

# Red Wine Without Borders

## **Franz Weninger.**

Franz Weninger is considered one of the pioneers of quality wine growing in Austria. Back in the eighties, long before the wine scandal and the ensuing revolution of the industry, Weninger had determined certain standards for his estate in Horitschon in central Burgenland, Austria, among them: reduction of yield, strict selection at the vineyard, and slow aging in wooden barrels.

At the time, that was unusual even in Blaufränkisch country in and around Horitschon. Only a year after he had taken over the family business Franz Weninger was already making a name for himself. His Blaufränkisch Kabinett 1983 fascinated the yet small body of wine experts and won international prizes.

By 1984 he was already experimenting with barrique.

"Even to this day I'm still proud of that wine," says Weninger, "I put an incredible amount of time and energy into grape selection and vinification. In addition, the weather conditions were perfect that year."

In the years to follow Franz Weninger would become a shining star among the Austrian red wine producers, and his wines would earn him an excellent reputation at a time when Austria still had the image of being a purely white wine country. In the red wine test conducted by the journal Falstaff, Weninger wines have been voted Falstaff winner four times already. But the highest honor Weninger has received to date came when he was named "Winemaker of the year" in 1995.

### **His Vineyard.**

Viticulture is Franz Weninger's passion. He is considered by many to be a perfectionist when it comes to vinification: he personally supervises the aging process of his wines and has made a name for himself as a barrique specialist. Nevertheless, Weninger is convinced that real quality isn't made in the cellar, but comes from the vine itself. That is why he has also planted high vine density vineyards (6,000 vines per hectare) with young vines that have been grafted to slow-growing, early-ripening lower trunks.

Franz Weninger: "In the cellar one can only bring out that which is already in the grape. The decisive conditions for good wine, therefore, are the soil and the climate. Also, the willingness of the wine grower to apply radical selection measures, for those who accept only the finest, shall be rewarded with the best results."

Weninger's way of working is based on the principle of exerting as little influence on the growth of the plants as possible so that the vines will once again find their natural balance. Converting to a bio-dynamic production method was seen as a logical step toward coming closer to nature and improving quality.

The conversion to bio-dynamic vinification in 2006, under the direction of the experienced agricultural economist Dr. Andrew Lorand, had been prepared for long time. The vineyards have been worked biological since 2004, compost is deployed and for years mineral fertilisers have not been used.

Today Franz Weninger owns 30 hectares of vineyards in and around Horitschon, most of them have been planted with Blaufränkisch, Merlot, Zweigelt, Cabernet Sauvignon and Pinot Noir. Some of the Blaufränkisch vines from the Hockäcker and Dürrau sites are up to 80 years old, the average age of the Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon vines is 20 years.

The Kirchholz site is one of the oldest sites in Horitschon, but in 2000 it was integrated into the Hochäcker site by request of the local vintner association. As with the Hochäcker site the soil here is rich in loam and clay. Some parcels, however, are mixed with abundant gravel. To emphasize this rocky soil the grapes from these parcels were vinified and aged separately for the first time in 2003. Franz Weninger produces around 6,000 bottles of this wine annually.

For several years, Weninger has also begun processing grapes from the Saybritz site in Eisenberg in southern Burgenland. The 0.6-hectare vineyard belongs to the Schürmann family, relatives of the Weninger family. The vines are approximately 37 years old, and the vineyard is located 400 meters above sea level on an extremely steep, southern slope. The topsoil is about 20 cm thick and composed of heavily chalky clay-loam soils, beneath this is a blue-gray schist layer.

The site Kalkofenboden is very rich in lime, warm with southern exposure. The loose limestone soil can be easily penetrated by the roots of the grape vines (to a depth of 5 meters). It is the ideal terroir for Pinot Noir.

## **His Estate.**

The Horitschon facilities are situated on a long strip of property, which is a form not uncommon in Burgenland. The winery was completely rebuilt in 1998 and has won several prizes for contemporary architecture. The cellar, bottling facilities, tasting room, office, and accommodations for overnight guests have been converted into open, sun-filled, and generously arranged spaces. Natural light fills the entire building, providing a pleasant working atmosphere.

Franz Weninger: "Our new facilities have a two-fold objective. On the one hand, we want a contemporary, modern, and open environment for presenting our products to our customers and visitors, and on the other hand, we ourselves want to be able to work in creative, airy, and stimulating surroundings."

The new facilities are the product of the collaboration between the Innsbruck-born architect Raimund Dickinger and Kriso Leinfellner of the architect team propeller z. Weninger invested approximately 1.5 million euros in its new building complex.

## **His Wines.**

**St. Laurent.** The perfect, storybook Burgenland wine: ruby red color, intensive aroma of black cherries and cherries, even young it already shows complexity and good density.

**Zweigelt.** Characteristic of the younger type of this varietal. Fruity, harmonious, velvety, with cherry notes in the nose.

**Zweigelt Raga.** Aged for 11 months in barriques, this is a fruity wine with sour cherry and plum aromas and light, sweet woody notes. A lively balance between fruit and acidity and a delicate mineral spice give this Zweigelt extraordinary potential.

**Blafränkisch.** A classic central Burgenland wine, aged in large oak barrels, ruby red, intensive flavor, lively on the palate with a long finish.

**Blafränkisch Hochäcker.** This wine is an example of what the predominant grape variety in central Burgenland is capable of bringing forth: very old vines, rigorous selection, and aging in oak barrels (at least one year) produce an elegant, complex wine with a long finish.

**Blafränkisch Kirchholz.** This wine is characterized by a dark ruby-pomegranate color, a clear, spicy blafränkisch fruit with distinctive mineral notes. Vinified from grapes produced by over 30-year-old vines grown on a terrain of clay-loam soil mixed with sand and gravel. Fermentation (spontaneous) and further aging in 2-year-old barriques yields a wine that is full-bodied on the palate with a pronounced fruity flavor of plums and blackberries and striking tannins!

**Blafränkisch Reserve.** The modern counterpart to the classic Hochäcker, made from a selection of the best grapes from the oldest vineyards. 15 months in the barrique give it a new dimension without adulterating the typical local character of the grape variety. A wine to be aged, best drunk between the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> year.

**Blafränkisch Saybritz.** The Saybritz site is located in southern Burgenland on the Eisenberg hill.

The grapes used to make this Blafränkisch come from vines of an average age of 40 years.

**Blafränkisch Dürrau.** In 1999 Franz Weninger for the first time vinified his Blafränkisch grapes from the Dürrau site as a single-site wine. The wine represents the rough-and-ready variety of the Blafränkisch, robust, rich in extracts, superb tannins, and a strong smoky, woody flavor.

Exceptionally dark, ruby-pomegranate color, intensive blackberry aromas, the juicy fruitiness of black cherries give this dense wine that is very typical for this region its distinctive quality.

**Merlot.** Originally planted as the predominant grape for cuvées, this international variety soon developed a uniquely independent character in these deep loamy soils and since 1995 has been processed as a varietal wine. In the nose it is fruity and elegant; on the palate harmonious and velvety. The wine is allowed to age for 18 months in new barriques.

**Cabernet Sauvignon.** Grown on the Hockäcker and Raga sites and aged in French barriques for 18 months.

**Veratina Cuvée.** From the names of his daughters Verena and Martina Franz Weninger coined this name for his best cuvée. Here Blaufränkisch, Zweigelt, and Merlot have been blended into a tantalizing work of art. The structure and tannins of the Blaufränkisch, the soft, melted caramel of the Merlot, the chewy voluminous character of the Zweigelt – a full-bodied wine of massive dimensions. Best drunk between the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> year.

**Pinot Noir Kalkofen.** This southern slope is known for its warm, chalky soil. Franz Weninger vinifies the grapes grown here to produce a barrique-aged Pinot Noir with plenty of fruit and a pleasant caramel-woody aroma.

## **Estate Profile.**

Vineyard: 30 hectares in and around Horitschon in central Burgenland, Austria. The soil here features a deep, moderately heavy to heavy loamy topsoil and is rich in clay and iron.

Varietals: Blaufränkisch, Merlot, Zweigelt, Cabernet Sauvignon, St. Laurent, Blauer Burgunder.

Production: 1,500 hl per year, which is equivalent to 170,000-200,000 bottles red wine only.

Cellar: 300,000 liters (barrels and tanks, 500 barriques)

Export: 30 percent; mainly to Germany, Switzerland and USA as well as to The Netherlands, Japan, UK, Scandinavia and Russia.

## **Franz Weninger in Hungary.**

### **Villány.**

Surrounding the southern Hungarian village of Villány, 30 kilometers to southeast of the town Pécs, there is a winegrowing area rich in tradition not far from the border to Croatia. Here, on less than 400 hectares of total vineyard area are produced some of the best red wines in Hungary – a standard that has been maintained for centuries. The history of winegrowing in Villány, in fact, goes back to the period of Celtic colonization. During the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy wines from Villány were sought-after export items, which for example were taken to America and Australia as early as 1840. The composer Franz Liszt loved these wines for their intensive aroma of violets.

This old tradition was almost lost due to the influence of two world wars and 40 years of Communism, but is being slowly regained since the mid eighties. For many years Franz Weninger carefully observed developments in this sector in neighboring Hungary. In 1992 he together with the Hungarian vintner Attila Gere finally took the plunge and founded the Weninger & Gere Winery in Villány. The very first wine Weninger & Gere put on the market in 1992 was an overnight success in the Hungarian gastronomic scene. It wasn't long before the wine was sold out. The enormous success motivated the two friends to buy more land for vineyards.

Today the Austrian-Hungarian team cultivates a total of 13 hectares, which are planted exclusively with red wine varietals. Although, in principle, white wine is also native to the Villány wine area, for instance "Olaszrizling," which can be found all over Hungary, or the mild "Hárslevelü," the best results can be had with red wines. It is with these wines that Franz Weninger has acquired the most experience in Austria, too: Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon, as well as to a lesser extent Cabernet Franc, and a cuvée called Phoenix, in which Kékfrankos is a dominant component.

In 1993 a new wine cellar was built. Since then the wine has been fermented in stainless steel, temperature-controlled tanks. This makes it



possible to preserve the typical southern fruit of the wine and to pay more attention to the specific requirements of the individual varieties. The must is allowed to remain in contact with the mash for up to three weeks, allowing it to extract color, aroma, and structure from the skins. This phase is followed by the biological breakdown of total acids. After a short phase of clarification, the wine is racked into barriques, where depending on the variety it is aged for 14 months to two years.

By the way, Franz Weninger was the first person in Villány to use barriques.

Franz Weninger: "The climate here is warmer than in Burgenland. We get a mix of Mediterranean and continental currents, and summers tend to be hot. The result is strong, deep-dark, full-bodied wines with a lot of potential. I predict that in a few years this region will have attracted strong international attention."

## **Villány Wines**

**Cabernet Franc.** Smoky-spicy red wine of Cabernet Franc grapes, easy to drink.

**Cuvée Phoenix.** Massive cuvée. A wine that ideally combines the vehement southern temperament with modern elegance.

## **Estate Profile.**

Vineyard: 13 hectares in and around Villány in southern Hungary. Loamy soil, southern orientation.

Varietals: Kékfrankos (Blaufränkisch), Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Cabernet Franc.

Production: 800 hl per year, which is equivalent to 120,000 bottles, red wine and rosé.

Cellar: 100,000 liters (barriques and tanks, 250 barriques)

Export: 90 percent is sold in Hungary, the rest is exported to Austria, Germany, Switzerland, Netherlands, UK and Russia.

## Awards and Notes.

### Wine Enthusiast, Roger Voss, October 2007

#### **The rise of Austria's red wines**

Franz Weringer

[...] With 56 acres, this is not a big operation, but with varied terroirs, he is able to produce an impressive range of wines. Among the best is Veratina, a blend of Blaufränkisch, Zweigelt, Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon. The single-vineyard Blaufränkisch from Hochäcker is concentrated and serious. His finest wine is a Blaufränkisch from the Dürrau vineyard, an explosion of deep cherry and blackberry fruits. [...]

#### **2004 Dürrau Blaufränkisch: 93 points**

Made from a single vineyard, this is Franz Weringer's flagship wine. Pure Blaufränkisch, it shows all the exotic flavors of the grape – mineral, spices, black cherries – packaged with dark tannins and smoky, toasty wood. To finish, there is cocoa along with a touch of sweet citrus. Great aging potential.

### A la Carte 2008

Blaufränkisch Hochäcker 2005:	94 points
Blaufränkisch Dürrau 2004:	93 points
Pinot Noir Kalkofen 2005:	92 points
Merlot 2005:	91 points
Veratina 2005:	90 points

### Gault Millau 2008

Blaufränkisch Dürrau 2004:	18,5 points
Blaufränkisch Reserve 2005:	17 points
Veratina 2004:	17 points
Merlot 2005:	16,5 points
Blaufränkisch Hochäcker 2005:	16 points
Pinot Noir Kalkofen 2005:	16 points

### Der Weinguide Vinaria 2007/2008

Pinot Noir Kalkofen 2005:	2 stars
Blaufränkisch Kirchholz 2005:	2 stars
Blaufränkisch Saybritz 2005:	2 stars
Blaufränkisch Reserve 2005:	2 stars
Veratina 2005:	2 stars
Merlot 2005:	2 stars
Blaufränkisch Dürrau 2005:	2 stars

**Falstaff Weinguide 2007/2008**

Blafränkisch Dürrau 2004:	92 points
Blafränkisch Reserve 2005:	90 – 92 points
Merlot 2005:	89 – 91 points
Veratina 2005:	88 – 90 points

**Wine Report, Wineguide 2008****Blafränkisch Dürrau 2002:** Top Ten – Greatest Quality Wines**Wine Spectator, USA, January 2008**

91 points	2003 Veratina
90 points	2003 Dürrau
89 points	2003 Blafränkisch Reserve
89 points	2002 Veratina
89 points	2004 Blafränkisch Hochäcker

**Wine & Spirits, April 2008****93 points 2005 Blafränkisch Hochäcker**

Dark and gripping, with rich, creamy depth and pungent aroma, this wraps its powerful intensity in a sophisticated and elegant package. The sappy flavors of blackberry and crushed cherry are backed by hints of game and spice, and the tannins are firm yet ripe and harmonious.

**91 points 2006 Blafränkisch**

Hints of mint and fennel underline the bold, juicy flavors of cherry and red berry. There's a concentrated, almost chocolaty depth on the palate, yet it's never heavy, with a structure that feels elegant and stylishly composed.

**International Wine Cellar Steve Tanzer, 2006****90 points 2004 Merlot**

Medium violettinged garnet. Rather shy aromas of sweet red berry compote, delicate oak spice and nougat. At once concentrated and fine-boned, with a very refreshing, juicy character for merlot. Firmly structured wine with lingering notes of caramel and bitter chocolate. Drink 2007 to 2014.

**90 points 2004 Veratina**

Powerful ruby-garnet with violet highlights. Discreet cherry and chocolate aromas with a leafy background. Concentrated fruit flavors are kept vibrant by refreshing acidity. Finishes with lingering red berry and lemon nuances. This blend needs some bottle aging to integrate its oak element. Drink 2007 to 2014.

**91 points 2003 Blaufränkisch Dürrau**

Medium garnet with violet highlights. Soil-driven aromas of wild cherry, minerals, spices and smoke, with subtle complementary oakiness. Tightly woven and stylish, with an impression of sweet fruit extract and harmonious acidity. The cherry and orange flavors are joined by chocolate on the long finish, which features abundant, satiny tannins. A solidly built Blaufränkisch with excellent aging potential. Drink 2008 to 2015.

**Wine Spectator, June 15, 2006**

91 points: 2002 Blaufränkisch Reserve

89 points: 2000 Blaufränkisch Dürrau

**Ilka Lindemann, Weinwelt, June 2006**

Simply Formidable

The traditional and modern harmonize well in Burgenland, Austria. We explored the region around Lake Neusiedl and found not only extraordinary vineyards but extraordinary wine makers and their wines as well. [...]

A hint of Weninger is all it takes. Weninger Winery. One look at Weninger's formidable label is enough to remember the bottle. That's good design. And one taste of Franz Weninger's wines is enough to instill a new love for Blaufränkisch and co. That's formidable wine. Franz Weninger is one of the biggest vintners in Austria and one of the top producers internationally as well. [...]

From Horitschon, I liked the 2003 Blaufränkisch Reserve. A charmer par excellence: dense aroma of ripe red berries, black currants, and black berries with a hint of spices and a delicate chocolate finish. An elegant, fruity wine that will prove addictive.

**Vinum Germany, May 2006**

**2003 Cabernet Franc Selection 15.5 points**

Lush and fruity, enormously juicy, spicy glaze, plays with muscles. A joint venture of the friends and colleagues Franz Weninger and Attila Gere. 2006 to 2012.

**2003 Kékfrankos Selection 17 points**

A powerful wine from the site Sporn Steiner. This Blaufränkisch is vinified from 40 year old vines, harvested only 30hl/ha. Promising flavors (blackberry, leather, cedar); strong, but at the same time tightly knit, matured tannin. 2006 to 2015.

**The Wine Detective, May 2006, [www.thewinedetective.com](http://www.thewinedetective.com)**

Sarah Ahmed

**Blaufränkisch Kirchholz 2004**

vibrant, rich and perfumed sour cherry and beetroot with cinnamon; ripe, velvety tannins.

**Blafränkisch Hochäcker 2004**

floral, white pepper nose, lovely purity of cherry and beetroot on its fresh and focused palate.

**Blafränkisch Reserve 2003**

delicate nose of raspberry with a stalky, minty edge and a hint of vanilla; surprisingly mouthfilling palate with powdery tannins, baked cherry/cherry stone and cocoa – very good.

**Blafränkisch Reserve 2000**

lovely wine showing nice development with its inky, floral nose and spicy, mellow plum and damson fruit; wet earth and mineral notes to its long, fresh finish.

**Blafränkisch Reserve 1992**

OK this is developed with bloody, savoury, mineral and brassica flavours – very Pinot Noir and very good with a lively acidity carrying a long finish.

**Dürrau 2003**

very old vines get the 100% new oak treatment giving this a more international feel...vanilla, toast and cocoa with sweet, ripe raspberry and cherry fruit; ripe, fine grained tannins.

**René Gabriel, Weinwisser, January 23, 2006**

**Austria in Red Wine Heaven**

**2003 Blafränkisch Dürrau**

Dark ruby-pomegranate color, deep purple at the center. A bouquet with finesse, abundant berry scents, cherry notes, hints of lilac, bursting with sweet aromas, fresh taste of cafe latte. Very delicate on the palate, graceful, elegant, phenomenal complexity, a truly elite wine.

18 of 20 points. Drink: 2012

**Wine International, November 2005**

**95 points 2000 Blafränkisch Dürrau**

Aged in 100 % new wood. Dense, intense black fruits, a mineral aspect and great length. Tannins are firm, acidity very good. It just needs time. Drink 2008 – 2020.

**Der Feinschmecker, November 2005**

**2003 Zweigelt Raga**

Whenever Der Feinschmecker tastes Austrian red wines, they always end up among the top ten.

Grown on almost 40-year-old vines in a heavy loam and clay soil rich in lime deposits, this Zweigelt has a smoky bouquet reminiscent of raw meat and dark cherries. It is strongly characteristic of its variety, fruity with sweet extracted flavors and a lively acidic structure; good length and potential.

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April 2008