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The Pour

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Blaufränkisch Reveals Itself

Just returned from a lunch with six Austrian producers of blaufränkisch, and some of their wines were revelatory.

I have to admit my previous experiences with blaufränkisch have been mixed. I've had some pretty stolid examples, but this tasting demonstrated convincingly that when treated properly in the vineyard and the cellar, blaufränkisch can make some gorgeous, graceful wines that are wonderfully expressive of their vineyards.

What does it mean to treat the grape properly? A relatively cool climate, for one thing, as well as interesting vineyard sites, and a restrained hand in the cellar. Many of the wines that I've had in the past have been made in a more heavy-handed way, with heavily extracted flavors and plenty of new oak. It was as if winemakers treated blaufränkisch as though it were cabernet sauvignon.

But another style of blaufränkisch has emerged, in which winemakers look at the grape as if it were pinot noir, handling it more gently while aiming for grace and elegance rather than power.

Indeed, as [David Schildknecht](#), the wine writer who organized the lunch and tasting, pointed out, blaufränkisch producers are not really interested in making cabernet or pinot noir, but in making the best possible blaufränkisch from their particular terroirs.

Yes, spoken like an adept master of ceremonies. Still, both styles were among the wines served at this lunch, and while I was unmoved by the more powerful versions, I thought the lighter wines were exceptional.

In particular, I was blown away by two wines from [Moric](#) (pronounced moritz), Roland Velich's effort to probe the potential of blaufränkisch. Velich is an avowed Burgundy lover, and while he is not trying to recreate Burgundy with blaufränkisch, Burgundy is his inspiration.

His 2002 Lutzmannsburg and 2002 Neckenmarkt both come from old-vine vineyards in the Burgenland, the region in eastern Austria adjacent to the border with Hungary. Both share an uncommon grace and elegance, along with savory mineral flavors. The Lutzmannsburg was a bit earthier, with lovely fruit, while the Neckenmarkt had an attractive high-toned herbal streak running through it.

I also was very impressed by two wines from Carnuntum, north of the Burgenland, not far from Vienna, made by [Muhr-Van der Niepoort](#), a team of Dorli Muhl and her ex-husband, [Dirk Niepoort](#), the Portuguese winemaking superstar. They, too, have taken inspiration from Burgundy, and also from Port. Specifically, as is traditional in the Port houses, they tread whole clusters of grapes by foot, which Ms. Muhr said helped to give her the freshness she seeks in her wines.

“We don’t care for color,” she said. “The only thing I’m passionate about is freshness.”

Indeed, her 2006 Spitzerberg was pale, fresh and graceful with winsome floral aromas and a wonderful texture. The 2007 was younger and tighter, but had an equally attractive texture and may prove better in the long run.

Other wines that I particularly liked included the 2007 Ungerberg from [Paul Achs](#), another graceful, elegant wine; the 2007 and 2004 Kirschgartens from [Umathum](#), which were done in a more powerfully fruity style, but did not sacrifice the elegant floral qualities that are so attractive in *blaufränkisch*, and the 2007 Reihburg from [Uwe Schiefer](#), a lively, energetic wine from the southern portion of the Burgenland.

Of course, this is just a quick snapshot from a fast tasting. But I liked the wines so much that I hope to linger over them one day soon.

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