

NÖ.4

toa zine

MAGAZINE FOR &
FROM WINE LOVERS





TOAzone No.4

We have learnt a lot since Corona has changed our lives – personally and in our daily work – more than a year ago. Uncertainty and the lack of face-to-face contacts have for sure been challenging factors but we have also learnt that developments such as online meetings or online fairs can have positive impacts. We have to keep adapting to what life brings along and make the best of it! In our newest edition of the Toazine, we have spoken to one of our partners in Sweden in order to give you a wine wholesaler’s insight on current trends and developments.

As springtime is a popular time for launching new vintages, we present a wine and the wine grower’s approach of each one of the TOA family estates. Be aware, “new” does not have to necessarily mean 2020.



Different origins, different vineyards, grapes and vinification approaches provide us with many style and tastes – from different vintages. This is exactly what we like: to show the world the diversity of Austrian wines! Have a look!

In our reoccurring sections, you’ll find a piece on the highly disputed topic of wine ratings, portraits of wine growers and of course, the newest edition of our herb witch’s season cycle – Ostara.

As usual: in case you are longing for more info and insight or you would like to share your opinion with us, please do not hesitate to contact us!

Enjoy reading and keep well!

Yours TOA team!

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WINE RATINGS • CUI BONO?

In Austria (and elsewhere) the wine rating spinning wheel is turning faster and faster. Every year, we see more wines climbing the ladder of “Mount Everscore”, reaching for the top. Is this justified? Who benefits?

Wine ratings in magazines and wine shows come as points, stars or glasses and they are usually presented as something of an impartial value. However, the reader a.k.a. the consumer should be aware of the monetary factor of those ubiquitous scores. After all, it's the winemakers who pay for having their wines rated, described and the results published.

How much? That depends, of course. Let's see some examples. In order to participate in Mundus Vini (a rather big German wine show) you'll have to pay ca. € 500 (for 3 wines). You wish to see your wine in Decanter World Wine Awards? That's € 400 (for 1 wine), thank you. A wine to be judged at the IWC (International Wine Challenge)? € 297. And so on and so forth. Nothing comes for free, we do know that. If you'd like to see your winery featured in the wine guide of the Austrian Falstaff magazine, you're in for € 690.

Wineries do benefit from high points, that's a fact. But what about the critic who donates these points? Producers and sellers are happy to see their wines being awarded scores of 90 or more but they are equally important for the critic whose name can turn into a (highly regarded) brand. He or she gets more public attention since wineries and the trade will obviously rather communicate high ratings.

For many wines, scores are the only way of making a difference on the market. Most of the wines on the market are produced using conventional – arguably industrial – methods and as a result they taste very much alike. What's the difference then? It's the (lower) price, the nicer label or the better story. Points are part of that story and thus, wine ratings are a legitimate business model that provides guidance in a sea of utterly similar wines.

POINTS = MONEY

For most consumers, wine is a luxury product (at least for wines that cost more than € 15) and high ratings help them confirm their social standing: “Look, I can afford this!” Brand products simply require legitimation by means of ratings, just the way it is with fashion. It's a fact - we are on the safe side when the brand is acclaimed internationally and promoted by celebrities.

Wine ratings are an entire industry or at least a real business: many magazines make a part of their living thanks to the fees charged for tasting and rating wines. Unlike in import-heavy countries such as Germany or Great Britain, in Austria, the big international firms are not willing to invest their advertising budgets given the patriotic drinking behaviour of the local population. Thus, the wine press heavily depends on the money paid for points, stars and ratings. Few (such as the platform [wein-plus.de](#) which is entirely financed by member fees) can afford to be independent.

This creates a sort of a competition for high ratings: you're going to be pretty generous with your points if you want to be the favourite child of the wine biz. Your theoretical reference wines are all-time greats such as 1945 Mouton Rothschild or 1947 Cheval Blanc? Who cares! Stephan Reinhardt, Robert Parker's expert for Austrian wines and one of the most respected wine critics a couple of years ago issued a statement claiming that paradoxically, those high local ratings cannot possibly reflect the wines' quality. High praise from everyone will not push anyone to commit to innovation but rather they risk drowning in complacency.

IS IT WORTH JUDGING EVERY WINE?

Reinhardt also brought up another interesting aspect referring to Austria's wine avant-garde. He argued that such growers are usually facing problems when leaving the supposed consensus and embarking on their very own, often innovative journey. However, if they were to break with the past, they have to break with the nice wine ratings and consumer expectations and start questioning all instead of producing wines according to the sound of the chorus.

In Austria, a lot has happened in the last couple of years in this regard and the number of alternative or low-intervention wines has grown considerably.

Nevertheless, the doubt remains: is it even possible to judge these – let's call them artisanal wines – to a fair degree? Such wines are usually unfiltered, they are more tannic and were given little sulphites at a late point in time. Thus, they do not follow the mainstream, the grower decided not to stabilize them and as a consequence, they might display

IS EVERYONE SUPPOSED TO JUDGE WINE?

We can discuss to endless lengths (and with passion) whether every kind of weird smell or tannin equals “a perfect terroir expression” or whether it's simply a fault. At the end of the day, it's up to our taste and tolerance – the same as with cheese or spiciness. Nowadays, individualism is our holy cow and the internet allows everyone to judge everything at all times. Like this, we see “ratings” of wines by random people on “dedicated” web and social media pages which suggest a craving for recognition rather than expertise. However, instant publishing and likes are a reality we have to accept – even though grudgingly.

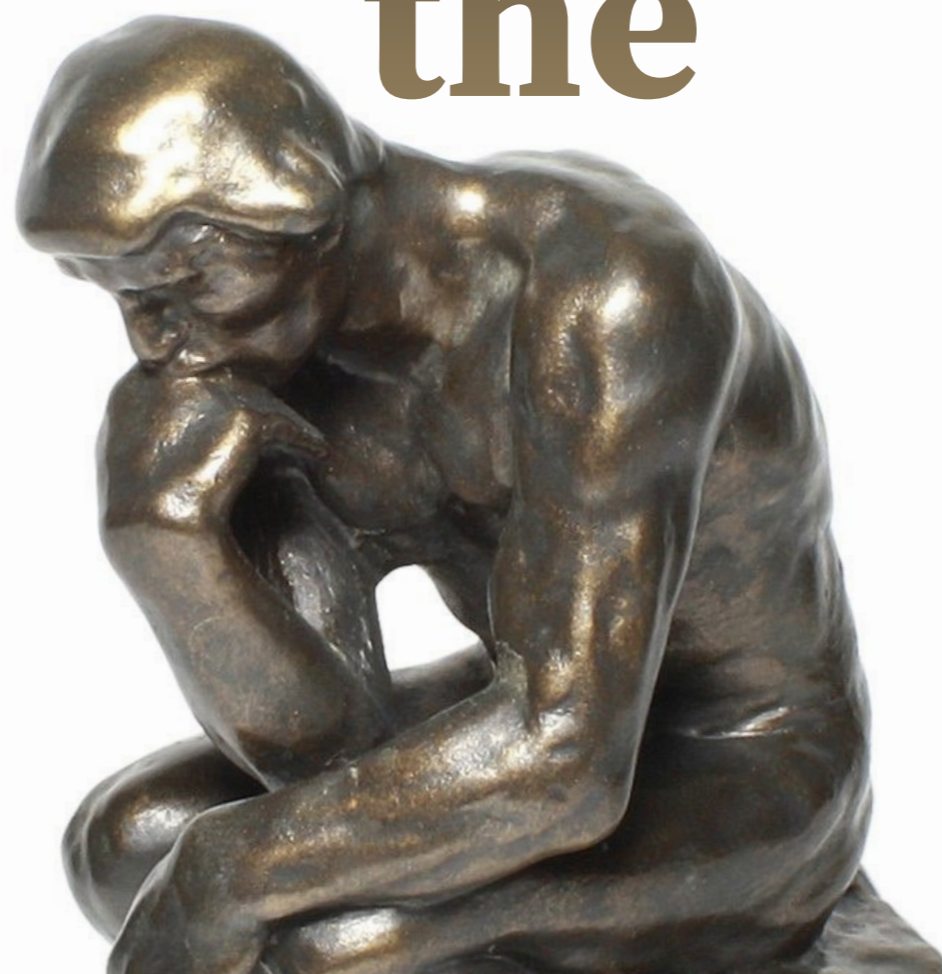
In my view, it's luxury to still have the time and energy to discuss wines (they are genuine luxury items) with such verve. It's great to see them trigger emotions, however, we people in the wine business, we should keep our calm and prevent further division. Every wine lover should be allowed to pick (or to avoid) his or her “wine pundit”. It's the same as in “I love this!” versus “I hate this”. Make up your mind and you'll save yourself from frustration. You'll always be right and no one will be wrong.

Points sell wine and earn money. We will not be able to change this, however, we should base our judgements more on reason and try to keep our feet on the ground. Credibility in the wine biz – something worth many points...

significant variations of development, even when bottled. Even the moon phases could have an influence. As for the consumers, they should be open to adjust their attitude towards wine, also when it comes to storing them. They are supposed to learn to live with the variations of a living product. It's the same thing with cheese lovers: a raw milk Camembert simply does require more attention than an industrial and preserved Gouda.

Low-intervention wines are perceived through emotions, their “taste” depends on our mood. This rules out any “reasonable” impartial judgement, at least according to many alternative wine growers.

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A Talk with Emma Bill

Emma Bill works at “The Wine Team”, a Stockholm based and well-established wine importer and distributor. Today, “The Wine Team” is among the largest wine firms in the dynamic Swedish market. Emma is – among other tasks – responsible for the Austrian portfolio. We asked her opinion on wine trends, the monopoly Systembolaget and the current situation in Sweden.



Emma, how did the Covid year affect the wine business in Sweden and your business in particular?

It has been a very insecure and special year. Especially in March/April 2020 the business was a bit in shock, and everything stopped for some time. The on-trade has been very negatively affected as there were quite severe restrictions for the restaurant business. The restaurants were allowed to remain open, which is of course good in comparison to many other countries; however, currently they cannot serve alcohol after 8 pm so the revenues are down by at least 70 %. For the off-trade business at the Swedish monopoly Systembolaget, sales have been better than usual. Stores remained open the whole time and as there was no travelling nor alcohol purchases in boarder shops, which is usually a quite big part of the Swedish consumption, they've had very high sales in 2020.

“Luckily”, The Wine Team mainly sells wine to Systembolaget, so our business has been going well despite the circumstances. Besides higher sales, costs were lower than usual due to the lack of travelling and events. It was rather astonishing to see how well the producers and transport companies adapted to the

new restrictions since there were almost no delays of transports or production. The worst part of our business in 2020, I would say, is that we were not able to visit any of our producers nor have them visit us in Sweden. This is something we're absolutely looking forward to doing soon again!

Will there be any effects that are here to stay also after the pandemic (or after we have learnt to live with it)?

I believe everyone has taken the time to reflect on how we used to live and what we miss/don't miss about that. In general, I believe people will travel less and many will keep working from home at least

partly, even when this is over. Wine-wise, there are a few changes in terms of consumer demand, and it seems that sales are moving towards a more premium assortment. This is partly due to not being able to go to restaurants, but I believe that if you start drinking more premium wines it will be hard to go back to less premium. You can see this trend both when it comes to bottles but also for bag-in-box. People are willing to pay more, to treat themselves, and this, I think, will continue even afterwards. Partly, this is also driven by Systembolaget as they ask for

more premium wines in their tenders. The Covid times brought a lot of international digital meetings and digital wine tastings, something I believe will also continue. It is a very effective way to have a more personal experience and relation without being on the road too often.

I have also heard rumours that we can expect a repeat of the roaring 20's once this is over, so let's hope that means the on-trade business will be able to regain the strong position they used to have before.

Consumer choices tend to evolve over the years. Are there certain trends you

see right now? (white, rosé, red, conventional or organic, varieties, levels of alcohol, etc.)?

Besides the already mentioned premiumization, the demand for organic wines is still increasing in Sweden, despite already being very high. It seems consumers are more careful with their health and thus try to select as healthy options as possible.

Italian reds in the appassimento style are still very popular, but slowly decreasing. The Swedes love their fruity and young wines but now also enjoy these styles from other origins. As for varieties, I would say that Sauvignon blanc is very strong on the white side and on the red side Pinot Noir is increasing. Riesling shows a positive trend as well. Swedish consumers traditionally like rather high alcohol degrees, but I would say that now, we also see styles of wines with more moderate alcohol levels being much appreciated, such as Vinho Verde. When it comes to countries, Portugal, but also Austria, are growing significantly. The assortment of Austrian wines has increased over the past years and the consumers seem to like the wines available as well as new wines launched. Austria is considered a very trendy wine country.

From a recent presentation I can also share the biggest trends according to an independent research organization:

- The proportion of mature drinkers (55+) is growing as they today make up around 51 % of regular wine drinkers. Among younger people, there is a growing part that does not drink alcohol.
- The mature drinkers have a bigger wine knowledge, but that doesn't necessarily mean they spend more, but instead use their knowledge to find good value for money wines.
- Younger people with less knowledge are more looking into price and brand

as they lack the knowledge, while mature drinkers tend to stick with what they know.

- During the pandemic we've seen two simultaneous trends; one group is experimenting more and wants to try new wines and styles, while the second group has stuck with old and well-known brands/styles of wine.
- The frequency of wine drinking has increased during 2020 and more so among women than men.
- Fair trade and organic are considered more important than medals among Swedish consumers, yet medals are still an important tool to stand out on the shelf.

What's your take on the perception of Austrian producers among Swedish customers? Any styles, regions or varieties that are gaining or losing in popularity in your view?

I would say only wine connoisseurs know about the different Austrian producers and regions listed, while the more general consumer is keener on the variety or wine label. Grüner Veltliner I would say is doing very well as it is an easy to like wine style and well suitable for the Swedish cuisine. Besides this I would say that Pinot Noir is what stands out the most as there are two very successful listings that have entered the market the last couple of years and have grown steadily since then. Let us hope these two can open the doors also for other types of red wines from Austria, so we get a bigger share as it's currently very limited. Zweigelt they have listed through tenders tend to exit the assortment as soon as they are ranked towards other products. Personally, I think the style of Blaufränkisch would be very well suitable for the Swedish taste buds.

How do you see the role of the Systembolaget and its tenders in the Swedish wine market?

In general, I think Systembolaget is a great source of a very broad variety of wines. Besides the fix assortment in stores you can also order wines to your store from the order assortment, which currently contains more than 9000 wines. This gives the Swedish consumer a great variety to choose from. Also, the purchasing process is very well done and the quality of the wines that enter the fix assortment is generally very high. Regarding tenders, I have mixed feelings. It is of course great if you manage to win a tender and enter the market with a broad distribution, however there are very few opportunities for a certain origin like Austria and competition is often very tough. They have recently also added a new type of tender for more limited volumes, but here, the selection process is even stricter and only few producers are considered good enough to be tasted in the blind tasting.

Then again, I experience the purchasers at Systembolaget as being rather open to trying wines we suggest for different tenders and they now also ask for input from the producer side before the final tender is published so to have a better insight in what would be realistic to ask for. I think with this mind-set and improvement of involving the producer side, there will be a more proactive approach to different tenders. Hopefully, it will also lead to a better result for everyone involved.

What do you like to drink after work (or in work ;)?

I like quite classic wines from the old world, but I am open to taste most styles of wines. Since a few years, I have grown very fond of reds from granitic soils such as Beaujolais crus and Garnacha from Madrid. I am also weak for white wines with a salty minerality, like Santorini Assyrtiko. Then again, almost nothing beats a premium dry Riesling, which is one of the best wines to express its terroir.

Martin Obenaus The Unchained Man

Every now and then, we add a producer to our diverse portfolio of Austrian wine growers. With Martin Obenaus, we did so during the last, unusual year. For sure, you want to know why!

Wherever we look, we see constraints, pressure, “chains”. We humans bend the environment to our will, we force nature to do what we want (to produce). This is of course obvious in viticulture since wine is an agricultural product and the grapes do not turn into wine and jump into our glasses by themselves. Just think of pruning, one of the first – and many – interventions done by man in the course of the viticultural year. And we have not even started talking about the many treatments applied to the soils, plants and finally, the wine. Now, the degree to which nature is manipulated, interfered with, is not God-given and inevitable. Humans are inventive creatures and there are many ways to step back and let nature do its thing and find its balance.

THE SECRET OF LETTING GO

Martin Obenaus is a young grower from Glaubendorf in Weinviertel and his goal is to “unchain” the nature in his vineyards as much as possible. For him, the method to achieve this is crystal clear: biodynamics. Let’s hear him out: Active soil life leads to a higher resistance of the vine to parasites and pathogens; it enables an intensive exchange with millions upon millions of microorganisms and a better resistance

to negative environmental influences. The vines are allowed to grow old, their roots go deeper and thus interact with a more vital soil fauna. A living soil is also better protected against erosion and its nutrient system is more diverse. Apart from that, it seems obvious to me that the information and nutrients that the vines absorb from the soil will ultimately be felt and can be tasted in my wines.

The decision to work biodynamically (in practice since 2012, in official conversion since 2018) was a logical consequence for Martin. This approach not only unchains the nature, so it requires less “help” or remedy. It simply creates more balanced wines that subsequently require less manipulation. He harvests grapes that ripen earlier and – let’s make it clear – ripeness is not about alcohol. The ripeness Martin cares about is one of ripe aromas, ripe texture of skins, seeds and tannins. Producing power and alcohol in today’s ever warmer vintages is no magic. The magical thing is to produce wines with a lot of taste but little alcohol! It’s all about harmony and balance!

CORNERSTONES OF MO

Biodynamics is the music Martin plays, the instruments are provided by his homeland terroir: typical Weinviertel

climate of cold winters & hot (often dry) summers. You’ll see white grapes, of course, such as Grüner Veltliner, Riesling and the rare Roter Veltliner but also Pinot blanc and Müller-Thurgau. Martin has a particular liking for reds and for Rösler (there is Zweigelt & Portugieser as well, naturally!), this little-known Austrian breed that is robust in the field and delights with great fruit and freshness in the wine.

When it comes to cellar work, less is more, and much is not needed anyway since the musts consist of healthy and balanced juice, the selection having been done by nature anyway. Martin ages his wines in stainless steel tanks (also a part of the reds!) and in beautiful large, old wooden barrels. There will be skin contact for many wines but in a careful manner – extraction of aromas from the skins is a good thing but Martin does not want to produce overly extracted, heavily “orange” wines, the focus always being on elegance and freshness. All wines are given an extended time on the lees so they can stabilize themselves naturally. You guessed it – filtration or fining are deemed useless at Obenaus, the sulphite additions are kept to a minimum or to zero.

CREATIVE MIND

A pro-active approach is a good thing, connects you more to your work (and saves money). To give an example, Martin has helped design the kettle for the compost tea he brings out into his vineyards. Before, this highly effective liquid is collected with the help of worms in a wooden box filled with vegetables and organic waste. He also builds all by himself especially great “insect hotels” designed for harbouring those indispensable little helpers. These hotels are then placed in suitable locations in the vineyards. Bio-diversity, another key to biodynamics.

in the most positive meaning. The MO line of wines is usually aged in stainless steel for the whites and large old oak barrels for the reds. The focus is put on a pure and elegant fruit character which, together with fresh, palpable acidity and low alcohol ensures joyful



grapes can occasionally be added to the red to emphasize its fresh profile. Unchained is the centerpiece of the Obenaus portfolio. While the human factor is more noticeable in the entry level MO-wines, Martin takes a step back when it comes to his “Unchained”-range.

He leaves the wines alone as best as he can and grants them the time they need. Consequently, they spend up to 2 years at the winery until market launch. They age partly in stainless steel tanks, partly in those beautiful old oak barrels (up to 4000 litres), which provide the wine with oxygen but do not impart any oaky character. Grüner Veltliner, Weissburgunder and Riesling are the backbone for the white edition, Zweigelt for the red. Thanks

SIMPLY GOOD

So, what’s there to be drank? The Obenaus portfolio is clearly structured: MO: stands for Martin Obenaus, as simple as that. But simple does not have to mean trivial. It’s rather easy-going

drinking without remorse. The MO-wines currently come in white and red and are composed of the typical grapes of the region: Grüner Veltliner as a basis for the white plus Riesling and Müller-Thurgau, Zweigelt for the reds. A dash of white

to their profound balance, they serve as a symbol of their soils, grape varieties and climate. Unadulterated, sometimes edgy, always true, unchained.



Thomas Straka a Welsch-y Man

They still exist. The hidden gems, the underrated grapes, the autochthonous treasures wine people are longing for these days. Oh wait! Maybe this one is a classic and people have just misunderstood it? Let's check out the story of Thomas Straka and his big love, the Welschriesling, and find out.

Thomas (a.k.a.) Tom Straka lives and works his land in Rechnitz which is located a 1.5 hours' southbound drive from Vienna, pretty close to the Hungarian border. The winegrowing region is part of "Southern Burgenland" and "Eisenberg DAC". However, Rechnitz is a very unique place on its own, both when it comes to natural conditions and winegrowing traditions.

Rechnitz lies 360 m above sea level on the foot slope of the Geschriebenstein, the highest mountain (884 m) in Burgenland. The Geschriebenstein is the last foothill of the Alps and its crystalline schist and magmatic deposits can only be found in four other places in the alpine regions. The mountain also acts as a weather divide and causes distinctive thermal lift. Wind blows nearly all the time, often strongly, and the evenings can become rather cool, even in midsummer. This, together with the crystalline schist lends wines plenty of refreshing crispness.

Alright, we have some great conditions for crisp wines and this is exactly what Tom strives for – and it is something that is more and more sought after among wine drinkers. Now, we just need reasonable viticultural practises and a couple of fabulous grape varieties.

WELSCH THE ANCIENT HERO

Welschriesling (also known as Graševina, Olaszrizling, Laški Rizling, etc.) is an ancient Eastern and Central European grape. You'll find it in Croatia, Hungary, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, among others and in Austria, pretty much in every region under vines. It is of course not related to (Rhine) Riesling. In Southern Burgenland, "Welsch" (as Austrians like to call it) has been the dominant grape for generations. By the way: Welschriesling is also an important grape in Styria but it is very often harvested and vinified as a "young", entry level wine. Tom has chosen a different way.

The rather late ripening grape is very versatile and translates its terroir very well while always keeping superb levels of acidity. Thus, you can have more light footed, fruit driven (green apples, herbs, orange peel) examples (Welschriesling Rechnitz at Straka's), dense and age

worthy single vineyard, old vine stuff (Welschriesling Prantner), skin macerated blends such as Stratos #Mash or even some pre-pylloxera gems such as the Welschriesling 3330. In a suitable climate, sweet wines from Welschriesling can be fabulous as well. "Welsch" by Straka is at all times a structured, mineral driven wine with depth and personality. It's because Thomas cares for it, in his vineyards and leaves them alone in the cellar.

LOW-INTERVENTION LOVE

Extra efforts and expense – that is what organic cultivation requires and it is one of the reasons some refrain from it. Not if you're Tom Straka and not if your goal is to produce wines which speak of their origin. Individual, distinctive wines. Tom gave up on herbicides already in 2003 and has been increasing organic farming ever since, having been certified in 2017. He trusts in cover crops, cattle manure and a lot of manual work (to avoid soil compaction), the windy conditions in Rechnitz preventing fungal diseases. What about wine making? Well, the Straka cellar is not typical when it comes to design (it is located in the premises of a former supermarket, something absolutely worth seeing!) but the low-intervention, laissez-faire approach indeed is typical –

of good organic wine growers, that is! Used oak, large oak, some stainless steel, amphorae, long time ageing on lees, careful and smooth macerations, little sulphite additions – that's it. The more time you spend in your vineyards, the less of it you'll need to spend in the cellar.

OTHER THAN WELSCH

The conditions in Rechnitz are not only beneficial for growing Welschriesling. Tom Straka also cultivates other crisp whites such as Pinot blanc, which is a great partner in blends (Stratos white, Alte Reben), some Sauvignon blanc and Grüner Veltliner (vinified in amphora). However, the unique soils of his homeland are a great terroir for Blaufränkisch as well.



Tom has different and very distinctive versions of this unanimously grand Austrian red: Blaufränkisch Eisenberg DAC, Blaufränkisch Rechnitz, furthermore two single vineyard wines and a superbly fresh example vinified in amphora. Although different in weight and structure, they all share a terroir driven approach with ripe yet never vulgar fruit, great acidity levels and this typical, savoury, spicy Blaufränkisch character. A lot of joyful drinking on offer by Mr. Straka!





The Herb Witch Project

OSTARA THE POWER OF SPRING

All signs point towards a new beginning at spring equinox, at a time when the forces of darkness and light, of day and night are in balance and winter finally bids farewell. Every year life awakens anew. The first fresh, lush green sprouts and the spring plants begin to bloom while the trees set about transporting water to their treetops as their buds break. The animal world awakens from its winter sleep and as the reproductive cycle restarts, butterflies and insects return.

Once upon a time, it was the great and powerful bear who woke from hibernation and rang in the beginning of spring. In our latitudes, however, the cheerful chirping of birds in the morning is one of the most beautiful signs of this season.

Life starts to rise again and to move on all levels as the forces of renewal and vitality are increasing day by day - it is a grand awakening.

Our pre-Christian ancestors held a great celebration at the spring equinox - Ostara. It was a symbol for the resurrection of nature, the return of life and for the beginning of the new cycle, a celebration of lightness and joy of life. People blessed the soil, which could be cultivated again,

asked for fertility and protection and blessed all life.

What happens in nature, of course, also happens in us humans and vice versa, for we are never separated from nature. We can therefore learn again to consciously perceive the forces of spring, to benefit from them and to live with them.

Nature is intelligent and gives us the right healing plants at the right time of the year. This way, in springtime, all spring bloomers support us during the transition into the new year. All spring flowers possess renewing forces and lend us humans courage, joy of life and lightness. They help us to cleanse, purify, rebuild and strengthen our bodies. Many medicinal plants wipe out the remaining illnesses we have suffered in winter. They are crucial in fighting coughs and colds such as the cowslip, the coltsfoot or the lungwort. The best way to do this is to include those plants throughout the springtime into our everyday cooking with herbs. We should eat fresh herbs, mix them into our salads or spreads and enjoy them as fresh plant juices, teas or soups. All of this helps us to rediscover their taste and please both our palate and our health.



The nettle, for example, is a perfect choice if we want to naturally clean our blood and boost its iron levels. Freshly prepared as a soup, tea, salad or spinach, it is both tasty and digestible. It is also important to strengthen our liver and to clean it thoroughly. For this, the dandelion is a particularly suitable helper and a powerful detoxifying medicinal herb. Last but not least - let's not forget about the wild garlic!

The wild garlic is one of the very first heralds of spring and it is a wonderful plant which cleanses and strengthens the gastrointestinal tract after the long winter. According to legend, its strong garlic smell woke the brown bear from hibernation and thus lured him out of his den. After all, garlic (also known as "bear's garlic") was the first food eaten by the brown bear after the winter. He instinctively knew that this plant would give him new strength. Yes indeed, wild garlic brings our entire body into shape again and helps even us humans to regain our "bear powers".

I'm going to grab some wild garlic now and I wish all of you a vibrant spring!

Yours, Birgit

NEW PERSPECTIVES

Young, fresh, new - buzzwords we hear all the time, and for sure when it comes to wine. It's not really surprising given that wine can only be produced once a year and wine lovers are eagerly waiting for the "new" vintage to be launched. In some countries, and Austria is one of them, it almost seems like a frenzy and you will see quite some wines from the latest harvest on shelves already in October and November. Needless to say, such wines (often made from subpar, early ripening grapes) are not the pinnacle of Austrian wine art. However, it is perfectly possible to launch young wines at an early stage, depending on variety, vinification and style, provided the wine grower's approach is a good one. You can have wonderfully juicy and fruit driven wines even after only 4-5 months in steel tank, and we're not talking aromatic yeast here. It's all about harmony and not trying to force things, vineyard management is key, as always. As for the reds, yes, they reward longer ageing but why not macerate them only for a couple of days, have some (or more) bunches do carbonic maceration and present super fresh, light footed, low-tannin red wines to be enjoyed chilled like a white? There absolutely is a public for that - just think of all the people who are asking for low-alcohol reds these days.

FRESH PERSPECTIVES

SET ME FREE

Springtime is a time for young wines but it is also one for releases of previous vintages. Currently, a lot of 2019 premium whites and many reds see the light of the day and also various 2018 (single vineyard) top notch reds. The focus, however, is on white wines as they are a perfect fit for the upcoming warm season, especially when providing lively fruit, structure and acidity.

Let's cut to the chase! In the following we want to show you wines from each of the TOA wineries, representing every style and approach when it comes to "fresh & new"!



KARL FRITSCH PURIST 2020

The Karl Fritsch estate is synonymous for world class, biodynamically farmed wines from the Wagram region. His (single vineyard) Grüner Veltliners and Rieslings are featured on the wine lists of many great restaurants and he is equally celebrated for his reds such as the Pinot Noir “P”, for example. However, next to the well-established portfolio, Karl also likes to produce some “alternative” wine styles, such as the skin macerated “Materia Prima” or the “Purist”. The latter is a Pet Nat which lives up to his name, the biodynamic approach and meticulous work in the vineyards providing for nothing less than perfect grape material. The current **Purist 2020** is an equal blend of Riesling and Muskateller, so expect a lot of floral aromas and this “grape-y” Muscat fruit, that is very popular among Pet Nat producers and lovers alike. The “manual” is well-known: fermentation in steel tank, bottling with just the right amount of residual sugar so the wine can finish fermentation in the bottle and come out dry, no addition of anything. Karl likes to disgorge his Pet Nat. A pure sparkling joy, it is.



MICHAEL GINDL RIESLING SODALIS 2018

For the followers of the Michael Gindl universe (no-compromise-unwavering-biodynamics), his aromatic Flora and the line-up of Buteo's are probably the most popular and most visible wines, liquid everyday-Gindl, so to say. Michael's close ties to his animals are reflected in the labels and names of his wines. A couple of years ago, Michael has extended his portfolio in order to even further emphasize the working philosophy of a biodynamic farm with its cattle, horses, goats, chickens, etc., adding **Sodalis** (the Latin equivalent of “comrade”, “companion”) at the very top of the range. Consequently, the grapes for these outstanding wines are harvested from parcels exclusively farmed by horses. **Riesling Sodalis 2018**: manual harvest, spontaneous fermentation, 2 days of skin contact, aged for a year in used acacia barrels, no fining, filtering or SO₂. Beaming with character, gripping structure and layers of fruit, supported by acidity. Outstanding!



GRUBER RÖSCHITZ GRÜNER VELTLINER RIED REIPERSBERG 2019

The Weinviertel was the first one among Austrian wine regions to be granted a DAC (protection of origin) status and it was – obviously – for wines made of Grüner Veltliner. Let's make no mistake about it, there is a lot of Grüner in Weinviertel (more than 6600 hectares, i.e. close to 50% of the area under vines). And no, it does not all taste the same, the soils being pretty diverse in Austria's largest wine region, and the approaches of winegrowers. The organic Gruber Rösschitz estate boasts a wide range of Veltliner vineyards with different terroirs and soils. You'll be offered savoury classic entry level Veltliners but also single vineyard wines which showcase their specific provenance. Ried (= site/vineyard) **Reipersberg** is one of those and it is one that speaks “granitic”. 340 m above sea level, weathered granite, up to 50 years old vines, hand-picked, vinified and aged in stainless steel in order to preserve the precision and purity of the site. This “GV” (as we Austrians like to call Grüner) does show ripe fruit but it is never overly exotic. Some pepper, of course, but above all minerality, precise acidity and great length. No rush, this will keep for years to come!

CHRISTOPH HOCH KALKSPITZ

Indigenous yeast, no addition of sugar (dosage) or sulphites and in fact nothing else than grapes, that's the main ingredients for Christoph Hoch's well known **Kalkspitz Pet Nat** – one of the first (and renowned) examples of this increasingly popular, natural sparkling wine style in Austria. A unique feature of Kalkspitz has always been the fact that it is blended based on various vintages as opposed to the common single vintage wine. Grüner Veltliner, blanc de noirs style Zweigelt and aromatic grapes such as Muskateller and Sauvignon typically make up the blend. However, Christoph puts aside wines from every vintage in order to add them as reserve wines to the most current batch. This way, he can add additional depth and different aromatics and adjust the Kalkspitz style according to his ideas. The latest version is based on the cool and elegant 2020 vintage and includes further batches from up to 3 older vintages. As always, expect enticing fruit aromatics, great acidity and smooth bubbles.





HOCHDEUTSCH WEIN MEA ROSE

Julie Hoch launched her fascinating mea range a couple of years ago (in case you don't remember: biodynamically farmed herbs or flower petals are dried and brewed as teas and blended with fermenting wine, which finishes fermentation in bottle so to retain bubbles) but she has never stopped working on the style and enhancing her wines. In fact, something that we wine lovers maybe are not aware of – to get the tea “right” is a far more complicated than one might think. As for the newest batch of **mea rose**, Julie has raised the alcohol level a little bit in order to make the whole more “winey”. For that and to retain the balance, she also had to brew a more intense rose petal tea. A part of the tea was therefore made using a “cold soak” technique which gives different levels of extraction than a “normal” hot tea. Also, Julie has planted a dedicated rose garden for the future – until now, the petals were collected in the vineyards. You get the idea – a lot of brain and manual work is required to offer the world a truly unique product.



REINHOLD KRUTZLER GEMISCHTER SATZ ALTE REBEN 2019

The famous Krutzler estate in Deutsch-Schützen has been producing outstanding Blaufränkisch wines for many years now. The small Eisenberg region has built its reputation on these unique reds grown on schist soils and cultivated by passionate family wineries. However, red wines are not the only style, the area is suitable for. In fact, white wines have always had a strong tradition in the entire Burgenland – and to this day, almost half of the vineyard area is planted with white varieties. Reinhold Krutzler is a grower who cherishes tradition, and this applies also to his whites. The concept of a “Gemischter Satz” (field blend) is probably the most ancient way to process wine. You can have light, fruit driven wines or dense “reserve” style wines, depending on the mix in the vineyard and vinification. Krutzler's **Gemischter Satz Alte Reben 2019** comes from 30 years old vines (Pinot blanc, Riesling, Veltliner & Chardonnay in the mix), is fermented in barriques and 600 L oak and aged in those same vessels for 11 months. Expect ripe fruit, well integrated oak, depth and a lot of minerality. Eisenberg not by label, but for sure by character!



ERICH MACHHERNDL PULP FICTION YELLOW XIII

The Pulp Fiction series made by Wachau avant-gardist Erich Machherndl is meant to broaden the horizons of classic Wachau wine styles and it has seen great success in the last couple of years. Erich's idea is to interfere as little as possible with these wines and he also shows people that Wachau is more than Veltliner and Riesling (take his super juicy Syrah as an example). The yellow **Pulp Fiction** is numbered as XIII and is a descendant of the (great) 2019 vintage. This is a blend of the rare Frühroter Veltliner (an early ripening white which is quite the diva in the vineyard but yields very nice, appealing wines), Muskateller and Weißburgunder. The wine has fermented on skins for 2 weeks and, rested on its lees in a used 600 L barrel and in stainless steel before being bottled without any fining or addition of sulphites. This is no dark, overly oxidised orange wine but a superbly fresh, aromatic (see Muscat!) yet herbal white with grippy structure and juicy acidity. A natural joy, if you like!

WINZERHOF HOCH BIO PETER & PAUL ROT 2019

Combining tradition and innovation and blending them into the present day, voilà the secret behind the organic Peter & Paul wines of Harald Hoch. The unique “Hollenburger” conglomerate soils and cool weather conditions make for a terroir that is perfect for cool climate, fruit-driven and savoury wines. “Peter” & “Paul” are centuries old antique wooden figures, that stand, to this day, at the entrance of the Hoch estate. They are synonyms for two approaches, a “classical” and a “natural” one. 50% percent of the **BIO Peter & Paul Rot** have been shortly fermented in stainless steel tanks in a reductive way. The remaining half was allowed to ferment spontaneously with whole bunches and aged in oak casks, without any addition of SO₂. This is one of those reds that will not exhaust you while drinking it so please do not expect a heavy bodied, highly extracted red influenced by oak. This is your cool climate Zweigelt offering a moderate body with alcohol of 11% vol., complemented by crisp red berry and plum fruit, light tannins and vital acidity. Moderation in wine (pleasure included) – here we go!





CLAUS PREISINGER
KALKUNDKIESEL RED 2019

Gols mastermind Claus Preisinger likes to combine his approach of care for nature & unadulterated wines with real pleasure in drinking his wines. What's that supposed to mean? In a nuanced portfolio such as Preisinger's, you'll have wines with more structure, depth and shelf life but you'll also have easy drinking, ready to be enjoyed whites and reds. **Kalkundkiesel** comes as a white and as a red, the most current vintage of the red being 2019. Claus unites his 2 favourite grapes here, Pinot Noir (picked at the beginning of harvest) and Blaufränkisch (picked at the very end). They ferment in a macération carbonique kind of way with a part of the berries being pressed into 1000 L open vats where they ferment for a couple of days before being transferred to amphorae and large barrels to finish fermentation and to age. This is a dangerously savoury, cool and fruit-driven (thanks to the typical Pinot-red-berry-profile) red with a certain funk and structure (Blaufränkisch helps with that) and it should be enjoyed slightly chilled – as all cool climate reds, by the way.



RUDI RABL
ZWEIGELT ROSÉ 2020

The Kamptal is a classic region for whites, especially Grüner Veltliner and Riesling, as the world knows. However, like almost every wine growing region in Austria, the area also produces great – cool climate – red wines. Think Zweigelt, Pinot Noir or St. Laurent, among others. Those reds certainly rather showcase their lively fruit than powerful bodies, which is a good thing if you fancy more than a glass to drink. Rudi Rabl is without any doubt one of the big names in Kamptal with many of the region's famous single vineyards under vines as well as a nice portfolio of reds. Speaking of: red grapes are equally suited for a consumers' favourite these days, Rosé. This growing segment combines the best of both worlds: the berry fruitiness of a red and the freshness of a white. Rudi's idea with his **Zweigelt Rosé 2020** is exactly this, to produce a cool fruit-driven Rosé that can be drunk without remorse during those upcoming warm days and evenings. The making of it is state of the art: a couple of hours of maceration on the skins, gentle pressing, spontaneous fermentation, malolactics, vinification in stainless steel tanks. Liquid fun!



HANNES SABATHI
CHARDONNAY
RIED JÄGERBERG 2018

Südsteiermark, Styria's most famous wine region has built its reputation on Sauvignon Blanc, that is common knowledge. However, its gloriously beautiful (some call the region "Austria's Tuscany"), high-altitude and steep slopes offer equally good conditions for other varieties, predominantly white ones. Chardonnay has been cultivated here for many years and is also called "Morillon" – you wouldn't have a local synonym if it wasn't for a widely grown grape, right? Hannes Sabathi proudly owns vines in some of the most prestigious single vineyard in and around Gamitz, just think of "Kranachberg". Some sites, however, are perfect for the "Burgundy" grape family (Chardonnay, Pinot blanc and gris in the Steiermark), such as the "Jägerberg" with its sandy limestone soils. The 2018 edition of the **Chardonnay Ried Jägerberg** was hand-picked, spontaneously whole bunch fermented in used oak barrels and aged on lees for 16 months. This is by all means a great combination of soil, grape and human approach: ripe yet fresh yellow fruit, a firm backbone of acidity driven minerality, great tension and length. There's no need to compare this to Burgundy, you can perfectly like it for what it is, Südsteiermark.

THOMAS STRAKA
WELSCHRIESLING
RECHNITZ 2020

In this edition of the Toazine, you'll find a portrait of Thomas (a.k.a. Tom) Straka and his passion for Welschriesling, this traditional Central-European variety, often underestimated and misunderstood. In many parts of Styria, it is harvested pretty early and marketed as a "young", "fresh & fruity" wine as many consumers like it that way. However, it requires more to let shine the true character of this great grape and its origin for few grapes can transport the terroir as well as "Welsch". Thomas cultivates his favourite grape at different vine ages and in different vineyards. Let's look at his **Welschriesling Rechnitz 2020**. Vines aged from 30 – 50 years growing on those unique Rechnitz soils (see the Straka portrait), are harvested at a ripeness that yields superbly balanced medium body and alcohol levels, vinified and aged on its lees in stainless steel before being bottled and released in April/May. This Welsch is bone-dry, does show the typical apple, citrus and herbal aromas but will grab your attention with its salty, "stone-y" minerality. A fully grown wine, not an insecure youngster. Watch out: new label design!





**TEGERNSEERHOF
DÜRNSTEIN
GRÜNER VELTLINER
FEDERSPIEL® 2020**

The Tegernseerhof's Wachau classic Federspiel stems from various, up to 50 years old vineyards around Dürnstein and Loiben, characterized by warm, sandy soils with gravel sediments. These soils have a low capacity of retaining water and therefore bring about a certain level of stress forcing the vines' roots to go deep. The 2020 vintage was a challenging one in the Wachau with late bud break, well balanced summer conditions but a severe hailstorm in August and frequent rainfalls at the start of harvest. Luckily, the end of the picking season was dry and rather mild, allowing for good quality – subject to a lot of selecting and efforts. The grapes for this **Dürnstein Grüner Veltliner Federspiel** have been carefully selected and hand-picked, then slightly crushed and left on their skins for a couple of hours (this was possible thanks to the cool weather during harvest). Fermentation took place in stainless steel, then the wine was racked, filtered and left to mature until bottling in March. This Federspiel genuinely reflects the 2020 vintage and showcases a cool, elegant and crystal-clear Veltliner that combines lightness and depth.



**ERWIN TINHOF
NEUBURGER
RIED OBERBERG 2019**

Erwin Tinhof is without any doubt Mr. Neuburger, he loves this old Austrian classic like his own children (we assume). Tinhof owns vineyards within the exceptional Leithaberg denomination, many of them directly in Burgenland's regional capital Eisenstadt. Neuburger made by Tinhof grows in different locations and is subsequently vinified into a wide range of styles. A brand-new wine yet from a very old (mentioned already in 1570!) site is going to be released this year, the **Neuburger Ried Oberberg 2019**. This „monopole“ site is said to be one of the most traditional vineyards in Eisenstadt. The vines grow on massive calcareous sandstone subsoils and barren topsoil, which is very dry and yields wines with great ripeness, yet low sugar levels. What do Erwin and Lukas do with it? Hand-picking, crushing of the berries incl. stalks, 10 hours skin contact, spontaneous fermentation in used 600 L barrels, 9 months on lees, no malo. You're in for a Neuburger with fantastic finesse and Burgundian charme, perfectly balanced, with aromas of blossoms, some flintstone and candied almonds. Let's predict: a Leithaberg-Neuburger-Tinhof milestone for the ages.



**JOHANNES TRAPL
GRÜNER VELTLINER 2020**

The Trapl estate in tranquil Stixneusiedl in the Carnuntum region has been a stronghold of a down-to-earth, working with the nature approach, having finished their transition to official Demeter standards as of the 2020 vintage. You should expect nothing less from Johannes than the most pure and honest expression of the region's terroirs and grapes. He has recently further streamlined his portfolio and introduced new labels for the entry level range. Entry level at Trapl's, however, does not mean trivial as every wine is given the attention it deserves. Manual harvest, spontaneous fermentation, up to 38 years old vines are parameters that would perfectly fit a single vineyard, super premium wine. Yet, this is the **Grüner Veltliner 2020**, a juicy everyday wine that is both typical of the Trapl style and the grape. Johannes does not like heavy wines and biodynamics help him harvest ripe grapes at lower sugar levels. Wine, after all, is supposed to be fun while drinking it! 10,5 % alc. really is all you need as long as there's fruit, harmony and freshness. No nonsense added, just like the label tells us!



**WACHTER-WIESLER
WEISSES HANDGEMENGE
2019**

The Eisenberg region is a tiny one when it comes to size (roughly 500 ha) but it is populated by some of Austria's most reputed wine growers. Christoph Wachter was considered the young shooting star for some time, but he has grown into a well-established name ever since. The Wachter-Wiesler's are constantly working on expressing the unique schist-driven Terroir of Eisenberg as authentically as possible. Next to a distinctive range of Blaufränkisch wines, Christoph also produces a red and white entry level series called "Handgemenge". This is a fun word in German: "Gemenge" is a blend, a mix, obviously created with a lot of manual ("Hand") work. At the same time "Handgemenge" is a not too serious scuffle or brawl, showing that wine doesn't have to be a dead serious product but should rather be enjoyed with friends, at parties, barbecues... Make no mistake about it: the Wachter Wiesler approach of cool, fresh, precise and dry wines also comes through in this **Weißes Handgemenge 2019**. Welschriesling, Chardonnay & Traminer, aged in large oak and stainless steel, unfiltered, unfinned, no make up. Exciting fruit aromas, great acidity, bone-dry. Great fun!





JOHANNES ZILLINGER PARCELLAIRE 2019 #1

Quite some new labels and names will see the light in Velm-Götzendorf this year. In order to streamline his portfolio, the entry level monovarietal wines – formerly known as “Velue” will be labelled as “JZ.velue”. The biggest change, however, is the new “Parcelaire” range which will replace the former “Reflexion” single vineyard wines. Here, Johannes has decided to focus on the coolest parcels of his oldest vineyards: limestone soils, sites close to forests, facing north and northeast and on windy hilltops. The **Parcelaire #1** was conceived already in 2019 and is a blend of 35 years old vines from Welschriesling & Chardonnay. The Welschriesling part fermented as whole bunches in amphorae, was pressed and matured in 500 L barrels whereas the Chardonnay fermented in old “Numen” barrels and was aged for 10 months under flor – all of it was blended 1 month before bottling. The taste is true to Zillinger style: “stoney” minerality, spicy, great acidity and displaying a lot of tension and length while remaining easy drinking and fresh. Biodyn farming, spontaneous fermentation, malolactics, unfinned & unfiltered – needless to say.



MARTIN OBENAU UNCHAINED ROTER VELTLINER

“Unchained” is the credo of young biodyn grower Martin Obenaus from Glaubendorf in Weinviertel. He aims to unleash the (self-healing) powers of Nature, encourage the balance of natural cycles and interfere as little as possible. He applies biodyn preparations and his home-brewed compost tea, an essence kind of liquid he brings out onto his ever more healthy soils. There are many benefits to this labour-intensive approach, one of them being the ability to harvest early, at naturally lower sugar levels yet perfect ripeness. The centerpieces of Obenaus are the “MO” and “Unchained” series which are all varietal (and partly vintage) blends. However, Martin does monovarietal as well. The rare, historical Roter Veltliner grape (not related to Grüner!) often needs a long growing season and high ripeness in order to yield expressive wines. Martin has a different approach. His **Unchained Roter Veltliner** comes from up to 50 years old vines, is gently processed and vinified in stainless steel so to showcase its fresh profile. At 11% alc., it comes as a highly refreshing juice with soft tannic structure and mouth-watering acidity. Worth trying!



WABI SABI ORANGE MOON

The stylistic spectrum of “orange” or skin fermented white wines is wide. Depending on variety and the length of maceration and fermentation as well as vinification the wine will be more or less dark, tannic and the fruit can naturally differ a lot. The Wabi Sabi approach is to produce wines with a certain edge, personality, and sense of place. But above all, Franz and his team aim to launch wines that are fun to drink. Orange Moon is a wine that likes to combine drinkability with a light “orange” touch if you will: some tannic structure but with a backbone of lively fruit and crisp acidity, low alcohol degrees on top. The (organic) grapes are harvested by hand in Weinviertel and consist of Grüner Veltliner for the biggest part with some Pinot Blanc. As different vintages lend more layers to the wine, the Veltliner is from 2019, the Pinot from the 2018 vintage. Vinification occurs mainly in stainless steel tanks so to preserve the freshness and the skins are macerated for about 7 days in average. This way, the wine shows an orange colour that is rather a darkish yellow, nice citrusy aromas, soft tannins and super fresh acidity. This is no meditation wine but one for many dishes, exactly the way we like it!





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