

Wine & Spirits

SPECIAL ISSUE

29th Annual
BUYING GUIDE

AS SEEN IN Wine & Spirits

Austria Styria

Neumeister

With castles on cliff tops and steep, sunny hills paved in green, southeastern Styria is one of Austria's most picturesque winegrowing regions. Thanks to wine-makers like Christoph Neumeister, it's also become one of the most exciting, putting out world-class white wines.

Volcano Land: Südöststeiermark—southeastern Styria—is known as Vulkanland locally, a reference to the extinct volcanoes that dotted the landscape some 15 million years ago. Then, when the Paratethys Sea retreated, it added plenty of gravel, sandstone and limestone to the volcanic mix. Christoph Neumeister takes advantage of the diversity of soils and exposures to grow a range of different varieties, including rare local vines like roter traminer, a pink-skinned variant of savagnin. His 2012 Steintal makes a strong case for the grape: Fermented spontaneously and aged 12 months in large, old wood casks, the wine is grandly proportioned, as rich in spicy red currant and rhubarb flavors as it is structured and firm. If you closed your eyes and tasted it, you might mistake it for a red—especially if there's paprika-dusted pork belly on the table, or pasta with chanterelles.

Styrian Grand Crus: Back in 1986, the Styrian Classic Vintners group formed to identify the region's best winegrowing terroirs. Now known as the Styrian Terroir & Classic Wine Estates (STK), the association

has classified the best vineyards as either premier cru (*Erste Lage*) or grand cru (*Grosse Lage*), awarding the designation to parcels that meet a number of detailed requirements, from minimum vine age to farming methods. Neumeister, who farms all his 75 acres organically and by hand, owns four classified sites, including Klausen, a premier cru site of limestone-rich soil tilted east-southeast on a precipitous slope. Here, the grapes get ripe, but slowly, allowing wines like the 2012 Klausen Sauvignon Blanc to accrue significant flavor depth with the structure to match. It feels almost fierce, the acidity winding through the wine like sinewy muscles, while skin tannins add grip—a sauvignon for the cellar, where it may outlive all your Sancerre.

Styrian Acidity: Neumeister talks about “Styrian acidity” as a hallmark of the local wines. “You get ripeness like in Friuli, but there's a lot more rain here, and it's cooler,” he says, noting that it rarely gets hotter than 86°F—and even then, the heat will last for only a week. There's also altitude to take into account: Climb to the top of Neumeister's vineyards—all between 1,100 to 1,250 feet—and most often there's a refreshing breeze. The advantage is clear when it comes to grapes like gelber muskateller, which isn't known for high acidity. Neumeister's 2013 has plenty of it, holding juicy, floral grapefruit and lime flavors to a long, lean line. It fits well into the Neumeister portfolio, a firm, elegant white with clarity and substance. —T.Q.T.



Winemaker/viticulturist:
Christoph Neumeister
Owner: The Neumeister family
Founded: 1960
Acres owned: 75
Cases produced: 15,000
Estate grown: 85%
Importer: Monika Caha Selections/
Frederick Wildman and Sons, NY
Website: neumeister.cc

TOP-SCORING WINES

- 94 '12 Südöststeiermark Steintal Roter Traminer \$34 (4/15)
- 93 '12 Südöststeiermark Klausen Sauvignon Blanc \$37 (4/15)
- 90 '13 Südöststeiermark Steirische Klassik Gelber Muskateller \$23 (4/15)

TOP 100 WINERIES 2015

The Steintal Vineyard



MONIKA CAHA SELECTIONS INC.

