

WEINGUT
ST. ZEHETBAUER

PRESS KIT

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Grown from history

“Experience is our most valuable asset“, says Stefan Zehetbauer, referring to his father’s knowledge and that of his ancestors. The young vintner runs the family winery in Schützen am Gebirge in their tenth generation. A grand anniversary generation so to say. The winery was founded as early as 1705 by Georg Zehetbauer. Stefan Zehetbauer, in turn, was the name of the ancestor who established the winery on today’s location in 1850. Around 2000, the enterprise was renovated throughout on the occasion of its 150-year-old existence. Completely in the original style and based on the existing structure – corresponding to the down-to-earthness and philosophy of the family of vintners. Thus, the typically Burgenland *Streckhof* farmhouse presents itself tastefully and unpretentiously. It is always the wine that stands in the foreground.

Whitewashed walls, and in summer blooming oleanders everywhere. Entering the winery is the way into a world of welcome. A glimpse into the barrel cellar attests to the family’s sense of tradition. It is a vaulted cellar that was rebuilt during renovation along the old design. Today, the craft of brick vault building is regarded as a rare art. It now covers and decorates the core of the winery. A special gem found in the cellar is the carved barrel bottom. It shows the family tree, which documents that the name of Stefan Zehetbauer has been passed down from one generation to the next.

On the other hand, the modern part of the cellar with its steel and fermentation tanks reveals that state-of-the-art technology has come in here too. Yet with the utmost cautiousness, as the vintner emphasizes. You feel highly comfortable in the tasting room, where wood, sandstone and bricks set the tone. Fitted with the best materials – designed and made for future generations. At the big wooden table customers and wine lovers have the opportunity to analyze the new vintage or simply taste the wines in a happy circle. Nothing appears intended here, but everything is as desired.

This is Stefan Zehetbauer

Stefan Zehetbauer has always wanted to become a vintner. He actually was infected by seeing his father's enjoyment in working with the natural product, wine. His desire became even greater when he attended the Commercial College for Viticulture and Agricultural Management in Neusiedl am See and the Agricultural Vocational School in Eisenstadt.

He understood early that experience is one of the key factors of success in viticulture. He therefore apprenticed in international wineries such as in Veneto and South Tyrol during his vacations. By working in the vineyards and cellars, and participating in wine analyses, he gained a lot of insights.

With the 2005 harvest, Stefan Zehetbauer expanded his field of work in his parents' enterprise, with the 2007 vintage he took over responsibility for winemaking, and since 2009 he is the official owner of the winery.

Inspiration for the vintner

“When I stand in our vineyards, especially on Steinberg, they give me power and energy. And I am spurred on as a vintner to create something genuine and permanent from this wonderful nature and calmness”.

Besides, Stefan Zehetbauer wants to do something else with his wines: to bring joy. “I only bottle wines I also enjoy myself”. What is most important to him is to capture clearly and distinctly the specific site and terroir of each vineyard in the wines. Although harmony is his credo, his wines also can and ought to be challenging and have some tension. After all, it is extremely rewarding to have a wine telling you more and more of its history with each sip.

Stefan also takes inspiration from music. To be more precise, it is rock music in its different forms – if only “handmade” and “honest”. To compare songs with wines – in terms of style and structure – is one of his great passions. For wine, too, follows a certain dramaturgy, comprising an opening part, midsection, refrain, and finale. And most important: the emotions that are awoken and will stick in your memory.

Just as Stefan is attracted to the quietness of the vineyards, he feels very excited about live concerts. Thus he would attend rock festivals in Germany or Italy and loves to remember concerts in the Arena di Verona or Madison Square Garden in New York. When entering the stage, the “moment of truth“ always comes, the actual skill of the musicians becoming apparent in the live performance. “I compare this to the situation when a wine is poured into the glass and just speaks for itself“.

Where the wine is born

“Our wine grows in the vineyard“. The latter being the realm of Stefan Zehetbauer Sr. “His experience is worth its weight in gold“, Stefan Jr. raves on, “I keep on learning something new“. Where does this instinct for the vines come from? “Already as a small boy I loved to go into the vineyards, always listening to my father with interest“, Stefan Zehetbauer Sr. unpretentiously answers. Proven old knowledge continuously supplemented with the new. Father and son place much emphasis on acquiring first-hand information on recent achievements and findings. “We always do a lot of research work before considering new approaches“. Besides, there are several parameters that have to be taken into account in most cases. For example, whether the rows of vines of a vineyard have to be covered with crops will depend both on the amount of rainfall and on the rootedness of the vines.

In general, the Zehetbauers stick to the principle of only carefully supporting the vegetation of the vines. Too much of an interference would disturb the rhythm of the vines and make them dependent on intervention by the vintner. To avoid this, Stefan Zehetbauer Sr. attaches great importance to a healthy and dense humus layer. This will balance the supply of nutrients and water especially in times of increasing weather extremes. All considerations focus on the cycle and mechanisms of nature. This will become apparent in supposedly small things. Thus, the pomace is composted and returned as fertilizer to its starting point, the vineyard. Cover crops are, moreover, grown in all corridors between the vines where tractors would pass. A special “vineyard climate“ thus develops, with plants and herbs that were already native to this area in former times. Among these are wild marjoram and thyme, which, as part of the terroir, have a marked impact on the characteristics as well as aromas and flavors of the wines.

This nature-related and cautious way of cultivation is the more effective the larger the portion of a coherent area under vine. For this reason, a new single vineyard site will preferably only be added if it borders a vineyard already in possession of the winery. In that case, the soil first of all is allowed to rest for some years as green fallow. The area will only be cut and mulched so as to promote the build-up of humus and enrich the soil with nitrogen. Valuable time during which the soil is able to fortify itself. When the vineyard is finally replanted, the vines will benefit from the vitality of the earth. Artificial irrigation is deliberately avoided so that the roots will find their way deeper into the soil more quickly. This will foster the uptake of nutrients and trace elements, and will make the vines altogether healthier.

Top site Steinberg – The secret of the monks

All of the vineyards of the Zehetbauer estate are located on and around the Schützner Stein, which is the impressive elevation that forms part of the uplands stretching along the western bank of Lake Neusiedl. Steinberg stands out as a stunning vineyard site. It is also the favorite place and preferred retreat of the Zehetbauers. There is an almost magical energy, ideal for recharging oneself or just enjoying quietness.

Steinberg was first mentioned in the 15th century – at that time still in the possession of a monastic order. A distinction per se: after all, the clerical vintners are known for being well aware of what vineyards would produce the best wine qualities. Rumors have persisted until today of a wine vault of the monks being concealed here in deeper layers.

Part of Steinberg has been in the possession of the family for 150 years. In 2000, Stefan Zehetbauer Sr. acquired a new plot on Steinberg, which lay fallow for more than 30 years and was even sporadically forested. The wealth of nutrients and vigor that the soil was able to gain during this period of rest becomes apparent from the vitality of the vines planted there.

What makes Steinberg so special is, first of all, its location. It is situated in the upper part of the Schützner Stein, where the forested ridge of the Leithaberg supports climate regulation. In winter it offers protection against cold breezes, while in summer the vines benefit from the cool nights provided by the forest. Even the soil has its own characteristics. While it is covered by a thick layer of humus, mineral mica slate will be encountered below. Also, the many herbs growing in that area add to the spell of the site. Wild thyme and sage decorate the rows of vine, exuding a spiciness that is also thought to be perceived in the wines.

Oenological instinct

“Wine is a matter of feeling“. When Stefan Zehetbauer entered into the winery, he initially chose winemaking as his main field. There he could directly implement his vision of being a purist regarding site specificity – always bearing in mind the variety in question and its authentic taste.

Each wine receives a maximum of attention. Thus, already the entry wines display lovely substance and perfect drinkability. The vintner individually decides how long the wines mature on the lees, how long they are allowed to age in barrels, and when the right moment comes for bottling. “Every vintage is different, so I leave it up to the wine when it’s ready“. Principally, the medium-bodied wines are launched between spring and the beginning of summer, whereas the site-specific and flagship wines will not be available before fall. In this respect, it bears mentioning that all wines are varietal wines, since the vintner endeavors to bring into focus the interplay between origin and variety in the taste. Besides, each wine is given sufficient time to develop its typical and individual personality. The vintner speaks of a clear profile, which frequently polarizes and, at the same time, fascinates. In any event, Stefan Zehetbauer’s wines are long-distance runners. That is why they need more time to unfold their full spectrum. Once in the glass, it is all the more challenging to get to the bottom of their multifacetedness.

In his work, the vintner is driven both by his consistent striving for further advancement and by the basic claim to attach great importance to seemingly small matters. Words of recognition and appreciation by customers or colleagues consequently spur him on to follow exactly this path.

Origin and taste: wines with identity

WELSCHRIESLING

“This wine is much sought-after in our area, it’s just typical of here“, Stefan Zehetbauer says.

Welschriesling is classically vinified in stainless steel tanks, the vintner taking care to reflect the original taste of the grapes in the wine. Thus, it shows appealing scents of apple and citrus paired with vineyard peach. Its crisp character and the consistent interplay of acidity and fruit are also very delightful. A wine that makes you drink another glass.

PINOT BLANC SONNENBERG

Sonnenberg is a *grosslage* on the Leithagebirge, which takes its name from that of the highest elevation. The vineyards from which the grapes are sourced are all situated within this *grosslage*. In the regions located higher, the vines thrive on slate and limestone; further below, near the Wulka river, they are planted on gravelly black earth. This wine is vinified in stainless steel tanks and usually left on the lees until March. Its nose exudes notes of flowers and yellow fruit with underlying herbal aromas and a touch of starfruit and quince. The poised palate delivers delicious suppleness and lovely solidity. It is offset by a delicate acidity and subtle piquancy.

GEWÜRZTRAMINER HÖLZLSTEIN

Hözlstein is a large limestone formation interspersed with plenty of shells. It stretches between the towns of Schützen and Oggau. The vineyard owned there by the Zehetbauers had been left uncultivated for quite some time before another valuable, adjacent vineyard was purchased in 2000. That raised the question as to which variety would fit best there. It ought to be something very Burgenland. The Zehetbauers finally chose Gewürztraminer, to which they attributed the greatest potential at that location. The calciferous soil, in fact, imparts a cool and finely tuned note to the wine, lending something dynamic to it. The charming perfume of roses is unmistakable, with aromas of litchi and a touch of myrrh joining in too. On the palate, this is complex and highly mineral, its lingering aftertaste making it a special wine experience. At the Zehetbauer estate, this variety, which is often referred to as a niche product, proves the opposite: “Gewürztraminer is a winner. It ranks among our most important wines. People get a kick out of it“.

LEITHABERG DAC WEISS

“The designation Leithaberg DAC signifies origin and minerality”. Following this philosophy, Stefan Zehetbauer selected the Pinot Blanc grape for this wine. It has a long tradition at the winery and is cherished by the vintner for its noble character and great potential. The vines thrive on lime and slate soils, which give the wine a lifted and lean character. The nose displays herbal spiciness with hints of lemon. The palate reveals the already mentioned minerality, which is rounded out by an attractive salty note. A long time on the lees and partial aging in slightly toasted oak barrels provides further refinement to this wine.

BLAUFRÄNKISCH MÖNCHSACKER

As the name of this single vineyard site suggests, it once belonged to a monastic order. It is located at the foot of the Schützner Stein and features a highly calciferous soil. This wine is produced in stainless steel tanks. The vintner is thus able to perfectly interpret the distinctive characteristic of origin of “that stretch on the Leithaberg“. For instance, through enticing aromas and flavors of cherry and tobacco, which are counterbalanced by an elegant structure and well integrated tannins.

MERLOT SINNER

Chronicles reveal early records of the single vineyard Sinner as “Sinnerhuet“ as early as 1570. This site also extends on the Schützner Stein, facing the lake. The soil texture is dominated by slate and lime. An exciting combination that gives birth to just such a wine: Juniper berries and black chocolate shape the aromas. Laid-back, yet distinguished, the wine enters the palate. The fine-grained tannin is perfectly integrated, lovely sappiness develops, mineral hints stay alive through the lingering finish.

LEITHABERG DAC ROT

This is one of the winery’s flagship wines, representing its attachment to the region. The oldest Blaufränkisch vines thriving in the single vineyards Reckenschink and Steinberg form the basis for this wine. Its special character derives from the prevailing lime and slate soils. It is aged in used barriques for 12 months, during which period its expansive aromas and flavors and its minerality start to evolve. A sinewy wine with perfectly built-in ripe tannins. Notes of blackberries combine charmingly with flavors of dark chocolate, while a delicate piquancy creates a bold counterpoint. A fruit-driven wine as can be expected from the Leithaberg.

CABERNET FRANC RESERVE

“People will simply remember this wine“. Due to Stefan Zehetbauer’s good relationship with the vines, even a late-ripening variety like Cabernet Franc feels comfortable on the Leithaberg. It thrives in the single vineyard Steinberg, whose south-southwest exposure with plenty of sunshine along with the heat-storage capacity of the mica-slate soil offer perfect growing conditions. The rows of vines are decorated with various herbs like wild thyme and sage, which are also supposed to be recognized in the wine. Stefan Zehetbauer Sr. planted Cabernet Franc on the Leithagebirge already in the 1980s – if only tolerated as an “experimental vineyard” by the authorities. The vines are up to 25 years old by now, and new plants are grafted at the estate from selected vines. The majority of the wine is aged in new oak barrels, after 12 months it is transferred to steel vats for harmonization, and finally it will undergo extended bottleaging up to 12 months before being sold. Its nose exudes intense spice reminiscent of a fir forest. On the palate, it displays flavors of dark fruit producing a densely textured mouthfeel with tightly knit tannins and intriguing succulence.

BLAUFRÄNKISCH STEINBERG RESERVE

Blaufränkisch plays an important role at the Zehetbauer estate. The name “Steinberg Reserve“ designates the flagship wine of their portfolio. Before this vineyard was replanted in 2002, it was left fallow for 30 years to recover. The resulting vitality of the soil makes the vines especially weather-resistant. Its favorable south-southwest exposure with plenty of sunshine and the mineral slate soil provide perfect ripening conditions for the grapes. “Steinberg Reserve“ is aged in small oak barrels between 18 and 24 months, followed by a period of rest up to 12 months in the bottle. The result is a powerful and profound wine with sizzling minerality and flavors of dark berries, juniper and earthy notes. Sappy tannins and an impressively lingering aftertaste suggest a great future for this wine.

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