

# WHERE CITY *MEETS* VINEYARD

Wieninger's Wine History in Vienna

## ENGLISH VERSION

*Austria has been making wine for about 3,000 years. Guided by the philosophy "small is beautiful," Austrian wines—made with an emphasis on quality over quantity—have received exceptional praise from wine lovers and experts around the world. Among all the world's wine regions, Vienna stands alone as a capital city that functions as a designated wine appellation. We visited Wieninger Winery, a family-run estate that represents Vienna and has earned acclaim both nationally and internationally.*

TEXT MANAMI TOMINAGA PHOTO ALRELIEN FOUCAULT

**T**he Danube flows east-west through the heart of Vienna, dividing the city in two. Rolling hills spread out on both sides of this great river: Bisamberg on the northern bank and Nussberg on the southern. Wieninger Winery's main operations lie on both sides; winemaking facilities with a tasting room and 25 hectares of vineyards on Bisamberg, while on Nussberg they run a traditional *Heuriger* (a tavern where winegrowers serve their own wines) and tend 15 hectares of vineyards. We visited the estate in Bisamberg. When we opened the door to the cozy tasting room, we were warmly welcomed by Alfonso Wismser, the winery's sommelier and export manager. "Fritz is traveling abroad at the moment," he said with a smile, showing us in and beginning our tour of the winery.

#### FROM TRADITION TO INNOVATION

With nearly 100 years of history, Wieninger Winery originally operated as a small *Heuriger*. The turning point came in 1987, when Fritz Wieninger, the current CEO and winemaker, took over the family business. From his teenage years, he learned advanced winemaking techniques and gained experience in cellars both domestically and internationally. This experience



encouraged him to decide on a shift in the family business direction. While maintaining the charming Austrian wine culture of the *Heuriger*, he focused his efforts on business expansion and the production of high-quality wines.

The crucial asset behind this transformation was a centuries-old monastery that Fritz's parents had purchased some 40 years earlier.

"At the time when they bought the monastery, they didn't have a particularly clear business plan," Alfonso explained. "They simply knew that this was their only chance to acquire the monastery."

The monastery was gradually transformed into their new winemaking headquarters, with production scale increasing steadily. Today, the winery has developed into an international operation that produces 350,000 bottles annually and exports to 45 countries.

Alfonso guided us through the converted monastery winemaking facilities, where tradition and innovation harmonize beautifully. The building, half buried underground, benefits from natural cooling effects and stable temperatures, creating an ideal environment for winemaking. The spacious ground floor houses large stainless-steel fermentation tanks and presses in orderly rows. In the underground cellar, we felt transported centuries back in time. The dimly lit basement is almost chilly, with barrels of various sizes ranging from 600 to 5,500 liters arranged throughout the space. "Some barrels have been in use for 12 years, and if maintained properly, they can be used for up to 25 years," Alfonso said. "We also use Italian-made angostura, which allow the wine to breathe naturally without adding flavors."

#### THE HEART OF VIENNESE

##### WINEMAKING: GEMISCHTER SATZ

Wieninger cultivates a diverse range of grape varieties, including Grüner Veltliner, Riesling, Chardonnay, and Pinot Noir. Each transformed into wines of exceptional quality. However, what truly distinguishes this winery is *Gemischter Satz*—mixed planting wines.



Fritz Wieninger, CEO and winemaker



Gemischter Satz represents a traditional winemaking approach requiring at least three different white grape varieties of Qualitätswein level to be planted together in the same vineyard, then harvested and fermented simultaneously. This technique emerged from medieval necessity, when access to clean water was limited and fermented wine provided essential beverage.

Cultivating only a single grape variety carried the risk of losing the entire harvest to disease or natural disasters, so farmers planted multiple varieties in the same field. "When varieties differ, their growth cycles differ too, so if one variety suffers damage, there's a possibility that you won't lose everything. It was risk management farming," Alfonso explained.

Fritz showed little interest in Gemischter Satz until around 1999. However, after tasting Gemischter Satz wine made using the grapes in the Nussberg vineyards he bought, he recognized its tremendous potential. In 2006, Fritz established Wien Wein (Vienna Wine), forming a group of winemakers dedicated to promoting the legitimacy of Gemischter Satz worldwide, and in 2009, he became president of the Vienna Gemischter Satz Association. These efforts culminated in 2013 when Wiener Gemischter Satz DAC received appellation status, defining three quality levels: Gebietswein (regional), Ortswein (village), and Biidenwein (single vineyard). This was the first time an Austrian wine style and growing region achieved such recognition.



Since 2006, Fritz has gradually transitioned to biodynamic farming, and in 2013 all the vineyards became fully certified.



**A REMARKABLE TASTING EXPERIENCE**  
Guided by Alfonso, we enjoyed tasting Gemischter Satz, while learning about the distinctive soils that shape them.

The drier, sun-blessed Eisberg features light, sandy loess soils with very high limestone contents, producing light, fragrant wines with vibrant acidity. The Nussberg features shell limestone and limestone soil, all crosscrossed with quartz veins. This mineral-rich terroir produces expressive wines with pronounced minerality—ideal for Gemischter Satz. Since 2006, Fritz has gradually converted to biodynamic farming and achieved full certification across all their vineyards by 2013. The biodynamic approach helps the vines express these different terroirs more clearly.

We tasted three expressions of Vienna's signature field blend, each revealing distinct terroir character. The regional Wiener Gemischter Satz DAC 2024 (€14) opened with fresh stone fruit and vibrant acidity from its 12-vineity blend including Grüner Veltliner and Weißburgunder (Pinot Blanc) across Eisberg and Nussberg sites. The village-level Eisberg DAC 2023 (€18.40) showed greater complexity, with Weißburgunder (Pinot Blanc) and Gemischter (Pinot Gris) from 40-year-old vines delivering smoky



minerality and fuller structure from sandy loess soils. The single-vineyard Ried 'im 107W Nussberg DAC 2023 (€26) represents the pinnacle—vino varieties including Sylvaner and Traminer from calcareous shell limestone soils, with remnants of a cool leaf from the last year period creating remarkable saline minerality and crystalline precision.

"One of the most interesting aspects of Gemischter Satz is that different varieties not only bring different flavors but also different stages of maturity," Alfonso said. "We take a thoughtful approach depending on the style we want to achieve—employing cold maceration to reveal hidden aromatics, managing fermentation temperatures to maintain the wine's inherent finesse. We use large barrels that are over 10 years old. These nurture the wine's character rather than overwhelming it."

The tasting offered a fascinating glimpse into how three quality levels, each characteristic, and wine-making approach are unified and expressed beautifully in each exquisite wine. The Austrian glassmaker Zalto's glassware further emphasized the wines' delicate nuances.

#### LIVING TRADITION

The true magic of the Wieninger wines, however, came alive when we visited their Nussberg Heurigen. In the rustic setting surrounded by lush vineyards and overlooking the Danube as it runs through Vienna, the wines found their perfect companions in hearty regional dishes. This harmonious pairing creates a convivial atmosphere that has made Heurigen the beating heart of Viennese culture for centuries.

#### FUTURE GENERATIONS, ONE VISION

What Fritz Wieninger pursues transcends simply making high-quality wine—he seeks to express the unique flavors that can only be born in Vienna, capturing the city's distinctive character in every bottle.

This vision has shaped a fundamental philosophical transformation within Fritz. Where he once saw himself as a winemaker, he now embraces

his role as a farmer. The crucial reason behind this farmer-first philosophy is the fact that ninety percent of what ends up in the bottle is created in the vineyard throughout the year. The most important thing is knowing the vineyards, knowing the plants, and spending time outside.

Today, this same vision lives on in the next generation. Fritz's three children—Sophie, Kathi and Maxi—each bring specialized expertise to the family business. In 2024, they launched their own wine line called "Wieninger aus," producing three wines with names that playfully combine their initials: "SoMa," "KaSoMa," and "SoSe."

Through his unwavering commitment to the land and craft, Fritz continues demonstrating Austrian wine's exceptional quality while elevating Vienna's international reputation. At Wieninger, three generations unite around this shared vision—creating wines that authentically capture Vienna's soul. Here, where urban landscape meets rolling vineyards and time-honored tradition embraces bold innovation, Vienna's most distinctive and captivating wines continue to emerge, bottle by bottle, vintage by vintage.

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#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR MASARI TOMIYAMA



Masari Tomiyama skriver på japanska och engelska och är en japansk författare och vinexpert som skriver för allt som går från månadliga uppdateringar på nätet. Hon skriver om vin, mat, kryddor, resor och kultur. Hon är en frekvent bidragsgivare till Japan Times, Japans största engelskspråkiga tidning, och kan hitta i Nakano-mat hen inte reser runt i världen.