



THE WINES OF AUSTRIA

STEPHEN BROOK

Neumeister

Straden. www.neumeister.cc

31 hectares. 180,000 bottles.

It's hard to see the Neumeister winery as you drive up the slope from Straden. It's plugged into the hillside, and visitors enter through what looks like a chimney and descend into the chic, cool recesses of the tasting room. Christoph Neumeister, who has been running the property since 2006, says: 'You need something dramatic to draw visitors to a remote corner of Austria!'

The estate has been organic since 2015, and most of the soils here are sedimentary, thus gravel with limestone and sandstone. The grapes are scrupulously sorted at harvest, and processed in the gravity-fed winery with no pumping. There are no short cuts in the wine making, and it shows in the quality of the wines. Even the basic ranges are mostly fermented with natural yeasts and usually aged in large casks; Neumeister aims to have completely dry wines, and they do not generally go through malolactic fermentation. His aim is to have wines with texture, complexity, and length. Highly aromatic wines are not his goal.

There are a number of Sauvignons. Klausen comes from a steep, east-facing site: a creamy, slightly soft style that still retains good acidity. Moarfeitl is from a south-facing site with more gravelly soils. The 2006 had green-apple aromas and flesh and volume on the palate, and was still going strong in 2015. The 2013 is imposing and creamy, with no grassiness and no heaviness. Finally, the 'Alte Reben' comes from vines planted in 1937 and 1951 and spends 30 months on the fine lees: the full-bodied 2012 has lime and apple aromas and a refined texture. These are all excellent Sauvignons, and distinct from the Südsteiermark stereotypes.

Neumeister's most important variety, however, is Grauburgunder, and Straden as a whole is a hotspot for this grape. The 2014 Klassik has pear compote aromas, a rounded palate, with upfront fruit and bright acidity. The more serious version, called Saziani, comes from 45-year-old vines and spends 18 months in a large cask. This is a seamless and stylish wine, hedonistic yet with enough acidity to give it zip and persistence.

Neumeister also makes a lively Gelber Muskateller, and a fleshy, exotic Roter Traminer 'Steinertal'. When conditions permit he produces a Saziani TBA, in 2013 a blend of Grauburgunder, Riesling, Welschriesling, and Chardonnay, with 250 grams of residual sugar.

In short, everything is worth tasting here. The wines are made in a restrained rather than exuberant style, without blaring aromas, but with beautiful texture and balance.