

Nō. 10

toa zine

MAGAZINE FOR &
FROM WINE LOVERS

A Talk with Assaf Dor.

Whereas in many countries, the natural wine scene can be seen as established and stable, it is still gaining momentum in Israel. The undisputed center of the trend is Tel Aviv, a fascinating melting pot of cultures, influences and flavors. MOBO Wine is one of the upcoming young import companies spreading the word – and great wines. We talked to its mastermind and chief operator Assaf Dor.

Assaf, how did you start and how do you define MOBO's approach?

I started with wine out of passion – I have been drinking and collecting wine for a long time and as I have a software business, I was also travelling a lot. This expanded my repertoire and gave me a more holistic view of what's happening in the world of wine. Over time I realized that it was becoming more and more important to me and something I'd like to include in my life, to take it up a notch. So I decided to establish MOBO, starting around 2018. I see myself rather as a "cultural agent", bringing to Tel Aviv, a city that I love, this message of curated wines, creating a community around it. I still own my software company which allows MOBO to grow more organically, which it does very nicely. We now have a good foothold in many important cultural hubs here, in serious restaurants and bars, places that love the wines and are happy to engage their clients with them. Our focus is natural wines, of course. We are looking for wines that have identity, that's the most important feature for us. In terms of character, we want wines which are recognized as wines of quality, not requiring some sort of a "back story" to justify faults or similar issues. We call it "classic but not trivial", wines that can be identified by the signature of the wine-maker, outstanding wines in terms of their taste or the region they come from. Our aim is to represent the vigneron and their work here in Israel. We are not looking for cherry-picking trophy wines.

Your core business is low-intervention, "natural" wines. How does this market segment do in Israel?

The Israeli market is a little bit strange because there is still a religious component to wine in the country as a substantial sector will only drink kosher wine. A lot of the local wine production is aimed to that and the traditional wine making in Israel is very homogenous. Everyone goes to the same schools, they drink the wines of their neighbors, and the style is very consistent with emphasis on Bordeaux varieties and big, rich, high-alcohol wines. There is a lack of expression of identity and it's becoming a little boring. Up until not long ago, this was the prevalence in the market and among wine drinkers, especially the older generations. When speaking of a new wave of the wine culture, we are witnessing a younger generation who starts to appreciate lighter wines, that is white and rosé wines, distancing themselves from the habits of the previous generation. This makes perfect sense for the summer season in a hot country like ours.

How does the scene manifest itself in Tel Aviv?

In regards to the natural wine scene, it has been flourishing for like 6-8 years. It was a little bit segregated in the beginnings as the wines were first mainly sold to some wine shops and not to many restaurants and there were few

importers specialized in this segment. In the last 4-5 years though, the interest in those wines has been growing gradually. More and more people have learnt to discuss the subject and more importers have joined the party – like us. There is now a wave of importers trying to find for themselves a region or some specialties. The cool thing is that most of us are really good friends, there is solidarity, we drink each others wines, party together and are happy to educate the market together. There was another significant pivot during Covid as this period has created a massive demand for wine. The more people are drinking, the more their palate looks for quality and for something that catches their attention. We now see the young generation very much focused on wine and a literal explosion of wine bars in Tel Aviv. No joke, there is one opening on a weekly basis, everywhere, some very well curated. Wine events, bars with high end wines, bars with geeky sommeliers, we see all kinds of new formats popping up. Obviously, not everything is perfect – the political unrests in the last months have seen a cooling down of the "tech party" (Tel Aviv is a technology center and lined to that, also one of the most expensive cities in the world). We analyze the situation and we know the momentum is not going to last like this but it's good in terms of educating the market. It's an interesting time to be in this business landscape right now.

When it comes to origin, the big 3 will be well known in Israel. What about the awareness of Central European countries like Austria?

Actually, it all started with Slovenia. A friend of mine and his import company started with wines from this not very well-known country (at least in Israel), putting in a lot of hard work, selling great wines for great value. He basically convinced the entire city to drink Slovenian wine! Speaking of Austria, I believe it is a very good fit for us because its high-acidity, low-alcohol wines are super compatible with our weather and the food. They can handle spicy food and are easy to pair with

more dominant flavors. We're trying to put Austria on the map and with good results! We have a nice footing with serious restaurants and groups in the city. Just like with our producers, we put great emphasis on working closely with our distributors – so they can tell the story, understand it and love it. Austrian wine has for sure risen in popularity in the last couple of years and generally is acknowledged as a quality product. For MOBO, Austria is an important region and we intend to grow it.

Do you see any trends in terms of styles of wine or is this still in a process of developing?

I believe that in the beginning, when the market starts being exposed to natural wines, people first are looking for the extremes, the experimental wines, things they have never tried before. This hype phase might excuse all kinds of technical errors. As time goes by, we see a consolidation towards the more well-structured, well-made, better-quality wines. Less punk rock, if you will, more of a centered wine making. Funnily, bubbles is a more sensitive subject: we planned to bring in more sparklings and only now, this segment is gradually happening. Let's see what happens this summer! As for other styles, it's definitely light reds which are in demand. Maybe this has to do with the rest of the world's fascination for Burgundy wines but those are annoyingly rare and expensive and need a lot of time. But I think this has led people to look for other styles of light reds, more approachable and less expensive.

What does MOBO actually mean?

MOBO is a Japanese term. The story was that the first Japanese to dress in modern, western clothes, those who wanted to shed "Japaneseness" in the Thirties, they were called "modern boys", mobo. For me, this refers to this old school vs. new school cultural revolution in wine, that is happening here. And I also have working with me a "MOGA" (a modern girl), my colleague Noam, who is a smart and passionate woman and I'm happy we can grow MOBO together!



NATURE. HUMAN. HISTORY. CLIMATE. REGULATION.

MORE THAN

The names of single vineyards (the Burgundians famously like to call them *crus*) can usually be seen on the labels of many, although not all growers, in Austria and elsewhere. This applies to many albeit not all countries and regions (see Bordeaux as a famous exception) and each one has its own history and traditions in this regard. Single vineyard wines often come with premium pricing and are meant to represent the smallest geographical unit, thus the most detailed degree of origin. Usually, they also represent the top tier – of a wine-grower's portfolio, of a specific appellation or within a certain classification,

be it governed by official regulations or private associations.

There have always been better and worse locations for growing vines and over the years, top sites have gained recognition among growers and consumers. Famously, the French served as forefathers and idols of a precisely defined system of *crus* – we know the stories of Cistercian monks in Burgundy who had studied for centuries the peculiarities of often tiny pieces of land in order to determine their suitability for what was a good or a better site. Specifically defined vineyards cannot, however, be regarded

separately from a wider concept of origin and consequently from the often disputed idea of the (in)famous **terroir** – usually defined as a combination and interplay between climate, soil, exposure, the plant material and human intervention). Natural conditions are hence a *sine qua non* for what is a good or great vineyard site. (Micro)climate, soil composition, altitude, exposure and the surrounding nature are the instruments the grower/winemaker has to play with when giving the concert of an origin, so to say. No doubt, there are a lot of choices to be made, and the human influence cannot be underestimated.

Not long ago, single vineyard wines used to be pretty rare in many regions. Also, the **origin** was seldom uniquely defined by the smallest geographical unit – a specific vineyard site – but often by the winegrowing municipality or region, at least in Central Europe. Mind that the *Germanic* system which used to focus on varietal names as opposed to the *Romanic* concept of region-village-cru was a recent development in the last half-century or so. In former times, grape varieties were a secondary feature given the widespread use of field blends and it was often the “village” level of origin that served as a quality seal, take Vienna's *Nussberger* or Wachau's *Loiben* as examples, proofs of good terroirs and kind of brand names in their own right. Of course, a couple of vineyards have always stood out (i.e. Kamptal's *Heiligenstein* or some Wachau sites) but that's nothing compared to today's abundance of labels bearing the names of single vineyards (there are hundreds of them in rather small Austria).

In order to better understand what's going on in Austria when speaking of specific vineyards, we must tackle the

A PLACE

topic from different angles, and ‘with a little help of our friends’ as Joe Cocker would put it. Many dimensions come into play here and many questions arise, depending on factors such as viticultural and vinicultural conditions and methods, market situation, tradition and wine law.

Let's see for some questions:

- Which are the natural parameters (and their respective importance) for an outstanding vineyard site?
- Is a single vineyard wine necessarily the best wine?
- How does vinification support or alter the expression of a particular site?

- How important is the human factor?
- How do time and age affect the expression of vines and wines?
- What about market relevance and pricing?
- Will climate change modify cultivation, vinification and the suitability of a site?
- What's more important, the variety or the vineyard?
- How do official regulations influence the grower's vinification approach and marketing?
- What should (official) regulations aim for?
- How do traditions and history impact the current developments?

Mentioning current developments in Austria, it is equally important to learn about the **nomenclature** and the players involved.

Lage (location or site) is used when speaking of defined vineyards and while many people are using *Lagenwein* or *Einzellage* (einzeln=single) when talking about a single vineyard wine, a *Lage* can also define a more general concept, simply the place where vines have been

being used in the majority of the state governed DAC provisions (for instance *Riesling Schenkenbichl Alte Reben Kamp-tal DAC Reserve – Schenkenbichl* being the name of the vineyard site). However, some powerful, privately organized associations such as the *Österreichische Traditionsweingüter (ÖTW)*, the *Vinea Wachau* or the *Steirische Terroir & Klassik Weingüter (STK)* have had and still have a big say in wine law policies. An example: the efforts targeting the *Erste Lage / Grosse Lage* classification were initiated by the *ÖTW* and are actually already being signed into law. Over the next 5 years and more, they aim to define the equivalents to premier and grand crus all over Austria, a process which is not going to go down easily, to say the least.

Are those designations accessible to everybody? Obviously not as the names of single vineyards are only allowed to be put on labels when a wine has passed the state tasting commission. This is based on criteria such as “clarity”, “typicality” and absence of “faults” and the tasters decide on the wine's fate for becoming a state approved *Qualitätswein* (quality wine) or not. Moreover, vineyard names are all linked to the DAC provisions which now cover every Austrian wine region. An unfiltered, low-intervention, maybe skin-contact wine is not going to pass, this is why many **low-intervention** wines have to be

declassified to *Wein aus Österreich – vins de table*. Some growers are ok with that, many are not – displaying where the wine comes from is not a minor detail, after all.

As usual, we have interviewed many growers on what they think about this fascinating, puzzle-like topic. No surprise, different people bear different views, there is consent and dissent, inevitably. Apart from the TOA-growers, we were also happy to learn what some other great producers have to say. We believe in diversity of opinions and in many shades of reality - just like with wine, it never gets boring!

planted. Whereas our German neighbors also use the word *Lage* (see *Erste Lage*, *Grosse Lage* in the VDP), *Ried* or *Riedenwein* are the official, purely Austrian terms and are synonyms for *Lage*. The Austrian DAC appellation system has adopted *Ried* or *Riedenwein* for a single vineyard wine, positioning it at the top of its pyramid of origin (region-village-cru or *Gebietswein-Ortswein-Riedenwein*), used in many but not (yet) all Austrian wine regions.

Just like anywhere else, **wine politics** are a source of discussions, quarrels and dynamics, good and bad, depending on positions and individual approaches. Currently, the single vineyard system is

THE NATURAL DIMENSION

MICHAEL GINDL HOHENRUPERSDORF WEINVIERTEL

In my region and for me, a good vineyard site is one that shows a perfect interplay of grape, soil and exposure. A “perfect” soil won’t be of any use if the grape variety is not suitable for it. Obviously, biodynamic farming helped me a lot reaching balance: years ago, I harvested the vineyards in several steps depending on the wine – some batches for this style of wine, some for another. I don’t do that anymore as the vineyards ripen in a balanced way so that I can pick all at once. Now, I differentiate the styles and the grapes I need for them according to the various ages of vines. The younger ones go into wines such as *Little Buteo*, the older ones into *Buteo* (where they are up to 57 years old) and into *Sol*. However, for my *Sodalis* wines, besides cultivating those uniquely by horse, I try to put emphasize on the vineyard sites which are indeed very different for each of them and there is a real difference one can taste.

ERICH MACHHERNDL WÖSENDORF / WACHAU

If I had the choice, my “perfect” vineyards would be terraced, with a good exposure and on barren soils. However, they should be self-sufficient, thus would not require irrigation. And they would give me, without excessive effort, the minimum in yield I strive for, with a growth that is not overly vigorous and obviously not too weak either. A site where I would have put vines in the earth 30 years ago and they would still be there, not giving my headache.

MARTIN OBENAU GLAUBENDORF WEINVIERTEL

I like the mix. Mix meaning that it’s not only about the vineyard on its own or the rows between the vines. For me, it’s about a piece of land, the surrounding nature where there is also untouched grassland, some trees, real nature, like a “jungle” if you will. So in my view, it’s not only about the soil composition or exposure. The surroundings are equally important and absolutely enhance the quality of where the vines grow.



FAMILY GRUBER RÖSCHITZ / WEINVIERTEL

An outstanding feature in our region (Western Weinviertel) are the granite soils, no doubt. We are located on the foothills of the Mannhartsberg mountain and the vineyards are planted on rolling hills at altitudes of 250 – 370 m. The higher one of our sites is located, the higher the proportion of granite. Also, these higher located vineyards are cooler and are exposed to pretty windy conditions. Those parameters define

great sites for me as they ensure for a lot of typicity and distinctive character in our wines. But of course, the loess-dominated sites are equally typical for us, especially for Grüner Veltliner whereas the granite sites are great for varieties which prefer drier and cooler conditions such as Riesling or Pinot Noir.

JOHANNES TRAPL STIXNEUSIEDL / CARNUNTUM

Of course, the soils are an important factor – for example, in the Stixne usedl area, we have great conditions, limestone rich soils with inclusions of chalk but also loamy soils and gravel from the Danube. However, for me, it’s our old vines that are a standout even if they are sometimes tough to work with. It’s the balanced growth that is reflected in balanced grapes and at the end of the day, in the wines. Obviously, besides the authentic soils and the age of vines, it’s many more factors which contribute to the quality of a vineyard site such as the climate (warm summers, cold winters, limited precipitations) – a great asset in the Carnuntum region!

CLAUS PREISINGER GOLS, NEUSIEDLERSEE BURGENLAND

In my view, *single vineyard* (or *Lage* in German) is one of the most abused terms, right after “terroir” or “natural wine”. However, specific vineyards are crucial for the producer in order to market wines of significance. Whether you can put it on your label or not is a different story but a narrow geographical unit for sure bears a certain importance. In

fact, it’s the most evident thing: imagine I receive a visitor – I show him the stones in my vineyard *Altenberg*, then I have him taste the wine made of its grapes from the barrel and finally we sit down and drink a vintage from the bottle. I don’t have to invent anything: this is where it comes from and this is how it tastes. Having great vineyard sites is obviously crucial in terms of a high level, quality production. Take *Bühl* in Weiden, a site on the northern shore of Lake Neusiedl. It’s pretty steep with a shallow gravel soil above limestone making for a moderate growth and small, concentrated grapes with plenty of substance. No matter the style of wine you aim for, a site like this is of great value!

CHRISTOPH HOCH HOLLENBURG / KREMSTAL

Our “innovative” way of working has begun about 12 years ago. We did not think a lot about what makes a good or less good vineyard site, we relied on what we knew from experience. However, as we were adapting our methods (i.e. with alternative plant protection approaches), we learned about new aspects of quality of certain vineyards. Just like in former times, we realized that the effort to be put into a particular site was becoming more and more a crucial factor. A “good” site used to be and is again for us today one where the vines grow in a natural balance (neither excessive growth nor too much suffering) and thus show good resistance towards diseases, are

well aerated and yield good quality and continuous quantity – not too little and not too much. So, for us, it’s an ancient approach we have rediscovered in the course of our learning process towards biodynamic cultivation.

RUDI RABL LANGENOIS / KAMPTAL

In my understanding, a good vineyard site has developed into one in the span of multiple generations, it also has a historical significance. Those who worked this particular piece of land have recognized that a certain plot yields outstanding fruit. Yes, we have seen changes in terms of the grape varieties and there will be adaptations in the future as well. However, I believe that a good vineyard will continue to be a good one regardless of varieties. It’s not only about the exposition (in the past, southern expositions were regarded as the best ones in terms of ripeness) as this factor is shifting due to climate change. A good site also stands out by being resistant to frost. Some vineyards might display advantages in terms of ripening, being cooler, avoiding over-ripeness but they can be affected by late frosts – unlike the really great vineyard sites. After all, we can keep in check issues of excessive ripeness by appropriate canopy management, for example. We allow high canopy growth in our vineyards, cutting the tips of the shoots very late, thus creating shadow and keeping soil temperature low.



© Hannes Polt



RUDI RABL GRÜNER VELTLINER KÄFERBERG ALTE REBEN KAMPTAL DAC RESERVE

Weathered gneiss soils below brown earth, old vines, vinified partly in 500 L oak barrels and partly in stainless steel tank, powerful yet elegant with great minerality.



RUDI RABL GRÜNER VELTLINER DECHANT ALTE REBEN KAMPTAL DAC RESERVE

Barely 300 m from Käferberg, thick layer of loess with limestone and gravel components, juicy, creamy style of Veltliner, vinification also partly in oak, partly in steel.



ERWIN TINHOF
NEUBURGER RIED GOLDEN ERD

Limestone-rich brown earth and sandy gravel soil, 50 years old vines, vinified in used 600 L oak barrels, a Burgundian cru interpretation of Neuburger.



ERWIN TINHOF
BLAUFRÄNKISCH RIED SETZ

45+ years old vines from an outstanding location on weathered mica schist soils, aging for 17 months in 228 L barriques.



ERWIN TINHOF
EISENSTADT, LEITHABERG
BURGENLAND

Speaking of a great vineyard, the planted variety is not the most important factor, it's distinctive features such as its climate, geology and exposition. For sure, the site should be planted with a fitting grape but in order to reflect the uniqueness of the vineyard and not vice versa. For us, a great vineyard will yield good wines also in bad years – this is the main difference to less great vineyards, which can produce good wines in great years, but not in difficult vintages. We even believe that in more difficult vintages, the typicity of origin can be more pronounced – thanks to a great site.

ROMAN HORVATH MW
DOMÄNE WACHAU

Basically, a good vineyard site produces good wine, as trivial as it sounds. In the Wachau region, we're very lucky to have at hand a multitude of great sites. For us, it is important that each one of those sites yields an individual, authentic wine expression. The origin may speak with a low voice but we believe that these various expressions do not necessarily need to "shout out loud". It is also not about always comparing one vineyard with another one and for many consumers, this is maybe not as important after all. It is more important to communicate the story behind each site, where the wine grows, what is happening there.

JOHANNES ZILLINGER
VELM-GÖTZENDORF
WEINVIERTEL

For my philosophy, I like cooler sites that are not fully exposed to sun especially in summer and early autumn in the afternoon hours. That is, vineyards slightly exposed towards the East and North.



MARTIN OBENAU
MO: WEISS

A site and grape selection from loess and gravel soils, mainly Grüner Veltliner + some Riesling and Müller Thurgau. Fermented in stainless steel, aged in steel and large, used oak.

Our soils are mostly dominated by sand and limestone with different layers of loess and clay on top. Generally speaking, I do not consider the soils to be the most important factor. It's rather the surroundings of the particular vineyard locations: which kinds of plants do grow there, is it a diversified environment with meadows, farmland, groups of trees, etc. I believe this has a higher impact on the wine. In terms of varieties, I think a lot depends on the methods of cultivation. For instance, some claim that a fertile soil is not a good partner for Riesling – I beg to differ. If your soils are more fertile, you should work with permanent cover crops (without breaking it) and include grass and herbs and less leguminous crops. The former are more drought-resistant and bring in less nitrogen. I don't believe vines need be exposed to excessive stress and suffering. It's like with humans: too little or too much is not good, it's always about balance.

CHRISTOPH NEUMEISTER
STRADEN, VULKANLAND
STEIERMARKE

I think that what defines a good vineyard has become more evident since we started cultivating our land organically. The higher the elevation and the poorer the soil, the better (provided the exposure is not too extreme). Our region, however, does not display large-scale vineyard sites, the plots are rather small, like islands. Also, one vineyard (like our *Saziani*) can include various sets of conditions – a southern, eastern and western exposure, poor sandstone above, more loam towards the foothill, all in one site. Hard to talk about homogeneity in that case. Also, at least in Styria, good vineyards are always a bit "naughty", not so "well-behaved". They are steep and the soil is poor (thus can drain water during rainy periods). Another crucial factor is yield: our approach (no fertilizer or nitrogen supply) does not give more than 25 – 30 hectoliters per hectare. These small bunches and small berries better show the typicity of a region, of a village, of a vineyard. It's basic entropy: the amount of energy (grapes,

sugar) you take from a vineyard (harvest) needs to be reintroduced (cover crops) so the vineyard can give you the same amount and quality of grapes the next year.

REINHOLD KRUTZLER
DEUTSCH-SCHÜTZEN
SOUTHERN BURGENLAND

For us, great sites, generally speaking, are those exposed to the south/south-west. Our unique soils (iron-rich loam in Deutsch-Schützen and green schist on the slopes of the Eisenberg hill) are a crucial component as well as they impart the wines with very particular flavors. However, I believe that the topic "single vineyard" is still very much uncharted territory in Austria. One needs to monitor supposedly good sites over many years, maybe more than 50 and this has not been the case yet except for a handful of exceptions. Speaking of Eisenberg, in order to do so, we would need a bigger number of estates...



WABI SABI WINES
WACHAU & DANUBE REGION

At Wabi Sabi, we prefer to express the terroir of a region rather than a specific site. a.qu.a.l.e.i.t.e.n (aquiferous=conducting water) in this context represents how we see a particular stripe of vineyards which are planted very close to the Danube, it's not only about the *Achleiten* site. The uniqueness of this terroir is unmistakably shaped by factors (besides the very important human part) such as the river, the stone terraces



WABI SABI WINES
A.QU.A.L.E.I.T.E.N BLANC

Renown "Achleiten" vineyard near Wachau's Wösendorf, terraced, gneiss soils, low yields. Mainly Riesling with some Grüner, aged in oak barrels up to 700 liters, bottled before next harvest.



WABI SABI WINES
RIVERSIDE WHITE

Appealing aromatics (Grüner, Riesling, Muskateller, Sauvignon blanc...) grown on gravel, loess and loam in regions influenced by the Danube. Aging in a mix of oak barrels and stainless steel.



THOMAS STRAKA
WELSCHRIESLING RECHNITZ

Comes from the top site Prantner, typical green schist soil, old vines, traditional aging in mostly used oak barrels.



THOMAS STRAKA
BLAUFRÄNKISCH ROSENGARTEN

More approachable yet dense Blaufränkisch character from the only loam-driven site in Rechnitz, vinified in 500 L oak barrels.

and the manual work required there - this is what we want to reflect in the wines originating here, working without irrigation, accepting low yields. We also believe that the ubiquitous element of those hot stones the terraces are built from also has a noticeable impact on the wine. The *Riverside* wines, on the other hand, represent the wider Danube region, vineyards along the river but up until the Eastern parts of Austria, the Leithagebirge, where the Pannonian influence is more pronounced, and the climate is warmer. These wines represent the more fruity, maybe a bit more “friendly” part of the spectrum.

THOMAS STRAKA RECHNITZ SOUTHERN BURGENLAND

The uniqueness of our soils is a decisive factor in Southern Burgenland. Vines which grow on green schist are able to yield fantastic wines, combined with other elements for sure, such as depth of the soil as water supply does play a big role in my view. *Prantner* is such a site, for instance. Exposure is equally important, Rechnitz’s vineyards being predominantly exposed towards South-East. Some sites, however, have a rather western exposure which seems to become an asset for the upcoming warmer vintages as they ripen later. Speaking of climate change, Rechnitz is in a good position compared to other Burgenland regions as the altitude is pretty high - our vines begin at 330 meters above sea level and reach up to 500 meters. This relatively large spectrum gives us room for manoeuvre. The only issue we could be facing is water supply in very dry years. The decisive factor in term of drought is also the variety. Welschriesling is capable of withstand such conditions and it’s not without reason that this grape has been cultivated here for so many years!

PURE JOY BOTANICALS

The base wine for these unique products stems from chalky, barren soils and is thus the perfect basis for bone-dry aromatic thirst quenchers. Julie Hoch

grows the style defining hops, herbs and flowers on the estate and evidently, it’s now irrelevant where they grow (and how they’re treated). **Hops**, for instance, is a particularly fascinating plant, in many ways similar to the vine but more fragile when it comes to the natural parameters. The conditions need to be just fine, otherwise hops will simply refuse to grow. Occurring in similar yet a bit tighter latitudes, it is more sensitive towards excessive amounts of sunlight, the soil needs to be more fertile (more clay) than for vines, airy but not too windy and water supply should be sufficient as hops grow extraordinarily in a short period of time. Also, they do not tolerate more than 30 degrees °C. Our hops are located in the fittingly called site *Hopfengrund* (=place where hops grow), one of the few locations in our area which fulfil these criteria. **Elderberry**, on the other hand, is far less sensitive but equally needs sufficient water. It likes a cooler and not too dry climate (for instance, it does grow on the Eastern Coast of the US but on the Western Coast). We have created our own elderberry plantation in a perfect site - not too barren and with enough sunlight as we only pick the flowers for our *Pure Joy Elderflower*.



THE HUMAN DIMENSION

MICHAEL GINDL

In my opinion, conventionally made “cru” are a nonsense. They have been vinified to death. In those, the human factor is at least at 80%. Just think of all the interventions such as yeast, nutrient salt for the yeast, all the fining methods, etc. How can someone working like that claim the character comes from the vineyard? Even when it comes to “natural” wine, I think the grower’s signature is much more visible when he uses all kinds of vessels (amphorae, a bit of concrete, a bit of this oak, a bit of that...). When I think back at how my grandfather used to make wine, it was harvesting, pressing, aging in a large old barrel, filling, that was it. I believe the cru profile emerged much better that way!

ERICH MACHHERNDL

There is a lot of room for interpretation in this issue. I’m still convinced that at least 60% of the profile depend on the grower, the human. I vinify all my different vineyards the same way and I see a typicality in the outcome. These typical traits are the same ones every year so yes, for me, there is a site character and I see it especially when having vertical tasting of a given “cru” - it’s evident the wines have grown on a particular piece of land. Some growers claim that a great site doesn’t depend on the variety, that it tastes on its own. For me - although I’m not trying not to emphasize varietal character - the grape will always have a say in the final taste. So, to sort of “calculate” this, I think it’s 60% grower, 20% location and 20% variety. And even if that would be a third each, the variety does play a crucial role.

KARL FRITSCH OBERSTOCKSTALL / WAGRAM

The more manipulations are carried out in the cellar and the more substances are being introduced from outside, the less we can see the vineyard, that’s obvious. I taste the wines of our *Traditionsweingüter* wineries regularly and blind - it’s the only truth. We still have a long way to go in terms of clearly seeing typicality, whether when it comes to a given vintage or for a certain region. I only see this for the Wachau - one might like the wines or dislike them but they are recognizable. Furthermore, I think that the signature of the winemaker is very dominant in the first 3-4 years in a wine. It’s the time factor (one that costs money, for sure) that helps bring out the “truth”. The top tier, the *Ried* wines should only be available in the market after a couple of years, ideally after 3 or 4 years.



© Hannes Polt

RUDI RABL

For me, the importance of a vineyard site is not more important for the concept of terroir (or origin to be more precise) than the soil, the variety and the winegrower. Origin means “this is where I come from” and this applies not only to the grape but

also to the vintner. There are countless factors having an influence on the origin, every oak barrel, the yeast I use, the malolactic (or its absence). All of them can exert a certain degree of standardization on the final product. Just like that, also whole bunch pressing and skin contact each provide for a specific expression of terroir! Do I allow the enzymes to leach out certain aromas from the pulp and skins or not? Do I add yeast or not? Do I allow or block malo, do I control temperature or not? “Doing nothing” - in contrast to what many claim - equally does have a big impact. All these decisions result in what I’d call the *grower-terroir*.

JOHANNES ZILLINGER

The human factor is a huge factor, for sure. Speaking of the famous terroir, the grower accounts for at least 50%, in my opinion. Imagine you have two growers working the same site, planted with the same variety, same rootstock, same age of vines. A couple of different interventions in the vineyard will yield two completely different wines, no doubt. And this does not even include the choices taken in the cellar.

ROMAN HORVATH MW

I would not mention a specific percentage as this has to be seen in context. When considering an individual wine grower and his vineyards, I have to keep in mind his very own style and the vineyards he is working with. Of course, the decisions in the vineyard (such as time of harvest) and vinification will have a great impact on his style. However, within the context of a winegrower, the vineyard



JOHANNES ZILLINGER
REVOLUTION WHITE SOLERA

Up to 40 years old vines on limestone-rich sandstone, multi-vintage, multi-varietal approach (Chardonnay, Riesling, Scheurebe), vinified in amphorae and oak barrels.



JOHANNES ZILLINGER
NUMEN FUMÉ BLANC

Vines mostly grown on the hilltop of the Steinthal vineyard, specially selected, fermented in amphora, aged for 16-18 months in 600 l oak barrels.

site remains crucial. The grower has to act with caution and remain true to his or her philosophy and “signature” – this is the prerequisite for transporting the character of the origin and the specific vineyard site.

CHRISTOPH NEUMEISTER

How good the terroir is depends 50% on the climate, regardless of your soils. The second most important factor is the human and then, there’s the rest – clones, rootstocks, soil... I try to take myself out of the equation as much as possible, not to be influenced too much as it’s the only way to hear the voice of the vineyard and the variety. Compare it to a musician who tries to stick to the original. Maybe the biggest influence in the vineyard and in the cellar is time. The thrill starts when vines reach 30-40 years of age and thereafter, the human has little to say. Except for some sulfur, we do not add or take away anything in the cellar. This way the time factor becomes the most important leverage, supported by your choice of the aging vessel and the level of oxidation and reduction. Also, time heals the wounds, in human beings and in wine. My goal is to produce long-lived, terroir-driven wines, no doubt.



Christoph Neumeister © Neumeister

WABI SABI WINES

An origin can only be reflected in the wine when the grower/winemaker knows how to translate it into the final

result. A desire is at the beginning, followed by reflections on how to do it the best way. Meticulous care and some luck are equally important in order to produce something “valuable”. There are differences, for sure: grapes from a top site like Achleiten will taste differently than ones from a flat site in Weinviertel, for instance. However, it’s on the grower to know which kind of wine he wants to produce. He has a certain idea of the product and has to ask himself from which vineyard he can produce a given style – obviously with reasonably yield as the economic factor is an important one! We believe that the use of yeast is another crucial issue and that origin can only be shown when working without adding yeast. For that purpose, we need to pick early (at low pH, high acidity) as wines with a high degree of ripeness would not end up dry without adding yeast – or their fermentations would take a long time, risking faults (which some might like but many don’t). As a consequence, we must not filter the wines as the lees provide for the necessary mouthfeel. These choices (and limitations!) are obviously responsible for how the wines taste in the end.

THOMAS STRAKA

Besides the obvious fact that the winemaker will always have a great impact on the final product, let’s not forget about “human” in terms of being a decent person. As a matter of fact, few winegrowers can work their land alone. Consequently, you need to treat your workers well, to motivate them, to make them believe in what they’re doing. It’s about giving and receiving. When it comes to interventions, I must say that the notion of “natural wine” is a tricky one to put it politely. Every single leaf I remove is already a human interference, the grower is a part of the entire process. In our cellar, we love to use oak barrels, the traditional vessels which have been used for ages. I’m convinced that they can show best the typicality of our vineyards.

THE HISTORICAL DIMENSION



CHRISTOPH HOCH

People often say that Austria does not have a real history in terms of defining single origins. In my view, this is not entirely correct. I’d say that Austria has a history in this regard which can be compared to the Champagne. There, single vineyards are existent but the focus, the real classification if you will, is based on the village. In Austria, some 70-100 years ago, after field blends and individual stake training (“Stockkultur”) were replaced by monovarietal cultures, it was entire villages, at least along the banks of the Danube, which were famous for particular wines/styles. For instance, there were two really well-known villages for Riesling, Weissenkirchen in the Wachau and Zöbing in Kamptal. Für Grüner Veltliner, it was Strass (also Kamptal) and Hollenburg, our village. You can see this on the average age of vines – we have a couple of more than 75 years old vineyards with Grüner, for instance. Also, due to a standardized know-how and experience in pursuing their traditional wine style, the name of the winegrower was not as important as the village origin! All our growers boasted the coat of arms of Hollenburg.

REINHOLD KRUTZLER

We never used to focus on single vineyards, we only have one red and one white on a label. Of course, great vineyards were known as such many years ago in our region, for example *Ried Weinberg* or *Ried Ratschen* in Deutsch Schützen (now a part of the appellation Eisenberg but different in terms of terroir). I have to point out that those vineyards and also the whole region of Eisenberg have not

had wider recognition until the 1990’s, us being a small region with many small family estates and small plots of vines. Famous 100 years old single vineyard wines simply did not exist here. We did bottle 2 vineyards separately in the 90’s but the defining factor for us was when we started vinifying wines from the actual Eisenberg hill. Combining various plots, we began marketing different wines but not as single vineyards. Our *Perwolff*, for instance, is based on our oldest vines from vineyards in Deutsch-Schützen as well as in Eisenberg. It’s the age of vines and this mix of sites which makes the wine so unique...

THOMAS STRAKA

For sure, some vineyards have been known for a long time in our region, at least among the locals. Their names, however, were names of houses or families which were cultivating them, such as *Saybritz* or *Szapary* in the Eisenberg area. For many, we do not know where their names came from, like for *Prantner*, a great site in Rechnitz. But we have also vineyards like *Fuchsschweif* (fox tail) which was most probably named like this because it looks like the tail of a fox from above. Or *Rosengarten* where people had gardens with roses in former times.



CHRISTOPH HOCH
WEISS G

Various plots but same approach, showing the lean, mineral character of the Hollenburger conglomerate, multi-vintage blend, aged in various old, neutral oak barrels.



CHRISTOPH HOCH
KALKSPITZ

Same terroir as for the Grüner but different plots (multi-varietal base wine), picked earlier, 2 vintages to combine freshness and depth from longer aging.



MICHAEL GINDL
RIESLING SODALIS

From a small plot in the *Wadental* vineyard, pure gravel, south-facing, highly distinctive. Vinification in used 500 L oak barrels for 2 years.



MICHAEL GINDL
BUTEO

Up to 50 years old Grüner Veltliner vines from several sites on loess, gravel & loam, skin contact for 12-18 hours, aged in used oak of 2000 L.



ERICH MACHHERNDL
RIESLING SMARAGD
RIED KOLLMÜTZ

A true representative of Erich's style: terraced, steep site, gneiss, long-lived Riesling vinified in stainless steel.



ERICH MACHHERNDL
GRÜNER VELTLINER SMARAGD
RIED POSTOLERN

High altitude, barren soils, cover crops all year long, not irrigated, a close-to-the-heart site of Machherndl. Vinified on fine lees in stainless steel.



KARL FRITSCH
RIED SCHLOSSBERG 1 ÖTW
GRÜNER VELTLINER

South facing, up to 12 meters of loess above prehistoric gravel, fermented in stainless steel, vinified in steel and large oak barrels.



KARL FRITSCH
RIED STEINBERG 1 ÖTW
ROTER VELTLINER

Steep south facing site on granite and schist, yielding mineral, focused wines. Vinification in 2000 L acacia barrels.

THE CLIMATE DIMENSION



© Gruber Röschitz

MICHAEL GINDL

I think that Grüner Veltliner won't have issues with drought provided you keep the yields low. Many growers make use of the fact that Grüner can produce high yields and I think that this is one of the reasons it seems to struggle with climate change. I even believe Riesling (which is said to cope better with drought) would have the same issues in the Wachau once they turn off irrigation. There are many non-irrigated vineyards in the Mosel and Riesling does grow there very well. My yields are at a maximum of 4,5 tons/hectare (for *Sodalis*, it's 2,5 – 3 tons) and I don't have to pick the grapes super early either!

ERICH MACHHERNDL

Some people claim a great vineyard will remain a great vineyard, regardless of climate change. But there are cooler vineyards and warmer ones, especially in our valley with its different exposures. I would always favor a cooler site, for sure. And I'm asking myself whether it's a good idea to plant Grüner Veltliner in warm sites... We have great growers in the region and they know what they're doing but who knows, maybe Blaufränkisch is not a bad option for warm locations (obviously, it's not included in the DAC (protected origin) regulations). I don't want to be a pessimist: I'm convinced that we can continue making great wines using the resources we have at hand right now. There are many (often contrary) approaches on how to cope with the situation such as the height of the canopy. I believe in a higher canopy: it gives me more surface for assimilation

and the roots are forced to go deeper. This way, the vine can more probably get water even in hot vintages – and they shade each other more!



MARTIN OBENAU

As for now, climate change is more of a positive than a negative thing – at least in my region of western Weinviertel as we are seeing less disease pressure. However, I think that we will have to adapt when it comes to root stocks in the near future. We will have to switch to less vigorous ones and we will have to accept lower yields per hectare. On the other hand, there will be less fungal diseases, less canopy work, thus less leaves and most probably healthier grapes. Less will be more!

For sure, the varieties are important and they require certain conditions. Here too, the surroundings do play a role. For instance, it would be a bad idea to plant Müller Thurgau (a grape I actually really like!) in a place that is prone to accumulate fog. Each grape has its peculiarities. Very windy exposures can be risky for grapes whose young shoots tend to be fragile - I'd lose half of the crop. So I

can't plant anything anywhere. For my Grüner Veltliner, sites on loess soils are great, no doubt about that. Grüner does not like too much of stress, it favors deep, fertile soils. Roter Veltliner is much more tenacious in this regard, I recently planted some on a barren, gravelly site. In our rather dry region, it's crucial to have a good plan when planting new vines as young vines do struggle with dry conditions unlike old plants.

GRUBER FAMILY

We definitely see the effects of climate change, yes. Varieties such as Riesling and Pinot Noir seem to handle hot and dry vintages better than Grüner Veltliner. However, there is a lot we can do to make things better – keeping the soils healthy (planting cover crops even in hot years) and bringing in humus. This keeps the soils cool and enables them to retain humidity better. We believe that our trials (now in the third year) with the minimal pruning method further help us reducing issues with regard to climate change. The vines and soils are shaded at an earlier stage of the season, for example. If we continue treating our vineyards well, the great sites will remain great also in the years to come.

KARL FRITSCH

The changing climatic conditions do have an effect and I talk a lot about it with my colleagues. It happens right in front of our eyes, especially with Grüner Veltliner. We witness vintages which are simply too hot for this grape, having repercussions on the style of the wine. It's getting tricky to link the resulting



GRUBER
PINOT NOIR RIED GALGENBERG

A hilly site with loess and granite in the upper parts, a place Pinot prefers for its dry and cool conditions. Vinified for cca. 8 months in used oak barrels.



GRUBER
GRÜNER VELTLINER
RIED MÜHLBERG
WEINVIERTEL DAC RESERVE

More than 60 years old vines, granite soil, slow growth, small grapes and berries, limited production. Aged in large oak barrels, great potential.

wines to a so-called cool climate style. I think that in 20 years' time, we will have to say goodbye to some traditions and varieties. On the other hand, the times have always been changing and looking back 30 years, Grüner and Riesling were not the main varieties in our regions as they did not reach sufficient ripeness in many years back then. We have had this window of opportunity for the current 2-3 decades, for sure, when climate played in concert with our vineyards (shallow, stony and higher situated ones for Riesling and more fertile, lush ones in the lower, closer to the river sites for Grüner. We will have to adapt anew. I believe that we have to focus on the typicity of our terroir based on origin rather than on certain varieties. Ideally, the consumer is going to think: "Yes, this is a typical wine from Wagram!"

ERWIN TINHOF

I do not see this happening necessarily in our Leithaberg region. Here, the great sites have always been situated on the slope. In the 80's, growers have also focused on flatter, lower sites as they could work them more easily and mechanized (those were the times of the more-is-better approach...). Those lower sites were also warmer, the soils more fertile. With climate change, the vineyards on the slopes again show why they are more valuable: the altitude is higher, they are usually closer to the forest (which provides for cooling), there is no waterlogging and obviously no risk of frost due to their incline. It's maybe presumptuous but there are similarities between Leithaberg and Burgundy – in the latter, the premier and grand crus are all located on the slopes. So, clearly, the micro-geography of our sites does constitute an advantage given the changing climate...

ROMAN HORVATH MW

Due to climate change, the parameters defining a good vineyard might shift a little bit but it's not going to be a "continental shift". Climate change has rather put more emphasis on the

work that needs to be carried out in the vineyards. 20 years ago, mother Nature was allowing more room for mistakes – today, our growers need to work much more precisely and carefully. Speaking of varieties, Grüner Veltliner is obviously not the variety boasting the highest levels of acidity, that is true. However, we have many tools to mitigate the impact of climate change – it is about working with the variety instead of trying to fight its character. We are convinced and confident that Grüner Veltliner will maintain its importance in our generation and also in the next one! We are not worried about the upcoming decades provided working with Grüner is adapted to changing conditions, for example by taking use of its tannic acid to support the acidity when necessary. We do not see a red wine boom coming to the Wachau for at least 20-30 years.



MARTIN OBENAUS
UNCHAINED ROT

The "Unchained" series is based on old Zweigelt and Rösler vines from barren, gravelly sites with low yields but high character. Aging in large, used oak barrels for up to 2 years.

THE REGULATORY DIMENSION

KARL FRITSCH

We have to point out that Austria has been pretty late in taking awareness of the single vineyard concept. Obviously, the Wachau has been a forerunner in this regard, focusing on their sites as early as in the 50's. About 15 years ago, the association of the *Traditionsweingüter* has taken on the task to develop a classification of crus and is currently working on defining *Erste Lagen* (premier crus) and *Grosse Lagen* (grand crus). For sure, not an Austrian invention but I believe that every country has to take its own paths and make adaptations to what's specific and necessary. Considering the rather diverse and at times complicated DAC protection of origin system (the Austrian equivalent to DOC or AOC), the efforts are now aiming to unify it by setting up the regional-village-cru concept in all regions. And to be honest, it's the easier to understand model, also in terms of export. The process is not simple, for sure, as we have to align many personal, economic and political stakes. I believe in the pros of this system as, for example, village origins can become household names, if marketed the right way - we have seen this in the past. To be successful, we have to spread one message and speak with one voice.

RUDI RABL

Single vineyard wines have a long history in my region of Kamptal. I have old labels made by my grandfather already displaying *Ried Steinhaus*, no mention of a variety (it has always been Riesling) whatsoever. We have recently

voted in the regional wine committee in favor of starting the classification of single vineyards. This process needs to start with classifying *Erste Lagen* based on their historic value, on market significance, a consistent flavor profile, etc. Only after 5 years will we proceed to further define *Grosse Lagen*. I guess we will end up with 4-5 of those grand crus in our region. For sure, there will be (political) discussions as many growers will want to see their vineyards classified. I believe that in order to avoid or end fights in this regard, the classification will have to be enshrined in law, sooner or later. The Kamptal will most probably become the model region for such a classification. What's more, in 5-7 years, a sustainable, organic or biodynamic certification will be a prerequisite for the vineyards to be classified – as surely as night follows a day.

MARTIN OBENAUS

Speaking of origin protection as we are having the DAC discussion all the time, I believe that a major part of the consumers cannot tell the difference between the various regions. I can tell the difference between producers but not whether the grapes come from this or that vineyard, honestly. Keep in mind that the DAC-policy requires a certain aromatic profile ("a Grüner has to taste of this and that in a certain region"). In doing so, it's useless to talk about single vineyards and their specific profiles... For the consumer, it's much more important to know a winery and their style – and that he or she likes it that way.

JOHANNES TRAPL

There is this famous pyramid going upwards from regional to village to cru wines and all of those levels are supposed to reflect the origin, right? Well, for me, the actual pyramid of origin is currently turned upside down, especially when considering conventional versus organic/biodyn cultivation. 80% of the wines are being farmed conventionally and, in my opinion, their character of origin is masked the most. 20% is organic and a couple of percent of those are biodynamic. So, this tip of the pyramid actually shows best the typicity or origin. It's absurd when the lowest quality in terms of reflecting terroir is allowed to display and mention origin on their labels (the conventional regional and village wines which pass the official examination and get their verification number easily) whereas those who try to show the true character of their origin (or single vineyards) are so often not allowed to do so or they have to fight for it really hard!





CLAUS PREISINGER
TRIPLE B

A single vineyard wine named the Claus-way: Blaufränkisch, Bühl (the actual vineyard), Burgenland. Sandy loam, old vines, low yield, aging in 1000 L amphora.



CLAUS PREISINGER
KALKUNDKIESEL WEISS

Grüner, Muskateller, Welschriesling, mix of vineyards on limestone and gravel, all kinds of fermentation and aging vessels (steel, concrete, large barrel, amphora).

CLAUS PREISINGER

The Austrian wine law is about 40 years old. For me, it's absurd that authorities are trying to tell me how my wine is supposed to look and taste. That is so 80's and while it may have had a justification back then, it's complete nonsense today. However, maybe the vibrant and creative "natural wine" movement in Austria would not have flourished the way it did if we had not faced the insanity of the official single vineyard (and denomination of origin) system. I love the place I'm in, being creative and free, like an artist if you will. I prefer this over marketing 5 different single vineyard Blaufränkisch, to be honest (with subtle variations, only a few can really distinguish).

JOHANNES ZILLINGER

There are countless single vineyard wines and I think that doesn't make sense. Of course, I do understand the motivation or parts of it behind that phenomenon. In the Weinviertel region, the majority of estates each label between 5-8 different Grüner Veltliner. So how to differentiate them? They need to put a vineyard name on them, also to justify the price difference! Some are picked earlier, some later, maybe from a site a couple of meters apart, most probably showing the same geological conditions – this has little to do with any terroir, it's just picking grapes two weeks later...and let's be honest, this also applies to many other regions. Elsewhere, it's the same story, but maybe with Sauvignon blanc instead. I rather prefer to show my ideas of certain wine styles, that is cool climate Austria, freshness, ripe acidity, authentic fruit expression – regardless of single vineyards.

ROMAN HORVATH MW

I, personally, try not to immerse myself too much into wine politics but the initiatives in order to classify *Erste Lagen* and *Grosse Lagen* and to include them into official regulations is for sure an interesting topic right now. The Wachau is somewhat tentative in this regard

which is of course due to the rather conservative attitude always held by our region. It is probably going to take a long time for us to be "ready" for these changes. Obviously, some would worry about their single vineyards not being honored as grand crus but this applies for all regions anyway. I even think that this classification could be an opportunity for some less known vineyards to receive more recognition. This depends on the legal definition, as currently, it's not the terroir or potential of a vineyard which makes it eligible for a "cru" but its current importance. However, I see opportunities for the future in this regard.



Roman Horvath MW © Domäne Wachau

CHRISTOPH NEUMEISTER

I'm generally a bit skeptical when it comes to classifying *Erste* or *Grosse Lagen*. The *STK* has been putting a focus on village and single vineyard wines in the last 15 years and this was a success, the wines have gained in value. We have also put our stamp on the (rather recent) DAC development in Styria. However, I think a classification of vineyards per se is a risky endeavor that could turn of all of us into enemies. We should rather classify the wines from specific vineyards, evaluating them over a span of 10-15-20 years, externally, maybe like the organic checks we're regularly having. The wines would need to be launched only after 2 years or so, be really drinkable after 5 years and keep on getting better thereafter. The number of such wines would be limited. Obviously, politics do not like that, they would rather satisfy everyone.



REINHOLD KRUTZLER
ALTER WEINGARTEN
RIED WEINBERG

Medium deep iron-rich loam soil, south-eastern exposure, 50+ years old Blaufränkisch vines, fermented in open vats, 18 months aging in mostly used 500 L barrels.



REINHOLD KRUTZLER
BLAUFRÄNKISCH PERWOLFF

Several vineyards, selection of best grapes, iron rich loam and schist soils, low yields, fermented in open vats, 19 months aging in 500 L oak barrels



WARGA-HACK
SAUVIGNON BLANC SCHIEFER

Typical of the Sausal region: high altitude, steep, barren schist soils, super low yields. Long vinification, low-intervention on lees in stainless steel.



WARGA-HACK
GRAUBURGUNDER PHYLLIT

Pinot gris with minerality and precision, supported by the demanding, laborious conditions of the Sausal terroir. Fermented on skins, aged in 600 L oak for 2 years.



JOHANNES TRAPL
BLAUFRÄNKISCH
1 ÖTW RIED SPITZERBERG

The only (yet outstanding) official single vineyard wine at Trapl's: 60+ years old vines on limestone, miniscule yields, open vat fermented and aged in 500 L oak.



JOHANNES TRAPL
ZWEIGELT

Various sites on limestone, loam and loess, vinified in stainless steel and used oak, homeopathic SO₂ addition, showcasing the light, fruit-driven spectrum of Zweigelt.

E V E N T S

Karakterre 12 @New York, USA

4 November 2023

www.karakterre.com

RAW @New York, USA

12-13 November 2023

www.rawwine.com/fairs/new-york-2023

RAW @Montréal, CAN

18-19 November 2023

www.rawwine.com/fairs/montreal-2023



Editor's office

TOA – Tastes of Austria

1020 Vienna – Austria

Palais Rohan, Praterstraße 38/30

toaworks@outlook.com