



Fresh from attending VieVinum 2016, Ravi Joshi recounts his multi-dimensional experience at the latest edition of this mega Austrian wine fair.

Austrian wine symphony at VieVinum 2016

This January when Austria was voted as the best wine destination in the Travvy awards, a random thought occurred to me about the country being on top of my wine exploration wish list. Little did I imagine that my wish would come true so soon, as I received an invitation from the Austrian Wine Marketing Board to attend their mega wine fair VieVinum 2016.

As a wine country, Austria has a rich history as also its share of upheavals

during the evolutionary period. Today, the country is widely acknowledged for its high standards of winemaking and some incomparable wines that add to the diversity of the wine world. Much credit for this goes to the country's stringent winemaking laws that continue to be improved upon while keeping pertinent issues like sustainability in focus.

At the centre of all this action is the Austrian Wine Marketing Board (AWMB), which was founded in 1986 for ensuring quality and promoting Austrian

wines. The Board has 50% ownership each from the industry and local governmental bodies. The Board's current Managing Director, Wilhelm a.k.a. Willi Klinger, is well known as a man of all-round talent who, apart from his administrative acumen, is also capable of delivering a wine rap while pounding away on his piano keyboard!

BIENNIAL WINE FESTIVAL

VieVinum is Austria's largest and most prestigious wine fair, held every



second year in Vienna Hofburg. The biennial wine festival is open for three days during the end of May/beginning of June. It invites wine enthusiasts and professionals to taste new wines from hundreds of Austrian producers and several international wine estates. Apart from the 'magnum opus', the fair incorporates supplementary events that facilitate a well-rounded wine experience for the visitors.

This year the tenth edition of VieVinum saw more than 15,000 visitors sampling wines from some 620 exhibitors. As invitees to the fair, we had the advantage of continuous updates that facilitated planning on our part to make the most of the visit.

Preliminary events started on June 2 and worked as a good acclimatisation for the hectic days that would follow. Now, we look at the main pieces that made up the grand event.

THE MAIN FAIR

The expansive interiors, spread across two floors of the magnificent Hofburg Palace, provided ample space for producers to showcase their products and organise discussions. For visitors,



An artist's creation to celebrate the 10th edition of VieVinum

a colour-coded routing scheme that segregated wine regions served as a faultless orientation. On the extremities of both the floors were the various conference halls that served as venues for the side events. The AWMB informed that as opposed to the earlier years, the press centre was migrated to an air-conditioned tent directly in front of the Hofburg, in order to provide more room inside the building for both exhibitors and visitors. The press centre was

well equipped with a modern office wherewithal like computer terminals, conference spots, internet connectivity and light refreshments. The adjacent area served gourmet lunch with wine to AWMB invitees, and an outdoor food court introduced the guests to other culinary possibilities. Along with some 450 Austrian estates on display, many diverse guest countries showcased their wines as well – Germany was particularly well represented this year.



Willi Klinger (extreme left) with previous managing directors of AWMB



Salon wines tasting in progress

VIENNESE HEURIGER EXPERIENCE

Conducted on the evening of June 2, this get-together at a well known Viennese heuriger named Fuhrgassl Huber worked as an 'ice breaker' for invitees from 42 nations. A Heuriger implies a 'wine tavern' having traditional roots in eastern Austria where local winemakers would offer their fresh wines after the growing season with the hope of selling a few bottles as well. Though the present-day Heuriger does not necessarily restrict itself to the latest vintage, it maintains the original essence of local wine and food served around traditional Viennese music played on the accordion and violin.

We were welcomed at Heuriger Fuhrgassl Huber by the enthusiastic AWMB team to explore scores of wines from different Austrian wine regions organized systematically in separate rooms and catalogued for easy reference. An extensive buffet spread of authentic Austrian cuisine and live music added to the charm of this traditional setting.



TASTING OF SALON VINTAGES 1988-2009

This year being the 30th anniversary of the AWMB, offered them a perfect occasion to dip into the archives of the SALON Austrian wines. SALON is Austria's most demanding wine competition, held annually since 1988. It chooses and crowns Austria's best wines from out of a total of 7,000 submitted nationwide. A historic selection of these prize winning wines was offered within the framework of a seated tasting in

the resplendent Landtagssaal (the famous parliament hall which has been a venue of dance and celebration for centuries) of the Palais Niederösterreich. Notwithstanding the mammoth scale of the tasting (39 flights with several wines each), the service was executed with clockwork precision and at admirable levels. It offered the participants a customised tasting experience where they could just raise a card to indicate a flight of choice and have it served from bottles arriving in insulated caddies.

BIG AUSTRIAN WINE PARTY

Surely more than a regular party, this first day conclusive event of VieVinum saw 550 guests enjoying a vast range of wines from a catalogued selection that guided them to the right bars from amongst several at the venue — the lively Museumquartiers area in Vienna. Accompanied with an exotic culinary

wine in its own niche, viz. Climate, Land, Grapes, Culture, People, Respect for Nature and Food Pairing.

An element of richness was provided to the fair by side events that one could opt in advance. I attended some of these events, described below.

New Europe Wines: Wines from Europe have been dominated by major

Reserve. The seminar was organised by the Austrian Sekt Committee with participation from producers. It involved tasting flights of Sekt alongside discussions on each category. I also had the opportunity to converse with Benedikt Zacherl, Managing Director of the Austrian Sekt Committee, to understand their long-term goals.

Demeter—Holistic biodynamic:

Abstract as it may appear, positive alignment of nature's forces to produce good wines has been quite demonstrable in the past years. The process involves taking substances from the nature, exposing them to natural forces and feeding them back to the nature in an altered form — all as remedies for nutrient depletion of the earth. The session on Demeter wines was conducted with active participation of producers who brought in samples such as flowers, weeds, seeds, quartz, etc. while highlighting their overall role in producing demeter wines. Wines produced by them were simultaneously tasted in the session.

German Vineyards of World Renown

— **A Historical Perspective:** This session was conducted by Daniel Deckers, Editor, Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, a well-known German newspaper founded in 1949. It traced the German wine culture from the origins of vineyard classification through the days of the vintners' plight and the holocaust, up to the "Riesling Renaissance". The session culminated with tasting a 'historical sample' wine from the first German VDP estate.

VieVinum 2016 provided visitors an opportunity for a deeper look into the world of Austrian wines, filling knowledge gaps. With dates for the next edition of the fair already announced (9-11 June 2018) and revised Austrian wine laws most likely to be formalised by this year-end, VieVinum 2018 will have a lot to offer both in terms of knowledge as well as wine offerings.


Hopefully accompanied by a new tune composed by Willi Klinger. 

Photo credits: ÖWM/Anna Stöcher & Ravi Joshi



The author (R) with sommelier Harish Acharekar at the fair

spread and a live band, the gathering was conducive for mingling with old as well as new acquaintances. This international melting pot of wine was appropriately utilised by the AWMB to celebrate its 30th anniversary, as the organisation introduced all its previous managing directors to the gathering along with a presentation on their respective achievements in shaping the AWMB of today.

A piano and wine-parody performance by Willi Klinger was an entertainment highlight of the evening.

On the fair's first day, during the opening hours reserved exclusively for AWMB invitees, "7 Elements of Uniqueness" was presented by Willi Klinger, interspersing knowledge with humour. After sharing facts and figures on the Austrian wine, Willi dwelled on 7 unique aspects that put the Austrian

producers like France, Italy and Spain in the past few centuries. However, several other nations with a rich winemaking history have seen resurgence in the past few decades. A seminar on the wines from these nations, called New Europe Wines, was conducted by London-based Master of Wine Jo Ahearne (who also produces her own wine in Croatia) and Saša Špiranec, a regional specialist of New Europe Wines. A diverse range of wines from Croatia, Slovenia, Montenegro, Romania, Hungary and Bulgaria were tasted along with deliberations on them.

Austrian Sekt: The seminar (€15 .00 per person) on Austrian Sekt was one of the paid seminars at the fair. I attended it to understand the nuts and bolts of the Austrian Sekt classification that was formalised in 2015 under the categories Klassik, Reserve and Grosse