



Strohmeier (Austrian Series #2)

Can you believe it? In the land of NZ-styled SB Gruner yeasts, in the home of loess and primary rock, in Austria, I stumbled into a world of winemakers who work minimally. And thanks to the Gravner worship, there is an insane interest in amphora, the new barrique.

Even more surprising is that the group of extremists making gorgeous wine, outside of the mainstream, are barely available in the States. With all of the wine importers combing Austria for gruner and rieslings and with all of the new importers looking to be the new Joe Dressner or José Pastor, you'd think that someone was on to them, right?

Many of these folk are in Styria, the area close to the Slovenian border mostly known for piercing and paint by numbers sauvignon blanc. In the area, my first stop was near Stainz to taste Franz Strohmeier.

His house was festooned and I said to myself, "These people are crazy. In a good way." I don't know why, but that was my instinct. I met Franz and his wife Christine (great cook, lovely lunch, asparagus soup and a quiche that had snow peas but packed with flavor), a couple who seem in love and have three children and live in their winery.

Franz is part of a small group of Biodynamic winemakers who call themselves Schmecke das Leben, which even in yiddish means, taste the life. I was like, right, I'll believe that when I taste it, but even I had to admit that the term had a naive sweetness. Never did I think the wines would live up to the name.



We went to the vines in his father's backyard a few meters away. He works 12h of rural land, next to the forest, cuckoos in the background. Mildew is a problem here and that makes copper sulfate a necessity, though he has replaced sulfur with whey, which he finds works. He is trying to use less and less copper in the mean time.

We ate cherries off of the trees, there was poly culture, and the bees were buzzing and the smell of grape vines in flower filled the air with a prettier version of Dove soap, but did the man have the touch?

Franz Strohmeier has the touch. Like many of the people in the group, he holds his wines back until they are stable and ready. The sauvignon blanc, 2008, spent 6 months on the skins and stems, and had some orange color, tannic, earthy, tangy. The 2007 weissburgunder, probably among the best I ever had. *Yum*, I wrote. Juicy. Some of his wines get sulfur at bottling, but he says he always reserves some for himself without the addition, he just finds they taste better.

I found all of his wines fascinating and mostly delicious. I'd never had a blauer wildbacher,



By reputation this makes a wine for early drinking; glug, glug.

Thumbing his nose at convention, he served a 2007 rosé, with the weight and depth of a ploussard, in his red-red, the wines turn into trousseau dusted with nutmeg.

Yes, he bit the amphora bug. The urns are waiting for the 2011 vintage.

Little else makes me more thrilled than crazy people making great wine.

(word has it that Williams Corner Wine and Monika Caha might have the wines)

<http://www.alicefeiring.com/blog/2011/06/hidden-wine-treasure-in-austria-some-buried.html>