

Weingut Hannes Sabathi

Gamlitz . Südsteiermark

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The Sabathi with the Roots

This is how Hannes Sabathi is often described. It comes, in one sense, from the physical appearance of his labels, but a much deeper truth does indeed lie rooted here. Hannes Sabathi is inspired by the soil. He has excavated multiple points in his vineyards, and investigated the subtleties of the earth itself in order to better understand the interplay of soil and grape variety. *'The wine derives its unmistakable and individual character from the soil. This fascinates me. This is where the truth in wine is to be found'*, says Sabathi. Or in other words, *'Intriguing soils make for intriguing wines'*, as he will occasionally comment.

The wines of Hannes Sabathi consistently demonstrate clarity and depth, along with a precise characterisation of the soil and the individuality of the vintage. One realises that here there is a winegrower at work who can not only express himself in extravagant terms, but who can also work in a restrained and subtle manner. Sabathi allows his wines to evolve with a great deal of intuition for the interplay between soil, grape variety and weather that is different every year: *'I do not see myself as a "winemaker", because I do not "make" any wine. The soil and the vintage make the wine'*, is how Hannes explains his approach as a grower. Anybody in this business who operates according to the 'less is more' principle, as Hannes Sabathi does, needs a great deal of experience, intuition and trust in nature, plus the courage to experiment – and above all, patience. *'If one is not patient in small matters, it is possible to foul up the grandest of intentions.'* This is clear not only to Hannes, but was once also expressed by Confucius. And Sabathi has had 'great things' on his mind from the very beginning.

The Sabathi estate is located on the Kranachberg in the Südsteiermark, near Gamlitz, and has been in possession of the family since 1860. For a long time they practised mixed farming – Hannes's father Otto was the first to place the focus on viticulture, in order to supply the estate's own Buschenschank (the Austrian wine tavern) with wine – and so Hannes grew up with wine. Even as a lad he cherished the wish to make distinctive and exceptional wines. In 2005, at the age of twenty-five, Hannes took over full responsibility for the business, closed the book on mixed farming and set out in search of the vinously remarkable – this remains his goal today still.

In this quest he is supported by his family. Karin Sabathi has the back end covered for the soil-scientist, handily managing the estate office. The two daughters Katharina and Philippa spread *joie de vivre* around every corner of the property, and Hannes's parents remain indispensable to daily operations.

Hannes Sabathi currently cultivates thirty hectares of vines in the Südsteiermark, plus four and one half hectares on the Grazer Kehlberg.

The Vineyard Sites

Each one of the vineyard sites has an extremely specific geologic and mineral history behind it. Hannes Sabathi makes a priority of encouraging the individual character of a site to live again in the wines; for this reason he intervenes in the vinification as little as possible and lets nature take its course. *'It has always been my dream, to vinify wine from various different soils'*, he says. And Hannes Sabathi has made this dream into a reality.

Ried Kranachberg . *salty elegance*

In Gamlitz. The kettle-shaped Kranachberg, with its south/southwest orientation, is situated at some 500 metres above sea level. The soil is composed of porous, limestone-rich, sandy gravels, which are the very best for imparting fresh and salty minerality to the wines. Wines from this site are always characterised by a nervy and elegant structure. Here Sabathi cultivates primarily Sauvignon Blanc.

Ried Jägerberg . *concentrated minerality*

In Gamlitz. The south-facing Jägerberg lies at approximately 350 metres elevation; thanks to its sandy, loamy structure and the limestone-rich soil, it offers an ideal environment for the Pinot family. Grauburgunder, Chardonnay and Weissburgunder are planted in this site, where they develop a warm and floral expression of fruit along with tightly structured, firm and mineral-driven body.

Ried Loren . *depth of substance*

In Leutschach. In 2010, Hannes Sabathi was able to plant vines in the monopole site Loren on the renowned Pössnitzberg. The Loren is situated at 550 metres above sea level and faces south. The heavy soils of grey chalky marl (called *Opok* locally), a mixture of limestone and loam, bring depth to the wine and deliver powerful substance to the palate, while the pithy acidity comes from the soil's significant limestone content. Here, Sabathi has predominantly Sauvignon Blanc planted.

Ried Kehlberg . *cool spices*

In Graz. In the southwest of the Steiermark's state capital city Graz, the south-facing steeply sloped vineyard Kehlberg lies at 420–520 metres above sea level. The loamy clay soils, layered upon Grazer limestone and dolomite, imbue the Sauvignon Blanc and Gelber Muskateller grown here with an unmistakable cool spiciness. Thermal dynamic tension generated by warm updrafts and the warming influence of the nearby city impart a velvety note to the wines.

The Wines

'Putting one's faith in nature and taking a modest approach – this leads to the evolution of wines that tell us about their origins – from a certain region, from a certain municipality, from a certain site'.

Hannes Sabathi is convinced of this.

The estate has structured its portfolio precisely upon this fundamental belief:

- Regional wines
- Ortsweine
- Single vineyard wines
 - and in addition:
- Reserve wines
- Flights of fancy

Regional wines

Refreshing, fruit-driven and lively. Wines that are typical for the Südsteiermark and for their grape variety. They are vinified in stainless steel tank and are comparatively low in alcohol.

- Sauvignon Blanc Steirische Klassik
- Weissburgunder Steirische Klassik
- Welschriesling Steirische Klassik
- Gelber Muskateller Steirische Klassik
- Scheurebe Südsteiermark
- Rosé Südsteiermark
- Mein Satz Südsteiermark

Ortsweine

The French call these '*villages*' wines, expressing regional characteristics. Elegant and composed, they exhibit depth of flavour, the typicity of the region and the full potential of their individual commune.

- Gamlitz Gelber Muskateller
- Gamlitz Chardonnay
- Gamlitz Sauvignon Blanc
- Leutschach Sauvignon Blanc
- Grazer Stadtwein FALTER EGO Gelber Muskateller
- Grazer Stadtwein FALTER EGO Sauvignon Blanc

Single vineyard wines

Hannes Sabathi, as member of the group STK (*Steirische Terroir und Klassik Weingüter*) distinguishes between single vineyards, Erste Lage STK sites and Grosse Lage STK sites.

Single vineyards

Extremely expressive and complex. Wines with a distinctive sense of personality, which precisely reflect the soils where the grapes are grown.

- Ried Jägerberg Grauburgunder Erste Lage STK
- Ried Jägerberg Chardonnay
- Ried Loren Sauvignon Blanc

Grosse Lage STK

A vineyard site with longstanding tradition and old vines, which bears the mark of a particular microclimate. Vinified with an extended period of *élevage*. Mineral-driven, complex, profound and cellarworthy, while at the same time being elegant and refreshing. Unmistakeable typicity of the site.

- Ried Kranachberg Sauvignon Blanc Grosse Lage STK
- Ried Kranachberg Weissburgunder Grosse Lage STK

Reserve wines

In the best years only, highly ripened clusters from selected vines in the Kranachberg are harvested separately and vinified in small wooden casks. These wines exhibit composure and depth, and are equipped with the potential to age for decades.

- Ried Kranachberg Sauvignon Blanc Reserve Große Lage STK

Freigeister – Flights of Fancy

'These wines are not designed to be submitted to the federal inspection', admits Sabathi in a mischievous tone of voice. He's totally fine with that, because what he wants to do here is to experiment freely with the aspects of a wine wherein he sees potential and with the possibilities of the vintage, without the constraints of convention. A little bit of anarchy, one might say. The results can be totally different from year to year.

- Amphora Sauvignon Blanc
- Natural Gelber Muskateller

Grazer Stadtwein . FALTER EGO City Wines from Graz

The Kehlberg in the southwest of Graz is a magical place. Between ancient forests, a young vineyard lies hidden. In this habitat – once more under cultivation – there are two species here that have re-established themselves after more than one hundred years of absence: the rare butterfly known as the Osterluzeifalter (*Zerynthi polexena*) and the grapevine. Both of them love sunny and steep hillsides on which nature can run its unregulated course, and where the hand of man intervenes as little as possible. This connectedness makes the sensitive butterfly (*Falter* in German) an ideal eponym for Sabathi's city wine from Graz, which one might call the 'alter ego' of the grower from Südsteiermark.

The first recorded comments concerning viticulture on the Kehlberg in Graz reach back to the year 1430. At that time, vineyards here belonged to the Admont Abbey. In the 1920s, the Grazer city district Strassgang, where the Kehlberg is located, was known as the 'Grinzing of Graz', referring to a famous wine-village within Vienna's city limits. There were numerous wine taverns to be found along the walking paths that served the recreational needs of Graz's residents. Wine grapes were grown here up until the 1960s – then came urban sprawl, generational change, the partition of estates and the increasing unprofitability of sideline businesses: the growers sold off their land. This spelled the end – at least temporarily – of viticulture in the Styrian state capital of Graz. All that remained were small vineyards producing wine for home consumption.

Happenstance led Hannes Sabathi to the Kellerberg. When he discovered the fascinating soils and the sun-drenched hillsides, then learned about their long history of wine production, it immediately became clear to him: *'We simply must make wine here once more!'* No sooner said than done – at least begun. Arrangements were made to lease the hillside parcels, underbrush was cleared away and the first Sauvignon Blanc and Gelber Muskateller vines were planted in equal measure in 2014. This metamorphosis did not go unnoticed – neither by man nor nature. On newly cleared hillsides, the extremely rare plant Osterluzei (English, 'birthwort', Latin *Aristolochia clematidis*) reclaimed its ancestral habitat and flourished once more. And with the *clematidis* came the even more rare butterfly, the Osterluzei-Falter. The caterpillar that grows into this particular butterfly nourishes itself solely from the *clematidis*. The presence of these specialists provides a clear indication of the harmonious ecological balance that flourishes on the Kehlberg. The Kehlberg's former grape growers as well, long since retired, look on with great satisfaction to see how the landscape of the Kehlberg is transforming itself back into that which they knew in their youth, and how the former vineyards have been reawakened to new life. Not infrequently does Hannes encounter one of these veterans in his vineyard, who quite happily tell him 'old stories about the Kehlberg'.

In the meantime, the area under vines on the Kehlberg has reached some 4.5 hectares. All of the vines are rooted within the city limits of Graz, which is assigned to the winegrowing

region 'Weststeiermark' (oder nunmehr Schilcherland?) The 2017 harvest found 2.5 hectares in production. Wines grown here in the unique clays of the Kehlberg, underscored with limestone and dolomite, combine the elegant and cool spices of the soil with a velvety finesse that comes from the warm updraughts. *'The Grazer Kehlberg is predestined for viticulture. I consider myself very fortunate to be able to vinify wines from these historic parcels, and with this restore the wine of Graz to the status it once enjoyed, and that it most certainly deserves'*, explains the grower with an air of gratification.

STK

To produce wines of unmistakable character, to delineate and underscore that which is typical of each unique top vineyard site, to communicate the virtues of Styrian wine on the international stage: these are the declared goals of the winegrower's association STK (Steirische Terroir & Klassikweingüter). Along with Hannes Sabathi, nine more marquee-players of Styrian viticulture make up the group: Gross, Lackner-Tinnacher, Maitz, Neumeister, Erich & Walter Polz, Erwin Sabathi, Sattlerhof, Tement und Winkler-Hermaden. The seal 'STK' is a protected trademark, and guarantees wines of top quality from the Steiermark. Wines produced by STK estates can be recognised by the STK-seal on the banderole.

The categories of STK wines

Steirische Klassik	first available after 1 March of the year following the harvest
Ortsweine	first available after 1 May of the year following the harvest
Erste Lage STK	first available after 1 May of the year following the harvest
Große Lage STK	first available after 1 May of the second year following the harvest

A Region for Body, Soul & Sauvignon Blanc

Steep slopes with long rows of vines, rolling hills, tightly winding roadways framed with stands of tall poplars – the Südsteiermark is a winegrowing region right out of a picture book. Neatly laid-out farmsteads hug the hillsides; the view from the terraces of the stone houses falls upon orchards and small wooded areas. The 'Südsteirische Weinland' encompasses a total of 2,200 hectares.

The grapes that grow here benefit from a moist and warm, already Mediterranean-influenced climate that offers the Südsteiermark an extended vegetation period – above all a sunny and warm autumn, which makes it possible for the clusters to mature slowly and evenly. The warm days are followed by cool nights; this promotes the development of rich and complex aromatic profiles, which particularly inspire the variety Sauvignon Blanc to richly nuanced expressiveness and noble character.

The steep vineyards and soils of sand, slate, marl and fossil limestone offer favourable conditions for crisp Welschriesling, fresh Sauvignon Blanc, finely vibrant Weissburgunder, deeply concentrated Morillon (Chardonnay), aromatic Traminer, Gewürztraminer and Muskateller, but also for red wine grape varieties such as Zweigelt, Pinot Noir and Blauer Wildbacher.

But it is, above all, Styrian Sauvignon Blanc that has attracted international attention, and which without any doubt figures among the world's finest. The distinctive style, characterised by the cool freshness of the region, meets on an equal footing with Sauvignons from the Loire Valley, from South Africa or New Zealand. And Hannes Sabathi, with his exceptional Sauvignon Blancs from Ried Kranachberg, has undoubtedly made an essential contribution to this successful development.

The History of Viticulture in the Südsteiermark

Viticulture in the Südsteiermark has a long tradition. Archaeological discoveries indicate that the Celts were making wine here from wild grapes some 2,500 years ago. Under Roman rule, systematic cultivation of the vine spread substantially. Viticulture flourished in the Middle Ages – one chronicle speaks of more than 6,000 wine producers; there are also written records of the thriving trade with Vienna and Italy. But between plagues and wars, the 16th and 17th centuries saw a decline in winemaking – vineyards were grubbed up or converted to farmland.

It was only the dedicated attention of Archduke Johann that brought an upswing to winegrowing. The great patron of agriculture – it was he who founded the *Imperial and Royal Agricultural Society for Steiermark* in 1819 – also became involved with the vine as well. He established a model wine estate, where no fewer than 425 different grape varieties were put to the test, at the same time promoting research into diseases of the vine. The plant louse *Phylloxera vastatrix*, which infiltrated Europe in the 1880s, destroyed great swaths of vineyards and caused a catastrophe from which the region would not recover for a long time. Of course a remedy was soon found, in grafting noble European grape varieties onto resistant American rootstocks, but the First World War soon frustrated these efforts.

After 1919, some ninety per cent of the area under vines in what had been the Steiermark became part of the new nation Yugoslavia. The Südsteiermark became a border region, one that struggled for economic survival. Many winegrowers converted their holdings to mixed farming. One milestone for the remaining growers was the enactment of the Buschenschank law in 1928. This brought winegrowers a welcome supplementary income by means of direct marketing, and also laid the foundation for a gradual revival of the Südsteiermark as a destination for tourism – still today, the Steiermark's typical wine taverns are a favourite destination for holiday-makers and travellers.

The true regeneration of the Südsteiermark as a leading wineproducing region began initially in the 1980s, when the first pioneers of uncompromising quality-oriented viticulture took the stage and aimed for international success. Their example encouraged other winegrowers as well to board the quality-train and created a sense of awakening in the hill country that persists in the present, and among other effects led to the Südsteiermark being today regarded as one of Austria's most distinguished and dynamic winegrowing regions.

Hannes Sabathi was and remains a pioneer in the Südsteiermark, for his concentration on individual vineyard sites and terroir. And meanwhile, the entire region has set itself on this same course toward the future, and is currently engaged with the exciting and sustainable process of vineyard classification.

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