

MEININGER'S

WINE BUSINESS INTERNATIONAL



OPTIMISM IN SOUTH AFRICA

Mike Ratcliffe is one of the more prominent and outspoken members of South Africa's wine industry. He has served on boards and founded important institutions. He gives his views to Robert Joseph. Page 30

THE WOOLWORTHS LEVIATHAN

Although largely confined to Australia and New Zealand, Woolworths is one of the world's top 20 retailers - and it sells huge volumes of wine. Jeni Port looks inside. Page 20

WHO'S WHO IN POLAND

Poland is one of Europe's fastest growing markets. Wojciech Bońkowski analyses who really influences it, from independents to multiple grocers to politicians. Page 36

POWER LISTS: US RETAILERS

Our ongoing series about the world's most important retailers uncovers the names that matter in the vibrant wine markets of Austin, Seattle and Chicago. By Scott Saunders. Page 24

DIFFERENT STYLES OF BUSINESS

When the Adams bought a French château, they assumed they could do business the Napa way. It turns out the market had other ideas. Robert Joseph reports. Page 44



STYRIA'S NEW IDEAS

Elsebeth Lohfert travels along the Styrian wine route and discovers a hive of biodynamic, organic, and classification activity.

When you drive the astonishing South Styrian Wine Route (Südsteirische Weinstrasse) you are in a time warp. Surrounded by vines on steep hills in all possible angles, you're in a green labyrinth. This is a dream world of beauty and bounty. Here is the reign of flowers and vines, of history and castles, witness to a rich peasant culture. As an outsider it's difficult not to romanticise.

Romance aside, this region is acclaimed as one of the world's best Sauvignon terroirs. Driving the wine route, it's easy to wonder how this southernmost wine-producing region in Austria covering a modest 4,240 ha has managed to become global. How do these generation-after-generation family winemakers manage to sell their small quantities worldwide?

The 'whys' are both local and global. For an explanation of the global, it's interesting to leap to the recent Nederburg Auction in South Africa, where Robert Joseph made a speech about the wine industry of the future. What's new in the market, he believes, is what he calls "issue" wines. That is, wines purchased

because of the way they are made, or the stance taken by the people who produce them. This trend has grown in tandem with the way consumers are changing their buying habits. As Joseph said: "Today we trust our peers or, just possibly, a supplier." Scratch the surface of Styria, and it's clear how the many orange and environmentally friendly biodynamic wines fit the trendy categories consumed in the leading gourmet circles of London, New York and Copenhagen.

Christoph Neumeister – a young producer who has taken over after his father and now is the second generation to make wines since Austria's complete meltdown in 1986 – gives an answer as to why "issue" wines of high quality are being produced in Styria: "We had to produce wine that made a reason to be bought." Neumeister is the tenth generation to work the Neumeister Winery in the East Styrian town of Straden, and he has a good grasp of regional history. "In the last 10 to 15 years, we have seen a constant rise in quality and more good-to-very-good wines," he says. "We were afraid 20 years ago, and made our Sauvignon Blanc in a 'world style'. Now there has been a shift to more characterful, complex and elegant wines, in a more original style." He adds that "Sauvignon is not easy because of all the rain, the frost, the high risk of hail, and steep hills. It's a lot of hand work."

He says that 99% of the region is family-owned. "We are living close and concentrated. We are all friends and know each other, and can say good and bad things to each other.

We are open and free to do that." In such a milieu "it's embarrassing to stay behind", so to help each other they have formed a group called Winzer Vulkanland (the Growers of Vulkanland) with about 70 members – the oldest being 35. They meet five times a year, with viticultural issues on the agenda.

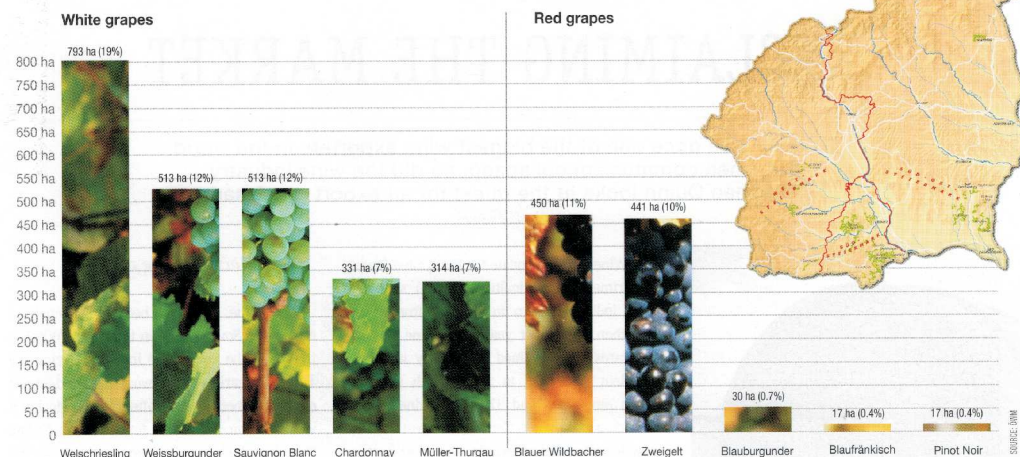
Such groups are helping winemakers all over the region to help each other raise quality levels.

The STK initiative

The Weingut Tement near Berghausen is situated above the Zieregg vineyard, with a magnificent view into Slovenia. In 1979, at the age of 19, Manfred Tement took over his parents' 2.5-ha winery and expanded it to the present-day 80 ha in South Styria, with another 20 ha across the border in Slovenia. Tement is widely recognised as the guiding star of the region, not only for excellent wines, but also for being instrumental in bringing to life a private classification of vineyards that he so far shares with nine of his colleagues. The group is called STK (Steirische Terroir & Klassikweingüter) and promote their wines with their own symbol of quality, the letters STK, which are printed on the banderole, the bottle's neck or on the label. The other members are: Gross, Lackner-Tinnacher, Wolfgang Maitz, Neumeister, Erich & Walter Polz, Erwin Sabathi, Hannes Sabathi, Sattlerhof and Winkler-Hermaden.

The private classification system they use

Major White Grapes and Major Red Grapes



has four different quality levels. These are:

1. *Steirische Klassik* are defined as wines of fruitiness, with plenty of aromas and flavours, that are vinified in stainless steel and which should be enjoyed within three years of bottling,
2. *Dorfweine STK*. Fruity and aromatic wines vinified in steel, carrying the name of the village (Dorf) where the grapes have grown,
3. *Erste STK Lage* are made from grapes picked late and sourced from the best sites. These are wines with a potential for ageing, and
4. *Grosse STK Lage*. These wines are made from the single vineyard classification of the STK wineries and aged for at least 18 months.

The question is, of course, whether more wineries will join them, so that the STK symbol will become a widely used guideline for the consumer, which is the vision of founder Manfred Tement.

Not everyone agrees with it. Hannes Harkamp from Weingut Harkamp in the sub-region Sausal (380 ha), for example, says: "Sausal has excellent conditions for premier and grand cru soils. None of the producers here are part of the private group of the STK winemakers though." He says that STK is following a Bordeaux-like classification, where every winery has to have a Grosse Lage ('great location') as well as an

Erste Lage ('first location', or first growth), "no matter if the properties are really suitable. As it is regulated privately, it is their decision what and how to classify. To be honest I prefer a classification of all Austrian Lagen."

Other changes afoot

Willi Klinger is the hospitable host inviting those who matter in the wine world to Styria and the other 15 Austrian regions he is responsible for. Since 2007 he has been the managing director of the Austrian Wine Marketing Board (AWMB) and his efforts have resulted in nine consecutive annual export increases. "Austrian wine is well marketed," as British wine writer Stephen Brook puts it.

Klinger also spends much time on the process of implementing the DAC (Districtus Austriae Controllatus) system, so far in nine out of the 16 regions. "Now the most intense DAC discussion is in Styria," notes Klinger. "We're trying to profile each of the three Styrian regions, but nothing has been decided yet. So far a DAC Steiermark for Sauvignon Blanc and Weissburgunder has been considered. A change of name for Southeast Styria becoming Vulkanland Steiermark, as it is a volcanic area, has been suggested, and then there is South Styria with two areas that might be divided. We don't know yet." To the outsider this seems a quixotic mission, with plenty of new names and new regulations to memorise – not

least in Styria, which now also includes the privately established STK.

Organic and orange

In the past decade, the number of organic estates has increased markedly in Austria, and now cover 10% of the total vineyard area. Here we are back to the "issue" wines – the organic, the amphora and the orange (white wines made with extended skin contact). Klinger even talks about a "radical new fraction" of natural wine and orange wine, which he calls "an exciting development and successful not only on the niche market".

Sepp Muster, of the biodynamic Weingut Muster, is an example. He and his wife Maria are part of a five-grower movement called Schmecke das Leben (or "taste life"), and he produces two orange wines – the Gräfin and the Erde. Not only are his wines sold worldwide, but they've been featured on the wine menu at the two-Michelin-starred restaurant Noma in Copenhagen, although he only owns 10 ha. For him "observing nature, going together with nature – that is working with wine. It is not a taste, it's a feeling. You can't make a law of it. We have to be open and catch the taste." When he serves his 2012 Gräfin Sauvignon Blanc, it shows delicate and expressive fruits, suggesting that Styria's experiments are leading to a very high quality level.

As Brook, whose book on Austrian wine will be published in 2016, says: "Hardly anybody makes mediocre wine." ■

STYRIA 4,240 HA (9% OF AUSTRIA)

Southeast Styria	1,400 ha
South Styria	2,340 ha
West Styria	500 ha