



AUSTRIA 2016

TERRY THEISE ESTATE SELECTIONS

THEISE MANIFESTO

Beauty is more important than impact.

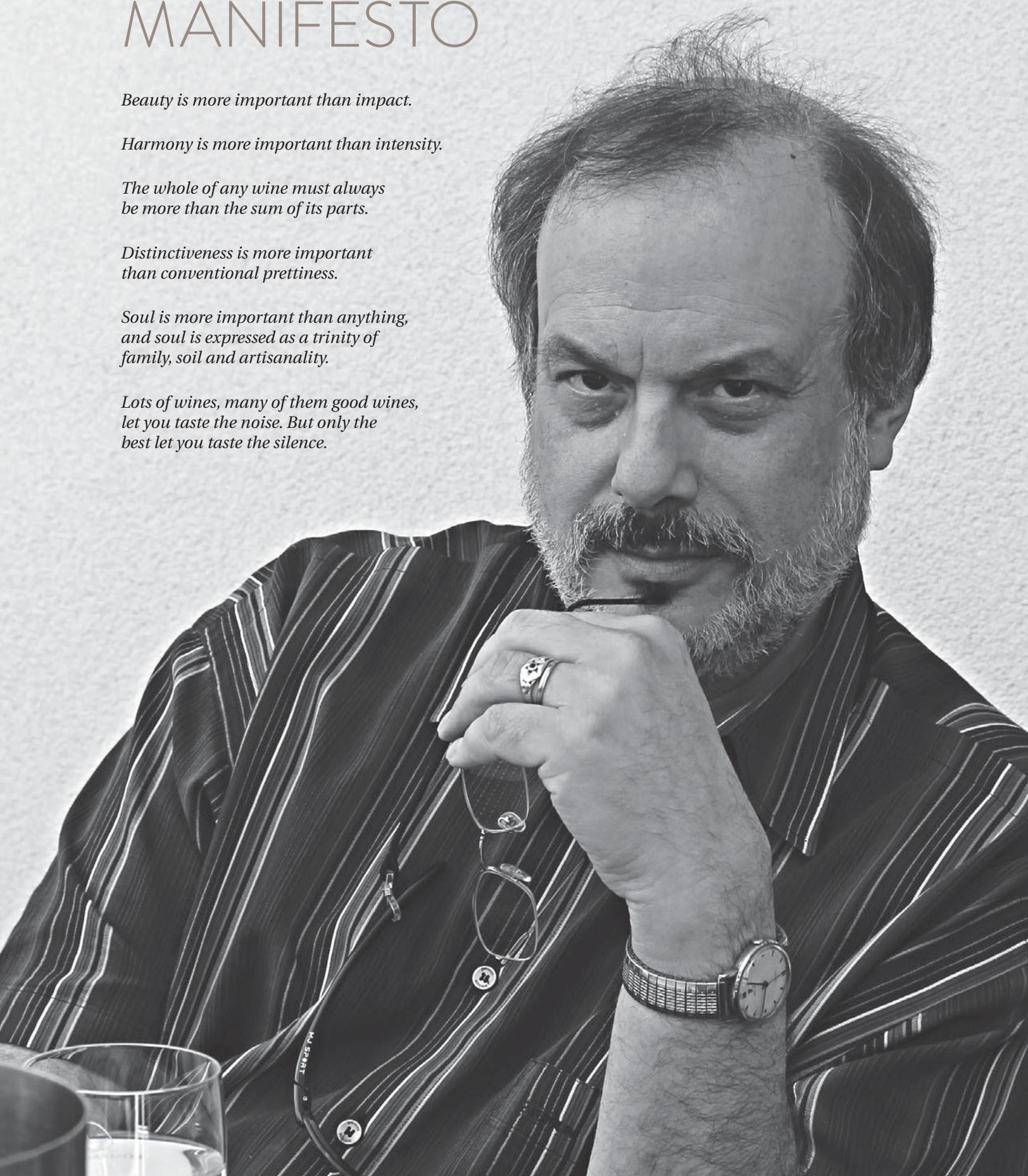
Harmony is more important than intensity.

*The whole of any wine must always
be more than the sum of its parts.*

*Distinctiveness is more important
than conventional prettiness.*

*Soul is more important than anything,
and soul is expressed as a trinity of
family, soil and artisanality.*

*Lots of wines, many of them good wines,
let you taste the noise. But only the
best let you taste the silence.*



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INTRODUCTION



Last year there was a fierce and devastating hailstorm on my second night in Austria. This year there was an even more damaging Spring frost a few days before I arrived. The growers were putting on brave faces—and growers are stoic by nature—but you could see they were traumatized. A few of them were looking at losing their *entire* crop. One of them was arguing with his insurance company, who wanted to delay payment until they determined whether the barren vineyards would create a second growth. Another grower with a less recalcitrant insurance provider said, “Yeah sure, we’re insured, but I don’t want the cash, I want the *wine*.” All of the growers, even those with only moderate losses, were discussing the capriciousness of extreme climatic events. “A wine grower learns to live with the occasional bad luck,” one of them said. “But it’s happening seemingly all the time now, and with no precedent. When have we ever had hail in May and in the middle of the night? Sure we’re always had Spring

frosts, but now the vine growth is earlier because of climate change and warmer winters, and this increases the damage.”

And all of this occurs against the backdrop of a truly outstanding vintage in 2015.

Does that compensate, or is it simply bewildering? Both, I suspect. One can even consider that *most* recent vintages have been either outstanding or (potentially) great: 2012, 2013, 2015, three of the last four. Nature, it seems, has grown immoderate, and it is truly either feast or famine.

Remember also, a grower isn’t merely dismayed because he’s lost his production-model. He feels sympathy and even sorrow for the violence done to his (or her) vines, whom he does not regard as “things” that give him fruit, but *beings* with whom he cooperates in a mutual relationship of equals. Any gardener will understand. If the living beings you tend are wounded, you feel the wound yourself, not just as an inconvenience to your

gardening vision, but in sympathy from one life to another.

Thus I have just returned from a vertiginous week of tasting, sad growers showing superb wines. Yo yo me.

So....Austria.

Austria has taken a firm place in the market, but this is a double-edged sword. Its stature is seemingly durable, but it is small, it is minor, and it can safely be disregarded. It often suffices to include “Austria” by dint of a token selection of wines that don’t begin to exploit the very large gifts this wine culture has to bestow on us. This makes me a little crazy. Not long ago I was in a restaurant while the staff were gathered to taste a new wine they’d just received. I’m a friend-of-the-house, and was offered a taste. It was a decent, solid European wine, I wouldn’t have minded drinking it but wouldn’t have had a second thought for it. On the way home it struck me, powerfully, that I can offer twenty or thirty wines of greater quality for that price, from this “Austria”

place that so many of us merely glance at. Those wines would have been actively delightful and memorable, yet they live in the umlaut-ghetto and have to cede space to lesser wines from “hipper” places.

This is also true of Germany—and by the way, the restaurant I spoke about is a great supporter of both categories, lovely people whom I wish I could clone – but Austria is considerably simpler than Germany. In Germany you have to deal with a theological degree of obscurity and confusion about what it actually is as a wine culture. Not so in Austria.

In Austria, the overwhelming majority of white wines are entirely dry, and those that are not dry are nearly always dessert-wine sweet. In Austria, the overwhelming majority of red wines are ripe and “viable” by international standards—not cool-climate curios—and they comprise a vitally healthy community of warm, dark-colored, medium-weight fruit-and-mineral-driven *food* wines.

You’ll have heard of most of the grape varieties, but what’s the point of the ones you’ve heard of? What makes Austria cool are her own grapes: Grüner Veltliner, Blaufränkisch (those two above all), Zweigelt, St. Laurent, alongside some of the greatest Rieslings on the face of the earth and excellent Pinot Blanc, Muscat and (even) Sauvignon Blanc. I often think, if we were only *now* introducing these wines to the market, y’all would fall upon them like salivating wolves. That they have been here for a generation (plus) makes them wines you suppose you can safely disregard.

That is a fatal mistake. If you care about offering your customers the best wines you can find, excellent values, quirky individual characters, compelling complexities, great wines cheaper than any other great wines in the world, you are derelict in your duties if you don’t dive into these wines in a very big way.

Grumpy old fucker, ain’t I!

Austria’s greatest contribution to the wine world is its native and signature grape variety, Grüner Veltliner. Most of you know it exists, yet there’s a kind of stink to it, as in something that “used to be trendy.” Think of the way you’re discovering all these hitherto-unknown cool things from all over the place, and how much fun it is. That was Grüner Veltliner in the late 90s and early “aughts.” And you don’t want to repeat what those guys did; you want to do new things. Got it, and sympathize.

The problem is, what should have happened was to recognize GV as a classic, whereas what did (too often) happen

was it got swept into the rubbish pile of the previously fashionable.

You’re not gonna like what I’m about to say, but in the service of truth I have to say it. Not one single thing that’s since been discovered, trumped, lionized, promulgated, put on wine lists and talked about with giddy delight, not ONE. DAMN. THING. has been nearly as excellent as Grüner Veltliner. Put any of them in my face, and I’ll just keep annoying you; Jura? Love them, not as good as GV. Timorosso? Very cool and interesting, not as good as GV. Doesn’t matter what you push upon me; you are ignoring *much* sweeter and lower-hanging fruit in order to clamber to the top of the tree and pluck inferior material.

So I’m asking you to look again. Taste seriously and see what your Dollars (or your boss’s) are actually buying, and then really, please, *do* make the best case you can that there’s better wine for the money than GV will give. I want to hear it; it will help me. If you’re right, it will humble my sad smug ass, which anyone will tell you is a good thing.

But I don’t think you can. No one can.

The “marketing” of this point can seem a little needy, and I suppose it is, because we’ve been saying for twenty years that Grüner Veltliner ages fabulously, and ability to age is how we know to take a wine seriously, or so I’ve been told. An august panel was convened one October in New York, to taste a bunch of mature GVs; Aldo Sohm was on it, David Schildknecht, Jancis Robinson, Willi Klinger, and for some reason, me. My guys at Skurnik staged another tasting in January, of Rieslings and GVs from the Kamptal going back to 1969. I thought the point was made, but I was already sold. The only way to know how the tasters felt is to see what they do, whether they decide to take GV seriously as opposed to ensuring the few token wines are duly stocked.

Austria is also a markedly good producer of red wines, from three native varieties I’ll describe in a few pages. These wines are not simple, but neither are they routinely grandiose and complex. They are wonderful medium-weight food-friendly fruit-driven wines. They are distinctive and individual. They get what wine’s supposed to do at the table and in our lives. They’re not afraid to be delicious. If you’re someone who likes Foradori’s basic Teroldego more than the Granato, your mind is ready for Austrian red. (And speaking of which: Lagrein? *Love Lagrein!* Blaufränkisch is better.)

This doesn’t even address the Rieslings, which stand with the world’s best

dry examples of the variety. They have more body, somewhat less acidity, more succulence and more “exotic” flavors than the good Trocken Germans. (Those in turn have perhaps greater precision, more digital focus, and a “cooler” feel, but the two are more alike than they are different.) And while there’s still a distressing proportion of severely gnarly rasping dry German Rieslings—fewer than before, but *not none*—this is not the case in Austria. The worst you can say about an Austrian Riesling is that it’s nondescript, whereas the worst of the Germans are painfully shrill.

* THE 2015 VINTAGE *

An amazingly even, substantive and charming vintage. There don’t seem to be any ordinary wines, let alone bad ones, and I suspect we’ll be debating which is the greater vintage—2015 or 2013—for many years to come. Speaking of white wines now, 2015 excels in the quality German-speakers call *dicht*, which roughly translates as density but which really denotes a richness of texture where you don’t find any holes in the wine, any place it might sag, any interruption of structural richness. This capacity was so omnipresent among 2015s that even the smallest wines were endowed with it. Our basic GrüVe liters have *never* been better. Entry-level wines such as Nigl’s *Freiheit* GV and Glatzer’s basic GV are absurdly good. It’s almost impossible to say whether GV is better than Riesling, except that Riesling always stretches higher, all things being equal. The Muskatellers are superb also, with all their angular nettly spiciness but also with the balancing elderblossom flavors that give them extra dimensions. Basically, every white wine I tasted was gifted with the vintage’s fine generous concentration.

But not only that. 2015 tastes as if it went to charm school. It excels in *fruit*. It has all the terroir and “minerality” a vintage can have, but it is always driven by ripe deliciousness.

Sounds almost perfect, right? It is almost perfect. For ambitious growers it is too perfect, because every lazy sod could make good wine, and there’s less way for the truly fine to stand out. One could argue that vintages like ’15 set an unsustainable standard; they spoil us. Be that as it may, it’s a vintage to buy and buy again, because it *will make friends*.

The wines are so consistent and so genial that I had very little curiosity about the weather that created them. I heard



the prevailing stories about heat-spikes in the Summer, about drought in some vineyards, about interrupted assimilation in stressed vines, about timely late-Summer rain, about a good proper Autumn and a happy harvest, where you could pick with a master-plan and the weather went along. I tasted almost zero botrytis and I only rarely tasted overripeness. I doubt we'll see many north-of-14%-alcohol bruisers, and I doubt we'll see bitterness.

Faithful readers will notice an absence of caveats and qualifiers in these remarks, and less of the light-and-shade I usually delineate when I describe a vintage. There was no need for such things. The vintage is reliable; it doesn't indicate a common "flaw" and it doesn't tell a story of a challenge surmounted whereby this guy did it but that guy didn't.

One thing 2015 was, was cruel to 2014. That vintage obtained a dubious reputation by irresponsible members of the press—not the wine press but the popular press—who told stories of awful harvest weather and who basically poured a lot of garbage over the vintage while it was actually being gathered. So inside Austria, 2014 was *infra-dig*, and when the first '15s entered the market it became impossible to sell any remaining '14s. Thus defenders

of that vintage—among whom I belong, with qualifiers—were digging out of some deep holes.

I offer a few '14s here. I love every one of them, and several are truly excellent wines. I was never "forced" to buy up the moribund '14s to gain access to the gleaming '15s, and no selections were made as "favors" to the grower. When the wine was good, I was glad to be helpful, but only then.

If there is anything to say about '15 it is, maybe, this: it tended to favor growers who normally make slim-bodied filigree detailed wines, as opposed to growers who make juicier more analog wines. Accent on *tended!* About mid-way through my nine days tasting I thought "This will be a great year for Nigl," as indeed it was, though in several surprising ways. I also thought "This type of year doesn't play to Hiedler's strengths" and yet Ludwig made a stunning group of Rieslings, many of his best ever.

HIGHLIGHTS AND SUPERLATIVES

Not easy this year! The entire vintage is a highlight.

As I mulled it over, I thought I'd bring you into the process instead of just blurt-ing who made the "best" this or that.

So—who is the **winery of the vintage?** Is it HIRSCH, who has his best collection in *years*, and who really seems to have taken a big leap forward? Is it GOBELS-BURG because basically who is any better than they are? Is it ALZINGER because the wines are not just stellar but heart rend-ing, though there isn't much to be had?

If you look only at the most aching beauty, it has to be **Alzinger**. Wine does not get better than this.

If you look at a sustained level of ex-cel-lence across a large range, with very high summits among them, it has to be **Gobelsburg**.

But if you look at the surprising, the improbable, the *WTF happened here??* then it HAS to be my in-the-zone pal Jo-hannes **Hirsch**, whom I think has never shown me a finer more consistent group of wines. But! This is based on tasting pre-bottled wine to a greater extent than at Gobelsburg, and so I hesitate...

The winery of the vintage is—the vintage!

The **wine of the vintage** is another co-nundrum. Candidly, the "best" wine may be something I only get 30 cases of (often

less) and even if I'm telling the "truth" I am also perhaps inciting demand I can't fulfill. In that spirit, I will again share the process.

From **Gobelsburg**, the twin peaks are **Grüner Veltliner Renner**, and **Riesling Heiligenstein**. These are truly great wines and there's enough to be had.

Alzinger's Riesling Höhereck Smaragd was the wine that most moved me. If tears were the criterion, this would be the wine. But the amount will be tiny.

This surprised me, but **Hofer's Grüner Veltliner Kirchliszen** is the best GV Hans ever showed me, a wine I wouldn't be shocked to have tasted at Nigl.

Even more amazing, **Glatzer's regular Grüner Veltliner** was an absolute mind-fuck in 2015; by no means as "great" as the others in consideration, but the greatest vintage of the 26 I've tasted, *and there's PLENTY of it.*

Finally, the wine perhaps closest to my soul, the stirring meditation-on-beauty that is **Nikolaihof's Riesling Vom Stein Federspiel**.

If I chose on the basis of my own pure response, then Nikolaihof. If I chose on a more "professional" basis then Alzinger and/or Gobelsburg. If I let sales-politics into the criteria, then Glatzer because it's the wine I have the biggest supply of. If I look at the pure genius of 2015, then Hofer because when has he ever made a wine like that?

I'll indulge myself. **NIKOLAIHOF**

The **Grüner Veltliner of the vintage** is certainly **NIGL'S** gorgeous, astonishing **Herzstück vom Kirchenberg**.

The **wine of the offering**, which takes other vintages into account, is an entertaining choice. Ready? Give it up to **Hirsch 2014 Heiligenstein Riesling**. Get ready to be entirely gob-smacked by the truly wacked-out amazing **2004 Sekt "R.D."** from **Gobelsburg**. Mustn't neglect the murmur and soulful **Hiedler Grüner Veltliner Familienreserve 2007**. The most unlikely great wine in the offering has to be **Bründlmayer's** astonishing **2014 Heiligenstein Riesling Alte Reben**. If we include sweet wine then certainly **Schröck's 2014 Ausbruch "Thurner"**, which is the greatest she has ever made.

So, for excellence we had no reason to have expected, for beating the odds and creating true greatness from out of the morass of challenges of 2014, I am lost in admiration for **Bründlmayer's** 2014 Heiligenstein Alte Reben Riesling, certainly the greatest Riesling of that vintage in Austria.

But for sheer **WTF**-value, the silly-good 2004 late-disgorged bubbly from

Gobelsburg.

The **best Muscat** this year—among a great many—is a tossup between **Nikolaihof** and **Schröck**, so I'd say to take Nikolaihof if you want something lyric, mineral and charming and **Schröck** if you want something more inferential and atmospheric. Oh shit, just take them both.

The **best low-end GV** is, sheesh, all of them! But especially noteworthy are **Ecker's Stockstall**, **Nigl's Freiheit**, **Hofer's Von Den Rieden**, and the aforementioned **Glatzer**. I am deliberately omitting members of this category that are always star performers, but suffice to say the Gobelsburg and the Hirsch will make you very happy indeed.

The **best Rosé** is **Prieler** for complexity and vinosity, and **Ecker** for animal deliciousness.

The **most noteworthy reds** in various price-points and along lines of stature, might include these guys: **GLATZER'S 2013 Zweigelt Dornenvogel**, **Sattler's 2013 St. Laurent Reserve**, **Prieler's 2014 Blaufränkisch Leithaberg**, **Setzer's 2014 Zweigelt**, and **Schwarzböck's 2014 Zweigelt**.

Of these, the single greatest, and the one you *must not miss*, is the **PRIELER 2014 Blaufränkisch Leithaberg**.

CERTAIN QUIRKY TASTING WORDS I USE, AND WHAT (I THINK) THEY MEAN...

I'll say **ore** if I think I'm tasting a minerality that seems ancient, carbonized, and that feels like it contains iron.

I'll say **physio-sweet** a bit reluctantly because I don't want you to think I mean "sugar." There is a sense of sweetness that comes from physiological (or "phenolic") ripeness, and you will sense it quite vividly. I used to call it "secret" sweetness but that could be misleading. Think of it this way: you know, I'm sure, at least one really *funny* person, who is so amusing that you're always at the edge of laughing even when (s)he isn't saying or doing funny things. That's the "sweetness" I mean; it's an aura of wonderful fruit that has nothing to do with "sugar."

I'll say **flowering fields** when there's a dispersed fecund aroma that's flowery but also a little feral, not the "sweet" floweriness of violets and wisteria and lilacs. Other tasters use "meadow-flowers" to describe similar impressions.

I'll say **vetiver**, but this is a true cognate. Google it. My own template for it is

the Guerlain fragrance, a great favorite.

FIRST AMONG EQUALS

Once again I will highlight special favorites by use of one, two and three pluses (+, ++, +++). Call it my subjective short-list. It has to do with a quality of being stunned by a wine, and it can happen with "small" wines or big ones; it has to do with quality of flavor as much as with rendering of flavor.

One plus means something like one Michelin star. Pay particular attention to this wine. Try not to miss it.

Two pluses is like two Michelin stars, getting close to as-good-as-it-gets now, no home should be without it. It's indispensable.

Three pluses almost never appear, because these are the wines that go where you simply cannot imagine anything better. Like three Michelin stars. There are rarely more than a wine or two per year that reach this level, 'cause your intrepid taster has to be virtually flattened with ecstasy.

There is sentiment to the effect that using any form of highlighting is invidious, since it damns the wines without plusses as also-rans. Obviously that's not the case, but I agree there's a danger whenever one establishes a hierarchy based on scores, even in such a primitive system as mine. But there's also a pragmatic consideration at play; you can't buy every wine in this offering, and my plusses try to answer the implied question *What should I not miss no matter what?* And of course you'll still pore through the prose for my many jokes and puns, and the Masonic messages I've cannily embedded within it. I'm also aware there can be political ramifications at play, and I ask you to believe I do my best to ignore them. A grower might feel slighted if he doesn't get enough plusses. A guy who loved me for all the plusses I gave him last year might wonder what happened if he got fewer or none this year. The pressure's on—and at the moment of tasting, I don't care. Nothing matters but the wine.

WHEN TO DRINK THE WINES

You can drink GrüVe either very young if you enjoy its primary fruit, or very old if you like mature flavors. GrüVe seems to age in a steady climb. Naturally the ripener it is the longer it goes, but in general it doesn't start showing true tertiary flavors till it's about 12 years old. Even then it's

just a patina. Around 20-25 it starts tasting like grown-up mature wine—but still not *old*. Wait a little longer.

Riesling, amazingly, ages faster. In certain vintages it takes on the flavor-known-as “petrol,” which it later sheds. Great Austrian Riesling will certainly make old bones—30-40 years for the best wines—but all things being equal GrüVe tastes younger at every point along the way. So: young is always good. If you want mature overtones wait about ten years. If you want a completely mature wine, wait about twenty.

Even more improbable; Pinot Blanc can make it to fifteen or even twenty years quite easily. If you want to wait, you’ll end up with something recalling a somewhat rustic white Burgundy. Mr. Hiedler has shown me more than a few striking old masterpieces, but then, he has The Touch with this variety.

A NOTE ON MY USE OF THE WORD “URGESTEIN”

I have tended to use this term as the Austrians do, to refer to a family of metamorphic soils based on primary rock. While it’s a useful word, you should bear in mind Urgestein isn’t a single soil but a general group of soils. There are important distinctions among it: some soils have more mica, silica, others are schistuous (fractured granite), still others contain more gneiss. Hirsch’s twin-peaks of Gaisberg and Heiligenstain are both classed as Urgestein sites, yet they’re quite different in flavor.

THE QUESTIONS OF ORGANICS

First, I’m not going to politicize this issue, because I don’t grow grapes or make wine for a living, and thus it would be fatuous of me to preach to people who *do*, about living up to my precious standards. What I’ll do instead is say what I see on the ground, and suggest what I hope will be useful positions.

The consensus among serious growers is to go as far as prudence will allow toward organic growing. Few of them use chemical fertilizers, or pesticides or herbicides, but many of them either use or *reserve the right* to use fungicides. Nearly every grower I know (or with whom I’ve discussed these issues) is mindful of the need for sustainability. Some of them just do their thing and answer only to their own conscience. Others belong to various organizations certifying and

controlling what’s called “Integrated” growing, wherein the allowable spraying compounds are detailed and enforced. There are two ways to look at this. One says these growers are just lazy or risk-averse and “integrated” growing is just a green-wash for something not much better than conventional/ chemical. I doubt many people who hold that opinion have ever had to support a family as winery proprietors, but their ferocity is at least well meant. The other opinion—the one I myself hold—is that any step in the right direction is to be encouraged, and it’s very likely the world is more improved if most people are taking those steps than if only a few are, because when forced to choose between all or nothing, they choose nothing.

The truly organic or biodynamic estates can choose whether to certify by various means, and most of them do. I have one certified-organic and two biodynamic estates in this assortment. The political issues around certification can be thorny, especially if one’s a lone wolf by nature. But what’s the alternative? If you won’t certify, do you really have a right to the claim of “organic” or “biodynamic?” After all, anyone can *talk* whatever he pleases, but the ones who endure the paperwork and the politics ought to be the only ones with rights to the power of the organic “brand.”

My position is to encourage the growers with whom I work to take whatever steps they can in an organic direction. I don’t think it improves their wines in ways you can taste discretely, though conscientiousness in one thing often implies conscientiousness in all things. Most important, I don’t subject my growers to any sort of purity test with only pass/fail as options. There are reasonable approaches other than mine, and I respect them, but this one works for me.

AUSTRIAN RED WINES

Well, they tried, and then bless them, they stopped. They wanted to show they could compete in the world of big oaky dull reds and so they planted the usual grapes and bought the usual barriques and made a few plausible wines. And then one day they woke up and realized they were far too eager to give the world a type of wine the world was already drowning in. They looked a little silly. The wines were paint-by-numbers.

And so they looked around and asked the true, salient questions. What do we have? What unique thing can we contribute? How do we add to the sum of

distinctive interesting wine in the world?

Here is how those questions are being answered. Not “have been” answered, but *are being* answered, because this is a culture in motion, and one that learns each year.

What seems to be true is, Austrian red wines straddle a line between “warm” and “cool” styles. They are rich and ripe—most of them make 13.5% alc without chaptalization. Most are dark in color. Most have the physiological “sweetness” of fully ripe fruit. Most are glossy and polished. But *most are fruit-driven*, medium in weight and *FOOD FRIENDLY*. Partly by dint of geography and partly by choice of grape variety, these are structured wines that seldom carry the stewy heat of hot-climate reds. Finally, most use wood as a seasoning and a nuance, because they got bored with overtly woody wines that taste the same as everyone else’s in the world.

And most important, Austria’s reds are delicious. There’s that word again. I see tasters finding (or dreaming) all kinds of virtues in the hipster wine-of-the-week, whatever quirky little beast comes from some obscure place that gives people bragging rights for “discovering” something previously—and often deservedly—unknown. Because if we are really honest, we have to acknowledge that some wines are obscure for very good reasons; they aren’t that good. “We make this wine as it’s been made for 1100 years, by passing the juice back over grape seeds that have been eaten and shit back out by a ferret,” and while that may be an interesting story, it’s probably a lousy glass of wine.

With even a modicum of selectivity, which is where I come in, it is almost always a yummy, helpful, substantive and yet charming glass of wine from Austria. They’re made from three native grape varieties that barely grow anywhere else. At least one of them offers all the angular quirks you could ever crave, but it won’t insult your intelligence or your palate. Another is absurdly delicious. Yet another is entirely compelling and fiendishly hard to grow. Here they are.

Blaufränkisch is the one with the highest up side, making nearly all of Austria’s most important reds. The best of these are among the world’s great red wines—not, perhaps, the greatest, but certainly the great. That echelon is represented here by PRIELER’S Goldberg and Marienthal single-vineyards, and by KRUTZLER’S iconic Perwolff.

Blaufränkisch is essentially the wine Sauvignon Blanc would be if it were red. It rarely has a lot of “fruit” but it seems to

have every possible berry and cherry, and if you taste bilberry, juniper, huckleberry, blackberry, black raspberry, black cherry, regular old cherry, I won't argue. BF also seems to have every herb under the sun, and I mean *under the sun*, as it tastes as though the herbs were hot when you plucked them. If you're an imaginative type and you write "weeds" or "garrigue" you're also getting the signal. If you smell and taste cracked black peppercorns, you're in. BF will appeal to the lover of Cabernet Franc, and if you're a habitué of Old-World Malbec or Tannat, you're also in the ballpark. It also feints toward Cabernet Sauvignon though in Austria it is far more interesting.

Its flavors are highly focused because it has the highest acidity of any important red wine—as high as Champagne. When it's ripe enough it brings a lavish and satisfying juiciness to its precision and clarity, and for a wine as un-seductive as this one is, it gives a great keen pleasure and scratches an itch few other reds can reach. It is a "vertical" red, not opulent; nor does it murmur or soothe. It's exciting and dynamic. It is also sensitive to soil, and is a reciter-of-terroir in a way I think can only be equaled by Pinot Noir. (Curiously, certain BFs start to resemble certain Burgundies when they're about 6-9 years old.)

BF has the widest quality spread of Austria's big-3 red grapes, reaching the greatest heights but also – when it's poorly vinified or wasn't ripe enough—giving gnarly unhappy wines that aren't very nice. But anyone who loves *Riesling* should be making a beeline for BF, and I am baffled by any curious wine nerd who looks past this variety in order to alight upon manifestly inferior stuff. (Jura reds? *Really?*)

Sankt Laurent is Burgundy-plus. It resembles a Burgundy that was cut with 10-15% Mourvèdre (or in other words, pre-war Burgundy...), offering the sweet roundness of Pinot with the darker barkier flavors of southern Rhône. The basic wine from SATTLER will show you the pure fruit with no wood at all.

You say it the German way; it sounds like "zonked cow rent." Though it resembles Pinot, it's not genetically related. But like Pinot, it is hard to grow; indeed a lot harder. It's a vineyard prima-donna that won't flower if it's the least bit miffed, and which gives a tight cluster of thin-skinned berries liable to rot, and so it needs a lot of canopy management and yield control and bunch thinning. No grower makes a lot, and the only reason anyone makes any is because it tastes amazing. When

you get a good one it will cover you in hugs and kisses, and you will gloat inwardly at the money you saved over the Burgundy you were gonna buy. If you think along lines of smoky, "blackened" Burgundy, you'll know what to expect.

Last there is **Zweigelt**, which is a 1933 crossing of BF and SL named after the man who created it. Zweigelt is both blessed and cursed by its insane attractiveness, and is sometimes relegated to beautiful-airhead status. If you skimmed the sweet top-notes off of Syrah, and left the earthy/animal stuff behind, you'd have Zweigelt. Considered a "workhorse" grape, if it yields too generously you get a sweet-scented St Amour or Regnie sort of wine, but if you crop it too thin you get a kind of opacity. It's tempting to just render it thoughtlessly because it is so tempting, but I'm seeing a lot of people asking "Just how good can this variety be if we really probe into it and see what potential it has?"

I can show it to you in many idioms, from all-steel to full-on "serious" wine vinification, but what you can *always* expect is a wine that smells gorgeous and enticing, sometimes fainting toward its BF parent and other times toward its SL parent, and almost always growing rounder and more plummy with air. It seems to exist only to give joy, but many examples don't stop at joy, but offer several dimensions of dustiness and complexity, always staying fruity and seeming to always be hale.

You could say Zweigelt is like Schiava, Blaufränkisch is like Lagrein and St. Laurent is like Corvino, if that helps. I'll throw in the umlauts for free.

Below the echelon in which red wine is Earnestly Great, I need it to be delicious. It bores me when it affects the attributes of "greatness" (which usually means overextraction, overoaking and too much alcohol) and does not deliver. Just because you wear a muscle shirt don't mean you gots muscles. I am a great lover of tasty reds, which usually fall at or below 13% alc and which just seem to *drain* out of the bottle, you drink them so fast. For me, a red wine is truly great when it gladdens the senses and flatters the food. That's the baseline. You can add mystery and complexity and atmosphere, you can add length, power and concentration, but you reach a point where an excess of pleasure becomes a kind of soreness.

There's a developing story that concerns the remarkable improvement of the red wines from regions once thought to be white-wine only. Maybe it's climate change. But after the whole French Paradox thing broke, lots of growers felt they

had to make a token red wine or two, just so the customer wouldn't have to go elsewhere for them. Most of those wines were pretty anemic, and a few of them are still pretty clunky. But more and more of them are viable, attractive and very tasty beings. We don't sell them very much, because (I think) you prefer to spend your red-wine Dollar on a grower who specializes in reds. Makes sense. But you're missing out on some very tasty numbers.

Herewith a list of reds-from-white-wine growers, which I plead with you not to ignore:

HOFER
ECKER
SCHLOSS GOBELSBURG
BERGER
SETZER
BRÜNDLMAYER

HIRSCHMANN



REGION / PRODUCT

Styria / Roasted Pumpkin Seed Oil

It was on my first trip to Austria. In the achingly beautiful region of South Styria, I was sitting in a sweet little country restaurant waiting for my food to arrive. Bread was brought, dark and sweet, and then a little bowl of the most unctuous looking oil I'd ever seen was placed before me, clearly for dunking, but this stuff looked **serious**, and I wasn't going to attempt it till I knew what it was. Assured by my companion that it wouldn't grow hair on my palms, I slipped a corner of bread into it and tasted.

And my culinary life was forever changed.

Since then everyone, without exception, who has visited Austria has come back raving about this food. It's like a sweet, sexy secret a few of us share. Once you taste it, you can barely imagine how you ever did without it. I wonder if there's another foodstuff in the world as little-known and as intrinsically spectacular as this one.

WHAT IT TASTES LIKE AND HOW IT'S USED

At its best, it tastes like an ethereal essence of the seed. It is dark, intense, viscous; a little goes a long way. In Austria it is used as a condiment; you dunk bread in it, drizzle it over salads, potatoes, eggs, mushrooms, even soups; you can use it in salad dressings (in which case you may *cut* it with extra-virgin olive oil, lest it become *too* dominant!); there are doubtless many other uses which I am too big a food clod to have gleaned. If you develop any hip ideas and don't mind sharing them—attributed of course—I'd be glad to hear from you. **THE FACTS:** this oil is the product of a particular kind of

pumpkin, smaller than ours, and green with yellow stripes rather than orange. The main factor in the quality of the oil is, not surprisingly, the **QUALITY OF THE SEEDS THEMSELVES**. Accordingly, they are hand-scooped out of the pumpkin at harvest time; it's quite picturesque to see the women sitting in the pumpkin patches at their work—though the work is said to be arduous.

OTHER DECISIVE FACTORS FOR QUALITY ARE:

1. Seeds of local origin. Imported seeds produce an inferior oil.
2. Hand-sorting. No machine can do this job as well as attentive human eyes and hands.
3. Hand-washing of the seeds. Machine-washed seeds, while technically clean, lose a fine silvery-green bloom that gives the oils its incomparable flavor.
4. Temperature of roasting. The lower the temperature, the nuttier the flavor. Higher temperatures give a more roasted taste. Too high gives a coarse, scorched flavor.
5. Relative gentleness or roughness of mashing. The seeds are mashed as they roast, and the more tender the mashing, the more polished the final flavor.

To make a quick judgment on the quality of the oil, look at the color of the "rim" if you pour the oil into a shallow bowl. It should be virtually opaque at the center, but vivid green at the rim. If it's too brown, it was roasted too long.

After roasting and mashing, the seeds are pressed and the oil emerges. And that's all. It cools off and gets bottled. And tastes miraculous.

STORING AND HANDLING

The oils are natural products and therefore need attentive treatment. Store them in a cool place; if the oil is overheated it goes rancid. Guaranteed shelf-life if stored properly is twelve to eighteen months from bottling. Bottling dates are indicated on the label.

THE ASSORTMENT

In the early days I tasted a wide variety of oils and selected the three millers whose oils I liked best. Typical wine-geek, eh! I couldn't confine it to just one; oh no, there were too many *interesting* distinctions between them. Well, time passed by and I began to see the sustainable level of business the oils would bring. If we were in the fancy-food matrix we'd be selling a ton of these oils (they really are that good and that unique) but we're wine merchants and we don't have the networks or contacts. So I'm reducing the assortment to just one producer, my very favorite: **HIRSCHMANN**.

Leo Hirschmann makes the La Tâche of pumpkin seed oil. It has amazing polish and complexity.

BOTTLE SIZES

The basic size is 500 ml. Liter bottles are also available, which might be useful for restaurants who'd like to lower the per-ounce cost. Finally we offer **250ml** bottles, ideal for retailers who'd like to get the experimental impulse sale; the oil can be priced below \$20 in the lil' bottle.

OAT-003 (12/250ml)

OAT-007 (12/500ml)

OAT-010 (6/1.0L)

PRIELER



REGION / SUB REGION

Leithaberg "DAC" / Schützen

VINEYARD AREA

20 hectares

ANNUAL PRODUCTION

8,000 cases

TOP SITES AND SOIL TYPES

Goldberg
(slate);
Seeberg,
Sinner
(limestone, mica schist);
Ungerbergen
(limestone with pebbles);
Mariantal
(limestone)

GRAPE VARIETIES

30% Blaufränkisch
15% Cabernet Sauvignon
14% Pinot Noir
10% Chardonnay
10% Merlot
10% Pinot Blanc
8% St. Laurent
3% Welschriesling

Georg continues his upward climb, both as *Le Patron* of the estate and also in his sure hand with the wines. Like all the Prieler, Georg loves to laugh and kibbitz and he (and they) are so charming that one risks not taking him seriously enough. Small chance of that these days, as this was a stunningly good collection of wines.

We'd spent the morning and midday down in Südburgenland and so were steeped in all-things-Blaufränkisch and in the iron twang of Krutzer and Wallner. Tasting Prieler's wine was a revelation. With no loss of mineral detail or peppery penetration, Georg's wines were more voluminous, more mouthfilling.

Just one more vintage to wait for organic certification. I show the wines as we tasted them—reds first. If you want to see Austrian reds at their most commanding, look no further.

2015 Rosé Vom Stein

12/750ml | AEP-116

+

95% BF (the rest is Merlot), this is probably the most serious Rosé I offer, a year-round wine with complexity and body. 2015 is a wonderful vintage, as good as can be, showing the highest common denominator of generosity, texture, fruit and detail; has a Provençal spice and snap and wildness; both linear and voluptuous, classic and exotic.

2014 Blaufränkisch Ried *Johanneshöhe*

12/750ml | AEP-119

This single-site wine is the entry-level, and is usually a fruit-forward albeit typically cracked-pepper rendition. The '14 shows a high point of BF pepper and the char-marks on grilled red meat. It has a lot of the Leithaberg in it—the '14 reds are all upgraded by Georg's decision not to bottle his two Grand Crus—the vintage was small and laborious. The tank-sample I tasted was ready to bottle; it's more brooding and earnest than usual, more dark iron but also greater length. It's an upgrade for sure, but it isn't the usual gushing beauty.

2014 Blaufränkisch "Leithaberg"

6/750ml | AEP-120

++

First to the wine, which is really amazing. It has all the fruit from the Goldberg and Marienthal, for the first time since the marvelous 2010, and this is pretty *freaking* ridiculous, maybe his best ever. For many growers this could be their top wine. BF at its explosive, sweet and ornery best! Blackberries and candied violets, peppers riding a wave of shimmering acidity, giving an irresistible juiciness; like herbs strewn into a sizzling skillet, or the outer crusty knuckle of a lamb roast.

Then to the name: *Leithaberg* is the name of the little massif of hill that's the border between Burgenland (to the south) and Carnuntum. The south-facing slope is decently steep and the soils are limestony. Some years ago a group of growers set about to use the name to denote "reserve" quality cuvées that would demonstrate as much mineral flavor as possible. Oak wasn't forbidden but its flavor was. The idea was the variety *in its soil*. Both reds and whites were made.

The program seemed to shape-shift, and the name "Leithaberg" was affixed to the (dreaded) "DAC," and so now it's used by everyone. I don't know about the other growers, but for Prieler it constitutes a classic mid-range wine, which paradoxically is over-endowed in "poor" vintages when the top Crus aren't bottled.

2013 Blaufränkisch *Marienthal*

6/750ml | AEP-121

(+) +

The Ch. Montrose of BF, this lava-flow of iron and carob and gamey-ness and blood. This one's a dynamo of mint and cocoa, it rears up with a nettle zing; it can't decide whether it's angular or voluptuous but is good at being both. More broody than the Leithaberg but also bigger, denser, with greater stature—ostensibly for now, but actually with the necessary age.

2013 Blaufränkisch *Goldberg*

6/750ml | AEP-117

++

One of Austria's true icons of BF, it shows as much graphite as three bottles of Brunello you'd somehow concentrated, forced into a syringe and injected intravenously. I love this wine in "moderate" vintages like '13; it has a truly noble fragrance; it would do high honor to Cheval Blanc, if you'd steeped it with violets and grape-hyacinth. The palate is riven by its acidity and tannin, which isn't to say that either is too overt or extreme. A swollen minerality comes on and clings and clings; the empty glass is pure ripe *kirsch*, and with air the whole thing deepens into winter truffles, and the texture grows appealingly juicy.

2015 Pinot Blanc Ried *Seeberg*

12/750ml | AEP-115

+

Curiously enough, it was actually the Pinot Blancs that first drew me here, old vintages I'd tasted somewhere or other, the kinds of wines that say *There are things you don't yet know about this grape...*

The '15 is markedly leesy and "sweet" straw, as always, but with more *dicht* than I think ever. Danke 2015. This has it all; freshness, body, lees, richness, semolina and jasmine – I mean, where else on earth does Pinot Blanc do this?



2015 Chardonnay Ried *Sinner*

(+)

12/750ml | AEP-114

Un-oaked Chard but with lees-contact to give it creaminess, grown on limestone. It's stonier and quieter than the Pinot Blanc (but also more recently bottled), it has a limestony twang and a crushed-rock texture; curiously lingering finish. It seems to simply need time, as it swells in the glass. Mineral, chewiness, sweet hay.

2015 Pinot Blanc Ried *Haidatz*

(+)

12/750ml | AEP-118

Aged in hogsheads of 2nd-use Austrian oak, it's potentially a gorgeous woody wine; toasty semolina, nectarine, lees acting as the avenue between fruit and wood—yes, I could be describing many Pulignys. It only misses the length of serious white Burgundy, but this cask-sample is making me all kinds of pleased.

HEIDI SCHRÖCK



REGION / SUB REGION

Neusiedlersee-Hügelland / Rust

VINEYARD AREA

10 hectares

ANNUAL PRODUCTION

3,300 cases

TOP SITES AND SOIL TYPES

Vogelsang,
Turner
(eroded primary rock, mica slate,
limestone and sandy loam)

GRAPE VARIETIES

25% Weissburgunder
25% Welschriesling
10% Blaufränkisch
10% Furmint
10% Grauburgunder
10% Zweigelt
5% Gelber Muskateller
5% Sauvignon Blanc

Heidi isn't obsessive about sulfur, as far as I can see. She doesn't seem pre-occupied with yeast. And yet after more than twenty years tasting and drinking her wines, I find they fit very neatly into the flavor-aesthetic of "natural" wines. They're inferential, sometimes round-about; they're often a little gauzy, they aren't micro-focused, they have "space" in them, they inhale and exhale. They are warm, honest and grounded, like the woman who makes them. Or rather, the woman who follows along as they make themselves.

For Heidi's wines actually do what other wines only purport to do; they go their own ways. For some tasters they're moving targets, and this frustrates a person who craves consistency. For me they're as unpredictable as all of *us* are unpredictable—not capricious, just animate, mutable.

What they have in common is a kind of tenderness. Burgenland whites are more "horizontal" than the GVs and Rieslings of the Kamptal and its neighbors. They don't have a finicky precision. They're like a really good storyteller who carries you along the narrative even when you wished he'd get to the point, and now you're captured and having fun. If the 2014s are any indicator, Heidi seems to be ever-more comfortable with wine-as-fellow-being instead of wine-as-object-to-"evaluate." But you need time for those kinds of wines. It helps to be able to daydream. Say you go to the coffee shop and you're gonna finish your project, so you get your booze and set up your laptop, and the next thing you know you're looking out the window at

the world going by, and a half hour passes. To me these are *crucial* moments. They are how we relax enough to let the world in. The project can wait. Even if it can't wait, it can just fucking wait. You *needed* to daydream. And you need a kind of wine that lives right exactly there, in that very consciousness, not a wine that galvanizes your attention so you can "nail" it or score it or tweet about it.

There are ways to make such wines, things you can do in the cellar, but you have to have an Ideal and steer toward it. Creamy texture is helpful. Leesiness is a reassuring flavor, I've always felt. The *breath* of cask (as opposed to the "taste" of wood) is often a soulful thing. The larger point is, it's lovely when wines can address our calmer selves, but we can't hear them if we aren't cultivating (or tolerating) our calmer selves, in which case we are I think a little starved.

Her son Georg has returned to assume his place as heir-apparent. When I first met him he was in a death-metal band with an ominous name I can never remember; something like *Scabies Grunt Wallow*, but don't hold me to that. It's nice to see them together, and it has grounded Heidi in a really stirring way.

In order of tasting...

2015 Gelber Muskateller

+

12/750ml | AHS-165

This offers a kind of Platonic perfection of a Heidi-Muscat. I wrote it was “ladylike,” with lots of linden and chamomile. It only seemed diffident; it comes back in about fifteen seconds and then occupies your palate with a delicious vapor of rosewater and quince and mango. In part it’s a grown up wine for grown up palates yet the flavors bring a pure animal bliss, even if you are a child. Especially if you are a child. Not too cold please. It’s the kind of wine that doesn’t approach directly but instead surrounds you.

2015 Weissburgunder

12/750ml | AHS-166

This is closer to the woody breadth of her Grauburgunders than to the sometimes-lean stony critter it’s been before. It’s especially chalky and scallop-y, markedly generous and leesy and not at all cerebral. More overt, more explicit. Knowing Heidi, it just came out this way this year.

2015 Furmint

12/750ml | AHS-169

I drank a Furmint from another Rust grower a few nights after tasting this. It was fresh and modern and more oaky than I preferred. Heidi’s wine is temperamental, sometimes obscure, always entailing a certain taking of risk. This ‘15 shows the spicy face of the variety, wick-smoke and ginger; the florals are rare and exotic, as if you’re in a grove of flowering trees in a new place you’ve never been. Or if some new herb was growing in your garden. It was all somewhat indefinite, and with air it seemed both to clarify but also to become more curious. My standards for these sorts of things are very high; this would pass muster easily in the natural-wine matrix; indeed some of those drinkers might find it too “correct.”

2014 Grauburgunder

(+)

12/750ml | AHS-173

A cask sample, as usual for this late-bottled wine. After the superb 2013, this will be a fine successor if it manages its alcohol, which is “present” (but which Heidi says is below 14%); there’s a ton of leesy sweetness and very little wood char; it’s stronger than ‘13 but less strong than the ‘11—which spilled somewhat over its banks. The finish is like toasted lees, or like the moment you first smell the chicken you’re roasting. A delicate nuance of saffron completes the picture.

2015 Rosé “Biscaya”

12/750ml | AHS-167

It’s our polyglot friend! Lagrein, Teroldego, Petit Verdot, Syrah, Merlot, Pinot Noir and Cab-Sauv comprise the cuvée, and the wine is richer than many Jura reds (and less icky than most of them); this is juicy and serious and rad—even stern. It’s a country wine made by a woman who’s comfy in the city also.



SWEET WINES

Heidi is making it a project to widen the audience for wines avec du sucre. I'd love her to succeed, if for no other reason that to redeem my abject failure to have done the same. Certainly the sweet wines from these parts are more voluminous and savory than German Rieslings are. They belong in the context of rich food, just as the Germans belong with refined and delicate dishes. Or so it seems to me. The good news is, we have the supernal 2014 vintage to consider now, which has given a few of the greatest sweet wines Heidi has ever made.

2014 Beerenauslese

6/375ml | AHS-162H

This Pinot Blanc & Welschriesling cuvée is among the steadiest wines I offer; this vintage may be a little higher in acidity, may have slightly more definition, but in general it just climbs on the train and rides.

2014 Ruster Ausbruch "On The Wings Of Dawn"

(+) +

6/375ml | AHS-174H

Heidi thinks this is her best-ever Wings," and she may very well be right. Really gorgeous aromas here! Savory, sweet, long, elegant and refined texture.

2014 Ruster Ausbruch Turner

(+) + +

6/375ml | AHS-175H

And *this* could be the greatest-ever sweet wine Heidi has made.

The cuvée is half-half Furmint and Sauvignon Blanc. Absolutely sensational aromas—a dream. Botrytis at its noblest. The palate is sublime. Fresh in a form of fantastic weightless intensity. While such wines are often (to me) over-rich, this is like a soufflé of comice pears. Luxury and snap and delicacy; truly a miracle wine. The "Wings" is corporeal, but this wine is half human, half ghost. Skims the senses like a little waving scarf.

SATTLER



REGION / SUB REGION

Neusiedlersee / Taden

VINEYARD AREA

15 hectares

ANNUAL PRODUCTION

5,800 cases

SOIL TYPES

Gravel with brown earth and sand

GRAPE VARIETIES

60% Zweigelt
30% St. Laurent
10% Syrah,
Cabernet Sauvignon,
Weißburgunder (Pinot Blanc),
Welschriesling

This luckless sweet man had hail in 2014 and lost nearly 100% of his vineyards to frost in 2016. It remains to be seen whether a second-growth will transpire. I wouldn't climb onto a roller-coaster with Erich, just for a little while.

Everything about this estate is candid and getting more so all the time. There aren't many wines. He knows what he wants to do, and does it. The wines are getting less oaky as he trusts his fruit more. The Austrian wine press is also noticing, and the wines are prominent among the top performers.

When you start out you have certain wines against which you model your own. You reassure your customers (and yourself) that you can compete with viable wines in the familiar idioms. You are, in other words, guided by a certain timorousness and insecurity. If you can demonstrate your competence at the prevailing style, you comfort yourself, please your customers, and sell some wine.

A lot of growers stop there. They know the right things to say, and they can create a plausible facsimile of a serious wine estate, and the wines are often tasty. But in the end they are dull. Because they have no way to answer the crucial questions: why do you exist? What is yours to say?

Growers who are capable and curious, who actually want to develop, will often find after a few years that they can trust the essential taste of their fruit. And so they adjust their cellar work to favor things that are inherent and downplay that which is applied later. Oak goes from being a bad master to being a good servant. I think this is exactly what's happen-

ing at Erich Sattler's tidy little winery.

Sattler is one of the few young growers I know who isn't out to get your attention but instead seeks merely to bring you pleasure. I love these kinds of wines, as you know. You take the first sip and think "Well sure, O.K., it's clean and pleasant and all, but..." and then the glass is suddenly empty and you barely know why. I could tell you why: it's because the wine *tastes* good and invites you to keep sipping.

2015 Zweigelt Rosé

12/750ml | AST-061

Always among the richest Rosés I offer, this '15 is enveloping, gloriously fruity and vinous, almost chewy. Mouthfilling and hugely satisfying.

2015 St Laurent

12/750ml | AST-062

Sattler's "basic" wines are almost always made in steel. It's fun to give them to tasters who remark on their "deft use of oak" because then I get to say "That's exactly right: there is no oak, which is probably the deftest way to use it." So if you wanna see how much flavor can come from *only the grape*, open, pour, repeat. That said, St-L can be reductive, and stainless-steel tank samples can also be reductive, and this wine was beneath a shroud. Other than a high-toned spiciness, it was impossible to appraise or describe.

2015 Zweigelt

12/750ml | AST-063

We tasted these wines interspersed with Glatzer's, as Erich made the drive to Göttlesbrunn to spare us the trouble. It was lovely and instructive to compare them; Erich's Burgenland wines were uniformly lusher and more chocolatey than Glatzer's baskets-o-berries. Sattler's wines are essentially "warmer," not better, just more voluminous. This one's round and carob-y, not showing much black cheery or violet but instead an enveloping richness that feints toward its St-Laurent parentage.

2013 St Laurent Reserve

(+) +

12/750ml | AST-058

This has really billowed and expanded in the last year, all mocha and almost caramel; it smells like St. Joseph. Older vines, riper fruit, aging in cask; you know the drill. What you don't know is how resplendent and seductive and basically wonderful wines like this can be.

2013 Zweigelt Reserve

+

12/750ml | AST-059

There are no "reserve" wines from 2014, so we'll be waiting another year for the '15s, which isn't so bad with *this* vixen to keep us company. What fine, sweet, angular complexity! A little less tannin and I'd have given a 2nd plus, but this is the wine you wish they were making more of in the Alto Adige (where excessive alcohol has become much too frequent); a ton of "cool" sweetness, smoky framboise, a playful arrival of spicy high notes, and a twang of sassafras in the finish.

SÜDBURGENLAND

A benefit to my working life is that I get to visit people and places I've grown very fond of. I wake up each morning, usually someplace I like, and think "I get to see Heidi today," or "I get to see Ludwig today," and so each morning is full of pleasant anticipation.

And yet as I made the entirely new drive to an entirely new place, I realized the other kind of excitement, the edgier kind, when you view a foreign place with those keen wondering eyes. What drew me to Südburgenland was of course the promise of the wines, the special Blaufränkisch that comes from those iron-rich volcanic often schisty soils. Nothing else tastes like they do. It was an added bonus that the tiny region entailed a bit of a schlep no matter where you started from. From Vienna, or from Rust where my colleague and I started, you pass through a lovely chaos of verdant hills called the *Bucklinger Welt*, and then through another few folds of deeply wooded ridges. You can't drive fast. You curve and curve and curve some more. And then suddenly you emerge with the crazily steep Eisenberg hill in front of you, as if someone carved off a slice of the Mosel and plopped it down in a little winky corner right on the border to Hungary. It feels "like a lost world," as Giles MacDonogh wrote.

We sat in the tasting room with Reinhold Krutzler and looked across the valley. "The village you see in the foreground, that's in Austria," he said. "The one behind it is in Hungary. When we were kids we'd see the lights from the guard towers, and our parents told us not to play too close to the border because there might be land-mines." The road signs are in both languages. You feel like you could go aground there, if you wanted to hide.

There's a sort of sub-village on the hill above the sleepy village of Deutsch Schützen, called *Weinberg*, which contains all the winery cellars and Heurigen, dotted over the gentle upward roll. Only the Eisenberg itself is dramatic; the rest of the region is gentle and pretty.

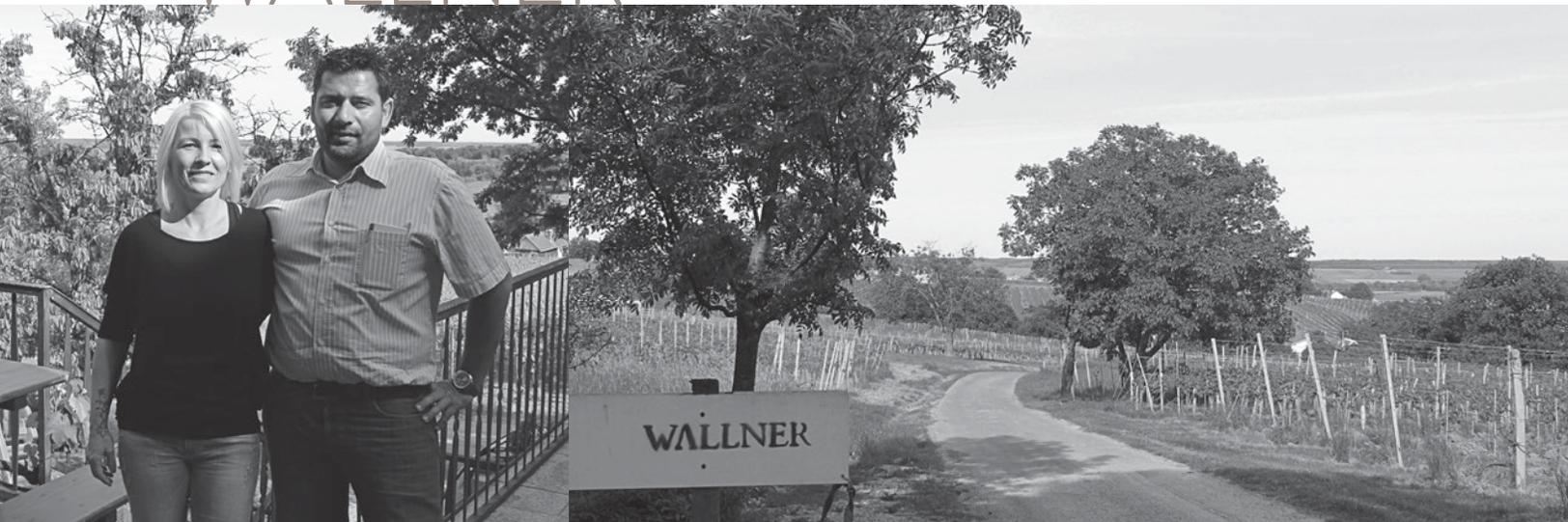
There's a local wine specialty called *Uhudler*, which is actually made from vitis Labrusca, but it's the remarkable Blaufränkisch that concerns us here. There are three acknowledged elite growers: Szemes, UweSchiefer, and Krutzler, and supporting them are a host of fine country wine estates, at least one of which—Wallner—is very fine indeed.

As a rule Blaufränkisch likes a heavy soil that holds water and warms slowly. In Mittelburgenland it often grows on loam and clay. Here in Südburgenland there's also loam, but also the unique configuration of iron and schist that gives the wines an almost blatant minerality and a compelling pointed spiciness. Most Blaufränkisch can be called "peppery," but these wines show an abundance of *nuanced* pepper, as though you were conducting tasting of various peppercorns from Indonesia and Sumatra and Madagascar. It's the closest red wine comes to the particular experience of tasting *white* wine, especially if you prize minerality highest among flavors. If really fervid Wachau Grüner Veltliner were red, it would be Eisenberg Blaufränkisch.

I could have fastened myself to the "top" guy and strutted my pride of association. But I wanted to also offer you something hearty and affordable so that you'd have an easier wedge into this region. Krutzler is indeed elite, but such things are appreciated best when they're predicated on a basis. Which makes us ask a new question: how good is that basis, at its best? How good can "good" be?

Thus I overcome my desire to shape this portfolio in the tidiest possible way, and rather than choose between two excellent estates, I offer them both. Ha ha; that sounds so cerebral! In fact I'm just a helpless promiscuous wine slut who can't say no to anything exciting.

WALLNER



REGION / SUB REGION

Südburgenland / Deutsch-Schützen

VINEYARD AREA

8 hectares

ANNUAL PRODUCTION

2,500 cases

TOP SITES AND SOIL TYPES

Deutsch-Schützen Weinberg
(profound, medium-weight to heavy loam over slate in deeper layers, some iron oxide) ;

Eisenberg
(light to medium-weight loam and sand mixed with slate and iron oxide)

GRAPE VARIETIES

70% Blaufränkisch
13% white grapes
7% Zweigelt
5% Cabernet Sauvignon (cuvée only)
3% Merlot (cuvée only)
2% St. Laurent

His little brochure has the emblem “echt—typisch—erdig” Genuine, typical, earthy. Sums it right up.

Gerhard Wallner assumed the estate from his father in 2002, and is up to “a good 7 hectares,” making honest yet polished wine. If you’re tempted to suppose the wines are rustic, believe me they aren’t. Nor are they rough-cut, foursquare or heavy-footed. They’re delicious, extroverted, hearty wines that also convey a lot of finesse. They show all the uniquely spicy character and clarity of the best wines of the region.

Though Wallner grows Zweigelt and St. Laurent (as well as a little Cab and Merlot), the Blaufränkisch is obviously front and center, and it’s the wine I’ll concentrate on.

Wallner will make you smile. Wallner will make you very nearly laugh out loud. But Wallner will also make you pause at times, because these wines, as happy as they are, are not *jolly* or boisterous.

Gerhard believes in keeping back-vintages around as long as possible, to show what Blaufränkisch is like when out of its infancy. I like his young wines, but I’m going to show you these vintages as long as I possibly can.

2013 St. Laurent

12/750ml | AWL-031

Gerhard had just blown my mind with his *white* Blaufränkisch (not enough wine to justify shipping, alas!), and then he goes and charms me with this fetching St. L. It felt a little wistful to taste such an irrepressibly joyful wine while looking out on rows of ruined vines—we were there a week after the killer-frost—not to mention I'm determined not to be deflected from my seething focus on Blaufränkisch. Yet. How does anyone walk away from a wine like this? Great roasty aromas, earthy in the best way; super primary fruit and an iron twang below. Generous and hearty but not remotely rustic. Grillin' some burgers? Improve the dreck you drink on your deck!

2013 Blaufränkisch ("Eisenberg DAC")

(+)

12/750ml | AWL-032

12/375ml | AWL-032H

The basic-BF shows refined pepper aromas (Tasmanian above all, though you have to take my word for that); dusty tannin though with a juicy texture that's *almost* elegant. A fascinating deep floral aspect arrives /with air and echoes into the tertiary finish. The wine has character and a rustic charm; it isn't glossy or "sophisticated," which is fine with me.

2013 Blaufränkisch Eisenberg ("DAC Reserve")

+

12/750ml | AWL-034

Sensational aroma, as hedonistic as BF can smell; but the palate is pure peppery BF, albeit with an interior sweetness and round tannin; a mizuna snap also arrives. Two months in bottle, it will only get (even) better. **If I had to pick just one wine to show "Südburgenland Blaufränkisch," this would be it.**

2008 Blaufränkisch Reserve

+

12/750ml | AWL-002

20/375ml | AWL-002H

My favorite. It remains for me the exemplar for Wallner's BF and for BF in general. It has everything, especially that incisive peppery spice that borders on kinky; Serrano-smoky, truffley, amazingly silky texture. Subjectively it's a +++ wine because it brings everything to the game without trying to charm.

2013 Blaufränkisch "Namenlos"

(+) +

12/750ml | AWL-035

12/375ml | AWL-035H

2008 Blaufränkisch "Namenlos"

+ +

12/750ml | AWL-037

His best cuvée of BF, old vines (40 to 90) and done in hogsheads, some vintages are too much of too-muchness, but the good ones—wow. The '13 is a big leap up from the Reserve; entirely denser, more chocolatey, as if there were Merlot involved (which there isn't); aromas are super-plummy; it's the *Vino Nobile* type, with minerality embedded below a molten swell of richness. True noble-cuvée here.

The '08 had been forbiddingly tannic but has mostly shed it, leaving only the glorious material behind. I love the cool-vintage '08 because it so perfectly aligns with the essential nature of BF, though some tasters may find it too intense.

KRUTZLER



REGION / SUB REGION

Südburgenland / Deutsch-Schützen

VINEYARD AREA

10 hectares

ANNUAL PRODUCTION

5,833 cases

TOP SITES AND SOIL TYPES

Deutsch-Schützen Weinberg
and Bründlgfangen
*(profound, medium-weight to heavy
loam over slate in deeper layers,
some ironoxide) ;*
Eisenberg
*(light to medium-weight loam and
sand mixed with slate and ironoxide)*

GRAPE VARIETIES

84% Blaufränkisch
8% Zweigelt
3% Merlot
3% white grapes
2% Cabernet Sauvignon (cuvée only)

Last year I had a moment of euphoria while tasting what seemed like the dawn of a new “era” at Krutzler, less broody more fruit-forward wines, friendlier wines, more comradely. I thought he showed *cojones* to walk away from the Affect Of Significance and concentrate instead on deliciousness. I asked Reinhold Krutzler if my impression was correct, if this was a deliberate course-correction of his, and he confirmed that it was.

This year the wines had reverted, mostly, to the way they were. I wondered about this. We went after seeing Wallner this time, whereas last year we went here first. Could it be due to that? The wines were mostly just bottled—were they bottled earlier last year? I don’t know. What I think I know is, when I see the wines it is either too soon after bottling, or at big tastings when my palate is over-stimulated and distorted.

Perhaps I receive a false impression? Maybe I like them better in cooler vintages, when they’re more transparent and graceful? I do think these are wines of a type wherein I’m a minority, someone who doesn’t “get” them. I see other tasters full of admiration, and suppose I am at fault.

The splendid stature of the “Perwolff” is easy to grok, even when the wine’s young. It’s the everyday wines I want to feel chummier toward. Because this is legitimately an Icon-domain in Austria, and I wonder at my adequacy when I’m cool toward what should be the most approachable wines on the table.

So I’ll give you my honest impressions, and ask that you bear in mind that I am not confident in myself right now.



2015 Blaufränkisch

12/750ml | AKR-028

Two weeks in bottle. Aroma of cigar-box, but the fruit seems tamped down. Coaxing the glass reveals a little black cherry and some details of pepper, but it's all crouching behind a tannic shroud, like a bouncer who won't let you into the club.

2014 Blaufränkisch Eisenberg

12/750ml | AKR-022

This is the wine in-between the "basic" bottling and the "reserve" wine to follow. I haven't offered it before as it seemed to clutter the picture. This year I wanted to show it because it's a year older, should be healthy, and because it shows a *lot* more terroir than the basic wine. (This soil contains, among other things, a crystalline green slate we see in the high Alps in Austria.) And this wine is way more mineral, less loamy, more slatey; a more delineated wine entirely. It too is tannic, but it's also spicy and with a delightfully fierce pepper-mineral finish. Worth the trade-up from the basic wine? I think so.

2014 Blaufränkisch Eisenberg ("DAC Reserve")

(+)

12/750ml | AKR-029

Cask-sample. A lovely aroma, and a complex, searching finish. Between is a lash of tannin, so...what? Which wine is it? Normally the finish is usually the truth-teller, the herald, and on that basis it's a ++ wine, showing basil, tobacco, summer truffle... but what will we taste when we drink it after bottling?

2013 Blaufränkisch Eisenberg ("DAC Reserve")

+

12/750ml | AKR-021

It's infinitely lacier than was the 2012, and so its sweetness emerges, especially on the super-attractive finish.

2013 Blaufränkisch Perwolff

+ +

12/750ml | AKR-020

Something sweet and lovely; ripe cherries and a Burgundian cast, like the violet side of Volnay or the south side of Nuits St Georges; succulent and euphoric, not self-serious or dour, and finishing with a wash of happy ripe berries and, curiously, even flowers, wisteria and lilac—first time I've found that florality in BF. There's a reason this wine is an icon. And with another year in bottle, it is fulfilling every possible hope; a spicy, noble, endlessly detailed and long BF. *Helpful* tannin. Slinky yet generous; warm and cool elements perfectly poised.

GLATZER



REGION / SUB REGION
Carnuntum / Göttlesbrunn

VINEYARD AREA
54 hectares

ANNUAL PRODUCTION
25,000 cases

TOP SITES AND SOIL TYPES

Rosenberg,
Kräften
(*calcerous clay*);
Haidacker
(*gravel, loam and clay*);
Altenberg
(*gravel and clay, with high lime content*);
Schüttenberg
(*sandy loam and gravel*);
Bärenreise
(*sandy loam and clay*)

GRAPE VARIETIES

37% Zweigelt
17% Blaufränkisch
12% Grüner Veltliner
10% Merlot
8% Cabernet Sauvignon
5% Weissburgunder
3% Sauvignon Blanc
2% St. Laurent
2% Pinot Noir
2% Syrah
2% other

The world's warmest most unpretentious guy making the world's warmest most unpretentious wines—one is tempted to say. Because it is mostly true, yet not the entire truth.

I've known Walter Glatzer, sheesh, since I started with Austria; even before, as he was one of the first growers I met while I was forming the first portfolio. He's a hearty kind of fellow, and his wines are nothing if not extremely friendly, but this doesn't arise from a *choice* to be "unpretentious." Glatzer seems to be missing whatever DNA-strand is responsible for high solemnity, or whatever it is that tempts people to *strut*. Given his cheerful openness to the world, his wines have grown as "serious" as they can be, and I'm no longer surprised when I see them arrayed among the winners in top-wines-of-the-vintage tastings in one journal or another. Perhaps the world is catching up with Mr. Glatzer and his delicious wines. I'd be happy to think so.

At one point I might also have seen them as charming "little" wines, and defended their virtues—as I still would. But today I think they have a richer claim to stake. Far from being "little" wines, I believe Glatzer's wines show that substance is certainly compatible with deliciousness, and that too many growers have ventured too far from basic sensuality when they form their wines.

You could erase 90% of the so-called "serious" red wines from the earth and I wouldn't even sigh. But a world without these cooing beauties? That would be poverty.

Walter's whites are similarly forth-

right. I don't think great or mighty wines are written into the land in Carnuntum, and lower production costs are reflected in outstanding quality/price relationships. Walter and I have never discussed his yields, but I imagine they are not ungenerous, and that's *fine*; the wines are every bit as concentrated as I need them to be.

Best for last: this year's collection was *by far* the best I've ever tasted here.

2015 Grüner Veltliner

+

12/750ml | AGL-201

Best vintage ever of this, and a truly insane value.

It's rich, cereal-y; jasmine rice, vetiver, spice and length; fresh yet rich; a long legume and cressy and bread-doughy mid palate, dueling with a crushed-rock texture. Look, this "basic" GV soars above its standard level and whatever you thought you might buy—double it.

2015 Grüner Veltliner "Dornenvogel"

+

12/750ml | AGL-202

It means "thorn-bird," named after the avian marauders who eat the ripest grapes, because they are smart and hungry birds. It signifies the top reserve wine in its category. Usually there's a big jump from the basic wine to this, but in '15 the basic wine's so good that the two differ more in style of flavor than in concentration or density. It starts with this being 80% *sponti* (spontaneous fermentation), which adds to the typical aroma of Tuscan extra-virgin olive oil. The palate is *markedly* salty, like eating Wellfleets with bread dunked in just-pressed new oil. More red pepper here, more intensity, but curiously less *dicht*. It's different, it has "reserve" flavors, it will age longer.

2015 Weissburgunder

12/750ml | AGL-206

Two weeks in bottle, so it shows a little mute, seeming to be snappy, vigorous and true, and I'm confident it is much more than only this....

Sauvignon Blanc Schüttenberg

+

12/750ml | AGL-208

Sometimes this single-vineyard wine doesn't soar past the "regular" bottling, but this 2015 is glorious; flinty, herbal, minty, full of *positive* pyrazine, "sweet" gooseberry. Toasty on the side-palate, with tarragon, hyssop and verbena in the middle; an elegant ripeness and substantial length.

2015 Zweigelt "Rebencuvée"

12/750ml | AGL-209

A new name for what used to be called "Riedencuvée," which the authorities thought sounded too much like a single-vineyard wine. Good to know they're looking out for us. Who's looking out for *them*, I wonder?

The wine is entirely back in form after an atypically gritty 2014; it's spicy and positively gurgles with fruit; it's creamy in a tulip glass and brash in the Zalto "Universal" but lovely in both. This wine is pure Glatzer, gorgeous, lovable, yummy.

2015 Blaufränkisch

12/750ml | AGL-210

Kind of a perfect entrée into the peppery wilds of BF because it has the Glatzer creaminess with the pointedness of the variety. It's very good in '15; bacony, mineral, salty and perfect.

2014 St Laurent

+

12/750ml | AGL-205

Most of the crop was lost, so this is the only SL, and contains all of the single-vineyard Altenberg. It's round, "sweet" and concentrated and even mineral—what a lovely being! I'm thinking Ima cook me up a mess-o-veal & truffle burgers and wash them boys down with some of this here hooch.

2013 St Laurent Altenberg

+

12/750ml | AGL-211

Well *this* is glorious! Elegant, round, savory; the juiciest cut from the perfect veal chop. As seductive as SL can be but also as focused and mineral. The finish is preposterously attractive. Basically, *gul-l-l-p-p!*

2013 Zweigelt “Dornenvogel”

+ +

12/750ml | AGL-212

The best vintage since 2003, and maybe the best ever. It's exceedingly seductive, a smart person's hedonism; a dance of warm and cool tones, concentrated structured deliciousness; sweet summer fruits, blueberries, sweet-100s, but also a rich freshness like grilled king salmon on a mild summer evening. This is a height Zweigelt seldom attains.

WEINVIERTEL

The “Wine-Quarter” is in fact a disparate region containing more-or-less everything northeast, north or northwest of Vienna that doesn’t fit in to any other region. You can drive a half-hour and not see a single vine, then suddenly be in vineyard land for fifteen minutes before returning to farms and fields again.

Vines occur wherever conditions favor them; good soils, exposures and microclimates, but it’s anything but what we’d call “wine country.” Which is in fact rather charming, since it doesn’t attract the usual glom of wine-people.

I don’t seem to be much of a pack animal. I tend away from the crowd, even when I appreciate what that crowd is crowding toward. It’s easy to go to the established regions and find excellent wine if you have a fat wallet. It’s too easy. I find I enjoy going somewhere alone and finding diamonds in the rough. Alas, Austria is a wine culture in which one is hardly ever alone. The entire Weinviertel is known, as Germany’s Rheinhessen is known—as the up and coming new region, DACs and related nonsense notwithstanding.

This started maybe 20 years ago, when the first wave of young growers applied modern methods and made far better wines than the innocuous plonk which came before. Attention was duly paid. But with repeated exposure one began to want something the wines weren’t giving. They were certainly “contemporary” enough, all cold-fermented stainless-steel yada yada, but most of them were lacking animus and soul. With the entrance of another wave of young vintners, it began to change.

It needs a certain drive, a kind of urgency to want to endow one’s wines with something more than simple competence. The formula for that is unexceptional, and lots of C-students can do it. And make perfectly decent wine. But certain people ask certain questions: How can I unlock what’s in this land? How do I make imprinted wines that people will remember? Why do it at all if it won’t be wonderful? For someone like this, wine isn’t just a formula or recipe; it’s a matter of anguish and relief and mystery and frustration and delight, it is so dimensional as to be virtually human. The more you live with it, the less you need what you “learned” and the better you hone and hear your intuitions. You can always spot such people because they’re

much happier in the vineyards than in the cellar. After all, the cellar is full of machines, but the vineyard is full of life. Surprises are few in the cellar but constant in the vineyard. Talk to your land and your vines for long enough and soon you will know when they answer you back. Every grower like this will tell you he was taught all wrong. “They teach you to act before they show you how to listen.” And in the end their wines become like they themselves are; alive, alert, attuned, questing.

SCHWARZBÖCK



REGION / SUB REGION
Weinviertel / Hagenbrunn

VINEYARD AREA
24 hectares

ANNUAL PRODUCTION
15,000 cases

TOP SITES AND SOIL TYPES
Kirchberg,
Sätzen
(*löss*) ;
Aichleiten
(*flyschgestein with löss*) ;
Hölle
(*flysch*)

GRAPE VARIETIES
50% Grüner Veltliner
15% Zweigelt
10% Gelber Muskateller
10% Riesling
5% Merlot
10% other

Hagenbrunn is virtually at the cityline of Vienna—you'd expect the trams to run out there. Some of the vineyards are on not-insignificant slopes, and most soils are loamy löss, with Riesling being grown in sandstone covered over with löss.

But how to describe the wines? Theirs is a silky substance not unlike Gobelsburg, in fact. They're not as creamy as Berger or Setzer; theirs is a more upfront palate dance. They make a quick and delightful impression. Oh just taste them. The wines are all arch and modern but not only arch and modern; there's an earthy substance to them also, and boy are they good value.

They've also been moving targets for several years now, because I never know what I'm going to like best. In warm years they can creep into overripeness—which I define as 14% (or higher) alcohol because that's just what I think. Rudi's also been changing/consolidating his bottlings lately. Still, this was the only address where I saw over-endowed Veltliners, and so I chose carefully. Overall the '15s are very good!

2015 Grüner Veltliner

12/1000ml | ASB-071L

Wanna see how good '15 is? *Taste this*. It is perfect! Lentilly and snappy, a 2-class upgrade from a normal vintage.

2015 Grüner Veltliner "Vier Gärten"

12/750ml | ASB-073

Of course it means "garter of fear," as you already guessed. It's an iris-y little critter, like the outer skin of a Nigl *Piri*; ore, mizuna, herbal snap, and in 2015 it's amazingly long—with all of 11.5% alc.

2015 Grüner Veltliner Bisamberg-Kreuzenstein ("DAC")

12/750ml | ASB-076

The second bottling (A.P. number 14) is really fine; lively and frisky, a happy bouncy puppy of GV; you can almost feel the breeze from its wagging little tail.

2015 Riesling Aichleiten

12/750ml | ASB-078

Very ripe but squeaky-clean; apricot, balsam and wintergreen, like two clouds merging; quite some mid-palate substance here; it's an ellipsis of inference, it doesn't land with its pieces visible but creates a kind of rich evocative mist of flavor, a meditation. Fridge-temp would be too cold.

2015 Gelber Muskateller

12/750ml | ASB-072

I often think this should be a CORE-LIST wine; he has enough, and it's really consistently excellent Muscat. '15 is a perfect vintage, not only the elderflower but also an herbal kick, leafy, with several dimensions of saltiness, like an herb smoothie with a dash of elderflower foam. Lovely, creamy, not pointed.

+

2014 Riesling Brut SEKT

12/750ml | ASB-080

He makes it in-house (not common), and it's on the dry side of Brut; shows a *fine* Riesling fragrance and a rich creamy palate with a white-flowery profile combined with a limestony snap. This was a big surprise!

2014 Zweigelt Bisamberg

12/750ml | ASB-074

We started with this Zweigelt at an in-store tasting of (mostly) Blaufränkisch at a courageous retailer in Boston last Fall. I saw it as a way in, knew it would be appealing and would reassure casual tasters that we weren't gonna force any weird-ass wine on them.

It sold out in a flash. People flipped over it. The store wished they'd bought three times more.

IT IS THAT KIND OF WINE.

This '14 is less witty than the 2013, but on the other hand all the best grapes went into it—they didn't make a single-vineyard Zweigelt this year—so it's more mocha, richer, many layered, succulent and long and yet still balanced and elegant, with some roasty Rhône richness.

+

H·u·M· HOFER



REGION / SUB REGION

Weinviertel / Auersthal

VINEYARD AREA

20 hectares

ANNUAL PRODUCTION

16,600 cases

TOP SITES AND SOIL TYPES

Freiberg
(*löss with loam*) ;
Kirchlissen
(*löss with clay*)

GRAPE VARIETIES

53% Grüner Veltliner
13% Zweigelt
9% Riesling
8% Welschriesling
4% St. Laurent
3% Weissburgunder
2% Gelber Muskateller
8% other

FARMING PRACTICES

Bio-Ernte Certified Organic

Auersthal is just barely beyond Vienna's northern suburbs, in a dead-still little wine village.

It's rather odd to drive there and see lots of wee little oil derricks, but such little oil as Austria produces comes from these parts, deep below the löss. I had either forgotten or had never known the estate was organic; they belong to a group called Bio-Ernte which has standards above the EU guidelines. In speech, by the way, "bio" is pronounced to rhyme with "B.O." which can lead to some drollery as you hear references to "B.O. wine" unless, unlike me, you have left behind your adolescence.

The vineyards lie in a rain-shadow and have to endure hot summers. In fact Hofer plants his Riesling in a fog-pocket as he gets so little rain. The wines are pressed conventionally (no whole-cluster) with skin contact, and all whites are done in stainless steel.

The wines are what I sometimes call scrupulous. They're not as sweet-natured as Setzer, not as creamy as Schwarzböck, not as brilliant as Ecker, but they are some parts of all those things, right down the middle. They're articulate and expressive. And man, are they ever scintillating in 2015, which has to be the best-ever vintage here.

2015 Grüner Veltliner

12/1000ml | AHF-078L

I tasted two lots (1602 and 1603), both of which were excellent, one quite rich and the other quite cressy and snappy. Both are the best in many years.

2015 Grüner Veltliner “Von Den Rieden”

+

12/750ml | AHF-082

Wow, 13% alc in 2015—it usually lands around 11.5-12—and double-wow, what a fantastic little wine. Gorgeous aroma; a bright, focused and animated palate, mineral jousting with lentil, “sweet” green (balsam, oolong), with splendid length, and even the finish is multi-colored. Alas, it will be **scarce**, and it’s on our CORE-LIST, so if you’re using it then don’t delay.

2015 Grüner Veltliner Freiberg

12/750ml | AHF-083

Starts apricot-y and moves through pepper and ends with a lashing of mint. Like big-leaf arugula or sorrel, in a salad with slices of dried apricot.

2015 Grüner Veltliner Kirchlissen

+ +

12/750ml | AHF-084

2013 Grüner Veltliner Kirchlissen

+

12/750ml | AHF-064

I think this is the only chance for a direct comparison of ‘15 and ‘13, and it’s remarkable and compelling and instructive. The **2015** is the best wine Hofer has ever made; chervil, anise-hyssop aromas; highly refined palate shows a balsam sweetness; the whole herb garden is grinning and beaming. *Dicht*, clarity, length, comparing favorably to Nigl’s loess GVs—yes, even the Alte Reben, amazingly.

The ‘13 of course has two years of bottle age, but it also shows as higher pitched, more floral, and sleeker. The wine is lovely, refined and willowy, expressive and peppery, rhubarb and sorrel, glowing and perfectly balanced.

2015 Zweigelt Rosé

12/750ml | AHF-079

A second bottling was just two weeks in-bottle when I was there, so most of its fruit and body were subdued. Last year it was the best Rosé I offered, so I am curious and confident.

2014 Zweigelt

12/1000ml | AHF-080L

This is a RIDICULOUS VALUE!

Round, seductive, generous, really excellent in this (or any) echelon; a truly hospitable and delicious wine.

2013 Zweigelt “Klassik”

12/750ml | AHF-075

Round and berried, velvety and typical, loving and enveloping, with a warmly earthy touch.

SETZER



REGION / SUB REGION

Weinviertel / Hohenwarth

VINEYARD AREA

30 hectares

ANNUAL PRODUCTION

16,700 cases

TOP SITES AND SOIL TYPES

Laa,
Eichholz
(löss over alluvial gravel and limestone)

GRAPE VARIETIES

50% Grüner Veltliner
30% Roter Veltliner
20% Riesling,
Pinot Blanc,
Chardonnay,
Sauvignon Blanc,
Zweigelt,
Merlot

What *does* happen with the wines in the middle? The ones that aren't rowdy and galvanic, but also not cerebral or arcane? I often call such wines humane, or gracious, or civilized, but that makes it sound like the way you have to act during the first dinner at your girlfriend's parents' house. I receive an actual tactile sense of pleasure from cordial, charming wines, but that's because I insist on having the time to pause and appreciate them. It does come down to time. Charm is a thing we cultivate.

Hans and Uli Setzer are a husband-wife team of wine-school grads maintaining a winery imbued with intelligence and purpose. I was surprised how close they were to the Kamptal and Kremstal (15 minutes from Berger or Gobelsburg) and wondered why Hohenwarth was banished to the lowly Weinviertel. Hans pointed out to me Hohenwarth sits at the same altitude as the summit of the Heiligenstein, thus essentially different from the more sheltered Kamptal. Nor does it have the pure löss terraces of the Kremstal or even the neighboring Wagram.

Though Setzer was a discovery for me, the estate is conspicuously successful, exporting to three continents and showing up on many of the top wine lists inside Austria, not to mention being a sort of house-estate for the Vienna Symphoniker orchestra.

The question is whether craftsmanship, intelligence and charm are things we value enough to pay for—to pay anything for. We pay for “greatness” and we pay for “value” but when we buy a Setzer wine I would argue we're paying for a kind of

humanity and civility. Do you value good conversation? Then what would you say if someone observed *What's the fuss? All you did was sit and talk?* You'd say, “You don't understand, clearly,” and you'd be correct. And you'd start to know why I feel these lovely wines are less cherished than they ought to be.

2015 Grüner Veltliner

12/1000ml | ASZ-079L

Guess what? 2015 is just as wonderful here as it is everywhere else! That said, this is perhaps the lightest among this year's Liters, though it's wonderfully charming with its sweet hay and lentil flavors. There's the tiniest little whisper of grassiness, but I think that is good news, because I hope to persuade you to trade up to...

2015 Grüner Veltliner "Vesper"

12/750ml | ASZ-080

...because this is actually even lighter than the Liter alcoholically, yet it's as delicate and vital as spring-water just as it bubbles and gurgles up from underground. Chervil and basmati rice complete the picture. GV at its summertime best.

2015 Grüner Veltliner "Ausstich" ("DAC")

12/750ml | ASZ-082

This wine has everything, except salability. It isn't the cheapest and it isn't the biggest; it's just delicious, useful and charming. Right, I know: poo on that. We don't "drink" wine, and if we do we certainly don't waste any mental bandwidth on how *delightful* or *delicious* it might be. That is for nimrods. We appraise our wines; it's a kind of blood sport, we judge and evaluate and we especially pay terribly close attention to how the wine makes us look; will our industry pals respect us? Does our wine have a big enough dick?

Is it enough for a wine to be unique and wonderful? Doubtful. Is the sweet-natured moderation of a wine like this something we might respond to? Nah, it isn't noisy enough. Do the aromas and flavors of boxwood, basmati and chervil have any chance of breaking through? You must be joking.

Are we at risk of perverting the very reasons we ever got into wine at all? Yes, *we are*.

2015 Grüner Veltliner "Die Lage" +

12/750ml | ASZ-083

The actual name of the site is *Eichholz*, which means "oak-wood," and which might then confuse buyers into supposing this wine will be oakly. It isn't; hence it is simply called "The Site."

In most years this is Setzer's best GV. Hans will not agree, because he is faithful to his big-boy the "8000," but I find that wine, not always but often, to be too musclebound, whereas this one is always intense but graceful and balanced. It is also the most mineral wine in the collection. This '15 recalls the adorable 2013, but like many '15s it isn't *merely* adorable; there's a salad-y snap, like eating sorrel leaves from the bag or sniffing certain green teas (like "Gunpowder"). It has a lovely juicy density with a dusting of crushed limestone, a gauze of talc and scree.

2015 Grüner Veltliner "8000" (+)

6/750ml | ASZ-086

The site is called *Laa*, and the principle is to plant densely (8000 vines per hectare instead of the usual 6000) to force each vine to sink its roots vertically down to find a reliable water source. It is usually a very big wine, as close as GV comes to the succulence of Semillon. This '15 has 13.9% alc and has an aroma I find akin to over-roasting—"That bird smells done..." It's like pheasant or grouse; spicy, pepper and nutmeg, right on the threshold of overripeness, but not quite. Feints toward a Wachau-like force, bone-brothy. It's only three weeks in bottle, so there's a big middle-piece I'm not seeing and which might "explain" the flavors on the periphery.

2015 Roter Veltliner

12/750ml | ASZ-087

This will explain it: www.austrianwine.com/our-wine/grape-varieties/white-wine/roter-veltliner/

It isn't a mutated Grüner, though it tastes like an *aspect* of GV, the shiitake and roasted pepper side, without the citrics and leaves. The vine requires a dedicated grower, and its proponents are more like "protectors" than just vintners. I didn't go in search of it but it kind of found me, via Setzer (and Ecker), and when I like it I offer it to you. As I very much do here; this 2015 is savory and bacony, brown-butter, shiitakes and chanterelles sautéed in bacon fat. This wine is *markedly* delicious and original, and you don't need to journey to East Fapistan to score it.



2015 Roter Veltliner Kreimelberg

12/750ml | ASZ-088

In fact these are so good in '15 I'm also offering this single-site bottling; it has the collagen richness of a great veal consommé; cardamom, nutmeg, no "fruit" to speak of, but instead a pure savor—morels, goose-fat, spice-box; distinctive, tasty and strong.

2015 Riesling

12/750ml | ASZ-085

A charmer; light-feeling, leafy and breezy; some hints of stone-fruits but more sweet-green, a melting into a cool shade, limey and delicate and loving, everything that's fully *good* about Riesling, when it doesn't need to affirm its existence by being "great."

2014 Zweigelt

12/750ml | ASZ-081

A lovely vintage of this wine is always delicious, softly tannic, moderately intense; pure fruit but not purely fruity; incredibly satisfying, a wine of civility and affection. What used to be called "Claret," really, and each time I drink it I think *Bless the person who made this wine.*

WAGRAM

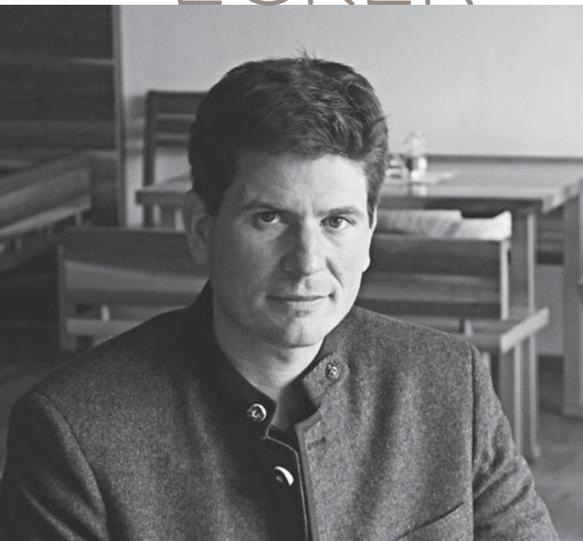
1889

The road from Vienna northwest to Krems is probably the only boring country road in all of Austria. It follows the flood plain of the Danube, and is dead-flat. About half way along, you notice little hills to your right about 5 miles in the distance. These are the löss terraces of the WAGRAM. Nearing Krems, the terraces draw closer and you're in the Kremstal, while directly ahead the dramatic hills of the Wachau beckon.

The löss hills of the Wagram are said to be unique in Europe for their depth, up to twenty meters (65 feet) in places. Wagram's the löss leader har har har. But the sandy-loamy ground is so thick that vintners can dig cellars in it without joists, yet this same soil is amazingly porous. This is ideal soil for GrüVe, and where it changes to red gravel or primary rock the vine changes to Riesling or Sauvignon Blanc. Vineyards are mostly on terraces or gentle slopes, facing south, far enough from the river to avoid botrytis in most years.

Can you taste it? I can't, at any rate. I am certain I couldn't identify any flavor markers for "Wagram" per se. The wines resemble Kremstal wines to me, at least those nearer the Danube and also grown on löss. Still, they had to call it something, and "Wagram" does sound like one of the bad-guys from Lord Of The Rings.

ECKER



REGION / SUB REGION

Wagram / Kirchberg-Mitterstockstall

VINEYARD AREA

20 hectares

ANNUAL PRODUCTION

11,600 cases

TOP SITES AND SOIL TYPES

Steinberg
(*weathered primary rock*);
Schloßberg,
Im Wasn,
Mitterberg
(*löss*);
Mordthal
(*löss with high lime content*)

GRAPE VARIETIES

50% Grüner Veltliner
15% Zweigelt
12% Roter Veltliner
5% Riesling
5% St. Laurent
5% Weißburgunder
4% Sauvignon Blanc
4% Gelber Muskateller

Please read this slightly longer-than-usual text, because in the course of talking about Bernhard Ecker and his remarkably lovely wines, I find I need to say something about this “dialect” of wine, and it’s something I think you need to hear, as a counterpoint to what you’re hearing from the naturalistas.

Not an argument *against* them, but the other side of the yin-yang.

This is “modern” wine at its very best. And I’m willing to understand feeling defensive about deploying a word like “modern,” because I agree we should be wary; too many times modern wines are simply denuded and clinical. Yet we should also be wary of being too precious about what we’d call “traditional” wines. It takes a degree of discernment to distinguish their true virtues from the ones we ourselves *like* to make out of their flaws.

I like every single wine I taste here. I like their exceptional clarity, their incisive detail, their high-definition obsessive nuance, their fresh vitality, and most of all I love their charm and deliciousness. It’s not the same sort of charm we see in Setzer, whose wines are more cashmere-textured, but it is something of great good humor that elevates the wines from mere correctness. I don’t want all wines to be modern as these are, but I want all *MODERN* wines to have the animation and soul I taste here.

“Soul” may seem like an odd word to use to talk about cultured-yeast cold-fermented stainless-steel wines, especially if you’re into “natural” wines where you’ve come to equate soul with something else.

But soul is more complex than that. And it lives where it lives, not where we assume it lives.

I sit tasting the wines, suffused with pleasure, and find myself wondering “Who would reject these wines out of hand, on what principle, and to what end?” I feel acutely sad that a person would exclude himself from this form of happiness. There is no dichotomy between wines like these and the special syntax of “natural” wines unless we insist there is. And if we do, we’re excluding another valid species of beauty for reasons I don’t think stand up. Either that, or I’m greedy and I don’t *want* to have to choose. I want them both.

I find soul in these wines because something in them ignites something in me. I taste plenty of modern, competent wine that does the “job” and leaves nothing behind. Not these. Delight lives in these. Clarity I think is a positive value. Clear pure fruit and mineral density and thirst-inducing fragrance are all positive values. There’s nothing contrived or plausible about such wines, and even the phrase “such wines” is misleading because there are *very* few such wines.

I think it boils down to this: it’s not smart to think that only tertiary, vinous wines can ever be “natural” or have animus. They breathe their particular breath, those wines, and I love them just as you do. But I also love the primary, because I think it takes a special kind of passion to want the drinker to see virginal fruit and terroir so brilliantly. Apart from which, soul is a thing that opens and dilates, and if we ourselves insist that wines like Ecker’s are

clinical, then we're closing off an avenue of bliss, and our souls are wounded.

Don't be misled by the paucity of plusses. Every single one of these wines will offer you such delight as you rarely taste, at astonishingly gentle prices, and they are honest gleaming thirsty-for-more wines, the kind you can't believe the bottle is empty *already*.

2015 Grüner Veltliner

12/1000ml | AEC-093L

Though I show it first we actually taste it last, after the big guys that precede it, not as a palate-reset but to show how it holds up. This joins the Setzer as the two *snappiest* of the '15 Liters; it's tensile and streamlined, pointed and brisk, with flavors of caraway seed. It isn't rich but it's also perfectly ripe.

2015 Grüner Veltliner von Stockstal

12/750ml | AEC-094

Really how is *anything* more vibrant and delicious than this?!? Zingy, salty, a ton of semolina charm, an inconceivably good wine-by-the-glass. Want to see the genius of 2015? *Look what happened to this "little" wine.*

2015 Grüner Veltliner Steinberg

12/750ml | AEC-096

One of the few Wagram sites on primary rock, this was among my most beloved 2013s, when it was mind-blowingly spicy and supernaturally clear. This one's herbal and cressy from Zalto's "Universal" but shows more fruit and middle from a tulip; boxwood and graphite, a spicy dandelion-green GV, with absurd vitality and a finish like chewing a curly parsley leaf.

2015 Grüner Veltliner Schlossberg

12/750ml | AEC-097

Back to pure loess now; indeed this is a pithy perfection of loess. Stern yet full of humor and joy. Hard to spit this circus of loess. Dark char on the finish. Quite a wine!

2015 Grüner Veltliner Mordthal

12/750ml | AEC-098

The oldest (50+) vines, his best GV; three weeks in bottle when I tasted it, but it clearly has the depth, polish and density of the superb 2013 without the top note of fruit the '13 had; instead this is more whole-wheat or rye, vetiver; still only an inference of a future complexity but stylish and balanced. And probably *the least you can pay for entry into the top class of Grüner Veltliner.*

2015 Roter Veltliner Steinberg

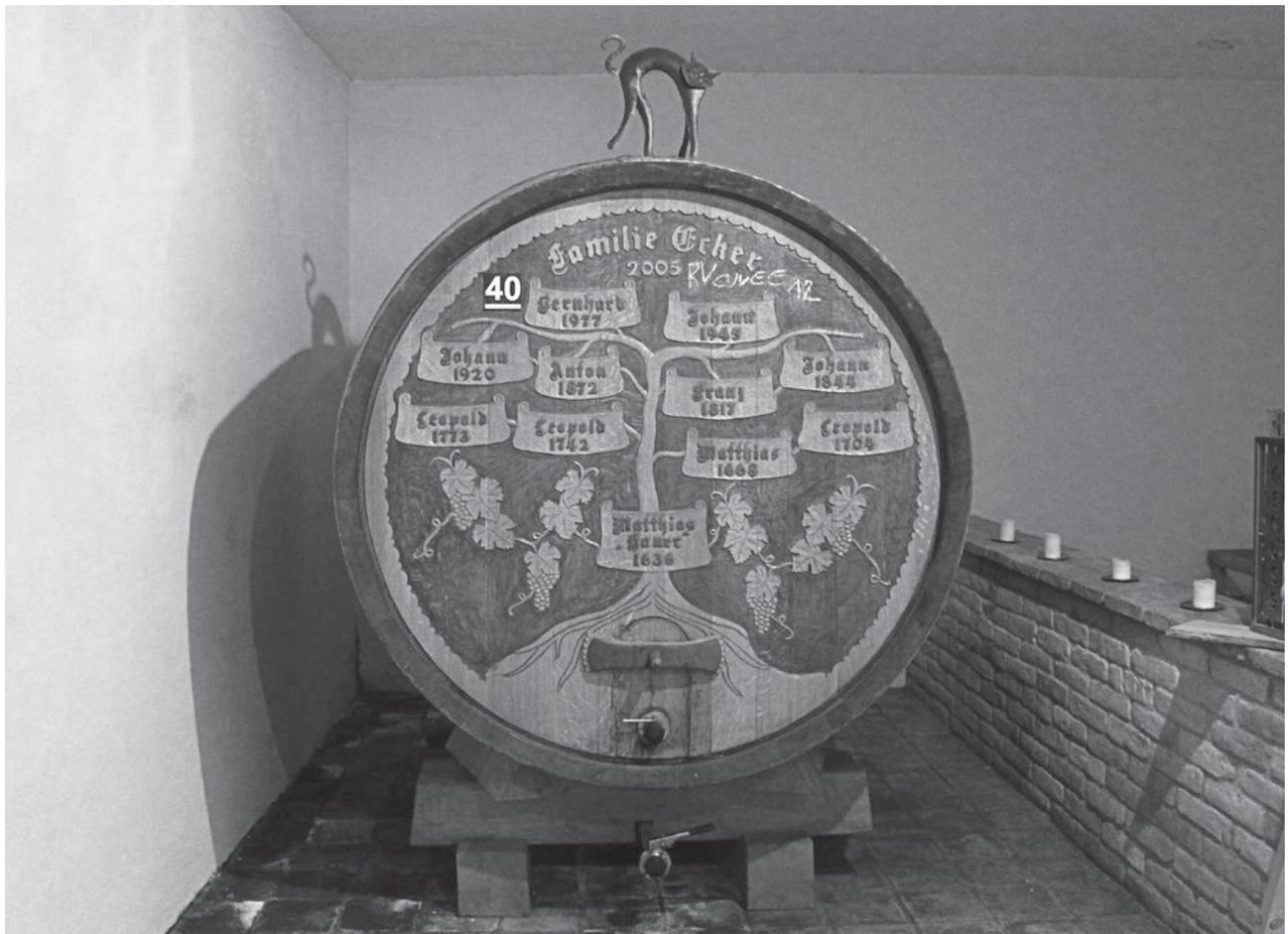
12/750ml | AEC-099

It would appear 2015 is quite beneficent to this variety! This is a powerhouse of precision, weight and richness; a sort of long-simmered seriousness, like bone-broth with red peppers and marjoram tossed in at the last minute; this was one time the Zalto was the better glass—the wine was explosive and mineral. They should change the name from "Universal" to "Single-Vineyard Roter Veltliner" glass.

2015 Riesling

12/750ml | AEC-100

Shimmering! Baseline Riesling, no frills or curlicues; it's grand and extroverted from Zalto and detailed, filigree and charming from a tulip; salty-balsamy finish from both. It's Ecker's best Riesling in at least five years.



2015 Gelber Muskateller

12/750ml | AEC-095

Surprisingly this was more like *Scheurebe* than like typical Muscat; redcurrant and shiitake, not catty or even all that flowery; more exotic roots (vetiver, parsley root), less spice than earthiness. I like that side of Scheu, and love this atypical little beast.

2014 Zweigelt

12/1000ml | AEC-089L

This is everything it needs to be, and all those things are yummy. Nor will the 2015 let you down when it appears down the road....

2014 Zweigelt "Brillant"

12/750ml | AEC-090

Roasty pure fruit, yet dark and bricky (a weird Terry-word I often use for Sangiovese); dusty tannin; lavishly delicious without high tones, carob husks, the fat cap on a veal roast; pepper and blackberry. What more can one ask? The 2015, on its heels, is riper and "sweeter" and more buoyant; it tastes scooped from the top of the stew, while the '14 is drawn from all the *gras* that sank to the bottom.

2012 St Laurent

12/750ml | AEC-091

+ +

Those two plusses are for sheer ecstatic deliciousness, not for any normative notion of "excellence" as it might be "measured." Grown on loess, aged in 3,000-liter oak casks, and what a fragrance. Cool, yet overripe damsons; playful, balanced, kinetic yin-tang between cool and warm notes; charm and seriousness, and a charred tertiary finish introduces yet another dimension.



REGION / SUB REGION

Wagram / Feuersbrunn

VINEYARD AREA

28 hectares

ANNUAL PRODUCTION

25,000 cases

TOP SITES AND SOIL TYPES

Feuersbrunner Spiegel,
Feuresbrunner Rosenberg,
Engabrunner Stein
(loess, Gföhler gneiss, sand,
chalk, and red gravel)

GRAPE VARIETIES

90% Grüner Veltliner
10% Riesling

FARMING PRACTICES

Respekt certified Biodynamic

Bernhard Ott's wines join the wines of Heidi Schröck, Ludwig Hiedler and Nikolaihof (in this portfolio at least) as being what I call "analog," that is, marked by a certain warmth in contrast to the chiseled surgical clarity of other kinds of wines. Analog wines take longer to understand because they're not explaining everything to you. They articulate in different ways. You need to let them build up over several years before they accumulate into a narrative you can repeat. In the interim you call them "rich" or "creamy" or, in Ott's case, corpulent, capacious and generous. Dionysian, not Apollonian.

Being with Bernhard at his estate in Feuersbrunn is a little like being with the Saahs' at Nikolaihof, in that it isn't just another "winery-visit," but rather an immersion into an entire environment that has a larger context than you expected, seeming to encompass not only the human world, but all of the world. You're invited to participate, not only to observe, and certainly not only to act as an audience. Instead you walk into a family's vision of life, a microcosm of the world they desire and have made for themselves.

A couple of news items to relay; though hail damaged a great many of Bernhard's vineyards, he was able to produce small amounts of his three Grand Crus. He also is now fermenting 100% *sponti*, which makes sense. A couple of the '15s showed a kind of grassiness I hadn't tasted previously, and I wonder whether this was some residue of the hail. Otherwise it's (yet!) another excellent vintage from a grower I think we still don't really grok over here. Of course the basic GV (Am

Berg) is laudable, but to really "get" these wines you have to move up toward the Crus, and ideally *into* the Crus. Ott, most vitally and purely, is Rosenberg; it isn't only his icon-wine, it's also the man himself in the form of Grüner Veltliner, among which it occupies a unique place.

2015 Riesling Feuersbrunn

12/750ml | AOT-052

(Extremely bottle-sick, so no note would have been accurate.)

2015 Gemischter Satz

12/750ml | AOT-053

A *newbie* from Ott, mostly from new vineyards he's recently bought, and mostly Welschriesling; it's carbonically macerated, and the wine is walnutty, vibrant and racy.

2015 Grüner Veltliner "Am Berg"

12/750ml | AOT-045

There are two bottlings, and as before it's mostly Ott's own fruit plus some (organic) fruit he buys from colleagues whose vineyards are *worked and harvested* by Ott's team. The early bottling is rich and smooth, and the second, equally creamy, is also a little tannic and shows more fennel and chervil; it's on the salad-y side. I love you for so handsomely supporting this wine, but with just a wee stretch upward you'll receive a big jump upward if you'll also consider....

2015 Grüner Veltliner "Fass 4"

12/750ml | AOT-046

....This is considered by Ott to be his first "serious" GV for the table, and in '15 it is really another type of wine entirely. Riper, bakier aromas, like a mini-Rosenberg; still some phenolics, it's overall more spherical than linear; analog and savory; paprika and mint and a lot of grip. Starting to occupy a new country with this.

2015 Grüner Veltliner "Der Ott" +

12/750ml | AOT-047

Put it this way: would you ignore Bourgogne Rouge from Henri Jayer?

This wine is made from young vines in the three Grand Crus, and if those wines are too spendy you can get a lot of their mojo here. Or if you happen to like intense wine but not *big* wine. This has a truly compelling aroma and a wonderful palate, meaty and roasty, salty and robust yet warming and sustaining; chewy but with its own rotund sort of polish.

2015 Grüner Veltliner Spiegel + +

6/750ml | AOT-048

This high-grown GV (highest site in the Wagram) gave my favorite of the big-3 Crus, at least in early May. At least! If you still, for some inexplicably stubborn reason, don't believe GV is serious, classic and even profound, then taste this. And if you persist in your belief then all I can say is: *Really!*? This wine is like impeccable sushi-quality squid; it's concentrated yet aerial, creamy yet with crazy grip; edible flowers and tat-soi. What a wine!

2015 Grüner Veltliner Stein +

6/750ml | AOT-049

The site is in Engabrunn, just over the border in the Kamptal, and it sits on (mostly) the so-called Gföhler gneiss, and will remind you more of Kamptal GVs than of Ott's expected style. Which compels me to wonder....how much of what I infer and (perhaps glibly) conclude about Bernhard's style has to do with his particular soils? Because this wine really wouldn't be out of place at, say, Bründlmayer.

It shows the purest gnarl of mineral and animality, funky iris aromas; rock-dust and rusks; the classic example of massive flavor virtually without "fruit" as-such; it's like a rock garden of vinosity, and curiously it's also like dark-meat turkey.

2015 Grüner Veltliner Rosenberg +

6/750ml | AOT-050

OK, understanding that I'm describing an embryonic wine, into the breach go I....markedly mineral aromas lead into a massively structured palate; like GV on an IMAX screen; as close as white wine comes to the experience of drinking *red* wine. Like the fat-cap on a pork-knuckle with roasted carrots. It's half-wine, half-food.

KREMSTAL & KAMPTAL

Austria's best values are coming from the Kamp and Kremstals. This doesn't mean the cheapest wines; it means the lowest available prices for *stellar* wines. Austria is often paradoxical in that the more you pay the better the value, e.g., the top Kremstal/Kamptal Grüner Veltliners seem to provide more quality than *any* other white wine the same money would buy. This may be partly due to the giant shadow cast by the neighboring Wachau, and the determination of the best Kampers and Kremsters to strut their stuff. For the price of really middling Federspiel from a "name" estate in the Wachau you can get nearly stellar quality in Kammern or Langenlois, and the absolute best from a Nigl or a Gobelsburg is substantially less expensive than their Wachau counterparts. And, every single bit as good. Other than the profound individuality of certain sites (Heiligenstein comes first to mind) there's little of regional "style" to distinguish these wines from Wachau wines. In fact Willi Bründlmayer told me all three regions were once one big region called WACHAU. Ludwig Hiedler points out Langenlois is warmer than anywhere in the Wachau, and he believes his wines need even more time than theirs do.

I had a rather subversive conversation with a Kremstal grower one year, as part of our mutual lamenting of the "DAC" silliness. He said "I'm not really all that sure why we need all these regions at all; Kremstal, Kamptal, Traisental, Wagram... are they really so different?" Well wow. I don't often hear growers speaking so blasphemously. It sort of made my mind reel. *You know*, I said, *even the Kremstal is senseless as a single region; the valley itself is one thing but it's very different from the löss terraces along the Danube in terms of exposure and microclimate*, to which he agreed. You can make a case for the Wachau between Dürnstein and Spitz, i.e., the gorge, because that area has singular characteristics. But I'm not entirely sure how the consumer benefits from having so many different regions whose wines aren't that different from one another. I rather think these things are done by bureaucrats and marketing folks, because they get a kick out of categorizing. Yet a *true* breakdown of these places based on soil, exposure and microclimate would look very different than the currently demarcated regions.

NOTES ON GAISBERG AND HEILIGENSTEIN

We get to see Heiligenstein from Bründlmayer, and then we'll consider it again along with its next-door neighbor Gaisberg from Schloss Gobelsburg, Ludwig Hiedler and Johannes Hirsch. That might look redundant, but these are two sites equivalent to Chambertin and Clos de Bèze and if *you* had three suppliers with parcels in *both* sites, you *wouldn't* offer them? C'mon now!

These are the preeminent Riesling Grand Crus of the Kamptal, and they stand among the greatest land on earth in which Riesling is planted. They're contiguous hillsides, each the lower slopes of the Mannhart-hills, but they're dissimilar in crucial ways. Heiligenstein is higher and broader-shouldered (thanks to Peter Schleimer for that image), and probably just the slightest bit warmer. Soils differ also—Gaisberg is crystalline, a soil type the Austrians call "Gföhler Gneiss" which you'll hear the Wachauers talk about also. It's granitic in origin, containing the so-called *Glimmerschiefer* ("gleaming slate") which is essentially fractured granite or schist containing little flecks of silica or mica which sparkle in the sun.

Gaisberg is the type of site wherein Riesling feels inherent, as if neither culminates without the voice of the other. It gives highly *Rieslingy* Rieslings. Slim in body, brilliant in berried and mineral nuance, on the "cool" side of the spectrum.

Heiligenstein's soil is said to be unique; so-called Zöbinger Perm, a sedimentary sandstone-conglomerate from the late Paleozoic Age, also containing fine sand and gleaming slaty clays. The site is too steep to have collected löss. The wines of this astounding vineyard are clearly profound, though more "difficult" and temperamental than Gaisberg's. Great Heiligenstein contains an improbable conciliation of ostensibly disparate elements: citrus-tart against citrus-sweet (lime against papaya), herbal against pitted fruit (woodruff against nectarine), cool against warm (green tea against roasted beets). The wines are more capacious than Gaisberg's, yet not as entirely brilliant; they have more stomach, they are tenors or altos when Gaisberg are sopranos.

Which is the better vineyard, you ask? Yes, I answer.

Indeed if Riesling got the respect it deserved, both sites would be studied as obsessively and in such detail as great vineyards in the Côte d'Or. And if the sky fell we would all catch sparrows. But two things bear mentioning. First, both vineyards (but especially Heiligenstein) have different exposures as they follow the mountainside, and there are distinctions between, say, Zöbinger Heiligenstein and Kammerner Heiligenstein. Second, these sites have many proprietors, and while you can't make mundane wine from either of them, there's unexceptional stuff to be found. Of course, in pages other than these...

BERGER



REGION / SUB REGION

Kremstal / Gedersdorf

VINEYARD AREA

18 hectares

ANNUAL PRODUCTION

20,000 cases

TOP SITES AND SOIL TYPES

Gebling
(*löss and gravelly löss*);
Steingraben
(*clay-marl-löss rock*);
Leithen
(*löss and rock*);
Haid
(*deep brown earth*)

GRAPE VARIETIES

70% Grüner Veltliner
15% Zweigelt
9% Riesling
5% Chardonnay,
Malvasier,
Cabernet Franc,
Welschriesling
1% Gelber Muskateller

Berger's GrüVe liter is the wine we sell the most of, and at this point it could almost coast. Almost.

But the crucial tiny membrane between almost and never is something I never need to worry about. Erich won't forget it. It isn't in his makeup. I can see each year how serious he is to ensure this wine is still performing for me. I mean, it's a modest wine he can't make more than pennies on, yet he cares about it because he's made of caring. I'm moved by the humble decency of taking care that this little wine is still good, is always still good. It takes just as much caring as it does to ensure a great wine is indeed great. But the difference is that everyone notices the great wines; you get trophies and awards and 'tout le monde' wants to buy you a beer. Here your caring goes un-remarked upon.

I suddenly remembered a thing I hadn't thought of in years. Once I was at a carwash that did some detailing of the outsides and insides, and as I was waiting for my decidedly cheap-ass car, I observed all the very nice expensive cars the guys were working on. But they took the same care with my funky beat up Accord hatchback as they did with the Caddies and BMWs, and I was extremely impressed. "Thanks for respecting even *my* crappy car," I said. "Just doin' it right," they said.

That's it: just doin' it right.

So while I am very proud and happy to offer and sell this Liter wine, I have to wonder why so few of its customers are curious to see what else Erich can do. "If this wine is *this* good then how must the

better wines be? They don't cost all that much more..."

The estate will join the wonderful organization *Fair And Green* starting with the 2016 vintage. I now have three members (Dönnhoff and Breuer are the first two), and I must confess, much as I am wary of "organizations" of any kind, that this one seems to be genuinely enlightened.

Berger is the last in what I'm starting to think of as my *Trilogy Of Charm*—which would include Setzer and Ecker—and I suppose I'll just spend my cranky-old-coot years fussing and foaming at how little we appreciate wines like these. This isn't such an issue with "civilians," normal wine drinkers, but the closer you get to the profession the more we seem to detach from our instinctual pleasure centers. To be sure, great wines warrant all the attention we can spare and all the words we can offer. But there are wines for which words are irrelevant; they just taste good and we love them.

A classic example is Berger's Loessterassen GV. It's in the middle of his range—the accursed middle—and all it does is taste addictively wonderful. It could be a proverbial desert-island wine because *you would never get tired of it*. While we rise to the demands of great wines, and are happy to, the companionably tasty wine asks nothing from us. We can relax with it. It is hale, easy-going, and it keeps us company.

w

2015 Grüner Veltliner

12/1000ml | ABG-156L

All that needs to be said is, this is this wine at its best.

2015 Grüner Veltliner Loessterassen

+

12/750ml | ABG-157

This returns to the form of the fantastically pretty 2013. It's riper than usual (13%) and was concentrated by crop reduction due to hail, but this is way above its prevailing level, more dusty and textured; shows the mineral side of loess but not without the wet-cereal sweetness; incredibly juicy and long.

In my fantasy I've been asked to present one wine with which to affirm the existence of GrüVe. I have my choice of many dozens of mighty and profound examples, whereby I can demonstrate that GV can also be "great." But that's almost too easy. To affirm that GV belongs among the finest grapes from which white wine is made, and that it should be uniquely cherished for its particular gifts, I'd prefer to present this *average* wine, the kind of wine a careful caring grower can make in any good vintage and that sells for the price of hamburger, not filet mignon.

One swirl, one sniff, one taste, and the doors swing open, and GV is welcomed into the elite. Even this simple wine? *Especially* this simple wine.

2015 Grüner Veltliner Gebling

12/750ml | ABG-162

Ah me, I always like this wine best in the "small" vintages like 2014. It's salty and stony and very impressive here in 2015—more stone than mineral, really—but with 14% you have to wonder what happens when the baby-chub dissolves. As of right now this is a pretty cool dude, garrigue-y and bakey, black salt and rusks.

2014 Grüner Veltliner Wieland

+ +

12/750ml | ABG-154

Case in point!

When I first saw it as a cask sample it was aging in neutral hogsheads, and I had small concerns about its high-ish alcohol and the "maybe 10%" botrytis it contained. But it has proven my fears unfounded. Toasted brioche and malt aromas; cask influence is present but not obtrusive; oleander and saffron, langoustines and satsumas, *very* sweet mid-summer squash and hugely expressive balsam. It's like a curious marriage between Aÿ Champagne and French toast.

The soil is a calcerous sandy loess, and the Grand Cru is new to Berger's stable starting with this wine. *VERY* impressive.

2015 Gelber Muskateller

+

12/750ml | ABG-158

Reliably among my favorite Muscats by virtue of its perfect combining of sharp and sweet elements; cattiness with elderblossom. The '15 is brightly spicy and shows the funky green side of elderflower; the highest union of floral, herbal and minty elements in a cream textured yet pointed beauty.

2015 Riesling Spiegel

+

12/750ml | AGB-161

As a rule this is Erich's "lesser" Riesling (the *Steingraben* is his premium wine), but there is no Steingraben in '15 thanks to hail, and, well, this is 2015, and this is some excellent wine! Interlocking cool and warm tones, green and silver and sapid Spring leaves and water gleaming off a pebbly stream; the tiny amount of RS is hugely helpful. It reminds me of old vintages of Knoll's Loibenberg Federspiel; complex, very long, a stylish delicious Riesling.

2014 Zweigelt

12/1000ml | ABG-159L

Light, raspberried, charming and direct.

2013 Blauer Zweigelt *Haid*

12/750ml | ABG-155

“Blauer” is the official ampelographical name for just-plain Zweigelt. The wine is raspberries and bacon; racy and “sweet,” the tangiest face of Zweigelt, the point where it just heaps a bucket of berries into your glass while bacon sizzles in the next room.

NIGL



REGION / SUB REGION

Kremstal / Senftenberg

VINEYARD AREA

25 hectares

ANNUAL PRODUCTION

25,000 - 30,000 cases

TOP SITES AND SOIL TYPES

Senftenberger Pellingen,
Hochäcker
(*mica slate, slate*)

GRAPE VARIETIES

40% Grüner Veltliner
40% Riesling
5% Sauvignon Blanc
5% Gelber Muskateller
10% other varieties

If Nigl had a “golden age” it was probably the decade of the 90s, when each vintage felt guided by a steady hand, and difficult years (96, 98) were easily surmounted. Nigl’s the guy you’d have wanted to do your brain surgery, his wines were always so incisive and scalpel-fine.

And great vintages were abundant; 90 itself, and also 93, 95 (when he was among the very best in all of Austria), 97 and 99.

It’s not that things went kaput in 2000. They just changed. The estate added land, they started building the hotel and restaurant, and a few of the wines went a little rogue. In hot vintages (03, 06) one started to encounter alcohol-bombs, which seemed at odds with Martin Nigl’s keen chiseled style. I continued selecting to find “his” kinds of wines, which always were there to be found, but I had to audition them now.

In 2015 we taste the third consecutive superb vintage here, and this means it isn’t just-so-happening; it is deliberate. We were there on a busy Saturday morning and Martin was clearly busy, so we dispatched the wines just a little faster than I’d have preferred. Nigl’s wines are too complex to taste quickly, unless you don’t need to write notes. So if I say “complex” it means I didn’t have time to write the 483 words warranted by the intricacies of these beings.

Martin also defeated my pitiable attempt to rein in the offering. The wines were just too good. I know it means *too many choices* and I know that’s bothersome, but I haven’t outgrown a doomed idealism that says “If a wine is beautiful then you should have access to it, and it

doesn’t matter if there are two beautiful wines or eight of them—nothing of beauty is left behind.”

Somehow the textural density of 2015 didn’t obscure the astonishing transparency of Nigl’s best wines, which are clearer than clarity, and so microsurgically detailed it’s like he arranged the flavors with little chef’s tweezers, just-so in the glass.

Let’s start with the classics.

2015 Grüner Veltliner Kremser Freiheit

+

12/750ml | AFN-265

The first-ever “plus” for this—ha!—“entry-level” wine. It’s sternly loessy but not “sweetly” so; it even has power, and a lovely nubby texture, with aromas and flavors of lentil and sorrel and barley, with a faro starchiness. We sell a lot of it, and if you’re a long-time buyer I promise you, you’ll take the first sip of this and think *WTF got into this?*

2015 Grüner Veltliner Senftenberger Piri

12/750ml | AFN-266

I don’t do the SOMMELIER ALERT thing for Austria, but if I did I’d do it here. Because this is the first of the primary-rock GVs at Nigl, and because it hits a price-point that gives access to that world at an attractive and useful tariff. I respect any somm’s wish to have “great” wines all over the list, and will only peep up with a tiny question—how *useful* are they? They cost a lot, they’re highly assertive, they deflect attention from the food, but $\langle \text{sigh} \rangle$...I understand, you have to have them.

This mid-weight wine offers *Urgestein* ore, arugula and pepper and yet is curiously juicy in texture, albeit the flavors are all mustard-green and ferrous and minty.

2015 Grüner Veltliner Alte Reben

+

12/750ml | AFN-271

The loessy terraces down-valley near the Danube, where this wine comes from, usually give it a certain gracious fruitiness combined with old-vines intensity and strength. I admire this ‘15 hugely, but it isn’t typical. Wonderful aromas lead into an assertively stern palate—the wine is **dry**—adamant, forceful, but neither brutish nor brusque, just *wham!*—itself. Its bossy mineral-ass self. The finish is pure dark mineral. I wonder if ‘15’s heat and drought forced the roots deeper into the (primary-rock) bedrock?

2015 Grüner Veltliner Rehberger Zwetl

+ +

12/750ml | AFN-272

The first of three utter masterpieces of GV, from an amphibolite vineyard mid-valley, and this wine is sensational. Its characteristic caraway-seed aroma is discreet, but precision and juiciness are supreme; glassy clarity, full of pitted fruit but not really apricot, more like not-quite-ripe greengage plum; less body than the Alte Reben, but a lot more grace, and the strong herbal flavors this terroir always gives.

2015 Grüner Veltliner “Privat” Senftenberger Pellingen

+ +

6/750ml | AFN-273

You expect this to be superb, and it is. From the lower part of a steeply terraced hillside, the soils run to amphibolite, marble, gravel and loam over a bedrock of mica-schist. We tasted a cask-sample which of course was euphorically expressive; it did seem basically *richer* than the wines around it, but not really more “intense.” (The Alte Reben was the most intense wine in the group.) This wine is queenly, blossomy, like an ambience of 500 flowering trees yet anchored to a flowing solidity.

2015 Grüner Veltliner Herzstück vom Kirchberg

(+) + +

6/750ml | AFN-274

Staring in the 2010 vintage Martin has bottled this wine separately when its volume warrants; otherwise it goes into the “Privat.” From the hotel’s parking lot a pathway goes toward a small terraced hill with a church at its prow, and this wine hails from those terraces. There’s never a lot of it.

This wine really has it all; almost the cut and relief of a Steinertal from Alzinger; rivulets of sweet herbs and a basmati and raw-dough starch and richness. Seductive and generous, but lithe, not voluptuous.

2015 Riesling Dornleiten

+

12/750ml | AFN-275

An utter delight. Balsam, “cool” shady sweetness, but what minerality! Such delicate solidity and focus, so fine-threaded; diligent, articulate and *tasty*. Certainly the best-ever vintage of this.

2015 Riesling Senftenberger Piri

(+) +

12/750ml | AFN-276

More succulent now, more wintergreen, more *weak-kneed bliss*, basically; easier to love, more cuddly and affectionate, but the mineral spine is maybe the tiniest bit less expressive.

2015 Riesling Hochäcker

+ +

6/750ml | AFN-277

In great vintages this is one of the world's best Rieslings. Yes, you read it right—one of the world's best.

It's a plateau above the Pellingen, on a complex soil in which the original loess eroded and exposed the bedrock of marble, amphibolite, paragneiss and mica schist. Because it is flat it stores water, and because of *that* it is stunning in dry vintages. I cannot, honestly, drink the 2013 without weeping. (Even if I'm also watching wrestling!)

This recalls the Höhereck from Alzinger, another miracle-wine; it has a similarly ecstatic mineral and otherworldly fruit—the fruit is maybe more prominent here. It has the chiseled coolness of a Gaisberg, the pollen wind of extraterrestrial fruits and orchids; a rare urgent bliss of inexplicable loveliness.

2015 Riesling "Privat" Senftenberger Pellingen

(+) +

6/750ml | AFN-278

Riesling's planted upslope now, in the steepest section with the poorest soil, and clearly Martin considers it his best Riesling—and me his most perverse customer, because I often prefer the Hochäcker. This cask sample was in a reductive phase that made it taste a bit feral, but I have over twenty years of tasting this wine and it has always been grand and important—so faith is called for!

2015 Riesling Rehberger Goldberg

+ +

6/750ml | AFN-279

I tried hard to walk away from it, but the wine just undid me. Another amphibolite vineyard, it does its herbs-untamed! thing but in the sleek and juicy style of the Herzstück or the Zwettl; all flint and gooseberry and lychee, rendered as *finely* as humanly possible. If you want something vamping, sexy and generous, do pay a call on Mr. Hiedler...

2014 Brut de Brut SEKT

12/750ml | AFN-270

It's the same as "Extra Brut." And that wonderful 2010 is finally drunk up – what a wine that was. This is the first disgorgement (4/2016) of what will be many; he disgorges it as-needed and says there's "plenty" more. I was happily surprised how agile and creamy this was with such a short *tirage*, but it's a Blanc de Noir in fact, mostly PN with Zweigelt. Stylish and delicious.

2015 Sauvignon Blanc

+

12/750ml | AFN-280

Another SB-for-people-who-love-Riesling, this is ripe but exceedingly refined, more Pouilly than Sancerre; classic but with impeccable reserve; it reminds me of Hexamer's. I can barely recall a more insinuating, interesting and *tasty* SB. Really grown-up and long, and not clamorous. How often do "finesse" and "Sauv-Blanc" appear in the same sentence?

2015 Grüner Veltliner Eiswein

12/750ml | AFN-281H

This combines two pickings, one in late October and the other after Christmas; good true varietal flavors and a correct but not stinging Eiswein acidity; it has the loessy "Freiheit" fruit (green bean) and is perfectly constituted and balanced

BRÜNDLMAYER



REGION / SUB REGION

Kamptal / Langenlois

VINEYARD AREA

80 hectares

ANNUAL PRODUCTION

33,000 cases

TOP SITES AND SOIL TYPES

Berg Vogelsang,
Loiser Berg,
Steinmassel
(primary rock);
Käferberg
(marine sediments on primary rock);
Heiligenstein
(Permian rock);
Lamm
(Loam on Permian rock)

GRAPE VARIETIES

38% Grüner Veltliner
19% Riesling,
43% Pinot Noir,
St. Laurent,
Chardonnay
and other varieties

FARMING PRACTICES

ISO 22000 Sustainable

I often talk about things like “class” and “timbre” when I write about Bründlmayer.

Class is indefinable. It bears upon a certain simplicity, but it isn't simple. It feels effortless but it isn't. It's richly satisfying but it's hard to say why. It may seem to have little to do with the reasons you buy this wine and not the other one, or with what you choose to drink, but at last you stumble upon it and find you can't resist any more. *Class* will give you pleasure deeper than joy or amusement.

Timbre is the way an instrument sounds, or more accurately, the way a given player makes it sound. The great players seem to release an almost fluid sonorousness from an instrument. It purrs for them. I often receive this image spontaneously when I taste Willi's wines. And I think if you put these things together you arrive at elegance, which is another wine-word you can't deconstruct. When you taste them, you'll find you respond from the richest aspect of your temperament, or else you'll barely respond at all. These wines won't put on a show for you, but they will deliver a calm grace and a genial loveliness.

There are a lot of wines, but there are a lot of *back-vintages*, which is exceedingly rare in Austria, and I join Willi in our quixotically doomed attempt to wean buyers away from latest-vintage mania.

I write about Willi, because we're contemporaries, but mostly it's his son Vincent who's the face of the estate for you. (And what a face...) Vincent affords me the deference appropriate to a Great-Friend-O-Dad's, not to mention a

big-market importer, but sooner or later this will all be his, and we'll see what that means. His own wine—the GV from Spiegel—is superb, and he has time to grow into the legacy.

It is stirring to observe the way this estate has soared the last 3-4 years, as if to issue the gentlest yet most confident reminders that they are indeed stellar. The “competition” between them and Gobelburg, in which Bründlmayer is an investor, is loving and mutually admiring, but at one point it began to seem as if Willi were being eclipsed, and his estate seems to have been spurred on, and is making the best wines I have ever seen in twenty years of tasting and representing them. It's an exciting, exhausting visit. There are a *lot* of wines, and a lot of demanding wines, not because they are “difficult,” but because they are majestic, searching and insanely complex.

REDS

2014 Pinot Noir *Dechant*

12/750ml | ABY-393

Stylish and herbal, as some PNs can be, but long and slinky and clinging with spice-boxy extract.

2012 St. Laurent *Ladner*

12/750ml | ABY-251

This is a superb Willi-red. The fervently attractive aroma leads to a warm and generous SL that stops just short of succulence, but enacts an affectionate complexity.

+

BUBBLES

Sekt Brut Rosé, N.V.

6/750ml | ABY-273

3/1500ml | ABY-273M

2013 base with '12 reserve wine; deg 12/2015, and will continue through this year (2016); a super-pretty fragrance, really delightful and fresh but not gushing; buoyant and delicate for a Blanc de Noirs, and it expands in the glass. A liquid salmon parfait.

Sekt Brut, N.V.

12/750ml | ABY-336

The base is 2012 with 2011 and 2013 included; deg July 2015; it is, again, a gracious elegant fizz, better than last year's and back in form as a sweet-straw and leesy wine with hints of salsify.

It bears mentioning that the Austrians are catching the bubble bug, and there are some "artisans" arriving on the scene making "interesting" (and sometimes excellent) fizz. But Bründlmayer remains the benchmark for elegance and class.

Sekt Extra Brut, N.V.

12/750ml | ABY-272

It's the same *assemblage* as the Brut but disgorged later (12/2015) and from somewhat riper base wines. It's succulent, lip-smacking, more vinous; toasted hazelnuts and rich chicken stock; savory and racy.

+

GROO-VAYS

2015 Grüner Veltliner Kamptaler Terrassen

12/750ml | ABY-376

Herbal and salty; mixes the yellow fruits of 2009 with the lentil and green of 2013; serene, classical, graceful. A fine vintage.

2015 Grüner Veltliner *Berg Vogelsang*

12/750ml | ABY-382

12/375ml | ABY-382H

A fine mosaic of mineral; dusty, a scree of little stones, green pepper, lime; not as pointed as usual, a more dispersed spiciness; sorely—again, an exceptional vintage.

GROO-VAYS (continued)

2015 Grüner Veltliner *Loiser Berg* +

12/750ml | ABY-389

It's the high altitude as much as the soil (paragneiss, mica-schist, amphibolite) that gives this Grand Cru its character, and makes this the most *Riesling-like* among Willi's Veltliners; this wine's full of lime and balsam; it's smoky and quite unlike any GV I've ever had; polished, glossy, intense and replete with sweet-green; creamy yet cool, like liquid marble; balsam, orchid, winter oolongs (Lishan)—all Riesling descriptors.

2014 Grüner Veltliner *Alte Reben* +

6/750ml | ABY-368

2012 Grüner Veltliner *Alte Reben* + +

6/750ml | ABY-287

In general the purpose here is to offer an entry into the top range at an affordable price. The wine has become rather more elegant since the *Spiegel* was removed for Vincent to make "his" wine. I like this '14 a lot, all the cigar-box and brassica and juicy "sweetness;" it's less peppery than it once was, but it's a seductive vintage of this wine, more delicious than "intense."

The '12 is a beast, with lots of torque and fire, all voodoo cajun mambo, a *court-bouillon* of lobster and peppers. If your resto is noisy then take this one.

2014 Grüner Veltliner "Vincent's" *Spiegel* +

6/750ml | ABY-377

Essentially a loess vineyard, but it doesn't bring a really "fruity" wine perhaps because the vineyard is quite old. This new-release '14 is full of wild Madagascar peppers, burned herbs; it's not as woody as usual—*yay!*—and shows lots of vetiver and juicy density, mint and soursop, and a surprising fruit on the mid palate. The finish is markedly herbal and peppery, shoot-smoky (the smell when they burn the vineyard cuttings); it's not a "big" wine but that may be deceptive, as it seems pretty coiled.

2014 Grüner Veltliner *Käferberg* (+) +

6/750ml | ABY-353

Do not serve this in a Zalto "universal" unless you really want to ruin it. *It needs a tulip*, and in that glass it becomes a juicy Puligny-like wine, creamy, sweet straw and a really complex mineral finish, emphasized with a not-displeasing botrytis.

2015 Grüner Veltliner *Lamm* (+ + +)

6/750ml | ABY-384

Perhaps the icon for GV in all of Austria, this potentially supernal wine is astonishing enough now, and I quake in my boots to imagine what it might become. It'll be bottled in September and we'll offer it in January, but start queuing up *now* for this is wine in the form of an English-Gothic cathedral, mighty, clear and detailed.

2009 Grüner Veltliner *Lamm Auslese* +

6/750ml | ABY-324

As the dry wine must be made with 100% clean fruit, any botrytis grapes are used to make whatever they wish to make, which is usually sweet.

Yet this wine is barely sweet! It has the balsamic fragrance of the (great) 1992 Lamm and the body of a dry wine—it's a sort of *Amarone* of GV but it isn't raisined and it has sensible alcohol. You know what? It's actually a FOOD-WINE, and you should **pair this thing**.

RIESLINGS

2015 Riesling Kamptaler Terrassen

12/750ml | ABY-385

Zingy, proper, if a little taut, as has been its nature the past few vintages. Tarragon, green tea and spearmint; quite the zippy beast.

2015 Riesling Steinmassel

12/750ml | ABY-386

2013 Riesling Steinmassel

12/750ml | ABY-312

The vineyard is like a petting zoo of minerals, and the wine is a Riesling for those who do not demand “fruity” flavors. Indeed the ‘15 tastes like actual caraway seeds were dissolved in it, with woodruff, dried marjoram, pine-resin, with minerality only emerging on the finish.

I’m stoked to see the ‘13 return! You get all the vineyard juju with the barest beginnings of tertiary development, and this is the one I’d buy if I were you.

2013 Riesling Zöbinger Heiligenstein

+ +

12/750ml | ABY-309

The ‘13 is the first stirrings of profundity; lemon balm, laurel, balsam and aloe; mineral just pours through in a soaking stream, leaving an exceedingly fine-grained salty residue; the exotic sexy richness is coiled in its corner, visible and waiting.

2015 Riesling Zöbinger Heiligenstein “Lyra”

+ +

6/750ml | ABY-390

A special cuvée from only lyre-trained vines, showing in Willi’s words that “You don’t need old vines to give great Riesling.” He adds, “The greater leaf surface gives increased photosynthesis, protects the grapes, and besides, it looks like the vine is throwing its arms up toward the sun.”

Comparing Lyra with Alte Reben is an abidingly fascinating exercise. In hot years Lyra often prevails, when A.R. gets too ripe. In most years it’s lovely to look at what I call “above ground flavors” (in Lyra) versus “below ground flavors” (in A.R.), but this doesn’t always mean the Lyra is *fruity*. Often it is quite herbal—this is, after all, Heiligenstein.

This ‘15 shows a superb, high-wire dance of sweet green and sweet peach, a real rapture of flavor. But not only that. It is a being of mature, intelligent gaiety, rapturous but not boisterous, incandescent but not sloppy.

To be offered in January 2017.

2014 Riesling Zöbinger Heiligenstein Alte Reben

+ +

6/750ml | ABY-361

Truly an amazing masterpiece, and the wine I most admired of anything I tasted in Austria.

Please remember how *toxic* many Austrians feel the 2014s to be. Growers start out on the defensive with any ‘14, and when a wine like this appears they are ready to gnash their teeth and wail. “If there is a great 2014 Riesling, I have it in my glass,” one of us said as this wine was tasted. No *“if”* about it, friend. This is a great Riesling.

Not “in spite of” 2014—because of it. Of course, there was no end of botrytis-ridden dross among ‘14 Rieslings, but that only heightens ones astonishment that a wine like this could be achieved. Bründlmayer has made any number of splendid wines over the past quarter century, but I’m here to testify: nothing should make them prouder than this very Riesling.

It’s an apotheosis of green depth, primordial; a forest-floor the sun barely ever touches. A wine that knows the dark because it can only *go* darkly. *Perfect* balance and deliciousness in a sapid green vein of pure mystery. The seeker finds his way to this, doesn’t understand it, and is happy. Sits with it. Imagines the old monks who created Chartreuse. Thinks of the meadows, wafting the breath of the warm afternoon, and the blender sitting while the dark comes on.

Beautiful, inscrutable, it is the wine of some new language.



AND A GIDDY CODA TO BRING US BACK TO EARTH

2015 Gelber Muskateller

12/750ml | ABY-391

Just bottled, so the elderflower is subdued, but the wine is fabulously lavish and juicy; opal basil and apparently catty—but you can't bank on this. Wait, wait.....

SCHLOSS GOBELSBURG



REGION / SUB REGION

Kamptal / Gobelsburg

VINEYARD AREA

49 hectares

ANNUAL PRODUCTION

20,000 cases

TOP SITES AND SOIL TYPES

Steinsetz
(*alpine gravel and löss*);
Gaisberg,
Renner
(*primary rock with mica slate*);
Grub
(*löss*);
Lamm
(*calcareous loam*);
Heiligenstein
(*gneiss desert sandstone
with volcanic particles*)

GRAPE VARIETIES

55% Grüner Veltliner
25% Riesling
7% Pinot Noir
7% St. Laurent
7% Zweigelt
2% Merlot

FARMING PRACTICES

ISO 22000 Sustainable

I can't write this into a little capsule. It won't let itself be written that way. So again I beg your patience, and ask for 2-3 minutes to tell you a story I know you should hear.

Peter Schleimer and I were having dinner one night, and we ordered Gobelsburg's 2005 Grüner Veltliner "Tradition," and it was lovely, and got us talking.

Peter loves it too, as do many of his colleagues at VINARIA (the excellent wine magazine he heads up), and so we wondered why the idea hadn't seemed to spread to other estates. A few days later Johannes Hirsch was thinking out loud, wondering what it might be like to return to the old cellar instead of the brand-new one he built a few years ago, and there's a general sense somewhere between curiosity and yearning about the old ways—or the Old Ways—but best I can tell "Michi" Moosbrugger's the only man to actually make a wine along those lines. (Except of course for Nikolaihof, all of whose wines are this way.)

It's important to say the *Tradition* bottling is neither a pastiche nor even really a tribute. It arises from a wish to enter the spirit of the vintners of 100 years ago, before the possibilities of technology created choices they couldn't have imagined. What was their relationship to their land, to their grapes? And how did they conceive of wine?

"The prime motivator for these thoughts arose during the tasting of the old wines in the estate's cellar," Michi begins. Though this was done in order to determine what these old wines might be worth, the experience set a

range of thoughts in motion. "Afterward I grew curious about the winemaking practices of the '50s and '60s, and spoke with Father Bertrand as well as the cellar-master of those days. I felt that to understand those practices would help me better to understand what we're doing today." "I began to form the theory that, as more technological possibilities existed and were used, the wines became more uniform. The opposite possibility was also to be considered; less technology meant more variable wines. But these were just my starting-out hypotheses, and I'm not at all certain absolute answers are to be found. I think in order to begin to understand the wines of the pre-technological era, you have to try and understand the ideas behind them.

"The purpose in those days was to "school" the wines, what the French still call *elevage*, to raise the wines, or bring them up. It thus followed that for each wine there was an Ideal, and the job of the cellar-master was to realize these Ideals in the pure Platonic sense. Only when the Ideal is reached is the wine ready to be appreciated and sold. Naturally there was no recipe, but there was a sense of finding the proper moment in time and in the wine's natural oxidation, and these things were determined empirically and by feel. It's a highly dynamic system, with differences from cask to cask, vintage to vintage, grape to grape. Those people presumed that wine had to develop and expand in oxygen, entirely contrary to what we think today, that we have to protect it from oxygen at all costs."

But what is this Ideal? And is it some-



thing a *priori*, or is it of necessity limited by the contingencies of possibility? In order to go deeper into these questions, Michi set about to make a wine as it would have been made between the end of the Franco-Prussian war and the start of World War 1. The results are offered below.

It's quite different from drinking the normal GrüVe *Renner*—the Tradition comes from that vineyard. I adore the Renner; it's one of my favorite GrüVes, but in its modern way it seems to stride right at you, outstretched hand, big smile, saying "I'm having a great day; let me tell you why!"

But drinking the Tradition is like walking in your front door, and your beloved is listening to music, and she looks at you and you see she's been crying. She doesn't have to say a word. But something has happened, and it saturates the room, and then her, and then you.

There's a diligence and a curiosity about Michi that I admire very much. His wines don't just happen. He has a guiding idea for all of them, and his approach is deeply craftsmanlike. He also seems to think in what I might call Monk-time (and I don't mean Thelonious, though that's in the mix also) in that his vision includes a tactile connection to the past and future, and he's not making "items" to obtain *this* score *this* year.

His "contemporary" wines are hued a little differently than those of Bründlmayer, the style to which he's most closely related. Both families of wines are detailed and pixilated, but Willi's are more silvery and Michi's are more color-saturated, and specifically more *green*. They radiate clarity, candor and vitality, and they'll flirt with you a little. The old-school wines—what I'd call the *ancient* wines—are not entirely under the control of their host. They began more redolent and studiously

woody, but they've probed deeper layers of late, and I have the sense they are gradually unlocking mysteries so obscure that none of us knew they were there.

All of this is to say that I am *moved* by the sight of a serious conscientious man who is making the world more beautiful. It is always stirring to witness such care. And of course, the ordinary concerns of the world are duly dispatched, and we spend time talking about numbers and labels and the needs of the day. But I wonder, after I leave, what goes through Michi's mind about the wines. He tastes them all along with us. I taste and say what I have to say. I always drive away in a kind of thrill, and a little guilty; I alight upon a year's work like a migrating bird, I sit on my branch and sing and preen and then I fly off again. He puts the bottles back in the fridge, he knows I loved them (I couldn't hide it even if I wanted to), and there it was: his work.

BUBBLES

Brut Reserve

12/750ml | AZZ-070

The assemblage has changed to 50% GV and 25% each Riesling and Pinot Noir. I don't know if this is permanent, but I suspect not. Look for the 12/2015 disgorgement, which is now on the label. The wine is typically herbal, refined, angular and on the money.

Brut Blanc de Blancs

12/750ml | AZZ-315

A new cuvée, disgorged the day before I tasted it, and so I can only note serious potential, but will defer details.

2004 Brut "R.D."

12/750ml | AZZ-291

+ +

This is amazing; even better than the 2001—actually quite a lot better. Deg 7/2015 the wine is outstanding and will wreak havoc pretty much wherever and however you use it, not to mention buttressing your cred—so don't miss it. It has all the 2004 wet forest leafy flavors, with lime and woodruff; it's less "antique" in flavor than the '01 was; it's fresh and thready, complex and salty, crunchy yet with a deep green verbena sweetness. Just when I thought my mind was anchored, there it went bogging again.

REDS

2013 Zweigelt Schlosskellerei Gobelsburg

12/750ml | AZZ-296

This is the negoç label, and this wine is in essence the red equivalent of the GV y'all love so much. It's cool, dusty, with super lissome fruit, and is basically everything you'd hope for—yet it's got some grip and is not *merely* fruity.

2013 Pinot Noir Reserve

12/750ml | AZZ-309

+

Last year's trio of '12s was an achievement such as one couldn't dare have hoped for as recently as ten years ago. Hell, *five*. I thought it had to be a one-time harmonic convergence, and had tempered expectations for the lighter '13s.

They *are* lighter, but this has a fetching aroma, quite *cool*, quite Morey S.D., and the palate follows lovely and charming and with a little tease of asperity; you lose your heart to a wine like this, so lacy and tender yet so firm and determined. I do, at any rate, but I adore the virtues of lightness as long as the wine has The Goods.

2013 St. Laurent Reserve

12/750ml | AZZ-310

Put it this way—the extra fruit is not unwelcome. Classy and more generous, juicy and seductive. The PN you sip and consider; this you slurp and repeat.

2013 Zweigelt Reserve

12/750ml | AZZ-308

+

Can anything possibly be more *delicious* than this?? Perhaps the finest, tastiest example of this misunderstood variety; a creamy texture, amazingly refined fruit, and serenely gorgeous without being cloying or ingratiating.

“GROONERS”

2015 Grüner Veltliner Schlosskellerei Gobelsburg +

12/750ml | AZZ-297

In a vintage as good as 2015 every wine punches above its weight, and even this GV stands easily among the *excellent* domain wines I offer elsewhere. It's real loessy, lentils and tapioca; complex but rich and stylish; herbal, boxwood and legume, beans and butter and dill and a satisfying richness of texture. Maybe the best vintage ever?

2015 Grüner Veltliner Langenlois +

12/750ml | AZZ-311

I was wary. Yet another wine? Sure, I understand this is a “village” wine to lead in to the Crus coming up, and I appreciate how Michi didn't want to jump from the negoç wine directly to *Steinsetz*. But whew, we got a lot of skus as it is....

The first sip demolished my concerns. It contains young-vines juice from the sites *Redling, Thal, Lamm (!), Renner and Grub*, which makes those wines even better. It shows superb focus in an herbal direction; hyssop and spearmint, leading into a spicy finish that leaves a tingle behind. Mid-palate is tense and vigorous, with “physio” sweetness.

2015 Grüner Veltliner Steinsetz + +

12/750ml | AZZ-303

There is also the matter of whether the price can be maintained for a single-vineyard wine that improves from year to year, and is now, no joke, about 50% better than it was up to 2010.

And *this* wine? Wow, an entirely euphoric aroma leads into the most glorious vintage ever of this; more lush and “sweet” than usual though still with its lemon-balm, mint and radish and balsam; though it remains a cressy GV it's a lot more spiffy these days, and along with the upcoming Renner it offers *ridiculous* value. For the time being....

2015 Grüner Veltliner Renner + + +

6/750ml | AZZ-304

When I tasted it I almost violently did not want to write a tasting note. It is a perfect vintage of this great, great Cru, and that's all that needs to be said.

The vineyard lies at the foot of the Gaisberg, on eroded gneiss with a lot of paragneiss, mica and amphibolite, all under a blanket of loess. Its wines are as good as the *Lamm*, which is a warmer site giving wines of greater amplitude and stature. Yet the quality of flavor and complexity of nuance are incomparable from Renner, and I had it next to the Lamm just to make sure I wasn't being diddled by my subjective preference for minerality.

2015 Grüner Veltliner Lamm (+) + +

6/750ml | AZZ-305

Lamm as a rule is buckwheat-y, rusky, savory but not thick, like a vegetable-veal stock with barley, yet oddly also like lamb itself. (“Lamm” doesn't mean lamb, but is rather a dialect word for “loam.”) It is a great wine though virtually without fruit per se. Its poise of gloss and power, intensity and outline, mass and transparency are emblems of the paradox without which no wine is truly great.

The aroma is sublime here, and the wine will be clearly and definitely Great. The palate is salty and amazingly detailed for all its power—as usual. Look, if *Lamm, Gobelsburg, 2015* haven't already convinced you this is a must-purchase, then you haven't been listening or I'm shitty at what I do.

2014 Grüner Veltliner “Tradition” (+) +

6/750ml | AZZ-312

The Renner GV, from which this wine is made, was the best GV I tasted from 2014, so I approached this wine with great hope.

The aromas are fascinating and almost inscrutable. There's the sweet mealiness from the vinification, but there seems also to be some botrytis—or its echo—that's more pronounced than it was in the “normal” Renner last year. Especially on the palate. And yet the finish (always the truest truth of a wine) is intricate and searching and surprisingly peppery, verbena-like. The wine isn't yet resolved, but the discussion among its aspects is itself compelling.

RIESLINGS

2015 Riesling Schlosskellerei Gobelsburg

12/750ml | AZZ-295

A hello! aroma, linden and woodruff at first; a fine, snappy Riesling, grainy and sweetly taut; a pitted fruit nuance dances with shade-grown Sencha; this is lively energetic tasty Riesling.

2015 Riesling Zöbing

12/750ml | AZZ-313

Again, a village-wine as a bridge from the negoç wine to the Crus. There's a spring-onion sweetness; intricate and sapid green and savory; exotic saltiness and a refined minty finale.

2015 Riesling Gaisberg

6/750ml | AZZ-306

Gaisberg to me is always a moonlight wine, and this one is cool, gauzy, sheer, ethereal and yet with a clearly visible dialogue (maybe even a dialectic) among minerals and blueberries; surpassingly refined and filigree, a Riesling-lover's wine, yet for all its high frequencies it is *not* delicate

2015 Riesling Heiligenstein

6/750ml | AZZ-307

As always, smokier, saltier and with another kind of texture, less crystalline than raw-silken; this vintage seems to emphasize the top notes and mineral more than the Wicca-potion, yet the aroma is entirely erogenous, a feather-stroke of almost unbearable complexity; cicada-hiss, anise-hyssop and black cherry in an infinitely precise and limitless gesture of measured power.

2010 Riesling Heiligenstein

6/750ml | AZZ-174

Michi wants to offer a couple wines with bottle-age, and this is a wonderfully curious way to begin. 2010, if you don't remember, was a ripe, powerful vintage with markedly high acidity, and this wine is developing typically; the structure is dramatic and the fruit is already completely tertiary. It's sturdy, with excellent length, and probably ready to drink. Paradoxically I am finding that extreme high-acid vintages actually should be drunk young, because wine does not really "age on its acidity." *Acidity* ages on itself, which is to say it is frozen-in-place, and really doesn't address the above-ground fruit at all.

2014 Riesling "Tradition"

6/750ml | AZZ-314

Made as always from Gaisberg old-vines, and in 2014 that wine had far more botrytis than I'm comfortable with. This wine has it also. **It is highly atypical, so do not expect it to taste as it "usually" does**, and if you're averse to botrytis in dry Rieslings then you won't be happy here.

HIEDLER



REGION / SUB REGION

Kamptal / Langenlois

VINEYARD AREA

28 hectares

ANNUAL PRODUCTION

16,500 cases

TOP SITES AND SOIL TYPES

Thal
(sandy löss and loam) ;
Kittmannsberg,
Spiegel
(löss) ;
Steinhaus
(gneiss with amphibolite) ;
Heiligenstein,
Gaisberg
(sandy weathered soils)

GRAPE VARIETIES

63% Grüner Veltliner
15% Riesling
6% Chardonnay
6% Weissburgunder,
Pinot Blanc
2% Sauvignon Blanc
8% Zweigelt,
Blauburgunder,
St. Laurent,
Sangiovese

At one point, having tasted (yet) another splendid collection of Rieslings, I looked deep into Ludwig Hiedler's eyes and said "Isn't it time to do away with this fiction that you're *not a Riesling-man*, since you often seem to make frisking amazing Rieslings?"

Yet I understand. Ludwig likes voluminous wine, and this itch is scratched with GV and Weissburgunder more than it is with Riesling. But the queen of grapes plays against his preferences, often with giddy results, and this has never been truer than in 2015. In some ways this is a perfect Hiedler vintage because it *does* offer capaciousness and power, yet it also has very little botrytis and it seldom runs overripe.

Another thing is changing. Both of Hiedlers' sons are adults now, and appear to be interested in the estate, which means they infuse their energies into the environment at the same time as Dad accesses the rather grave spirit that comes to gentlemen who suddenly find themselves more vulnerable and introspective than they (we) used to be. The consolation is that we find our friendships deepening in the sweetest ways, as though we'd received some license to be tender at last.

It wouldn't be right to suggest it's anything-goes at Hiedler; in fact the wines and the man are entirely disciplined within the context in which he prefers to operate. Which is different than the others. And when you hear about it you might expect the wines to be much more untamed and atavistic than in fact they are. In fact what's striking here is how clear, refined and focused they are, while em-

phasizing a round rich vinosity in place of chiseled primary fruit. (It also suggests we are sometimes perhaps too forgiving of the flaws in some "natural" wines, as Hiedler's are as "natural" as they come, and they are not flawed...)

At some point with his wine in my glass I had a flickering thought that this was precisely the kind of wine I most loved to drink, and that most people ought to love to drink; vivid and forthright, frisky and yet with substance, solid and strong yet still drinkable. And not so digitally detailed that you feel you have to study its every nuance with each and every sip. There is something incredibly hale about Hiedler's wines. They seem to glow with health and vitality.

The first organic experiments are happening, in the sites Thal and Kittmannsberg. And for the past several years now Ludwig has done only spontaneous fermentations without enzymes or even SO², and without temperature control. Part of this is Ludwig's innate restlessness, and another part is his desire to eschew the established orthodoxies.

"I am a restless spirit," said Ludwig Hiedler; "I always want another angle to improve the wines." Hiedler likes extract most of all. "It's the single most important facet of wine," he says. "That's why I don't believe in the whole-cluster pressing, because you lose too much extract." "Plus," he added with a merry gleam, "I like to be different from the others!"

2015 Grüner Veltliner “Loess”

12/750ml | AHL-214

This is of an entirely other order than was the somewhat snippy 2014; pretty, transparent, gracious, elegant, even aristocratic. Warmly satisfying and giving.

2015 Grüner Veltliner *Thal*

12/750ml | AHL-217

GV at its closest to Viognier or Semillon. This '15 has a round structure that wraps around you; it's loessier than usual, but shows the typical fire-roasted pepper flavors; a very good vintage of this big juicy wine.

2014 Grüner Veltliner *Kittmannsberg*

12/750ml | AHL-208

The artist formerly known as “Novemberlese,” and then as simply “November,” both of which have been used by other growers also, and so it reverts back to its actual site name. It has always been the blue-eyed child in a family of brown-eyes, a kind of neo-classical firm dignified wine, and this '14 is another iron monument to loess; a puff-pastry sweetness, like phyllo dough you left in the oven twenty seconds too long; boxwood and iris, sorrel and summer savory, salt and chile threads; earnest and less obdurate than in a “normal” year, but still firm and strong, like Delphic columns coated in cream. The actual soil is limestonebearing loamy sandy silt.

2014 Grüner Veltliner *Schenkenbichl*

12/750ml | AHL-218

First offering. Ludwig says it's “pure gneiss” but the standard reference says otherwise – amphibolite with “siliceous material”—and in any case these are the first vintages where this vineyard's wine is being bottled by itself. The 2015 is massive and unready, but the '14, which I offer proudly, is a wonderful GV, full of ore and vivid mineral. Someone said “Winter pear” and I said lemon rind, micro greens, sorrel, another pivot-point from '15, less hedonic but no less loaded.

2014 Grüner Veltliner “Maximum”

6/750ml | AHL-219

First offering, and a lovely vintage for this—better than the '13! 100% malo here; alc in balance with 13.5%. Sweetly green, like a sorrel and wintergreen ice cream; this wine rings a big deep bell; the finish is complex and brilliant; a perfect *Hiedler* wine, and another example of the paradox: his top wines are often best in the (so-called) “weaker” vintages.

2007 Grüner Veltliner “Familienreserve”

6/750ml | AHL-216

New release. This is Ludwig's equivalent to Nikolaihof's *Vinothek* wines; he bottled it in September 2015; it was aged on its gross and fine lees with regular *battonage*. This is a search party walking through dark trails; an interior wine, quiet and meditative, Gregorian, passionately introverted, and almost unbearably complex. It tells a dark story, not sad, only serious and grave, yet the finish turns lovely again, with ripples of smoke and mineral.

Decant it, don't serve it too cold, use it as you would a Jura wine though it isn't *sous voile*, and feel how deeply it is imbued. You will find a flavor deeper than *flavors*.

2014 Weissburgunder “Maximum”

6/750ml | AHL-224

In the olden days, later than the Punic Wars but before you reached puberty, this was one of the world's greatest Pinot Blancs, as far as the grape could be taken, resplendent, *strong*, ageworthy, and tasting like no other PB in the world. Then in the climate-change era it succumbed to alcoholic excess more often than not. Ludwig still loved it – he's a hot-blooded guy—but I shrank from its scorching intensity. ***This, though, is like the old days*** when the wine was at its startling best. 13.%% alc, so it's ripe but not overripe, with old-vines density and sweet, sweet straw; it recalls the '99 to me; succulent yet salty and savory, and with marked length. Brown butter, roasted chestnuts, langoustines, and the sideways influence of the new acacia cask in which it was aged.

Again, you wanna be original? To have what no one else has, do what no one else does? This wine will make you an *alpha* among somms, you'll be bold and proud, and oh...your guests will flip.



2015 Riesling “Urgestein”

12/750ml | AHL-220

+

Well howdy! Wild plum, balsam and sorrel and meyer-lemons and verbena; oh man, an *exciting* vintage of this, really animated and playful, with a shimmering finish mostly of spicy-minty top-notes. The empty glass smells uncannily like a Brauneberger Juffer, but what precedes that is like *no other Riesling you will ever taste*, at an **affordable price**.

2015 Riesling Steinhaus

12/750ml | AHL-221

++

My subjective fave among Ludwig’s Rieslings. The site is steep with myriad little terraces, amphibolite and gneiss higher up, loess lower down, giving a Riesling for people who love Scheurebe, or you might say it’s Riesling having *birthday sex*. For me this is a **not-to-be-missed** wine in this offering because it gives you all its warm-hearted kinky generosity for a reasonable price. Fragrances are refined, lime and verbena, but the palate is explosive, completely delicious and almost shatteringly complex; hyperactive interplay of herbs, ripe citrus, exotic fruit all blasted together in a Hadron-collider buzz of life-force, a twitching spazzy dance of herbal ripeness.

No one—*no damn one* on earth could have made a Riesling like this. Give it up for individuality! And take a deep bow Mr. Hiedler.

2015 Riesling Gaisberg

6/750ml | AHL-222

(+) +

This is bigger and more regal, more queenly than Steinhaus; it’s more intense and certainly more “Grand,”—and grand it is; white tea, white lilacs, peach, even coconut and lychee; great power and gooseflesh-tingly minty intensity—it accents the mint, in fact.

2015 Riesling Heiligenstein

6/750ml | AHL-223

++

It’s like music returns to the world. Or like many hands tossing flavor into the pot, and no one cook has the secret. She’s in love, she wants to ladle her love into the food, she has to. She is urged to; she has to breathe this love with every gesture. Next thing you know the food is a miracle. Incidentally, the wine is long and gorgeous and wonderful. Lest we forget....

HIRSCH



REGION / SUB REGION

Kamptal / Kammern

VINEYARD AREA

31 hectares

ANNUAL PRODUCTION

12,500 cases

TOP SITES AND SOIL TYPES

Kammerner Lamm,
Zöbinger Gaisberg,
Zöbinger Heiligenstein
*(löss, eroded mica slate topped
with brown soil, eroded primary
rock with desert sands and
volcanic particles)*

GRAPE VARIETIES

65% Grüner Veltliner
35% Riesling

FARMING PRACTICES

Respekt certified Biodynamic

This was the visit from which I emerged as stoked as I could possibly be. It might be fatuous to pronounce this a “comeback” collection for Hirsch, but it was surely the most remarkably fine array in the past bunch of years, and suggests the estate will rejoin the elite in the Kamptal. Maybe it was the generally hale nature of the 2015s, but ‘Hannes not only showed us cask samples of his Grand Crus—which he said he wouldn’t do any more—but they were extremely good and not unready. I will list them here, but please understand they won’t be available until January 2017. In the interim are the Crus from 2014, a sterling series of wines for which no apology needs to be made.

In the top range of Kamptal producers, Hirsch is the moving target. The others are all pretty much settled in to their identities, even (or especially) Hiedler the outlier. Hirsch is the shape-shifter, and I think this arises from an aspect of his temperament whereby he refuses all rote and routine, and everything is challenged all the time.

If you add the various issues pertaining to his conversion to bio-dynamism over the last six years, you get an estate where the wines really do almost “make themselves.”

The most dramatic examples of this were the two extraordinary vintages of single-vineyard Riesling that wouldn’t ferment dry, and which were bottled as they were.

These ’07s and ’08s are every bit the masterpieces I said they were—I have them in my cellar and they move me to my depths each time. Their celestial

qualities, and Johannes’ courage in letting them be, are why he was my winery of the vintage two years running. And yet opinions differed. My former colleague Kevin Pike believed their existence sent a mixed message, (I don’t know whether he actually liked the wines.) and created a discontinuity of identity that damaged the estate commercially. I’m such an idealist, I cannot fathom how wines as beautiful as those wines were could possibly damage anything. All they did was make my heart soar. Yet if people expect “a certain type of wine” from Austria, they must have it or they become bemused. In any case, the wines have since been predictably dry.

But Hirsch seems to eschew predictability almost as a statement of principle. His wines are lower in alcohol than other grower’s wines, possibly because bio-dynamically grown grapes are often physiologically ripe with less potential alcohol than conventional grapes. But also because ‘Hannes likes them that way. This means that a certain alcoholic torque may be noticeably absent, even from his “big” wines. He also likes to leave them on their lees well into the following year. I suspect there’s a sweet spot where lees and fruit combine perfectly, and if you miss it then your wine loses fruit which may or may not be recovered. “Losing fruit” isn’t a categorical mishap, of course, but leesy wines are less direct.

2015 Grüner Veltliner

12/750ml | AWH-145

+

The plus is for sheer class, and is the second year this wine has shone with such brightness. And this with all of 11.5% alc, which means you can gulp it with impunity. Maybe I should change my name to "Impunity," so that everyone will come over and drink with me. The wine has a wonderful fragrance, even a complex fragrance of vetiver and terroir; it's firm, linear, spicy, but there's nothing really overt here; all the quality is inferred, the way a poem is inferred by its first line. Overall it's a silvery wine, birch-smoky.

2015 Grüner Veltliner Kammern

12/750ml | AWH-146

This replaces what used to be called "Heiligenstein," which was confusing because there is also a *Grosslage* with that name. Our newly named fella is the bleed-off from Lamm, Grub and Renner, and this is among the best iterations of this wine ever. Exceptionally salty and with lots of the "flowering-fields" thing GV can show.

2015 Grüner Veltliner Renner

12/750ml | AWH-147

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Now we're talking. Wonderful aroma, pure vetiver; as primordial as spring-water, rich and densely textured, a lovely complex wine that's almost fluffy; a swirl of infinitely fine pieces of flavor, all seen from the corner of your palate's eye, and snuggling beneath a virtually tactile blanket of texture and mineral richness.

2015 Grüner Veltliner Lamm

12/750ml | AWH-149

(+) ++

Though it was a wine-in-development, it's clearly a potential masterpiece; a beaded curtain of herbs leads to rusks and vetiver; infinite strength and articulation without the thing we usually call "power," because wines like this assert nothing but communicate everything. Nuances of star-fruit and veal stock lead into a youthfully stern finish.

2014 Grüner Veltliner Lamm

12/750ml | AWH-142

+

Another instance where tasting the '14s—the good ones—increased my respect and regard for them in contrast to the bigger-better-easier '15s. This is a silky, taut strong wine. It's still finding its way to expressing *Lamm* (and even GV for that matter), but it's seriously good.

2015 Riesling Zöbing

12/750ml | AWH-150

(+)

The structure is what I call "horizontal," but if you accept a wine that doesn't *jab* at you, this has regions of herbs, smoke and irises, and a suggestive and fine, smoky finish.

2015 Riesling Heiligenstein

12/750ml | AWH-151

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2014 Riesling Heiligenstein

12/750ml | AWH-143

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The '15 is ecstatic and the '14 is quietly profound. I love them both and each for its own reasons, and I will own them both and use them for disparate purposes. The '15, remember, won't be offered until January 2017, but you won't be sad to have to put up with '14 while you wait. '15 is a clamor of gray and green; smoky, candle-wicky, chamomile and lavishly balsam; it taps into some ur-current of Riesling and is an astonishing wine.

The '14 is a diligent, articulate and perfect Riesling, accenting its green flavors; it's thready and whispery and gentle. I completely love and adore it, this careful masterpiece for careful palates attached to souls who know the bliss of silence and solitude.

2014 Riesling Gaisberg

12/750ml | AWH-152

+

Juicy texture and lots of wild blueberry flavor, it's straightforward compared to Heiligenstein but there's every manner of puzzle and intrigue off to the side. *These are stunning 2014 Rieslings*, and members of a VERY small family of such wines.

WACHAU

I think my favorite thing of all about the Wachau is the idyllic Landhaus Bacher in Mautern, where I like to stay when I'm there. You feel very cared-for.

The rooms are dear without being either stultifyingly luxurious or too adorably precious. The restaurant is just a perfect joy; lovely, radiant food, nothing show-offy, just purity, vitality. The amazing Johanna, who never seems to sleep, sets the tone for utterly exquisite service, and is somehow there the next morning to coax you into reluctant consciousness with her almost unbearable gaiety.

The restaurant's wine list is an Aladdin's cave of treasures from the Wachau and its neighbors. And yet, as I perused it night after night I found myself more drawn to the wines of the Kamptal and Kremstal, which simply offered more quality-per-Dollar than the magnificently unreasonable Wachau. Why magnificent? Because the region is stupendously beautiful and the best wines are the pinnacles of Austrian wines. Why unreasonable? Because there's too much business chasing too little truly great wine. The Wachau is a wonderful place to be a tourist, a gourmand, a wine-geek, but it's an awkward place to do business.

The greatest Wachau wine will distinguish itself from its neighbors in the Kamptal or Kremstal the way great Côte de Nuits does from Côte de Beaune; all things being equal, Wachau wines are simply weightier. The best of them, though, are distressingly scarce, and prone to be pricey, especially at lesser levels of ripeness. The great wines are worth whatever one can afford to pay for them, but the smaller wines often strike me as dubious values. And one must be quite selective. There's a large disparity between a few superb properties and the general run of rather ordinary vintners who seem content to coast in the slipstream of the region's renown.

A subversive thought came to me. Since the problem with most Federspiels are that they're too flaccid and taste incomplete, and the concomitant problem with many Smaragds is that they're annoyingly overripe and brutishly heavy, *why separate them into two unsatisfactory categories*, but instead, why not just make **one** wine of say 13% alc instead of one with 12% and the other with 14.5%? You could average the price, and if you absolutely had to, you could make a few

body-builder types just to appease your throbbing manhood. I say this semi-facetiously, but it's actually not a bad idea. Perhaps it could be applied only to the top Crus, and the lesser sites can go on making the lesser wines they're making now.

Not that any of this could ever happen, but I'm just the idiot to propose it! We can attack it just as soon as we've rid the world of "DAC."

The Danube cuts a gorge through a range of hills that can truly be called rugged. Vineyards are everywhere the sun shines, along valley floors on loamy sand soils, gradually sloping upward over löss deposits and finally climbing steep horizontal terraces of Urgestein once again, the primary rock soil containing gneiss, schist and granite, often ferrous (which may account for the "ore" thing I often use in tasting notes).

ALZINGER



REGION / SUB REGION

Wachau / Unterloiben

VINEYARD AREA

10 hectares

ANNUAL PRODUCTION

6,250 cases

TOP SITES AND SOIL TYPES

Mühlpoint
(*clay mixed with gneiss*);
Liebenberg
(*mica schist*);
Hollerin
(*gneiss mixed with löss and loam*);
Loibenberg,
Steinertal
(*weathered gneiss*)

GRAPE VARIETIES

55% Grüner Veltliner
45% Riesling

I'm hearing that Wachau wines are in retreat from the alcoholic (and botrytis) excesses of the last decade, and I would like that to be true. Because then the wines would be more like Alzinger's.

I suspect that if you wait long enough, things take the shapes they're meant to take. In my early days with Austrian wines I imported Hirtzberger and E.X. Pichler (both of whom were enticed away from me by an opportunistic competitor. It ended badly.) and with great respect to both of these outstanding producers, I don't miss them. I think that among the greats of the Wachau there are a few estates whose wines we don't merely admire, we love them. And among those, I have half of them, and that's fine by me.

I see Alzinger as spirit-kin to people such as Dönnhoff and Raveneau, wines that are endlessly complex and mysterious but seldom explicit. You'd almost prefer to describe them with music rather than words. It has to do with texture, but not texture alone. It enacts a quality of evanescence, as though some divinity was floating in the air around you, which laughed and gleamed when you tried to grasp it. I have to wrench myself out of reveries to "describe" the wines. It's why my language gets so silly.

Leo came over to visit us (and many of you) in January of 2015 which he didn't need to do. We receive an allocation from him, we take it all and sell it all, and there isn't by any means enough. So he needn't visit in order to "grow" his business; this incredibly sweet guy came over because he wanted to meet you, wanted to thank you, wanted to know the market and how his

wines were used. If you want to even begin to understand the ethereal kindliness that inhabits these wines, start by considering the man. He did say the vintage had been a struggle, and that he'd made only one Smaragd, but that he was increasingly happy with what he did make, and besides, after so many ripe years in a row, why be irked when the new one was lighter? Yes, true.

But as always these are another kind of great wine, not the kind that pins you to the chair, nor the kind that pick you up and hurl you around, nor the kind that get in your face saying Now see here! while you succumb to their greatness. These wines are the purest kind of love and solace, powerfully expressive yet mostly gentle wines, the kind that you might believe can release oxytocin into your body, they deliver such affirming calm. I drank a bottle of E.X. Pichler's 2002 Steinertal Riesling one night, and it was as marvelous as I expected it to be. I've long admired the glossy power of those wines at their best. Yet when I looked at the words I was using to discuss it—it was showing well, it performed beautifully—I realize I felt like I was an audience for the wine, that I was separate from it in some crucial way. Perhaps this has everything to do with me, and it's by no means a slam on a highly laudable wine, but when I drink Alzinger's wine I have no such feeling. With them I feel included, roused, affectionate; I feel a thing akin to love.

The two top sites are among the greatest Grand Crus of the Wachau, and they are polar opposites in style.

The **LOIBENBERG** is as mighty in the glass as it looks on the huge terraced hillside, and yet for a powerwine it isn't at all

brutish. The wines, whether Riesling or GrüVe, are tropical and exotic, yet they manage an uncanny light-footedness and refinement. I suspect a synesthese would taste yellows and oranges in the wines. Loibenberg is a summer day with peaches ripening on the tree, but it's breezy and fresh, not sultry and thick.

STEINERTAL is the coolest among the Loiben Crus, both actually and metaphorically. It's small and hidden back—5.5 hect-

ares, divided in three sections, with only four proprietors I know of (one of whom has Muskateller planted; someone get me that to taste), of whom Alzinger owns the largest share. It's more or less the first terraces you see if you're driving in from the east and the Kremstal; indeed it's sheltered by the craggy cliff of the Pfaffenberg. Steinertal makes marked wine, "green" flavors, as estoteric as Loibenberg but in another register of nuances; green teas, herbs,

limes, heirloom apples, often a naked minerality. It seems predestined for Riesling, and even Alzinger's splendid GrüVe can be mistaken for Riesling (at least until you taste the actual Riesling alongside). You could construct a fanciful vision of Steinertal taking a trip to the Saar and returning with the thought "I want to make wines like those wines."

2015 Grüner Veltliner *Frauenweingarten* Federspiel

12/750ml | ALA-153

Subtle and delicate; green beans and broccolini; a sneaky sideways length; salty mid palate with some marjoram resinousness; classy but not overt or upfront, though it does show the classical Austrian *endless* finish. (Really, pay attention; it seems to leave and then returns and clings to your palate for 5-10 minutes or longer.)

2015 Grüner Veltliner *Mühlpoint* Federspiel

12/750ml | ALA-154

Really spicy now, and with more warmth, but still this *cordial* greeting, this easy grace; neither the attack of a cool year nor the enveloping generosity of a hot one, but some effortless accord between them. As if an idea, fulfilled, a reconciling, and while it seems to take place quietly, it clings and clings.

2015 Grüner Veltliner *Mühlpoint* Smaragd

6/750ml | ALA-155

A big jump from the Federspiel—*big*. Vetiver, smoke, ore, a lot more "dark" minerality, both "sweeter" and more stern, as if the kindness of loess met the strictness of urgestein. In any case it's more solid, with a grown-up poise and sobriety

+ +

2015 Grüner Veltliner *Loibenberg* Smaragd

6/750ml | ALA-156

It has the smell of a great wine and the palate-force also, but here I remembered 2006, as this starts to yell a bit in the finish. Probably "about 14% alcohol; it's our ripest wine this year." No doubt an important wine, and we'll see after bottling whether it's also a balanced one.

(+) +

2015 Grüner Veltliner *Steinertal* Smaragd

6/750ml | ALA-157

Fantastic aroma! An utter classic vintage of this, a numinous dialogue between its herbal, racy and limey elements and its physio-sweetness, between the citric pinch and a creamy mid-palate richness. Leo says it's like a 2013-2012 hybrid—makes sense.

+ +

2015 Dürnsteiner Riesling Federspiel

12/750ml | ALA-159

Angular structure in a ripe format; more herbal, lime, ore, iris and sorrel. Early Spring, only a surmise of prettiness, sharp and cressy as you sit by the still frigid stream, and look at all this new green miracle.

+

2015 Dürnsteiner Riesling Smaragd

12/750ml | ALA-160

New! And a perfect mid-weight Riesling, like the baby of the royal family. Lime, verbena, true aloe-vera, this wine is wholly and entirely good—which of course is a valid form of greatness.

+ +



2015 Riesling *Liebenberg Smaragd*

++

6/750ml | ALA-161

Another vineyard whose wine keeps improving as the vines get older. This has so much vigor, juiciness; lemon ginger radish... it bites so good! Finish of thyme, allspice and succulence.

2015 Riesling *Hollerin Smaragd*

+

6/750ml | ALA-162

It's like a peach soufflé with an herb sauce, greener than usual for this charmer. A disciplined hedonism here, less tantric than the last two Smaragds but more curvaceous; lime-blossom and (sorry, again) verbena. A beautiful "cool" Hollerin, not so peachy or cox-orange, more lemon balm.

2015 Riesling *Höhreck Smaragd*

+++

6/750ml | ALA-163

The greatest young wine I tasted this year, it is the terminus of every great facet of Wachau Riesling, the herbs from this, the peaches and plums from that, the mangoes from another, the smoke from yet another—all there. A stunning vintage of a stunning wine, very rare; rich and weightless. *Lux Aeterna*. How and when this heaven arrives, after months of sweaty muscle-straining labor, only heaven knows.

I am really sorry how little I can offer. The vineyard is small and Alzingers don't own much of it. I'm lucky to get it at all.

2015 Riesling *Loibenberg Smaragd*

(+) +

6/750ml | ALA-164

<whew>.....down to earth after that Höhereck. This Riesling is more firmly anchored to consensual reality and yet it's entirely exotic, hints of gooseberries, but this cask sample is hard to surmise. Bottling will benefit this wine, I think, will organize its elements and ennoble the texture.

2015 Riesling *Steinertal Smaragd*

(+) ++

6/750ml | ALA-165

Words? Really? What's to say? It's a superb, direct and clearly amazing Riesling. Fantastic vintage Steinertal!

NIKOLAIHOF-WACHAU



REGION / SUB REGION

Wachau / Mautern

VINEYARD AREA

22 hectares

ANNUAL PRODUCTION

8,300 cases

TOP SITES AND SOIL TYPES

Steiner Hund,
Klausberg,
Im Weingebirge,
Vom Stein,
Süßenberg
(primary rock topped with humus or gravel, and eroded primary rock)

GRAPE VARIETIES

55% Riesling
35% Grüner Veltliner
10% Neuburger,
Gelber Muskateller,
Gewürztraminer,
Frühroter Veltliner,
Chardonnay

FARMING PRACTICES

Demeter Certified Biodynamic

We are determined to make these catalogues shorter, yet the sad truth is you can't write in brief about this estate, because as soon as you start you end up writing about all of life. The "headlines," if one can even glean such things, are that all is well but one mustn't presume. That is, with an estate like this one, you're not surprised to encounter a few quirks along the way. As a rule the wines are atmospheric of antiquity, and most of the time this is stirring and beautiful. If any given cork isn't perfect you get bottle variation showing as just-plain oxidation. And the occasional cask comes close to a kind of *sous-voile* thing which one either appreciates or doesn't. But the overall effect of these wines as a group is to return you to a kind of holy innocence. You can feel like, "This is the way wine (among other things) used to be before it got all fucked up an' stuff..."

Most of you already know the story and love the wines. Bio-dynamic since 1971, first Demeter-certified wine estate in the world, all those things. The wines and the family convey a seamless unity, radiantly good humor, and an unfussy gratitude. And yet still, in their context they are open to almost infinite possibilities, and it strikes me that my most "conservative" estate is also my most radical.

We were sitting in a schmoozy kind of way with "Nikky" Saahs, and he was talking about the old days. Someone may have asked why the estate decided to go bio-d so long before anyone else did. Nikky told us that in the 60s his father didn't use the prevailing chemical treatments because times weren't good and he

couldn't afford them. So he did without, and his vineyards did without, and after a few years both man and vine alike learned how to do without.

Some of you have seen the proud great linden that occupies the courtyard; it has become something of an emblem itself, that tree, yet at heart it's also a kindly giver of shade and shelter from the rain, not to mention a home to a lot of birds. One can't imagine Nikolaihof without that tree, yet one also can't quite explain why it makes such sense. It seems to coalesce a lot of love into its nexus, that huge green being. The birds love it, the buzzing pollinators love it, any human being who gets near it loves it, and I think the tree also loves its life and being lovely and useful. In a sense it stands for our relationship to nature itself. There was a moment where their little wire-haired dachshund, charmingly known as "Lumpy," was up on his tiny hind legs peering intently into the tree and barking, and Nikki explained "Sometimes when we throw his ball to him it gets caught up in the branches and eventually falls back down, and Lumpy thinks the tree is also playing with him." Well *that* explains everything.

And if you harbored any expectation the young generation would somehow "modernize" Nikolaihof, it was Nikky who insisted on reviving the use of the ginormous 18th-century wooden press, which had become a museum piece.

It's starting to be possible to talk about the "style" or the language of these wines. They are wines of atmosphere, and some

of that atmosphere is that of the cellar, its ambient aromas and also the environment of the casks. Nikolaihof's wines are (almost) never what we'd call woody, but the casks have perfumed their breath. In

"normal" wines there is an explanation; in these wines there is a breathing. When I open a bottle at home, and I open a lot of them, I always feel, with the first whiff of aroma, that I'm opening the pages of a

19-century novel. Yes they smell like GV or Riesling or whatever, but they also smell like food cooking and people laughing in the next room.

RAD STUFF FIRST:

2015 Gelber Muskateller +

12/750ml | ANK-190

From out of nowhere this has become the best Muscat I offer from Austria, a wine which is only ostensibly "simple" but which has layers of something akin to minerality. This '15 is fabulous, one of the ladylike vintages but with mineral out the wazoo, especially into the endless finish. It's blossomy but *funky* blossoms, not the well-behaved ones; a "sweet" mid-palate feels weightless but endless, and the wine is both spicy and floral; uncanny in a dozen ways, this little guy....

2015 Neuburger

12/750ml | ANK-189

Nice! Juicy, salty all umami; brown-butter and turkey leftovers.

2013 Sekt Brut Rosé

12/750ml | ANK-171

Dark-hued and *really* fruity, but all dark fruits, rose-hips. Fervently aromatic and a little clamorous, and it tastes like Nikolaihof. It also recalls that really *dark* Rosé from Pierre Gerbais in the Aube.

2012 Sekt Riesling Extra Brut

12/750ml | ANK-172

It's rich, as the '12s generally are. I think it's super cool that Nikolaihof wants to make bubbly, and these wines have a lot of puppy energy, but I wonder whether Nikki ought to let them attain the repose that typifies his still wines. Just sayin'.

GROONERS (in the order I tasted them)

2014 Grüner Veltliner "Zwickl"

12/750ml | ANK-185

Leave it to them!

This is, in essence, an *unfiltered* "Hefeabzug," and you get two wines in the same bottle if you want. How? It's fallen bright in the top one-third, and if you pour carefully you will have a clear wine. You can then *shake the rest of the bottle* to mix the sediment and pour yourselves a cloudy glass of tasty atavism. They encourage this!

The wine-on-top is oyster and delicate and birchy. The cloudy one is "darker," more boxwood and cress. It's fun! But the clear wine, in the '14 vintage, is lovelier. However, the 2015 on its heels is doughier and richer and here the cloudy wine makes more sense. In any case, I offer you what is probably the world's first interactive Grüner Veltliner.

2015 Grüner Veltliner "Hefeabzug" +

12/750ml | ANK-182

The regular *sur-lie* bottling seems to have attained some uncanny virtuosity of late—though Saahs would quarrel with "of late," and they make a good case if the **1987 vintage Hefeabzug** they gave us to drink is anything to go by—what a fantastic wine that was.

This '15 is wonderful nonetheless, sweetly oyster aromas lead into a palate full of sweet energy; it's long but not really a saline length, but more of a delicate floral chalkiness that coats the palate and doesn't quit.

GROONERS (continued)

2015 Grüner Veltliner Im Weingebirge Federspiel +

12/750ml | ANK-187

After the mineral attack of the Hefeabzug this wine is almost sedate. But this is deceptive. A sideways mineral length comes in midway through, and takes off its shoes. It's there to stay. Its first fruit runs in the sorrel-lentil direction, delicate, refined....and then the stray but determined mineral. In some ways this gentle wonder is the essence of Nikolaihof.

RIESLINGS

2015 Riesling "Vom Stein" Federspiel + +

12/750ml | ANK-188

No one in the world could make a wine as wee and little and yet as astoundingly beautiful as this one. Breezy and cool and clinging and endless; wet-straw flavors feel loessy but the balsam and physalis say primary rock. Affectionate and richly satisfying, Nikolaihof at their utter best when they're not in their "antique" dialect. Beautiful in every way but the intense one. Purely sapid and companionable.

2004 Riesling "Steinriesler" (+)

6/750ml | ANK-191

What a strangely compelling visit this was, a real panoply of experiences. This has 11.5% alc; it's "Vom Stein" but not labeled. It isn't as nutty as the '98 or '99 were, and it's not as spicy as the '02; instead it is fervidly *green*, led by verbena, radish, grilled fennel; a curious note of quinine and pickled ginger and parsley root; it has 2004's herbaciousness and angularity; it's a salad in a glass.

2013 Riesling "Vom Stein" Smaragd + +

6/750ml | ANK-183

Not surprising how gorgeous this is—'13 rules! The wine is all a swollen umami middle, and all a complex and sweet mélange of grains, leaves, rock dust and flowers. Haunting smoky length, like summer squash on the grill. It's melted the explicit high-notes of '13 into a murmur of butter and powdered ginger. Who in the world makes wine like this? Radiance seen through frosted glass. Someone says she loves you, and you can't believe your ears.

2011 Riesling "Baumpresse" + +

6/750ml | ANK-192

It's painfully spendy, but have you *seen* that massive press? Apart from which, truth is truth; the wine is superb. Grain and smoke and jasmine and turkey stock and fingerlings at their little sweet best. This wine is intense, though with all of 12.5% alc.

2013 Gutsriesling Lieblich

12/750ml | ANK-159

23 g/l of residual sugar, as it happened, and every wine here is as-it-happened. So Nikki declined to futz with it. The result tastes like something Florian Weingart would have made in the Wachau, all the mirabelle and herbs but with a different twangy terroir here. I don't know what "use" you'll make of it; I only know I like it.

HANS REISETBAUER



In 1990 Hans Reisetbauer planted his first apple orchard of 1.5 hectares in Kirchdorfergut and on September 16, 1994 Christian Carl of Göppingen built a still from plans designed by Hans himself. Quickly Hans gained notoriety in 1995 by winning “Schnapps of the year” at the Destillata specialist trade fair. Reisetbauer has been named “Master Distiller of the Year” by the Austrian gourmet guide A la Carte in '04, '07, '08 and '09. Most recently he won the Falstaff’s “Spirits Trophy Award” in 2010.

Hans Reisetbauer’s dedication in his orchards, detail in distillation and constant quest for new innovations has led him to be considered one of the finest producers of Eaux de Vie in the World. In order to control the quality of his products, Reisetbauer mostly uses fruit grown on his own property. Hans has also done careful comparisons to find the best water for use in his process, exclusively using spring water from Mühlviertel. As Hans explains, “Temperature, time and aeration during fermentation, as well as condition of raw material are important factors influencing the quality of the final product.” Following fermentation, the mash is distilled twice with the heads and tails being discarded. Only the “heart” of the distillate is kept as it contains the most prized volatile and aromatic components from the raw material and is responsible for creating distinctive aromas. Lastly, the product is diluted with water to bring it to 41% alcohol. Reisetbauer’s Blue Gin follows the same detailed approach, utilizing a recipe of 27 botanicals from 10 different countries, and strictly Mulan variety wheat harvested from Upper Austria.

- Apple in Oak Barrel** 6/375ml (also available in 1.75L) | XHR-024
- Apricot Eau de Vie** 6/375ml (also available in 1.75L) | XHR-003
- Plum Eau de Vie** 6/375ml (also available in 1.75L) | XHR-001
- Williams Pear Eau de Vie** 6/375ml (also available in 1.75L) | XHR-002
- Raspberry Eau de Vie** 6/375ml (also available in 1.75L) | XHR-009
- Cherry Eau de Vie** 6/375ml (also available in 1.75L) | XHR-004
- Wild Cherry Eau de Vie** 6/375ml (also available in 1.75L) | XHR-011
- Elderberry Eau de Vie** 6/375ml (also available in 1.75L) | XHR-005
- Rowanberry Eau de Vie** 6/375ml (also available in 1.75L) | XHR-006
- Ginger Eau de Vie** 6/375ml (also available in 1.75L) | XHR-014
- Carrot Eau de Vie** 6/375ml (also available in 1.75L) | XHR-013
- Hazelnut Eau de Vie** 6/375ml (also available in 1.75L) | XHR-028
- Mixed Case Eau de Vie** 6/375ml | XHR-035
 Wooden case including 1 bottle of each: Apricot, Plum, Williams Pear, Raspberry, Carrot and Rowanberry
- Whisky** 6/750ml | XHR-015
- Blue Gin** 6/750ml (also available in 1.75L) | XHR-025
- Brut Apfel (2009)** 6/750ml | XHR-027
 Sparkling Apple Cider, produced Méthode Champenoise, with 100% estate Jonagold apples.

REFERENCE

GRAPE VARIETIES

GRÜNER VELTLINER

Austria's signature variety—one in every three vines is GV—is a late-ripening thick-skinned grape. Vine material is important, and the new generation of vintners is gradually eliminating all the nasty old clones that were only bred for mega-yields.

GV will excel in every echelon; it makes a great quaff, a lovely medium-weight al-fresco wine, and it makes superb powerful wines that stand easily with every great dry white in the world. Among them, it is the most flexible at the table, because it goes with things that defeat every other wine.

Brassicas? Check. Asparagus? No worries. Artichokes? Perfect match. Shrimp? You betcha. What about cabbages and things like that? If it stinks up your house when you cook it, GV is the wine to drink *with* it. Plus it goes with all the things other dry whites are used for. This is why I am about to say that GV should have pride of place on your wine lists.

As a rule it's a medium-to-full bodied wine. When grown in primary rock, these are common descriptors for it: pepper, boxwood, mustard-greens (arugula, mizuna, tatsoi, et.al.), "ore" (a ferrous sense), shoot-smoke, basils, cress, mints and parsleys, strawberry, tobacco, and ordinary apple and citrus. When grown in loess, then you find legumes, lentils, various kinds of beans, grain (barley, oats, maize), vetiver, sorrel, oleander, roasted bell-peppers, rhubarb. Seen naked on the page, you could look at these things and say *ewww, who'd want to drink that?* But when you taste, you know right away you're encountering something distinctive, original, and indispensable.

However "trendy" GrüVe may have been, its greatest value is it isn't merely trendy, but rather has a permanent place in the pantheon of important grapes, and a prominent place among food's best friends. Among the many wonderful things Grüner Veltliner is, it is above all THE wine that will partner all the foods you thought you'd *never* find a wine for.

One wishes to be indulgent of the caprices of attention in our ephemeral world. But at some point over the last two weeks, tasting yet another absolutely supernal GrüVe, my blood commenced to sim-

merin'. Where dry white wine is concerned this variety should have pride of place on wine lists. There is simply NO other variety more flexible and none offering better value especially at the high end.

Aging Grüner Veltliner: you gotta be patient! I know of no variety other than Chenin Blanc (in the Loire, of course) which takes longer to taste old. All things being equal, Veltliner lasts longer than Riesling, and it never goes petroly. What it can do is to take on a dried-mushroom character that becomes almost meaty. Mature GrüVe has been a revelation to every taster I've seen. It's a perfect choice for a rich fatty meat course when you prefer to use white wine. Don't think you have to drink them young—though if you catch one at any age short of ten years you are drinking it young. Think of young GrüVe like fresh oyster mushrooms, and grownup GrüVe like dried shiitakes.

RIESLING

Riesling makes virtually every one of Austria's greatest dry white wines, which is to say many of the *world's* greatest dry whites. GrüVe comes close, but Riesling always stretches just that little bit higher. That's because Riesling is the best wine grape in the world, of either color. And because Riesling enjoys life in Austria.

Great Austrian Riesling is unique. Austrian growers won't plant it where it doesn't thrive. It's almost always grown in primary rock, a volcanic (metamorphic/ igneous) derivative you rarely see in similar form or concentration elsewhere in Europe. These soils contain schist (fractured granite), shinola (just checking you're actually paying attention), mica, silica, even weathered basalt and sandstone. Riesling's usually grown on terraces or other high ground.

It's about the **size** of Alsace wine, but with a flower all its own. And there's no minerality on the same **planet** as these wines. And there's sometimes such a complexity of tropical fruits you'd think you'd accidentally mixed Catoir with Boxler in your glass.

GELBER MUSKATELLER

Only in Austria (and Germany) are they required to distinguish between

this, a.k.a. *Muscat a Petit Grains* or *Muscat Lunel* and its less refined but more perfumey cousin the Muscat Ottonel. Most Alsace "Muscat" blends the two, and usually Ottonel dominates.

"Yellow" Muscat has become trendy in Austria, much to my delight, because I dote on this variety. It ripens late and holds onto brisk acidity; it isn't easy to grow, but oh the results it gives! In good hands the wines are something like the keenest mountainstream Riesling you ever had from a glass stuffed with orange blossoms.

I'm offering every single one I could get my greedy hands on. Unscrew that cap, splash the greeny gurgle of wine into the nearest glass; sniff and salivate—drink and be *HAPPY*.

PINOT BLANC

a.k.a. WEISSBURGUNDER. What used to be perhaps the world's best examples of this variety have seemingly succumbed to climate change. Many of the Serious Ones are now, to my taste, simply too alcoholic. That does leave the mid-range ones as very pure renditions of Pinot Blanc (without the blending in of Auxerrois, as is practiced in Alsace), and these often show fruit and shellfish notes I don't encounter elsewhere in the world. Yet as outstanding as the best wines can be, they face competition from the Germans and the Swiss, and even in Alsace there are a few growers who take the variety seriously.

AUSTRIAN WINE LAWS

No great detail here, as this stuff bores me as much as it does you. The headline is, this is the toughest and most enlightened (or least *unenlightened*) wine law in the world, as it had to be in the slipstream of the glycol matter.

There's a discernable trend away from the whole ripeness-pyramid thing. Most growers don't seem to care whether it's a Kabinett or a Qualitätswein or whatever; they think in terms of regular and reserve, or they have an internal vineyard hierarchy. So I follow their lead. I am possibly a bit too casual about it all. But I don't care either. The dry wines are all below 9 grams per liter of residual sugar, so you can tell how ripe the wine is by its alcohol. If there's a vineyard-wine it's because the

site gives special flavors. And old-vines cuvées are très chic.

Austrian labels have to indicate the wine's residual sugar. They're actually a bit off-the-deep-end on this issue. There's a grower in my portfolio almost all of whose wines have a little RS. This is deliberate. The wines are fabulously successful, and nobody finds them "sweet." But another wise sage voiced a note of caution. Other growers (said the voice) notice this man's success, and they imitate his style so they too can be successful. But they do a facile imitation of the most *superficial* aspect of the style, i.e. the few grams of residual sugar, and the next thing you know our Austrian wines are once again headed in the wrong direction. Don't get me wrong (he continued), I like the wines; they're not my style but they're good wines. But everyone doesn't have this man's talent. And so in a sense his wines are dangerous.

Such are the terms of the debate!

Here's my take on it. To focus on a vision of absolute purity as an Ideal will create unintended mischief. Will do and *has* done. Every grower's goal should be to produce the most delicious, harmonious and characterful wine he can. If that means zero sugar some years, 3 grams in others and 6 grams in others then that's what it means. "Oh but then we'd have to manipulate the wine," they retort. But this is fatuous. Winemaking is *ipso facto* manipulation. We are talking about degrees of manipulations, and which are acceptable under which circumstances in the service of what. "We would prefer an unattractive wine than one which we have confected into attractiveness by manipulating its sugar" is a reasonable case to make, provided one has the courage to accept the consequences of making unattractive wines. What too many do, sadly, is to sell unattractiveness as virtuous, in a fine example of Orwellian doublespeak.

Remember, I'm not advocating the *addition* of flavor, but rather the preservation of flavor already there. A modicum of sweetness does not obtrude upon a wine's character—it was in the grape, after all—provided the producer guarantees this with his palate. Most of us know how much is too much. So, while I respect the underlying scruple the growers espouse, they err in making this an ethical issue. It is instead either a pragmatic or an aesthetic issue, or both.

But maybe a little empathy is called for. I arrived right in the creative heat of the wine-renaissance in Austria, and am less sensitive to the dubious past

that preceded it, but which the growers remember. After the War and into the '70s Austrian wine was usually a pale imitation of German, but cheaper. Co-ops and *négociants* controlled the market, and integrity was an endangered species. Sweetness sold, especially when it was used to add a spurious prettiness to overcropped insipid wine. When Austrian growers experienced a rebirth of passion and idealism, they also wanted to distinguish themselves by breaking ways with the past, and so they favored dry wines with mass and vinosity. I do understand their wariness about residual sugar; the slope doesn't look as slippery to me because I have never fallen down it. That said, enough time has passed that they can lay aside their fear, because the dogmatic opposition to homeopathic bits of RS is taking potential beauty away from their wines, and making them less flexible at the table.

DAC

And just what does this acronym mean? It means "Don't ask, Charlie," because I'm not going to answer you. This may seem churlish, but I am truly annoyed. I published an article in *WORLD OF FINE WINE* that detailed why. Some growers agree with me, and I suspect others do but hesitate to speak out. So, in a nutshell, this is the pith of my dismay.

DAC, however laudable its aims (and to a certain extent they are), is essentially a bureaucratic and abstract construct, the results of which add *nothing* to the facts on the ground, only adding to the drinker's burden, because now he needs to learn not only the facts, but the bureaucratic *system* of categorizing them. And if the DAC is modeled after appellation laws in France or Italy, one does well to ask how usefully *those* laws are working out.

They will say that every grown up wine culture has codified an appellation system in order to guarantee typicity, distinctiveness and integrity. They will say, as Austria strives to both emerge from an earlier era of mediocrity and to join the mainstream of Fine European wines, it is time for an appellation system to be established.

I will reply, as we see how these systems ramify in practice, we also see the ways they can strait-jacket a wine culture, can inhibit visionary thinking and retard innovation. There is a constant ongoing tension between protecting that which has proven to be a region's most profound mode of expression—such as Sangiovese

in Brunello, for example—while also permitting a sense of questing and exploration. Sometimes it works very well, and sometimes it stifles people, and to the extent the laws are ignored, they become relics of irrelevance.

Why, then, would the Austrians willingly take that risk? What does it add? I think it appeals to their pride. And I think that the pride is justified; after all, what wine culture has accomplished what Austria has, in just the last 27 years?

But the DAC fixes something that isn't broken, something that is actually vital and healthy, and the "cure" for the non-existent disease has serious risks of its own.

It attempts to codify the facts on the ground. Ask yourselves *why*. How is your world improved by codifying these things?

"The Kamptal is best known for its outstanding Grüner Veltliners and Rieslings, though other varieties do well there." That's what the books will tell you. *How is that not enough??*

And now? The "Kamptal DAC" permits only Grüner Veltliner and Riesling, insists the wines be dry, and insists on minimum alcohol levels. That's a new bunch of stuff you, poor drinker, has to memorize, and which has added *nothing* at all useful for you. Indeed, if Hiedler could always sell his Sauvignon Blanc with "Kamptal" on the label, because that's where it grew, then how is your life improved by his now having to *declassify* the Sauv-B to "Niederösterreich"—which you now must also learn the meaning of—because the variety isn't approved for the Kamptal-DAC?

Learning the facts is enough. Having to learn how a bureaucrat or a marketing guy has catalogued the facts is a waste of your time.

To my justly proud Austrian friends: do not show your pride by clamoring to be included in an already existing system. Show it by saying "We have no need for the existing appellation systems or to imitate them here at home. We will instead evolve *new* systems that will preserve the gains we have made and will keep alive the spirit of adventure that make ours unique among Old-World wine cultures."

So, I will not refer to "DAC" unless it is *the actual name of the wine*. Then we have to use it. But if it's merely a useless appendix to an already complete name, we're going to ignore it. Hiedler's *Grüner Veltliner Thal* is not improved by being called *Grünern Veltliner Thal Kamptal DAC*.

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