

Christoph Hoch

Press dossier

2019



Christoph Hoch
Winzer aus Hollenburg a.d. Donau



The vintner.

Christoph Hoch took responsibility for the winery in 2013 and is supported by his family. He has chosen a new and uncompromising path in which he seeks to express the uniqueness of the Hollenburg community. He has studied the terroir of his habitat systematically and compared them to other wine growing regions, in particular the unique geological formation "Hollenburger conglomerate". It is his aim to create exceptional Grüner Veltliner and Riesling with the unique stamp of Hollenburg. To achieve this he employs the traditional methods of his ancestors in winegrowing and winemaking. To take the plunge to biodynamic cultivation and certification as "DEMETER" – winegrower was a logical step.

The genealogy of the Hoch family can be traced back to the year 1640: the wine labels depict the original coat of arms. The Hoch family has resided in Hollenburg on the Danube River ever since. The Danube and nature in general have always been the determining factors for the family: in their main occupation as regulators of ship navigation and as winegrowers. The Hoch's employ the knowledge acquired through centuries to produce vibrant wines of great finesse.



His stated goal is, " to produce inimitable wines with good ageing potential; wines that aren't just 'good', but rather wines that inspire emotion!"



A brief history.

1640 The Hoch family began trading with goods transported on the Danube River. They purchased goods from ships landing in Hollenburg and sold wine to them. At the time, virtually every local family grew and made wine, but at the Hoch's viniculture went hand in hand with trading. Several members of the family were mayors of the market town.

The Danube was regulated at the end of the 19th century and regulation and control of river navigation nationalised. The Hochs gave up the shipping trade and concentrated on agriculture. Christoph's grand-grandfather Karl Hoch specialized the farm on winegrowing and fruit production after WW2. The Hoch family practices exclusively viniculture since 2008. In 2012 conversion to organic winegrowing begins. In 2013 the first wines with the Christoph Hoch label are released. In 2015 the first sparkling wines are released; DEMETER – certification.

Philosophy.

Christoph Hoch pursues one goal: to make the expression of his homeland tasteable in his wines. The foundation for this is the rich experience and tradition of his family, which he deeply respects. His parents Harald and Andrea have given him a solid foundation of the oldest and best family vineyards with which he has the opportunity to realise his ideas. His parents and his sister Daniela lend their full support in all his projects. Christoph says, "Tradition is important to me because it is not a given thing to have. I am proud of it, but I have any dynastic ambitions. I am just one in a long line of ancestors!"

Hollenburg differs fundamentally from the surrounding wine growing regions. The soils are characterised by a unique geological formation: the Hollenburger Conglomerate (see also under GEOLOGY). The flora in and around the Hollenburger vineyards shows some peculiarities. When Christoph tried to research what the unique attributes of the region means for the wines, he quickly hit on walls. "Until today the grape variety has always been in the foreground. No one questioned what the conglomerate soil does for our wines. Very few winemakers tried to highlight the terroir in their wines. "This is exactly what I want to do: work with the soil and the climate of Hollenburg to create exciting wines with a background!"

Christoph Hoch began his search on his own, "Actually I have no wine role model, so this was the beginning of finding myself. I don't know anybody who delved into the subject of Hollenburger Conglomerate. If I want to gain a deep understanding of my roots as a winegrower, I have to try to comprehend conglomerate. It is completely different from anything else around here that I could have worked with as model. I had to search myself and develop a foundation. Otherwise I couldn't get where I want to be." His interest in geology and soils inspired Christoph to travel several winegrowing regions to learn about the differences between Hollenburger Conglomerate and, for example, slate and lime soils. "I have scrutinised the rocks and their characteristics. To me it is important not only to touch rock samples but also to feel the soil!"

Christoph explains that his goal is, "Inimitable wines with ageing potential. I know that a lot of winemakers state the same, but I have to go my own way to accomplish this with as few compromises as possible. I don't want to make wines that are simply 'good'. I want my wines to arouse real enthusiasm – or clear rejection. I want to inspire emotions! With the methods of the past and the knowledge of today I shall be able to realise this!"



Geology.

The vineyards of Hollenburg are dominated by conglomerate rock. This is solidified river sediment stemming from the Limestone Alps that were drained by the ancient Traisen River. This soil is comprised of cobbles and pebbles of various sizes that are held together by calcium carbonate. The soils are correspondingly calcareous and alkaline (Ph 7.5).

With no regards to climatic influence, this determines the following attributes in wine:

- The high content in lime results in higher acidity in the wines.
- This acidity is buffered by the potassium available in calcareous soils and thus tastes smooth.
- Therefore it is possible to produce wines that are delicate and rather light in alcohol. In other words: the grapes can be harvested in a phase when it is possible to exploit their full aromatic potential. Crisp spiciness is achieved without wines appearing too meagre. The potassium buffers the acidity and wines that are simultaneously creamy, crisp and multi-layered. A good acid structure is important for wine longevity.

Christoph Hoch states "The best examples for this are wines from the 1970s and the 1980s. At this time grape ripeness wasn't the big topic. Harvest took place in the second week of October. The wines were rather light in alcohol (10.5 – 12.0% Vol.) due to a cooler climate and higher yields. Tasted today, wines from this period that were grown on acidic soils appear lean and unattractive. On the other hand, wines from calcareous soil are still crisp, lively, and exhibit ripe, attractive aromas. The knowledge and methods of production were more or less the same as they are today, which means that on the long term only the origin makes a difference."

"The roots of a vine are able to create their own environment through interacting with micro-organisms which themselves depend on the bedrock."
(Lalou Bize-Leroy)





Climate.

The climatic conditions of the Hollenburg vineyards show some peculiarities. The vineyards are situated at altitudes between 210 – 350 meters above sea level (50 – 200 meters above the Danube River) and are shielded from the west through wooded hills and the Dunkelstein Forest. Atlantic air masses mix with a warm Pannonian climate, which is influenced by the valleys of the Danube and Traisen Rivers.

The average annual temperature is 9.4°C (49 F)

The average annual precipitation is 520 l/m²

*"The laws of nature are the same everywhere. The art is to live with it."
(Hans Diwald, Austrian pioneer of biodynamic winegrowing)*



Hollenburger Konglomerat stone is essential for the style of the wines Christoph Hoch vinifies.



Vineyards.

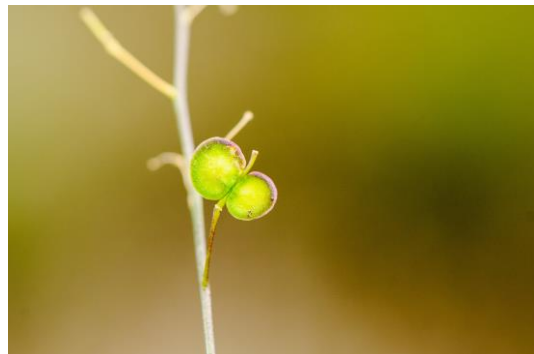
Christoph Hoch's primary vineyards are divided into two areas. Those orientated towards the northwest are cooler and yield compact and firm wines. The sites orientated towards the southeast are warmer and yield wines with more body and a slightly exotic character.

Christoph began conversion to certified biodynamic viticulture in 2013, a process that lasts three years. In 2015 he becomes a certified "DEMETER" winegrower. He expects further enhancement of character in his wines. "Biodynamic cultivation gives me more options. It has a positive influence on spontaneous fermentation, varietal character, and regional typicity. Natural things go more smoothly and with fewer complications. If, for example, I were to use fungicides, I would chiefly kill fungi and yeasts and have fewer nutrients available for the fermentation process. In the past, artisanal vintners made stable wines with less alcohol, but with freshness and delicate tannins through simple handwork. They worked with screw presses, wooden casks and nearly no chemicals in the vineyards."

The vineyards and the surrounding areas have a distinctive flora that has evolved on calcareous soils with a unique microclimate. Some of these plants are endemic such as the wild geranium colloquially called the "bloody cranesbill", the *Biscutella laevigata*, and the black pine. Christoph Hoch states, "It is important to comprehend and to protect these plants because origin will always have a high significance in premium products."



Rosmarin-Seidelbast
(„Wetterkreuznagerl")



Brillenschötchen



Cellar.

Christoph Hoch says about himself, "I am highly interested in technical matters and my education was focused mainly on vinification techniques. Despite this, for my wines I want to apply the old traditional methods to coax the maximum out of the terroir."

For certain charges, Christoph even uses a traditional screw press "to extract tannin from the grape skins". He further explains, "Gruener Veltliner is allowed a maceration time after a light crush with the stems, again with the theme of tannin extraction." Afterwards he lets his wines ferment spontaneously in wooden barrels. Some on the mash, some racked.

The single lots then are matured in large, used wood casks, - every single barrel with a different approach: some oxidative, some with malolactic fermentation. "Each barrel is a small independent project. There is a certain idea in each barrel. Some of them are completely different, some of them are similar." Each working step results in two different products. The use of used, clean wooden casks allows the wine contact with oxygen without the sensory influence of new oak.

The wines remain on the lees without additional sulphur until January. "Adding sulphur dioxide late is not a risk if the wine has tannin. I try to do it the same way as my grandfather: he smoked each barrel with sulphur before the harvest, then washed it and again added a little sulphur depending on the size of the barrel. Usually this was sufficient. If later it became necessary to add some sulphur he racked the wine into a freshly sulphured barrel". Before bottling the single lots are blended according to Christoph's interpretation of the Hollenburg terroir. Different lots (= barrels = individual projects) which went into the wine. They need not necessarily be from the same vintage. The main goal is to reach the highest possible complexity in the wines.

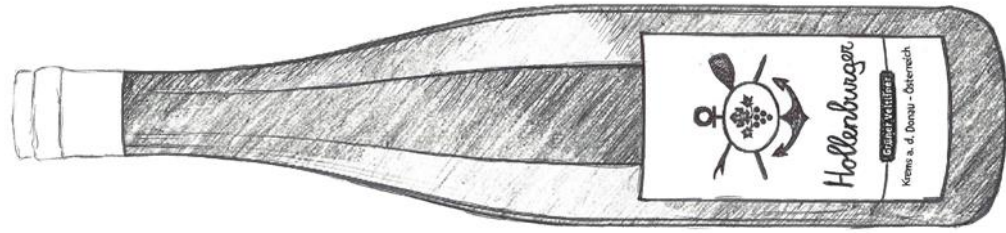
"This gives me more safety and allows me to make the best possible wine – not wines levelled by the year of picking. So my wines are not compatible, at least not in Austria." Says Christoph.

The wines are light or medium in alcohol content (12 to max. 13% vol.) with tannins that contribute to structure without astringency; they are full-bodied, vibrant and appetizing with good intensity and depth on the palate.



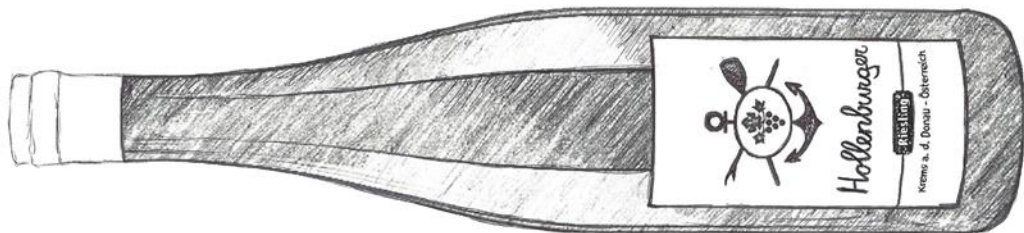


Still wines.



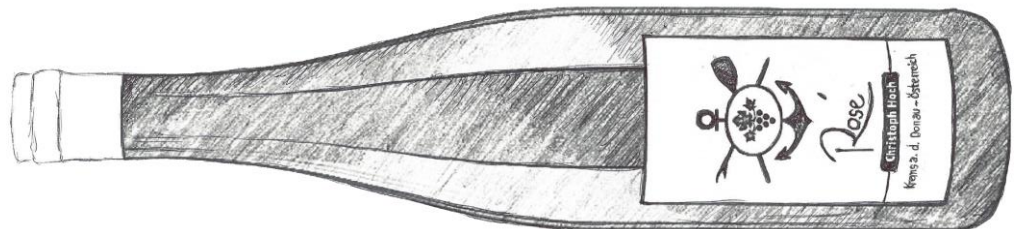
Hollenburger Grüner Veltliner N.V.

Gruener from terraces with Hollenburg Conglomerate and loess soil, 250 – 300 m above sea level. Fermented spontaneously in large oak casks. Smokey mineral nuances, delicate and elegant. Offers fascinating and demanding finesse with splendid drinkability.



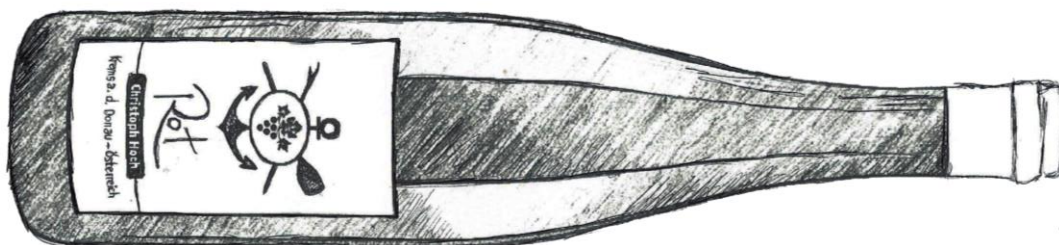
Hollenburger Riesling N.V.

A very lively and attractive Riesling growing on meagre calcareous Hollenburger Conglomerate soils 290 – 360 m above sea level. Fermented spontaneously in big oak casks. Intense nose with a broad spectrum of aromas like ripe peaches and fresh lemons. Delicate spiciness and salty mineral touch.



Rosé N.V.

A rosé wine, that awakens you. Disarming freshness and vigorous. Lean, straightforward, juicy. Racy acidity. Mulberry, gooseberry, tarragon. Initially, the wine is austere on the palate but gradually evolves into a tangy acidity, with fresh, vibrant fruit. You will find a lot here - anything but kitsch.



Rot N.V.

A red wine, that makes you feel lighter. Disarming freshness and vigorous. Lean, juicy. Racy acidity. Mulberry, gooseberry, tarragon. Initially, the wine is austere on the palate but gradually evolves into an tangy acidity, with fresh, vibrant fruit. Mouthfeeling like freshly squeezed grapes.

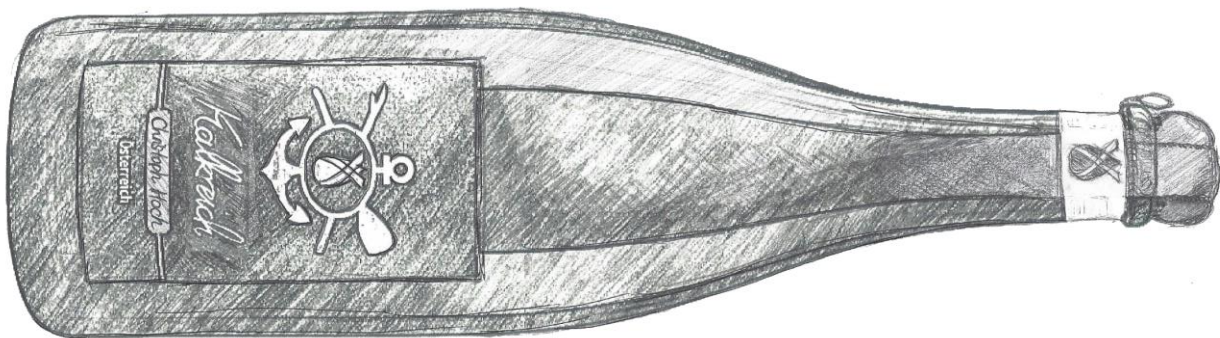


Natural sparkling wine.

At the outset of Christoph Hoch's sparkling wines there was in fact some criticism of a barrel sample of a 2012 still wine: „This wine is so acid you can only use it for sparkling wine!“ Why not thought Christoph and started his research. After all chalky soils are the fundament of Champagne. Looking for wineries who would be willing to share informations with him he became friends with the also biodynamic working Champagne wineries de Sousa, Tarlant and Laherte. Benoit Tarlant gave him 12 used Champagne barrels and bet he would not accomplish to make a Pet Nat (otherwise Christoph would have to pay for the barrels). To house the Champagne barrels the oldest cellar of the Hoch family dating back to the year 1640 was adapted as sparkling wine cellar because with a temperature of 16°C it is a little warmer than the cellar for the still wines and possesses a different microbiology.

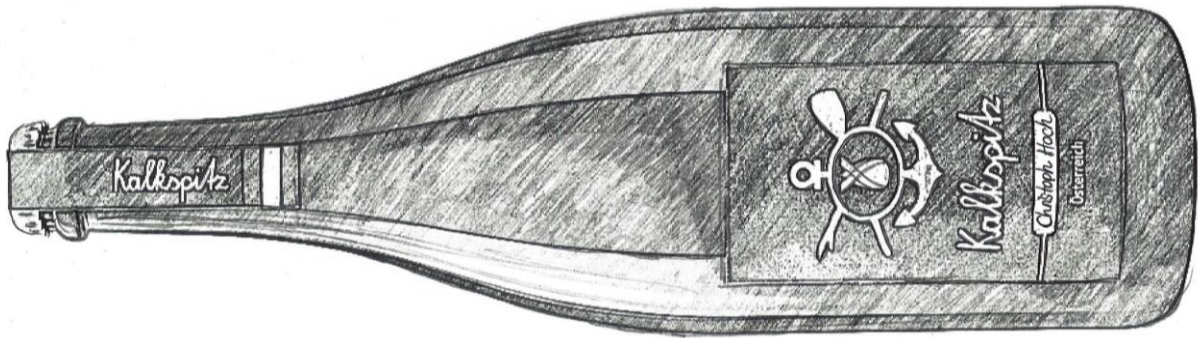
Together with de Sousa and Laherte Christoph started a vinery project. Old ungrafted Chardonnay vines with different scions and stocks are combined and planted in 2015 and 2016. Diversity is a pillar of biodynamics and is lived here. To analyse the outcomes there is exact documentation about each single vine. According to Christoph's motto: „I have only once a year the chance to learn. So I want to exploit this opportunity in the best way!“

The sparkling wine project started in 2012 with the deliberation that the Champagne region is also characterised by limy, chalky soils. But to make another "ordinary" Sparkling wine was never the intention of Christoph Hoch. If, then completely different! For the **Kalkreich n.v. brut nature** a ready fermented wine with a supplementary 15% of fermenting must but no extraneous additives like sugar was bottled according to the "Méthode traditionnelle". The carbonate pressure is around 7 bar.



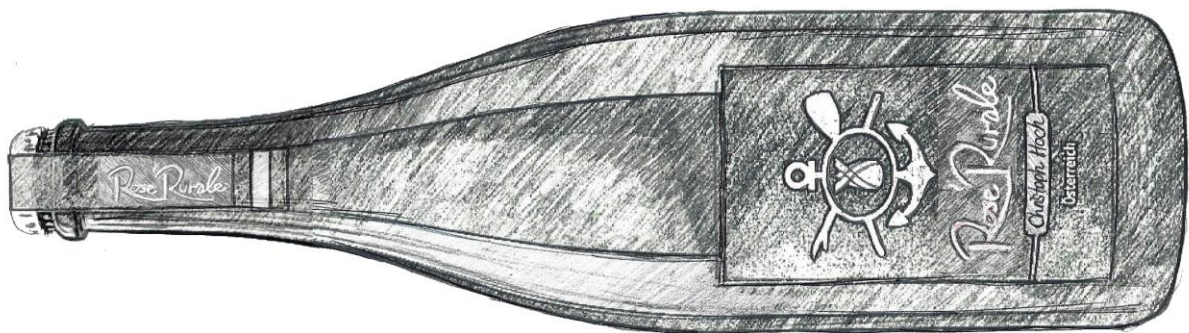


The **Kalkspitz** is a sparkling wine made in the Méthode ancestrale, also known as „Pétillant naturel“ or „Pet Nat“. This is the most natural method to produce sparkling wine with the least intervention of the winemaker. Here, the fermenting must which still contains unfermented sugar is bottled and closed with crown caps. The moment of bottling is absolutely decisive because the residual sugar content determinates the carbonate pressure. The fermentation process is completed in the bottle; the wine will not be degorged and so will keep a slight cloudiness. But as lees and acidity preserve the Kalkspitz, it will be particularly suitable for storage.



According to Christoph Hoch's philosophy the Kalkspitz is a combination of different grape varieties and lots, of earthy and fruity tastes. The wine is bone-dry with a maximum alcohol content of 11% vol. and a carbone pressure below 3 bar. She is characterised by a crisp acidity which is encased with the creamy yeasty components. The aroma of mash and skins is desired, the fruit opens up when exposed to the air. She goes well with cheese, white meat, fish and vegetables.

Similar to the Kalkspitz, the Rosé Rurale contains different grape varieties. The style pf this sparkling rosé wine is a typical "Christoph Hoch": a tangy acidity is coming along with a nice tannin structure. A Rosé without kitsch.





Christoph Hoch *unfiltered.*

Which style of wines do you prefer?

I like wines of the purists like Rudi Pichler in the Wachau and individualists as Andreas Schumann from the Odinstal winery in the Palatinate region. I like the system and the structure of Burgundy. I also like well-matured wines from my region.

I prefer white wines and I try to learn something with every wine I taste. I'm afraid that the wines I order in a restaurant are not among the cheapest... anyhow I prefer mature white wines.

When do you consider a wine mature? And what are the quality features?

For me climate, soil etc. should be in foreground in a well-matured wine, not the variety. This may be after 4-5 years and also after 25-30 years, depending on origin and winemaker. But what all these wines have in common is that they are very taut and vibrant.

Reinhard Löwenstein of the Heymann-Löwenstein winery on the Mosel once said while tasting a 15-year-old Riesling, "At last the fruit has gone!" I can really follow him, because only then does the structure, the framework, the soil appear. That is why I appreciate a lot of what has been made in the past. I like mature champagne: yeast, wood, slightly oxidised, a border crosser, that's what fascinates me! Sometimes I can find this style in Burgundy - too mature, but on the border, and combined with acidity. That's it: a thin line between genius and lunacy, wines that are enticing, but not exhausting.

You have talked a lot with older winemakers. What was the most surprising detail they have told you?

In the past, nearly every farm kept goats and cows as a source of milk. Farms were more holistic. The animals were fed the first trimmings from the vine canopy. These young shoots had the best assimilation and were the sweetest of the year; they made the milk sweeter and a high price could be fetched. For me this is proof of how good nature's cycles function, if you only allow them. This was one more detail that encouraged me to shift to biodynamic cultivation.

One experience that I have made is that it is impossible to make heavy wines from our soil. They would get too opulent and clumsy, because they would lack acidity. Here, we have to make delicate and spicy wines!

What kind of food do you prefer?

I am generally open-minded and inquisitive. Besides classic Austrian cuisine I like very detailed and elaborate dishes: Japanese or fine French cuisine - certainly never overloaded."

What do you think about wine and food pairing?

For me the wine should be able to stand on its own. I don't want to burden myself with this highly complex topic. If a wine is called a good 'food companion', that is often interpreted that the wine is not so great on its own, either because food can hone a wine down or a wine will cover a lot of things. It is a very important topic, but not in my focus.

You are a very dynamic person with several projects and plans. What drives you?

As I said before I am an inquisitive person. My desire to learn is huge. Euphoria makes my occupation a passion – perhaps with a slant towards madness!

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