



# Austria 2013

*Terry Theise Estate Selections* 







# 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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# Introduction

*The “you” I’m addressing is someone I’m presuming to be a wine professional in your 20s to early 30s. Older people, let alone persons of my Punic age, know this stuff already. But you folks have a lot coming at you, so I’m going to grab the salient factors and wedge them into whatever mind-portal I can find.*

Actually most of you have at least some sense of Austria, and though there’s more for you to know, what you do know is accurate. A lot of you have been there, and were surprised. “These people are like Italians except they speak German” would sum it up. Not to mention they all speak English, and though they live in an especially fine beautiful Old-World locale, they themselves feel more modern than the Germans do.

Yet it can seem beautifully strange there. One morning I awoke in my hotel in Rust, a handsome medieval little town in Burgenland, near a big shallow lake with a huge reedy shoreline, full of frogs and other critters that storks like to eat. So there’s a plenitude of storks, on every rooftop it seems, and that morning I was almost eye level with a very glam bird who was tidying the exterior of her nest. It was one of those *It has ever been thus* instants, where you feel the tingle of nature going about its business without concern for your short-ass life. I’d heard the frogs when I turned out my lights the night before, and now I was spying on a busy stork, and all around me was a mellow antiquity, and man, it was Europe. Yet a few hours later I sat at dinner and ate a meal so modern and ethereal it could have easily been New York or Chicago or San Francisco.

Austria is also simpler than Germany where wine is concerned. There’s no identity crises here, and there’s a whole lot fewer internal contradictions, ideological struggles and multiple identities, all the things that make Germany so, um, entertaining.

So, what must you know?

First, this was only a fitfully quality-oriented wine culture until the mid-80s, hardly known abroad, and barely worth knowing. Too many of the wines were made as cheaper alternatives to sweet German wines, and the whole queasy thing reached its apogee when a scrum of scummy wine merchants were discovered to have used the active ingredient of anti-freeze in their wines, to make them seem richer and sweeter.

This was a blessing in disguise, because it forced the wine culture to reinvent itself, which it did, aggressively and in amazingly short order.

It is now a **dry wine culture**.

It is now overwhelmingly a **small-family estate wine culture**. There are very few negociants left, and the small number of co-ops are among the best of their kind anywhere.

To the extent sweet wines exist, they are almost always **true dessert-wines**.

Austria is quite apart from Germany in meso-climate. It’s more easterly and more southerly. It takes you 7-8 hours (if you’re lucky with traffic) to drive from the Rheingau to the Wachau.

As most Austrian vineyards lie in the wind and rain shadow of the Alps, the growers struggle with insufficient precipitation. Germany’s climate is still “maritime,” but Austria’s is continental.

However, the dryness of climate in Austria allows for a large proportion of organic production, both in crops and grapes. Austria has the largest percentage of land in certified-organic production of any nation in the EU.

Let’s take Riesling, and compare apples to apples.

Though it’s only 4% of the vineyard plantings, Riesling produces a substantial majority of Austria’s greatest white wines. They are nearly always bone dry. They are less fat than Alsatian wines have become, less sweet than (many) Alsatian wines have gotten, less earthy, yet more tensile and minerally. Compared directly with the *good* German Trockens, they have more body and juice, and they seem more generous. That said, there are tasters who prefer the *cooler* feel of the dry Germans, and who find Austrian Riesling too flamboyant. I myself don’t have a preference; I like them both, each for its native virtues. But it’s fair to say that dry German Riesling is all over the spectrum quality-wise, from brilliant terroir-wines to quite decent simpler wines to a still-distressingly-large number of yowling nasty wines. These you will *not* find in Austria. Riesling is destined to be dry here, and though you’ll find dull or mediocre wines, you’ll almost never find a shrill or biting one.

Austria is of course a smaller wine country than Germany. It also has a feverishly thirsty domestic clientele, who are served by an activist wine press who compete against one another to be the first with the earliest reviews, thus everyone’s ass is up for grabs, so if you don’t make at least decent wine, you’ll be exposed in a hurry. Thus the **base-line of competence is markedly high in Austria**.

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.

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.)

That’s the salient material. Ancillary but still important; Austria makes important Pinot Blanc, makes very good but often too expensive Sauvignon Blanc, is the world’s largest supplier of Gelber Muskateller, which is a great stupid miracle when it’s good, and makes often-decent wines from commonly seen international sorts, few of which I offer here. We don’t need them.

Austria should be a major source for you. Too often it’s just a niche or an afterthought. This is a wine culture unique in the world, building on the gravitas of centuries but grabbing the chance to reinvent itself from scratch in the late 80s. It’s youthful and fresh yet rooted and deep. It manages a miraculous balancing act between *being* cosmopolitan and sophisticated yet *making* fiercely individual wine that’s saturated with identity. Looking for the good guys? These are the good guys. Please, support them generously. Theirs is still a wee little culture doing all the things we say we want, but somehow we’ve relegated them to not-as-cool as whatever the wine du jour is this

month. I mean, I *want* all those cool new wines in the world, I like discovery. But I also like perspective.

To be entirely honest, I sometimes wonder whether these wines are actually too good for the larger audience I think they should have.

A thing like that can sound elitist. “Too good for the likes of *you*, Bucko.” So go ahead and tag me. But if you do, I’ll allow myself to observe that there are hundreds of wines on retail shelves and restaurant wine lists that are *not as good* as these wines and cost as much or more. Why, if you don’t mind my asking? I submit that it’s because there’s an unacknowledged contempt toward anything with German words on the label, an underlying assumption that such wines can never be more than trivial and certainly aren’t worth anything north of fifty Dollars. If I’m right, then I’m not an elitist; I’m just a sad and puzzled idealist.

Maybe I’m wrong and it isn’t contempt, but rather fear. I find it odd that people who are serenely competent in all other walks of wine, who don’t mind when they mangle the French, Italian or Spanish languages, are suddenly reduced to stammering helplessness as soon as an umlaut appears. What is it about German that makes a person feel so abruptly incapable? Certainly the language isn’t as euphonious as the romance languages, but that didn’t stop the somm-glom from embracing “Txakolina,” and God help me, if you can say “Sauvignon Blanc” you can say “Senftenberger Piri.”

## THE QUESTION OF DRYNESS

Though Austria is properly a dry (white) wine culture, they’re sometimes scaredy-cats when it comes to the untasteable but incredibly helpful few grams of RS by which many wines would be (even) more delightful and delicious, and sometimes profound.

In some cases they go too far. Dry means *dry*. The operating principle is don’t interfere with the wine, so in vintages when fermentations go all the way the wines are very dry. Other times a few slovenly grams of sugar remain. It’s as it happens.

I approve of a wine culture with an aversion to confecting, but this is an early stage of maturing into a culture which knows when to be rigid and when to relax. But we’re ahead of ourselves. Suffice it to say I have never tasted and cannot imagine an Austrian white wine that was diminished by a *small* amount of residual sugar, undetectable as sweetness, but discernable as deeper fruit, more thrilling flavor (and incidentally more flexible at the table). And they could do it if they *wanted* to; Süßreserve (a.k.a. *Dosage*) has been legal for years now, though I know of no one actually using it. They are very squeamish. I understand, since I’m squeamish too, but we’re at different spots on the squeam-o-meter. Sure it’s a slippery slope, and if you keep sliding down it you open the door to all kinds of manipulations. If! The fact is there’s zero reason to assume this would happen.







People need to trust themselves, and their palates.

After all, it stands to reason that if there are degrees of sweetness there are also degrees of dryness. There is soft-creamy dry and there's accommodating dry and there's very crisp dry and there's fierce austere dry and there's even this-could-use-some-damn-sugar dry, and it's nothing but obtuse to assume dryness *as such* is a value. It's just a way for a wine to be, one of a thousand ways. "We want our wines to be *dry*" is too often an excuse for failing to consider how *individual* wines taste, and whether their *particular* dryness is agreeable, or the best thing for that very wine.

These are matters of taste, or they ought to be, yet often I suspect there are several too many shoulds and gottas going on before the fact. There are too many people who cling to the *Idea* that sugar is evil, sugar is pabulum, sugar is how bad wines are disguised; therefore sugar is to be avoided on principle *unless it can't be*, in which case you invoke the even more prevalent principle that wines shouldn't be manipulated. In other words, sugar's O.K. but only when you can't help it. Well, sigh. This is the kind of thing seductive to wine writers but somewhere oblique to the truth.

Each time I raised these issues with growers, I saw them trying to hide their dismay behind a veil of politeness. Some were willing to agree that *Rieslings* could indeed benefit from a mini-dollop of sweetness, but not Grüner Veltliner. That should always be dry; it tastes better that way. I'm suspicious of uniform opinions, but O.K., the world can probably do without GrüVes carrying little bits of sweetness. Or? The next-to-last GV grower at whom I tasted was Hofer, and he's really a non-interventionist, being organic and all. And one of his GrüVes had a few grams of RS—and tasted absolutely wonderful. I think a couple questions are at play here. To one's own taste one should always be faithful. If you truly hate sweetness then you shouldn't consume it. For the rest of us—the 99.8% rest of us—perhaps a little flexibility is in order.

## \* THE 2012 VINTAGE \*

Of course the headline is the dreadful May frost that came so late, after the danger was supposed to have past. The first question I asked anyone was "How much did you lose." The silver lining is the concentration of fruit in the small crop that survived.

If all you taste are the excellent-to-superb estates, as mostly I do, you're tempted to conclude 2012 is a bloody marvelous vintage, with fruit-driven yummy wines that also show all the terroir jazz and nuance anyone could ever crave. You'd be right—but only for that echelon of growers.

In fact for those growers I think 2012 is a notch better than '11; it has more acidity, more concentration, yet even with these attributes it also has more *cream* somehow. It tastes richer. It is richer.

Two things were decisive. One was drought, as it was a dry season and a hot late-summer, and those who couldn't irrigate often showed wines that smelled great and entered the palate like a party, but which stopped abruptly (as if the police had been summoned) and finished clipped and sometimes bitter. In some cases there was sunburn on the skins, which also creates bitterness.

In the terraces of the Wachau/Kamptal/Kremstal drip irrigation has been common for years. Riesling wouldn't grow there without it. At one time I sought to object to this on grounds of "purity" but I had to concede the wines were drenched with terroir *and* the world was better because they existed. In the Weinviertel irrigation is very rare, and so 2012 becomes a year where location matters crucially. The difference between the wines from the best land and the "good" land is larger than usual.

It is also a vintage where, yet again, high alcohol can be a factor, especially in Grüner Veltliner. Oh boy, did we talk about this. The growers agree there is a "situation," but no one knows what to do about it. Do the solutions reside in canopy work, in larger yields, in different vine material, in earlier picking, in less selective picking, or all/none of the above?

Often in 2012 these 14% and higher wines gave a curious appearance of grace on the palate, and I wondered if I was being silly. But when I concentrated, I felt it, the telltale whiff of either medicine or jalapeño-heat, things that put me off. At one estate we agreed it was absurd to assume I (or anyone) could discern between wines of 13.9 and 14.1alc., so I asked not to be told. And, sadly, nailed it. I'd honestly rather not fuss, and I know my 14% line in the sand is arbitrary. Yet a line needs to be drawn somewhere, and that's the point where my odds of being happy start to plummet. Still, I'll show you a few of the better ones, just so you can suss them yourself.

I'm also remembering 2006, a high-alcohol year that seemed to have absorbed that ripeness into a big regal monument of power and vinosity. Yet 2-3 years later, the baby-fat having melted away, the wines were too often clunky, oafish and crude. With wines north of 14%, it doesn't matter what they taste like in the first year unless you plan to drink them in the first year.

There were some light wines in '12 that showed grassy notes, as though they'd been blended with Sauvignon Blanc, or had been dive-bombed by ladybugs. No one could account for it.

But there were also a large number of wines that number among the best Austrian wines I have tasted, in an especially persuasive form. If 2011 was a silky granular-textured vintage, 2012 is a rich, creamy vintage yet with its weight elegantly dispersed. It's just more sensual somehow; it's a better *kisser* than '11 is. (And I made out with both of them...)

The reds were wonderful, at least the "lesser" cuvées that were ready to taste. This corresponds to my dismay over many of the highly-touted 2011s, which often tasted way too tannic for my tender palate, and which were

mono-maniacally minty. The "little" wines are loaded with gushing berried fruit, but their bigger more "important" siblings are sometimes just ill-contained. The '12 reds are ripe but more *fruity* than the mega-berried '11s. I can tell I'm going to like them much more.

You can't say it's better for GV or for Riesling, though you can observe that Riesling was almost never overripe, and GV sometimes was. Still, for each guy who clearly had a stunning GV vintage (Gobelsburg) there was another who had a stunning Riesling vintage (Hiedler). And I'm glad, because 2011 clearly favored Riesling, but y'all buy a lot more Veltliner.

Speaking of which, I'm waiting for dry Muscat to be trendy and it looks like I might wait forever, but they're good in '12, fairly restrained as this beast goes. Maybe next year we'll sell them the way we sell Rosé; taste in January, ship in April, drink before Labor Day. Though one doesn't wish to consign this variety to some "fragile wine that needs to be drunk young," because two nights ago I was poured a stunningly good Muskateller that I knew wasn't recent, but guessed was between 6-9 years old, and I thought my guess was really cool. It wasn't cool at all. The wine was Polz's **1990**, a wine I'd actually shipped back in the day, and a calmly fresh and gorgeous Muscat of a mere 23 years of age. I doubt I'll have a more remarkable wine experience this year.

## HIGHLIGHTS AND SUPERLATIVES

### THE WINERY OF THE VINTAGE

Hands-down, **Gobelsburg**. It's the best collection of Grüner Veltliners I've ever seen, and the Rieslings are also citizens of a rare country. It can seem tedious to cite this masterly estate yet again—and maybe I should retire his number, as it were—but what else can you feel but gratefulness and awe? He makes it look easy, but it isn't easy. The *GV Lamm*, and the (2011) *Riesling Tradition* reach lofty pinnacles of beauty and meaning. So I won't repeat those wines below, when individual accolades are discussed.

### OTHER SUPERB COLLECTIONS OF 2012s

#### ALZINGER

#### WINES OF THE VINTAGE

(Excluding any of the Gobelsburgs, for reasons noted above...)

At the TOP END—*HIEDLER Riesling Gaisberg*, *NIGL Riesling Hochäcker*.

In the MID-RANGE, a remarkable wine; *HEIDI SCHROCK'S haunting, almost achingly beautiful FURMINT*, with the proviso to drink it from a **tulip** glass and not from one of those strange big Zaltos.

At the LOW-END a shout to *ERICH BERGER* and his paradigmatic *GRUNER VELTLINER LOESSTERASSEN*.



## THE WINE OF THE COLLECTION

Clearly and dramatically *NIKOLAIHOF'S 2008 RIESLING KLAUSBERG RESERVE*, which is, as simply as can be said, as gorgeous as wine can be.

## A FEW MORE GREAT GRÜNER VELTLINERS

In no particular order, pay special attention to *BRUNDLMAYER'S Spiegel*, *OTT's Stein*, and *NIGL's new vineyard, the Rehberger Zwetl*.

## MUSCAT(S) OF THE VINTAGE

It's a good but surprising vintage for Gelber Muskateller. Most of the wines show the elderflower aromas by which one identifies them as fully ripe, yet this seems to vanish on the palate. At this point I think *NIKOLAIHOF* has established an abiding superiority in this genre, as the wines have an oystery minerality that adds a second dimension. And *ECKER*, again, is markedly successful. Finally, *HEIDI SCHROCK'S Muscat* is quite a bit fresher and less baroque than her 2011 was, yet every bit as original.

## ROSÉ OF THE VINTAGE

No question; *HEIDI SCHROCK'S "Biscaya"* which is quickly establishing a reputation as one of the world's most singular and compelling Rosés.

## RED WINE OF THE COLLECTION

(excluding repeated offerings from last year)

*PRIELER Blaufränkisch Leithaberg 2010*  
*SATTTLER Zweigelt Reserve 2011*

## SURPRISES AND ODDITIES TO PUT ON YOUR SHORT-LIST

*NIGL Sauvignon Blanc*  
*HOFFER Zweigelt Rosé*

## THIS YEAR'S ZANY ANTIC HARD-CORE LIST WINES

If you don't know the concept, we have a so-called "Core List." These are what we keep in year-round stock. It's as close as this portfolio ever gets to "commercial" wine, and the selections have to be consistent and reliable; we can't have "off-vintages" with the Core List. I don't know how many wines it contains, but it's not a lot.

That leaves a few hundred wines we offer you on pre-arrival (or Direct-Import, if you prefer), many of which many of you get to taste at our various orgiastic presentations. "I filled an entire bucket at the Theise tasting..."

Among those several hundred, there are wines I myself especially love, and which I do not want to let disappear into the glom. So each year we buy a group of them, a different group every year, and you get a 1-off shot at them. This keeps me the jocund fella you know

me to be. I get riled when way-cool wines are ignored, as my wife will gladly tell you, and so you're committing a social service by buying these babies.

Here they are, and why:

**Schwarzböck** GV 4 Gärten: you'll see a few of these cheerful light GV's, from relatively unheralded growers whose wines are so freaky-charming it galls me when they just drift away into the indifferent ether.

**Ecker** GV Stockstall; this is about as adorable as GV ever gets, and I am categorically certain that this money will not buy you a more pleasurable white wine.

**Ecker** 2011 Zweigelt Brillant: substitute red for "white," and it's the same text as the last one!

**Setzer** 2011 Zweigelt: It's one of the sleepers in the book, a mid-weight sort of really good Bordeaux Superieur palate that has poise, charm and tastiness without being "simple." Think of a slightly fruitier version of the Gobelburger.

**Berger** GV "White Stone," named after the soil in the vineyard (Zehetnerin) it grows in: I am bound and determined to show what Erich Berger can do beyond the Liters, and this is as magnetic as a puppy (plus he tells me it's paper-trained), and it's also exactly here, in this entry-to-estate-bottled GV that the variety shows its greatest charm.

**Berger** Riesling Spiegel: because this is perfect inexpensive dry Riesling that doesn't get nearly enough love.

**Hofer** GV Von den Rieden: All of the above, plus certified organic.

**Glatzer** Sauvignon Blanc Schüttenberg: we've all done well with Glatzer's basic Sauv-B, so I thought we'd play with the superior single-vineyard one, which I found dramatically delicious and successful in 2012.

**Krutzler** 2012 Blaufränkisch: if there's one single entry-level BF that has polish and class yet is entirely expressive of the splendid weedy angularity of this amazing grape, it's this one. Most of Krutzler's wines are priced fairly, yet too many of you assume no Austrian red wine could be worth such prices. Give me two minutes and I'll show you they are.

## 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 riper 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.

### A NOTE ON MY USE OF THE PHRASE *SECRET SWEETNESS*

This emphatically does not denote a wine with camouflaged residual sugar; in fact it doesn't refer to sugar as such at all. It attempts to describe a deeply embedded ripe-tasting flavor that *suggests* sweetness but which is in fact the consequence of physiological ripeness. Most of us know by now there are two things both called "ripeness": one is the actual measure of sugar in the grape (or must), which can be ostensibly "ripe" even when other markers of underripeness (e.g. bitter seeds or high malic acids) are present; the other is a fuller ripeness when both seeds and skins are sweet. Austrian whites from physiologically ripe fruit often convey a kind of sweet echo even when they contain little or no actual sugar. I like my little phrase "secret" sweetness, because it's a sweetness that seems to hide from you, though you're sure it is there. But if you look straight at it, *poof*, it's gone. Look away and there it is again. It only consents to let itself be inferred. This I just love.

### OTHER VAGUE NOTIONS ABOUT TASTING NOTES

I'm a geek for flavor. Approach me at a farmer's market and offer a sample of an apple, and I'll probably say no. Offer me samples of *five different* apples and I'm all over it. I love variations on a theme. And so I've lately discovered the fascinating variety of black peppercorns out there, and now our kitchen is full of them. And we're a pair of geeks, my former chef-wife and I, so we're creating a working pepper lab to try and suss what goes best with what. I tell you this because you're going to see some weird words in a few of my notes – other than those I regularly use—and while they don't help you if you've never tasted these things, they're accurate and thus I need to explain them.

The *sweet* peppercorns are primarily the wild Madagascar, which is markedly fruity and complex, and this Nepalese one called Timut that smells amazingly like tangerines.

The more "serious" ones include the Lompoc from Indonesia, and the all-time great Sarawak, which is smoky and truffly. There are numerous others; a French company sells a slew of them in little graduated-cylinders, and a man named Akesson is just like a wine merchant, visiting the producers and selling terroir-specific and vintage-dated peppercorns. Look here if you're interested: [www.akessons-organic.com](http://www.akessons-organic.com).

Tasting notes are strange in any case. I delved into the subject in my book along more speculative lines. Here they serve an ostensible purpose, which is to tell you what the wines tasted like so as to help you decide what (or if) to buy. But they keep getting away from me. I try to be carefully specific and concrete, but it's against my nature, and I sometimes feel as if a wine is grabbing my hand to lead me somewhere it knows I should go. If at that enticing point I'm furiously trying to figure out which color of iris it smells like, it walks away in dismay and I'll never know where it might have taken me.

Not to mention, have you or has anyone ever made a buying decision because a wine smelled like brambleberries or rather like huckleberries? "I just *have* to have more wines that smell like huckleberries on my list (or in my store)!" Dude, I doubt it. If these notes consciously "try" to do anything, it's to paint the most visceral possible picture of the wine, and sometimes that assumes the form of something definite and other times something ethereal. The meta-message is, we don't need to defeat the poor wine by mastering its every conceivable nuance. We need to join with it as it invites. Your process may differ depending on where you are in your wine life, but the true prize is not to master, but to surrender.

### 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 biodynamic 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

In my early days I didn't go looking for red wines. In one case (Glatzer) they found me and I was glad. But it seemed that my then-major competitor was claiming that ground, and it made sense; his approach to Austrian wine was through Italy, whereas mine was through Germany.

But over time I encountered these winning red wines more frequently, and I found them ever-harder to resist. Prieler and then Sattler were added, and I started to study the native varieties, and also to drink the wines more often at home. Still, this portfolio was overwhelmingly white-wine oriented, and the few reds available were afterthoughts.

That had to change. Because I found myself believing more and more strongly in the red wines in general, and in Blaufränkisch in particular. I mean to make a Statement: we yield to no one in our Austrian red wine offering. In fact I am so convinced by the wines that I'm exploring a way to do an interactive tasting with you guys, wherein you're invited to bring along what you feel are the best available wines in a range of price-points, and we'll taste them together—blind if you wish—with Austrian reds from this portfolio. For I am growing more secure by the day, that these new reds from this old/new culture are providing the greatest drinking pleasure available per Dollar—unless you need your socks knocked off, your blocks busted, or your whelm over-ed. If you're willing to "settle" for beautiful, elegant mid-weight food-luvvin wines that have *all the concentration and intensity they need to do the job*, but not so much as to scream for your exclusive attention, then you and I have something to talk about.

Austrian red wine is to be taken seriously, that much is beyond dispute. What I am selecting are just what I like best, wines with poise, grace and elegance but also with length and density. Neither I nor my growers are into

shock-and-awe wines; we all know how facile it is to make those inky dull creatures. Even the biggest wines from my producers—what I call their super-Tuscans— never let the flavor-needle lurch into the red.

A few Austrian reds can stand with the great wines of the world; not the greatest, but certainly the great. And it is gratifying to note a growing appreciation within Austria for reds with attributes of grace instead of mere brute power. Anyone can make such wines if you grow grapes in a hot enough climate, and they all have a pall about them, something withering and obtuse. Yet this singularly prevalent idiom is becoming less attractive to many Austrian vintners, who seem to have discovered what makes their wines unique and desirable, and who've set about to nurture it. Good for them! One symptom of this growing enlightenment appears among the Sattler offering. Erich did away with his "super-Tuscan" wine (which he called Cronos) and is using that fruit for single-varietal bottlings of stellar-class Zweigelt and St. Laurent. I'd like to see others follow suit.

About twenty years ago, when Austria was still deciding whether it wanted to be Bordeaux, Burgundy or Tuscany, the growers planted the usual suspects, and you'll still find them here and there: Pinot Noir, Cabernet, Merlot, plus someone has Zinfandel planted somewhere. But there's a discernable and laudable return to the several indigenous varieties, of which there are three types to interest us, each unusual, and each offering something we cannot find elsewhere.

The easy one is *Zweigelt*, because it almost always tastes marvelous and it always smells seductive. You know the way certain people just seem effortlessly funny? Zweigelt seems effortlessly tasty. Only a churl could dislike it. Then comes *St. Laurent* (pronounced to rhyme with "zonked cow rent"), which is harder to grow but almost as easy to adore as Zweigelt. It's suave and earthy, and you love it if you love the funky side of Pinot.

And then there's *Blaufränkisch*, which I feel is the master class in Austro-reds, the last taste to be acquired but the one with the most abiding fascination and offering a pleasure deeper than joy. Details are comin' right up.

**ZWIEGELT:** The last word in red wine! Rolls right off the tongue, eh? Well it rolls right off *my* tongue and down my happy throat, because at its best this is oh-so-drinkable. It always smells great! It's a cross of St. Laurent with Blaufränkisch and its most overt fruit note is sweet cherry, but there's more to the best wines. Imagine if you could somehow skim the top notes off of really ripe Syrah, so that you had the deeply juicy fruit and could leave the animal-herbal aspects behind. That might be Zweigelt. It also does interesting things in the glass. If you like its high tones of black cherry and huckleberry you should drink it without aeration. In a carafe though, it seems to default back to its St. Laurent parentage, growing more and more "Burgundian" with oxygen. There are also some Zweigelts that offer the dusty tannin and beautiful weedydness of Blaufränkisch.



**SANKT LAURENT:** A très hip grape, folks. It's Pinot Noir-ish with a "sauvage" touch, and it can do nearly all the things fine Pinot Noir does, but with added bottom notes of sagey wildness. More growers would plant it, but the vine itself is prone to mutation and it can rarely be left in the ground for more than twenty years or so. It won't flower unless the weather's perfect. It produces a tight cluster of thin-skinned berries, and is thus subject to rot if conditions aren't ideal. "You have to be a little crazy to grow this grape," said one grower. And all kinds of growers are stepping up to the challenge; St. Laurent has become the trendy grape, and I gotta tell ya, I absolutely love it. If you love good Burgundy but can't afford to *drink* good Burgundy, this variety will satisfy you all kinds of ways.

At first St-L was thought to be a genetic mutation of Pinot Noir, but modern ampelography has proven this to be false. Still, we really don't know *what* this grape is. Modern theories suggest it's a Burgundy grape of some kind with the other parent being either an unknown or an extinct variety.

It's the fastest-growing red grape in Austria (from a small base, of course), having nearly doubled in acreage since 1999, while remaining a distant 5th among all red grapes planted. Though there are 11 known clones, none of them is anything but a bitch to grow. I remain convinced that if this grape and its wines came from *anyplace* that didn't speak German, it would be mega-trendy in our fair land.

Finally there's the **BLAUFRÄNKISCH**. It's of the cabernet type, a little brickly and capsule-y, and when it's unripe it's slightly vegetal. In fact I think the quality-spread is widest here. Most of Austria's greatest red wines are made entirely or mostly from Blaufränkisch, yet weak Blaufränkisch is less pleasing than weak Zweigelt. (I've yet to taste a truly crummy St. Laurent.) I'd still put it in the Malbec-y school (whereas the Zweigelt is Syrah-y and the Sankt Laurent is Pinot-y). Zweigelt is for spaghetti, Sankt Laurent is for duck or squab, and Blaufränkisch is for lamb chops. A perfect three-course meal!

In fact there seems to be a kind of awakening within Austria, whereby the Blaufränkisch is being discovered to be a fascinating and remarkable variety. David Schildknecht just published a magnificently comprehensive and scholarly piece in *Wine&Spirits* bringing us all up to speed on the general state of thinking among the grape's growers and consumers. I asked David a few questions, because I wished to consult an impartial observer before I issued some grand statement I wouldn't be able to support.

**TT:** *What claim does Blaufränkisch stake to uniqueness?*

**DS:** *Both I and those who grow this grape have trouble describing the results for novices in terms of more familiar grapes and genres, a typical answer – depending of course in part on style*

*and terroir – being "a bit like a Northern Rhône; a bit like a Piedmontese Nebbiolo; a bit like certain Burgundian Pinots; a bit like a genuinely great cru Beaujolais..." When you find yourself reaching for such diverse and distinctively delicious points of comparison and still coming up short, then, I'd argue, you know you are in the presence of something uniquely special... [and] that's pretty exalted company to keep.*

*And speaking of terroir and style, when you find a grape as responsive to the one and adaptable to the other, that too is special.*

*I'm not sure of another cépage that enjoys the position of Blaufränkisch as regards our experience of its aging potential. Serious solo flights with this grape only began in earnest two decades ago, but It's already clear that a) you don't appreciate its full potential until you taste 10-15 year old examples and b) scarcely any of the earliest efforts by the most earnest, original, and risk-taking growers have yet faded in the bottle, so we have good reason to believe that today's top wines will age beautifully for many years and as yet virtually no reason to speculate what will be their allotted span. Silvia Prieler just wrote me after reading my recent article that she places utmost importance on Blaufränkisch's ability to reveal new charms over many years as well as on the fact that we don't yet know how many. (TT: my emphasis)*

**TT:** *Is there a sense in which it is particularly Austrian? I have said "If Grüner Veltliner were red, it would be Blaufränkisch." Is that statement supportable?*

**DS:** *There is such a sense insofar as Blaufränkisch is arguably the other grape in Austria's menagerie that is capable of greatness; highly site-sensitive; stylistically malleable; and (as yet anyway) rare and unproven outside Austria. I suppose one might be able to conjure up notions of national character and varietal character and claim that one is somehow especially fitting to the other, but I suspect the variations on that game are endless, which is to say unchecked by any evidence but only by the limits of the player's cleverness. And I know not to challenge you on that field, Herr Theise!*

**TT:** *Given all the variety of attractive red wines in the world, what is the salient case for including Blaufränkisch in a merchant's (sommelier, retailer, wholesaler, importer) offering?*

**DS:** *Virtually every merchant I know has a*

*personally felt need as well as a significant cadre of customers who are on the lookout for something “new” to set alongside the rather small canon of cépages or cépage-terroir combinations that dominate the market and wine literature. The question then is whether the newness wears off. Given the rapidity with which Blaufränkisch is being transported by growers ever-closer to sublimity (100-point Nirvana ;-); the dazzling diversity it reveals in response to terroir and human stylistic ideals; its fascinating flexibility at table; the mystery of “how will it end?” in the bottle; not to mention the colorful and outspoken cast of growers that champion it, I don't think the sense of discovery will wear off on wine lovers in any hurry.*

***TT: When Blaufränkisch fails, it's usually because...***

*DS: ...growers try to take shortcuts in order to render an inexpensive “Blaufränkisch 101.” This variety needs some breathing space – and, above all, time – in cask to really reveal its virtues. As I've written before, “Blaufränkisch punch” is no more interesting than “Pinot punch” and since by contrast Zweigelt, Gamay, or Grenache can be irresistibly delicious after only a short post-fermentative stay in tank, let them continue to dominate the \$10-15 retail realm (even as they of course excel also in more exalted variations). ...or because some still try to treat it as if it were Merlot or Cabernet or they were in Bordeaux ...or (perhaps in that same connection) try to compensate for vine material that gives low skin-to-juice ratio by extracting more aggressively.*

***TT: Even decent average Blaufränkisch will show you...***

*DS: Dimensions that go well beyond fruits and berries.*

***TT: Great Blaufränkisch is unique among wines in showing...***

*DS: I struggle to answer this because the styles and soil influences are so varied; the “end point” in bottle maturation a mystery; and because to pull out a few traits and imply that their conjunction is sufficient to establish a unique description is probably inherently an exercise in overreach. But there are nearly always dimensions that find one reaching for floral and mineral vocabulary; there is generally an aura of smokiness; and a combination of refreshing and invigorating primary juiciness with faintly, attractively grainy texture.*

Thanks David. I feel better now. I'd also add that the more I drink this variety the more it feels right-bank Bordeaux-ish to me, or even like Malbec as it grows in Cahors. And yet there's something that resists direct analogy to *any* other variety, except to observe that it isn't “sweet” like Zweigelt and it isn't “round” the way St. Laurent is. Blaufränkisch is incisive, pointed, full of herbs and spices and weeds, very seldom especially “fruity” but often like berries and smoke. As I looked around for the right supplier(s), I found myself repelled by anyone who used too much blatant new wood or whose wines were obtrusively tannic. Tannin is innate to the variety, and when it's balanced it adds an agreeable jolt of dust to the varietal juiciness. I found that if I searched for elegance, that BF's native complexity would invariably follow. I also wanted variety within the variety, and among Prierer, Wallner and Krutzler there's no redundancy that I can see.

Having (as it were) graduated to Blaufränkisch, I find there's no turning back. It scratches an itch. I cherish its little bite. And it isn't remotely “difficult” like Tannat or Mondeuse or Trousseau can (sometimes) be; it's delicious but not *dee-lish*, if you see what I mean. I even entertain the radical thought that Summer Of Riesling could easily segue into Winter Of Blaufränkisch without missing a beat.

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.

Two final pieces of happy news: there is a tangible retreat away from oak as a dominating flavor, and a concomitant appreciation of its great value as a seasoning. Growers have more confidence their wines don't need the pancake makeup of 300% new barriques. Second, 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*).



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 littleknown 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 course, 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

Neusiedlersee-Hügelland // Schützen

vineyard area // 20 hectares  
annual production // 8,000 cases  
top sites & soil types // Goldberg (slate); Seeberg,  
Sinner (limestone, mica schist); Ungerbergen (limestone with pebbles)  
grape varieties // 30% Blaufränkisch, 15% Cabernet Sauvignon,  
14% Pinot Noir, 10% Chardonnay, 10% Merlot, 10% Pinot Blanc,  
8% St. Laurent, 3% Welschriesling



*New developments here. I drank a bottle of Champagne with Silvia Prieler in this absolutely cool farmer-fizz bar in Vienna called le Cru, and she told me why she'd left the winery and returned to her original life as a scientist.*



Yet she still lives in Schützen (and commutes to Vienna), and it's hard for her to stay away from the estate. "And of course if I go I get pulled in," she says. This leaves her brother Georg, who is nine years younger. He has his parents there, both to do some of the work and also to provide "institutional memory," and he can always call Silvia, something which she says he's doing less and less often. Georg and I spent a good long time together and he didn't seem at all tentative or overwhelmed.

An interesting question is, will the wines change? But of course you want to know; change from what? So: Prieler is a classic Burgenland estate making about 75%

red wine, supplemented by white and Rosé. As a rule the whites are somewhat Provençal in nature, i.e., dry, stony and delicately herbal. Only the basic Pinot Blanc shows more "sweet" langoustine and acacia-blossom notes. The reds differ by variety, with the Blaufränkisch leading, a markedly deep wine that sometimes broods but often sings. It can be tannic but is never coarse. There's also a Pinot Noir that's basically a bucking bronco that sister and brother both have tried to tame. It makes a wine modeled on Burgundian lines, and when it works it seriously resembles good Côte D'Or.

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**Prieler at a glance** // An estate both admired and beloved within Austria, for hearty yet focused whites and sumptuous deeply structured reds, both of which are undergoing certain deft transitions; the whites more primary (i.e., less malo) and the reds more succulent (i.e., fewer gravelly tannins).

## 2012 Rosé vom Stein

AEP-092

One grows tired of ghettoizing pink wine as something that has to be drunk by Labor Day. This one's a year-rounder made from 90% Blaufränkisch and 10% Merlot; it's quite salty, almost a Riesling lover's Rosé, with a Provençal twang, herbs and grasses; really firm grip on the back, a serious wine in fact! Brush a piece of fresh wild king salmon with olive oil and before you stick that baby on the grill, smell the fish and the wine; two octaves of the *same* note.

## 2012 Pinot Blanc Seeberg

AEP-089

2012 in this house reversed the usual contrast to '11; these wines are more linear and rocky and the '11s had more fruit. This could be mistaken for Chardonnay in all its starch and stone; the '11 was a corn bisque in comparison. Georg left it longer on the skins, in fact, so there are starchy phenolics and scree; it was on the lees until February, and there's a cat's tongue finish.

## 2012 Chardonnay Ried Sinner

AEP-090

"I get bored with these overloaded wines people say are *mineral* but actually aren't," says Georg. Correctly! This unoaked Chard is subtler than the Pinot Blanc, as if they'd switched identities. So I asked for a different glass. I'm not sold on those rather silly Zaltos everyone uses, so Georg brought me an old dusty Riedel tulip they hadn't used forever.

The wine was vastly better in it. Vastly. A world of difference. Pulverized oyster shells and straw and salt and a delicate firm fruit with notes of chervil and sorrel, and the entire texture was way more juicy.

## 2011 Leithaberg Pinot Blanc, 6/750ml

AEP-084

## 2012 Leithaberg Pinot Blanc, 6/750ml

AEP-091

The '11's in bottle now, sporting 13.8% alc (though the label says 14%), which barely registers through all the leesy cream.

What's "Leithaberg?" A range of low hills behind the north shore of the lake (Neusidl, the shallow one), dividing "Pannonia" from the Viennese plain. Aircraft on their glide-paths landing to the north fly right over it at low altitude.

It's also the name of the local appellation, or "DAC" (see the back of this book, which is where it belongs...), but before that it was a Brand created by a group of (12, I think) growers, who wanted a name for separate cuvées made in order to show *minerality*, from the limestony soils of these hillsides.

The 2011 has a curious note of currant-leaf; it's as sweet as fresh lobster and as nutty as basmati rice. The '12, fermented in large wood for the first time, was too opaque to read.

## 2010 Blaufränkisch Ried Johannishöhe

AEP-087

## 2011 Blaufränkisch Ried Johannishöhe

AEP-095

**CORE LIST WINE.** The 2010 will be sold through this year, and we'll introduce the '11 in January 2014. I'm tasting the '10 in bottle for the first time. It shows lots of iron and pepper and really blatant mineral; there's still a deliberate raw-silk texture but it's more taut than the '09 was. It makes a good intro to the variety because it simply doesn't compromise or try to be your chum; it's pure Blaufränkisch.

The much riper and more boisterous '11 is deep cassis, charred bark and Sarawak pepper; a deeper texture, more juice but also more pepper-bacon. Tasting the 2010 again, it seemed cooler but more articulate. The flamboyant backdrop of the '11 mitigates the tannin, which is more exposed (though not disagreeable) in the '10.



**2010 Leithaberg Blaufränkisch, 6/750ml** + +  
**2011 Leithaberg Blaufränkisch, 6/750ml** + ( + )

AEP-085  
AEP-093

Leithaberg reds are permitted to use large barrels or used barriques as long as no flavor is imparted. The grape and ground are paramount.

The fragrance of the 2010 is nearly every reason to love Blaufränkisch, the pencil and pepper and the skirt-steak meatiness, yet it doesn't "seduce" or flatter, it just expresses its freaky complicated self, and does it with endless juiciness and a sting of rosemary, leading to a finale of rocks and iron-filings, all with a silky polish...cool and blue. An exceptional vintage, because all the (Grand Cru) Goldberg is in it, having been deemed unworthy to bottle under its own name.

The '11 *seems* more intense and graphite-y mostly because of a swollen mid-palate and finish. It has less silk and more tannic grip, but it's also more likely to be blatantly stellar. I like introverted wines more than most people do.

**2011 Blaufränkisch Marienthal, 6/750ml** ( + ) +

AEP-094

This site has become iconic thanks to the great vintages from Triebamer, and there was a tacit do-not-compete between him and Prieler whereby they wouldn't bottle Marienthal if he didn't bottle Goldberg, where he also owns land. Georg thought it was time for a change, but first went to visit his friend, bearing samples, to ensure that justice was being done to the vineyard, and to explicitly establish the new situation. Now *that's* respect and collegiality.

In fact this wine is poles apart from Goldberg. It's more seductive and chocolatey; an east-facing limestone vineyard, where Prieler's parcel's in the steep section; it's like a carob cream pie with a ragout of porcinis, the earthy Burgundian side of Blaufränkisch, dark and autumnal, with the graphite emitting a tracking signal as though from under a pile of decomposing leaves.

**2009 Blaufränkisch Goldberg, 6/750ml** + ( + )

AEP-086

The hill is schist and thus the wine is mineral. It shows a Pomerol kind of primordial iron, winter truffle, earth and smoke. It's a leaner wine than Marienthal, but also more intense. Curiously, with age it becomes gentler and more Graves-like, but this takes at least ten years. It's one of Austria's icon-reds, and if you score some, decant it 2 hours out. There's an angular sort of "sweetness" here, and a magically intricate finish. It has the seething power of the world's great reds, but otherwise virtually *nothing in common* with them. It is very particular wine, and more superb because of it.

**2011 Pinot Noir Hochsatz, 6/750ml** ( + )

AEP-096

This will be bottled earlier than usual, "to keep the fruit." It's round and ripe in the Chambolle style; Georg used more large casks than Silvia had, and this has animal, bloody promise. And I don't mean brett!

## Brandy

Well now!

It seems there was some Grüner Veltliner planted in Prieler's land at some point, and Engelbert refused to make wine from it. Instead he made brandy, none of which was ever bottled or sold, but each vintage was made and aged until the grapes were grubbed up. So, this is a **1990**, *bottled in April 2012*, which I guess makes it an "XO" though I don't know what they're gonna call it. It's more like a Spanish brandy than a Cognac; nougat and caramel; smooth and markedly complex. Actually I'm really gob-smacked by this. High notes of steel and mint and cherry.

# Heidi Schröck

Neusiedlersee-Hügelland // Rüst



vineyard area // 10 hectares  
annual production // 3,300 cases  
top sites // Vogelsang, Turner  
soil types // 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

*If you've seen Heidi recently, and if you'd seen her before, you'll notice she is gradually disappearing. Any more svelte and she can dodge the raindrops. She does report that some of her girlfriends are bemused, but I myself am enjoying the metamorphosis, though at times I find myself thinking "You're really very hot, but what did you do with my friend Heidi?"*



I went to see Heidi in the morning of a day when I had dreamed like crazy the night before. Since I moved to Boston I've been dreaming again. I'd forgotten how it was. Where I lived before was so brutally all-consuming that sleep was a kind of oblivion I needed just to cope with being conscious. Now it's like a 24-hour show, as if the throbbing noise dissipated and let loose the night furies. I love it, but you have to be willing to carry the echo of whatever you've dreamt into the day.

So it's good to have the dream world back. The screen isn't dark any more, and one of these nights I hope to join Steven Colbert and Keira Knightly as we tumble naked through the snow down Mt. Washington on our way to eating six dozen Nootka Sounds from the B&G Oyster Bar. But anyway, when I got to Heidi's house I was all buzzing from a chittery night's worth of visions, and I wanted to see a friend I could relax with.

A stork was scratching its head in its nest on top of a

neighboring house. Rust is full of storks. They arrive in the Spring and gorge themselves from the Stork-smorgasbord also known as Lake Neusidl. Beautiful, magical birds, with their dreamy kite-like flight and their clackety mating calls and their silly yet beatific faces. I'd never seen one scratch its head before; he looked like he was stumped over a clue in the Times crossword puzzle. For an instant I thought I was still dreaming. And so I joined my friend Heidi, and her wines, and her life among the storks, for a few genial hours.

Of the many things I love about Heidi Schröck, one is that she's one of the few who really does what so many others only *say* they do—let her wines lead the way. No two Heidi-vintages are the same. She doesn't wrestle her fruit into a shape she has determined in advance. In 2004 when nothing wanted to ferment fully, she made an entire vintage of Halbtrocken wines, anathema in the domestic market (but delicious then as now).

I'd love Heidi's wines even if I didn't love Heidi, but I love them even more *because* I love the person who makes them. I know you know what I mean. Any of you who've met Heidi will know exactly what I mean. If you haven't met her, the easiest way to sum her up is to say she's real, and you can talk with her. I mean, what can be more important about a person?

She makes it look easy. Much easier, in fact, than it has been for her. But that's how it is with certain people, and Heidi's one of them. Though she's as lusty and earthy as anyone I know, she doesn't seem to know how not to be graceful. She is one of those very few people who appear to have figured out how to live. She possesses an innate elegance and sweetness. I have no idea what effort this might entail—none, I suspect—but she is naturally conscientious and thoughtful without being at all self-effacing. She invites affection with no discernible effort. Because all she has to do is offer it.

## 2012 Rosé “Biscaya”

AHS-137

This is made from *eight* varieties, several of which are, let's say, not officially “recognized” in Austria. It's the most original rosé of any I know. Vinous, borderline funky, rather in the “natural” idiom, and I think I need two years to arrive at the vocabulary for it. For now, it's a “heavy” fruited wine that feints toward tomato-water and rhubarb and rose hips, and it's *definitely* a year-round rosé.

## 2012 Gelber Muskateller +

AHS-141

Ho-Kay, it's time for a mango-papaya infusion! Total vanilla brioche; all that's missing is the foie torchon. Even a note of lemon-custard. The palate is surprisingly taut and salty, creamy yet lively and fresh; some rice-pudding, but this is nowhere near as opulent as the 2011 was, nor as waxy—yet it's also too vinous to drink ice-cold, so please don't!

## 2012 Weissburgunder

AHS-138

Here's a wine where you can observe the way Heidi lets her wine determine itself. After the fresh-corn “sweetness” of the '11, one might have expected her to try to *form* the new vintage into that very attractive shape. But no, this shows cooler aromas, basmati and tapioca; the texture is lees-creamy but the flavors are bright, briny and spicy; the finish is rock-dust and ginger with Wellfleet coppery nuances. It's another wine that improved in a tulip-shaped glass—*enough* already with the silly Zaltos.

## 2012 Furmint ++

AHS-140

I sometimes think if I had to select just one wine from my entire portfolio that would express *why I do this and what I believe in*, it would be this one. 8.82 hectares in all of Austria—Heidi has 10% of them—reintroduced after having vanished by a small coterie of loyal idealists, difficult to grow, late-ripening and high acidity, and a subtle searching flavor that so perfectly expresses the sad sweetness of late Autumn. The stubborn fragrant quince, the little divinity-crystals in the pear, the low honey-sun, all there in these wines.

And the new vintage is the best in many years, judged strictly as wine *qua* wine. It's subtle, and entirely haunting; quince and osmanthus and bread dough; dramatically better from the smaller glass, where it becomes more satiny and allusive; amazingly intuitive and meditative; indirectly salty with a hint of talc, a sense of something you know and yet have missed, as if you'd been at sea and returned at the end of Spring, remembering every blossom but not having smelled them, all those little lost flowers, and now it is almost Summer. This is the wine of the triste of everything known and lost, the rarest sweetness. Yet it seems to linger, as if to console you.

Being with a wine like this is a lesson in how to live and what to care about. You can buy and sell it if you like, as I do, but most important is to simply let it find you.



### 2011 Grauburgunder

AHS-145

Fermented wild, aged in three small casks, one of which is new, fermented in those casks and kept on the gross lees with lots of stirring, and malo also in cask. It's my go-to woody white, and I start to wonder if Pinot Gris isn't more suited than Chardonnay to this kind of vinification. Chard is a wuss, the oak destroys it. Gris has the fat and muscle, but having said that, this '11 shows more grape-sweetness and less oak than its forbears. Wonderful absorption of lees and an oatmeal richness to go with the cask flavors. It gets lighter on its feet each year—just 13% alc.

### 2010 Beerenauslese "Selektion," 6/375ml

AHS-130H

This is somewhat more buttery and less grainy than it sometimes has been; more grace and delicacy. It's demure if not quite "ladylike." Full of finesse, and as a "dessert" wine it's markedly easy to drink—and to afford.

### 2011 Ruster Ausbruch "On The Wings Of Dawn," 6/375ml +

AHS-139H

Heidi told me it was nearly impossible to make Ausbruch in Rust in 2011, and she surmises that her one sole cask is the only one. But she had to do it, as an homage to her father who died that year, who made these wines his whole life and passed the knowledge (and the wines) down to his girl.

More dried than botrytised grapes, and so it's saltier and more *truly* honeyed, like a Satsuma marmalade with smoked salt, cinnamon and fig. The wine itself is lovely, but the heart-story behind it is unbearably touching.

## The Trio of Schröck & Kracher Wines

These can now be released, though under sad circumstances, what with Alois Kracher's distressingly premature death. He and Heidi were friends, and "Luis" loved a new project, and he wondered what sort of wine he might help make on the "other" shore of the Neusiedlersee, where the soils were more complex than the sands of Illmitz. I spoke with him on Heidi's cell phone one day as she and I were driving home from dinner. She'd told me about the project, and I assured Luis I'd be glad to collaborate with Vin Divino on joint marketing and sales, assuming they felt the same. Luis said he was very relieved to hear it, and I wondered why. I didn't think it was extraordinarily gentlemanly of me... Now of course it's all changed. Alas. Luis is gone. As I write I'm not sure what's becoming of Vin Divino. Nor do I know how much wine Heidi wants to sell. I only know I want to be the only guy selling it. There are two wines, a dry one called Greiner (the name of the vineyard) and an Ausbruch. Both are now '07s.

### 2007 Schröck & Kracher Greiner Welschriesling, 6/750ml

AHS-136

### 2007 Schröck & Kracher Ruster Ausbruch, 6/375ml

AHS-123H

### 2008 Schröck & Kracher Greiner Welschriesling Halbtrocken

AHS-133

Whether it's the more elegant '07 vintage, or whether it's another level of know-how with the second vintage, these wines are in another league entirely from the somewhat ungainly maiden voyage, and for the first time you can taste the synergy that must have motivated the project at the beginning.

The Ausbruch is warmer and more forceful than the hotter, more assertive 2006. It's a classic example of the baroque power of the Ausbruch genre; quite bruléed and vanillin, but not really creamy. This has magma power.

# Sattler

Neusiedlersee // Taden

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



*My local distributor carries Sattler's basic St. Laurent, so I've been along while it's taken out to show to customers. Most don't know what it is, and suppose it might be all weird and umlaut-y. Until they taste it.*



Then I get to watch the gradual melting away of each successive layer of resistance, as the sumptuous prettiness of the wine completes its seduction. I don't even care if a customer insists on pronouncing it as if it were French—Sawhn Lawhrahnn, instead of the much easier “Zonked Low (like “cow”) Rent”. In fact, here's the handy-dandy mnemonic—it's like “Zonked Cow-Rent” which is of course the stipend paid by a drunken Guernsey when he knocks over your fence.

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 prevailing 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.

Erich Sattler is emblematic of the new generation of Austrian vintners, a wine-school grad, 4th generation in the family, taking over as recently as 1999. "We make wine as my grandfather did," he says, "only with better machines."

### 2012 Zweigelt Rosé

AST-044

Deep rhubarb and cranberry color, and again year-round vinosity; sockeye and tomato-water. Not a picnic wine unless you plan to roast a goat.

### 2012 St. Laurent

AST-046

**CORE LIST WINE.** This is why I have such confidence in the 2012 reds. It's lovely, balanced and chocolatey; roast duck with plum glaze; for me it's one of the *finer* vintages, less effusive than '11, rounder and truly richer, though it's less "intense." Again the low notes of iron. Tasted a few degrees warmer than I'd actually drink it, so the fruit will be even shapelier. As always, not a scrap of wood, so look at how much stuffing-drenched exotica you can get with *fruit alone*.

### 2012 Zweigelt

AST-047

**CORE LIST WINE.** (Cask sample). This *will* be good, but right now it's on the fine lees under CO<sub>2</sub>, and it needs time to shrug away its reduction. Seems to go more in the tobacco and raspberry directions, more dust and Cab Franc than roses and Barbera. But we'll see.

### 2011 St. Laurent Reserve +

AST-048

Bottled the day before I tasted it, so <ulp>...but it was explosively blackberried and seriously rich, not just shrieking with tannin and mint and overripe berries. A sweet balanced tannin here, and a big slow river of fruit; smoky char comes near the end, and even with its gushing richness it still seems fresh. You *want* to sip it again; it's not tiring. Part of you wants to slug it down.

### 2011 Zweigelt Reserve ++

AST-045

This smells totally frickin' delicious! You just have to applaud how he *aced* this vintage. Szechuan spare-rib and apple-smoked bacon, oozing-sweet berries and embedded low notes of cedar; the palate is spicier than the fragrance, with more mint and snap, violets and char. Tasty and complex, and a stellar achievement.

### 2011 Zweigelt "Wonderful Life," 6/750ml +

AST-050

Now and again Erich will bottle a single-vineyard cuvée, and name it after a Nick Cave song. (I think he should use Zappa, just because I want to sell a wine called "Burnt Weenie Sandwich.") I tasted a cask sample; we'll offer the wine in January 2014. It's a 45-year-old vineyard, and the last time it was made alone was 2006. This is quite, deep; really a savory pork-roast with a jus including cloves and Madagascar peppers; the tannin is absorbed well, and the wine is more deeply engraved and broodier than the "Reserve," and also more Burgundian with its earth, mushroom and truffle.



# 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 Rüst 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 MacDonald 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.

Though on the day we visited, all was a clamor of people and the crash of glasses. It was open-door day, and it was sunny, and starting at noon the tasting rooms were full and people started staining their teeth with spicy red wine. 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, UweSchiefer, and Krutzler, and supporting them are a host of fine country wine estates, at least one of which—Wallner—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.



vineyard area // 8 hectares  
annual production // 2,500 cases  
top sites & 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**, Zweigelt 7%, St. Laurent 2% as well as Cabernet Sauvignon 5% and Merlot 3% (only for the Cuvee); appr. 13% white

*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. As is my standard practice, I drank the wines at home over a period of months before deciding to visit the estate; I always want to see how a wine *drinks* rather than how it “performs” in a tasting situation. I

know myself by now. When a wine is great I sit with my chin in my hands and stare at the air, letting its greatness soak in, saying very little. And when a wine is entirely wonderfully *good* I get up and pace the room and mutter to anyone present “Wow, this is farking delicious!” or words to that effect. (I’ll even do it when no one’s present, but you have to take my word.) 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.

**Wallner at a glance** // Excellent supplier of juicy and varietally scrupulous wines from a “lost world” in extreme southeastern Austria.

**how the wines taste** // Luscious yet peppery, “rural” but not at all rustic, and lip-smacking drinkable.

## 2008 Blaufränkisch

AWL-011

This cool, long season gives a wine itself precise and *cool*, as if giving a speech it had plenty of time to memorize. Only 12.5% alc, wonderfully! For me it's the entry wine if you want to understand the variety; silky and deeply berried and showing really focused pepper and mineral. Incisive and hi-def. When it's gone, we'll proceed to...

## 2011 Blaufränkisch Eisenberg DAC

AWL-010

It's the same wine, but now the region has its "DAC" and so the label changes and there's one more useless thing to have to explain. The wine is classic pepper-and-weeds in his warm grilled-meat style; the tannin is dusty and the wine is ripe but feels adamantly dry. Did you know how high the acidity is in this variety? Higher than Champagne in fact, and this little guy's packing 5.6g/l which may be why BF is so appealing to us white-wine chaps. This '11 is wildly herbal and juicy, a no-quarter-given wine saturated with *somewhereness*.

## 2008 Blaufränkisch Reserve +

AWL-002

Another pure, howl-at-the-moon BF; precise and precisely my type, Serrano-smoky, truffley, amazingly silky texture, complex and nettley. Buy this one to see what this grape is.

## 2007 Blaufränkisch Reserve +

AWL-003

And buy this one for sheer hedonism, though opinions may differ about this particular wine, which fastidious tasters may feel to be decadent in a faded-flowers kind of way. I agree the wine is now fully tertiary, and this happened rather fast, but I like the aged beef and summer truffle and the vinous "sweetness" that harkens a little to Burgundy.

## 2009 Blaufränkisch "Namenlos" +

AWL-005

Wallner makes two *têtes de cuvée*, one of them a blend called "Kentaur" that includes "international" varieties, and this one called "Nameless" that's the very best he can do from Blaufränkisch.

It's from old vines—at least over 40 and some as old as 90—done in 500-liter casks (more than double the size of barriques); it shows the massive smoky essence of BF; immense, capacious, radioactively spicy and peppery, like fruit baked in a kiln. Yet for all its intensity it's also supple and graceful as it smolders away. It's like a saddle of lamb cooked over a fire of vine shoots.





vineyard area // 10 hectares  
 annual production // 5,833 cases  
 top sites & 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 // Blaufränkisch 84%, Zweigelt 8%, Merlot 3% as well as Caberne Sauvignon 2% (only for the Cuvee); 3 % white

*That an estate as stellar as this one was without an American importer following the troubles at Vin DiVino—a period of some six years—gives me very mixed feelings. On one hand, sure, I’m lucky. On the other hand—why? We need to care more about this remarkable grape, and if you’re still not sure why, then a single taste of any of these will convince you.*



This is a bit of a stretch for me. Krutzler’s in a price segment with which we normally generate only moderate numbers. But his are among Austria’s very best red wines, and I feel a sense of duty to show you exactly what these wines can do.

Though they are more sophisticated than Wallner’s wines, they’re by no means anonymously “international.” They have more frequent-flyer miles, one might say. But they do not forget where home is.

And yet when you talk with Reinhold Krutzler about his grape growing or winemaking you find you have almost no “news” to report. Wines like this, regardless of variety or even of color, are always treated the same: grow excellent grapes, not too many of them, pick at the best possible time, and do very little in the winery. When you read through his brochure his priorities emerge quite clearly. “Fine minerality,” “silky texture,” “The wines exude intense

minerality,” “concise, earthy, fruity, sophisticated.” He has found that his best results derive from making small-blend cuvées rather than single-site bottlings. He also identifies the unusually wide swings between day and night temperatures as major contributors to the fervent aromas he seeks.

BF is a high-acid grape in any case. Its analyses would shock you, in fact. I’m all too aware there’s a theory that red wines shouldn’t have high acid, but it is far from the whole truth. Blaufränkisch *thrives* on its acidity; it makes the wines fresh even when they’re broodingly intense; it gives them the incisive clarity they show at their best.

Krutzler’s is a 10-hectare estate, not very big at all, with three on the Eisenberg. He sells through his wines faster than does Wallner, and most of what I had to taste were very recently bottled 2011s. Fortunately I had many months with more mature vintages at home, so I could see these brash young ‘10s with the necessary perspective.

**Krutzler at a glance** // The “top” estate in Südburgenland is among the elite red-wine producers in all of Austria.

**how the wines taste** // Weighty and classy, with more polish and sheen than Wallner’s more lusty forthright style. YET: still quintessential Blaufränkisch!

## 2012 Zweigelt

AKR-005

I told myself *don't do it, focus on Blaufränkisch*, but the wine won me over, and is the class among Zweigelts from people who don't focus on Zweigelt. It's polished and lively, with a Barbera-like acidity and violets like crazy.

## 2012 Blaufränkisch (+)

AKR-004

**HARD-CORE LIST WINE.** The aromas are subdued but the palate is creamy and fruit-driven as 2012 is; it's a discreet and diplomatic BF—but just 3 weeks in-bottle. Spicy and Sangiovese-like, with tons in reserve.

## 2011 Blaufränkisch Reserve

AKR-006

### 2011 Blaufränkisch Reserve, 12/375ml

AKR-006H

### 2011 Blaufränkisch Reserve, 6/1.5L

AKR-006M

It has a beautiful classy aroma; smoke, violets, currant-leaf, entirely polished and fetching. It does the 2011 mint-and-tannin jive, and you can argue the tannin is "sweet." I'd still lay it down, and let me repeat that I'm quirkily oversensitive to tannin, so you might find this wine thrilling right now.

## 2011 Blaufränkisch "Perwolff," 6/750ml (+ +)

AKR-009

### 2011 Blaufränkisch "Perwolff," 12/375ml (+ +)

AKR-009H

### 2011 Blaufränkisch "Perwolff," 6/1.5L (+ +)

AKR-009M

A curiosity of this often-great wine is how tender and delicate it becomes with the age it needs—13-16 years at least—considering how massive and adamant it is at first. A 2001 from magnum was complex and almost filigree, direct and flowery and charming.

But back to reality, and to this brooding opaquely tannic infant. Still, some sweet mass pulses through; you have to trust the deep rich aroma, with its Lynch-Bages cassis, hint of cedar, black-pepper and pencil shavings. The palate is clearly "sweet" in the modern idiom, and it's too soon for the varietal specifics to show through; its soul is waiting for things to calm down.



vineyard area // 54 hectares    annual production // 25,000 cases  
 top sites & 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% **Blafränkisch**, 12% **Grüner Veltliner**,  
 10% **Merlot**, 8% **Cabernet Sauvignon**, 5% **Weissburgunder**, 3% **Sauvignon Blanc**,  
 2% **St. Laurent**, 2% **Pinot Noir**, 2% **Syrah**, 2% **other**

*These are the wines—the only kinds of wines—you actually want to drink after a big day of tasting. They’re as soul-satisfying as a steaming bowl of spaghetti; they seem to offer unconditional love. And they’re cheaper than therapy!*

Walter Glatzer’s doing a smart thing: holding stocks back so as to have 18 months worth of wine in the cellar, which in most cases means two vintages. This is especially good for the reds, which always bulk up with a year in bottle—even the “wee” ones. I discovered a low-fill bottle of Glatzer’s ‘97 GrüVe Dornenvogel buried away in an out-of-the-way case, and thought I’d better drink it. The wine was wonderful, and now I wish I’d kept it! One gets used to seeing Glatzer as a supplier of “useful” white wines to be pounded through and hardly thought about, but this ‘97 was every bit as good as an entry-level Smaragd from the Wachau—at a third of the price.

Walter Glatzer is a miracle. An amazingly nice guy, making sensational wines and offering them at way down-to-earth prices; this isn’t, you know, an everyday occurrence! He’s also obsessively motivated to keep improving the wines, which he seems to do annually.

I also want to sing a paen of praise to this man’s red wines. He makes them to be drunk and loved, not admired and preened over. He could easily make each of the prevailing mistakes: too much extraction, too astringent, too tannic, too oaky, reaching beyond their grasp. But year-in and year-out these are absolutely *delicious* purring sex-kitten reds.

He’s installed two fermenters, one for reds and one for whites, the second of which is kept underground in a newly-built cellar in order to keep fermentation temperatures down. He has 54 hectares of vineyards, from which he aims, like all the young lions, to grow the best possible grapes. He’ll green-harvest when necessary, not only to increase dry extract but also to guarantee physiological ripeness. Glatzer does all his harvesting by hand, though he could, if wished, work much of his land by machine.

## 2012 Grüner Veltliner

AGL-166

**CORE LIST WINE.** Like a lot of ‘12s; super aromas, ripe snappy salty entry, and then a slightly abrupt finish. But no worries; no one’s studying a wine like this; you drink this sucka and grab for the next sip.

## 2012 Grüner Veltliner “Dornenvogel” +

AGL-169

Glatzer’s top wines are named “Thorn Bird” after the avian marauders who like to dine on his ripest grapes. Some years there’s only a small step between the regular GV and this, but in ‘12 there’s a big jump: this one’s like really fresh unfiltered cold-pressed Greek olive oil, full of starch and mineral and secret-sweetness. Three lots went into it, two of which fermented ambient; it shows marked length and spice and a splendid finish combining mizuna snap, resinous pepper and semi-funky hedge flowers.

**Glatzer at a glance** // Along with Ecker these are the best values in this offering. And with steadily increasing quality, especially among the reds. Tight, reductively brilliant whites that should be poured by the glass at every restaurant in the universe!



**2012 Sauvignon Blanc**

AGL-172

A little vogue has developed for this lovely fellow. The '12 shows classic grassiness (but not “vegetal”) and redcurrant and a delicate bell-pepper note; really Old World, no perfumey bubble-gum here, just a cool SB like a Touraine or even Quincy.

**2012 Sauvignon Blanc Schüttenberg +**

AGL-173

**HARD-CORE LIST WINE.** Thought we'd trade up this year, as unlike 2011, this one is a serious upgrade and worth its higher price. Salty, rich and flinty, and now we see an almost Riesling-like minerality; long and penetrating but savory and spicy. His best yet.

**2012 Weissburgunder**

AGL-174

Crisp, snappy and even a little phenolic; has 13% but seems as crisp as a winter twig, though it starts to get tortilla-rich as it warms in the glass.

**2012 Zweigelt “Riedencuvée”**

AGL-167

**CORE-LIST WINE.** Can a red wine smell prettier than this? Or taste creamier, or more animally *delicious*? This is the utter best of the utter purity of simplicity. Yet don't suppose it is “light” or slim; it is rich but directly fruity, and it is ridiculously attractive.

**2012 Blaufränkisch +**

AGL-168

**CORE-LIST WINE.** The best “basic” BF yet from Walter. It has length and a concentrated roundness—it isn't a blob—and it disperses into small streams of spice and soft tannin; it has the crustiness of BF if not quite the classic pepper. A really savvy restaurant would pour them both as a flight, and let guests compare, and watch the bottle-orders fly in—for they will.

**2011 St. Laurent**

AGL-171

It's hugely seductive. If it were someone in a bar you'd be staring like a salivating beast at it. It's also long, and perfumey, and an essence of plums. Think of a *perfect* cheeseburger in liquid form...

**2011 Zweigelt “Dornenvogel” +**

AGL-175

This and the next wine are examples of my antipathy to wines I find too tannic, but also my understanding of my oddness in this regard. This one is a giant implosion of fruit and tannin, but I suspect you'll fall in love with its density and power and ripeness and *accept* the tannin.

**2011 Blaufränkisch “Bernreiser”**

AGL-176

Probably the most tannic wine I've ever offered. But I'm hoping the spicy power of fruit will overcome it. It's an important statement of BF and I want to show it, though I did whisper that an addition of 2-3% Merlot (which he has) would open and soften it. This idea was “met with interest.”

## A Day on the Tasting Trip

It wasn't a typical day, but neither was it unique. One has days like this.

I was alone this year. My colleagues were otherwise busy, either working or getting to know their newborns, so I went about by myself, like in the old days. The one-on-one with growers was different in a way I enjoyed. More deliberate, quieter, less guarded. And my time in the car between appointments was mine alone, so I could think and introspect and listen to my dreadful music.

I got to Feuersbrunn an hour early for my visit to Ott, so I seized the caprice and went for a walk. Leading toward the hills was a road lined with ornamental cherries, all in bloom, heavily scented on the mild humid day. The vineyards were full of clovers and grape hyacinth and other little bloomies whose names I don't know. It was the lunch hour, and very quiet; when the 2pm tractors started up the noise was jarring. But for now it was peaceful as I walked along.

I saw rabbits, deer and pheasants in the vineyards. To a wine grower these creatures are pests they grudgingly accept; they like the animals themselves, but they bother their work and their vines. Yet it was all so free, somehow; no one there except me and the hundred flowering trees and the rapeseed fields and the grape hyacinths. The two deer were huge, as they are when they have no predators, and when

they leapt away from me it was on muscular sinewy legs.

So I got to Ott, happy and full of oxygen. We tasted. He played me a tape of his son laughing. The boy is seven or eight, something like that, and something made him laugh and not stop, made him keep laughing so that each laugh generated another burst of laughing, and the sound was so wrenchingly gorgeous and sad, the life force and the innocence inevitably lost; we played it again and again, and not only because it was funny.

Little Rosalie came into the room, now two and a half but still daddy's girl, still snuggling into his shoulder and peering out every few seconds to make sure nothing crucial was happening that she might miss. After ten minutes or so she was fetched, and as she toddled away she turned and waved a jaunty goodbye—see ya. The Swedish woman who was there last year has a baby of her own now, little Magnus, four months old, whom she carries in a snugly on her belly; a curious child, who regarded us quite intently, as if we were creatures he would need to consider at a later time.

When our work was finished we went outside for a "jause." This is a snack of simple food one eats in the open air. It entailed raw-milk butter, delivered twice a week along with raw organic milk, cream and yoghurt—the son complained one week, when the

supply had to be supplemented with supermarket *organic* milk: "Did you thin this with water or what?" There was half of a huge wheel of mountain cheese from a high-alpine maker they know personally, and two big blobs of blood-sausage made by one of their workers ("Patrick") and some raw ham Bernhard carried back from the Südtirol, and some bread baked twice a day by the woman who watches the village kids, and at one point someone observed "You know where each bit of all of this comes from" and Bernhard said *Yeah, I guess I do*. It was him and me and his assistant and eventually also the guy who manages the compost and another guy who does the grunt-work in the cellar, who turned out to be the guy who also made the blood-sausage.

At one point a little boy arrived on his bike—he may have been eight—looking for Ott's son who was still at soccer practice. Bernhard said "Marcus will be here in a few minutes; come sit with us and have some food," and so the kid removed his helmet and took his place. They told him what all of it was; the cheese from the pal in the mountains, the ham brought back from Italy, the bread baked by Mrs.- (someone), the butter from the guy who delivers the milk, the blood sausage from Patrick, and what was so stirring about it was that the boy was an entire valid citizen, treated as an equal, spoken to like a "player" in the world of affairs, not like some silly *kid*, but also not precisely like an adult. I watched amazed—how exactly do you bring this off? You do

it by talking to him as a *human being* who belongs among you, even though he is young and small, and this boy spoke back from his rightful place, not as an imitation-adult, but as a boy with equal status. I really was gob-smacked. I mean, there we were, sitting under the sky in a spring evening, eating this lovely food, being human beings together with the blackbirds singing and the evening coming on, and the child was not even exactly "invited", but rather included because of course he'd be included; what else would he be? His pal was coming back in ten minutes or so; hang out with us while you wait. I thought—*This is how you raise whole human beings; just like this.*

I was a little weepy when I drove away. It seemed like I had somehow misplaced or lost my life, or had disregarded it. What I'd just seen had looked so easy. I wondered if it was as easy as he made it look. I don't know, and I wish I knew. It would help me to know. As I drove on through the darkening country, the lilacs had started to open, and in a still sunlit field there was one of the many small religious monuments dotted all over Austria, out there by the road. It was Christ on the cross, but this particular place had been allowed to grow wild, and the lilacs were up to his chest, profuse and fragrant, and I thought *This is how this day ends*, Christ on the cross, covered in lilacs and blood.



# 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 microclimates, 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.

As you know, wine folks descending monolithically upon a region (for whatever good reason) have a salubrious effect on prices if you’re a grower. Thus the quiet Weinviertel is a primo source for *bargains*. With the Dollar in the shithouse, now seemed like a good time to prow for values.

But if I’m honest there’s more to it than even that. 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 new man in this offering is on the local radar or I’d never have known of him. 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 15 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.

# Schwarzböck

Weinviertel // Hagenbrunn

vineyard area // 24 hectares

annual production // 15,000 cases

top sites & 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



*Rudi Schwarzböck assumed control of the winery from his father in 1994, though he says “1997 is really the first vintage I was happy with,” before proceeding to blow my freakin’ mind with an insanely fabulous Riesling from that great vintage. His wife Anita took her share of the reins in 2003, and the two function as a seamless team.*



If I don't go into detail about vineyard or cellar work it's not because I'm short of data, but instead because none of it would surprise you. Most of the really good ones do things a certain way, and I'll need several years of hangin' out time with these good folks before I'll know what lives between the tick and the tock.

Hagenbrunn is virtually at the city-line of Vienna – you'd expect the trams to run out there. Some of the vineyards are on not-insignificant slopes, and most soils are loamy löss, with Riesling being grown in sandstone covered over with löss. Rudi and Anita seem

in every sense to be a typical young vintner-couple, but even on first acquaintance I sense something more. Rudi seems just a little bit shy, as if he's more at home in the world of the vines than in the tasting room. His seeming diffidence reminds me of Walter Strub's, in that it reflects less a hesitancy than a modesty built on knowing there's always more information and you're never done experiencing. I'm eager to know this guy better.

But *how* to describe the wines? Theirs is a silky substance not unlike Gobelsburg, in fact. They're not as creamy as Berger or Setzer; theirs is a more up-

front palate dance. They make a quick and delightful impression. Oh just taste them. The wines are all arch and modern but not *only* arch and modern; there's an earthy substance to them also, and boy are they good value.

I never quite know what I'll find here. Rudi's a man I'd call cautious, as long as you don't infer I mean "timid." He isn't. But he wants to be sure his grapes are ripe, and he calculates risks and benefits carefully. This means that some of his wines are high in alcohol, by my standards, and this is because he won't risk them not being entirely physiologically ripe. So I pace around through them and take the ones that work, and these can differ from year to year.

To continue the digression, I *drink* very few wines

over 14%, but I'll make a few available to you here and there, because there's a difference between my subjective Terry-the-private-citizen palate and my Terry-the-wine-merchant palate. There has to be. Even though they overlap 99% of the time, I recognize there are wines I happen to not like because of some silly subjectivity, and to respect both you and the grower, I'll put them in the offering with a candid tasting note. That said, disagreeable wines almost never make it in, and if they do I'll tell you why.

It's easy for me or anyone else to come along and tut-tut over a couple wines that may have gotten away, but you try managing a 23-hectare property with more than 50 different parcels, tough guy.

### 2012 Grüner Veltliner, 1.0L

ASB-043L

The quality is ridiculous this year! You smell the wine three feet from the glass. Very rich and almost baby-plump; mildly peppery with a tatsoi snap.

### 2012 Grüner Veltliner Vier Gärten

ASB-046

**HARD-CORE LIST WINE.** It's a classic light-to-medium bodied GV, with classic arugula and sorrel; the wine is all foreground but what's there is so pretty. GV at this level can be so winsome, and while it's likely to be more intense and proud and grand and amazing in its bigger iterations, it's never more *delicious* than when it's just like this.

### 2012 Grüner Veltliner Sätzen-Fürstenberg

ASB-047

A blend of two vineyards from the far northwestern end of the region, some forty miles away, on different soils, more primary rock. And here's GV at its mineral best; tobacco-y smoky, cressy, garrigue, all kinds of herbs; pointed and focused yet gentle, and in its spicy way quite friendly. Still, this is for GV lovers.

### 2012 Grüner Veltliner Kirchberg +

ASB-048

(Tank-sample, still on its fine lees); almost a Pinot Blanc-like semolina sweetness; green walnut, bright yet rich, not peppery, but more a carpaccio-like umami, sweet and lobster, creamy and stylish. Any idea when you'll bottle it, I asked? "None. We do slow winemaking!"

### 2012 Gelber Muskateller

ASB-045

He showed me his "regular" one plus another tank that was drier. Normally he'd blend them, but a customer asked for the drier one alone, and I did the same. It's catty and grassy, with lots of lime and char and almost a GV pepper; bone dry, yet oddly long and spicy.



# H.u.M. Hofer

Weinviertel // Auersthal

vineyard area // 20 hectares

annual production // 16,600 cases

certification // Bio-Ernte Certified Organic

top sites & 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



*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 have a quality of moderation and intelligence; they are clear and reasonable. In "normal" vintages such as '08 and '10 they are exceptionally deft and even charming. In warm years they can flirt with extravagance. They have a kind of firm smoothness that's cool like marble. There are some lovely reds to show you.

So, great wine, amazing value, and certified-organic viticulture? Help me make this lovely man a star!

**2012 Grüner Veltliner, 1.0L**

AHF-054L

It's especially peppery and sorrel-y this year. Among the various GV Liters I sell, this is the herbal one, and this bottling is markedly charming. It's on the market as you read this; later bottlings will hail from purchased *organic* fruit.

**2012 Grüner Veltliner Von den Rieden +**

AHF-058

**HARD-CORE LIST WINE.** And it's been so consistently good the last few years I wonder if it belongs on the actual core-list. Riper than usual (13%) yet it's winsome; spriggy, sweet parsnip and quince, and as spicy and charming as GV can be.

**2012 Grüner Veltliner Freiberg**

AHF-057

**CORE LIST WINE.** I waffled between this and the more fennel-seed crackery '11, which he still has, but the sheer fruit of this '12 won me over, and bottling will focus it even more. Now we're into the flowering-field vetiver side of GV.

**2012 Zweigelt Rosé**

AHF-055

This is markedly good in '12, and has the stuffing to make it through the year. Fruit and substance abound; it's even salty.

**2012 Zweigelt, 1.0L**

AHF-056L

I doubt I saw a true sample of this, so I'll defer a note until I can taste it again. A stubborn reduction taking the form of a celeriac top-note obscured what looked like a rich vinous wine below.

**2008 St. Laurent**

AHF-053

Forthright, textbook SL without frills or flourishes; round, plummy, juicy and direct.

**2009 Gaissberg**

AHF-059

In this single vineyard an experiment is taking place, with new crossings bred to be fungus-resistant. You've read about these things. The grapes in this wine are called "Cabernet Carol" and "Monarch," but there are many others. An organic grower is especially interested in varieties where he can avoid any unnecessary spraying.

A little new oak does nothing but good. The palate is spicy, "sweet" and tasty in the way of a good young Rioja crianza. I was surprised to find it so yummy, and somms would have a story.

vineyard area // 30 hectares  
 annual production // 16,700 cases  
 top sites & soil types // **Laa, Eichholz** (löss over alluvial gravel and limestone)  
 grape varieties // 50% Grüner Veltliner, 30% Roter Veltliner, with 20% Riesling, Pinot Blanc, Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc, Zweigelt and Merlot



*Every portfolio has a sleeper, and this is the sleeper in mine. It has to do with how busy we all are. For wines like these, you need to be able to slow down enough to notice how lovely they taste.*



Because their strengths aren't (often) overt; they're less about volume and more about tone, less about force and more about charm. They're often wistful and dreamy, like bossa nova, but you won't get them if you can't pause. Big tastings don't flatter them. And big tastings are all that most of us have, to form an impression.

But here is a place I am as happy as I can ever be.

I feel charm is among the highest aesthetic virtues. In people it denotes an effort of behavior whereby you feel appreciated and cared for. In wine or music it creates a response of palpable delight. I find this feeling more pleasant than many other feelings which seem to have greater prestige. Don't get me wrong; there's a place in me for being knocked out, blown away, stunned, impressed, but I find none of these as exquisitely pleasurable as feeling delighted or charmed. Also, charm is a flexible virtue. Charm can exist in big wines or medium wines or little wines. I also appreciate this virtue because it seems less reducible to recipe: any grower of unexceptionable talent can make intense wine. It seems much more intuitive to

craft wines of charm, less a matter of formula than of constant attending to tiny details. And knowing all the while that your wine won't be the biggest, boldest, loudest rock-em sock-em wine on the table. But it will insinuate, will crawl inside a certain temperament and sing its siren song, and this is the pleasure for which we live.

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.

In my book I spend a lot of time talking about charm, which is an aesthetic component in which I take a special delight. I owe a great debt to Setzer for helping me learn this. I don't actually know if he sets out to make "charming" wines; for all I know it's a corollary benefit of his soils, micro-climates or what have you. Yet these are the wines he lives with, and I think it's both civilizing and healing to drink such delicious wines all the time. It's got to release some special pleasure hormones.

Though they had a normal vintage—no late frost and June rain at the "best possible time"—it was an atypical year for them. The lighter wines, so reliably delightful, had unusual gooseberry flavors as if some rogue gene of Sauvignon had snuck in. The mid-weight wines were clearly the best among the collection, and even the top wines managed their high alcohol levels as well as such wines ever do.



### 2012 Grüner Veltliner, 1.0L

ASZ-054L

Lentilly and fresh, correct and snappy. Am I damning with faint praise? Not when so many wines of this type are either neutral, insipid, or pimped up with enzymes and fermented ice-cold, so the wine smells like lime and bananas. This is *honest* everyday GV.

### 2012 Grüner Veltliner “Ausstich” DAC

ASZ-060

At 12.5% alc it's a leap up from the light wines, more sweet lentil and green Sencha notes; a pointed yet juicy GV that's a pure classic in the not-peppery direction, with a lovely poise of juiciness and earthy focus.

### 2012 Grüner Veltliner “Die Lage” +

ASZ-057

This perennial favorite is remarkably fine in 2012; aromas seem to spring from the glass; limestone and currant-leaf and even tortilla chips; chewy, solid and spicy, with an adamantly charred, crusty finish, like scallions and boulders! A sinewy and muscular GV.

### 2012 Grüner Veltliner “8000” Weinviertel DAC Reserve, 6/750ml

ASZ-061

From a vineyard with especially dense vine-planting, the idea being to stress each individual vine to force its roots to go deep looking for water.

It's a big 'un, and I think you should decide. 14.5% alc, just bottled, and Hans is convinced by its oversized harmony. I am too, as far as it goes at this stage, and it seems to belong to a family of graceful monsters from 2012, large but well-proportioned, and not overcooked. Even the finish achieves a certain balance at first, before the tertiary shows a sour char and heat. But this isn't strange from just-bottled big wines, and I give this serious talented vintner the benefit of the doubt.

### 2012 Roter Veltliner Kreimelberg

ASZ-058

This ampelographic cousin of GV is named not by the color of the grape skins but by the color of the leaves as the grapes ripen. If you took GV, tamped down the herbal and citrus side and tamped up the shiitake and roasted red pepper side, you get Roter Veltliner, which also can smell like GV at about ten years old. And this is one sexy Mama here. All the soy and paprika and roasty peppers in a zaftig form you wish you could grab and squeeze. It's a weekend with a lusty lover who likes to laugh.

### 2012 Riesling

ASZ-062

It reminds me a bit of Hollerin (see Alzinger) and a bit of Höhereck (ditto); stone-fruits and lime and pepper, white flowers and green tea and verbena, a super-pretty dry Riesling with hints of tarragon and mirabelle, that grows dramatically in the glass.

### 2011 Zweigelt

ASZ-059

I am a True Believer in this wine, which I keep in my cellar each vintage and have found unfailingly satisfying and delightful every single time I've opened one.

It's less grinningly fruity than, say, Glatzer, and it's less earnestly dusty than, say, Gobelsburger. It's right-bank Claret, really, but I wonder which of them is *this* good at this price? Berries and cedar and ripeness and cherry-tobacco; round yet dusty, a lot of deeply embedded “sweetness”—the first finish is that way, then it shifts to berry marmalade, then to dried shiitakes and cloves.

# Wagram

*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.



vineyard area // 20 hectares  
annual production // 11,600 cases  
top sites & 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 loner-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 sat tasting the 2011s, suffused with pleasure, and found myself wondering “Who would reject these wines out of hand, on what principle, and to what end?” I felt 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 winethat 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*.

## 2012 Grüner Veltliner, 1.0L

AEC-060L

This as always is crisp and more than correct; it’s not quite as extroverted as Schwarzböck’s, though it has a lean length and showed well *after* the big wines that preceded it.



**2012 Grüner Veltliner Stockstall**

AEC-064

**HARD CORE LIST WINE.** And an utterly adorable loess GV; sweet semolina, sleek and white-flowery; super clear and crisp; white tea and oatmeal and cream of rice and basmati. I don't know how a sentient human being resists a wine like this, especially at its price!

**2012 Grüner Veltliner Schlossberg**

AEC-065

Use this to see GV-on-loess in its purest conceivable form.

It's really solid and earnest this year; smoky char and mineral and Tasmanian pepper; serious like the way your face looks when you're trying not to laugh; lentil and fennel-seed and a finish that says "So there!"

**2012 Grüner Veltliner Mordthal +**

AEC-061

Old vines (over 50) from one of the Grand Crus of the Wagram, and this one sees a portion of steamed acacia casks, more neutral but more porous than oak. The alcohol is 14.1% and it's well poised and stuffed, though I'd say to drink it within two years. A strong terroir statement, this is plum and duck-skin and oleander; chewy texture in a solid and pronounced whomp of vinosity.

**2012 Roter Veltliner**

AEC-063

Wonderfully tasty and juicy and not as musky as it can be; almost like a GV with gravy, but charming like crazy, and with a wee hint of grassiness to give it snap and lift.

**2012 Riesling**

AEC-066

Almost bifurcated: welcoming aromas of pitted-fruit lead into a laughing palate that suddenly clamps down with an almost fiercely dry minerality and a serious abrupt finish. Yet with air it starts to melt in the middle again.

**2012 Gelber Muskateller +**

AEC-062

Muscat for Riesling lovers, it's so mineral. It's actually from Schlossberg, which may explain it! The lime and cat are there to start, and then it's just so stony it's like you crushed them with an immersion blender. A picture for your Fakebook page; your cat and a bunch of limes in an immersion blender... This is more Calvinist than the '11 was, but also longer and more herbal.

**2012 Zweigelt, 1.0L**

AEC-067L

Again completely yummy and more than 1-dimensional; black cherry, cherry-tobacco, roasted red beet, and as always, absurd value.

**2011 Zweigelt "Brillant"**

AEC-057

**HARD CORE LIST WINE.** This has improved dramatically in the past year. It's like a mix of Schiava, Lagrein and Syrah, and is generous and rare-meat savory; cloves and shiitakes, spicy and lip-smacking, and a perfect pour; a party you're glad you were invited to!

**2011 Zweigelt "Tradition"**

AEC-058

Explosive, like a fireworks of blackberries. You get three mouths-full for every sip.

**2009 St. Laurent**

AEC-059

This is purely and simply delicious! Silky, generous and easy-going; blueberry on top and roast beef *jus* on the bottom.



vineyard area // 28 hectares  
 certification // RESPEKT  
 annual production // 25,000 cases  
 top sites // Feuersbrunner Spiegel, Feuresbrunner Rosenberg, Engabrunner Stein  
 soil types // loess, Gföhler gneiss, sand, chalk, and red gravel  
 grape varieties // 90% Grüner Veltliner, 10% Riesling

*Bernhard Ott and I have so many friends in common it's a wonder we haven't worked together till now.*



Many of you know the estate through the various importers with whom they used to work, and in one instance (Valley View in California) still do. Certainly the label is instantly recognizable, as well as being graphically brilliant. And certainly the wines are outstanding.

Bernhard didn't have enough wine to start with a new importer. He's also a man who lays admirable emphasis on doing the Right Thing, and he wanted time to consider it all, and to part from his existing importers in a decent and gentlemanly way. Besides, though it felt like we knew each other based on our many common friends, we'd actually never met. And we needed to see if we were simpatico.

With Ott you can't possibly divest the person and the wines from each other. You represent him as much as you do them.

This is no small property: 32 hectares plus another 6 ha he buys from another organic grower. Ott, as you know, is organic, and he also does certain bio-dynamic practices though not under the Demeter auspices. A number of growers (including Hannes Hirsch) all started

transit to bio-d at the same time—safety in numbers—but for various reasons they ended up creating a group of their own, called “RESPEKT.”

His first vintage was 1993, at the age of 21, but the estate he inherited was already in the green vanguard, having stopped chemical fertilizers as early as 1971.

Ott is most renowned for their Veltliners, correctly, but there's also a little Sauvignon Blanc and two Rieslings, one traditionally dry and another made in the German idiom as a lower-alcohol wine with some residual sugar. Johannes Leitz has a consulting hand in it.

One final, grateful word is in order. I had some concern that by taking Ott on, I might be creating instability in my existing portfolio due to internal competition. So I asked the potentially affected growers to tell me how they felt. To a man, they all gave their blessings. “He's a friend, we know him, it'd be good for you both, we think it's lovely...” I was, and remain, very moved by this.

And so we begin.

**Ott at a glance** // Enormously consequential estate, especially as a Lama of Grüner Veltliner.

**how the wines taste** // Not heavy, but weighty. Not fat, but corpulent. Not creamy, but substantive. Imagine the polar opposite of, say, Nigl. These are analogue and warm-feeling, even when they're lithe and structured. Quite particular in site delineation, and highly redolent of not only “terroir” but also of landscape.

**2012 Grüner Veltliner Am Berg**

AOT-020

**CORE LIST WINE.** It's the lead-in, whole-cluster pressed, detailed and filigree. This '12 has sorrel, lentil and oyster shell among its nuances, plus a lot of mineral grip; a subtle fennel-seed anise note. Bernhard chuckled when I said it had five pounds of flavor in a 2-pound bag.

**2012 Grüner Veltliner "Fass 4"**

AOT-021

Ott intends the Am Berg to be drunk with food, but this is the first in the range that could stand alone. It's the 25th vintage, and quite a chunky rock-powder GV, compact and chewy yet generous and almost briny, and as starchy as pasta-water.

**2012 Grüner Veltliner "Der Ott"**

AOT-023

Young vines from the Grand Crus. We get into spices and roasted peppers now; less mineral and more savor, and also more exotic and analogue. Two weeks in bottle has probably subdued the outward drama, because length is there in spades.

**2012 Grüner Veltliner Spiegel + (+)**

AOT-025

The highest elevation among Ott's three Grand Crus, thus the coolest and breeziest; the soil is gravel over conglomerates. There's such expressive mineral it's as though the terroir were broiled, below which is a mushroom-stocky savor, but mineral blasts through again, and then you get grilled eggplants and then powdered rock blown on a cold wind and then sweet corn and oleander—a completely paradoxical and *amazing* creature that sets up camp on your soft-palate and will not leave.

**2012 Grüner Veltliner Stein + +**

AOT-026

This site is actually in the Kamptal. The subsoil is the so-called Gföhler gneiss (such as is in the Gaisberg, for example) with a sandy-loessy topsoil. Bernhard leased the vineyard in 2006, as part of a growth phase. The owner watched him working in the vineyard, and was so impressed by the way he cared for the soil, she offered to sell it to him for "any price you want to pay." I heard that story and felt a flash of tears.

This is more of-a-piece than the Spiegel—but *what* a piece, a potion of terroir with the saltiest savor you can imagine. If you could sous-vide a Wellfleet oyster you might get this; amazing brininess for something so corpulent and generous. Day-long finish. I don't do SOMM ALERTS in this catalogue, but this is about as perfect a restaurant GV as can possibly be imagined.

**2012 Grüner Veltliner Rosenberg + +**

AOT-024

Among Austria's iconic Grüner Veltliners, and singular in style, which is to say it is not classical, but reminds me of some lovely odd hybrid of GV and Cotat Sancerre. This '12 shows the most raw power of the range, but a second wave of mineral arrives; the site seems to be about roasted beets and currants, then boxwood and pepper, Thai basil and arugula, cardamom and allspice. In 2011 its sheer gravitas was needed to deepen that vintage's omnipresent chumminess, but in '12 it takes its place among equals of superb stature, the yang to the yin of the Stein.



# Kremstal & Kamptal

These two regions used to make up one region called Kamptal Donauland—but no more. I'm sure someone had a very good reason for the change! The regions are now named for the particular valleys of the little streams Krems and Kamp, and I'll just obediently organize them that way.

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 slatey 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.

# Berger

Kremstal // Gedersdorf

vineyard area // 18 hectares  
annual production // 20,000 cases  
top sites & 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 and Welschriesling, 1% Gelber Muskateller



*Berger's GrüVe liter is the wine we sell the most of, and at this point it could almost coast. Almost.*



But the crucial tiny membrane between almost and never is something I never need to worry about. Erich won't forget it. 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..."

I wrote in some detail about Erich in my book, because his choices fascinate me. In short, I'm sure we'd agree that ambition is what drives the quality-minded vintner. He wants to make exciting wines that get attention. But what drives the vintner who just wants to make delicious wines that make people happy? That's what I don't understand.

And I would stake this claim; if you buy wine for **practical** reasons, not simply to have "nothing but 90+!!" on your shelves or wine-list, you must pay attention to the *quality*, the *loveliness* of the flavors of the wines you choose. Any clod can buy and sell BIG-ASS wines. Show reserves, wines for the tasting room. I want to sell you wines for FOOD and LIFE. Berger's wines are delightful and affordable. 'Nuff said?

#### 2012 Grüner Veltliner, 1.0L

ABG-128L

**CORE LIST WINE.** This year's Liter is cressy and stern; it has attitude. Seems drier than other vintages; it's juicy but in place of the semolina charms it usually presents, this one has A Point To Make.

#### 2012 Grüner Veltliner "White Stone"

ABG-131

**HARD-CORE LIST WINE.** It's amazingly focused and charming in 2012, the "sweet" face of GV, full of good-nature; parsnips and lentil and fresh sweet crayfish; the palate has charm and snap, like a mesclun mix of greens; good length and a spicy finish; the empty glass smells like mizuna.

#### 2012 Grüner Veltliner Lössterrassen +

ABG-132

This is magnetically pretty and charming, with tons of spontaneous *yum*-factor; he sold a pallet in a single week to casual weekend visitors, and you'll see why with the first sip. It's a perfect loess GV, Berger at his vamping best, and a wine that goes from cookie-dough to strawberry to pepper in one elegant palate journey.

#### 2012 Gelber Muskateller

ABG-127

As always this is a highlight among the vintage Muscats; full of elderflower aroma but then full-on green on the palate, though this one's fleshier than many, and shows a complex spice, herbal tang, pine-forest, and delicate mint.

#### 2012 Riesling Spiegel +

ABG-130

**HARD-CORE LIST WINE.** Usually this is the cool little Riesling to lead us into the big sexy Steingraben, but in '12 even this wee chap has 13% alc, and it's a spiffy and deft balancing act between cool, shady mineral and non-effusive fruit, and a determined (if not outright forceful) approach; some apricot, some grainy-nubby loess minerality, wonderful length; a calmly thoughtful yet generous and expressive dry Riesling.

#### 2012 Riesling Steingraben Kremstal DAC Reserve + (+)

ABG-129

*This* is exotic and seductive; dried fruits, meyer-lemon, roasted yellow sweet peppers, even brioche; wow, it does smell like certain Champagnes, but then there's a nettle-and-spice element that's pure Austria. Zero botrytis and reasonable alc, and a lot of wiggle, plus it's a ton of mojo for an ounce of money.

#### 2011 Zweigelt, 1.0L

ABG-126L

A plummy cool Dolcetto, basically. Which of course you can't actually get from Dolcetto anymore. A shade-cool, berried interluded between the meaty-roasty '09 and '11. It has all the single-vineyard wines (Haid and Leithen) this year, so it's an overachiever and a bargain.

#### 2011 Blauer Zweigelt Haid

ABG-133

A charming, bacony wine with "sweet" tannin, darkly concentrated fruit, and pancetta-richness.



vineyard area // 25 hectares  
 annual production // 25,000 - 30,000 cases  
 top sites & soil types // Senftenberger Pellingen, Hochäcker (mica slate, slate)  
 grape varieties // 40% Grüner Veltliner, 40% Riesling, 5% Sauvignon Blanc,  
 5% Gelber Muskateller, 10% other varieties



*You'd expect these wines to come from a bespeckled gentleman with finely chiseled features, who speaks deliberately and cultivates a side study of medieval jurisprudence. That, or some sort of monk-savant.*



But no, these almost eerily searching wines hail from a hearty unpretentious country fella. When you meet Ludwig Hiedler you feel a total unity between human and wine, but with Nigl all you can feel is perplexity.

It is tempting to see Nigl's wines as objects to be examined, because they are so digitally precise that attending to them in minute detail seems like the most appropriate response. People who enjoy High-Def explicit complexity are made ecstatic with these pixilated and eerily expressive wines. As am I.

But lately I have been making myself *drink* them just as though they were ordinary beverages, because I want to see what kinds of *lives* they live when they're not wine-specimens we examine delightedly. And I've discovered

that what they need is time, ambience, and food. Not because they are imbalanced (the usual bromide for crummy wine is "Oh it needs food," to which the only proper response is "No, it needs to be better wine.") but because they exist in the sensual world, and they are more useful than we think.

A '97 Riesling Privat I drank a few weeks ago was both breathtaking and superb with the greeny-salady dish on the table. At Nigl's own restaurant—very good these days, by the way—I have not once felt the wines were too refined, at least not for *my* schnitzel. I do think they favor fine food, as they themselves are cut fine and not robust. I do think they tend to run cerebral, and are best suited to occasions where they can receive your absorbed

**Nigl at a glance** // No one would deny this estate's inclusion among the absolute elite in Austria, and many observers wonder if there's anyone finer. Extraordinarily transparent, filigree, crystalline, mineral-drenched wines of mind-boggling clarity. Prices remarkably sane for world-class great Rieslings (compare to the best in Alsace!)

attention. I do like them best in warmer weather, because their ultraviolet coolness is refreshing.

Theirs is a penumbral or spectral sort of beauty, around the edges of which is something invisible, like radio waves, the vinous equivalent of molecular cuisine; you feel neural pathways firing as you taste them. But in his own establishment the food is what I'd call country-traditional with unusual respect for ingredients and everything from scratch. It was dysphasic drinking these keen ultraviolet wines with a big ol' plate of noodles with morels and sweetbreads, but it showed me something. As otherworldly as they sometimes can appear, with food they snuggle right up as all good wines do.

The Krems valley has a climate rather like that of the western Wachau. "During the ripening season we get oxygen-rich, cool breezes in the valley," says the Nigl price list. "Therefore we have wide temperature spreads between day and night, as well as high humidity and often morning fog. These give our wines their spiciness and finesse. Another secret for the locally typical bouquets and the elegant acids of our wines is the weathered urgestein soils, which warm quickly."

Only natural yeasts are used to ferment in

temperature-controlled tanks. He doesn't chaptalize and his musts settle by gravity; after fermentation the wines are racked twice, never fined, and bottled—as I once saw—first thing in the morning while they and the ambient temperatures are cool. What he gets for his troubles are wines with a high, keening brilliance and with an amazing density of mineral extract which can leave an almost salty finish on the palate, as though an **actual** mineral residue were left there.

Other than the couple standbys at the low end of the range, I'm finding I can't predict how Martin's wines will be until I taste them. It's because he is convinced he has to have physiologically ripe fruit, and when he gets it his wines can screech into the red zone alcoholically. He's also willing to admit a small amount of botrytis into the mix. It can seem odd, given how ice-clear and detailed his wines can be, but then I remember it's a similar situation at Hirtzberger; a relatively cool microclimate, a natural tendency toward wines of finesse and high fragrance, but an almost perverse allowance of overripeness and botrytis in some wines. However, in common with most of 2012, Nigl's Rieslings were more moderate and refined than his GVs – with one marked exception...

## 2012 Grüner Veltliner Freiheit

AFN-209

**CORE-LIST WINE.** And right down the middle; like the '07 was, not as plump as '06 or '09 nor as lean as '08 or '11. The perfect loess GV in miniature, like a *bonsai* of GV, each leaf clear and each branch outlined in high relief.

## 2012 Grüner Veltliner Senftenberger Piri +

AFN-217

Has its lovely leafy fragrance, as sapid as a Styrian wine; the palate is stern and salty-smoky; boxwood and mizuna, yet also charming and long and full of piney nuance.

## 2012 Grüner Veltliner Rehberger Zwetl + +

AFN-219

Martin obtained this vineyard in 1999, but opted to replant as the vines were unwell; this is the first crop from now-5-year old vines. The site is mica-schist with loessy topsoil, quite different from his other sites. So! It's actually quite *Riesling*-like, reminded me of Gaisberg in its white flowers and blueberry and enormous yet differentiated mineral; it's radiant and hale yet amazingly articulate and intricate. More "feminine" than his other GVs, and for me it's his best 2012 GV and a vintage standout.

## 2012 Grüner Veltliner Alte Reben +

AFN-218

A big wine to drink young while it has the fat to mitigate its 14% alc, and also enjoy its gorgeous primary aromas of cookie-dough and flavors of "secret" sweetness; peppery finish to a loessy GV at an apex of charm and grace—for the next 18-24 months.

## 2012 Grüner Veltliner "Privat" Senftenberger Pelling, 6/750ml (+)

AFN-216

## 2012 Grüner Veltliner "Privat" Senftenberger Pelling, 12/375ml (+)

AFN-216H

## 2012 Grüner Veltliner "Privat" Senftenberger Pelling, 3/1.5L (+)

AFN-216M

More Veltliner ordnance, 14.5% this time, but it's creamy and exotic, neither vulgar nor bellicose; just massively salty and Sarawak-peppery with a stern buzzing finish that stops just short of the doorway to heat. Cask-sample, by the way, so it may seem less creamy in bottle.

**2012 Riesling Dornleiten**

AFN-210

**CORE-LIST WINE.** The best vintage in many years; a pretty, demure and rosy-cheeked Riesling; medium-bodied (12.5%), and all tactful and inferential, and delightful. Has that savor and cool green sapidity again, that made me think of Styria, yet it's markedly long.

**2012 Riesling Senftenberger Piri +**

AFN-214

Another wine that seems oblique, as though it were looking at you from the corner of its eye, but there's HD-pixilation of glass-clear terroir; smoke and mint and pea-shoots; a remarkable dance of eerie polish and ice-splashes of mint.

**2012 Riesling Hochäcker, 6/750ml + + (+)**

AFN-223

Mineral leads the way, with white hyacinth and soursop (see Wikipedia if you don't know this fruit); the palate is a witches-brew of spices and rocks and miso; like a dance of 1000 veils as the exotic fruits and leaves fall away and the arcane mineral starts to pulsate. Absurdly animated yet not at all hyper. Classic great Austrian Riesling, like none other in the world.

**2012 Riesling "Privat" Senftenberger Pellingen, 6/750ml + +**

AFN-215

**2012 Riesling "Privat" Senftenberger Pellingen, 12/375ml + +**

AFN-215H

**2012 Riesling "Privat" Senftenberger Pellingen, 3/1.5L + +**

AFN-215M

Still in a mute phase from bottling, and people who saw it in cask tell me I'm underrating it. But: plums, charcoal, compound-butter, mint and pepper are present; such an expressive mass it can only stammer now, like an explosion from a soundproofed room. More raw power and less exotic than Hochäcker.

**2012 Gelber Muskateller**

AFN-226

Perfect expressive aromas in a gooseberry and resinous profile; the palate follows with a stirring bite of freshness and citricity. It would actually quench thirst.

**2012 Sauvignon Blanc +**

AFN-227

As good as this grape can be in its most direct and forthright side; astoundingly mineral, currant-leaf; almost no pyrene stink nor any vegetal pepper; just a Riesling-like saltiness and flint and a fine leafy bite on the fresh breezy finish, resolving into quince. You better believe I'm buyin' me some for the private stash.

**2012 Zweigelt Rosé**

AFN-211

Dee-lish; vinous, good color; solid and fruit-driven without being exactly "fruity." Bravo to Martin for making a year-round Rosé, resisting the trend of frail wines that expire by September.

**2010 Nigl Brut de Brut Rosé (Sekt), 6/750ml**

AFN-212

All 2010; moderate color of Coho salmon; super-attractive "cool" aromas, and a vividly bright, refreshing palate; perfect hot-weather fizz, sleek and snappy.

**2010 Nigl Brut de Brut (Sekt), 6/750ml + (+)**

AFN-220

70% Chardonnay, 30% Grüner Veltliner. I swear he said he was discontinuing this, yet here it still is. 100% Chardonnay—I asked for "Blanc de Blancs" on the label. Zero dosage. Most of it is still *en tirage*, but I'm grabbing a bunch because it's so damn good; grown on limestone, it's a crackery and addictively gulpable fizz; not "simple," just straightforward and tasty.



## Some Thoughts on Profundity

We are not all equally sensitive to the profound. It's facile to blame the byte-culture for inhibiting this ability, but in fact I doubt it's an "ability" at all; it's simply an aspect of temperament. Some of you possess it, and yet I wonder whether there's something in the syntax of modern life that obscures your view of it. I don't know.

I do know that profundity takes time, a willingness to give time, an ability to slow time down, and some sense of the way time passes at different speeds. I look at the world and it seems like we're very busy compressing time into little capsules of reality; we swallow them one after another. We expel them one after another. Even if you happen to be someone who might respond to the profound, how does it find its way into you through the incessant chatter?

When we are visited by profundity, we seem to feel a silence, we seem to watch the world dissolve. I don't think this is consonant with irony or attitude, and if these things are important to you, I fear you might defend them, and push away the profound. But again, I don't know.

When I began with wine there was a lot of literature describing raptures with profound wines. I saw it as permission; it was fine to respond powerfully when a wine was powerfully beautiful. Quite a relief for a guy like me. Today as I scan around the wine-lit, I don't see very much writing about the larger values. I see people trying to be the first to break the news about some Viognier from Tobago, I see people asserting their points of view about the issues of the day, I see plenty of consumerist rankings of wines, but I see very little revelation, or even just passion. Thus I suspect you're not seeing it either, and that may be a reason you don't associate wine with the potential for transcendence.

The problem is, if this deepest piece is missing, then all the other pieces that balance on it are unstable and wobbly. Without some organizing principle, wine becomes just another ephemeral and incoherent thing. When the foundation is missing, any little wind can blow the house away.

Obviously not all wine is profound, but just as obviously a few of them are, and when we know these wines exist, their existence gives form and layers to our entire wine experience. Please remember, though, that profundity is the opposite of cerebral, the opposite of "exciting," the opposite of entertaining by dint of its novelty

or intensity. It is instead the columns of the monument that houses our souls. It is the carbon dating of our abiding authenticity, the thing we inhabit for a while, that stretches away from our particular temporal lives.

By now you're ready to give up; what is this crazy asshole talking about? In a nutshell: it is possible for wine to be profound. When you encounter one such wine, you will find yourself stilled in a crucial way, provided you hear the signal through the noises of living, and *provided* you've been reassured that such an experience is normal, if rare.

Don't imagine it happens very often. Even if you're one of those collector guys with a cellar full of masterpieces, if you drink them too often you can get jaded, and numb away the heart and soul nutrition. I'll share a note I wrote a few months ago, about a wine I knew would be good, maybe even great, but did not know would be profound.

It was a classic Riesling from the Rheingau, from an estate that was stellar when it made this wine.

First, it was a good bottle. The cork came out in pieces, but came out, and the wine was entirely clean. We drank it at cellar-temp, about 54°.

The first glass poured was a solid heady amber, and a little cloudy. That was fine. With wines of this age, you know they freshen in the glass, and the first impression is just the outermost layer of skin. The cloudiness was probably just the dissolved tartrates mixing through the wine.

So, bricky spice aromas breathe into low notes of leaf-smoke, sweet paprika and malt. The palate was (still, after quite some time) rich and sweet, but in a minute it became overwhelmingly estery, with Palo Cortado orange-peel and nuttiness. The wine was berserk with intricacy and beaming with confidence—it wasn't broody or meditative. Then came a milk-chocolate note like the ones old Champagnes are wont to show. This wine was solid and stentorian, yet part of it was melting, or seemed to want to.

But that's OK; I'd melt for us both. I took the glass outside into the cold, under a cloud-riven moon, and there came a celestial fragrance of lime parfait, a new green note, and the green swoons into the orange swooning into the paprika rust swooning into the sweet vigor of an old gentleman who hasn't

lost a step, who is writing an epic poem of beauty and difficulty. The force of expression felt crucial, the things one says with the final breaths and the grieving loved ones at the bedside. But the wine isn't nearly tragic; it's flourishing and hale.

The second glass was colder—I'd wanted to lower the temp a bit—and was even more estery and malty, and felt less sweet. It is truly great wine, an aching dark zenith of loveliness, malt sprinkled over gorgeousness sprinkled over death.

And yet! It's still itself, or rather *he's* still *himself*, a riverfront Rheingau Riesling with the classic dried apricot of Hattenheim. The "old" wine thing shimmers at the edges like the overtones of pealing bells.

It's a full-grown adult. It can easily go another 15-20 years. It's a Spätlese from a great vintage that will peak around age 70. 70. I paid \$140 for it.

1959 Hattenheimer Stabel Spätlese. Estate-bottled Schloss Reinhartshausen. I was in Miss Nordeen's kindergarten class when those grapes were picked.

These days we'd be micro-analyzing the acids and extracts, and looking for reasons on-paper why a wine or a vintage might be considered excellent or great. We'd busily explain it. In those days, they just knew. It was clear in the vineyards; a grower once told me "You know when a vintage is great when the whole floor seems to rise, when you don't have to "select" to get great wine, but when the whole thing's on fire." 1959 was such a vintage, yet if it came along today we'd fuss that it doesn't have enough acidity. Maybe the young wines seemed sweet and flabby; I don't know, I wasn't there. But I did see the laughable way we misjudged the great 2003s – not all of them, certainly, but that small segment of profound ones. And I think part of the reason we failed to suss '03 is because we weren't taught how to read and recognize profundity.

Finally, this is all well and good, but how *do* you know? How do you recognize the profound, or distinguish it from the merely remarkable, amazing, or stellar?

First, the wine pushes you away from itself. Right away you find you're not thinking about the "item" in your glass. You're thinking about your life. Sometimes you're just thinking about *life*.

Then, you find it hard to break down the flavors, not because it's actually difficult, but because it seems irrelevant. You're too busy looking for someone to hug. You want to hear music, or read poems, or just look out at the moon. You don't want to fart around with descriptors.

If you're at all like me, you feel oddly sad. Beauty and sadness often walk arm in arm. You have a vague uneasy sense of something having been wasted, squandered.

You may also feel, fleetingly but powerfully, that now, this minute, you are in the country of reality, that what you thought was "your life" is only so much dross.

I want you to know that these states are there, not so you will grope for them—that doesn't work—but so that you won't repel them when they show up. Such knowledge becomes grounding, and knowing that it's there helps you organize everything else on top of it. But *not* knowing it's there makes you insecure, and makes wine cacophonous. It only takes a little faith. But you will quench a deeper thirst than you knew you had, and doing so, will settle a question that's been nagging you.

Are there "profound" wines in this offering? Maybe; it's too soon to say. There are candidates. The notes will tell you. Not because I will explicitly claim a wine is profound, but just because of the way I followed its current and wrote what it wanted. Because one thing a profound wine always does is to seize your imagination and hurl it a thousand feet into the air. You write the view, and the sense of height and of falling back to gravity and earth. That is the story you need to tell, so peer back at the innocent bottle, and nod a small thanks, for appearing, and showing the way to the sky.



vineyard area // 80 hectares    annual production // 33,000 cases  
 certification // ISO 22000 Sustainable  
 top sites & 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.

*Apropos profundity, Willi brought along a majestic 1992 Lamm GV to lunch, and the wine clashed gorgeously against the Springtime alfresco vibe, the yumminess of the fried chicken I ordered, the chance to hang out and talk with him and his wife Edwige, not to mention the blossoms and the birds. The wine kept pulling me inside and the occasion kept pushing me out into the bright cool Spring day.*

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.

Though Bründlmayer is by far the largest estate I represent—at a whopping 80 hectares, I find it lovely that we still taste in the cozy little tasting room. I’m sure there’s somewhere in the vast Willi-nexus where delegations are entertained, but we still taste in this small room off the equally unassuming winery on a quiet Gasse in Langenlois. It’s nice, and familiar.

I’m also impressed by Willi’s decision to hold his

**Bründlmayer at a glance** // Generally considered Austria’s best winery, based on steadily outstanding wines across the entire range. I’ll confess it’s gotten harder, not easier, to sum this up over the 16 years I’ve been visiting here. In each of the last two vintages the texture of Willi’s wines has changed. Lately they’re showing the calm zen demeanor of Alzinger’s wines. Perhaps less explicitly articulate, yet somehow more kind. I don’t think it’s on purpose, or at least, it may be a collateral effect of something else he set out to do. Willi is remarkably willing to let the wines control their own destinies. In many vintages, one or another of them will escape, such as the insanely peppery ’09 Vogelsang GrüVe. I can hear him say “We don’t seek to shape it; the wine follows its own preferences.” Willi refers to me as a “classicist,” because he notices how I wince at certain extremes, of alcohol perhaps, or botrytis. He in turn is admirably willing to love a wine even if it’s what I might call ornery. His sparkling wine is the nearest thing to Champagne of anything that isn’t Champagne, yet it doesn’t imitate Champagne and only tastes a little like it. His reds are strikingly fragrant, but he seems to prefer them cool, sometimes to a point I perceive as stiff. But this is how he wishes them, lean and stretchy and sinewy. It is very good of him to tolerate my being selective among them. I’d call Willi’s wines sophisticated and civilized, as long as you know these aren’t euphemisms for diffidence. The best ones taste as though they were fond of you.

**how the wines taste** // The wines are quite unlike any wines I know, not in their actual flavors, but rather the way flavors are presented to the palate. They are, it might be said, the Stradivarius of wines, distinguishable (and made precious) by the beauty of their tones. Indeed, I always seem to think in sonorous terms for Willi’s wines: “THE ACOUSTICS of the fruit are perfect,” I wrote at one point. You taste class immediately.



biggest wines back from release until he feels they're more ready, a principled choice with financial consequences, that only a market "leader" could make. But our thoughtful and charming friend is deceptively mild in his social persona. Beneath the surface lies courage and a bedrock integrity.

When I grow up I want to be like Willi, so serene, thoughtful and wry, but stern as iron about his core principles. He's one of the best people you could meet. He's sharp as a tack, quick as a whip, cute as a button and very alert. He follows a conversation with his gaze, absolutely interested and ever curious. One wag of a journalist dubbed him the "Wine Professor" because of his thoughtful mien, but these wines, serious as they are, come from someone who knows WIT—and how to brandish it!

Soils are rocky and dry in the hills, fertile and calcareous in the lower areas. That's according to Willi's estate brochure, from which I'll quote a little.

"All different wines are aged by the classical method in oak and acacia casks in deep vaulted cellars. In the vineyards the family apply organic principles

(no chemical fertilizers, herbicides and chemical sprays)." Bründlmayer neither crushes nor pumps 90% of his musts; the other 10% is macerated overnight and crushed to emphasize varietality. Nor is this formulaic; it adapts from year to year.

Bründlmayer is universally revered and respected. Partly it's the wines, of course, their outstanding success in a variety of idioms over so many years. It's also because of Willi himself, who combines a piercing intellect with such halcyon demeanor you can't help but be fond of him.

I also think Willi's wines are changing somewhat from the time I first encountered them, or perhaps it is I who have changed. They are like an extremely good-looking woman (or man!) who wears very understated clothes. They are almost completely without affect, but with great candor and transparency. I also appreciate the willingness to risk, even when I'm unconvinced by the results. I'm sure Willi would say "It keeps things interesting."

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.

## Grüner Veltliners

### 2012 Grüner Veltliner "Kamptaler Terrassen" +

ABY-279

**CORE-LIST WINE.** The best vintage since the wonderful 2009, with that sweet graininess and flowering field, plus the richness of '12, and the sheer intelligence and sophistication of these wines.

### 2012 Grüner Veltliner Berg Vogelsang

ABY-297

### 2012 Grüner Veltliner Berg Vogelsang, 12/375ml

ABY-297H

Classy mid-weight GV (12.5%). The big Zalto glass pushes the peppery spice at you, but the classic Riedel tulip shows the superfine fruit. Mannerly and serene; less adamant than it sometimes is. Still, in essence Vogelsang is about nettles and rock-dust.

### 2011 Grüner Veltliner "Alte Reben," 6/750ml +

ABY-260

### 2007 Grüner Veltliner "Alte Reben," 6/750ml + +

ABY-259

When this is good it's *really* good, and the 2011 has wonderful grip and elegance for "big" wines from this warm year; classic rusk and dried porcini aromas; salty and tatsoi and really good Pho; stern yet juicy, serious yet sensual.

The 2007 gets better and better, now sweet-natured and warm. There's also an '08 in the wings, but bless him: *we have the luxury of waiting for it.*

### 2012 Grüner Veltliner "Alte Reben," 6/750ml + +

ABY-284

To be offered in January 2014, or rather, not to be offered *before* January 2014. The wine is fabulous, with wonderful deep secret-sweetness and yet transparent and not remotely heavy. A "cool" stretching lift, as some '12s show, but not many show this authority *and* this loving kindness.

## Grüner Veltliners (continued)

### 2011 Grüner Veltliner Spiegel, 6/750ml + +

ABY-264

I only know this vineyard from Hiedler, who uses it to make lighter wines from Pinot Blanc. This wine belongs to Willi's son Vincent, in fact, who bought the site from his father, planted with 45-50 year old GrüVe vines that used to go into the *Alte Reben*. It's a really stony GV; fennelly and powerful; a wintergreeny sweetness below this megalith of steel and stone. Way to go Junior: an amazing maiden-voyage! One of the best GVs I tasted in 2011.

### 2012 Grüner Veltliner Spiegel, 6/750ml + + (+)

ABY-289

I'm not sure I can wait for this '12; it's among the top GVs of the vintage; the combination of gigantic minerality, secret-sweetness and the prettiest hint of anise-hyssop make it overwhelmingly loveable.

## Rieslings

### 2012 Riesling "Kamptaler Terrassen"

ABY-277

I must have seen this at the worst possible time, as it showed a severity and stinginess quite atypical for Willi's wines. Final judgment must be deferred.

### 2012 Riesling Zöbinger Heiligenstein +

ABY-290

### 2012 Riesling Zöbinger Heiligenstein, 12/375ml

ABY-290H

The cask-sample I tasted is creamy and exotic, almost buttery.

### 2011 Riesling Zöbinger Heiligenstein "Lyra," 6/750ml + + (+)

ABY-267

Named for the Y-shaped trellising system that increases leaf canopy, thus shading the grapes *and* giving more photosynthesis. It also "looks like the vine is throwing its arms up toward the sun," says Willi (poetically!), who adds, "And it shows that you don't need old vines to give great Riesling."

I quite lost it here. The wine is rapturous. It's a quintessence of all the fruits and exotica of Riesling; utter pagan orgy of Riesling. The *Alte Reben* is religious, but this one is orgastic.

### 2011 Riesling Zöbinger Heiligenstein Alte Reben, 6/750ml + + (+)

ABY-268

I'd come to approach this wine warily, as it's been over-endowed alcoholically for many of the past vintages. But this insane masterpiece just undid me. The alc. is below 13.5%, and this is every single thing this cuvée can be at its very best. Talmudic minerality, and to call its smoldering depth "chewy" implies you *could* chew it. I think you'd have to drill through this baby! Massive fruit, profound in every way. A wine for the ages, and (yet) another example that no wine at all comes anywhere *near* to Riesling.

## Pinks 'n Reds

### 2012 Zweigelt Rosé

ABY-295

Delicate, rhubarb, fruity but not “silly,” and fresh but not bracing. Lighter than earlier vintages.

### 2011 Zweigelt, 1.0L

ABY-270L

A pure fruit explosion; you should wear a bib when you drink it. It's mega-ripe (13.5%) for a Liter, fabulously sappy and addictively pretty wine, all violets and huckleberries.

*(A NOTE: there will be a 2011 Zweigelt Reserve to be released in January 2014, of fantastic quality, effusive and almost creamy, possibly Willi's most seductive-ever red.)*

### 2004 Cabernet Franc “Cuvée Vincent”, 6/750ml

ABY-269

I was *seriously* impressed with this, perhaps more than any previously tasted Willi-red. Unexpectedly ripe and gracious with a fetching aroma and a sweet-natured palate. And can you get Chinon with 12.5% alc. that doesn't have a bell-peppery stink? This is like a fine Chinon of the 70s or 80s. On last encounter it was just starting to enter its tertiary stage, which shows as a nuance of oxidative notes, though the finish is firm, not tired. Still, the wine is telling us to drink it. So, um, do.

### 2009 Pinot Noir “Cecile”, 6/750ml

ABY-293

### 2011 Pinot Noir Reserve, 6/750ml

ABY-294

The '09 is for real PN-lovers; it's so tertiary and moderate and gentle; sweet-tempered but not “sweet” tasting, yet it's long and lingering, tactful. (Even the lighter '08 had more chi and fruit sweetness) However: the '11 is seductive and sweet, with Bründlmayer's silky polish and smoky length; this is the crowd-pleaser, the charmer. *AVAILABLE JANUARY 2014*

## Bubbles!

### 2008 Sekt Brut, 6/750ml (+)

ABY-257

A new (12/12) disgorgement of the wine we showed you last year; it's a tic drier, still silky and flowery with exotic Chinese 5-spice notes; sheer fun to drink, even if there isn't a schnitzel in the vicinity.

### Sekt Extra Brut, 6/750ml +

ABY-272

Disgorged March '13, it's based on 2008 with a little 2009, and has 13% alc; it's fabulously salty and sweetly grainy; right now I'd say this is the best fizz that isn't Champagne; buttery and nutty and mature. *Don't* miss it.

### Brut Rosé, 6/750ml +

ABY-273

### Brut Rosé, 3/1.5L

ABY-273M

Half-half '08/'10, and as always a cuvée of Zweigelt, St. Laurent and Pinot Noir. “St. Laurent is the *heart* of the sparkling wine,” says Willi. This is out-of-this-world fruity and charming, like beet-chips, raspberries and rhubarb, and a delicate smokiness.



# Schloss Gobelsburg

Kamptal // Gobelsburg



vineyard area // 49 hectares    annual production // 20,000 cases  
certification // ISO 22000 Sustainable  
top sites & 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**

*My winery of the vintage could have warranted that designation for any of the last several vintages, and I think it's time to say this is among the world's most compelling and consequential wine estates, and though I wouldn't say it's "the best" in Austria, I would say there are none better.*

The 2012s were as rapturous a group of wines, especially Veltliners, as one could ever taste, and believe me, if Michael "Michi" Moosbrugger weren't such a quiet guy I'd have been banging my head against the wall yelling "No! No! Wines *can't* be this fucking amazing!"

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 something 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.

Schloss Gobelsburg has a centuries-old monastic tradition, during which, as Michi puts it, "There were periods when the wines were great and periods when they weren't; after all, not every generation of monks had the same passion or skill. But what was always true was the quality of the land." When Willi first told me the story he too pointed to the vineyards. "Terry, it is some of the absolute best land in the Kamptal," he said.

But the property was drifting, and as no relief was in site from within, the monks considered summoning the cavalry from without. Willi was approached and his advice sought.

Bründlmayer had a customer, a young man in the opposite end of Austria. Michael Moosbrugger was a restless wine lover, just barely thirty years of age, who had visions of making wine someday. Potentially great winery needs new blood. Young, energetic and visionary wine-lover seeks winery. Put the two together and **whoosh!**

Michi's wines excel by precision and polish now. Their texture is truly silken, and their "temperament" is as pensive as that of their maker. Gobelsburg has entirely shed the skin of the Michael-Willi association and has arrived at its own place in the firmament.

Gradually, one step at a time, Moosbrugger has added new categories of excellence to his roster, until it seems everything he touches blazes into brilliance. His sparkling

wine is fabulous. His *reds*, from a region not known for great reds, are sensible and lovely. This doesn't result from any sort of alchemy, you know. It looks easy when you're sitting in the tasting room and the wines are so good you start taking their excellence for granted. But in fact it involves gradual and painstaking work you do when no one is watching. Choices of vine material and replanting when necessary. Re-design in the cellar—including an innovation so brilliant you can't believe no one thought of it before. Knowing that large cellars such as Gobelsburg's have varying temperature zones, and wanting to move wines among different zones without having to pump them, Michi invented a system of casks-on-wheeled-platforms, so that entire casks can be wheeled hither and yon.

Michi is aware of the gravity of a Great Tradition, but rather than weigh him down it seems to prod him on. If he is aware of occupying a place in history, I imagine it's to hope that, hundreds of years from now, someone will read a chronicle of Schloss Gobelsburg and cite his era as one of enlightenment. He is certainly an example of leaving the world better than you found it!

Feeling awed yet? That's not my intent. Michi's a rather quiet guy (as guys go) but he and Eva are actually Just Folks, and my visits here are warm and relaxed. In fact I've left a couple soul-prints at Schloss Gobelsburg. I was there with colleagues and customers on 9/11/01. And in a piece of eerie synchronicity, I was there on the very day we heard the news that Bin Laden had been killed.

**Brut Reserve, N.V.**  
**Brut Reserve, N.V., 6/1.5L**

AZZ-070  
AZZ-070M

Still mostly GV with some PN and Riesling; this was disgorged 01/13 and is majority 2008 with a little '09. The disgorgement date is now *on the label*. Again it's a silky and somewhat exotic fizz, with the angles and herbs of GV, coloring just outside the lines. You'd drink Bründlmayer with the schnitzel and this one with the salad.

## Red Wines

### 2011 Gobelsburger Zweigelt

AZZ-197

“Gobelsburger” (as opposed to the estate Schloss Gobelsburg) is a 2nd-label permitting purchased fruit, and able to reach certain price-points, while protecting the Great Name for the top wines.

Berries and cherry-wood here; it's discreet and less dusty than it sometimes is, plus a lot more *comme il faut* than many gushing '11s; a civilized wine with the bearing of a diplomat.

### 2011 St Laurent Ried Haidegrund, 6/750ml +

AZZ-205

Superb and classy yet also easy-going and genial; ripe polished fruit completely subdues such oak as may be there—in fact it's done in 600-liter casks—the mid-palate is like rare Waygu with summer truffles; the texture is silky, the demeanor is sweet, and the wine is, truly, noble.

## Grüner Veltliners

*The BEST LINEUP of GVI have ever tasted in a single vintage from a single estate!*

### 2012 Gobelsburger Grüner Veltliner +

AZZ-189

Euphoric fragrance, sweet and tenderly delineated; sweet grains and white flowers; the palate is digital and pixilated, cressy and a tiny bit of langoustine-sweetness plus the brine from the stock of the shells. The quality-price rapport has to be among the very best on earth.

### 2012 Grüner Veltliner Steinsetz +

AZZ-192

### 2012 Grüner Veltliner Steinsetz, 12/375ml

AZZ-192H

**CORE-LIST WINE.** For many years this showed the most esoterically spicy side of GrüVe, as if it were fined with glacier dust and scree and stirred with a peppermint stick. The 2010 was markedly juicier, but I ascribed it to the vintage.

This '12 continues the new pattern—if it *is* a pattern, because I asked Michi if the “accent” of the wine was being changed on purpose, and he said no, suggesting that perhaps the older vines were creating another kind of wine. Mind you, this '12 is plenty spicy, minty and eucalyptus-y, *but* unlike the pre-2010 vintages it isn't obdurately firm and nippy. Vetiver, flowering fields and juiciness coat the bones; barky and pine-resiny. A completely original white wine!

### 2012 Grüner Veltliner Renner + + (+)

AZZ-198

The site lies at the foot of the Gaisberg, and contains eroded gneiss with a high proportion of paragneiss, mica and amphibolite. A perfect condition for wines of minerality and generosity—just what this is. And it is also, and always *the best value in this portfolio*, because it costs about 25% less than its peers.

Utterly gorgeous aromas and as nearly perfect a GV as any money can buy; all of its lilac, jasmine, vetiver and semolina and corn-bread and diver-scallop, and with stunning torque and disciplined power. The best vintage *ever* of this.

### 2012 Grüner Veltliner Grub, 6/750ml + +

AZZ-201

The vineyard sits in a basin below the Gaisberg and Heiligenstein; the soil derives from loess, and is sandy-silty and calcerous with gravel, atop silt and sandstone. It's a wind-protected heat trap, and I often find its wines too brusque and oafish for my taste.

Not this time. The aromas are *remarkably* mineral and the alcohol is actually moderate—rare for '12—but as always it's the most *Puligny* among GVs, though this one actually has green aromas of aloe and balsam underneath the thump; massively salty and completely rich and concentrated yet, miraculously, without heaviness.



**2012 Grüner Veltliner Lamm, 6/750ml + + +**

AZZ-202

This will occupy a seat at the table of the Great Gods. It is as sublime as wine can be, because of its astonishing combination of juiciness, angular power and trembling spiciness.

*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. Compared to the endomorphic Grub, Lamm is the mesomorph. Its poise of gloss and power, intensity and outline, mass and transparency are emblems of the *paradox* without which no wine is truly great.

**2011 Grüner Veltliner “Tradition,” 6/750ml + +**

AZZ-193

**2011 Grüner Veltliner “Tradition,” 6/1.5L + +**

AZZ-193M

Meditative, and could almost be lulling if it weren’t so animated and salty; like a crusty dark bread of Renner (from which it comes, in fact); this cask-sample was due for one more racking, so the final profile could be even more tertiary.

## Rieslings

**2012 Gobelsburger Riesling**

AZZ-190

Sleek and discreet; radishes and aloe-vera, less effusive than the GV, more introspective. Still, it’s focused and silky and herbal.

**2012 Riesling Gaisberg + +**

AZZ-199

The perfection of the *cool*, a moony minimalist wine, like a Miles Davis solo, or the waltz of the little dancer in the music box, or a full white moon over a black field of icy jewels.

**2012 Riesling Heiligenstein, 6/750ml + +**

AZZ-195

Trades a little of Gaisberg’s outline and scores lovely exotic notes in return; spices, orchid-oolong and peony; not the gravitas of mineral of Gaisberg but more a semifreddo of middle-eastern spice and osmanthus.

**2011 Riesling “Tradition,” 6/750ml + + +**

AZZ-196

Markedly strong Gaisberg character (from which indeed it hails), thanks I’m sure to the very old vines. This is simply *profound*, a complete rapture of flavor; wild white flowers and fresh dark bread; endlessly spicy, focused yet the mid-palate is a long whispered secret, of funerals and birds, and the girls are giggling as the stew simmers and your short, sad, amazing life fills with laughing, light and hunger.

## Two Sweet Wines

**2012 Grüner Veltliner Auslese, 12/375ml**

AZZ-203H

A markedly spicy and varietally true not-quite-dessert wine; stopped by chilling—“We rolled the barrel outside into the cold”—like a lemon tart with sea-salt, more savory than “sweet,” and bottling will slim it even more.

**2011 Grüner Veltliner Eiswein, 12/375ml**

AZZ-204H

Picked February 1st (under nets), this is a very rich and super-exotic wine that actually is a dessert-wine; in fact from Steinsetz, it shows aromas of spearmint and aloe vera, and the palate is a key-lime custard with vetiver.

# Hiedler

Kamptal // Langenlois



vineyard area // 28 hectares  
annual production // 16,500 cases  
top sites & 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

*After all these properly modern scrupulously correct wines, welcome to the crazy-hippy world of Ludwig Hiedler.*



Though 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...)

**Hiedler at a glance** // Don't like squeaky-clean, reductive wines? Step right up! Amazing values for chewy, ample wines with old-fashioned meat on 'em. They are among the highlights in every vintage.

**how the wines taste** // Satisfying, is how they taste! Look, I adore those filigree delineated wines, you know I do, but after five days of tasting them it starts to feel likework. They demand study. With the first hit-o-Hiedler the palate sits up with a jolt: "Is there a party? Sure feels like it!" Yet within their succulent density is all the complexity you could wish for. They're the thinking-man's wine porno!

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.

Things are astir at Weingut Hiedler, and in the loveliest possible way: They are slowing down.

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 SO<sub>2</sub>, 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!"

### 2012 Grüner Veltliner "Löss"

AHL-185

**CORE-LIST WINE.** And by far the best vintage of this since I started shipping it. Quite a thrill in '12, with twice the body and concentration it usually has; a slice of white-meat chicken with creamed lentils, arugula salad and a gentle apple-vinegar. With a really heavy dumpling!

### 2011 Grüner Veltliner Thal +

AHL-176

### 2012 Grüner Veltliner Thal +

AHL-186

**CORE-LIST WINE.** As he still has '11 (a large-volume vintage is the reason why), I'm not sure whether we'll sell these consecutively or concurrently.

Loess and red sand here, and an old (over 60) vineyard, the Thal is the purest embodiment of Ludwig's spirit. The '11, which I wrote had "a note of the crisp skin of a perfectly cooked fish," is saltier and more fine-boned than the '12, very spicy with ore and garrigue. But that '12 is monstrously good; it's soft taco-shell compared to the crisper '11—but '12 is denser. It's a cashmere sweater, and '11 is a silk scarf. '12 is a final blast of mint, '11 is a goodbye kiss of nettle and red peppers. Equal in quality, radically different in style.

### 2011 Grüner Veltliner Kittmannsberg "November" +

AHL-177

Two notes: one, this is a different bottling than the wine we shipped last year, much later (December) and somehow markedly better. Two, the word "November" will disappear from the label starting with the 2012.

It's all concentrated straw, and oyster beds, sweet-salty and coppery, silky and dignified, a Brooks Brothers GV. This is creamier, leesier than the first bottling, more scallop-y and tapioca. But this one's always the neo-classical GV compared to the baroque companions it rides with.

### 2012 Riesling "Urgestein"

AHL-187

**CORE LIST WINE.** He picked *all* of his Rieslings within a single week, and all were between 12.8-13.2 alc, and it's no wonder he regards this as a *Riesling vintage* above all. I enthusiastically agree.

This one's bright, a real ice-splash of green stinging freshness; pea shoots, delicate mint, citrus and mineral covered over by a soft blanket of "sweet" veggies.

### 2012 Riesling Steinhaus +

AHL-190

A steep site of myriad little terraces, amphibolite and gneiss higher up, and loess lower down. It gives the most exotic-green among Ludwig's Rieslings, and this one's like a salad of 50 edible herbs and greens, including mint and tarragon and lovage and pine; absurdly mineral, with a foamy brine; it's the apex of its idiom, Riesling of massive flavor and essentially no *fruit*.



**2012 Riesling Gaisberg, 6/750ml + + (+)**

AHL-191

*Entire* Grand Cru aroma! This is completely amazing. How can it be so focused, so angular and yet so creamy? A pudding from the best pastry chef on earth; she's a genius with candied ginger, she made a potion of white iris; you weren't even hungry but you ate all of it and half of your date's. It would be seriously neglectful and maybe even foolish *not* to buy this wine.

**2012 Riesling Heiligenstein, 6/750ml +**

AHL-192

Exotic and extravagant; smells like Uva Ceylon; as always a witches brew, smoky and deep and incense-y, with a finish of smokes and peaches.

**2011 Riesling "Maximum," 6/750ml**

AHL-193

Halbtrocken but still 14.5% alc, this is like a Thai curry; green onions and prawns, little corn-cobs and basil, smoked salt and *just* the right amount of heat. It was cooked with a vanilla bean, removed before serving.

**2011 Weissburgunder "Maximum," 6/750ml**

AHL-189

In the early 90s when I began here, these wines were so amazing I wrote they were the best Pinot Blancs in the world. Tasting them again now, in the form of a sublime 1993 Ludwig was kind enough to open and share, I would make that statement again.

Vintages of the last decade have gotten over-endowed. Maybe it's climate-change, or later picking or lower yields or all of those things, but these days I'm tasting monuments to admire instead of wines to actually use. Ludwig and I have talked about it, and he seems to agree in theory. But how does he obtain the ripe flavors he desires *and* keep the wine below 14%?

This is one of the big ripe ones; it smells like toasted brioche, vanilla yoghurt, flowering mustard and very fruity peppers like the wild Madagascar; the palate is rusk-y, lemony-salty and a wee bit hot.

*(NOTES: we have a few cases of a ++ quality 1992 Riesling Heiligenstein that smells and tastes almost like mature Champagne, and Ludwig also offered me ten cases of a new item, a Muscat-Ottonel that tasted for all the world like a mannerly, flinty Sauv-Blanc, amazingly charming and smelling like cherry-blossoms. It isn't expensive; ask us for some.)*

vineyard area // 31 hectares  
annual production // 12,500 cases  
top sites // Kammerner Lamm, Zöbinger Gaisberg, Zöbinger Heiligenstein  
soil types // löss, eroded mica slate topped with brown soil, eroded primary rock  
with desert sands and volcanic particles  
grape varieties // 65% Grüner Veltliner, 35% Riesling



## *I have a strong personal affinity with Johannes Hirsch. Actually, I love the man.*

I love his wit, I love his lone-wolf streak (because I share it), I love his seriousness, I love his collaborativeness—we have never had a problem we couldn't solve promptly and with no lingering static—and I love the simple ease of his trimmed down portfolio. I consider him a friend. But when I taste his wines, I taste only his wines. Sentiment waits in the next room.

I happened to speak with Hirsch during the most gruesome days of 2008's summer, when all it did was rain and the vineyards were struggling to stay healthy. "So Mister Bio-dynamic; great timing, dude!" I said—I'm such a sensitive guy—and 'Hannes replied "You know, if this had been the first year of transition I don't think I'd have gone through with it, because it's so difficult..." but when we had the bottles lined up nine months later he echoed something I've heard before: "Now when I taste the wines I really forget what we went through to make them. I know it was difficult but I don't physically remember it, you know?"

You often hear how the wine "makes itself," but here it actually does. The '07 and '08 Rieslings had RS, and the '09s had either much less or nearly none. That's how those grapes fermented. Johannes is fearless this way; he expects his customers will understand that wine isn't identical each year. Those "sweet" Rieslings were so delicious they offer an implied rebuke to the Puritanism of other Rieslings in Austria, which seem to grasp at dryness as an absolute value. Hannes seems to *get* that there are few if any absolute values in flavor; he works his vines and sprays his valerian drops and nettle teas and picks his grapes when they're ripe and lets them be and if they stop fermenting with RS then so be it. It's not a lot of RS, they're not (eek) "German wines," and he barely seems to attend to

whatever Critical-Opinion they may engender.

With regard to the bio-d thing, Johannes is there now, the transition is done, but typically for him, he had some issues with the politics of the matter, and now "wishes I hadn't said anything, and just done it." I have a principle of not identifying as organic or bio-d anyone who doesn't certify, because it prevents people from green-washing their way to the organic "Brand." I am contradicting myself here because it can't be helped—you already knew (because I already told you) that Hirsch was among a group who were all converting to bio-d together. So there's no point in being coy about it now.

We tend to like to party with Johannes, 'cause he's crazily witty and likes to have fun, but when the party's over he's a man with an active and probing mind. And he seems to have no fear. He was the first in Austria to go 100% Stelvin, the first to delay bottling and releasing his Grand Crus.

Sometimes when you have your kids they lead you back to your soul, and the Johannes Hirsch I know now is rather different from the one I met ten years ago, still fun and witty, but entirely more probing and curious, even restless. He seems to want to go back and rethink choices that seemed simple when he made them the first time. He seems to want to decelerate in general. His wines, always exciting, are becoming profound.

An offering of Hirsch these days consists of whichever of the current vintage is ready to offer, plus anything still available and showing well from previous years. I like that it's not confined to "the latest vintage!" and that the wines have a chance to inhale and exhale. It respects them, and us.

**Hirsch at a glance** // Zoom! Went this agency, from out-of-nowhere to the top. Stellar-quality wines from a star-quality vintner at reasonable prices. AND AVAILABILITY IS GOOD.

**how the wines taste** // For such great wines these are comparatively "easy" to understand: they're juicy and spicy and their flavors are candid and animated. Specific nuances are, as always, determined by the vineyard.

## 2012 Grüner Veltliner

AWH-106

**CORE-LIST WINE.** The new label will be the ongoing label, as I seem to have been in a minority-of-one who *liked* the label changing each year. Ya happy now? The wine will make you happy if not; ripe, tobacco-y and smoky, deep and earthy and almost tannic in the finish. Really huge for 11.5% alc, it tastes like a mushroom stock you threw a few drops of Sauv-Blanc into.

## 2012 Grüner Veltliner “Heiligenstein”

AWH-102

**CORE-LIST WINE.** Lots of color for a '12; silky and silvery on the palate with a tactile deposit of mineral; the wine is ostensibly gentle and then hits a crescendo with this blatant scree. It seems also to float somehow; it isn't a thing in gravity, but rather a great weightless orbit of morels and minerals.

## 2011 Grüner Veltliner Lamm +

AWH-097

## 2011 Grüner Veltliner Lamm, 12/375ml +

AWH-097H

## 2011 Grüner Veltliner Lamm, 3/1.5L +

AWH-097M

It's not wine, it's food! A veal and porcini liquid poured over toasted rye bread with dark-meat turkey; weighty but beautifully proportioned; less “profound” than generous and savory. Not a monument but rather a big-boned wine to *drink*. And within 4-5 years, I'd say, as this vintage doesn't seem structured to go for decades.

## 2012 Riesling Zöbing +

AWH-111

**CORE LIST WINE.** A *beautiful* fragrance, like a potion of irises and lavender; the palate defaults to its mineral middle, with a long silky texture and a dusty wash of scree and leaves; a lovely light essence of Riesling.

## 2011 Riesling Gaisberg + (+)

AWH-095

## 2011 Riesling Gaisberg, 12/375ml + (+)

AWH-095H

## 2011 Riesling Gaisberg, 3/1.5L + (+)

AWH-095M

## 2012 Riesling Gaisberg + +

AWH-107

## 2012 Riesling Gaisberg, 3/1.5L + +

AWH-107M

As 2012 is the vintage for Gaisberg, I want to get that wine here ASAP. The aroma is a miracle. Starry-night Winter-sweet Gaisberg, mineral to a point of near-pungency; endlessly expressive yet with poise and repose; the way a virtuoso makes it “look easy”? Like that.

The lovely '11 is as mineral as '12 but more grainy, more barley-like and savory; it seems also more dispersed until the sudden laser-focus on the finale.

## 2011 Riesling Heiligenstein +

AWH-096

## 2011 Riesling Heiligenstein, 3/1.5L +

AWH-096M

## 2012 Riesling Heiligenstein + (+)

AWH-109

## 2012 Riesling Heiligenstein, 3/1.5L + (+)

AWH-109M

The '11 is a spicy beast; nettles and Szechuan pepper and a crazed saltiness. '12 seems to show more stomach, pungent smoke and spice; more turbulent than the moon-silent Gaisberg; its pure dryness accents the roasted pepper char; serious and embedded mineral. But cask-samples can evolve unpredictably, so let's watch where this goes.



# Wachau

*I think my favorite thing of all about the Wachau is the idyllic Landhaus Bacher in Mautern, where I like to stay when I'm there. You feel very cared-for.*



The rooms are dear without being either stultifyingly luxurious or too adorably precious. The restaurant is just a perfect joy; lovely, radiant food, nothing show-offy, just purity, vitality. The amazing Johanna, who never seems to sleep, sets the tone for utterly exquisite service, and is somehow there the next morning to coax you into reluctant consciousness with her almost unbearable gaiety.

The restaurant's wine list is an Aladdin's cave of treasures from the Wachau and its neighbors. And yet, as I perused it night after night I found myself more drawn to the wines of the Kamptal and Kremstal, which simply offered more quality-per-Dollar than the magnificently unreasonable Wachau. Why magnificent? Because the region is stupendously beautiful and the best wines are the pinnacles of Austrian wines. Why unreasonable? Because there's too much business chasing too little truly great wine. The Wachau is a wonderful place to be a tourist, a gourmand, a wine-geek, but it's an awkward place to do business.

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.

Indeed this problem is getting worse, not better. Even if one yields the point that the best Wachau wines are the best Austrian wines of all, the second level of Wachau wines are nothing out of the ordinary and they're highly overpriced. I begin to wonder if Wachau wines don't really reach their sweet-spot of ripeness until the "Smaragd" level. Below 12.5% alcohol a great many taste malnourished and incomplete.

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 overripe 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).

The locals talk of a "climate fiord" brought on by the gorge-like configuration of the landscape and the collision of two climactic phenomena; the Pannonian current from the east with the continental current from the west, all of which make for extreme variations of day and nighttime temperatures. The autumns, particularly, are clement and usually dry. Early November picking is routine. (Though one sly grower said: "There's nothing romantic about picking in November.") The western section of the regions is said to give its finest wines, due in part to cooler nighttime temperatures as the breezes blow down from the hills. The wines become fuller-bodied and more powerful as you move downstream, reaching their utmost force and expression in Loiben and Dürnstein.



vineyard area // 10 hectares  
annual production // 6,250 cases  
top sites & 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**

*These are powerfully expressive yet mostly gentle wines, the kind that you might believe can release oxytocin into your body, they deliver such affirming calm.*



I was in the loo as we moved into the Riesling Smaragds, and there was the most delicate little spider, with silvery green legs and a body the size of a fennel seed. You wouldn't be afraid if she crawled on your face. I wanted to give her a name. What would such a silky little being be named? Just as I was admiring her there was an especially lusty little blackbird trilling away

outside. I mean, this bird was *loud*. I had to chuckle at the juxtaposition of metaphors, the little slender spider in her repose, the yapping bird with its helpless melodies. I often find these totems are all around us if we know how to look.

I drank a bottle of F.X. Pichler's 2002 Steinertal Riesling one night, and it was as marvelous as I expected

**Alzinger at a glance** // Sleek, clear, winsome yet authoritative wines from the kindly hands of the newest Wachau superstar! Every vintage since 1995 is amongst the best collection in Austria.

**how the wines taste** // Alzinger's wines are uniformly threaded into skeins of nuance and even when they're at their biggest they're always shapely and lissome. They aren't delicious because they're great; they're great because they're delicious.

it to be. I've long admired the glossy power of those wines at their best. Yet when I looked at the words I was using to discuss it—it was showing well, it *performed* beautifully—I realize I felt like I was an *audience* for the wine, that I was separate from it in some crucial way. Perhaps this has everything to do with me, and it's by no means a slam on a highly laudable wine, but when I drink Alzinger's wine I have no such feeling. With them I feel included, roused, affectionate; I feel a thing akin to love.

Alzinger's wines are no more forceful than any of the other Wachau greats. They aren't longer, or riper. What they do is take the serenity with which they're endowed and pass it upward through a kind of apotheosis, beyond which they are beatific and glowing. You wouldn't be surprised if the cellar master were the Dalai Lama. Alzinger's wines almost never push and assert; they are instead amazingly sanguine and calmly lovely. Their force is a force of kindliness. They take you in. They do not strut. Yet if you are tempted to think I'm offering an elegant rationale for less-than-stellar wine, you'd be wrong. The magazine *VINUM* recently published the results of a 10-year retrospective tasting of most of the Wachau's GrüVe monuments, FX Pichler Kellerberg, Knoll Schütt, Hirtzberger Honivogl—that crowd. You'll be interested to know Alzinger had the 2nd-highest composite score (90.7) which was .8 below the top.

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 synesthese 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 terraces you see if you're driving in from the east and the Kremstal; indeed it's sheltered by the craggy cliff of the Pfaffenberg. Steinertal makes *mark-ed* 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 Riesling, 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 returning with the thought "I want to make wines like those wines."

## 2012 Grüner Veltliner Mühlpoint Federspiel

ALA-125

This is the hillside below the Steinertal, where the slope moderates and you don't need terraces. The soil changes also, but whereas the wines used to be overtly green-beany, recent vintages have shown more minerality and a cooler profile, which Leo ascribes to the vines' aging, and "to the roots reaching their water source as they go deeper into the soil."

Salty and sorrel-y as it's been since 2010—the wax beans are gone, the new minerality is indirect in 2012, but lingers.

## 2012 Grüner Veltliner Mühlpoint Smaragd, 6/750ml +

ALA-126

Here we do have force, urgestein ore and arugula, and a fiercely spicy finish. An adamant classic, big and muscular and sinewy.

## 2012 Grüner Veltliner Loibenberg Smaragd, 6/750ml + +

ALA-124

Atypically *green* this year; vetiver and pine—at least at first, in this cask-sample. The palate is both more exotic and more directly mineral, and there's an endless stream of smoky-salty savor that virtually licks your tongue. It's profound, seductive, a philosopher with a talent for witty anecdote, and it's entirely attractive, *addictive*, without being at all "yummy." Wow.

## 2012 Grüner Veltliner Steinertal Smaragd, 6/750ml + (+)

ALA-127

This one's the Wild Child, a pagan orgy of mints and leaves, the kind where you'd hallucinate if you ate them. Some capsicum-heat is present, to which I may be oversensitive. This plant-essence juiciness can make a guy lick his chops.

**2012 Riesling Dürnsteiner Federspiel**

ALA-133

Just a lovely light-bodied Riesling, moderate in every way; not especially peachy, not markedly mineral; just a civilized and companionable wine, at least until the avalanche of scree-dust mineral at the end. Just bottled, which may be tamping this down.

**2012 Riesling Liebenberg Smaragd, 6/750ml +**

ALA-129

The world's most radishy Riesling, vaporous and eucalyptus and nettle and ore and wintergreen. Pure spicy shimmer; if there were a mouthwash called "Essence Of Riesling" it would taste like this. A huge volume of flavor, and just a little of what we'd call "fruit." A cool steep terraced site upstream from Dürnstein, on amphibolite, and the 13-year-old vines have rooted to the aquifer and are starting to pull from the sub-soils.

**2012 Riesling Hollerin Smaragd, 6/750ml + +**

ALA-128

OK, *here's* the fruit! Leo tells me their parcel is loess-y, which likely accounts for it. Also the herbs, also the minerals, also that feeling of falling through layers of stony juice—this is tectonically mineral. Yet there's also a pure madness of dialogue, a slice of just-ripe apricot, a slice of wild-boar ham wrapped around it, a mint leaf, and pop! into the mouth. Wash it down with some mineral powder mixed with starchy pasta water. Head-shakingly complex yet also hedonistic

**2012 Riesling Höhereck Smaragd, 6/750ml + +**

ALA-132

Last year we got a few bottles, and this year we'll get a few plus a few. The total production is around 70 cases—the *total* production. "Um, Leo," I said, "Wouldn't it make sense, since the production is so tiny, to sell it all to one customer? Someone, for example, such as, perhaps, me?" Ha haha; yes, that would be funny.

Now don't be mad if you can't get any. Even if I were to beg pathetically I couldn't eke more than 10 cases from them. I wish it were otherwise, because in some vintages I think this is the best Riesling of all. There's authority here, solid power, and an astonishing conciliation of Hollerin's fruit with Loibenberg's exotics with Steinertal's minerality.

Of course it's *absurdly* superb; the highest expression of all of it; herbs, ferrous ore, char, exotic green fruits, secret sweetness, currant-leaf; this tiny vineyard makes one of the greatest Rieslings on earth.

**2012 Riesling Loibenberg Smaragd, 6/750ml + +**

ALA-130

Well what is it? Verbena and wintergreen, or quinces and plums? Or the dozen salad greens? Like chewing a sprig of Italian parsley, or eating the "Spring Mix With Herbs" right from the box. But there's also delicate mango and lemon, plus Sencha and osmanthus, in this crazy miracle wine.

**2012 Riesling Steinertal Smaragd, 6/750ml + + (+)**

ALA-131

A walk through the deep woods with an old monk who shows you what plants you can eat. Each step is a blessing. This is the most sapid vintage of any I've tasted, as if you took a fistful of edible leaves and squeezed the juice out of them. The bracing spiciness is leavened by an almost creamy tenderness. I don't know how to account for such a thing. I taste it, and walk among wonders.



# Nikolaihof-Wachau

Wachau // Mautern

vineyard area // 22 hectares    annual production // 8,300 cases  
certification // Demeter Certified Biodynamic  
top sites // Steiner Hund, Klausberg, Im Weingebirge, Vom Stein, Süßenberg  
soil types // 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



*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.*

Some of you have seen the proud great linden that occupies the courtyard; it has become something of an emblem itself, that tree, yet at heart it’s also a kindly giver of shade and shelter from the rain, not to mention a home to a lot of birds. One can’t imagine Nikolaihof without that tree, yet one also can’t quite explain why it makes such sense. It seems to coalesce a lot of love into its nexus, that huge green being. The birds love it, the buzzing pollinators love it, any human being who gets near it loves it, and I think the tree also loves its life and being lovely and useful. In a sense it stands for our relationship to nature itself. There was a moment where their little wire-haired dachshund, charmingly known as “Lumpy,” was up on his tiny hind legs peering intently into the tree and barking, and Nikki explained “Sometimes when we throw his ball to him it gets caught up in the branches and eventually falls back down, and Lumpy thinks the tree is also playing with him.” Well *that* explains everything.

Maybe it’s because we know one another longer now, but I find myself wanting to remind you, as much as Nikolaihof is a Bastion-Of-The-Biodynamic, and as meaningful and stirring as the people and their wines are to me, as I draw closer I enjoy that these are really just people leading a particularly fine life.

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.

Once we were seated one year, I asked Christine, “When are you happiest in your work?” I thought the question was straightforward. Others to whom I’ve posed it have said things like I like it best in the vineyards, or I really enjoy the blending, it fascinates

me to taste so analytically, or things of that nature. Christine seemed quite undone by my innocuous-seeming query. “Oh I don’t know how to answer a question like that,” she said, and “No one has ever asked me that question.” She was so shy I was unbearably touched.

Finally she said she enjoyed the times when she felt useful because at such times she was aware of the gift given her—the power to be useful. Whether in the family or in the vineyards or the garden or in the restaurant they also run, she liked to feel she could put her providentially endowed power to good use. It suddenly struck me she embodies the Buddhist idea of enlightenment; to be cheerful and useful. It is certainly the least neurotic approach to one’s life!

Since everything is unified within these walls (and outside them also) it is very clear to me that Nikolaihof’s wines also embody that enlightenment. “Cheerful and useful” would be a perfect way to describe them. Even at their most profound, and they attain such profundity quite regularly, theirs is never an intimidating or haughty Greatness, but rather a sapid companionability that’s almost affectionate. The wines talk not only to your senses, they talk to your life.

Saahs’ preference for the bio-dynamic life doesn’t seem to hail from a concern we’d call “environmental” in the political sense. It rather arises from their overall approach to sharing life with other forms of life, and also from their sense of time.

Nikolaihof is the oldest winery in the Wachau; the buildings are soaked in history. The winery was the first Demeter-certified wine in the world. They have farmed and made wines organically for 40 years; for them it is vitally important to treat wine as a grocery first and foremost, as a comestible.



A study has been published which appears to prove the salubriousness of Biodynamic wines in general and Nikolaihof's wines in particular. Christine is very proud of this, and I'm happy for her. Yet somehow I'm less touched than she is, and I think I know why. I recall seeing a story in one of the magazines which said scientists had isolated the health-giving compounds in wine and could make them available in pill-form. At which point it became very clear to me; we don't drink wine because it is (merely) "healthy;" we drink it because, in an holistic way, it is good for us. Not only for our discrete bodies, but for our whole lives and souls. That wine is in fact harmless and probably even healthful is something we already knew intuitively; it's a bonus, but it ain't why. I am sure Christine knows this too.

Needless to say, the utmost emphasis is laid on the vineyard. Old vines, low yields, natural farming, and unmanipulative cellar work are the secrets, so to speak, but to quote Dr. Helmut Rome: "The secret of these wines lies not so much in cellar technology—which in any case barely exists—as in the special care of the vines." He quotes Saahs as saying, "You shouldn't shove a wine along; just give it a controlled peace so it can develop itself." Fermentation (natural yeasts,) and all aging is in old wood. The wines spend a long time—up to 4 months—on the lees. Nor is Saahs chasing the blockbuster icon or pushing the ripeness envelope. Remember his admonition that wine is a foodstuff. "I like to drink wine, not study it," he says. "We pick when the grapes are ripe, we don't wait for overripeness. There's nothing charming about harvesting in November."

It takes more people to farm organically; the Saahs employ 10 workers for 20 hectares. They claim a conventional winery could do the work with four or five. They are happy, they say, to give employment to more people; "We are not in this world just to make money," says Christine Saahs. Among the 20 hectares of land are two meadows allowed to grow wild. "We learned if we didn't control the vegetation in these meadows

that the most predatory of the plants would eventually overcome the weaker plants, so each year we mow the meadow twice. It levels the playing field," she added, looking thoughtfully into the distance. "We don't drive a big car, we don't take world cruises... but we do mow our meadows twice a year," she said, as if to herself. "We simply occupy this little form of skin and bones for a few years, but we need to nourish our hearts and souls by finding a home in our parts of the world and caring for this home."

Perhaps this simple rootedness appeals to something lonely in us Americans. We are such spiritual and emotional nomads. We seem hesitant to lay claim to this world, perhaps for fear of having to surrender to it. When I am with the Saahs' I always feel a jolt of recognition; this is the anchoring I seek, or imagine myself seeking. But could I live as they do? I don't know.

Some of these wines are as still as silent ponds, and each nuance of flavor is like a small pebble dropped in the silvery water, and you watch the tiny silent ripples flow slowly toward shore. They seem utterly without affect, but instead serenely themselves. They are numinous in their very lack of thrusting and pushing. They are candid and modest. I cannot tell you how these wines stir such a calmness of spirit. Other wines are perhaps more poignant, or more exciting. But I have never tasted wines more settling than these. Each of them is like a slow centering breath, a quiet breath, the breath of the world, unheard almost always beneath the clamor.

It's a shame that words like "sublime" can lose their music and force through squandering, and I know I'm part of the problem. But the quality of sublimity in Nikolaihof's wines has to do with their basic characters; hale, trustworthy, unaffected, substantive but never tiring, explicitly *connected* and charged with a gentle force. It isn't about making you love *them*; it's about what they can do to ease your way, by whispering their tender steady reminder of the sweet secrets of the world we share.

**2012 Gelber Muskateller (+)**

ANK-133

Just bottled when I tasted it, standing outside in the sun upon arriving, as a welcome-drink. I wanted to grab the bottle and just slug it, honestly. But I forced myself to be mature, and drank it from a fine stem, and noticed how sapid and almost creamy it was, with its subtle lemon; starchy and spicy and with the extra dimension of oyster-shell that makes it the best Muscat among my Austrian offerings. Peony and white lilac also, and three atmospheres of length.

**2012 Grüner Veltliner “Hefeabzug” +**

ANK-120

**CORE-LIST WINE.** Brilliantly saline and fennel-y, starched and stiff, talcy and lemony, twitchy-vital and spicy chi. Considering this is Christine’s “I am wine,” I herewith invite her to join me in two dozen east coast oysters, after which we’ll take the day off.

**2012 Grüner Veltliner Im Weingebirge Federspiel**

ANK-123

**2012 Grüner Veltliner Im Weingebirge Federspiel, 6/1.5L**

ANK-123M

Markedly lissome and chiseled, slate-blue eyes and high cheekbones; even a little phenolic and certainly mineral, especially for this estate. The finish is clipped but the alc is below 12%, and the clarity and oyster grip is almost more typical for Hefeabzug.

**2011 Grüner Veltliner Im Weingebirge Smaragd, 6/750ml +**

ANK-121

**2011 Grüner Veltliner Im Weingebirge Smaragd, 6/1.5L +**

ANK-121M

Delicate and soulful. Not a flashy first impression. 12.6% alc. Pea shoot and vetiver and a curious tickle of tannin; a careful beautiful wine with nothing to prove. Again a stirringly mineral finish.

I should emphasize, I don’t need to or want to summon any kind of spell when I’m tasting here. I try instead to erase my screen and then transcribe whatever takes place. I mean, the wines are how they are, and I seem to feel my only authentic response is directly into image and metaphor. And the tasting itself is quite workmanlike; 4-5 glasses are lined up and the wines poured into flights, just like anywhere else. And then they start to peel, and the usual deconstruction of flavors just isn’t called for. Better to fall into the aura of the peeling, to hear the complicated overtones, to feel the air between the wine and me. That’s what seems to work.

*(PSSSSST! Those of you who buy the Neuburger are in for a treat, as the ’12 is the best vintage in many years...)*

**2012 Riesling Vom Stein Federspiel**

ANK-127

**2012 Riesling Vom Stein Federspiel, 6/1.5L**

ANK-127M

Adorable aromas of quince and currant leaf lead into a lively spicy fennel-y palate. The direct attack is really, ah, striking. Though they didn’t design it, of course. It’s like tatsoi leaves you eat from the bag.

**2010 Riesling Vom Stein Smaragd, 6/750ml +**

ANK-129

**2010 Riesling Vom Stein Smaragd, 6/1.5L +**

ANK-129M

Almost rugged and gnarly—that’s ’10 baby. Flowering fields aroma doesn’t specifically signal “Riesling,” but the stretchy sinewy palate scratches that very itch; it’s the sting of *mint* without the mint of mint.

**2009 Riesling Steiner Hund, 6/750ml + +**

ANK-126

This vineyard is existentially unique, as if it had its own magnetic fields. Druids would have built their megaliths there. Maybe at night a UFO lands silently and all the little space dudes get out and do some magic, I don’t know. But I know of no other great wine that seems so unknowable, overwhelming and haunting.

Beautiful and unusual, all of its gorgeously strange green mineral together with the chamomile and yellow fruits and osmanthus of ’09—I mean really, you can’t stop sniffing it. More solid and firmly spicy than the more oxidative ’08 and ’07; this is like the ’05 diving into an ice cold pool; all the crazy mineral jazz plays on the back palate.

**2008 Riesling Klausberg Reserve, 6/750ml** + + +

ANK-132

God help me, I *know* this is expensive. I do. But this is an ecstasy worth any amount of money. The fragrance is a transport of white flowers, quince and fresh raw langoustines, with the very sweetest ginger. The palate is beyond space and time; spicy, bewitchingly salty and minty, and trust me, it will stop your life for a moment. You won't recall what you were doing. It all falls away, and the beauty assumes your entire sky, your whole vista, and whatever pool of love and safety you emerged from. Want a map to your deepest heart? Here, you only need a glass, a corkscrew, and a moment of repose. That's all.

The vineyard is next to Steiner Hund, higher up and cooler.

**2006 Riesling Vom Stein "Jungfernlese," 6/750ml** + +

ANK-135

It means the virgin-vintage, the first crop from young vines. And it's what the Germans would call *Feinherb*, and it's what any sane person would call irresistible! A potion of iris and lavender, spicy and penetrating; very long, seductively earthy, like a really profound Nahe Spätlese, almost the 5-spice and wildflower of Dönnhoff's Felsenberg.

**1998 "Steinriesler," 6/750ml** + + +

ANK-117

"Riesler" is an archaic term for Riesling. Saahs wanted to see how a wine might age in cask without sulfur if it were an ordinary and not a grand wine to begin with. The first example was a glorious 1999, offered two years ago. So what do they do for an encore?

Offer something even older.

This is a masterpiece of time, nature and instinct. Less "humble" than that '99 was, and more insanely, dauntingly complex. I could detail its three paragraphs worth of nuance if I had 40 minutes to study it. Let's just say, a perfect *positive* oxidation, a whole encyclopedia of wild flowers and herbs, a mélange of every possible salt, and the gentlest note of allspice and pink peppercorn.

I don't care what it costs—don't miss it.

**1995 Riesling "Vinothek," 6/750ml** + + +

ANK-111

First came the 1990 Riesling, then the 1991 GV, then the 1993 GV, each of them as beautiful and soulful as wine could ever be.

And now this.

It's just 12.5% alcohol. This tender wine has been alone so long, it's almost forgotten how to speak in language—so it sings. All it does is sing. You want to speak of its noble oxidation but you get caught in the sultry web of its amazing floweriness and pure vetiver. It actually, after all these years in cask, needs oxygen. Your sensual-analytical skills don't help you here. Put them away. Quiet down, all the way down. You can enter the house, they've left the door unlocked. But once inside, the rooms are dim. You find your way by an instinct you didn't know you had. You listen as you never did before. And you are given back to yourself, a strange new person, swimming in beauty and as supple as a child, pensive and amazed.





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.

## Eaux de Vie

<b>Apple in Oak Barrel</b> , 6/375ml	XHR-024
<b>Apricot Eau de Vie</b> , 6/375ml	XHR-003
<b>Plum Eau de Vie</b> , 6/375ml	XHR-001
<b>Williams Pear Eau de Vie</b> , 6/375ml	XHR-002
<b>Raspberry Eau de Vie</b> , 6/375ml	XHR-009
<b>Cherry Eau de Vie</b> , 6/375ml	XHR-004
<b>Wild Cherry Eau de Vie</b> , 6/375ml	XHR-011
<b>Elderberry Eau de Vie</b> , 6/375ml	XHR-005
<b>Rowanberry Eau de Vie</b> , 6/375ml	XHR-006
<b>Ginger Eau de Vie</b> , 6/375ml	XHR-014
<b>Carrot Eau de Vie</b> , 6/375ml	XHR-013
<b>Hazelnut Eau de Vie</b> , 6/375ml	XHR-028

*(Eaux de Vie also available in 1.75L bottles)*

**Mixed Case Eau de Vie** XHR-010  
*Wooden case including 1 bottle of each: Apricot, Plum, Williams Pear, Raspberry, Wild Cherry and Rowanberry*

## Grain Spirits

<b>Whisky</b> , 6/750ml	XHR-015
<b>Blue Gin</b> , 6/750ml	XHR-025

*Blue Gin also available in 1.75L bottles*

## Fruit Wine

**Brut Apfel (2009)** XHR-026  
*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 alfresco 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 the last two weeks, tasting yet another absolutely supernal GrüVe, my blood commenced to simmerin'. 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.

Obviously you're not going to slash away at all your Chards and Sauv-Blancs and all the other easily saleable wines. But if you are who you claim you are, then you have to resist consigning this remarkable variety to the scrap heap of the previously fashionable. In fact you should increase the presence of GrüVe on your lists, and when someone demands to know "What's with the umlauts?" you can bask in the knowledge you're about to *RAWK* his very world.

**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.

Grüner Veltliner is a damn-near great grape variety. Often while tasting it I wonder how dry white wine can be any better, and then the Rieslings start appearing (you taste Veltliner first in Austria) and you see they have just a *little* more dynamism and even finer flavors. Thus the Veltliner is always priced around 10% below Riesling, which is correct. **THE BEST GRÜNER VELTLINERS ARE THE BEST VALUES IN THE WORLD FOR GREAT WHITE WINE.** I mean big **dry** white wine. And Grüner Veltliner is unique and incomparable. It adds to what we can know about wine.

### 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), shirola (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. Here's what I have. 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 *trés 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 “Niederösterreich”—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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