



**Josef Ehmoser, Tiefenthal, Grossweikersdorf, Wagram,
Niederösterreich, AUSTRIA**



Josef & Martina Ehmoser (photograph Karen Jenkins)

Austria has a strong domestic market for its wines and has experienced a renaissance in exports over the last fifteen years or so. The government bodies have worked closely with producers and the regions to successfully rebuild their international reputation after the scandals of the 80s. Austrian wine labelling and the ongoing evolution of their wine laws can be rather complex, but the main focus is for each region to offer primarily traditional Austrian grape varieties. The DAC system (*Districtus Austriae Controllatus*) highlights flagship regions and varieties and has gradually brought labelling and regulation under a unified national approach from 2002. The designation of DACs is still ongoing with some such as the Wachau's DAC established quite recently. Wagram is amongst the last awaiting their DAC to be finalised.

The main driving force in Austria and internationally is the Austrian Wine Marketing Board. The AWWB, as with everything Austrian, has a very detailed approach and their website provides impressive information and resources on all aspects of the Austrian wine industry.

Austria is famous for its white wines, typically vinified dry and its reds are steadily gaining more international attention. The Wagram region is particularly noted for Grüner Veltliner, which is around 50% of the total plantings.



The main wine regions in Austria are all to the East. Niederösterreich (Lower Austria), is the largest, with over half of the total vineyard plantings. It encompasses all the regions encircling Vienna and Wagram is one of 8 sub-regions. Wagram is to the north-west of Vienna, following the Danube for a 30 km stretch, with the majority of the vineyards on the northern bank. The Danube Valley winds westwards through four more sub-regions; Traisental to the south of Wagram and then Kamptal, Kremstal and most famously the Wachau. These vine growing areas along the Danube are surprisingly reachable, within one to two hour's drive from Vienna. For Wagram think East of Krems, west of Vienna. Wagram's vineyards south of the Danube are mainly around Klosterneuburg, which is town famous for its monastery, leading wine school and winery.

We think Ehmoser provide a great introduction to both Austria and its internationally recognised, signature grape variety. They offer consistently well-made examples including a particularly good value entry level Grüner Veltliner.

Josef and Martina are a gentle, unassuming couple based in the hamlet of Tiefenthal in Grossweikersdorf. They are quietly confident and articulate about their dedication to creating carefully produced wines, true to their region. Their professional, efficient communication skills (viz website), epitomises the organised, detailed approach, characteristic to many Austrian producers running their family businesses. They describe their philosophy as "tradition and origins matter to us."

Josef took over the family vineyards and winery in in 1996 after completing his wine studies in Krems. His maternal grandfather had originally set up the family business in the 1930s, buying vineyards which included vines on Hohenberg. He sold his wines in barrel directly to the local restaurants and eateries to serve by the glass. Unusually for the time, he also began bottling his wines in the then traditional one and two litre bottles. Josef's parents added to the vineyard holdings in the 1980s and by then everything was in bottle and mostly 75cl. Josef and Martina have continued the tradition and adding 'a little more' to their holdings to give them 17ha in total.

Josef and Martina's declared respect for their heritage is fully backed up by their actions. They were early adopters and are fully certified under the AWWB Sustainable Austria program, which requires a thorough evaluation of 9 elements covering all aspects of the vineyard and winery under Ecology, Economy and Society. They have also installed solar panels to run the power and water for their house and the tasting room. More importantly they are now in conversion to fully organic production, for which they will gain certification in two years' time.

The Ehmoser label shows an abstract image of the landscape depicting the elements most important to them: the sun shining over the Danube, a view of the foothills of the Alps, (that can be seen from Hohenberg on a good day) and the old winery hut and walnut tree in the heart of their vineyards on Hohenberg.



Climate

The main climatic influences in Austria are described as 'Pannonian', which references the Roman province of that name, roughly equating to the Pannonian Basin which is surrounded by the Carpathian mountain ranges on three sides. It is these warm air currents which flow in from Eastern Europe that have moderating effect on the seasonal temperatures. They meet the cooler air coming in from the Alps and the West. The Danube is a strong factor in channelling the currents to a greater or lesser extent depending on the width of the river valley. This determines the differing microclimates: the more open the valley, the more the warmer air can circulate to influence the grape growing seasons. The summers can be warm, but nights remain cool and in September. Cool air allows evening temperatures drop considerably, encouraging a longer growing cycle to achieve physiological ripeness, whilst maintaining good acidity levels.

Geography

Wagram (*not to be confused with the one just north-east of Vienna, the site of one of Napoleon's numerous battles against the Austrians in 1809*), was the name given to this designated wine region in 2007. It was originally part of the larger 'Donerlaube' designation, which included Traisental. Hence, it is relatively 'new' in terms of recognition, as a regional name, even though the area has a long winemaking history.

The vineyards around Grossweikersdorf are set back about 10km, in the rolling hills north of the Danube, the landscape has an open, agricultural feel and you need to actually seek out the pockets of vineyards, amongst the other crops in the surrounding landscape. There are around 2,700ha of vines in Wagram and around 280 producers, roughly twice that found in the Wachau, but also spread over a larger area.

Wagram's vineyards on the northern bank are particularly noted for their deep and relatively fertile loess soils, prevalent in this section of the Danube. The soils were formed as a deep layer from windblown debris, deposited over an ancient marine deposit. Martina highlights the high limestone content in the soils at around 30% and fossils which can be found, particularly on Hohenberg.

Vineyards

Their 17ha are all with the commune of Grossweikersdorf and are spread across Steinberg, Hausberg, Kobel, Hohenberg and Georgenberg. Their largest holdings are in Hohenberg at nearly 8ha which account for around two thirds of the total of this single vineyard. Recently both Hohenberg and Georgenberg have been accredited as *Erste Lage* and can be referred to as *Erste Lage* with 1 ÖTW appearing on their labels from the 2019 vintage.

The ÖTW *Österreich TraditionsWeingüter*, a rather intense title, is the producer association covering all the Danube wine regions, including 'Wein' in Vienna. Inclusion in the ÖTW



register acknowledges top, single vineyards, which offer a classic, high quality expression of their region.



Old winery hut and walnut tree in Hohenberg Vineyard (photograph Karen Jenkins)

Hohenberg is Ehmoser's highest vineyard at around 350m, with 47 year old vines. The average across their other holding is 15 years. The majority of vineyards have netting against the risk of hail and retain ground cover. This is both friendly to the local wildlife and helps maintain competition against vigorous vine growth. The loess offers good water retention for the vines. Everything is harvested by hand.

Winemaking

The Ehmosers have a modern, minimalist cellar, which they finished building in 2008. It is laid out with central hall and rooms leading off for each stage of the process. These include a glass entrance to the original cellar dug into the loess.

They work with temperature controlled stainless steel tanks and some wood fermenters. Time spent on the lees is an integral part of Josef's winemaking for which they use large oak casks in Austrian and Hungarian oak. They also have two concrete eggs. Any wood used is primarily intended for ageing rather than any oak influence on the wines. For the last ten years they have worked mainly with 500L and 1000L for their reds and 1500L and 3000L for the whites. The wines receive no fining and a light filtration before bottling.

Wines

Grüner Veltliner here, seems to have an affinity with the lime rich loess soils, which can give a broad, creamy texture to the wines, along with the aromatics, counterbalanced by good acidity. This forms the majority of Ehmoser's production as their 'Wagram Terrassen'



and single vineyard bottlings. They also produce a Weisser Burgunder (pinot blanc), a Riesling, reds from Zweigelt and St. Laurent (both crosses), as well as a rosé from Zweigelt. A regionally speciality is the Gemischter Satz (also a DAC in Vienna's urban vineyards), which translates as 'field blend' from a single vineyard (Hausberg) and co-fermented.

Both these wines are bottled under screwcap:

Grüner Veltliner 'Wagram Terrassen'

This is their 'estate' wine, blended from across their vineyards in surrounding Grossweikersdorf, (previously labelled Von dem Terrassen). It is vinified entirely in stainless steel and bottled as required for release from Spring onwards. It certainly sees a benefit from having spent some extra time in bottle.

Riesling 'Vom gelben Löss' Grossweikersdorf

This is the one Riesling they release, blended from grapes grown in the Kobel, Hohenberg and Georgenberg vineyards. It is vinified in stainless steel a proportion spends time on the gross, then fine lees. The name '*vom gelben Löss*' refers to the yellow soil colour.

Their two, single vineyard (Ried) wines are bottled under cork:

Grüner Veltliner 'Ried Hohenberg' Erste Lage ÖTW

The Hohenberg single vineyard Grüner is vinified in a combination of stainless steel, concrete egg and wooden fermenter. Then spends time on the gross lees and a proportion further aged on fine lees in concrete and wood before blending. It leans towards an elegant, textured and aromatic style.

Grüner Veltliner 'Ried Georgenberg' Erste Lage ÖTW

Georgenberg 'Saint George's Mountain' is named after the St George's Church in Grossweikersdorf, to which it originally belonged. It is both fermented and aged in wood and is a fuller, richer style, with great balance.

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