

Weingut Machherndl

New Wave Wachau





My name is Erich Machherndl and I want to share my enthusiasm for wine with you. My parents wanted me to attend the Federal College and Research Institute for Viticulture and Pomology in Klosterneuburg. Because I was born in 1972, this would have meant that I would have started there in 1986. Unfortunately, that was the year following the glycol-scandal and winegrowing in Austria didn't seem to offer bright prospects for the future. In addition to that, I knew what the job of a vintner meant for my parents: lots of work and little spare time. All I knew at the time was that I didn't want to become a vintner. The guideline was: learn smart!

Return of the Prodigal Son

I finished a technical high school for communications, engineering and electronics with a focus on medical engineering. I immediately received attractive job offers and that's what I did for 8 years. I travelled a lot and earned good money; but one day I started to help my parents at the winery on weekends...

I cannot name a specific reason why I returned home. There was nothing like an arousal. Maybe I wanted to pay back my parents for always supporting me. When my father turned 60, he passed the winery to me with the words, "You can do whatever you want with it. Carry on, sell it or lease it out." For the subsequent 4 years I sold medical engineering equipment during the week and worked at the winery on evenings and weekends. Then came time to make a decision. And not for one second have I felt any regret.

Freedom

Today I am sure that had I begun the Federal Viticulture College in Klosterneuburg, it would have been a tortuous duty, because I felt no desire to become a winegrower. I eventually decided of my own free will. I always had a different perspective of winegrowing. I am free to do as I wish and my winery is small enough to allow me to make wines according to my personal taste. Fortunately, I am able to find enough like-minded people who buy them.

THE STYLE OF THE WINES

I didn't have to change the style, because I always loved the wines my father made. I have simply refined them. The Machherndl-style has always been pointedly dry. I think my father's wines were always underestimated. Maybe I have a kind of incentive to do him justice. The wines he made were also always extremely long-lived. Wines from the early 1980s still appear young and fruit-driven. This was true despite the fact that he did not work according to the accepted opinions of how to make wines with a long shelf life. All the wines he made were ready for bottling on New Year's Eve. That means there must be other criteria for a wine with ageing potential, things like the vineyards, the climate, how the vines are cultivated and the intrinsic quality of the wines themselves.

It seems to me that the medium-bodied Federspiel® wines have a longer shelf-life than the Smaragd® wines, which are often harvested over-ripe. For me the Federspiel® wines offer at least as good a reflection of the Wachau terroir. To be honest though, today we usually don't see the amount of acidity that was the norm in those days. Today's Federspiel® wines are the Smaragd® wines of former times.

For me, a really good wine should never be fat, but rather filigree, precise, and very vibrant on the palate.

WACHAU

Wine has been cultivated in the narrow part of the Danube River valley called “Wachau” since Roman times. To make cultivation possible on these steep slopes, they have been terraced for over 1000 years. To this day that continues to mean plenty of manual labour, especially when meeting the challenges of organic winegrowing. The vineyards rise from the shores of the river at about 200 metres above sea level to 450 metres. The soils are comprised of weathered metamorphic rock in the terraces with occasional loess deposits. Continental climate extends into the Wachau from the east. Next to the moderating effects of the river and the constant air circulation it creates, the cool katabatic winds that sweep down from the forested peaks are the secrets to the spicy elegance of Wachau wines. The regional winemakers’ association, Vinea Wachau, controls the strict regulations of its Codex Wachau, which guarantees the origin and purity of our wines. Our winery is a proud member of the Vinea Wachau and we make new interpretations of the traditional style of the wines – New Wave Wachau. Our common goal in the Wachau is to create elegant, spicy wines with distinct character of origin and drinking pleasure.

The Wachau is an extremely dry area, between 380 and 450 litres of rainfall per square metre annually. This is sometimes difficult for Grüner Veltliner, because it needs a certain volume. I only irrigate about half of my vineyards. We cannot simply borrow methods and concepts from other winegrowing areas in the south and transfer them to our sites and varieties. We have to find our own ways based on the experience of our ancestors.

To offer wine lovers orientation for our wines, the Vinea Wachau created three registered trademarks thirty years ago. They have been so successful that their names are even often used to verbally describe wine styles outside the Wachau area, but they are only genuine and protected for Wachau wines!

Steinfeder®: Fruity charm and a stipulated maximum alcohol content of 11.5% by volume characterise the lightest style of top Vinea Wachau wines called Steinfeder®. The name itself refers to the typical “Steinfeder” grass (*Stipa pennata*), a grass that grows near the vines in the Wachau's terraced vineyards. It is feather-light and fragrant, just like the wine named after it.

Federspiel®: A pronounced and nuanced character distinguishes this classic, dry wine. Federspiel® wines feature a must weight of at least 17° KMW (19.4 °Brix) and an alcohol content of between 11.5% and 12.5% by volume. “Federspiel” was the name to describe the use of a prey dummy in falconry, a sport once favoured by the aristocracy and practiced in the Wachau.

Smaragd®: Smaragd is the name for the best, most treasured wines from the Vinea Wachau members. The alcohol content of these wines has a minimum of 12.5% by volume. Highest grape ripeness and natural concentration are what make this world-class designation possible. Emerald-coloured lizards, also known as Smaragd lizards, find a habitat in the terraced vineyards of the Wachau. On bright, sunny days, they bask in the gleaming sun among the vines and have become the perfect symbol for Wachau wines with full physiological ripeness.

IN THE VINEYARDS: LOGICALLY ORGANIC

In 2007 I quit using herbicides. It wasn't easy to assert this with my father, because he couldn't conceive it and the extra effort should not be underestimated. Meanwhile, he has digested it. For me, the progress towards organic viticulture has been absolutely logical. As of 2018, we are certified organic.

I don't believe one is able to taste herbicides in wines, but fundamentally I like the idea of competition between plants in a vineyard. My goal is not to work more, but rather that the vineyards become increasingly autonomous and require less intervention. If you remove competition for a rootstock and give it everything it needs, it will grow more vigorously. Then you have to tie vine shoots not just once, but five times and you have to cut back the foliage more frequently. This also means you have to drive through the vineyards more often and end up compacting the soil, which then must be aerated. It becomes a vicious circle. I find the alternative much more exciting and am willing to accept lower yields. The vineyard eventually needs me less frequently, but the measures I take are more demanding and complex.

Pruning in winter determines the training of the vines for the entire year. At this time, no one knows what the year will bring. If I prune for higher yields in winter and try to reduce this affliction in June, I won't achieve good balance in the plants. I prune for yields of 3,500 to 4,000 kilogram per hectare annually for all qualities. That means in good years I produce 50,000 bottles of wine, in difficult years only 25,000 bottles. On the other side, I don't have problems with must weight or ripeness and I find my vineyards are becoming more resistant to stress.

The system finds its own balance, if you let it.

Through abstaining from herbicides, mowing now requires 4 – 6 weeks labour instead of just three days. In 2017 I sprayed plant protection 8 times to remain on the safe side. Conventional grape growing would have required 6 treatments, so I had 3-4 days more work.

The biggest threat in our narrow valley is peronospora (downy mildew). Spots where plant protection treatments do not reach remain vulnerable. The vines and canopy must have a form that makes it possible for every spot, every leaf, can be treated. You have to be well prepared and able to act swiftly. In April and May, when humidity is high and everything is growing rapidly and budding takes place, this can be stressful. Grape picking has to be done carefully and extremely selective.

When plant protection measures are finished in August, nothing more should be done. I don't use special fungicides against Botrytis. Due to permanent green cover and moderate, often very loose fruit set, we have few problems with rot and this can be tasted in the wines.

Usually I do one or maximally two picking rounds. My goal is to get everything ripe at the same time in one vineyard. In this way, we achieve the character of the site and the vintage.

IN THE CELLAR

At the beginning of being a real winemaker, I had a certain delight in gadgetry. Initially I planned to build the cellar completely new, but after flooding in 2002, when the water came in through the windows in the first floor, I decided to reconstruct and invest in the existing building. It was possible to control the fermentation automatically through the CO₂-emission. I could calculate the whole process and generate lovely graphs on paper, but this doesn't make wines more interesting. Today, I simply keep an eye on fermentation temperatures; for me 19° - 21°C (66° - 70°F) is proper. White wine fermentations on the mash should not go above 25°C (77°F).

In my case, if a wine ferments on the mash, then it is 100% of the grapes, not just a part. I don't always let the wines finish fermentation on the skins; as soon as I like the structure of the tannins, I press. Sometimes that is at about 20 g/l residual sugar and the wines continue to ferment in stainless steel. Wines remain on the lees until May or June. I don't practice bâtonnage, because it is not the style I'm striving for. In the end, the wines only need very little sulphur, sometimes even none at all, before bottling.

I am very relaxed about sulphur. When I detect oxidation, I stir the lees. If a wine then still shows a tendency towards oxidation, I add a little SO₂. But honestly I am not really sure what this is down to, why some wines need SO₂ earlier and others later or barely any at all. Fermentations usually take place thoroughly and rapidly without cultivated yeasts. If a wine would really not ferment properly, I wouldn't hesitate, but simply add some yeast. But it has been a long time since I had to do that.

In principle, I like to experiment: when to add sulphur and how much of it, intercellular fermentation, maceration times, fermentation on the skins, etc. I try everything that brings more structure in the wine. I don't acidify; I tried that once and I was not at all convinced. The temperature at grape picking has a bigger influence on the aromatic development, so I try to pick at cool conditions, because it is hard to chill mash. I once macerated a classic medium-bodied Grüner Veltliner Federspiel for 8 days, but I would never allow it to become phenolic or tannic.

Grape reception, grape processing, and pressing – all of this influences the final result. There is no recipe that can be conveyed from one winery to another. I am working with extremely long maceration times and I don't press with high pressure. I thus sacrifice some must, but I get structure through ripe tannins and abstain from clarification. All my wines are extremely dry and very stable, so I need less sulphur.

My father already had a philosophy, "If it's not absolutely necessary, I leave the wine alone."

Don't intervene in things that will happen on their own.

OUR VINEYARDS

The vineyards are quite heterogeneous. In Kollmitz, for example, soil composition changes between the upper and lower parts and from east to west. Therefore, I cannot just say, "This is a Grüner Veltliner from loess". Our sites aren't simple and easy to explain; it is more complex. On my 8 hectares (20 acres), I have 23 different plots, most of them rather small due to weddings, divorces and deaths. This is typical for Wachau.

We harvest each plot separately and try to ferment them in small charges. I combine grapes according to site and style; they are blended afterwards. The range is rather big: four light and medium-bodied Grüner Veltliners and three full-bodied wines. I don't want to reduce the spectrum, because each one tastes different. Because I am a wine fanatic, I find it worthwhile.

Bachsatz

The Bachsatz lies on a southeast inclined plain of paragneiss and amphibolite. The vines here were clone-selected and the finished wines show more aromatic intensity than in our other sites. The site is irrigated.

Harzenleiten

Paragneiss and amphibolite soils prevail here with a covering of glacial loess. It is a young vineyard with a south-southeast aspect on an irrigated, terraced slope. It was planted with Grüner Veltliner and Syrah in the year 2000. It produces wines with lean and cool characters.

Hochrain

Paragneiss with some lime set the tone here. Four vineyards, including the "Seelenkräutel" parcel, are dedicated to Grüner Veltliner. Two vineyards date back to 1987 and 1973 respectively. Hochrain faces south-southeast. It is partially terraced and irrigated.

Seelenkräutel

The Seelenkräutel is a sub-site of Hochrain on the plain, and is perfect for our Grüner Veltliner Federspiel wines. Calcareous paragneiss dominates the soil.

Kollmitz

The south-southeast oriented and partially irrigated Kollmitz vineyard consists of a bank of loess that runs halfway up the slope. Beyond this, solid weathered paragneiss rock with little humus prevails. The varieties planted here on both the plateau and terraced rows include Grüner Veltliner, Riesling (planted 1973) and Weissburgunder (Pinot Blanc).

Steinwand

The Steinwand site is situated at the foot of the Kollmitz slope. The Grüner Veltliner that grows here was planted in 1969 and displays intense aromatic characters.

Kollmütz

Loess and rock mark the eastern parcels of the Kollmütz, our most important site, while rock prevails in the west. We have four terraced parcels from south-southeast to southwest on the high plateau in Kollmütz. Some of our best Riesling, Grüner Veltliner and Chardonnay wines thrive here.

Höll

The south-facing, terraced and irrigated Höll vineyard is a sub-site of Kollmütz. Its soil is sandy and predestined for the production of Grüner Veltliner and Gelber Muskateller (Muscat Blanc á petits grains). The results are healthy, loose-berried bunches.

Postolern

The non-irrigated Postolern is our most highly elevated site. The soils are composed of paragneiss and amphibolite. Our Frühroter Veltliner, Grüner Veltliner, Pinot Gris and Zweigelt vines thrive here at around 370 metres below the edge of the forest.

WINES

I know this is a rather broad assortment for a small winery like ours. But as I said before, each single vineyard yields very different wines. I am so crazy about wine that it is my goal to respect each different site. Because I am playful, more wines continue to be added my range: mash-fermented wines, red wines and a substantial number of wines made from Burgundian varieties. These are some of them:

Grüner Veltliner Ried Hochrain Federspiel

This one should combine highest possible drinkability with subtle depth. Delicately tart, refreshing and animating with mineral substance.

Grüner Veltliner Ried Kollmütz Federspiel

Cool, concentrated and tangy; a wine with noble character, pure and minimalistic. If I have one favourite among my wines: this would be it.

Grüner Veltliner Ried Bachsatz Federspiel

Almost the opposite of Kollmütz: rich and generous, but athletic and without exuberance.

Grüner Veltliner Seelenkräutel

Rich and fleshy with stimulating fruity charm and herbal character.

Grüner Veltliner Ried Kollnitz Smaragd

A kaleidoscope of fruits, gentle and charming, but it can pounce. Always a natural beauty.

Grüner Veltliner Smaragd "For friends only"

This one is really only for friends and therefore bottled exclusively in magnums. The extremely selected essence of a Grüner Veltliner from Wachau.

Riesling "Mitz & Mütz" Federspiel

Picked from the Kollnitz and Kollmütz sites, hence the name. A vivacious wine, racy and compact.

Riesling Ried Kollmütz Smaragd

A concentrated essence of Riesling. Aristocratic, mysterious and noble. Plenty of ageing potential!

Weißer Burgunder Ried Kollnitz Smaragd (Pinot Blanc)

Delicately fruity, scents of brioche with the velvety buttery texture of white Burgundy: a wine for many moments in life.

Chardonnay Ried Kollmütz Smaragd

Rather a tropical type: merry, fruit-driven, mouth filling and always down to earth.

Grauer Burgunder Postolern Smaragd (Pinot Gris)

Vibrant, high in extract, down to earth and still subtle. This is my idea of a Pinot Gris.

Pulp Fiction yellow

Frühroter Veltliner is aromatic and Muskateller rather intense. Together they benefit from fermenting on the mash and show mouth-filling grip and notes of herbs like lemon balm.

Pulp Fiction green

The essence of Wachau, but this is really new wave: mash-fermented Riesling and Grüner Veltliner are blended and show gripping structure and long ageing potential.

Pulp Fiction red

Syrah in the Wachau? I give it two years maturation without sulphur in a big oak cask. It then shows that in a great terroir like the Wachau, even exotic varieties can yield great wines.

And from time to time I have wines made from mash-fermented Grüner Veltliner and Grauburgunder (Pinot Gris). You find current bottlings on our website www.machherndl.com




GENERAL INFO:

Area of cultivation: 8 hectares (20 acres)

Wines: 95 % white
5 % red

Grape varieties:

58 % Grüner Veltliner
22 % Riesling
5 % Pinot Blanc
5 % Chardonnay
5 % Pinot Gris
3 % Zweigelt
3 % Syrah

In conversion to organic winegrowing, certified through LACON  AT-BIO-402

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