are open to almost infinite possibilities, and it strikes me that my most "conservative" estate is also my most radical.

We were sitting in a schmoozy kind of way with "Nikky" Saahs, and he was talking about the old days. Someone may have asked why the estate decided to go bio-d so long before anyone else did. Nikky told us that in the 60s his father didn't use the prevailing chemical treatments because times weren't good and he

couldn't afford them. So he did without, and his vineyards did without, and after a few years both man and vine alike learned how to do without.

And if you harbored any expectation the young generation would somehow "modernize" Nikolaihof, it was Nikky who insisted on reviving the use of the ginormous 18th-century wooden press, which had become a museum piece.

It's starting to be possible to talk about the "style" or the language of these wines. They are wines of atmosphere, and some of that atmosphere is that of the cellar, its ambient aromas and also the environment of the casks. Nikolaihof's wines are (almost) never what we'd call woody, but the casks have perfumed their breath. In "normal" wines there is an explanation; in these wines there is a breathing. When I open a bottle at home, and I open a lot of them, I always feel, with the first whiff of aroma, that I'm opening the pages of a 19th-century novel. Yes they smell like GV or Riesling or whatever, but they also smell like food cooking and people laughing in the next room.

And when Nikolaihof wines "work," they are charged, numinous with spirit, atmospheres and questions and reverie and longing. In isolated instances when they don't "work," they are merely strange. I have shrunk from those wines, in part because they didn't please me, and in part because I want to show that the most *hands-off* wines in the world don't *have* to taste bizarre. And I am very happy to tell you that this year's group of wines was the finest and purest in many years. Apart

from my own pleasure, I'm just happy to see what pinnacles these most "natural" of wines can attain.

When you let these wines in—and you are very much aware of them *entering*

your body—you feel as if you're receiving a signal from the Pleiades. It doesn't feel like A Wine, but rather like the fluid culmination of a whole world that built up to it. You're not only pleased, you are deeply

happy. You are part of something healthy and purposive, and all you have to do is pour. And then dream.

RAD STUFF FIRST

2016 Neuburger

12/750ml | ANK-200

Supposedly it is this—<http://www.austrianwine.com/our-wine/grape-varieties/white-wine/neuburger/>—yet Jancis says it's PB-Silvaner crossed, and Wiki says it's Roter Veltliner and Silvaner. So, um, <shrug??> I dunno. Let's say that it's among the aromatically "neutral" varieties, like a Chasselas with more body and paunch, agreeably nutty and in this iteration it's markedly bright and even herbal. '16 is good to grapes like this.

2015 Gewürztraminer

12/750ml | ANK-194

12.5 alc! A *whisper* of RS. A total classic Gewürz that you can drink!

2016 Gelber Muskateller

12/750ml | ANK-202

A big ol' MWAH! To everyone who bought the Muscat-vertical we offered a little while back. This wine is quickly taking its place among the most *interesting* dry Muscats in existence; this vintage is as elegant, angular and salty as the '12 and almost as stony as the '08; not really racy or taut, but gleaming and joyous. Mind you, it was in bottle two weeks, so who knows how batshit crazy it may yet prove to be.

2014 Sekt Riesling Extra Brut

12/750ml | ANK-208

No note because we tasted it standing up in the courtyard and it just felt wrong to "take notes" at that moment. The wine was excellent. I felt bad spitting it out onto the ground.

VELTLINERS (in tasting sequence)

2015 Grüner Veltliner "Zwickl"

12/750ml | ANK-186

2016 Grüner Veltliner "Zwickl"

12/750ml | ANK-197

This is, in essence, an *unfiltered* "Hefeabzug," and you get two wines in the same bottle if you want. How? It's fallen bright in the top one-third, and if you pour carefully you will have a clear wine. You can then *shake the rest of the bottle* to mix the sediment and pour yourselves a cloudy glass of tasty atavism. They encourage this!

The wine-on-top is oyster and delicate and birchy. The cloudy one is "darker," more boxwood and cress. It's fun! The 2015 is doughier and richer and here the cloudy wine makes more sense. We'll sell it til it's gone, and the '16 is slimmer and finer, with even a hint of Manzanilla. In any case, I offer you what is probably the world's first interactive Grüner Veltliner. Give lees a chance!

2016 Grüner Veltliner “Hefeabzug”

12/750ml | ANK-196

The regular sur-lie bottling seems to have attained some uncanny virtuosity of late—though Saahs would quarrel with “of late,” and they make a good case if the **1987 vintage Hefeabzug** they gave us to drink is anything to go by—what a fantastic wine that was.

The ‘16 is a wee slip of a laddie with 11.5% alc, and it’s yummy chalky-oystery zingy wine with all the typical starchy energy. Three weeks in bottle seems to have subdued the varietal fingerprint, but this will return. Slip it into your next Muscadet tasting and watch it wreak havoc.

2016 Grüner Veltliner “Im Weingebirge” Federspiel

12/750ml | ANK-198

+

Two weeks in bottle, this wine is already legendary within Austria. It’s also wonderfully light (11.5%) and *apparently* varietally discreet, but everything else is pure light Nikolaihof; glorious texture in a Goldilocks wine, light and loving, everything just right.

2010 Grüner Veltliner “Im Weingebirge” Federspiel

12/750ml | ANK-100

+

This may have been intended for longer cask-aging, but Nikki’s running out of cask space and this boy was “hastened” (ha!) into bottle. It is, in any case, a great antique Nikolaihof wine, recalling all kinds of things; Chablis, Klevener or Auxerrois or even (esoterica alert, forgive me) a Swiss Completer, but whatever it reminds you of it’s murmury and gorgeous, like the jus from a veal roast with porcini and a hint of cloves.

At this point we tasted five vintages of GV Smaragd, all of them available (in teeny amounts), and I decided to offer two of them alone and then a vertical-case of the other three. Sketches follow.

2013 Grüner Veltliner “Im Weingebirge” Smaragd

6/750ml | ANK-156

+

I have had a strange aldehydic bottle of this wine, but the last two have been nearly breathtaking, and this one was splendid and beautiful with inner firmness beneath a melting texture.

2009 Grüner Veltliner “Im Weingebirge” Smaragd

12/750ml | ANK-099

+

Can wine be greater than this? Chamomile, beeswax, meyer lemons, overwhelmingly beautiful!?

RIESLINGS

2016 Riesling “Vom Stein” Federspiel

(+)

12/750ml | ANK-203

Another incipient legend, capped from bottling; it seems tender and meadow-y, fibrous, delicate, yielding, sorrel-y.

2013 Riesling Steiner Hund

+

6/750ml | ANK-204

This is a GREAT Riesling vineyard, and makes a singular wine, with such an occult concatenation of herbs and leaves and rocks and scree it feels Druidic, as though UFOs would land their spacecrafts there (and the little space-dudes could live on the wine, which they would guzzle and then fly away again). Great vintages of this wine stand not only among Saahs’ finest achievements; they stand among Rieslings finest expressions and among the earth’s most arcane secrets

Is 2013 such a vintage? I thought it would be. But it turns out, it’s an outlier, not only unlike other Steiner Hunds but almost not Riesling any more. It’s loose-knit and extremely herbal— woodruff, sorrel aloe—yet not as mineral as usual, or else it’s mineral embedded in a green-tea flavored tapioca-textured pudding. Dauntingly complex and speaking some strange tongue; marjoram, salts, stunningly weird, and almost endless. And if I am entirely candid, there’s also an aldehydic note of *Flor*. I think it came from a time in this cellar when a few wines went rogue, but that’s not to say it is unacceptable. It wouldn’t be here if that were so. Just so you know what you’re getting.

2010 Riesling Steiner Hund

+ +

6/750ml | ANK-139

This on the other hand is a paradigm of the vineyard, an excellent vintage of which only **30 6-packs are available**.

2005 Steiner Hund “Jungfernlese”

+ + +

6/750ml | ANK-206

It means the “virgin” crop from a new vineyard. Some was sold, some held back and re-offered. And forget my descriptors, this is INCONCEIVABLY GREAT, INSANELY COMPLEX RIESLING

2011 Riesling “Klaus Am Berg”

+ +

6/750ml | ANK-205

This is the beeswax-chamomile face of Riesling (which I adore); spring crabapple-blossom, wintergreen; a seductive and deceptively “easy” wine that yields to a swollen finish that’s nearly unfathomable, growing in spicy penetration.

2000 Riesling “Vinothek”

+ +

6/750ml | ANK-195

This as you know is a concept whereby a Smaragd wine is left in (large) cask for fifteen years or longer, without sulfur. (There’s a parallel program called “Steinriesler” made from lighter material, but I wasn’t persuaded by the current vintage.) This is the best since the ‘95; solid, powerful, smoky; strong but not heavy, an old iron stove of Riesling. The roast is reposing fragrantly, and the stove still smolders....

2013 Gutsrisling Lieblich

12/750ml | ANK-159

23 g/l of residual sugar, as it happened, and every wine here is as-it-happened. So Nikki declined to futz with it. The result tastes like something Florian Weingart would have made in the Wachau, all the mirabelle and herbs but with a different tangy terroir here. I don’t know what “use” you’ll make of it; I only know I like it.

HANS REISETBAUER



In 1990 Hans Reisetbauer planted his first apple orchard of 1.5 hectares in Kirchdorfergut and on September 16, 1994 Christian Carl of Göppingen built a still from plans designed by Hans himself. Quickly Hans gained notoriety in 1995 by winning “Schnapps of the year” at the Destillata specialist trade fair. Reisetbauer has been named “Master Distiller of the Year” by the Austrian gourmet guide A la Carte in '04, '07, '08 and '09. Most recently he won the Falstaff’s “Spirits Trophy Award” in 2010.

Hans Reisetbauer’s dedication in his orchards, detail in distillation and constant quest for new innovations has led him to be considered one of the finest producers of Eaux de Vie in the World. In order to control the quality of his products, Reisetbauer mostly uses fruit grown on his own property. Hans has also done careful comparisons to find the best water for use in his process, exclusively using spring water from Mühlviertel. As Hans explains, “Temperature, time and aeration during fermentation, as well as condition of raw material are important factors influencing the quality of the final product.” Following fermentation, the mash is distilled twice with the heads and tails being discarded. Only the “heart” of the distillate is kept as it contains the most prized volatile and aromatic components from the raw material and is responsible for creating distinctive aromas. Lastly, the product is diluted with water to bring it to 41% alcohol. Reisetbauer’s Blue Gin follows the same detailed approach, utilizing a recipe of 27 botanicals from 10 different countries, and strictly Mulan variety wheat harvested from Upper Austria.

Apple in Oak Barrel

6/375ml (also available in 1.75L) | XHR-024

Apricot Eau de Vie

6/375ml (also available in 1.75L) | XHR-003

Plum Eau de Vie

6/375ml (also available in 1.75L) | XHR-001

Williams Pear Eau de Vie

6/375ml (also available in 1.75L) | XHR-002

Raspberry Eau de Vie

6/375ml (also available in 1.75L) | XHR-009

Cherry Eau de Vie

6/375ml (also available in 1.75L) | XHR-004

Wild Cherry Eau de Vie

6/375ml (also available in 1.75L) | XHR-011

Elderberry Eau de Vie

6/375ml (also available in 1.75L) | XHR-005

Rowanberry Eau de Vie

6/375ml (also available in 1.75L) | XHR-006

Ginger Eau de Vie

6/375ml (also available in 1.75L) | XHR-014

Carrot Eau de Vie

6/375ml (also available in 1.75L) | XHR-013

Hazelnut Eau de Vie

6/375ml (also available in 1.75L) | XHR-028

Mixed Case Eau de Vie

6/375ml | XHR-035

Wooden case including 1 bottle of each: Apricot, Plum, Williams Pear, Raspberry, Carrot and Rowanberry

Whisky

6/750ml | XHR-015

Blue Gin

6/750ml (also available in 1.75L) | XHR-025

Brut Apfel (2009)

6/750ml | XHR-027

Sparkling Apple Cider, produced Méthode Champenoise, with 100% estate Jonagold apples.

REFERENCE

GRAPE VARIETIES

GRÜNER VELTLINER

Austria's signature variety—one in every three vines is GV—is a late-ripening thick-skinned grape. Vine material is important, and the new generation of vintners is gradually eliminating all the nasty old clones that were only bred for mega-yields.

GV will excel in every echelon; it makes a great quaff, a lovely medium-weight al-fresco wine, and it makes superb powerful wines that stand easily with every great dry white in the world. Among them, it is the most flexible at the table, because it goes with things that defeat every other wine.

Brassicas? Check. Asparagus? No worries. Artichokes? Perfect match. Shrimp? You betcha. What about cabbages and things like that? If it stinks up your house when you cook it, GV is the wine to drink *with* it. Plus it goes with all the things other dry whites are used for. This is why I am about to say that GV should have pride of place on your wine lists.

As a rule it's a medium-to-full bodied wine. When grown in primary rock, these are common descriptors for it: pepper, boxwood, mustard-greens (arugula, mizuna, tatsoi, et.al.), "ore" (a ferrous sense), shoot-smoke, basils, cress, mints and parsleys, strawberry, tobacco, and ordinary apple and citrus. When grown in loess, then you find legumes, lentils, various kinds of beans, grain (barley, oats, maize), vetiver, sorrel, oleander, roasted bell-peppers, rhubarb. Seen naked on the page, you could look at these things and say *ewwww, who'd want to drink that?* But when you taste, you know right away you're encountering something distinctive, original, and indispensable.

However "trendy" GrüVe may have been, its greatest value is it isn't merely trendy, but rather has a permanent place in the pantheon of important grapes, and a prominent place among food's best friends. Among the many wonderful things Grüner Veltliner is, it is above all THE wine that will partner all the foods you thought you'd *never* find a wine for.

One wishes to be indulgent of the caprices of attention in our ephemeral world. But at some point over the last two weeks, tasting yet another absolutely supernatural GrüVe, my blood commenced to sim-

merin'. Where dry white wine is concerned this variety should have pride of place on wine lists. There is simply NO other variety more flexible and none offering better value especially at the high end.

Aging Grüner Veltliner: you gotta be patient! I know of no variety other than Chenin Blanc (in the Loire, of course) which takes longer to taste old. All things being equal, Veltliner lasts longer than Riesling, and it never goes petroly. What it can do is to take on a dried-mushroom character that becomes almost meaty. Mature GrüVe has been a revelation to every taster I've seen. It's a perfect choice for a rich fatty meat course when you prefer to use white wine. Don't think you have to drink them young—though if you catch one at any age short of ten years you are drinking it young. Think of young GrüVe like fresh oyster mushrooms, and grownup GrüVe like dried shiitakes.

RIESLING

Riesling makes virtually every one of Austria's greatest dry white wines, which is to say many of the *world's* greatest dry whites. GrüVe comes close, but Riesling always stretches just that little bit higher. That's because Riesling is the best wine grape in the world, of either color. And because Riesling enjoys life in Austria.

Great Austrian Riesling is unique. Austrian growers won't plant it where it doesn't thrive. It's almost always grown in primary rock, a volcanic (metamorphic/ igneous) derivative you rarely see in similar form or concentration elsewhere in Europe. These soils contain schist (fractured granite), shinola (just checking you're actually paying attention), mica, silica, even weathered basalt and sandstone. Riesling's usually grown on terraces or other high ground.

It's about the **size** of Alsace wine, but with a flower all its own. And there's no minerality on the same **planet** as these wines. And there's sometimes such a complexity of tropical fruits you'd think you'd accidentally mixed Catoir with Boxler in your glass.

GELBER MUSKATELLER

Only in Austria (and Germany) are they required to distinguish between

this, a.k.a. *Muscat a Petit Grains* or *Muscat Lunel* and its less refined but more perfumey cousin the Muscat Ottonel. Most Alsace "Muscat" blends the two, and usually Ottonel dominates.

"Yellow" Muscat has become trendy in Austria, much to my delight, because I dote on this variety. It ripens late and holds onto brisk acidity; it isn't easy to grow, but oh the results it gives! In good hands the wines are something like the keenest mountainstream Riesling you ever had from a glass stuffed with orange blossoms.

I'm offering every single one I could get my greedy hands on. Unscrew that cap, splash the greeny gurgle of wine into the nearest glass; sniff and salivate—drink and be *HAPPY*.

PINOT BLANC

a.k.a. WEISSBURGUNDER. What used to be perhaps the world's best examples of this variety have seemingly succumbed to climate change. Many of the Serious Ones are now, to my taste, simply too alcoholic. That does leave the mid-range ones as very pure renditions of Pinot Blanc (without the blending in of Auxerrois, as is practiced in Alsace), and these often show fruit and shellfish notes I don't encounter elsewhere in the world. Yet as outstanding as the best wines can be, they face competition from the Germans and the Swiss, and even in Alsace there are a few growers who take the variety seriously.

AUSTRIAN WINE LAWS

No great detail here, as this stuff bores me as much as it does you. The headline is, this is the toughest and most enlightened (or least *unenlightened*) wine law in the world, as it had to be in the slipstream of the glycol matter.

There's a discernable trend away from the whole ripeness-pyramid thing. Most growers don't seem to care whether it's a Kabinett or a Qualitätswein or whatever; they think in terms of regular and reserve, or they have an internal vineyard hierarchy. So I follow their lead. I am possibly a bit too casual about it all. But I don't care either. The dry wines are all below 9 grams per liter of residual sugar, so you can tell how ripe the wine is by its alcohol. If there's a vineyard-wine it's because the

site gives special flavors. And old-vines cuvées are très chic.

Austrian labels have to indicate the wine's residual sugar. They're actually a bit off-the-deep-end on this issue. There's a grower in my portfolio almost all of whose wines have a little RS. This is deliberate. The wines are fabulously successful, and nobody finds them "sweet." But another wise sage voiced a note of caution. Other growers (said the voice) notice this man's success, and they imitate his style so they too can be successful. But they do a facile imitation of the most *superficial* aspect of the style, i.e. the few grams of residual sugar, and the next thing you know our Austrian wines are once again headed in the wrong direction. Don't get me wrong (he continued), I like the wines; they're not my style but they're good wines. But everyone doesn't have this man's talent. And so in a sense his wines are dangerous.

Such are the terms of the debate!

Here's my take on it. To focus on a vision of absolute purity as an Ideal will create unintended mischief. Will do and *has* done. Every grower's goal should be to produce the most delicious, harmonious and characterful wine he can. If that means zero sugar some years, 3 grams in others and 6 grams in others then that's what it means. "Oh but then we'd have to manipulate the wine," they retort. But this is fatuous. Winemaking is *ipso facto* manipulation. We are talking about degrees of manipulations, and which are acceptable under which circumstances in the service of what. "We would prefer an unattractive wine than one which we have confected into attractiveness by manipulating its sugar" is a reasonable case to make, provided one has the courage to accept the consequences of making unattractive wines. What too many do, sadly, is to sell unattractiveness as virtuous, in a fine example of Orwellian doublespeak.

Remember, I'm not advocating the *addition* of flavor, but rather the preservation of flavor already there. A modicum of sweetness does not obtrude upon a wine's character—it was in the grape, after all—provided the producer guarantees this with his palate. Most of us know how much is too much. So, while I respect the underlying scruple the growers espouse, they err in making this an ethical issue. It is instead either a pragmatic or an aesthetic issue, or both.

But maybe a little empathy is called for. I arrived right in the creative heat of the wine-renaissance in Austria, and am less sensitive to the dubious past

that preceded it, but which the growers remember. After the War and into the '70s Austrian wine was usually a pale imitation of German, but cheaper. Co-ops and négociants controlled the market, and integrity was an endangered species. Sweetness sold, especially when it was used to add a spurious prettiness to overcropped insipid wine. When Austrian growers experienced a rebirth of passion and idealism, they also wanted to distinguish themselves by breaking ways with the past, and so they favored *dry* wines with mass and vinosity. I do understand their wariness about residual sugar; the slope doesn't look as slippery to me because I have never fallen down it. That said, enough time has passed that they can lay aside their fear, because the dogmatic opposition to homeopathic bits of RS is taking potential beauty away from their wines, and making them less flexible at the table.

DAC

And just what does this acronym mean? It means "Don't ask, Charlie," because I'm not going to answer you. This may seem churlish, but I am truly annoyed. I published an article in *WORLD OF FINE WINE* that detailed why. Some growers agree with me, and I suspect others do but hesitate to speak out. So, in a nutshell, this is the pith of my dismay.

DAC, however laudable its aims (and to a certain extent they are), is essentially a bureaucratic and abstract construct, the results of which add *nothing* to the facts on the ground, only adding to the drinker's burden, because now he needs to learn not only the facts, but the bureaucratic *system* of categorizing them. And if the DAC is modeled after appellation laws in France or Italy, one does well to ask how usefully *those* laws are working out.

They will say that every grown up wine culture has codified an appellation system in order to guarantee typicity, distinctiveness and integrity. They will say, as Austria strives to both emerge from an earlier era of mediocrity and to join the mainstream of Fine European wines, it is time for an appellation system to be established.

I will reply, as we see how these systems ramify in practice, we also see the ways they can strait-jacket a wine culture, can inhibit visionary thinking and retard innovation. There is a constant ongoing tension between protecting that which has proven to be a region's most profound mode of expression—such as Sangiovese

in Brunello, for example—while also permitting a sense of questing and exploration. Sometimes it works very well, and sometimes it stifles people, and to the extent the laws are ignored, they become relics of irrelevance.

Why, then, would the Austrians willingly take that risk? What does it add? I think it appeals to their pride. And I think that the pride is justified; after all, what wine culture has accomplished what Austria has, in just the last 27 years?

But the DAC fixes something that isn't broken, something that is actually vital and healthy, and the "cure" for the non-existent disease has serious risks of its own.

It attempts to codify the facts on the ground. Ask yourselves *why*. How is your world improved by codifying these things?

"The Kamptal is best known for its outstanding Grüner Veltliners and Rieslings, though other varieties do well there." That's what the books will tell you. *How is that not enough??*

And now? The "Kamptal DAC" permits only Grüner Veltliner and Riesling, insists the wines be dry, and insists on minimum alcohol levels. That's a new bunch of stuff you, poor drinker, has to memorize, and which has added *nothing* at all useful for you. Indeed, if Hiedler could always sell his Sauvignon Blanc with "Kamptal" on the label, because that's where it grew, then how is your life improved by his now having to *declassify* the Sauv-B to "Nied-erösterreich"—which you now must also learn the meaning of—because the variety isn't approved for the Kamptal-DAC?

Learning the facts is enough. Having to learn how a bureaucrat or a marketing guy has catalogued the facts is a waste of your time.

To my justly proud Austrian friends: do not show your pride by clamoring to be included in an already existing system. Show it by saying "We have no need for the existing appellation systems or to imitate them here at home. We will instead evolve *new* systems that will preserve the gains we have made *and* will keep alive the spirit of adventure that make ours unique among Old-World wine cultures."

So, I will not refer to "DAC" unless it is *the actual name of the wine*. Then we have to use it. But if it's merely a useless appendix to an already complete name, we're going to ignore it. Hiedler's *Grüner Veltliner Thal* is not improved by being called *Grünern Veltliner Thal Kamptal DAC*.



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