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California **GATEKEEPER**

The Concannon Cabernet Clones Achieve
International Recognition



*John Concannon in front of
the Livermore, CA winery.*

Journaling along the Danube

by Noah Singerman

Head Sommelier at Saxon + Parole in New York City

I RECENTLY JOINED IMPORTER AI SELECTIONS AND A GROUP OF urban American sommeliers on a trip to Austria. Austria has been growing grapes and making wine for thousands of years. But now there is a younger movement of winemakers, championing the country's indigenous grapes. Through innovative organic processes, Austrian winemakers are showing the world that they belong on stage with the other major wine regions of the world.

My traveling companions to Austria were New York somms Natalie Grindstaff of Craft, Louis Fabbrini of Santina, Kimberly Cavoores from Café d'Alsace and Marseille, and Kimmy Wade from Son of a Gun in Los Angeles. Our trip was led by Volker Donabaum, Austrian Portfolio Manager for AI Selections and a native of the Wachau region whose family is heavily involved in the wine industry. (Volker thinks his last name might be related to the Danube River—Donau in German.) Our other guide was James Endicott, a bi-coastal wine salesman.

Here are some highlights from my wine journal during the trip.



PHOTO: VOLKER DONABAUM

Somms on the Danube (left to right): Kimberly Cavoores of Café d'Alsace and Marseille (NYC), guide Volker Donabaum, Kimmy Wade from Son of a Gun (Los Angeles), Natalie Grindstaff of Craft (NYC), James Endicott of AI Selections, author Noah Singerman of Saxon + Parole (NYC) and Louis Fabbrini of Santina (NYC).

Martin Mütenthaler's vineyards of Riesling and Grüner Veltliner.

DAY 1 We arrive in Vienna and meet up with Volker. A stop at a cafe for a much needed cappuccino and we're off to Burgenland.

We arrive in Burgenland, south east of Vienna and meet Pia Pfneisl, the owner of **Weingut Strehn**. Pia's grandfather Joseph started the winery in 1965. Now Pia's brother Patrick is the winemaker and her youngest brother Andreas, who just graduated from wine college, is the vineyard manager. "Wine for us is just passion, not business," Pia says. "We don't make a lot of money." After tasting her Blaufränkisch wine, we understand her passion.

After our tour, we are off to the **Hannes Reeh** winery for dinner. We barbecue Austrian-style with sausages and large amounts of Champagne.

DAY 2 I was up by 8 a.m. for a three-mile run along fields of wild flowers and veggies. Then we toured Hannes Reeh's vineyards. They are filled with a dark red clay soil that produces an elegant style of Zweigelt. Hannes's winery is very modern, with all new production tools, lots of barrels and state-of-the-art machinery.

Off to the Wachau Valley!

Our first stop is **Weingut Veyder-Malberg**. Peter Veyder-Malberg is a soft-spoken guy who cares deeply for the soil and the bugs that nurture his vines. While tasting at his dinner table, he speaks like a watchful parent of his soil, and how nourishing it affects the grapes. To him, wine is an expression of the soil. Peter was trained with all the technical skills of a great winemaker, but his passion and respect for the land shines bright in our glasses.

Now, we are off to dinner at Volker's family's winery, **Weingut Sighardt Donabaum**. We eat venison tartare, sausages, cheese and lots of wine made on premise. Belly full, I walk home alone, about 45 minutes down the road. The streets are quiet and filled with the smell of the wet stones of the Danube River—a smell I will never forget.

DAY 3 Up at 8 a.m. for a three-mile run along the Danube River, amazingly refreshing. We arrive at **Weingut Martin Muthenthaler**. Martin worked with Peter Veyder-Malberg and also works using an organic and biodynamic practice. Martin shows us his newly built terraced vineyard. "My new hobby," he says with a smile. He has built 100 meters out of 1,000 of it, and says it will take him another six years to complete.



Vintner Peter Veyder-Malberg explains Austrian terroir.

PHOTO: NOAH SINGERMAN

DAY 4 No run along the Danube for me today. We arrive at **Matthias Hager's** vineyards. He is very passionate about organic and biodynamic production. We then eat lunch at his brother's restaurant and farm, where they raise chickens and pigs. We taste the wines, which are understated, like the winemaker, with great balance and purpose.

Our last winery stop is **Franz Proidl**. With over nine generations of winemakers in their family (the winery was founded in 1738), you could say their history runs deep. Patrick, Franz' son, will be the tenth generation of winemakers in the family.

Dinner at **Gasthaus Schwarz** in the village of Nohagen is epic. The wine list is a sommelier's dream, complete with ten vintage verticals of all of the best vineyards, and best producers in Austria—all for the same price.

Day 5 One last run along the Danube River. This time, I jumped in. It was cold and refreshing. So meaningful to think about this historic water and its influence on the grapes of this region, integrating the old with the new. Now, off to the airport.

Austria is a beautiful country. The people are nice and welcoming, the food delicious, the history alive. These factors combined make world-class wine. While I knew about the wine, history and lineage before I arrived, it was refreshing to see how the newer generation looks to the older for guidance. Matthias Hager trained at Hirtzberger and Martin Muthenthaler at Domaine Wachau. Their quest for knowledge continued. They practice organic, biodynamic grape growing, garnering a respect for the land.

In learning that what you put into the ground comes through in your wine, vintners like the ones we visited have perfected the expression of terroir. With a continued push towards natural and organic wines, Austria is becoming ingrained in the minds of a new generation of sommeliers and wine consumers. *SJ*



Tenth-generation Patrick Proidl overlooking his family's vineyards.

PHOTO: NOAH SINGERMAN



Johann Donabaum pours tastes of his Riesling for somms Louis Fabbrini and Kimberly Cavoeres.

PHOTO: VOLKER DONABAUM