

NŌ. 6

toa zine

**MAGAZINE FOR &
FROM WINE LOVERS**



Dear partners & friends!

The annual cycle comes to a close, once again and will inevitably begin anew (check out our “Herb Witch”). Many things have been keeping us busy, not only work, obviously. Speaking of work, thus wine, the TOA wineries are looking back at a great 2021 vintage (see the “Pretty Happy” part in this zine), despite some challenges which are, obviously, part of our life. Challenges are also “daily business” for you, our partners. For us, it is fascinating to get to know the people behind (and sometimes in



front of) the curtains, that’s why we have interviewed 2 of them, in Canada and Switzerland. Different parts of the world, different approaches, same goals: to promote wine as an individual, artisanal and close-to-nature product that can be so much more than fermented grape juice. By the way, preserving the bubbles which emerge during fermentation can be a good idea and result in some fine fizz – passion and knowledge provided. Here’s to all of us!

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ORGANIC VITICULTURE

Do organically or biodynamically produced wines automatically have to be more expensive? How do wine-makers assess the risk of low-intervention vinification? Do we pay an insurance premium for it? How much is individuality worth to us? And: what does value actually mean?

Imagine the following scenario: a wine-maker tries to process his must into a good wine with as little intervention as possible, little or no sulfur. However, the must – having been left to do what it does naturally – turns into vinegar. The winemakers and their customers have to ask themselves: to which degree is low-intervention winemaking supposed to be economically viable? Does the price include a sort of risk premium? Does organic wine always have to be more expensive?

The first question can be answered pretty easily: a wine turning out “undrinkable” in the cellar is a rare occurrence. Yes, some experiments do go wrong, but no winegrower in his right mind will put economically relevant quantities at risk. Those are merely experiments. Therefore, it is not necessary to calculate a surcharge for them.

Let's try to answer the second question: in a biodynamic viticulture, managing the vineyards is significantly more complex and risky. However, assuring quality in the vineyard will determine how smoothly things will go down in the cellar. Therefore, it is imperative for winegrowers who work according to organic and biodynamic principles (simply “organic” in the following for the sake of simplicity) and with as little intervention as possible in the cellar, to lay the foundations in the vineyard and to manage their actual economic risk based on them.

HOW EXPENSIVE IS “ORGANIC”?

One of the winemakers interviewed on the subject replied with a question of his own: “Shouldn't we rather ask ourselves whether the price of conventional wines is justified?” After all, he claimed, a grower can minimize his risks by using systemic pesticides, mineral fertilizers and lots of machinery, as well as oenological aids in the cellar. Hail and frost can affect every vineyard (organic or not), but in conventional agriculture, it seems that economy is more important than ecology – in contrast to what advertising wants to have us believe.

“Still, many wines are being produced with unsustainable methods, exploiting natural resources and sometimes even human life. They fetch very high prices and are hailed by critics. But pricing should rather be based on the criteria of a circular economy as per one hectare of vines I need about four times the area for animals, fodder plants, etc. That would be fair, and sustainable. Today, however, people pay for a brand, not for the actual quality of the wine. Harvesting only one grape per vine does not automatically make for a better wine, and not every high-priced wine is produced with an artisanal mindset and a lot of effort in the vineyard.” This being said, the Winethinker would like to point out that everyone's interpretation of quality is based on individual (and therefore different and not easily measurable) perceptions.

The situation is different when speaking of soil quality as one can check out for example by consulting the evaluation criteria of the Austrian Federal Environmental Agency: <https://www.umweltbundesamt.de/en/topics/soil-agriculture/soil-protection/soil-observation-assessment>)

It seems that economy and ecology are opponents in this regard. Using green crops, for example, brings more life and diversity into a vineyard, but also results in competition for the vines when it comes to water and nutrient availability, thus reduces the possible yield. Plant protection is another factor: the more “natural” and discreet its use, the more risks it poses for the health of the grapes. Increasing the frequency of treatments can save a harvest in the short term but in the long run, this entails soil compaction and damages the ecosystem. This is especially the case in organically treated vineyards. Refraining from using machines but animals instead is an alternative, but an expensive one. Owners of dogs or cats will agree, knowing how much they're paying for the vet, medication, food, etc.

ECONOMY VERSUS ECOLOGY

As yields per hectare are lower in organic viticulture, growers are bound to fetch higher average prices in order to end up with a reasonable income. Sustainable farming methods put less strain on the ecosystem. This way, the customer is also paying for the protection of natural resources and thus for supporting the next generations.

This sounds good and is certainly something the consumers agree upon. The problem, however, is that whereas a higher price should not be an issue in the premium segment, it might very well be one in the ...

Nevertheless, this retail segment is also facing increasing competition and the erosion of prices. More and more wineries are getting certified organic and are pushing into a highly contested market segment (organic and biodynamic wine) that is more expensive than the average (conventional wine). In view of this, one grower even told me that wineries would obtain an organic certificate more easily than ever, he feared, due to less rigorous controls.

label, closure, transport from Italy to Austria and distribution. 20 percent VAT included. One reason could be that all sorts of interventions are allowed in order to obtain the EU organic certificate, provided the substances are also certified organic and GMO-free. And there is plenty to choose from nowadays. The Austrian biodynamic grower's verdict? “I refuse to join this game. I'd rather downsize my family business and focus on the premium segment, which is also more fun.”

To actually enjoy what we're doing is an important factor, something we should not underestimate. One of the growers I talked to said: “It is fundamental to decide how you want to live your life as a winemaker. Do you want to talk prices all the time or enjoy the “good life” with sommeliers, chefs and lovers of good wine and food? Does living a good life require having a lot of money or rather spending your time with interesting people you don't have to talk money with? Yes, I want to give my workers a decent wage and I want to eat high-quality food. The current situation shows us that we can actually afford many things which would have been unthinkable two years ago. If not always in a positive sense.”

In the vineyard, we have to strike a balance between ecology and economy. In the cellar, it's quality versus taking risks. It is on us, the people who produce and the people who buy to find the balance and sustain it.

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wine
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IT'S GETTING TIGHT

Well, well. And we thought that it was great to see more and more wineries taking the organic path. Apparently, as the world goes, there is no light without shadow.

Another winemaker's quote: “If I could, I would only produce premium wines. In the vineyard, the effort required for basic wines and premium wines is very similar. But I hardly earn anything on the basic stuff as the price pressure is growing steadily. I don't want to save money on packaging and design - these bottles transport my brand as well.” Branding, here we go again - as we all know, appearances do matter.

Recently I tasted an EU organic-labeled Pinot Grigio purchased in an Austrian supermarket, at €3.99. It was drinkable by all means, though not memorable. I wondered how this was possible: grapes from organic farming, costs of vinification and cellar equipment, bottle,

... entry-level or basic segment. In other words, wines that come at around ten euros for the end consumer – a price above average anyway (a bottle of wine in Austrian super markets was €5.39* in 2020).



A Talk with Philip Morisset

Philip Morisset is a Montréal based importer of family-run, organic and low-intervention wines. Although his company “Origines” has only been operating since 2016, Philip looks back on many years of experience in the booming Québec wine market. Let’s check out his insight on former and recent developments!

Philip, please tell us about how you came into the wine biz.

I started as a sommelier, on the restaurant side of the business. The region where I was born (Charlevoix in Québec) is very touristic so my first jobs were restaurant jobs. When I later ended up in higher end places, I worked with other sommeliers who transmitted me their passion for wine. At a certain point in 2000 I decided to get into wine full-time. In 2006 I moved to Montréal and started to be a bit tired of the whole restaurant life beat. Until 2009, I was consulting for an import company and in 2010 I met Jean-Pierre who owned a restaurant but was also starting to import wine. In 2016 I decided to embark on my own path and started to build “Origines”. We have 4 full time employees now, have moved to new offices and despite the two slower years (for well-known reasons) the future looks bright now!

Québec/Montréal has for a long time been a stronghold for organic and “natural” wines – how come?

Yes, that is true! It all started already in the mid-nineties around pioneers such as Jean-Philippe Lefevre and Jeannot Gingras. Back in those days, those guys have taken a lot on them and they have probably tasted a lot of vinegar – the hygiene was not being mastered back then as it is today and the growers were working a little bit neglecting science,

so to say. Sometimes it worked out well, sometimes not so... However, as Montréal was so early on the scene, this makes it a very mature market. Even the individual customers are pretty well schooled on wines in general and also on natural wines. So we don’t have to explain anymore why a wine is cloudy, for example.

Do you see any trends in your market when it comes to wine styles? Skin maceration, cloudy wines, low alc. reds, Pet Nats...

All of that (laughs)! I think, this is a natural process. We have had the “Parker-years” when we were looking for impressing, right-in-your-face wines but those wine saturate you after 2 sips. When you get into natural wines, you listen to your body, how it reacts to these wines – and it wants more. If you want vibrant wines, you cannot over-concentrate them. Also, we’re not any more at a point where we want to wait 20 years for a wine to be ready. That’s why we come back to more “fluent”, easy-drinking wines, ideally without compromising the complexity. Take “pet nat” for example: we were seeing a lot of very young pet nats in the beginning which were obviously not ripe enough to go into still wines. Now, we’re starting to see pet nats with little more aging on the lees, little more refinement. Of course, with climate change, having lower alcohol wines is a big challenge. The organic



growers and their balanced way of cultivating do have an advantage in my view. Another trend is a big coming back on local, indigenous varieties but also on older methods of winemaking – just think of blending red wine and white wine for a Rosé, which up until recently was unheard of (except for Champagne) but a common practice in former times as nearly everything was planted in field blends. This method makes a lot more sense in warmer regions than trying to under-extract. Talking about Rosés, they are also gaining momentum in our market

after having put in a lot of work. And I’m talking Rosés that are drunk throughout the year and not only in summer.

What’s your take on wine faults? Volatile acidity or mousiness – how high is your threshold of acceptance?

Well, for some years, young sommeliers were starting directly with natural wines without knowledge of the more “traditional” wines. But, you know, mousiness for example, it is a fault and you cannot answer with: “it’s normal cause it’s natural wine”. That would be unfair and disastrous for all natural and even organic

wines. Let us not forget that many “traditional” wines can show off-aromas as well, just consider brettanomyces. In this regard, the new trend for craft beers has had an impact since beer drinkers switching to wines were really tolerant towards brett – not knowing it was a fault. So there was a little setback but we’re coming back to balance, I believe.

What do you think about official certifications? Biodynamics without the label, is this something you care about?

There are many factors in play here. I believe we do need the certifications for the consumers. I can visit the winery and figure out how they work but it’s not that easy for the consumer. Anyone can claim they’re work organically or biodynamically but the certification is the only way to prove it to the consumer. A problem is, of course: “Who pays for those certifications?” In the best of worlds, there would be a tax on chemicals used instead of having to pay more for wines that are certified as not using them! It’s absurd paying extra for working clean. What you guys have in Austria, where people already associate quality to a clean way of working, that is really a great thing.

Some growers are proud of not adding any SO2. What do you think of that?

I have never been an “Ayatollah” of these zero-zero-sulphites wines, I do not mind if there’s a little added. But I’m up for zero provided the wine is stable! Too much SO₂ is a problem in my view – it doesn’t allow the wine to vibrate the way it should, it’s a question of energy. What’s very important for us is that the wine travels well, mind we’re in Canada. I also think that more and more producers are past that “I wanna show I can do it with zero-zero”. That might work well locally but as soon as you put the wine under “shock” of the long transport, it can get tricky, even more so because the state monopoly still does not want the wines to travel in refrigerated containers. We have to be really careful choosing what we have transported at which point of time, just think of the problems during summertime.

Everybody speaks about it but many of the best growers are not allowed to use it due to law restrictions. What do you think about the importance of origin?

Professionals are more aware of origin, of course and there is a lot going on in the moment in this field. I think appellations are necessary but there should be

some form of simplification – appellation systems everywhere are so different, it’s very tough for the consumers to follow. However, the area of production is for me something very important to be put on the labels because it refers to a climate, to a terroir. Then again, it depends on how big and diversified the region is. When the region is big (such as Weinviertel, for example) putting it on the label does not necessarily designate a particular terroir. It’s way more precise for smaller regions like the Wachau. In general, if we uniformized the legislation for origins, we could pinpoint specific geographical units more easily. When speaking of regions or appellations I also think that we should honour local grapes. Nature did things well, and most of the times the best results come from using local grapes. That’s the question: should we control that or leave it to the market to decide?

A TOA family wine you have in your fridge right now?

(Laughs). Sorry, I have nothing in my fridge right now, the weekend is over. I’d have to go to the office! Seriously, we’re doing very well with our TOA producers! It’s special because we had a very hard time during the pandemic as we don’t work much with the state monopoly and restaurants were closed. I think we have worked well on the image of all of our producers, the impact of Instagram for instance has been huge and we are pre-selling basically all of the wines now. Ultimately, we and our producers will benefit from that period. Austrian wines are also very popular in Canada right now – we are way over the scandals of the eighties. We see two big buzzes at the moment: Austria and Cataluña. For sure, it’s niche regions (everybody has French wines) but we’re doing very strong here. Whenever we have Austrian wines coming in, everybody is jumping on them. We’re very happy about that!



PRETTY & HAPPY

What is the good thing about cool climate? Cool wines, obviously, provided the growers respect what nature provides them with – without trying to copy warmer regions. Another, admittedly ambiguous fact is vintage variation. Whereas you’ll probably rarely see growers struggling with ripeness in southern Spain or Chile and one could argue that climate warming has been favoring ripeness also in cooler regions, the vintages still do turn out differently on a regular basis. In fact, Austria has seen two cooler vintages in 2020 and 2021, at least compared to

a couple of extremely warm and often dry years such as 2018 or 2019. It will take some time until the 2021s will be on the market but you can see vintage variation very clearly in the fine and elegant 2020s as a lot of wines from that year have been released already. They delight with lower alcohol and higher acidity levels as well as with charming aromatics – to be honest, what more could serious wine people wish for?

So how was 2021? Unlike many other regions, especially in Europe, the latest vintage has not been a catastrophic one in Austria. There were scattered hail damages, yes, and some regions have also seen higher levels of fungal pressure (oidium, peronospora). However, the loss of yield and – most important – quality was limited, generally speaking. The weather conditions were very good throughout the harvest months of September and October and the growers were able to pick very nice fruit at balanced ripeness levels and outstanding acidity levels. You’d like a more personal insight? Let’s see for a couple of reports from our TOA-wineries!





RABL

If I should describe 2021 with one word, it would be “unbelievable”! I have never had such a vintage in my 33 years of winemaking. We have had average yields and great ripeness but above all, fantastic acidity so we expect not only full bodied but also super elegant wines, in our entire range and for all varieties. The reason for this were the cold (not cool, really cold!) nights we had throughout the harvest. We did have some hail but it didn’t affect yields and we were even able to leave some Riesling grapes hanging for a great Auslese as well as grapes for Eiswein.

SABATHI

The quality of the 2021 vintage was very good at our estate. Judging from how the wines are developing in the cellar, this might even turn out to be a great vintage – we will see. We had some rain-falls during flowering so compared to the last 3 years, the yields are down by some 25%. Although at an early stage it looks like 2021 was a year favoring aromatic varieties. We’re in Southern Styria so this comes in very handy ;)! Sauvignon blanc will be great and we have never had such fantastic qualities with our Muskateller before. Stylistically, we will stay true to our philosophy. Stay tuned!



OBENAU

I’m pretty satisfied with this year’s harvest. Unfortunately, we were hit by hail in some vineyards so I could have easily picked more fruit but that’s life – or nature! Picking started a bit later than in 2020, about 10 days but the weather conditions were nearly perfect with only 2 days of rain and cool nights (a jacket was necessary every morning). I never worked more than 14 hours per day during harvest – an unusually “short” time for a winegrower! Acidity levels and ripeness were perfectly balanced and fermentations started quickly, probably thanks to the overall cool temperature, so I was able to vinify my wines the way I like it, without interfering too much.

TINHOF

2021 was great! Yields were a little bit down compared to average, but only some 10%. Also, we started picking around 2 weeks later. The outstanding feature of this vintage was the fact that phenolic and sugar ripeness advanced at the same pace, plus, the acidity levels remained high throughout the harvest months. Like that we could pick without any stress. We are super happy with how the Neuburger vineyards turned out and will continue to vinify them without malolactic fermentation so to preserve the freshness. Also for the Burgundian varieties such as St. Laurent, 2021 looks really good. I would say that this year’s harvest was similar to harvests we used to have 20 years ago – which is a good thing in my view!



KRUTZLER

Here, in the Eisenberg region or at least for my winery, the weather turned out perfectly, especially in the months of September and October and we did not have any problems with fungal diseases whatsoever. Compared to 2020, harvest started some 8 days earlier (on 20 September), the last grapes being picked 1st of October. We have witnessed a great level of ripeness in our fruit and despite temperatures above average in September, we expect delicate and elegant wines which will not display overly high alcohol levels. For me, 2021 will be a fantastic vintage which will be a great joy to drink in the years to come.

TEGERNSEERHOF

Except for some Vetliners, most of our wines are still fermenting so it’s a bit early to issue a final verdict on 2021. However, things are looking very good. We had some hail end of July but the yield is on average nonetheless. The time of picking was roughly like in 2020 – we started a bit later but finished a bit earlier, and we were able to pick under ideal weather conditions. Like in many other Austrian regions, the acidity levels are spectacular. I believe that these cooler, elegant vintages like 2020 and 2021 will be perfect for showing the world the typicality of Austrian wines, white Wachau wines of course, speaking of Tegernseerhof!





TRAPL

Like most of my colleagues all over Austria, I'm very satisfied with the outcome of 2021! Quantities are on average and qualities really good. The sugar ripeness was a little bit higher throughout my portfolio, I assume it was because of the rainfalls we had beginning of August. As a result, the vines did not go into a heat-induced break (like in the hot years) but continued to ripen. Of course, we're talking Trapl-levels here, with some 11-11,5 % vol.! Already at this stage, the wines are showing beautiful aromatics and freshness. My personal favorites are the Zweigelt and Blaufränkisch batches but all whites and the skin fermented stuff are also conjuring a smile upon my face!



WACHTER

Julia and myself, we have great news about harvest 2021. We don't want to brag but we brought in perfectly healthy and tasty grapes. Even though it was quite a warm year we were able to pick our fruit on time. The crop was a little bit smaller due to late August rains in our region. We have established a new system in the cellar so we can now process at least 80% of the mash without any pumping. This gentle processing method will put an even greater emphasis on the finesse of our wines. The wines which are already pressed and finishing fermentation in barrel show brilliantly, with lots of fruit, superb acidity and depth. We are very much looking forward to these wines!



WARGA-HACK

We have started picking in mid September and, as usual, we were the first ones in our region. Low pH-levels are very important to us (of course, achieving physiological ripeness at the same time) so timely harvest is what we strive for. We have had 12 picking days with 12 helpers on average. In our most important site, the Demmerkogel, we have had some hail so total yield is a bit less but we can't complain about quality! The canopy was as healthy this year as rarely before, in Kitzack for example, the vines looked really perfect. As for the varieties, our classics such as Sauvignon blanc, Muskateller and Riesling present wonderful aromatics and the fermentations are proceeding slowly but steadily. We couldn't ask for more, really!



A Talk with Paul Blume

Paul Blume is a Germany born, Zurich based importer of organic and low-intervention wines. Having been “formed” in the world of restaurants and sommeliers, he was at the right place and in the right time when Switzerland started to discover other than classical wines a couple of years ago. The wine world is rapidly changing in formerly “sleepy” Switzerland. Paul told us about the Why and How.

Paul, tell us about your beginnings. Where do you come from and how did you end up in Zürich?

Wine has been a part of my life since my early education. I started in Cologne and was trained by Dieter Müller but to be honest, we focused mostly on partying, being away from home for the first time. In my early 20's I then moved on to Tyrol (Achensee) where my passion for wine really kicked off. They had an outstanding cellar and I was in charge of the wine list already as a young somm, which was really cool! Later, I did a pit stop in Canada, also in a top-notch restaurant (largest wine list in North America) and back in Europe, I went to a hotel management school, always keeping close contact with wine. After another short stop, in retail with Andreas Schick, I wanted to go back to the mountains so I applied in Austria and Switzerland. The best offer came from Zurich and I became F&B manager in a large restaurant & event group. I purchased wines for 14 restaurants.

From that point, I started to think about starting a wine business on my own, at first in cooperation with the group I was working for. But in 2016, shortly before we planned to launch it, my partner decided not to be part of it, so I was left on my own. This was the best thing that could have happened to me! I borrowed some money from friends and family and started with 7 pallets. I didn't have

any bank loan and did everything on my own, working as a somm at the same time to cover my overheads. Everything I earned there went straight into my project. Luckily, it grew steadily and organically and was able to work without pressure, even continuing working as a somm. 2 years ago, Zarina got on board to take care of social media and strategic planning. Today, we sell some 180 wines from 35 producers, focusing on the on-trade and organic and biodynamic wines.

Your focus is on low-intervention wines from family growers. These wines have until recently been a little niche in Switzerland. What's the status quo?

I believe that I have become the wine merchant who has facilitated the access to low-intervention wines. In the beginning, many things went wrong in this segment: faulty wines were sold to the people or they were sold without any explanation. Of course, we must admit that Switzerland used to lag behind the rest of Europe when it comes to this kind of wines and still does. Too much money, too much classic drinking. Where tradition is so firmly established, change processes simply take much longer. Label and brand drinking is also brutal here. As far as we're concerned, we had the best timing to start with "our" wines and with our concept.

My gut feeling tells me that the demand is going to grow and a lot, especially because of the target audience. Our portfolio is very well received by all those who are our age and younger. The current success also has a cultural dimension as wine is experiencing a hype we have not seen probably for 30 years. Drinking wine is hip and the natural wines fit in nicely with their modern labels - the overall package is perfect at the moment. This is even more true for the gastronomy - every young restaurateur who has a cool concept wants to sell these wines. We are witnessing great momentum in this area and in principle, we don't need to make any acquisitions. So I don't feel any pressure to grow.

Is Zurich different from the western part of Switzerland?

I wouldn't claim that the differences are huge. In general, Zurich is not as price-conscious as the French-speaking part of Switzerland, which pays a bit more attention to the price-quality ratio. Then, of course, we have the famous “Rösti trench” (a cultural boundary between German-speaking and French-speaking parts of Switzerland.) but that is slowly breaking down, probably for generational reasons. Basically, all restaurateurs want to have as wide a selection as possible and not only what is available on their doorstep. We're seeing a lot of movement in the natural wine scene, with a lot of new

restaurants opening, and many new, small wine merchants. The market is getting a whole new dynamic.

Do you see any trends in your market when it comes to wine styles? Skin maceration, cloudy wines, low alc. reds, non vintage...

One thing is for sure: we are seeing huge changes in Switzerland right now. Consumption used to be 2 thirds of red and 1 third of white wines but last year, for the first time in decades, this has shifted to fifty-fifty! White wines are definitely on the rise and we expect this to continue growing. In terms of style, the “classic” aroma spectrum still sets the tone - the “funky” aromas are not being accepted yet. So it's got to be fruity, round and clean and the acidity should not be too high. We have to be careful: we, the experts, we are not the crowd. That being said, “orange” is clearly on the rise, the demand is growing. Pet Nat is also really taking off at the moment, I see a huge market for these sparkles in Switzerland!

What's your take on wine faults? Volatile acidity or mousiness - how high is your threshold of acceptance?

It was clear to me from the beginning that we didn't want to be associated with those “stinky” kind of natural wines that the “scene” and hipsters were so eager to drink. Our focus has always been the restaurant business and I knew that we needed to promote well-made, clean wines. Somehow, we have grown into that role, although, of course, we're still a small distributor. Luckily, it is getting easier as more and more wines are produced the way we like them.

How do you estimate the status of Austrian wines among these wines?

In my opinion, the standing of Austrian wines is excellent. I guess that Austria

and France are taking the first or second place in Switzerland in this segment, it's more or less even. Germany, Italy and Spain are slowly joining them, although some of them are still offering a mixed bag when it comes to quality.

What do you think about official certifications? Organic, biodynamic, does the logo matter?

Nobody really cares about that, frankly, at least as far as my business model is concerned. We do not rally supply the food retailers but the gastronomy. Thanks to the close relationship I have



with my customers, they know that when we tell them something, it's true. Of course, that's also because we know all our winemakers and the way they work. That's why certifications are not an issue - for us.

What about SO₂? Zero, a little or more?

In my opinion, it makes sense to add SO₂ when it's necessary to do so. For sure, there is always a couple of hardliners, but that's part of the game. We have been working with “our” wines for years now and we are always in

contact with the winemakers. If things are looking good, the grapes are perfect and everything has gone well in the cellar - then it's up to the winemaker to say “I can fill them this year without adding SO₂, it feels safe.” But then there might be a year when they say “Hey, I should add a little”. I can fully understand that and I'll communicate it to my customers accordingly. For us, it's important to know how much has been added because many people want to know.

What do you think about declaring the origin of a wine?

To be honest, nobody gives a damn, really. It's the producer and the packaging that are really important for the customers! If you line up some bottles in a restaurant, for example, and you have someone pick one, I'm gonna bet on which of the bottles they will pick up first - the one with the most interesting packaging. The challenge is this: finding a way between cool and modern and that “hipster shit” which was so easy to sell in the past.

In my opinion, the most promising approach (for the next years to come and in all segments) is to produce wines with an appealing design but which are recognized for their quality and consistency. In this respect, I hold all TOA winemakers in extremely high esteem.

They get better every single year, they are really stepping it up in freshness, precision and tension. For me as an importer, I couldn't be more happy. I can buy those wines “blind” from basically every one of the TOA winemakers. And the sommeliers and consumers are also aware of that and specifically ask for those wines. Huge compliments!

MABON Autumn Equinox

Mabon is the second important harvest festival of the annual cycle. It's the time when we say thank you for all the gifts of Mother Earth, celebrate the harvest and show our gratitude through harvest rituals. Besides harvest, the equality of day and night which represents a turning point towards the dark half of the year is also of great importance. For our ancestors, harvest time was just as important for survival as the fact that Mother Earth provides and nourishes us with all her gifts.

For the second time in the year, we witness during this festival a special state of equilibrium, a moment when day and night are perfectly equal. Everything is balanced and finds itself in equilibrium and harmony, a state we can experience as a deep evenness between the forces. This particular state of equilibrium is a significant turning point. From this day on, the energies begin to change. The days become shorter again and the nights longer. Fog and darkness gradually return, silence resumes its place. The time of retreat and decay is dawning upon us. In nature, life takes a step back and the dying begins. Everything is pointing towards difficult times, times we must overcome.

And yet we see that the annual cycle is in flow, that there is no life without death and that everything comes full circle. For while the leaves of the trees die and fall off, new buds are formed at the same time. They will give birth to new life and awakening in spring. The leaves that fall to the ground provide the earth with new fertility, thus new life is already emerging in the silence and darkness. Let us seize all those energies celebrating the harvest time and let us say thank you for all we have been given in this year. We should go quiet and reflect. The silence allows us to introspect so we can reawaken once the dark period has ended.

However, before nature retreats completely, she shows herself one more time in extraordinary abundance, splendor and intense colors. We marvel at autumn and its red, blue and purple berries on wild hedge plants such as rose hips, elderberries and sloes. They all strengthen and invigorate our immune system during this season of the year.

Many field crops such as fresh potatoes, pumpkins, carrots and beets reach their ripeness, just like apples, plums, pears and grapes which are ready to be harvested. Blueberries, raspberries and blackberries provide the immune system with important vitamins and give

us strength for the winter and we can source necessary fatty acids from hazelnuts and walnuts. However, autumn is not only the time of harvest, but also the time of processing, canning and storing. We prepare supplies for the winter, preserve fruits and store vegetables. Medicinal herbs are collected and processed into teas and elixirs, which serve as important remedies in winter time.

The fruits of the apple tree are of particular importance in this regard. Apples are our most essential domestic fruit and provide us with important vitamins, especially in winter. In the past, they played a significant role in surviving the cold season in good health. The apple tree was also known as the "paradise tree" and its fruit, the apple, is a symbol of perfection, wisdom, knowledge, fertility and love. Unfortunately, after the demise of matriachal cultures, the apple turned into a symbol of sin and decay. Rose hips and their bright red fruits are equally wonderful and beneficial plants. They contain particularly high levels of vitamin C and can be served as a tea, powder or processed into jam. These autumn berries strengthen the immune system and have anti-inflammatory and pain-relieving effects on us.

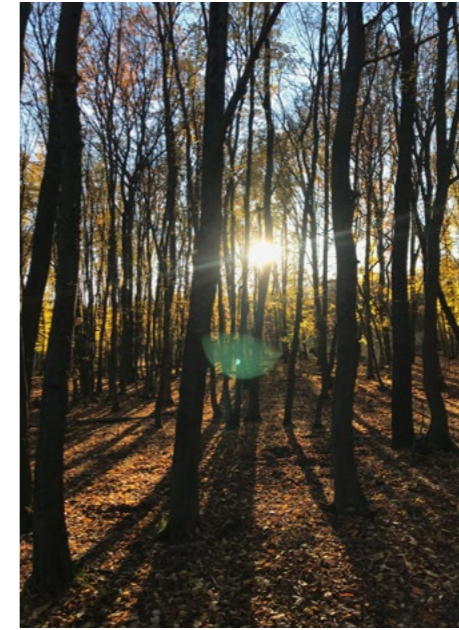
SAMHAIN THE CYCLE BEGINS ANEW

Around the late autumn new moon, the transition from fall to winter takes place. The remaining leaves fall from the trees which and stop absorbing water through their roots. Plants dry up completely or retreat into the ground, nature turns increasingly gray, cold and lifeless. Fog moves across the land and darkness takes its place. Silence returns. Winter is the time of regeneration and introspection.

Already in pre-Christian times, Samhain was considered a festival which was meant to honor the ancestors and the deceased, the unborn life, beings from other worlds as well as oracles and the turn of the year. We used to celebrate the beginning of winter and the very end of summer. The old year had finally come to a close and we could greet the new year. The Samhain festival is a symbol for the eternal cycle of life as new life can only arise through death. It is a celebration of retreat, silence and darkness. The "outside life" loses its predominance – just as nature retires in these days, so do the humans. They stay in their homes and welcome darkness and the approaching winter months. Dying and death are topics brought to the fore as they are more visible and more concrete than during any other time of the year.

Every day the fog patches get thicker, the humidity increases and the temperature drops. The bright autumn colors are fading. It's time to retreat to the warmth of the house and to look inside ourselves, to look back at the year gone by. We shall let go the old and at the same time sow the seed that is supposed to sprout in the upcoming year. It's also time to draw strength from the silence and from reconsidering our roots and the memory of our ancestors. Samhain is a meaningful festival, it is a cornerstone which marks the turn of the year.

The retreat of the life forces can also be seen in the animal world. Forest animals gather the last nuts and fruits. Some



animals also go into hibernation or move to warmer areas. Many insects die or seek protection in ground. By observing the

animals, we can often see whether we will be facing a severe or a mild winter. Autumn time is also a time for the roots, the native root plants being some of the most important plants around Samhain – the time for roots is also a time for the ancestors. Life above ground gradually loses its strength and retreats into the earth so to survive the winter months. The power of nature shifts towards the earth and into the roots of the plants. That's exactly where you can still find vitality in the fall and use it for healing purposes. For herbalists, the late autumn is when they go collecting roots for ointments, tinctures and elixirs, such as from valerian or angelica.

Valerian is a comforting and relaxing medicinal plant. As a tea, ointment or incense, it "relaxes" strained and overwrought nerves and helps ease muscular tension. It helps us fight stress works so we can let go of it and feel free again. It's a softening agent for everything which has turned stiff and its warmth penetrates deep into our tissue and relaxes both on a physical and mental level. Angelica has always been used to protect against infection. Whether as a tea, incense or balm, it has inhibiting effects on germs, viruses and bacteria. It also strengthens the entire immune system and our whole body. Angelica has beneficial effects on the gastrointestinal tract and the entire digestive system. Its warming ability harmonizes the metabolism, stimulates the formation of juices and removes unwanted germs. Chewing the root or seeds of angelica protects against infection and has a invigorating and regenerating effect.

In great anticipation of the winter solstice in December, I will now process the last fruits and roots into ointments, incense mixtures and teas and then dedicate myself to the winter woods and Christmas plants, their healing powers and subtle messages and I will connect with the magical toadstool. Let us all overcome the dark season!

Yours Birgit

Sparkling wines come in a lot of variations, styles and taste profiles. In Austria and elsewhere in the world, the last decade has seen a huge impact of new and rediscovered fizz, a considerable part of it resulting from the desire of organic and biodyn growers to show their philosophy not only in still wines. CO₂ after all, is an inevitable part of fermentation and due to hands-off winemaking (sometimes also negligence, yes) we have seen more than one bottle accidentally sparkling in a presumably still wine. Naturally, the good growers have since learnt to tame their rebellious “children”, mostly by avoiding risky levels of residual sugars. Or they accepted or even encouraged a potential post-fermentation and CO₂ and closed their bottles with crown caps. Many of them also started to produce “Pet Nats” right away, as a matter of fact.

styles of fizz

COPY & PASTE

Now, as we all are aware of, successful brands and styles are readily being copied or imitated. Just think of Champagne and its constant fight against unauthorized use of the brand. Regulations for production and labelling can be a useful thing but few customers really do read (or understand!) the back label at all. DOC, DAC, g.U., few give a damn, let's be honest. It does not get better when it comes to the “dryness”-levels as they differ significantly from those for still wines. Imagine this: you can label a sparkling wine (regardless of the classification, more or less) as “trocken” (not “brut”, sure) while having up to 32

grams of sugar! Yes, “trocken” (“dry” in German) is a whole different story for sparkling wines, but a perfectly misleading one.

Speaking of Austrian Sekt, some classification rules have been established recently (a pyramid defining “Klassik”, “Reserve” and “Grosse Reserve” depending on factors such as fermentation, origin of grapes, time sur lie, etc.) Still, also in this case, the “Klassik” does not need to have been fermented in the bottle. Frizzante, anyone?

UNDER PRESSURE

Pétillant Naturels have actually emerged as a huge trend in the industry in the last decade or so (there must be up to 100 different labels now only in small Austria), reflecting the tastes of many growers and customers alike: to drink unfiltered, unfiltered and often non-sulphured, low alcohol, dry, sparkling wines with refreshing acidity levels and non-aggressive perlage. These products are well in line with the low-intervention approach the nature-minded growers had successfully applied for their non-sparkling wines.

As a producer's personal choice, they come cloudy, yeast included or disgorged, macerated or not, in white, rosé or red. The handling is usually (or at least ideally) really done by hand, thus Pet Nats tend to be individual satisfying the customer's longing for “as natural as it gets”. Crown caps and modern packaging are further reasons for this sparkling success story. Yet, As the world goes, Pet Nats are also facing – presumably unfair – competition as ignorant regulating bodies (in Austria) have struggled in finding a reasonable definition and putting it down in law. For now, a sparkling wine can be marketed even if it's cloudy and

oxidative as long as it is labelled as “Pet Nat”. Fine, but they did not care to define the production method. Thus, anything can be bottled as Pet Nat as long as it's sparkling and cloudy-oxy. Such as tank fermented, 25 g residual sugar bubbles, proudly carrying “Pet Nat” and “Méthode ancestrale”, sometimes on the same bottle.

“The Revolution devours its children” is a saying we could apply for the aftermath of the Pet Nat wave which has hit the market. Not willing to be under the same umbrella as all the copycats, some pioneers of the segment have stopped

highlighting Pet Nat prominently on the label and instead using terms like “méthode ancestrale” or “rurale” or focusing on the established brand name. These growers have always been ready to defy classification or the lack of it, innovation and independence being a part of their nature. There's no way around it: if you want to pick the “right” sparkling wine that suits your philosophy, look out for the “right” producer. In the following, we show you some styles of genuine bubbles: Sekt, méthode ancestrale and some products not categorized as sparklings but in which more or less fizz plays a fascinating role...



KARL FRITSCH PURIST

The Wagram region where the renown Fritsch estate produces its outstanding, biodyn farmed wines is not really known for sparkling wines - besides some Frizzantes, only a handful of estates produce Sekt. There's no Sekt on offer in the Fritsch house either but as you would expect nowadays from a biodynamic farmer, the Fritsch Portfolio does include

a Pet Nat. The Purist is true to its name: an honest, bone-dry and pure wine (no additions of anything other than grape juice) that combines Riesling and Muskateller in equal parts. As 2021 was a great vintage at Fritsch's, expect lively aromatics and acidity. Fresh sparkles and drinking pleasure guaranteed!

GINDL BUBBLES

Michael always does his own thing. Just like himself, his still wines are individual characters and the same applies for his sparkling product, simply called "Bubbles". It is one of few really red (not rosé) methode ancestrale sparklings in Austria. The base wine is a composition as local as it gets, and more. We have Roesler, an Austrian breed that provides

for nice acidity and appealing fruit, Blauburger (another cross of Blauer Portugieser and Blaufränkisch) which gives a lot of colour and "Gindl rot" a red variety bred by Michael's grandfather on his own. The aromatic result is on the darker side of the red berry spectrum with some tannic grip, very individual and authentic.



GRUBER RÖSCHITZ SEKT BRUT RESERVE

The Gruber siblings' approach is to produce typical Weinviertel wines while taking care of their environment. Grüner Veltliner, Riesling, Zweigelt, etc. are the backbones of their operation but they also produce some very nice méthode Classique style, obviously organic certified "Sekt". In the recently established Austrian Sekt classification pyramid, the Gruber sparkling ranks in the "Reserve" category and rests on the lees for 18

months. This 2018 edition is made of Grüner and Riesling (equal parts) and rests sur lie for 18 months prior to disgorgement. Respecting the grapes, this is a fruit-driven (apricot, Golden Delicious apples), dry (just 2,5 g of residual sugar!), dense and only slightly brioche-y Sekt with nicely integrated bubbles that not only serves as a classic aperitif but also as a great food companion.

HOCHDEUTSCH WEIN ROSE BLOSSOM

Julie Hoch and botanicals, voilà a love story that is meant to last. She loves working with her plants and herbs and "marry" them to wine. The recently launched alpine herbs range is a non-sparkling addition to her portfolio but she will of course continue to work on the sparkling side of her offer. The Rosé edition of the botanical sparklings not only refers to its colour but also to the

ingredients, rose blossoms, as the name suggest, grown, selected and carefully treated by hand, of course. After being dried in a special drying cabinet (called Herbert), a tea is cold soaked and brewed and married to fermenting rosé wine based on regional varieties. You'll get roses, naturally but also juicy freshness, great acidity and low alcohol! Unique stuff!





ERICH MACHHERNDL ROSÉ SEKT

Cool climate regions are destined to produce cool climate fizz. You would probably expect Grüner or Riesling as Erich is based in the Wachau region but as he's a special guy, so is his Sekt. It's a Rosé one and the base wine is a part of the Zweigelt batch which was also used for Erich's pink Pulp Fiction wine. Unsulphured, unfiltered, it ferments and ages in stainless steel so to preserve the fruit and after bottling and second

fermentation it is allowed to rest sur lie for 2 years. With its low dosage of 3 grams, this is a wonderfully dry and refreshing Sekt that shows an unusually dark pink. Expect savoury, red berry fruit on the palate, balanced perlage and great acidity despite the wine going through malolactics. As with all of Machherndl wines, it's all about careless drinking (in the most positive way)!

CHRISTOPH HOCH ROSÉ RURALE

Christoph Hoch is one of the pioneers of natural sparklings in Austria. His portfolio actually boasts an entire range of them. Besides the widely known Kalkspitz and the limited Kalkreich, the Rosé Rurale edition complements the portfolio. Typically Hoch, this wonderfully refreshing juice is a blend of regional red grapes Zweigelt, St. Laurent and a dash of white Muskat Ottonel (for some

extra aromatic kick), blended from various vintages to show additional complexity. The base wine is vinified in old oak barrels and blended before the fermentation is induced with a powerful, fresh must instead of sugar and yeast. The taste? Low-alc, bright red berry fruit, lime, juicy red apple, bony-dry and with a light-footed perlage. Great as an apero and by-the-glass!



WABI-SABI WINES SPACE BUBBLES WHITE

Wabi-Sabi is about beauty in imperfection, and a part of the philosophy is also not to adhere to conventions. The Space Bubbles sparkling is a lightly disgorged methode ancestrale fizz that marries typically Austrian varieties like Grüner, Riesling, Muskat and similar, the blend and proportion of which may vary according to vintage and what it

brings to the wine. The cornerstone is, in any case, a lively structure, appealing but not overdosed fruit and a certain roundness which makes it very drinkable and a great companion for all sorts of occasions. Without unnecessary manipulations, obviously, this is a drink the consumer doesn't need to philosophize upon, but simply enjoy it.

THOMAS STRAKA READY STEADY GO!

Tom Straka is a fun guy to be around and so is his "Ready Steady Go!" fizz. You will not be surprised that it's a 100% Welschriesling, partly from top material he also uses for his Welschriesling Grünschiefer. The winemaking is state of the art for a fruit driven Pétillant: fermentation in stainless steel, bottling at the right moment, aging for roughly 6 months. One day before disgorgement,

the bottles are turned upside down so to collect the yeast – in doing so the fizz ends up just a little bit cloudy after disgorgement. After opening the bottle you get whiffs of citrus and apple fruit with nice herbal notes, the varietal acidity keeps it fresh and the natural perlage lifts this light-footed, low-alcohol everyday companion.





**CLAUS PREISINGER
ORDINAIRE**

Claus' methode ancestrale sparklings (there are two of them – Ancestrale and Ordinaire) are 100% in line with his way of thinking wine. They are based upon regional varieties, farmed biodynamically, picked early and vinified without any unnecessary additions of whatsoever. Unlike many sparklings in this category, the Ordinaire (bearing the

name since it's one "simple" fermentation as it should be) is a rosé which is not created by saignée but rather by blending a white (Welschriesling) and a red (Pinot Noir) in equal proportions. You would have guessed it: this one is all about freshness since both varieties possess a great deal of acidity. Add some Pinot fruit and be sure to drink liquid fun!

**BIO PETER & PAUL
PET NAT**

The main concept of a true-to-the-style Pétillant Naturel should be a truly refreshing drink. Lively fruit, good acidity and low alcohol are the ingredients the winemaker should embrace. The Pet Nat made by Winzerhof Hoch is such a pour-me-by-the-glass product, easy-going, organic and simply a perfectly juicy drink. Typical as it is, this blend

is composed of Grüner Veltliner and Muskateller, the first two providing for mouthfeel, the latter for more pungent aromatics (think flowers, citrus). A honest style with no more than 3 bars of pressure, the perlage is light and supports the vivid character of this Kremstal fizz.



E V E N T S

We will be present at the following wine fairs in 2022:

Millésime Bio

24 – 26 January 2022, Montpellier, France
www.millesime-bio.com

Vinexpo Paris

14 – 16 February 2022, Paris, France
www.vinexposium.com/en/wineparis-vinexpo

Slow Wine Fair

26 Feb – 1 March 2022, Bologna, Italy
www.slowinefair.slowfood.it

ProWein

27 – 29 March 2022, Düsseldorf, Germany
www.prowein.de

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