

Nõ. 2

# toa zine

MAGAZINE FOR &  
FROM WINE LOVERS

## Dear Austrian Wine Lovers

Welcome to the second edition of our Toazine! (We hope you liked the first one!). As usual, the new year is already in full swing. A great deal of the first months of the season we have dedicated to trade fairs – a challenging but important part of the business. Feel free to take a look at how we do it! Yes, this topic is a highly discussed one in the light of the current developments as many fairs are being cancelled or postponed. As all wine professionals and wine lovers, we hope that the situation will get back to normal as soon as possible. Fingers crossed!



Green is the colour of the moment, do you agree? We're not necessarily speaking in terms of politics now but about the focus on sustainable wine growing. The judicious use of cover crops is a big topic for our growers.

We have interviewed Christoph Hoch on his practices, and you can also read a piece on herbs by our "herb witch" Birgit. The famous vineyards of the Wachau are another subject we would like to plunge into with Erich Machherndl & Martin Mittelbach of Tegernseerhof. This is merely an appetizer, find out more by turning the pages...

Enjoy Toazine No. 2!

Yours,  
TOA Team  
(Franz, Birgit, Branko)

## Content

INTROLUDE .....	3
OPINION : UNDER COVER .....	4
PORTRAIT : GRUBER RÖSCHITZ .....	6
TALKING TO : NEIL LIN .....	8
PORTRAIT OF A REGION : WACHAU .....	10
THE HERB WITCH PROJECT .....	12
THE VINEYARD ALPHABET .....	13
PORTRAIT : SABATHI .....	14
VINTAGE : 10 YEARS AFTER – RED EDITION .....	16
PORTRAIT : WEINGUT TRAPL .....	20
FAIR BUSINESS .....	22
OUR PARTNERS .....	26
EVENTS .....	27

Top producers have long since realised that the work in the cellar is no longer the most important part of producing good wine. The real magic (and the lion's share of work) takes place in the vineyard. One secret of success is to let grow more than only the vine...

### COVER CROPS: ESSENTIAL HELPERS

If you take a look at many regions' vineyards you can still see more than one with neat rows of vines and bare soils in between. Tidy and clean - an image that supposedly testifies to good management and is often the exact opposite. For the good producer, cover or vegetal crops have become an important part of the vineyard ecosystem and one of the crucial factors for the quality of their wines. Like many things in life, the management of these cover crops is a mosaic of many considerations and decisions, which require coping with the terroir and specific strategies. Let's take a stroll through these "gardens of wine".

In planting cover crops, grasses, cereals, herbs and legumes are sown and allowed to grow in order to achieve a variety of positive effects. The entire ecosystem (soil, plants, living beings) should benefit from these, because one thing is clear: the focus on the vine (or even grape) alone has no future. The soil is a non-renewable resource and must therefore be preserved for future generations. Which are the main benefits of cover crops for the vineyard ecosystem? They:

- break the grapevine monoculture
- play an important role for the biodiversity in terms of interaction with bacteria and fungi
- offer protection from erosion and aerate the soil
- improve the availability of nutrients which they turn into humus
- at the same time ensure positive competition between vine and cover crop, thus moderate



- excessive growth while improving grape quality
- improve water balance (which can be better absorbed and stored thanks to root systems building tunnels and loosening the soil)
- offer food supply for beneficial insects (via blossoms, biomass) and encourage biodiversity
- prevent soil compaction and provide for a better trafficability (machines, tractors)
- serve as a shield against heat and drought
- in general improve soil vitality and its long term health

The many benefits must have at least some downsides too, as it seems, right? Now, for some growers the competition for water, especially for young plants and in rather dry locations may seem an argument against cover crops. However, such stress can be avoided by seeding the plants mainly before the winter period, by keeping the cover low (flattening or mowing it) or by alternating its use in every second row of vines. The right seed mix is crucial as well.

Cover crops for sure are a complex matter and best practices heavily depend on factors such as climate, respective vineyard location, type and condition of the soil, age of the vines and the wine-grower's goals. We have interviewed Christoph Hoch of the eponymous biodynamic estate in Kremstal's Hollenburg on his approach and practices.

# UNDERCOVER

### Christoph, how do you apply cover crops?

Our vineyards are divided into 4 different cover crop zones in terms of the seed mix. 3 of them depend on the location (is it a rather rich or poor soil, is it extremely calcareous or "simply" calcareous?) and the goal for the respective vineyard (depending on the yield: rather more quantity or rather more quality?). As for the 4th mix, we use it for what we call "soil recovery". Here, the focus is not the grape, but only the soil (providing nutrients, ensuring proper rooting, green mass for creating humus and seeding plants on which also the bacteria and other organisms can spend the winter and simply feel good).

### Which pros and cons do cover crops have in your view?

Frankly, I do not really see cons here. I believe that the soil should never be left open during the entire year! An open soil does not compete with the vine but after being left open for a longer period of time it dries out and loses organisms. Of course, you can open it every now and then (i.e. in order to mobilise nitrogen) but after that plants should be allowed to grow again. Thinking of it, actually the biggest "disadvantage" is the human being taking the wrong decision... (As for the benefits, please see above).

### Which seeds and plants do you use and why?

Well, there are quite a few - for me, the most important thing is a good mix. Let me give you an example for a better understanding.

1) What's the soil I'm dealing with (proportion of loam and limestone)?



2) Which grape variety, especially when it comes to vigor and sensitivity to drought?

3) What do I aim for? Let's say it's Riesling (high vigor and less sensitive to drought) growing on loess soil (rather rich soil and medium content of limestone). I will seed plants with a higher demand for nitrogen and which produce more carbon and I will have them grow until maturity (cereals such as rye and oats). I do this in order to reduce the vigor of the Riesling and therewith the susceptibility for diseases and rot.

4) How is the balance between the plants? Cover crop must not be one-sided since you can't predict the weather for the entire year. Having this in mind, I will not only seed rye but also plants which grow a lot faster and consolidate the soil (i.e. buckwheat) as well as small proportions of blooming plants as a "pasture" for bees in order to encourage biodiversity.

5) Where's the origin of my plants? They should not be too exotic or unusual. There is a reason why certain plants do thrive in our region - and others do not!

### What will the future bring in terms of cover crops in view of climate change?

Naturally, we will have to adapt our approach to the changing conditions. We will have to use other (but still local) plants and pursue other goals, for example break it down at an earlier stage. But let me repeat: the soil should never be left open the whole year long!

## GRUBER RÖSCHITZ – FAMILY TIES

The Weinviertel is the largest wine-growing region in Austria and it is also the region where most Grüner Veltliner is grown. Among the countless wineries you will find every possible structure: large, small, medium, conventional and organic. Grüner Veltliner is omnipresent, no surprise there, but almost all grapes that are processed into wine in Austria thrive in the various soils and climates of the Weinviertel (whose translation, by the way, is “wine district”). A remarkable winery, which on the one hand boasts a considerable size, but which is still managed by one family, is Gruber Rösschitz.



Fig. 1: Gruber Rösschitz © Astrid Bartl

### MODERN FAMILY

The village of Rösschitz is situated on the eastern foothills of the Manhartsberg mountain range and provides ideal conditions for wine-growing – probably the best in the whole Weinviertel region. Blame the soils: primary rock with granite and partly shallow loess topsoil. The crystalline rock soils and the rather cool climate allow for an exciting, fruity, elegant style of wines. Rather warm days, always cool nights, this is what grapes love in order to develop seductive aromatics. It's all about freshness here and the Grubers succeed brilliantly in highlighting this Austrian USP. By the way, the Grubers, who are they? Let's have them introduce themselves:

*Together we can achieve more. We, that are 3 brothers and sisters, pulling together. Maria, Ewald and Christian, each responsible for specific areas and all with the aim of creating authentic wines in our homeland. Whether in the vineyards, in the cellar or in marketing: we share the work and grow together.*

### ORGANIC BY CONVICTION

The Gruber family has been working the many parcels of their winery organically since 2015. They do this out of conviction, not because fashion demands it. The extra work they put in is rewarded with more typicity and character despite lower yields. Give nature free rein, promote the self-healing powers of the vines and preserve the most valuable resource - the soils of their homeland, that is. Nowadays, the organic approach is also invaluable given the more and more challenging conditions caused by climate change. Thanks to their approach, the grapes ripen earlier, form less sugar and alcohol and need less sulphur, plus, cover crops counteract drought periods.

As already mentioned, the family manages a rather large vineyard, with a total of 80 hectares. Not surprisingly, the wine portfolio is also extensive, as such a size also brings with it a variety of soils and conditions. Depending on location, age of the vines and grape variety, they create a colourful, inviting range of great wines. Grüner Veltliner is the boss, but Riesling, Chardonnay and the reds such as Zweigelt, Sankt Laurent and Pinot Noir also have their merits. To introduce all of them here would go beyond the scope, but a stylistic classification will certainly provide some help.

The structure is clear: The entry level wines (à la Grüner Veltliner, Riesling, Gelber Muskateller or the juicy Rosé, whether with the protected origin "Weinviertel DAC" or the addition "Rösschitz") convey carefree drinking pleasure, varietal typicity and refreshing acidity (always important!). With their single vineyard wines, the Grubers are keen to present the different soils. Reipersberg (weathered primary rock), Hundspoint (loess soils) or Mühlberg (granite), they put

their stamp on the wines, no matter if Veltliner, Riesling or Chardonnay. Sankt Laurent and Pinot Noir grow on the Galgenberg (granite with loess topsoil) and highlight the expressive way red wines from the north of Austria can be. Just a few examples among many, because of course, Gruber Rösschitz also produces sparkling wines and sweet wines. And something called Black Vintage. What's that?

The Black Vintage series is something pretty special. It is the Gruber's playground in terms of showing the world of wine what their region is capable of (and why not?). Year after year they select particularly exciting and charismatic wines that are vinified with as little intervention as possible. Black Vintage Pinot Noir, Sankt Laurent, Riesling or Chardonnay, these wines are strictly limited and combine power with finesse. One of a kind, so to say.

### SPRITUS VINOSI GRUBERIALIS

Finally, did you ever wonder what these little creatures on the Gruber Rösschitz labels are supposed to mean? Well, these “wine spirits” are fitting symbols of cooperation and the family's natural approach. They are microorganisms that naturally control pests, break down minerals and boost the fermentation. The Gruber siblings' work provides the ideal environment so they can help them harvest healthy grapes and produce unique wines. Sounds good, doesn't it?



Fig. 2-4: © Weingut Gruber Rösschitz

## A Talk with Neil Lin

Neil Lin and his firm Eurowill are our partners in China/Shanghai. Despite being a (potentially) huge and growing market, it is not always easy to promote Austrian wines here, even more so natural wines. However, Neil is confident the best times are yet to come. We have spoken to him, so let's read what he has to say!

### Neil, how did you start with wine, what was your motivation?

Wine was my very first job when I left school. I studied Law at university but when I was thinking about my career during the final year, I realized that I wanted to look for something more interesting to do. I attended some social activities in Shanghai and discovered that it was wine that opened my mind to a beautiful world. So I decided to start my career in wine.

### China is a huge market. What makes it special in your point of view, which are the challenges and opportunities?

China is a huge market for everything, but in terms of wine, it is still a very tiny market compared to Japan, the US and other countries. China only started to import quality wines in the 90s and this segment has not

gained momentum until after the 2000s. Much later than our neighbor Japan due to a lot of reasons, and especially when it comes to natural wines.

But as you can see, everything grows very fast in China. That's why I can say that the opportunities are here. We are the very first ones to

“WE ARE WORKING ON IT!”

promote natural wines in China. We had gained some experience in tasting and getting to know natural wines a couple of years before we decided to start our own business. Also, we're trying to bring the best products to China because as you know, good products can speak for themselves just because they're good!

The challenges lie in the fact that the market has not been educated to drinking wine properly and wine has definitely NOT been part of the culture in any period of Chinese history. We have to educate the people and convince them to drink wine. This takes a long time. In any case, we do feel comfortable because we can see the quick development here year by year.

### Who are your main customers and how do you reach them?

We have been dealing with wines for over 10 years now and have put an emphasis on natural wines for 3 years already. We do have some good connections. Our main customers are new wine bars, restaurants and bistros as well as distributors outside of Shanghai. Online platforms are another important part, as are private customers. Since I'm very confident in the quality of

our products, we know that good products will attract people much easily than others. Also, we are promoting the natural wine culture (not necessarily hard sales but in sharing the ideas and experiences in natural wines) on our own platform which is really helping us to spread the word.

### Could you tell me your opinion on the acceptance and popularity of Austrian Wines among sommeliers and customers in your area?

Austrian wines have an image of high quality among all sommeliers and customers, but they are not yet very common in the market. Of course, high quality comes with higher prices. It's going to take time and very hard work in order to push Austrian wines even further. We are working on it!

### Is there knowledge and demand for organic or biodynamic wines? And what about alternative wine styles (amphorae, Pet Nat, macerated whites...)?

Of course, there are quite some people who know about organic and biodynamic wines and styles like pet nat or macerated white wines... For us, this is the core part we are focusing on right now. We believe in the people who work in the field on their own. They definitely know the best about their products and they can make things happen. We have chosen natural wines only because they're good, and also because it's a more easy going segment fitting young people's daily lives (nice packaging, good image, drinkability, better for health, etc...).

### Do you see particular trends for the future – how might customer preferences evolve in your point of view?

As I said further above, we can see that there is a trend among people to pay more attention to their daily lifestyle. Nowadays, the first bottle that really makes an impression on young people is a bottle of natural wine!

### Which wines do you prefer personally and with what kind of food?

I prefer wines with drinkability. Drinkability doesn't equal easy. It means that you don't want to put the glass down and just want to enjoy one sip after another. As for the food, I always prefer Chinese or Asian food. And I have another dream: to open a wine bar/bistro that serves Chinese food with natural wines!



Fig. 1: Neil Lin © Neil Lin

## Location, Location, Location

The Wachau is not big when it comes to area under vines. Regarding its perception at home and abroad, however, there is no doubt about the greatness of this Austrian flagship region.

The reasons for this are certainly the region's focus on top notch vineyard locations, the signature grapes of Grüner Veltliner and Riesling and the "trinity" of Steinfeder, Federspiel and Smaragd established by Vinea Wachau. We wanted to know: How important is the focus on location for our partners in the Wachau? Is there a "cooler" climate Wachau? How does climate change affect them? Erich Machherndl from Wösendorf and Martin Mittelbach from the Tegernseerhof in Dürnstein took their time and answered.

**Erich, the Wachau's fame is based on its famous single vineyards. Blessing or curse? Or both?**

In my view, it's a blessing. I like single vineyards and the fact that recently they have been brought to the fore even more. I'm talking about the "romanic" system of putting an emphasis on the origin versus the "germanic" system of highlighting the grape variety. To be honest, I haven't worried too much about potential pros and cons of the single vineyard focus. My single vineyards have always been my main focus and all of them carry a vineyard designation - except for the "Pulp Fiction" wines (where I'm not allowed to state a vineyard name and which I market as "Landweine"). I would not be opposed to indicating the origin of these wines as well, I have to admit.

**Your vineyards are located more towards the western part of the Wachau, which is said to have a cooler climate. What's your take on this and the wine grower's influence on the style of wines?**

To be precise, my vineyards are located exactly in the middle of the region, in the moderate part of Wachau, i.e.

it is not as hot as in Dürnstein (in the east) and less prone to late frosts and hail as in the Spitzer Graben (in the west). A mix would be nice, let's say 75 % around Wösendorf where our winery is located and 25 % in Spitzer Graben. But then again, I'd lose a lot of time driving around!

Jokes aside - working organically or biodyn, I think it would be challenging to cultivate vineyards that are too far apart and with completely different rainfall conditions. If you're looking for a cooler stylistic, you'll find it more and more in vineyards with a higher altitude - in my case in Kollmitz, Postolern or Höll; but there are also other examples like Steinertal, Kalkofen, etc... You cannot deny there's a big influence by the wine grower's philosophy. We are trying to find a strategy for the hot



vintages and this is obviously reflected in the wine. I work mainly with tannin - like it or not. I do like it.

**Speaking about climate change – how does it affect you?**

I have noticed that our harvesting strategy has changed dramatically in recent years (at which point of time do I pick the grapes in a specific vineyard). For example, I used to pick the Riesling Smaragd from my steep vineyard Kollmütz during the last third of the harvest, now we often pick it in the second week already!

**Your portfolio not only comprises Veltliner and Riesling but also varieties like Pinot Gris, Zweigelt or Syrah. What about the typicity of vineyard sites for those?**

The typicity of a vineyard location is a hot topic, yes. However, since hardly anyone vinifies his wines like I do, I can't make comparisons to other winemakers/wines. For me it's a mix of the vineyard's signature and the winemaker's one. But you can easily detect it by tasting wines from locations where I grow several varieties - like Postolern (with Grüner Veltliner and Pinot Gris) or Kollmitz (with Riesling and Pinot Blanc)!

**Martin, most of your vineyards are located around Loiben/Dürnstein. How come?**

The Tegernseerhof (a Bavarian monastery) was actually the first estate in this part of the Wachau. After the secularization in 1803, our family came into possession of these vineyards, which is why our core property is located here. In former times, we used to have land in Joching as well and a couple of years ago we were able to lease these vineyards again.

**Do you also have sites in the Wachau "far west", in the Spitzer Graben?**

Actually, we do have a project there with a friend (and a different label), a Neuburger in the site Elsarner Brandstatt. In terms of Wachau, that is already quite far away from our home.

**What is your opinion on the climatic differences between the East and West of the Wachau region?**

As a basic rule of thumb, it is of course safe to say that it's cooler in the west and grapes ripen at a later point of time. Furthermore, precipitation is higher there. Naturally, this implicates advantages and disadvantages. In some years, the sites in the western part do not reach a satisfying ripeness at all! In the Loiben area, it is definitely warmer and drier, with a stronger Pannonian influence. However, also here, sites in higher altitudes or those located in basins can be pretty cool.

**How does climate change affect you? For example, isn't it increasingly difficult to harvest Steinfeder?**

I know that "cool" is very much in vogue at the moment, it's what everyone wants to hear now, especially when the language comes up on climate change. However, in our part of the region the only really warm sites can be found in the middle and lower part of the Loibenberg. I believe that "warm versus cool" very much depends on the handling by the wine grower. It's a bad idea to over-simplify things. The decisive factors are the understanding of vine growth, canopy management and,



of course, the processing of the grapes. Ripeness can certainly be delayed by careful vineyard management.

As for the Steinfeder, I do not believe that's true! We produce Steinfeder on a yearly basis. It has become something of an art but not by blending overripe and unripe grapes in order to achieve the required alcohol level. What we do, is to harvest Federspiel, after that Steinfeder and then again Federspiel! Thanks to our diverse vineyard sites and the levels of ripeness they reach at different periods, we do have room for

manoeuvre. You simply have to know which grapes are to be harvested at which point of time.

**What's your take on the upcoming designation of origin „Wachau DAC“?**

Honestly, I love it! For us, little is going to change. I think it's good that by establishing this protection of origin, the core values of the Wachau will be given a solid foundation. Wachau will remain Wachau and the DAC concept includes every aspect of the region. As for the single vineyard wines (like e.g. "Kellerberg"), they'll have to be made from Grüner Veltliner and Riesling. I'm sure that single vineyard labelling for Pinot Blanc or Chardonnay is not really necessary anyway in the Wachau. At least not for export markets!

\* As from vintage 2020, the protected designation of origin, DAC (Districtus Austriae Controllatus) is also planned (although not signed yet by lawmakers) for the Wachau, not as a replacement but in addition to the established Steinfeder Federspiel-Smaragd classification. As in other DAC-regions, the concept will be based on the pyramid system of single vineyard

wines – village wines – regional wines. Besides Grüner Veltliner and Riesling, also other varieties planted in the Wachau for a long time (Pinot Blanc, Pinot Gris, Chardonnay, Neuburger, Muskateller, Sauvignon Blanc, Traminer, Pinot Noir, St. Laurent and Zweigelt) will be allowed to carry "Wachau DAC". What's more: hand picking will be a *conditio sine qua non!*

## The Herb Witch Project

Birgit is our office manager and a driving force behind numerous TOA operations. Apart from that she is deeply engaged with plants and herbs. She observes the annual cycle and thinks a lot about the essential processes and cycles in nature. In our „Herb Witch Project“ she shares her thoughts and impressions.

### MY DIALOGUE WITH THE WABI SABI PLANT BEINGS

It is a cold, wet and foggy winter day at the beginning of January. We meet for gentle pruning in Franz' Wabi Sabi vineyard in Dürnstein in the Wachau.

Veils of mist are passing through the terraced vineyards, drifting over the nearby riverbed of the Danube. They prevent me from having my view wander into the distance and marvel at the magnificent landscape. The dense fog does not allow for any distractions. Due to the blurred field of vision, I shift my focus to the immediate, the essential of the moment.

While the others are already busy cutting and working, I absorb the place and its plants. I walk through the rows of vines and pay attention; I appreciate the place and I feel gratitude.

I'm grateful for the abundance this vineyard has given us over the past year. Grateful and respectful for the place and this very moment in time, for what is allowed to be. Retreat. Above ground, everything is at rest now. Underground, already initiated

by the light impulse of the winter solstice in December, the plant world is preparing for its new life cycle within the upcoming annual cycle. Inside the earth, invisible to the seeing eye, processes of healing and renewal are taking place at this very moment. Once these changes have been completed on the inside, in the essence of things, they can emerge slowly and manifest. Grateful for what is going to be, I pause, I listen to the silence and I feel the peace on the outside.

I focus on the perception of the vineyard and its vitality on the inside and outside and I connect with the four elements. The power of the earth, supporting and uplifting. The power of water, pure and liberating. The power of the air, relieving and attentive. The power of fire, warm and transforming. I observe calmly and invite the nature beings to show themselves, to interact. In this Wabi Sabi vineyard I see them reveal an extraordinary variety of medicinal herbs. It literally transforms into an herbal spiritual space. I am delighted and grateful towards the nature beings for these impressions of mugwort, comfrey and nettle, mullein and dandelion, yarrow, ribwort and wormwood, to name but a few.

In the end I see about 20 different herbs, in the middle of winter. Overwhelmed by this abundance, I am now starting to connect with the plants. I'm studying their characteristics, their essence, their individual signatures. I am wondering: why do certain plants occur naturally in this particular vineyard? What exactly do these medicinal herbs point towards? What is their significance for the soil, the cultivation of the soil, the use of biodynamic preparations, the prevailing (micro)climate, the symbiosis with the vines and living beings, and much more? Above all, I wonder how we can benefit from these plants and their beings, from this natural herbal pharmacy in a meaningful way in order to stay healthy?

Guided by the rhythm of the annual cycle, by the nature beings and their incessant transformation, everything remains exciting and thrilling. Full of joy, I am looking forward to accompanying this vineyard through the year and to finding answers to my questions, in order to increase my knowledge and to deal with further topics.

And for those who were wondering ... of course I did help pruning the vines ;-)!

Fig. 1: © Branko Mucina

## The vineyard alphabet

Great wines are born in great vineyards. Origin is key: we want to know where a product comes from, how it is made and who did it. Since centuries, winegrowers have studied their land and have identified the best plots for their fruit. It is no coincidence that many icon wines are recognizable not only by their producer but by their vineyard name – think of Burgundy, think of Piemonte and yes, of course, think of Austria. In our vineyard alphabet we would like to introduce to you the vineyards of the TOA wine partners. Step by step, letter by letter.



E - EXLBERG

“Exlberg” is a vineyard a part of which is also cultivated by renown biodynamic grower Karl Fritsch based in Oberstockstall, in the Wagram region of Lower Austria. The site is warm and aerated, lies on the typical loess soils and is thus perfectly suited for red grapes. Karl vinifies a fruit driven, medium bodied and super charming **Pinot Noir Exlberg** that gives unanimous proof that Wagram is also a land for cool reds!

Fig. 1: © Weingut Fritsch



F - FEUERSTEIG (FORMERLY KNOWN AS FEUERSTEIG)

If you're looking for outstanding Sankt Laurent, this is the place. („Feiersteig“ means something like „fire protection belt – „Feier“ in this case being a dialect expression for “Feuer”). Erwin Tinhof's **Sankt Laurent Feuersteig** grows on dry brown earth rich in limestone and on sandy subsoils, the vines are up to 56 years old. This outstanding red wine combines power with low alcohol, dark forest fruit, prunes and finely polished tannins.

Fig. 2: © Weingut Tinhof



G - GALGENBERG

We stay with the Pinot family, in fact the “Galgenberg” vineyard (meaning “gallows hill”, a rather gloomy name) yields both “cousins”, **Pinot noir** and **Sankt Laurent**, courtesy of the Gruber family from Röschtitz in Weinviertel. With an altitude of some 300 m, loess soils and limited yields, both wines share similar character: they're full of red and dark berry fruit, alluring aromatics and a lively acidity – beautiful examples of cool climate, cool reds.

Fig. 3: © Weingut Gruber Röschtitz



## Hannes Sabathi : brilliant expressions of Styria

Do Styrian Sauvignon blanc wines have a one of a kind taste profile? Many wine lovers would gladly agree. What's more, Styrian white wines have not only gained in reputation in the last decades but have also conquered the wine lists of many restaurants all over the world. So there must be something to this extraordinary beautiful landscape and the wines it yields. Is it the soils? The climate? The grapes? Or is it the wine grower? Speaking of, Hannes Sabathi lives and works on the "Kranachberg" near Gamlitz in the breath-taking wine growing region of Southern Styria. Here, the conditions for extraordinary wines are unique, but would you have thought otherwise? In Austrian winelands, the hills and slopes of Styria are unmatched in altitude and steepness thus require dedicated manual work. As for the climate, it is warm and sunny (see the proximity to the Mediterranean), pretty humid and those warm days are followed by cool nights. Combine all of this and you'll see

an extended vegetation period ensuring slow maturing of the (mainly) white grapes. Now, what one makes of this is far from automatic - cultivation methods, treatments, picking periods and vinification being part of the terroir. The human decision factor, here we go.

### I GOT ROOTS

The most important thing for me is to make authentic, earth-driven wines that may well have rough edges, but which radiate personality. This style may not be in line with the Styrian mainstream and not everyone will like it, but it challenges the consumer to deal with the wines more intensively.

Says Hannes. He has taken responsibility for the family estate (in possession since 1860) in 2005 and has since developed his very own style of cultivating the vineyards and vinifying his wines. As for any great wine estate, the sites and soils

are the backbone, the ground on which everything is built. The roots depicted on the labels, they do have a meaning. The Sabathi family is proud to possess parcels in some of the region's most extraordinary hills (see "-berg" as an ending to almost every vineyard name).

There's Kranachberg for example, with its permeable, sandy gravel soils. They convey freshness and salty minerality. Wines from this site (such as Sauvignon Blanc, Weißburgunder & Morillon Kranachberg) are always characterized by a firm yet elegant structure and noble aromas. In extraordinary years, selected grape material from this vineyard is destined for the Sauvignon Blanc and Morillon Reserve wines. They excel with their unmistakable minerality and huge potential – do not drink them too early!

The south facing Jägerberg lies at an altitude of around 350 metres above sea level and is an ideal location for Burgundy varieties thanks to its

Fig. 1: © Stefan Robitsch

sandy-clay structure and calcareous soil. Pinot Gris (see Grauburgunder Jägerberg), Morillon (a synonym for Chardonnay) and Pinot Blanc grow here, developing warm, floral fruit aromas and a tightly structured, mineral palate.

Southern Styria – like other appellations in Austria - uses the "Burgundian-style" pyramid which classifies wines following their origin. The single vineyard wines are (naturally) on top, next come the "Ortsweine" i.e. "village" wines. Whereas the single vineyard gems represent the purest expression of Sabathi's best sites, the Gamlitz range shows the diversity and typicality of the various vineyards surrounding this village. With Sauvignon Blanc, Chardonnay or Gelber Muskateller, all carrying the suffix "Gamlitz", you'll taste a perfect interpretation of the region - Sabathi style! Fruit driven but structured, at all times supported by great acidity.

Südsteiermark on the label forms the generic base of the pyramid and at Sabathi, this means straight forward light-footed wines with great freshness, lots of fruit character and joyful drinking. Welschriesling, Weißburgunder, Sauvignon or Scheurebe, there is a wine for everyone.

Hannes is an openminded man who likes to explore new territories and is not afraid of alternative approaches. Skin fermented Muskateller or Sauvignon blanc vinified in amphorae show a different yet fascinating face of region, grapes and terroir. Worth trying, no doubt!



So what about the distinctiveness of Styrian wines compared to Sancerre or New Zealand and their common signature variety Sauvignon blanc? For sure, much of the answer depends on individual approaches. For Sabathi, it is the salty, mineral structure that stands out. The fruit character is more subtle than for example in New Zealand, not as overtly exotic but gripping at the same time. The acidity is well integrated, as is the use of oak for the signature wines. All in all, it's the inherent elegance and noblesse that really make a difference. Sabathi and Südsteiermark, they belong on the world wine map for a reason...



Fig. 2-4: © Weingut Hannes Sabathi | Fig. 5: © Stefan Robitsch

# 10 years after

## Red Edition

### VINTAGE REPORT 2009

For decades, the years ending with 9's have been regarded as great vintages in Austria (probably by chance) and 2009 was no exception. After a sufficiently humid winter and spring, April was extremely warm, followed by an unusually wet May. The summer had it all. Hail, thunderstorms, torrential rain and short periods of heat reduced yields and required a lot of work in the vineyards. Luckily, this summer of extremes gave way to a comforting warm autumn. From September till October, the weather was warm and sunny and cool nights provided for perfect ripening. Once again, 2009 kept the promise of the legendary 9.

History is able to teach us invaluable things. Understanding what has happened and why things have turned out they way they did helps us deal better with present challenges. This applies to wine in particular since it is a living product. We have tasted a wine in its youth and see it develop over time. The character changes, the fruit might fade, tannins get softer, tertiary aromas come up. Was it a great year or a lesser vintage? How does the wine show 5 years, 10 years, 20 (or even more) years later? Is this (single) vineyard capable of consistently yielding age-worthy wines? How did the vinification back then influence the profile?

We know very well that regions like Bordeaux, Burgundy or Piemonte are famous for their mature masterpieces. But what about Austria? To be fair, those bodybuilder blends from the late 90ties (think new barriques, think lot of extraction) did not fulfil the hopes of some to compete with French Grand Crus. However, good producers have learned their lessons and we know now: the potential is there. Wines made from the best grape material and by highlighting elegance and structure are nowadays at eye level with other iconic regions. This is especially (yet not exclusively) true for Blaufränkisch, the unmistakable No. 1 when it comes to quality and longevity. Let us take a look at the not too distant but almost perfect vintage 2009. Some bottles may still be available and they will for sure live for another 10 years – patience will be rewarded.

### REINHOLD KRUTZLER PERWOLFF 2009

In the last Toazine we have presented the iconic Perwolff on the occasion of its 25th anniversary. Being a wine with great ageing potential, there's no surprise also 2009 is among the best. 2009 was a superb vintage, the grapes were able to ripen perfectly thanks to a beautiful autumn, claims Reinhold Krutzler from Southern Burgenland's Eisenberg region. Perwolff is based on the top Blaufränkisch grapes from Deutsch Schützen and Eisenberg vineyards and is aged in barriques and 500-liter barrels. Having changed the "recipe" to 100% Blaufränkisch as from the 2012 vintage, the 2009 still contained a little portion of Cabernet Sauvignon. The wine shows beautifully now, showcasing black berries, sweet spice, it is juicy, elegant and boasts a tight texture with ripe acidity. A delicate and harmonious Perwolff, Reinhold maintains.



### ERWIN TINHOF BLAUFRÄNKISCH GLORIETTE 2009

A great terroir for Blaufränkisch is also the Leithagebirge west of Lake Neusiedl. The Erwin Tinhof estate cultivates top sites directly in the region's capital Eisenstadt and has been doing so organically for several years. One of these sites is called "Gloriette" and is planted with up to 60-years-old Blaufränkisch vines. The soil is pure shell limestone with little humus cover. Gloriette is harvested by hand, fermented spontaneously in open vats and matured for 24 months in barriques, 30% of which are new, the rest up to 5 years old. 2009 was also a picture-perfect year for Tinhof, with a long vegetation period and the bespoke Indian summer, which delivered ripe and healthy grapes. How does the wine taste today? Dark ruby red, fine spices, noble wood, fresh structure. A very fine and typical Blaufränkisch with great length and tension, it combines elegance with power, says Erwin Tinhof.

**JOHANNES TRAPL  
BLAUFRÄNKISCH  
SPITZERBERG 2009**

Moving up from south to north, we leave Burgenland and arrive in Carnuntum. Here, at the last extension of the Little Carpathians, right at the border to Slovakia lies the Spitzerberg (also see our portrait on the grower and this exceptional site on page XY). The Spitzerberg probably yields one of the most delicate, almost Pinot-like Blaufränkisch examples – at least when taken care of by quality freak Johannes Trapl. The 2009 edition has been harvested on October 3 and 100 % foot stomped (a not so common but very gentle way of extracting colour and tannins), 5% of the grapes having been left as whole bunches. After 6-9 days of maceration the grapes have been pressed and transferred into 450 and 500-liter barrels (30% new). The wine was bottled in May 2011. Blaufränkisch Spitzerberg always needs a couple of years to open up, it is very tight in its youth, says Johannes Trapl. Thus, 2009 is built to last, still showing lots of red fruits, great acidity and finely grained tannins.



**GRUBER RÖSCHITZ  
CUVÉE ROYALE 2009**

Yes, single varietal Blaufränkisch accounts for some of the most acclaimed wines from Austria. However, it's not only about the variety but also about the wine-growers skills and passion. Plus, cooler regions such as Weinviertel can also deliver age-worthy reds given the fact that warm vintages more and more provide for good conditions and ripe grapes. Family Gruber in Röschitz has believed in the potential of their reds for a long time and their Cuvée Royale 2009 is a beautiful example for that. In Weinviertel, the 2009 vintage was pretty similar to the rest of the wine growing regions in terms of challenging weather in spring and summer and its happy ending in autumn. The Cuvée Royale is a blend of Zweigelt and Merlot, both from single vineyard Galgenberg (loess and loam). After meticulous selection the wine was vinified and aged in barriques, 15 months for the 2009. How do the Grubers like it? It is surprisingly youthful and vivid, very elegant and fruit driven (sour cherries, red currants) there is no sign of dried fruits. Add great acidity to the mix and here you go - a wonderfully matured cool climate red!

Fig. 3: © Weingut Trapl | Fig. 4: © Weingut Gruber Röschitz



Fig. 5: © Branko Mucina

## Johannes Trapl – courage pays off

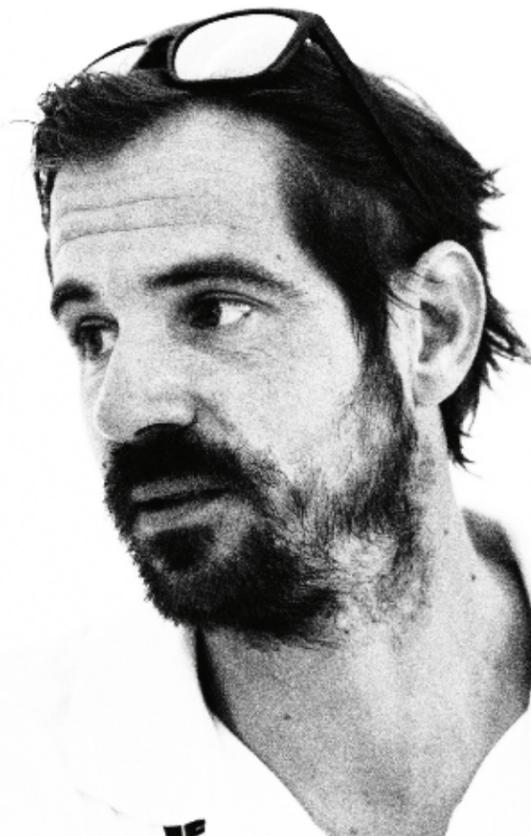
**Stixneusiedl. A name that rings a bell, doesn't it? Ok, not so much (it's a village, fyi). Let's try Carnuntum, the region he lives in. Better? For people who know the Austrian wine landscape in depth, for the real wine pro's, probably yes. One reason for this is Johannes Trapl. How come?**

The small Carnuntum region (named after an old Roman settlement) extends east of Vienna up to the border with Slovakia. The vineyards are situated south of the Danube over three hilly landscapes: the Leithagebirge, the Arbesthaler Hügelland and the Hainburger Berge. In Stixneusiedl, you'll find heavy soils of loam and loess, as well as sandy and gravelly soils. A Pannonian climate with hot summers and cold winters, the nearby Danube and Lake Neusiedl allow the grapes to ripen fully. Thus, in principle, the conditions for great wines could hardly be better...

Johannes Trapl started as a winemaker from scratch. He was a young man, when his father handed over the business to him in the early 2000s but he gave him the freedom to do whatever he wanted - provided he took the consequences. A first courageous step in Johannes' wine CV. He subsequently started to build up the formerly miniscule winery step by step. Whilst acquiring additional plots of land his mindset evolved around one question: how could he show a different - truly authentic - face of the region?

To understand the audacity of this step, one needs to know what the Carnuntum region stands for. Although white and red grapes share roughly equal parts of vines planted, the region is more likely to be seen as a red wine region. Zweigelt is the king, usually picked as ripe as possible and vinified to power wines, along with Zweigelt-based cuvées, them too bragging with their muscles. Biological farming used to be an alien

concept in the region until recently (despite mostly low occurrence of fungal diseases), not to mention biodynamic approaches. Someone who harvested weeks before the others and whose wines barely exceed 12.5% alc. had to be considered a stranger, eyed suspiciously, often criticized.



### AGAINST ALL ODDS

Johannes Trapl wondered: what is typical of my region? How should white wines from Carnuntum taste? Which red grapes are true representatives of my homeland? What is it about the unusual, hardly known terroir of the Spitzerberg? And how can I treat the top variety of Blaufränkisch so that it can show an individual image of Carnuntum - and not taste like hundreds of other super-ripe specimens that have been so fashionable over the last 20 years? The answer lies - as always - in the vineyard.

Johannes has been cultivating his vineyards organically since 2010, the entire estate having been certified since 2016. In 2018 the Demeter logo has been added the labels. It is the vineyard which enables the desired style: vines in natural balance, healthy soils and biodiversity allow for earlier harvest of already ripe grapes, which produce elegant, exciting wines with digestible alcohol levels. The cellar work is merely the final consequence, thousands of hours of work have to be done outside. It took time and a lot of effort, but this is what Johannes wanted.

### FINE WINES INDEED

There is a central ideal that runs through all wines made by Trapl: all of them are lean, precise and light-footed. The differences lie, obviously, in the respective grape variety and its ageing, the emphasis being more or less on fruit and structure. Palpable acidity is a must, it is the backbone of all wines. To start with, the "classic" Grüner Veltliner, Zweigelt

and Rosé are mostly vinified in steel, they convey drinking pleasure without being boring for a second.

Carnuntum white and Carnuntum red carry their name for a reason. They combine the typical grape varieties in the respective wine colour (Grüner, Pinot blanc and Welschriesling for the white as well as Zweigelt, Blaufränkisch and Sankt Laurent for the red), are aged for an extended period of time and show more complexity.



In the past, Trapl wines also carried the addition Reserve on the label. Today they no longer do so, since "Reserve" suggests that other wines are "smaller". Hence, Johannes is more concerned with their typicity than power, it's their origin that matters. Blaufränkisch Prellenkirchen already shows the winegrower's great enthusiasm for this exceptional grape variety - firm, lively, cool fruit and fine tannins. Sankt Laurent is another favourite, because this Diva in the vineyard demands a lot. Pinot-like in structure, darker in fruit,

glistening acidity. Only experts can do Sankt Laurent!

When it comes to vinification, Johannes relies on different vessels: stainless steel tanks, used barrels (most of them of 500 litres) and a whole range of amphorae. All ageing methods and almost all grape varieties come together in the fascinating Rosé Uni6. Perhaps the only concept wine in the house, but what a Rosé! The Karpatenschiefer, on the other hand, is a Grüner Veltliner, which was matured in amphorae to show the different, distinctive facets of this all-Austrian grape.

### FINALLY : THE SPITZERBERG!

The Spitzerberg is the last extension of the Little Carpathians reaching in from Slovakia. Its barren, extremely dry limestone soils with traces of schist carry very old Blaufränkisch vines and give birth to an extraordinary wine (Blaufränkisch Ried Spitzerberg) whose character is pretty unique in Austria. How does it taste? It's all about delicacy, structure and a long life. Red fruit elegance meets high tannins and

acidity, exceptional length and subtle power. You will have to wait a couple of years so it can reveal its full potential, yes. But Johannes did not give up either, do you remember?

## Fair Business

Wine fairs are part of the business just like acidity is part of wine. They can be challenging, but you can't do without them. Meticulous preparation, concentration and focus during the fair as well as precise post-processing are the decisive factors for a successful fair.



### ALL OVER THE WORLD

TOA and its partners have been participating in the most important international and national trade fairs for many years. Since 2002, we and our partners have been participating in the (at least to this day) most important wine fair in the world, the Prowein in Düsseldorf. Also at Vinexpo (formerly taking place in Bordeaux, now in Paris) you can regularly find a TOA stand and the MillésimeBio in Southern France's Montpellier is anyway part of the fixed program for the organically certified wineries. Each fair has its own characteristics and challenges. The sheer size of Prowein, for example, with its thousands of exhibitors and even more visitors is particularly challenging. Add to the mix astronomic prices and a crowded city. The industry professionals know what we're talking about. Yet, everybody's there: buyers, exhibitors, important contacts. With good planning, the big fairs do make sense!

### GOALS

Of course, it is always great to meet a new promising partner at the given fair. Someone you can imagine working together in the future – in the best case over many years and building on mutual trust. However, the acquisition of new partners should - from our point of view - never be the only goal you're looking for. Maintaining existing contacts is no less important. Business partners and winemakers exchange information about new developments, taste the current vintages and discuss strategies. More than often it is simply about saying hello, of showing that one is on the spot, at the pulse of time.

For the TOA partner wineries, 2020 has already been a busy year when it comes to trade fairs. MillésimeBio in January in Montpellier and Vinexpo Paris in mid-February. In even years, however, it is also time to represent "at home". That's exactly what we will be doing at the largest Austrian

wine fair VieVinum from 6 to 8 June at the Hofburg in Vienna. It will once again be an honour to welcome and support our partners in Austria's capital! Yes, we too complain about the fair madness from time to time. But we can't imagine life without it!

Now, the Prowein in Germany has just been postponed due to the corona virus. In light of these developments, it will be interesting to see how the wine fair business is going to react – and to continue. It is probably way too early for any serious assessment. As Austrians, we hope that the VieVinum will take place as planned. However, should wine fairs continue to be postponed or cancelled in the foreseeable future, we would like to offer you at least a little virtual wine fair kind of compensation. Without any claim to completeness, we present a couple of beautiful wines made by TOA winegrowers. Have a look at new releases and current vintages!



**KARL FRITSCH  
ROTER VELTLINER  
UNFILTRIERT 2018**

Luckily, Karl also grows the Wagram flagship Roter Veltliner. This unfiltered beauty (spicy, tangy, great length) is the perfect result of great grower + great variety.



**MICHAEL GINDL  
FLORA 2019**

Available as from May, the fragrant (Riesling, Scheurebe, Muskateller) representative of the Gindl House of Lords (ok, wines) is not going to disappoint you in its 2019 edition. Of course not!



**CHRISTOPH HOCH  
GRÜNER VELTLINER  
HOLLENBURGER NV**

Christoph's wines are non-vintage but you must absolutely try this latest edition of the Grüner. The blending of younger and reserve lots really does make sense!



**WINZERHOF HOCH  
PETER & PAUL RED 2018**

Cool climate reds rightfully enjoy increased popularity. This fruit driven, super fresh example is a blend of stainless steel and large oak. 2 philosophies, one joy.



**HOCHDEUTSCH WEIN  
MEA ELDERFLOWER**

You fancy herbs? You fancy wine? There is no way around Julie's extraordinary botanical sparkling (a marriage of biodyn elderflower tea, biodyn wine and refreshing fizzle).



**REINHOLD KRUTZLER  
WELSCHRIESLING 2019**

Reinhold is a master of Blaufränkisch, no doubt. His spicy and refreshing Welschriesling will show you why Südburgenland has always been a region for great whites too!



**ERICH MACHHERNDL**  
PULP FICTION  
VI 2018

Your outside-the-box Rosé from Wachau: 7 parts Syrah, 1 part Zweigelt, gentle pressing, no filtration, no added sulphites. Rose hip, red currant - embrace the dark side of Rosé.



**CLAUS PREISINGER**  
KALKUNDKIESEL  
ROT 2018

Low alc., low intervention, low sulphites. High pleasure, high esteem. That's what Claus' reds convey and that's what we love!



**RUDI RABL**  
PINOT NOIR  
ALTE REBEN 2016

Kamptal and Rudi, they can also do Pinot. Old vines, judicious use of oak and sufficient time to mature, that's the recipe. A savoury, spicy and elegant red, that's the result.



**TEGERNSEERHOF**  
RIESLING SMARAGD RIED  
STEINERTAL 2018

One of Martin Mittelbach's coolest sites and we're not speaking of climate only. A young, powerful Riesling, with racy acidity, vibrant fruit and plenty of life ahead!



**ERWIN TINHOF**  
NEUBURGER  
EISENSTADT 2018

Looking for an alternative to Grüner and Riesling? Then try this extremely drinkable, native grape. You can't go wrong with Neuburger made by Tinhof!



**JOHANNES TRAPL**  
SANKT LAURENT 2018

This masterpiece proves 2 things: concentration of flavour does not need high alcohol. And: Sankt Laurent is worth fighting for. Thank you, Mr. Trapl!



**GRUBER RÖSCHITZ**  
GRÜNER VELTLINER  
SEKT RESERVE 2016

Sekt can be easy and light, ok. Family Gruber's 2016 Reserve strives for greater things: body, creamy texture and ripe fruit. Get some food and fill your glasses!



**HANNES SABATHI**  
GRAUBURGUNDER  
JÄGERBERG 2018

This single vineyard top notch Grauburgunder is a true First Growth (the 2018 as from May). Dried herbs, elegant and soft yet with fascinating structure and potential for many years.



**THOMAS STRAKA**  
STRATOS WEISS 2018

Tom is our main expert on the ancient grape of Welschriesling. In this highly quaffable blend, it is married to Chardonnay and Riesling. Authentic – just like the wine grower!



**WACHTER-WIESLER**  
BLAUFRÄNKISCH  
DEUTSCH-SCHÜTZEN 2017

One of the new „village" (so to say) Blaufränkisch at Wachter-Wiesler. 24 months in big oak, juicy, down to earth, unfiltered. No make-up. This is how we roll!



**JOHANNES ZILLINGER**  
GRÜNER VELTLINER  
NUMEN 2018

If Veltliner grapes could speak, they would ask for Johannes' care, fermentation in amphorae and extensive time in old acacia barrels. And they would want to end up as Numen.

OUR PARTNERS



CLAUS PREISINGER



WEIN VOM LEITHABERG



Christoph Hoch  
Winzer aus Hollenburg s.d. Donau



WEINGUT  
FRITSCH



PEPP



Johannes  
Traschl



SCHLOSS MAISSAU  
Manbartsberg Austria



EVENTS

## Upcoming Events

### TOA @ VIEVINUM

6 – 8 June 2020 in Vienna, Austria  
[www.vievinum.at](http://www.vievinum.at)

### TOA @ VINEXPO HONGKONG

8 – 10 July 2020 in Hongkong  
[www.vinexpohongkong.com](http://www.vinexpohongkong.com)



admin office  
MD Franz Hofstätter  
1020 Wien – Austria  
Palais Rohan, Praterstrasse 38 / 30  
Tel. +43 664 4626199  
[toa@live.at](mailto:toa@live.at)

working & visitors office  
toa – tastes of austria  
1020 Wien – Austria  
Palais Rohan, Praterstrasse 38 / 30  
Tel. +43 664 4541754  
[toanews@live.at](mailto:toanews@live.at)

