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Above, from left to right, industry leaders and experts such as Edward Smith, Nigel Bruce, Nicolas Boulay, Roland Müksch, Willi Klinger, CK Tsang, Michael Shum gathered for Blaufränkisch tasting dinner hosted by Hong Kong Wine Society. Right page, Head of Austrian Wine Marketing Board, Willi Klinger, serves as an advocate, introducing Austrian wines to people in the Asia Pacific region.



A rising grape from Austria

by Roland Müksch photos by Keith Sin

Blafränkisch wine tasting dinner deeply impressed every diner. Head of Austrian Wine Marketing Board, Willi Klinger, ambitious and passionate, en route to promote Austrian wines all over Asia



The 28 tasters were in unison to agree on the high quality,

Is Blaufränkisch the red Grüner Veltliner of Austria? Like the white signature grape of Austria it can uniquely express terroir to Burgundian precision. It is also a variety that can age and improve with age effortlessly, as the tasting of this article will show. Even more so, it is also a wine which is versatile and which pairs extremely well with food. However, to answer the question straight away – probably not, or at least not yet, but for the wrong reasons: Blaufränkisch only recently has come into its own, with the help of young wine makers like Prieler and Weninger, who recently took over from their fathers, and have created wines of ethereal subtlety and extracted every pinch of terroir. Furthermore, wines from the likes of Krutzler, Triebaumer and Kollwentz, now show sufficient maturity to display what these wines can achieve with age. There is also now a discovery of these wines in culinary circles in leading modern restaurants like Noma in Copenhagen. So what is Blaufränkisch? It is a late ripening dark skinned red variety, that often displays dark fruit and spicy characters, has a good lift and ample tannins. Blaufränkisch can also produce wines of lighter colour which almost resemble Pinot Noir from

Burgundy if treated with a gentler touch. The variety is most famous in Austria and there in Burgenland, where it has gained reputation, but is also important in Hungary, where it is called Kékfrankos and in Germany where it is known as Lemberger. Back to Austria and back to the origin of this article, the Hong Kong Wine Society organised and hosted a definitive tasting of Blaufränkisch in the presence of the ever so entertaining, enthusiastic and insightful head of the Austrian Wine Marketing Board, Willi Klinger. 12 wines from the best Blaufränkisch producers in Austria were sent over for the tasting directly from the cellars of the producers. What is rare is that most of them actually were mature or had some age. This is indeed unusual and difficult for Austria, where most white wine is consumed in the year or the year after production and the reds not much later than that. Hong Kong however has the British palate – or as they say, the love for wine which is very mature (i.e. wine necrophilia). The Hong Kong Wine Society, which has staged blind wine tastings for over 35 years on a nearly weekly basis, is a prime example of this preference. Willi Klinger, who was in Hong Kong for



age-worthiness and terroir expression of Blaufränkisch

the Gala Dinner for Room to Read (Austria had sponsored many wines for this event), was the perfect host for the evening. He was also very straight forward. To date, the success of Austrian wine abroad has been white wine, with critics and sommeliers from New York, to London and Tokyo raving about Austrian GV (Grüner Veltliner) and Riesling. China, one of the most important emerging wine markets, which unfortunately also prefers reds over whites, is still a market for Austria to crack. During the evening, Willi in fact made a pledge to personally ensure that Austrian wine is appreciated in Hong Kong and China within the next five years. It did not take much convincing for The Hong Kong Wine Society, as the wines were speaking for themselves. Willi's entertaining stories, explanation of his uniquely designed vintage chart and piano skills made of this exceptional tasting at Crown Wine Cellars a night not to be forgotten. The 28 tasters were in unison to agree on the high quality, age-worthiness and terroir expression of Blaufränkisch. The results of the tasting (The Hong Kong Wine Society amalgamates individual rankings of tasters to a ranking of the evening) clearly

demonstrated that the variety requires age to come into its own: higher scored wines showed a near linear correlation to their age. The tasting demonstrated that there were two styles of Blaufränkisch: one more masculine, with good affinity to oak, as long as not overdone and with lots of spice, dark fruit and brambles., the other more feminine, lighter coloured, with intense minerality shining through and a perfumed bouquet. So what does the future hold? Willi explained that the recently introduced DACs for Blaufränkisch in Burgenland are the first step to establish terroir for the variety. He is realistic about this – it will take time for the DAC system to produce results. He also sees and works already on the next step – the delimitation of the different Lagen (i.e. Cru) in the regions. This of course is an even more difficult task, as it will require soil analysis, micro climate analysis, but also consensus of the growers on delimitation. He is however someone with a very long term view and know that all these thing take time. He knows how great Austrian wines can be – so confidently he says: “With time we will get there”. To be continued... 🍷



Above, left, 12 wines from the best Blaufränkisch producers in Austria were sent over to Hong Kong for the tasting directly from the cellars of the producers; Willi Klinger, head of the Austrian Wine Marketing Board, were taking notes of these exceptional wines. Right, Willi Klinger and the Vice-Chairman of Hong Kong Wine Society Roland Müksch were exchanging thoughts over the tasting.



Above, left, Founder and Director BEE Drinks Global, a wine branding and marketing company, Francesca Martin was examining the wine colour. Right, the Blaufränkisch tasting organised by Hong Kong Wine Society was taking place. In the picture includes Catherine Yen, Karl Bachmair, Roberto Cioaca, Michael Botelho, Tersina Shieh, Greg De'Eh, Nigel Bruce, Nicolas Boulay and Myrna Jivraj.



87 **WENINGER, KÉKFRANKOS, HUNGARY 2013**

Weninger also produces a Blaufränkisch just across the border in Hungary, as parts of Hungary used to be Austrian and parts of Burgenland Hungarian. This unoaked young wine, displayed primarily fresh fruit aromas of cherry and brambles. The wine felt a little rustic and reductive and was still coarse on the palate, with stemmy tannins. Time will be needed to integrate the wine and to tame it. (weninger.com)

89 **JURIS, SELEKTION, BLAUFRÄNKISCH, 2013**

A lightly coloured wine, reminding of a Burgundian Pinot. The aroma profile is very delicate and feminine, interwoven with aromas of ripe blackberry. The palate has good grip, a pleasant lemony acidic streak and nice fruit aromas. Not as long, but there was interesting evolution in the glass. (juris.at)

90 **GUT OGGAU, BERTHOLDI, 2011**

Rather different from its peers, this wine was intensely inky. However, there was a dustiness, mintyness and some mandarin peel aromas, that was not to be found in the other wines. The palate on the other hand, was more classic, with lots of ripe blackberries, sweet ripe black currant and velvety tannins. (gutoggau.com)

89 **UMATHUM, KIRSCHGARTEN, BLAUFRÄNKISCH, 2011**

The nose displayed overripe and dried fruits aromas, slightly rustic farmyard characters. A bit warming. The tannins a little bit stemmy, providing good structure and spice. (umathum.at)

90 **MORIC-ROLAND VELICH, LUTZMANNSBURG, BLAUFRÄNKISCH, 2009**

An interesting wine that combined aromas of brambles, with many tertiary aromas. Slightly dusty smoky and some streaks of fresh tobacco,

black currant leaves and medicinal aromas. The wine had a good body and weight and elegant, but slightly stemmy tannins. A wine which needed further age to evolve. (moric.at)

93 **HEINRICH, ALTER BERG, BLAUFRÄNKISCH, 2007**

A wine that displayed immense purity of fruit, that made it hard to resist. The high quality was immediately apparent and accentuated by the aromas of violets. Hints of tobacco and tea leaves just betrayed that this wine was not as youthful as it first appeared. This age had also rounded out the edges, integrated the lightly toasted oak influence and provided a harmonious balance for this wine. (heinrich.at)

92 **SCHLOSS HALBTURM, BLAUFRÄNKISCH, 2006**

A Grande Dame of a wine, eluding to the great wines of Bordeaux. The ripe fruit was only part

of a perfumed aroma kaleidoscope. On the palate there were high notes that balanced the fruit sweetness, and the polished tannins. Aromatic, balanced and elegant. (schlosshalbturn.com)

94 **KOLLWENTZ, POINT, BLAUFRÄNKISCH, BURGENLAND, 2004**

Only two years younger than the two oldest wines of the flight and it was apparent that this wine had not yet reached its apogee. It was still tight, with dense tannins. The fruit blended well with delicate spiciness. On the palate much more vibrant and racy than on the nose. The flawless structure and balance just confirmed that it will continue to improve with age gracefully. (kollwentz.at)

93 **WENINGER, DÜRRAU, BLAUFRÄNKISCH, 2013**

Another wine which was more ethereal than massive. The nose was intensely seductive,

with fine floral aromas, roses, freshly crushed red berries and hints of fresh meat. The palate was juicy, very young, still with lactic hints and a slight metallic edge. The fresh acidity gave this 2013 wine superb freshness. Overall just too irresistible not to drink now, but time would round the edges and bring this wine to another dimension. (weninger.com)

95 **ERNST TRIEBAUMER, MARIENTAL, BLAUFRÄNKISCH, NEUSIEDLERSEE HÜGELLAND 2002**

If the Krutzler was masculine and powerful, the Triebaumer was ethereal and Burgundian. Beautiful floral notes were blended with a hint of black berries and a good lift of red berries. The evolution of forest floor and fresh cepes, was subtle and just added to the complexity without taking anything away. Despite this lightness the wine was seamless and just flowing into a long finish. (triebaumer.com)

96 **KRUTZLER, PERWOLFF, BLAUFRÄNKISCH, SÜDBURGENLAND 2002**

This wine really stood out. It had a unique and distinctive nose, but was absolutely hedonistic. Brooding dark berries and tea leaves were intertwined with liquorice and a high octane minerality. The structure of thi Blaufränkisch was flawless, dense, rounded and seemed to go on without ever losing tension and stretching out in length. (krutzler.at)

93 **PRIELER, GOLDBERG, BLAUFRÄNKISCH, 2002**

This was a wine which changed a lot in the glass. Initially delicate and shy it later revealed ripe fruit, succulent blackberries and balsamic notes, revealing some of the maturity of the wine. The tannins were exceptionally powdery and a precise acidic backbone led into a tantalising finish. (prieler.at)