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toa zine

MAGAZINE FOR &
FROM WINE LOVERS



Dear friends & partners!

This edition of our TOAzone is dedicated to a regularly discussed topic – acidity. Acidity is obviously extremely important as it provides for freshness and liveliness, something that is ever more crucial to provide for in times of climatic changes. We can discuss acidity in terms of viticulture (what should I do in the vineyard in order to retain a healthy acidity?) and vinification (how do I press, ferment, blend and age my wines?). However, it is also vital to see acidity as a part of the



winegrower’s stylistic approach. Austrian wines stand for fruit, crunchiness and drinkability, no matter the origin. Origin, is, by the way, a source for many discussions and arguments as well, for nearly all Austrian regions are now covered by DAC’s. The “Wine-thinker” reflects upon this topic, so take a look! As usual, you will also find two interviews we conducted with young, relentless importers, Jens from Norway and Roland from Hungary/UK. Enjoy reading!

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ORIGIN IN DETAIL

In Austria, the topic of delimitating and classifying vineyards is being discussed ever more passionately. However: does anyone care outside our wine-bubble, and do we risk damaging our reputation for a merely academic question?

Recently, the 17th DAC region has been added to Austria's appellation portfolio, the "Wagram DAC". The Wagram is a region whose soils are mainly characterized by loess and which covers 2,439 hectares of vineyards, and 27 localities have been granted a village appellation. To be honest, I did not even know that there were 27 villages in the Wagram region at all. By comparison, Tuscany has 56 IGT, DOC and DOCG areas, which is twice as many and for 60,500 hectares, this equals 25 times as much as the Wagram. And who could name them all?

Is Austria's wine industry overacting when it comes to protecting its wine origins – a reasonable goal per se? In my view, yes. No one I have spoken to understands the Wachau DAC regulations and its regional, village and single vineyard designations, intertwined with the successful brands of Steinfeder, Federspiel and Smaragd. This "typically Austrian way" is a perfect example of a solution which takes into account the needs of everyone except for the consumer's. That is, the smallest possible compromise is made, regardless of whether the result is practicable or not. This way, the Wachau regulations boast a mix of origins, grape varieties and alcohol levels. The issue has been solved much more sensibly in Styria, where a few village appellations were agreed upon, plus several grape varieties, but in communication and marketing, the focus has been put on only those really typical of the region.

THE ORIGIN-VARIETY HYBRID

We are facing a fundamental problem: so far, the Austrians have not been able to decide whether they wanted to favor the origin or the grape. The first two protected origins were each limited to a grape variety typical of the region: Grüner Veltliner in the Weinviertel and Blaufränkisch in Mittelburgenland. Soon afterwards, things started to get a bit more crazy along the Danube. Both Grüner Veltliner and Riesling were given DAC status in the regions of Kamptal, Kremstal and Traisental even though more Zweigelt than Riesling is under vines in each of them.

In the meantime, we have reached a point where almost the entire range of grape varieties is seen as typical of a given region. Well, why not: the mixture and the lack of clear distinction is something very typical of our country. Neither is it absolutely necessary in terms of wine. Is there a reason for all established varieties, at least for a regional appellation which must not state a specific origin, not to be granted protection? As for the village and single vineyard appellations, the range has been narrowed down anyway. In principle, this "pyramid of origin" based upon the Romanic system does not lack reason. The more precise the origin, the clearer the profile and yes, it is indeed a good thing to protect origins.

Grape varieties are subject to constant change: 100 years ago, the list of varieties looked completely different than it does today, and in 100 years, it will look completely different again. We will have more Grenache, Syrah and PIWI ("disease tolerant") varieties than today, even in top locations. Also, let us not forget that vines can be planted in many regions of the world. Just imagine China declaring one day that Grüner is the best variety in the world and planting

it widely. Within one generation, the market would be flooded with Grüner from China and hardly any consumer, seeing 5 bottles from China on the shelf as compared to one from Austria, would still recognize the grape variety as typically Austrian. On a small scale, by the way, this is already happening in the Pacific region, as New Zealand is exporting more and more Grüner Veltliner to its neighboring markets.

MARKETING THE ORIGIN CAN BE A SUCCESS

In France, Italy, or Spain, the protected origins reflect a clearly defined style vinified from specified grape varieties. Does everyone know the grapes permitted in a Bordeaux, Chianti or Rioja? Probably not but these wines have a tremendous success all over the world. ...

DOES EVERY VINE NEED IT'S OWN APPELLATION?

... They stand for something. However, showing attitude has never been a great strength in Austria, we prefer to avoid obstacles. One could argue that the focus on origin compromises diversity but even the supposedly conservative French do not reject all innovations. Recently, the first disease tolerant variety has been admitted for the production of Champagne and we might see this happening in Bordeaux as well pretty soon.

WHO HAS THE BEST SITE?

Let's talk about classifying specific sites. Just like in Burgundy:

**.thinker
wine
the**

this site has been one of the best for centuries, its wine one of the most expensive ones. This is a Grand Cru, the second best is a Premier Cru, etc. A couple of Austrian producer associations haven't embarked upon this path under private law classifying their vineyards themselves.

Although not regulated by law, this has attracted a lot of attention as they have certainly raised awareness among lawmakers, entailing discussions. There is no doubt associations such as the ÖTW or the STK are serious about their efforts and they are ready to open their classifications to all producers once this status has been recognized by lawmakers. However, it seems that ministries and grower colleagues alike do not want to submit to the ideas of a bunch of successful and prestigious estates regardless of whether such a step is a wise thing to do or not.

At the moment, consensus seems far away, even giving way to rumors about prohibiting the use of these private classifications on bottles and labels.

And what is the point of it all? Which wine lover knows and recognizes the difference between a Grüner Veltliner from loess soils in Fels am Wagram and Feuersbrunn? Who can explain exactly the difference between the Grassnitzberg and the Hochgrassnitzberg? Does anyone really care?

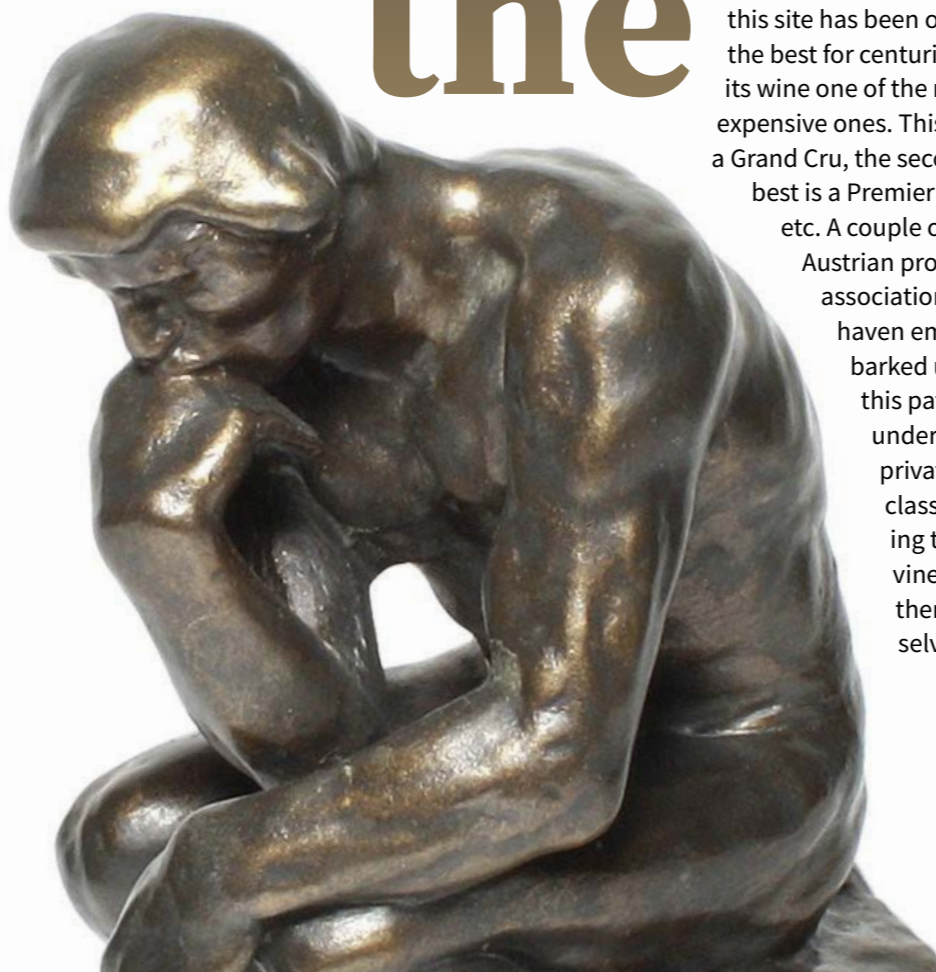
LOW INTERVENTIONS, NO ORIGIN

Sometimes I feel like knowing all people who do care by their names. No doubt, it is fun to taste wines from different origins and to figure out one's favorites. In Bordeaux, for instance, I appreciate the wines of St. Julien – so this should also be possible in terms of Austrian wines, right?

Well, this will probably remain a fantasy as long as the vinification approach and the winemaker's signature keep overshadowing the profile of the origin. Tastings have proven this point on several occasions as timing of harvest, fermentation method and oxidative or reductive vinification had rather allowed for conclusions about the producer than the appellation.

Vice versa, growers who follow low-intervention approaches are not allowed to state the origin on their labels. Skin fermented whites or such with minimum or zero doses of SO₂ for example, are not considered quality wines by law despite the fact that they are being featured on the wine lists of some of the most fashionable restaurants in the world. As a consequence, it's the grower who receives all credits even though he or she thinks it should rather be their products. This feels unfair: wines made by using a lot of modern technology, enzymes, finings etc. are allowed to insist on protection of origin whereas the low-intervention ones (deemed a closer reflection of their origin) may not. In the meantime, we see things moving in Austria in this regard as the regulating bodies have announced reforms allowing the statement of origin also for low-intervention labels.

Austria is still a rookie in this „business of origins“. Merely 20 years ago, the first DAC was set up for the Weinviertel. There is room for hope that we will see even stronger profiles in the 20 years to come. Until then, I hope that the people at power won't waste time caring only about themselves and fighting but that they will take the consumer along – with a clear message!



A Talk with Jens Føien

The wine business in Norway is as dynamic as complex, the country being one of the Monopoly markets of Scandinavia. “Working” it is no easy thing and requires dedication and knowledge. Jens Føien is one of the masterminds of “Mousey Wine” in Oslo. This relatively young company has started with a focus on the Horeca segment, however, the pandemic has also brought about new perspectives for Jens & his team. They have learned to “play” the Monopoly game as well, providing private customers with delicious juice as well.

How did you start with wine, Jens?

I started washing dishes in a pub, in 2003 and then I worked as a waiter and bartender. At some point, I figured out this wine thing, so I went to wine school in 2010 and began to work in more high-end restaurants after that. Later I got the idea to start my own business and sort of slowly ventured into that. We are a group of people who quit working for others and started our own businesses. Now, we have 2 restaurants, a wine import company and a small food import. We also produce our own cider. We started our restaurant “Brutus” in 2016 and I worked there for 3 years on the floor but after we had kids, it was hard to work nights. At this stage, I rather work daytime. Maybe I go back some day but for now, I’m very happy with our situation.

Tell us about your company “Mousey Wine” and how it has been doing currently.

We started in 2018. As we had “Brutus”, we saw that there were some wines which were not available on the market and which we wanted to bring in. That’s why we started the import company, but more as a side business, to travel and to work closely with the farmers. It sort of kept growing ever since. By January 2019 I was a full-time wine importer. Our

focus was restaurants since this is where we come from and where our network is. Gradually, by end of 2019, we also started to work the Monopoly segment – and when Corona hit, this was our only market, especially during lockdowns. We tried to “hack” that game as it’s complicated to sell there. You have to plan ahead, get all the right documents, you cannot do any PR, all that stuff. Now, we are like 50/50 in terms of sales to restaurants and to the monopoly. Corona has also had a positive impact on the wine business since people suddenly found themselves with more time at hand, for example to browse through the many Instagram influencers’ pages. Also, the interest for wines and for “niche” products such as we work with, had increased. In the end, all of this helped us better understand the monopoly in spite of the many up-and-downs during the last couple of years.

What’s the status quo in Norway in terms of consumer acceptance for low-intervention wines?

I think it’s probably the same story as everywhere but you know, Norway is on the edge of Europe. We are far from Paris and London in terms of mentality but we have seen big changes in this regard. In 2003-2006, people discovered Chablis, Sancerre, wines from the Rhône valley and German dry Rieslings. In the span

of 2014-2017, the interest for “natural” wines grew slowly but steadily and now it’s much more common, more household. Nowadays, people can go to any restaurant in town and ask for Pét Nat or “orange” wine, asking questions like “You have something smelly?” or “Hit me with something funky!”.

Do you see any trends among these wines – for certain styles or colors?

Pét Nat is definitely very popular at the moment. In the beginning, like in 2015, it was more of a curiosity, now it’s very household, it’s everywhere. The same goes for macerated whites which people are craving these days, so it seems. The pattern of the normal consumer’s habits is changing. People are more concerned about eating organic nowadays (just think of sourdough bread with long fermentation) and it doesn’t really make sense to drink conventional wines alongside. It has become a holistic thing. It’s the same with restaurants considering that 1 out of 2 new restaurants feature a more or less natural wine focused wine list. Keep in mind that, increasingly, many people chose where they go depending on the wine list! So I’d say that all the big natural wine trends are now established in our country. Light reds, fruit driven macerated whites, fresh Pet Nats, darker Rosés, you name it.



How do you choose the wineries you want to work with?

First of all, tasting the wines is crucial. Flavor is our focus and the feeling - the first impression is important. We want to make sure the wine has freshness and energy, see if it feels good, has acidity, fruit and balance. We want to work with people who have the same wavelength, the same chemistry. We are a worker-owned business, so we don’t have to do anything that we’re not comfortable with. Our connection to the producers and their wines is a personal one. What we like ourselves and what sells is obviously a big part of this.

Do you care about certifications, like organic or biodyn?

Not really, to be honest. We support it and it’s a good thing but knowing the way the farmers work and how it affects

their wines makes a bigger difference than the certification on its own. But I don’t have a strong opinion about certifications, that’s not my job. I respect people’s choices and I understand why it’s a big part of agricultural work but it’s not crucial for us choosing a wine or not.

What’s your take on Austria and its producers in Norway?

I think that we have come to a point in Norway where people buy from producers and not really from a certain country. At least in our (relatively small and relatively niche) business, it’s more about customers knowing the producers, the wines and their style rather than buying by origin per se. However, Austrian wines are big in Norway – this has been the case for a long time with more classic producers and I think now, there are many famous winemakers from the natural wine segment who are

really successful. When I was in sommelier school back in the days, those wines were more of a curiosity but now, it’s established stuff, it’s a no-brainer. No one raises an eyebrow now when being served a low-intervention Grüner from Weinviertel, for example. It’s more like “Cool, give it to me!”.

What about your personal choices – what do you like to drink when the kids are in bed?

Anything goes. The same stuff I sell, I guess, depending on what we’re having for dinner. I’m a sucker for Gamay or any other cooler regions’ wines but also aromatic white wines from anywhere. I can down a bottle of Flora with my pasta, no problem (laughs)! I like to drink different stuff – “something new is always something better”, voilà my famous quote from the Tom Cruise movie “Cocktail”.

A Talk with Roland Szimeiszter

Roland Szimeiszter is one of those young “somm-turned-importer” enthusiasts who simply decided to follow their dreams. Born and raised in Hungary, he eventually ventured into the dynamic (and challenging) UK market, focusing on organic and biodynamic growers from where he comes from – Eastern and Central Europe. Working on both sides of the English Channel, Roland runs his import company “Roland Wines” in London and the “Lees Brothers” in Hungary. Two great addresses if one’s looking for passionately produced & authentic juice.

Roland, please give us an insight into your CV.

Well, I have worked in hospitality my entire life. In Hungary, I studied Hotel Management and did an internship in the US at one point. There, I worked with a more extensive wine list first and also had the opportunity to visit wineries. After returning home, I finished university and started working for a group where I managed the wine list for a couple of restaurants. I also started to study wine at the WSET and had the option to either go to Rust or London for Level 4. London, it was. I wanted to combine this with gaining working experience so I sent out letters to Michelin star restaurants and luckily, I got a job and worked as a Sommelier at Marcus Wareing for 2 years. This was also important for me in terms of my tasting experience and getting to know a lot of suppliers. But I also realized that the winemakers I knew from home were not represented in the UK. So in 2017 I decided to start “Roland Wines” and to import those wines. I started with nine growers and it gradually grew to 19 by now.

How is the standing of organic, biodynamic, low-intervention wines in the UK?

My portfolio is quite niche, for sure. I work with at least organic certified growers and they are from Central and Eastern Europe, so that narrows it down even further. But it’s growing bit by bit every year, also in terms of listings in restaurants – I believe the wines have a place on almost all of the wine lists. I want to show the big diversity of these regions. Hungary and the surrounding countries, have a very rich wine culture dating back thousands of years. Unfortunately due to communism Hungary is still behind countries like Austria, Germany and even Slovenia, when it comes to biodynamic viticulture. But it’s developing slowly. In the UK, I think definitely more and more people are open to trying biodynamic, organic and natural wines every year. If we look at the entire wine production on the world, I believe

our segment is around 3%, so it’s probably going to stay a niche but it is for sure growing in the high-end gastronomy.

Do you sell to restaurants only or also to end customers?

We sell to both. We had a web-shop ready before Covid hit so it was not only to compensate for restaurants being closed during the lockdowns. We were rather trying to build a platform where restaurants could get information on the products but this obviously also helped our sales during the pandemic. We were also able to retain quite a few private customers who buy regularly. However, our focus is always going to be the hospitality sector!

Do you have to “educate” the people or do they know what they’re getting?

Education is always necessary! We do invest a lot of time and energy to provide staff trainings for our clients and regular tastings. I believe this is one of the best ways to transmit the message of the wine-maker successfully to the end consumer. This is also the reason why we put more information on the website. But there is always room for improvement.

Do you see any trends among the wine styles in your “niche”?

I do see a huge demand for “orange” wines, and also for light juicy reds which basically applies to most of the reds I have in my portfolio in the UK. I think that Pet Nat is more popular in less developed markets, which is what I see in Hungary, where it is a much bigger thing than “orange” wine. Of course, in Hungary, there is only a handful of natural wine importers so we have maybe a bigger slice of the cake in this regard. However, the market is super tiny compared to the UK.

Which are the biggest challenges for wine importers in the UK after Brexit?

It’s difficult to judge Brexit on its own as there is also the Covid situation and now

the war in Ukraine. It’s super complex and tough to single out one or the other. In any case, shipments got more expensive due to more paperwork but now also due to the Ukrainian crisis. In the last 2 weeks, literally every single freight company announced that they are going to raise the prices, by at least 10% which has a huge impact on the distribution in the UK, especially for middle sized or small importers who do not have entire containers shipped at once. Lack of labor is another big consequence of Brexit. There are definitely way less people now who want to work in the hospitality industry and it’s more difficult to employ a sommelier, for example. So for us small importers, it’s challenging because we lose a few positions in restaurants and we almost have to start again. Things are changing, but we will adapt!

What do you think about the definitions for “natural wines”, “raw” wines, “low-intervention” wines?

I believe there are some clear definitions for “natural wine” like the one established by French law recently. It clearly states that the grapes have to come from at least organic, preferably biodynamic sources and they have to be certified. The wine cannot be filtered or fined and it can only have certain amounts of sulfites before bottling. For me, that is a very clear explanation. If we’re talking about the general public’s understanding of natural wines, there might be a difference. The customers are not educated accordingly and when buying wine, the information available is often hazy. I think us importers bear a huge responsibility in communicating the terms and what we sell transparently.

Which are your personal choices, what do you like to drink?

I like Jura a lot, it’s one of my favorite regions! Most of the time I chose whites or light reds when I drink. I’m always looking for something interesting and new to try. Style-wise mineral, linear and structured. I don’t like when oak is in the forefront and I prefer low alcohol wines.

ACIDITY

THE BACKBONE OF WINE

Acidity can be an emotive word. Too much of it, too little, balanced or not and a mystery for many consumers, it is nonetheless one, if not the most important component of good wines. Alcohol, body, sweetness and fruit are crucial factors, of course, but they could hardly do without an appropriate level of acidity. Acidity also impacts fermentation and the growth and vitality of the yeast. In this regard, the pH level plays a huge role. As in all aspects of wine growing and making, it's all about balance and there are many pieces making up the final picture. The vintner can and should take all necessary steps, in the vineyard and in the cellar in order to bottle a wine in the end whose character equals more than the sum of its components. "Understanding" acidity, however, is not easy as there are simply dozens of factors and actions that can alter the outcome – in a good or in a bad way.

The scientifics of wine acidity are pretty complex – as all biological processes. There are several types of acidity in a wine but usually, the wine-makers refer to its total when speaking of it or they compare the proportions of the two major ones: "malic acidity" and "tartaric acidity". But then again: how much is high or how little is low? You can have a total of 4 g/l in a bland red or 17 g/l in a highly concentrated sweet wine – and anything in between. Also, the number of grams does not necessarily tell how acidic a wine will taste as it interplays with all other components, obviously. Usually, you will see degrees between 5 and 7 g/l for most of the wines in Austria. However, a wine with a higher content of malic acid, for example, will taste more acidic even if its overall acidity is lower than in a wine with more tartaric acidity. There are many other things to account for: malolactic fermentation can greatly change the taste (and aromas). Sugar is a factor, the yeast another one, alcohol is, just as tannins or CO₂. It all depends. On climate, viticulture, time of picking, yield, the pH level, the variety and obviously processing and vinification. It's the winegrower/winemaker who shapes the style and it's a good thing we have many of them.



THE IMPACT OF CLIMATE AND VINTAGE

Indisputably, the impact of climate change and the increasing number of hot and dry vintages is also felt in terms of acidity levels. Generally speaking, whereas (high) acidity would have been a problem a couple of decades ago and growers even resorted to measures such as deacidification, the parameters (and dealing with them) have significantly changed in the last years. In a hot vintage, the time of picking becomes even more important as acidity levels can decrease pretty fast, especially when the nights are not cool enough during the harvest. The growers face fundamental decisions: they want to achieve good levels of ripeness without sacrificing low pH (which is crucial for fermentations to run smoothly a quickly) and acidity. This applies to whites and reds alike. Austria is about fresh, fruit-driven wines – the “cool climate” character is an important USP of its image. The country has experienced a series of warm vintages in the last decade but the most current ones – 2020 and 2021 – have turned out late ripening, “classic” and cooler for a change. Whereas the wines from 2020 display very fine and delicate aromas, those from 2021 have been blessed with a lot of extract yet unseen levels of supporting acidity.

We harvest our grapes maybe a little later than our colleagues, especially for our single vineyard Veltliners. In 2021, we harvested the last batches in mid-November as the weather was perfect, the grapes super healthy but at medium alcohol levels and excellent acidity! For us, this was a fantastic vintage! – EWALD GRUBER

WORKING THE VINES

To little surprise, the groundwork for great wines is laid in the vineyard. Good growers have learned to adapt to changing conditions and do what’s necessary in terms of working their soils and protecting the grapes in order to avoid excessive exposure to sun and to retain a lively acidity. Canopy management is as important as keeping the yields low: Too many grapes on the vine will result in a high proportion of malic acid which will then be degraded after malolactic fermentation (resulting in a lack of total acidity) or the wine is going to taste overly tart and “green” if MLF is suppressed.

As vintages get warmer, the time of picking is often moved forward by many

growers (just ask them about the 2018 vintage). However, they have to make sure not only the sugar levels do not get too high, but phenolic and aromatic ripeness is achieved as well.

As the Burgenland is the hottest wine growing region in Austria, I have to work very thoroughly in terms of canopy and leaves management. Our grapes, for example in the very sensitive Pinot Noir, hang very low and we try to provide as much shadow as possible, only taking away some leaves from the inside. We need them to be aerated but not exposed to direct sun light.

– CLAUS PREISINGER



Gruber-Röschitz
St. Laurent Galgenberg

The Weinviertel is not only about whites and Grüner. The Grubers also produce some wonderful, juicy regional reds like this single vineyard St. Laurent on granite and loess soil. Aged for 8 months in old barriques, this comes at perfect 12,5% with the grape’s typical soft tannins and lively acidity. Just the way it should be.



Claus Preisinger
Fruitloops white

Furmint is a rare yet historic Burgenland variety being rediscovered recently. Claus blends it with Scheurebe and Riesling so there will be no lack of vitality here. Semi-carbonic vinification, amphora, used large oak, no SO₂ - a linear, aromatic and extremely pure juice.

We always strive to obtain fresh, drinkable and low-alcohol wines. Our wine style is shaped in the vineyards: we do not defoliate the grape zone and our cover crops grow high. This brings about positive stress for the vines and slows down growth so we can harvest ripe grapes at low sugar levels and a great deal of ripe stalks. We foot-stomp many of our grapes, add the stalks and co-ferment them in order to get more structure and liveliness in the finished wines.

– JOHANNES TRAPL



Johannes Trapl
Blaufränkisch

Blaufränkisch at his light-footed, drinkable best: foot-stomped, 80% of ripe stalks co-fermented I steel and aged for 12 months on the lees in old 500 L barrels. Fine grained tannins, nice sour cherry fruit and with mouthwatering acidity, of course!



Johannes Zillinger
Parcellaire blanc & sauvignon

This blend of mainly Pinot blanc and Sauvignon blanc stems from a north-easter slope and a hilltop near the forest. Whole bunch fermented, aged in amphorae, old barrels and partly under flor, this is juicy, fruit-driven, superbly fresh yet deep and complex. Only helper in this regard, but its contribution is not to be underestimated.

Selecting dedicated plots for a certain wine style is another way of providing for adequate ripeness at drinkable alcohol levels, supported by the kind of acidity the grower needs for his idea of wine.

I chose the plots for my Parcellaire wines so to guarantee a cooling influence and thus freshness, even in hotter vintages. They are exposed to the north and north-east or are located close to forests which supply cool air. The acidity levels from grapes growing here are not necessarily si-

gnificantly higher as one might assume but I can harvest them later and thus have a higher proportion of tartaric acid as compared to malic acid. At the time of malolactic fermentation, I do not lose the tartaric acid, I only lose the malic acid.

– JOHANNES ZILLINGER

The schist soils in the Sausal region favor acidity as the pH level of the wines I yield from them is very low. However, meager soils can result in dragging fermentations as they do not contain a lot of nitrogen. This is why I don't decant my wines too much so there are more nutrients for the yeast.

– RAINER HACK

GRAPE PERSONALITIES

Austria boasts a number of varieties with great potential for acidity, Riesling for sure being the most notorious one among them. Naturally, it depends on where they grow, how and when they are harvested and treated afterwards but Sauvignon blanc, Muskateller, Welschriesling, Chardonnay and Pinot blanc are also candidates for fresh, vivid wines to only name a few. For aromatic grapes such as Sauvignon blanc or Muskateller, a low pH level is extremely important as it helps preserve the fruitiness. For the future, late ripening varieties or such with small berries will be more and more important as they will be able to withstand the effects of hot vintages.



many conventional Zweigelt) it's roughly 1 g/l higher – after alcoholic fermentation. Once MLF has finished, this levels off to approx. 6,5 g/l. As for Blauer Portugieser, I harvest it pretty soon so it has high acidity but this mellows down very well during vinification.

– MARTIN OBENAU

MASTERS OF CELLAR

Diligent viticulture is the basis for healthy grapes and healthy grapes are the basis for reducing manipulations in the cellar. That being said, processing the grapes and musts does of course require human intervention. The key for all quality-minded winemakers is to process their

raw material quickly, in clean conditions and without messing around.

The methods of **pressing** (destemmed or whole-bunch) and **skin contact** (before or during alcoholic fermentation) are vital factors to keep in mind. Skin contact and skin fermentation will reduce the total acidity as the skins release potassium but the wines will also lose fruitiness. Obviously, you will gain structure as the tannic load increases – the tannic acid might even help giving the wine more freshness, something the growers resorted to in hot vintages such as 2018.

In principle, the leaching out of potassium is an issue you can solve at the time of harvesting. If you pick during a cool period (let's say 10°C) you can do a



Wurga-Hack – Morillon Schiefer

Morillon aka Chardonnay is known for its great acidity structure. Combined with the schist soils of the Sausal region, this low-yield, stainless steel vinified white bursts with minerality. Its subtle fruit and structure is very typical of the region and the vintner's style.



Martin Obenaus – Unchained Stein&Holz rot

Zweigelt, Blauer Portugieser & Rösler are those regional grapes Martin likes to work with. Vinified in stone barrels and used oak for more than 2 years, this non-vintage red shows the purpose of blending: each grape gives what it takes: body, acidity, fruit, depth.

The levels of tartaric acids versus malic acids very much depend on the variety. When I look at the biodynamic, low-intervention segment, quite some wines are picked very early and can be pretty sour. This is simply not possible in my region! I have never had a batch where I thought, "this is too acidic". Apparently, the warm condition and the sun sort of "burn" all "green, vegetal" components. Of course, I pick some batches earlier so I can blend them later on with riper parts.

– CLAU PREISINGER

Now, as everybody is aware of, the No. 1 variety in terms of plantings and distribution in Austria and worldwide is Grüner Veltliner. It is a versatile grape which can show many characters but its acidity levels are not exorbitant, to tell the truth. It is therefore even more important to retain a level of overall freshness by taking the right steps.

We started to cut or rather not cut many of our vineyards following the minimal pruning method. Like that, the

grapes ripen later, the berries are smaller and their skins are thick – the color is therefore also deeper. This method also provides more shadow for the soil from the start on which has a positive impact on its health and the living organisms: in a Guyot pruned vineyard, the canopy needs to grow first, so we are 6-8 weeks ahead. All of this is beneficial for Grüner Veltliner for which we want to achieve ripeness at a later stage.

– EWALD GRUBER

Even though Austria is commonly associated with fresh whites, a cool character is also a good thing for its reds, we believe. You can make bold red wines all over the world but for cool climate juice, acidity is vital. Blaufränkisch offers great acidity as do St. Laurent and a couple of other, maybe less familiar red grapes.

My Rösler usually has pretty high levels of acidity, one of the reasons I like this variety so much. Compared to Zweigelt (mine displays around 7 g/l which is much higher than



Pure Joy Botanicals – mint

Julie Hoch is always thinking of the future so brace yourself for a couple of new botanicals. One of them will be the mint edition: as usual, hand picked and gently processed herbs are co-fermented with biodynamic base wine, bone dry, slightly sparkling and a "pure joy" at 7% vol. alc.



Michael Gindl – White Bessi

Michael produces single vintage wines but also a couple of non-vintage ones. This one consists of Grüner, Pinot blanc, Scheurebe and also Zweigelt and is aged in used oak between 12 – 36 months. You get the idea: ripe structure combines with freshness, grip and great length.

longer skin contact without leaching out too much of it. However, we are seeing temperatures of 25 °C during harvest and 28-30 °C in the grapes on a sunny day. Like this, potassium is leached out very quickly! This is why we resort to whole-bunch pressing and little skin contact in order to prevent the precipitation of potassium bitartrate which would reduce the tartaric acidity to a certain degree.

– JOHANNES ZILLINGER

Malolactic fermentation (MLF) is another highly discussed topic among wine professionals as MLF usually has a notable impact on the aromas and flavors of the wine. Generally speaking, malic acid is converted by lactic acid bacteria into the “softer” lactic acid and CO₂. The wines then usually (there are always exceptions) taste smoother, creamier and MLF also provides for stabilization. The winemaker also has to take good care as faulty MLF can result in off aromas such as yoghurt. Malolactic fermentation can occur during fermentation already, directly afterwards or even some months later, in spring when it gets warmer. It is common for red wines, but producers



**Karl Fritsch –
Riesling Ried Mordthal**

A top-notch site on loess farmed the biodynamic way does not need to yield high alcohol. This outstanding Wagram white is vinified in stainless steel and offers bright fruit, bright acidity (>7 g/L) and certainly a bright future!



Christoph Hoch – RIESLING

On his limestone conglomerate soils of Hollenburg, Christoph strives to produce delicate and light-footed wines. His Riesling is composed of various vintages, batches and aging vessels in order to provide for multilayered complexity and precision at the same time.



Peter & Paul – Riesling

The Peter & Paul wines are single vintage wines, so expect finesse and elegance from 2020 and the upcoming 2021. The wine is partly aged in stainless steel (this guarantees fruit expression), partly in used oak for a more “natural” feeling. Perfect by-the-glass companion!



**Erich Machherndl – Grüner Veltliner
Federspiel Ried Hochrain**

After a couple of years, there will be a new release of this wine at Machherndl's. Meager gneiss soils and high altitude provide the basis for minerality and precision and the vinification in steel tanks underlines the profile of this superbly fresh and authentic Wachau Veltliner.



Wabi-Sabi – a.c.q.u.a.l.e.i.t.e.n GV

From the outstanding Achleiten vineyard in the Wachau, this Grüner is picked on the edge of physiological ripeness, partly whole-bunch pressed, partly with short skin contact, 50% vinified in new oak. After malolactics, it still offers great acidity, grip and substance, all of this at only 11,5 % alc.



allow it to happen for white wines as well. They can trigger it deliberately by inoculating their musts but very often, the bacteria are already present in the cellar and MLF will happen every time.

In my winery, MLF simply happens and it occurs in a “freestyle” manner in terms of time – sometimes it starts during alcoholic fermentation, sometimes after it, sometimes not before spring. In principle, the sooner all processes are done, the better with regard to stability but I trust my wines – and they do not disappoint me!

– MARTIN OBENAU

In terms of acidity alone and how it is retained (or converted), the vessels in which the wines are vinified or matured do make a difference, but it is not a big one.

As a result of the micro-oxidation in large oak barrels, the wines are not “locked up” as much as in a stainless steel tank for example and the acidity is better integrated.

– RAINER HACK

Of course, fermenting and aging in oak barrels will have a big impact on the flavors, the mouthfeel and the fruit as oxidation and autolysis significantly change the profile of a wine, be it white or red. Managing the yeast is also crucial: bâtonnage will keep it alive and lend the



wine more body and roundness, again at the expense of fruit. As for malolactics and the precipitation of potassium bitartrate, stainless steel, wood or clay are going to “behave” pretty much the same. What about concrete?

In theory, the vinification in a (new) concrete vessel (egg, for example) should result in a certain loss of acidity so I spread the inside with tartaric acid so it does not take it from the wine. Other than that, the difference is not huge. Also when it comes to MLF, the vessels do not make a big difference.

– CLAUS PREISINGER



**Thomas Straka –
Welschriesling Grünschiefer**

Welschriesling from schist soils offers a unique experience. Thomas picks this one from old vines in a single vineyard and vinifies it in a mix of oak barrels. The salty minerality is unmistakable but also expect herbs, some apple fruit and great structure. Southern Burgenland at its best!

BLEND IT IN STYLE

After vinification and aging, the outcome, however, is not settled once for all. Even in monovarietal, single vineyard wines, the “finished” wine very often is a blend. A blend of various plots in one vineyard harvested at different stages in time, for instance, or a blend of different sites. Many growers pick a part of their fruit so they have an “acidity reserve” which they can combine with other batches (at different stages) in order to achieve what they had in mind. Blending varieties is another stylistic approach, for example Riesling with Grüner or Zweigelt with Blaufränkisch – or basically any other grapes, also whites ones with red ones, why not. The wine-maker can also combine the musts or



**Erwin Tinhof –
Blaufränkisch Leithaberg**

Neuburger specialist Erwin Tinhof also produces Blaufränkisch in the outstanding Leithaberg appellation. Vinified the “traditional” way (large oak barrels, medium to full bodied), this Austrian classic offers alluring cherry fruit, fine tannins and structure for the long run.

wines fermented or aged in different vessels – stainless steel or amphora would then lend pure fruit and more linearity, oak more body and complexity. Last but not least, as many (especially organic and biodynamic) growers decided to drop out of appellation systems due to constraints and inflexible regulations, non-vintage blending has become a popular way of creating unique wine styles. The final blends can consist of 2 but also more vintages, and they can also combine all the elements above (grapes, vessels). Reserve wines will provide for complex aromas, more current ones for freshness – or acidity. The richness in wine styles is without any doubt one of Austria’s standouts. Another one is the focus on quality, especially when it comes to establishing its foundations in viticulture. Despite all challenges, our growers should stick to styles which underline the uniqueness of their origins – and of course, their individual approaches. Acidity is not the only helper in this regard, but its contribution is not to be underestimated.



E V E N T S

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

ProWein

15 – 17 May

Düsseldorf, Germany
TOA booth: Hall 5, F 50

Karakterre

19 May

Eisenstadt, Austria

VieVinum

21 – 23 May

Vienna, Austria



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