

WHERE THE SOIL NOURISHES THE SOUL

Notes on a trip through Austria

A man in a striped shirt and dark vest is working in a vineyard, tending to a young grapevine. The vineyard is lush green, and a large, white, protective sleeve covers the trunk of the vine in the foreground. In the background, rolling hills and a building with a red roof are visible under a clear sky.

IT'S GOT
TO BE
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LOWER AUSTRIA



A recurring thought cycles through one's head in Niederösterreich (Lower Austria), the Kamp Valley and the Wachau Valley in particular: Places like this still exist? The Danube snakes peacefully through the terraced hills here. Mustard grass grows as yellow as Easter candy. People live much as they have for centuries. The beauty and lifestyle here seem inconceivable in this day and age—areas this pure and authentic in many parts of the world seem to be trading in those very qualities for mass consumption and franchise chains. But it's different in Niederösterreich. Locals haven't just resisted unsustainable development; they've chosen to embrace their heritage gastronomically, viticulturally and agriculturally.

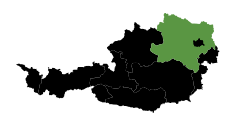
The gently rolling vineyard hills of Langenlois are passing in the distance when suddenly Willi Bründlmayer puts on the brakes. As the dust from the old dirt road settles, Willi points excitedly at the banks of earth rising sharply from either side.

"That is *löss*," he says with a grin, referring to a soil responsible for his prizewinning Grüner Veltliner, a soil whose origins date back 500 million years, long before the Habsburgs ruled here, before the Romans and the Celts and even the

dinosaurs, when those gentle hills in the distance rose as high as the Himalayas. Bründlmayer resumes driving, and one is struck by a thought: What kind of place is it where I find myself caring about soil types?

Things are different here—this is apparent just 90 minutes after landing in Vienna, when suddenly the world is a calm, green, ancient, stylish place. This is Niederösterreich (www.weinstrassen.at), an easy drive from the capital but somehow light-years away from that louder, more garish outside world. The Danube and the picturesque towns along its low banks seem to have agreed upon a pace altogether different from the rest of the world. The river doesn't flow so much as meander, slowly winding through this pristine UNESCO Cultural Heritage Site landscape—and so does life in the villages tucked under the valley's dramatic terraced hills.

To roam Bründlmayer's certified-sustainable vineyards above Langenlois is to experience not just a peaceful, bucolic lifestyle, but that all-too-rare sensation of standing amid a genuinely new idea. Defying past viticultural practices, Bründlmayer grows grass and other flora between his rows of grapes to prevent erosion, he says. And rather than spray for one particularly troublesome



WHAT TO TASTE

Wine & Spirits magazine declared Bründlmayer the best Austrian winery of the last 25 years. Discover more than 20 wines, each with a dramatically different expression, at the Loisium Vinothek.

WHAT TO DO

Don't just take pictures of the Danube! Hop aboard a tour boat and then sit back. Sip some wine while floating by the lush vineyards where it originated.

WHAT NOT TO MISS

High above the Danube, the 17th century Schloss Dürnstein castle is Niederösterreich's sole five-star hotel. After a sumptuous breakfast with a river view, guests can swim in either of two pools, explore the narrow streets of Dürnstein or hike up to the Kuenringerburg Fortress ruins, where Richard the Lionhearted was reportedly imprisoned in the 12th century. Splendid captivity indeed!

caterpillar, Bründlmayer releases harmless pheromones that disrupt the butterfly larvae's mating patterns.

What do pheromones and erosion have to do with a vacation? For one, they're responsible for the light, elegantly structured whites that have put Austrian wine on the map. But there's a larger point, beyond good wine. The story of Bründlmayer is that of Niederösterreich itself, a site of dramatic history, natural allure and a growing community of vintners and apricot farmers, chefs and artists dedicated to celebrating the bounty and beauty around them.

With every stop along the Danube (www.donau.com), one encounters another figure from this colorful cast. What follows, invariably, is a walk through lush orchards, a tour of ruins once inhabited by lonesome Roman sentries, or a fine glass of Riesling on a patio as the sun sets over the deep green horizon.

Incidentally, a setting sun merely begins the next—and most delicious—part of the day: dinner, ideally enjoyed under the majestic Kaiser lime tree in the courtyard of the Nikolaihof winery and restaurant. The oldest wine estate in Austria, Nikolaihof was one of the first to experiment with biodynamic production. It was also one of the first to craft dishes from pure,

locally grown ingredients, which are served in its 1,000-year-old dining room. From blood pudding with apricot mustard to celery and nettle dumplings, a dinner here is a sprawling, merry and casual affair that lasts well into the warm night.

After enjoying the fruits of the region, one starts wanting to learn about them. Winding your way up to the exploding pink apricot blossoms and ancient stone walls of Krems, you find the Winzer Krems winery, one of the largest wine collectives in the country, not to mention home of prizewinners like the peachy, peppery Grüner Veltliner "Edition Chremisa" 2006, which was awarded 93 points by *Wine Spectator* magazine in 2008. A visit to the wine experience Sandgrube 13 (www.sandgrube13.at) delivers much-needed information on the exploding Austrian wine regions and their varietals; you'll get a thorough introduction that's sophisticated but clear enough for a novice to appreciate. A certain question springs to mind while watching a short film on the region's viticulture—complete with apricot scent dispersed in the theater at key moments: Why can't all wine education be this much fun?

Centuries-old vineyards and state-of-the-art wineries. Modern interpretations of ancient recipes. In one fair-tale village after another, one is struck by the happy marriage of new and old; of tradition melding seamlessly with innovation.

With both the past and the future in mind, the futuristic Loisium hotel, wine and spa resort (www.loisiumhotel.at) was built amid rows of Grüner Veltliner grapes in the village of Langenlois. A collection of geometric shapes, the Steven Holl—designed creation is both wholly different from its environs and deeply in tune with them. The glass exterior of the hotel's ground floor lets the serene greenness of the region literally shine through. The serenity doubles when you surrender to the hotel's elegant Aveda Wine Spa and its unique wine-infused treatments—a whole new take on vinotherapy!

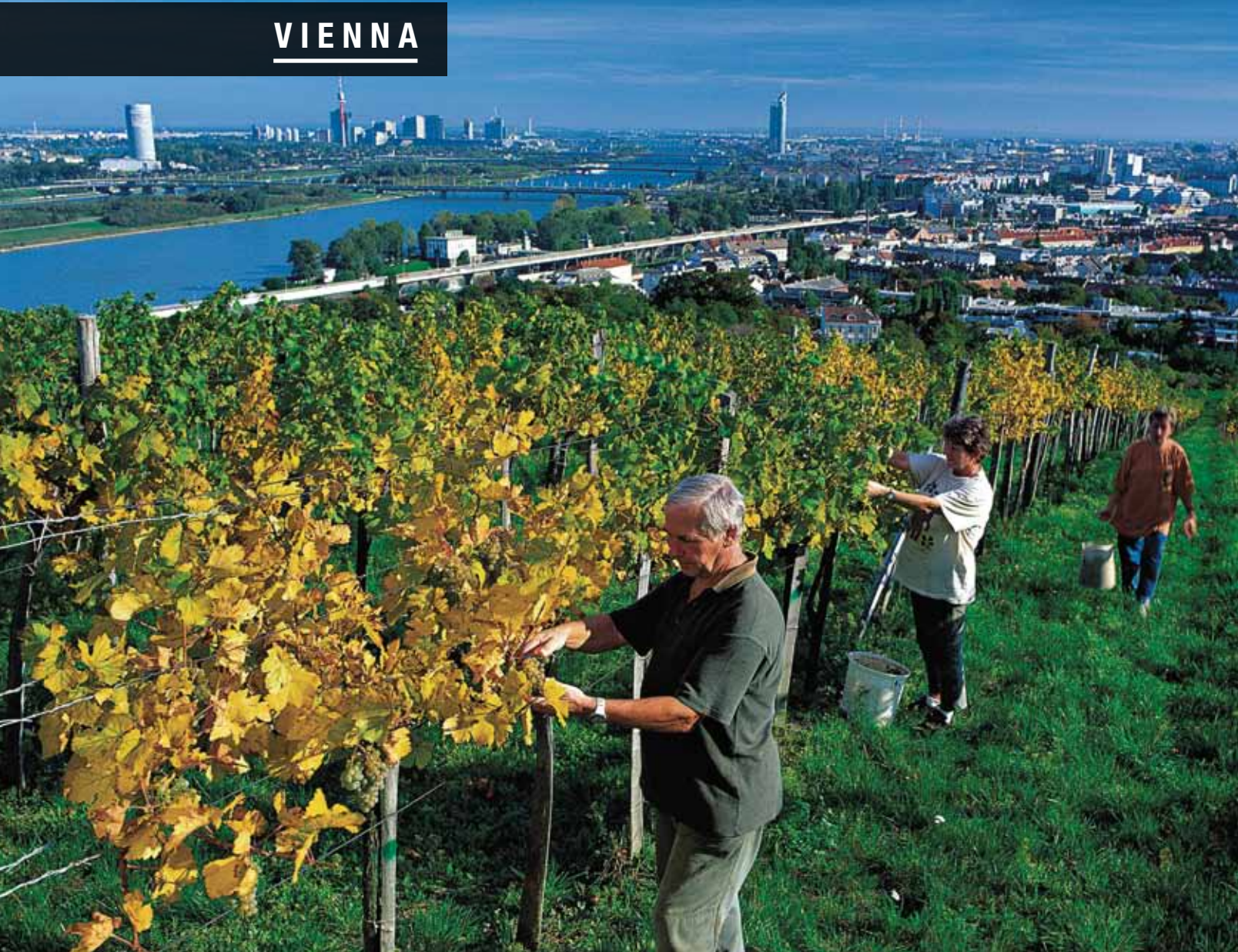
Meanwhile, the wine center, with its impressive cellar and bevy of information about local wine, is an essential stop for vinophiles and architecture lovers alike. And after glimpsing at a millennium-old masterpiece, like the Benedictine Melk Abbey, a beautiful icon of Baroque architecture high above the Danube, you'll be even more impressed with the Loisium and its new interpretation of form.

In both Loisium structures—and really throughout the region—the array of tranquil spaces heed the first rule of wine appreciation: relax.

PHOTOS: [B] W. Bründlmayer©ATO/Colin; [C] Loisium Wine Center©Loisium/Herbst; [D] Apricots©DanubeNOE/Bramberger



VIENNA



Wine didn't come to Vienna. Vienna came to wine. "Vindobona" was the name the Romans gave this area centuries before a city would form—good wine. They weren't just being polite, either. To this day, Vienna is the only world capital with any significant wine being produced within city limits. For years the wine made here was more utilitarian in nature—something to serve at the many folksy *Heurigen* (a family-run wine tavern) around town. But in recent years, the emphasis has shifted from quantity to quality. Respected vintners are bringing their visions to the exploding culinary and cultural renaissance happening in Vienna. If only the Romans could see it today.

It's afternoon at the grand Schönbrunn Palace, Vienna's most celebrated vintners are presenting their latest vintages to a well-heeled crowd of enthusiasts. Fritz Wieninger, a driving force behind the city's wine renaissance, slips outside to admire the rows of grapevines being planted behind the palace for the first time in more than two centuries. "We're in an industry that's been around for more than 2,000 years. We have to have long-term thinking about wine," he says.

Wieninger is explaining his conversion to biodynamic wine production, but he could be speaking more generally about what's happening throughout his city. After Niederösterreich, one returns to Vienna (www.vienna.info) expecting imperial history and quiet, courtly cafés. What one finds instead is a city bursting with energy, a hip art, music and design scene and yes, a thriving, serious wine-growing region—all right alongside the waltzes and cups of *mélange* you were expecting.

With the reinvention of Viennese wine has come the reinvention of many things, including the cuisine. Sure, the traditional Viennese specialties at a classic *Heurigen*, like Mayer am Pfarrplatz, remain the same, but these days the best meal in town is at the famed Steirereck. In one of the loveliest corners of Stadtpark, the bright, modern restaurant and café is perched over the Wienfluss river and looks out at St. Stephen's cathedral. A long, leisurely meal is served here: veal, smoked catfish, calf breast, oysters and other memorable dishes, complemented by a legendary cheese selection from the dairy downstairs.



WHAT TO TASTE

On the outskirts of Vienna is Rainer Christ's *Heurigen*, and it's not to be missed. High-quality local food and the finest of Christ's wines make for a memorable night at this cozy spot. If it's warm, sit outside under the stars.

WHAT TO DO

A visit to the Imperial Palace is essential, and no aspect is more memorable—or moving—than the Sisi Museum, devoted to the famed empress's tragic life. For all of the city's monuments to the *Habsburg* Empire, it takes an intimate exhibit like this to reveal the human side of the monarchy. Roam through the artifacts of Sisi's daily life, and catch a glimpse of the free spirit that captivated Vienna so long.

WHAT NOT TO MISS

It's not every day that you're commanded to try vinegar on your vacation, but *Gegenbauer* isn't an everyday operation. Visit their stall at *Naschmarkt* and treat yourself to a memorable tasting of this family's world-famous vinegars. Forget salad dressing. These aged, artisanal creations can go on ice cream or meat or be sipped like wine. You'll never look at balsamic the same way again.

The Viennese are quick to joke about their famed efficiency; take advantage of it with an easy ride on public transportation to the peaceful vineyard walks along the outer ring of the city. With primary rock soil, chalk sediment, layers of loam and *löss* and five distinct microclimates, a geographically limited area can grow a surprising variety of grapes. It's those natural conditions that convinced celebrity winemaker Rainer Christ to let nature speak for itself with his celebrated *Grüner Veltliner*s, *Muscats*, *Zweigelt*s and the quintessential *Gemischter Satz*, a unique field blend found only in Vienna.

"I think people are getting more interested in selecting wines from smaller wineries, where a wine isn't the same year to year, and there's much more complexity and nuance to discuss," he says.

On what seems like every block, some new cultural scene is erupting, from theater to dance, opera to the symphony. A visitor needs to look no further than the lively, youthful *MuseumsQuartier* (www.mqw.at) for evidence of this cultural rebirth. Where once the monarchy kept horses, young people now congregate in a hopping outdoor plaza.

As Vienna has come alive with this new energy, hotels have responded in kind. The artsy *Altstadt Vienna* and the wine-themed *Rathaus Wine & Design*, both just a short walk from the *MuseumsQuartier*, are as chic as anything the city has to offer. And when you want to travel like a head of state, the ornate *Sacher Hotel* gives every guest a dignitary's welcome.

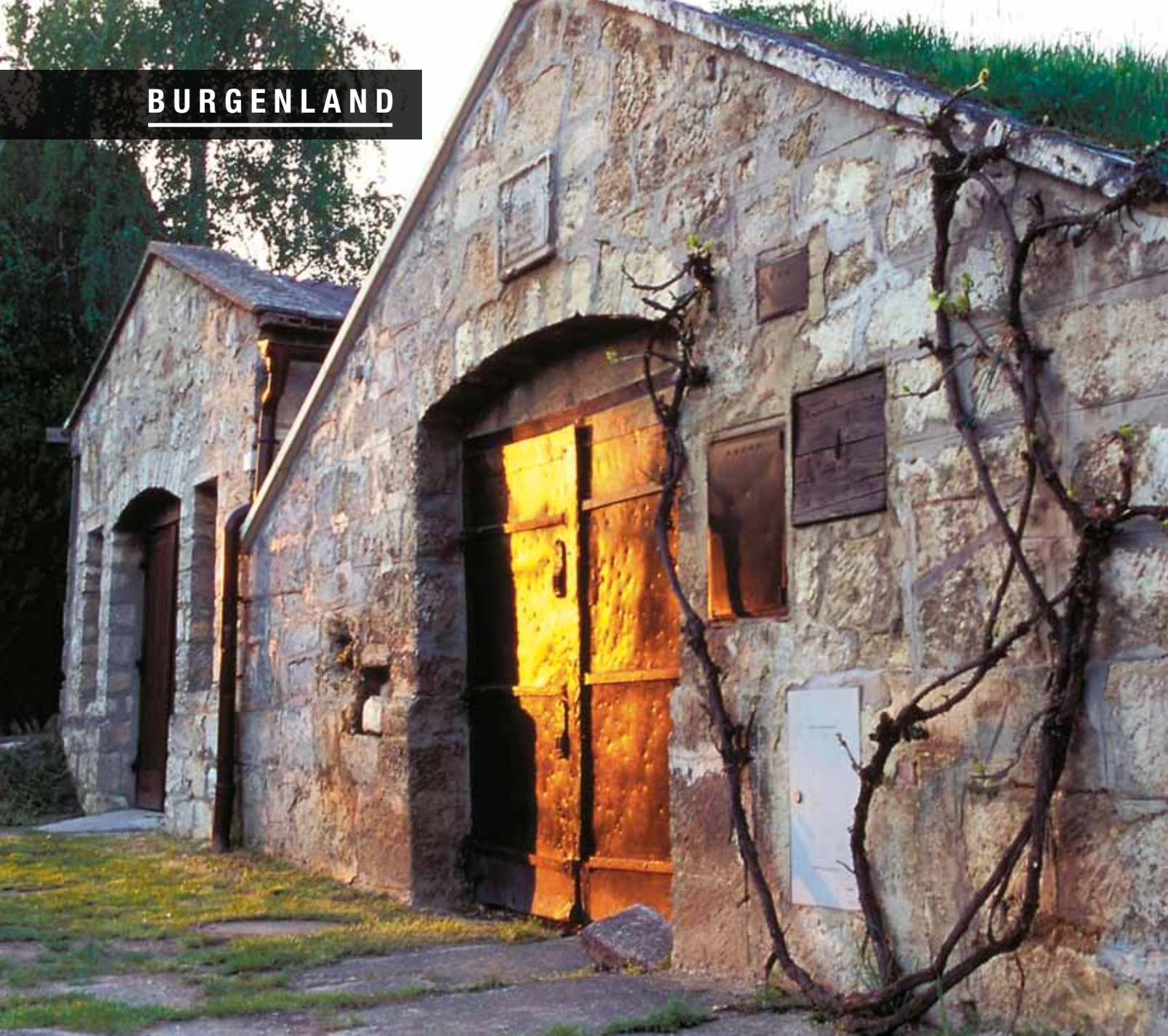
Before leaving Vienna, any gourmand—or just anyone, for that matter—will want to stop at the *Naschmarkt*. Few spots better capture the city's liveliness and diversity than this sprawling outdoor market. This has long been a dynamic culinary intersection, blending the spiciness of the Balkans, goulash from Hungary and the finesse of Italian cooking with occasional notes from Jewish and Polish cuisine. Stroll from colorful stall to colorful stall, watch as the eclectic mix of local specialties is prepared before your eyes. If Vienna feels like a crossroads of the world in a place like this, that's because it is.

PHOTOS: [B] Woman with wine glass©WT/L. Beck; [C] Schönbrunn Palace©WT/Maxum; [D] Naschmarkt©WT/G. Ezsöfi



www.austria.info/wine

BURGENLAND



Barely an hour's drive from Vienna, Burgenland is rural and quiet enough to make Niederösterreich look like Main Street—and yet it's dotted with innovative vintners, chefs and artists determined to both preserve wonderful old traditions, and breathe new life into them. It's noticeably warmer here, hence the array of white, sweet and red wines, all thriving in a climate stabilized by the striking Lake Neusiedl, the third-largest lake in Europe. To the terraced Wachau Valley, Burgenland is a place of low plains, achingly gorgeous landscapes and a long weekend's worth of biking, vineyard touring and memorable gastronomy.

You know you're far from the city when the locals can tell you exactly how many storks live in their village. "Two," declares Max Stiegel, and then he scurries back to the kitchen. The renowned chef is responsible for Gut Purbach in the postage stamp-size village of Purbach. From the stone-still street, Stiegel's restaurant

might just be another schnitzel-serving pension. But behind the thick old walls, one finds the loveliest re-imagination of traditional Austrian design and cuisine imaginable. The décor is straight out of a modern art museum, and Stiegel makes all dishes on site, from the venison tartare to the lake fish with fresh herbs, pairing each with the perfect Austrian wine.

Where the vineyards of Wachau hug the Danube, those of Burgenland spread far and wide over the sprawling, flat land, a wash of golds and ambers and greens just west of Hungary (www.weinburgenland.at). The heart of the region is the 320-square-kilometer lake, around which the towns and villages are clustered. A paradise for windsurfers, sailors, beach lovers and bird-watchers, the lake remains distinctly mellow, even as it draws Austrians year-round (www.neusiedler-see.at).

Which perhaps makes it more startling to find such striking modern architecture and edgy cuisine here. Maybe it's not



WHAT TO TASTE

Far beyond Burgenland, Ernst Triebaumer is synonymous with Austria's so-called red wine miracle; his family has been cultivating the vineyards around Rust for 300 years. Triebaumer's Chardonnay, Welschriesling, Gelber Muskateller and Cabernet-Merlot are all renowned, but it's the Blaufränkisch Mariental that people the world over seek out.

WHAT TO DO

The picturesque towns dotting the perimeter of the lake are too far-flung to cover on foot. It's far more practical, and pleasant, to pedal around the well-kept bicycle paths all around. *Fahrräder Bucsis* rents bikes at very reasonable rates; stop for a picnic alongside the countless nearby vineyards.

WHAT NOT TO MISS

The storks! You don't have to be a bird-watcher to appreciate the giant, prehistoric-looking creatures frequently found atop chimneys near the lake. If you're lucky, you'll catch them mid-flight—the massive whoosh of their wings lends an otherworldly feeling to the small lakeside towns.

popularity of Austrian wines owes itself, in part, to a lull in the industry some years back.

"The wine industry in Austria had crashed in the '80s, and that turned out to be a great thing for the wine itself (www.winesfromaustria.com). A new generation of winemakers suddenly had the opportunity to explore new ideas, to start anew," he says.

Revolutionary vitnners, locavores, foodies, greens. All are terms we've come to associate with today's food and wine scene. But there is another single word that increasingly embraces all these elements: Austrians.

What began centuries ago as pragmatism—eating seasonally and farming responsibly made financial sense—grew over time into a deliberate and sophisticated approach to winemaking and gastronomy.

Having circled the lake entirely, the only thing left to do here is beat a path right to it. More enterprising visitors may join the annual swim from Mörbisch to Illmitz, but a less grueling appreciation of the lake can be found at Mole West, a modern, glassy restaurant situated not just near, but on the water.

As with so many places in Burgenland—and Vienna and Niederösterreich—you begin to develop a strange feeling around the time chef Wolfgang Ensbacher's wild pig prosciutto and venison goulash arrive. You gaze out at the stunning pink sunset over a distant shore, take a sip of a local Blaufränkisch, sample the prosciutto and flash back briefly to that hectic and chaotic world left behind at the airport. The thought is inevitable: I don't ever want to leave.

surprising to discover Vienna bubbling over with new culinary, art and wine movements—but to encounter these in a quiet village, like Purbach, Eisenstadt or Rust? One starts to suspect there's something in Austria's water.

But then that's always been true. The picturesque little shops and snug, cozy homes here may appear quaint, but it was places like these that produced the Mozarts, Haydns, Wittgensteins and Freuds of the world. Innovation has long had a foothold in even the most remote parts of the country.

Take the acclaimed Weingut Pittnauer, for instance, which approaches winemaking with the same creativity that Stiegl brings to his kitchen.

"Tradition is important in wine culture. But you shouldn't close your eyes to new things," says Gerhard Pittnauer, who's three years into a switch to biodynamic production. For Pittnauer and a number of other young winemakers in the region, the growing

PHOTOS: [B] Mole West©NTG/M. Ranz; [C] Rooftop with stork©NTG; [D] Pittnauer Winery©Pittnauer



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AUSTRIA'S UNIQUE VARIETALS



LOWER AUSTRIA

WACHAU, KREMS, AND KAMP VALLEYS

The largest of Austria's wine-growing regions showcases a favorite varietal. Look around: broad riverbanks are filled with Löss: light, fertile soil. Its harvest? **Grüner Veltliner**, beloved for good reason.

Take a sip of this distinctive, full-bodied white wine. The bite of freshcracked pepper is there, and it's pronounced. "This is foodie wine. It goes perfectly with traditional Austrian cuisine," declares Ludwig Holzer of Winzer Krems, one of Austria's oldest wine producers.

Then one looks up from the riverbanks, and spots the marvelous terraces. These near-vertical fields are home to a source of Austria's distinctive **Riesling**, vivid with citrus, a whiff of wind and flint, and a finish that goes on an on.

Increasingly, too, the region's growers plant red varietals: spicy **Zweigelt**, earthy **Pinot Noir**—all with the specific mineral flavors so characteristic of this magical storybook land.

WHERE TO TASTE

> **WINZER KREMS**: a cooperative with deep medieval roots. Specialties: Grüner Veltliner, Zweigelt, Riesling. For a primer on the region (and a full sampling of its wine), take the 90-minute tour. www.sandgrube13.at

> **LOISIUM VINOHEK**: The tasting room is the exclamation point at the end of a tour of the marvelous wine museum—a monument to the region's rich history and fertile imagination. www.loisium-vinothek.at

> **URSIIN HAUS**: as much a convivial community center as a tasting room, Ursin Haus pours a wide range of wines from the surrounding Kamp Valley and Langenlois. www.ursinhaus.at

> **DOMÄNE WACHAU**: This cooperative sources its grapes from excellent vineyards in Lower Austria. The setting is straight out of a painting, with green grapes and ancient walls climbing into a light mist. www.domaene-wachau.at

VIENNA

19TH, 21ST, AND 23RD DISTRICTS

Many are surprised to learn that urban Vienna is also a wine region. But within the city limits, 320 winemakers tend 1,680 acres of grapes—mostly in the river-flanking areas of Nussberg, Kahlenberg, Bisamberg and Mauer.

Urban wineries are undeniably romantic: at a moment's notice, one can wander—even picnic—among the vines.

And yet, sophistication still rules. The predominant varietal is **Gemischter Satz**, a traditional white field blend, made even more modern with the use of organic or biodynamic agriculture and cutting-edge technology. This wine is not for the faint of heart: the nose and taste are intense. American wine journalist Alice Feiring praised it as "complex," with flavors ranging from "mineral to honeysuckle" and even a "touch of skunk."

WHERE TO TASTE

> **WEIN & CO. AM NASCHMARKT**: Here, eccentric Wein & Co. founder Heinz Kammerer introduced his revolutionary wine shop/bar hybrid to Austria. Choose from over 100 wines by the glass, buy a bottle in the adjoining store, or meet and greet the winemaker of the month. Other locations are at Stephansplatz and Schottentor, a short walk from the Imperial Palace. www.weinco.at

> **UNGER & KLEIN**: a tiny spot with a hearty selection of more than 1,000 wines by the bottle and by the glass. www.ungerundklein.at

> **WIENO**: The city's newest wine bar, adjacent to the Rathaus, has just one source for its wine: the vineyards surrounding Vienna. www.wieno.info

> **MEINL'S WINE BAR**: located in a wine cellar, away from the bustle of Austria's finest gourmet shop. Ask the sommelier to suggest something tried-and-true, or something mind-blowing. www.meinlamgraben.at

BURGENLAND

LAKE NEUSIEDL

Much ado is made about the great Lake Neusiedl. How it's as vast as an ocean. How birds flock to its reedy edges. How its average depth of 1.8 meters (less than 6 feet) means you might be able to stand anywhere on the lake floor, and still breathe.

By summer's end, 2,000 hours of ripening sunshine have converted that shallow lake into a warm bath. Autumn days start cool—and end steamy. The surrounding grapes develop *botrytis cinerea* the winemaker's beloved "noble rot", and they shrivel.

The most raisin like of these grapes are brought to the press, producing subtle, world-class sweet wines: **Auslese**, **Beerenauslese**, **Ausbruch**, and **Trockenbeerenauslese**.

Burgenland is also Austria's red-wine capital. In the 1980s, a handful of pioneering winemakers shocked the world by planting red wine grapes. These sent their offspring abroad (to Bordeaux, Australia, and California) to learn. They bought *barrisques* (small oak barrels). They bided their time.

Today, such vintners as Pöckl and Heinrich have gone almost exclusively red. They produce wines of velvet and spice, such as **Zweigelt**, a popular hybrid of two other Austrian reds, berry-rich **Blaufränkisch** and earthy **St. Laurent**. One can also find Bordeaux blends, obscure reds like **Blauburger**, and **Merlot**.

WHERE TO TASTE

> **WEINWERK BURGENLAND**: The draw here is the list of more than 400 wines. Be original and forgo the tasting room for the open-air tasting garden. The shop sells local jams, vinegars, and other edible souvenirs. www.weinwerk-burgenland.at

> **WEINKULTURHAUS GOLS**: Ninety-five Gols winemakers are represented in the town's oldest building. Don't miss the cellar, and its "land of giants" bottles, shot through with a mysterious light. www.weinkulturhaus.at

> **ESTERHAZY WINERY**: Just a little way outside of Eisenstadt stands a state-of-the-art tasting room, which holds treasures from the Esterhazy vineyards all around the lake and from the Leitha mountain range. Look for **Pinot Noir**—their speciality. www.esterhazywein.at

FUN FACTS

VINOHEK: A tasting room, usually covering a specific area, such as a village or entire wine region. Think of it as a library for wine—except you can keep what you drink!

HEURIGER (plur. *Heuriger*): A wine tavern. Traditionally, wine was accompanied only by cold food, but *Heuriger* have evolved to include kitchens. Also referred to as *Buschenschanke* (plur. *Buschenschanken*).

LIPTAUER: A spread made of farmer's cheese, spiked with paprika, caraway seeds, bits of onion, and pickles. A popular snack served on a thick slab of country bread.

TO LEARN MORE

Go to www.austrianwine.com and enjoy a cornucopia of wine information. Find out where local tastings and seminars are held, learn how to pronounce the names of varietals, what food pairs well with each wine, and how wines have been rated in recent years.

Another great place to go for Burgenland wine information is www.weinburgenland.at. Look for a bloglike account of the local weather, or check out the image gallery for stunning photos of the region (register to download).

PLAN YOUR OWN EXPERIENCE

Request your free wine-country travel planning kit by e-mailing travel@austria.info; then visit www.austria.info/wine for some fantastic trip ideas. The first 100 people to e-mail will receive a complimentary Wine Skin, an innovative wine carrier that keeps bottles safe during transport.



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BURGENLAND



☰ SUGGESTED ITINERARY

DAYS 1–3 Once you land in Vienna, your first order of business is to leave. You'll be back—for now, enjoy the pleasant hour's drive into the wide-open serenity of Burgenland. When a timeless quiet engulfs you, broken only by the faint whoosh of a stork's wings overhead, you've arrived.

Your first stop: **Purbach**. Park in this tidy, picturesque village and check in at **Gut Purbach**, the town's most elegant restaurant and lodging, hidden behind charmingly unassuming old stone walls. This is Austria, epitomized: the rustic and traditional blended with the modern and chic.

From Purbach it's a quick drive to the village of **Gols**, where you'll find **Weinkulturhaus**, a lovely winemakers' cooperative housed in the oldest building in the village—meticulously restored, and a perfect entree to this historic wine region. For evidence of how little Burgenland has veered from that history, make a stop at the **Dorfmuseum**, an open-air museum that presents a vivid snapshot of life here just a century ago, from ancient wine presses to an old cobbler's station.

Not everyone lived the simple life here. Mandatory is a stop at **Halbturn Palace**, the grand, 18th-century estate once used by the imperial family as a summer residence. The beautiful palace is still very much alive: cultural events, a lush garden, and local delicacies at **Knappenstöckl**, a restaurant on the premises. But don't fill up. Your

sprawling, multi-course dinner back at **Gut Purbach** will require an empty stomach, and many subsequent postcards to describe the sumptuousness.

By day two in Burgenland, the lake—the shimmering centerpiece of the region—beckons. Make your way through the charming little villages encircling it—**Donnerskirchen**, **Oggau**, and **Rust**—and eventually down to **Mörbisch**, where you can catch a ferry across, mingling with the sailboats and occasional windsurfers while sipping a local Zweigelt. Feeling even more ambitious? Top-quality bicycles can be rented inexpensively in **Neusiedl am See**, and from there you can pedal around the lush perimeter of the lake, admiring the birds and wildflowers, and perhaps popping into the hip (and architecturally daring) **Mole West** for lunch. Plan your time well and you'll arrive in **Podersdorf** by nightfall, in time for a cozy dinner at **Dankbarkeit**, a family-run *gasthaus* serving fresh local dishes.

Last day in Burgenland? Hit some wineries. **Juris**, **Beck** and **Pittnauer** are all conveniently close, in Gols, and worth the walk. And should the tastings put you in a contemplative state, a visit to Haydngasse, Haydn's former home in Eisenstadt, is in order. The building is unremarkable—and therefore all the more compelling for producing such a remarkable figure. You'll hum his sonatas throughout dinner at the delicious and fashionable **Nyikospark**, in Neusiedl am See. To learn more, visit www.neusiedler-see.at.

✓ HEARTY EATING AND LYRICAL TUNES

> **PANNONIAN AUTUMN FESTIVAL** MID-SEPTEMBER THROUGH LATE NOVEMBER
Eisenstadt: The small autumn festivals around Lake Neusiedl proudly highlight everything fresh, seasonal, and local: red or sweet wines, regional specialties such as venison, pumpkin, and wild mushrooms. If you're around on November 11th, don't miss the Martinigans Festival throughout the region, which honors Burgenland's patron saint with a traditional duck dinner. www.neusiedler-see.at

> **HAYDN FESTIVAL** APRIL THROUGH OCTOBER
Esterhazy Palace, Eisenstadt: For more than 40 years, Joseph Haydn directed music for the court of Prince Esterhazy. Few have heard of the prince, but Haydn's legend thrives, and visitors flock to Haydn Hall (the renamed original building) for its magnificent acoustics. Concerts run from April through October, although the festival happens in September. www.haydnfestival.at

> **LISZT FESTIVAL** THIRD WEEK OF OCTOBER
Raiding: This leading Liszt festival dazzles music lovers in a state-of-the-art concert hall next to Liszt's birthplace. www.franz-liszt.at

🏠 HISTORIC HOTELS

> **THE NIKOLAUSZECH**
Purbach: This hotel—with its warm hearth and awe-inspiring antiques—is as charming and intimate as tiny Purbach, on the north shore of Lake Neusiedl. www.nikolauszeche.at

> **BURG BERNSTEIN**
Bernstein: There are ten cavernous rooms and suites in the towers and turrets of this seriously antique castle. Also on the grounds: an abandoned well and a prehistoric museum. If not the history, then come for the food: breakfast in the courtyard or dinner in the Baroque dining room, with its frescoed walls, deep bay windows, and ornate plasterwork. The recipes, of course, are meticulously traditional. www.burgbernstein.at

> **BLIEM'S WOHN.REICH**
Halbturn: You'll think you've wandered into Eden. A 150-year-old winery and farmhouse are tucked inside a vast inner courtyard lined with flowers and fruit trees. Arched windows light the spirited, modern rooms. Check for cooking classes, and wine seminars at www.bliems.com.

LOWER AUSTRIA



☰ SUGGESTED ITINERARY

DAYS 1–3 Where Burgenland sprawls flat and wide near the Hungarian border, Lower Austria unfurls as a series of villages nestled along terraced hills near the winding Danube. Follow the river from Vienna until you find yourself face to face with something stunningly modern, surrounded by a region as old as time: the **Loisium** hotel and wine center, in **Langenlois**. Enjoy the spa and the on-site *vinothek*, take a stroll through the vineyards in the front and back, dive into the pool, and settle in, finally, for a lovely dinner under the stars at the hotel's gourmet restaurant.

The next morning, make your way to **Dürnstein**, an ancient town perched on a steep hill overlooking the Danube. Hike to the top to get a stunning view of the **Wachau**—and inspect the ruins of the **Kuenringerburg Fortress**, where Richard the Lionhearted was reportedly imprisoned in the 12th century. Tramp back down the hill and head over to the nearby **Loibnerhof** for an idyllic lunch in the extensive green garden abutting the river.

Back to the grapes! The **Winzer Krems** at **Sandgrube 13**, in **Krems**, offers an entertaining and memorable tour—by the end, you'll leave with a surprisingly complete grasp of winemaking in the region, and probably a few prizewinning

bottles, too. From there, you're not far from the finest biodynamic meal you're ever likely to encounter. **Nikolaihof** is both an astoundingly good restaurant and a legendary winery—home of the largest grape press in Europe—and it's always too soon when you finally leave the peaceful courtyard where dinner is served.

Having driven alongside the **Danube** all this way, it's time to get yourself on it. Boat cruises run regularly between **Melk** and **Krems**—contact the companies, **DDSG** and **Brandner**, for schedules. Once you're aboard, you can enjoy your latest favorite Grüner as the vineyard responsible slowly eases by on the shore. Several options for both lunch and dinner await, including **Holzappel**, **Florianihof**, **Jamek** and, yes, a longed-for return to **Nikolaihof**. When at last you peel yourself away from Lower Austria, your final order of business is to attune your nose to the fresh apricots that give the wine its fruitiness, and the country some of its most beloved dishes. To learn more, visit www.niederosterreich.at, www.weinstrassen.at, and www.donau.com.

✓ SIPPING MUSIC ON THE DANUBE

> **GRAFENEKG FESTIVAL** MID-AUGUST TO EARLY SEPTEMBER

Lower Austria: This spectacular open-air festival—under the artistic direction of Rudolf Buchbinder, Austria's finest pianist—began in 2007, to the delight of critics and audiences worldwide. A single ticket admits you to the park grounds, pre-concert talks, twilight recitals, and evening concerts. Best of all: the breathtaking new outdoor auditorium, with its acoustic "cloud" canopy, like a giant bird in flight. www.grafeneegg.at

> **WINE AUTUMN CELEBRATIONS** MID-AUGUST TO LATE NOVEMBER

Regional: More than 800 wine-related events along the Danube highlight a 2,000-year-old tradition made refreshingly modern. Marvel at impossibly steep vineyards. Ramble in ancient villages. Dine on your pick of seasonal meals, rustic—or haute cuisine. www.weinherbst.at/wein/e

> **KELLERGASSENFEST** MAY–SEPTEMBER

Regional: *Kellergassen* (cellar streets) are a collection of beautifully preserved old wine-press houses found throughout Lower Austria wine country. Today, they're home to Kellergassenfest, or local wine festivals where's the tastings flow, and the laughter linger. www.weinstrassen.at/wein/e

🛏 SLEEPING AMONG THE VINES

> **LOISIUM WINE & SPA RESORT**

Langenlois, Kamp Valley: Designed by star New York architect Steven Holl, the Loisium offers stylish, modern rooms with sweeping views of the neighboring vineyards. Dine at the gourmet restaurant, Vineyard. Get a treatment at the Aveda Wine Spa—a deep-tissue massage, or wine-based facial. Visit one of the world's best wine museums, an underground fantasia of light, imagination, and fascinating history. Themed packages can be found at www.loisiumhotel.at.

> **SCHLOSS DÜRNSTEIN**

Dürnstein, Wachau Valley: Today, this magnificent, 17th-century castle is part of the Relais & Chateaux hotel collection. The setting—perched atop a cliff teetering over the Danube—is legendary, and the rooms befittingly majestic. www.schloss.at

> **GUESTROOMS AT NIKOLAIHOF**

Mautern (near Krems), Wachau Valley: The Nikolaihof Estate is one of Austria's top bio-dynamic wineries. It's not a bad place to visit, either, with its 12th-century abbey, original gift shop, and restaurant. Nineteen new guestrooms, completed in 2008, are priced at only €31–50 a person per night. www.nikolaihof.at



☰ SUGGESTED ITINERARY

DAYS 1–3 If Burgenland offers a glimpse of the simple life—quiet little streets, fresh local foods, rural splendor—Vienna sweeps you off your feet with its energetic character, multiculturalism, and sophistication. **Hotel Rathaus Wein & Design** captures this vibe perfectly, marrying the city’s traditional elegance with its hip, modern wine scene. Drop off your bags and make your way to **City Center**, a five-minute walk easily stretched to a leisurely two hours.

Depending on your preferred pace, you can explore the **Ringstrasse** on foot or by tram. Either way, take a break for lunch at the perennially stylish **Zum Schwarzen Kameel**, the famed Art Nouveau restaurant and cafe. A *mélange* at a nearby cafe will give you an excuse for some mellow people-watching before you resume your tour of the historic center. The **MuseumsQuartier** also awaits, with its vast plaza teeming with young people and impromptu cultural happenings. By evening you’ll be ready for **Kulinarium 7**, the swanky wine shop and restaurant in the well-preserved **Spittelberg** district.

Resist the urge to dash out of the hotel in the morning—the phenomenal breakfast served is a must. Fully fueled up, you’re ready for a jaunt to the city’s not-to-be-missed

vineyards. Tram D will take you to **Nussdorf**, a pleasant, green suburb surprisingly close to the city center. Roam the vineyards that have been supplying Vienna with its wine for centuries. For a look at vines growing even closer to the city center, pay a visit later to the splendid **Schönbrunn Palace**, versions of which have been here since the Middle Ages. In celebration of the city’s winemaking tradition, this UNESCO World Cultural Heritage site recently planted vines in its own backyard. Top off the day with an evening at the world-famous **Vienna State Opera**.

Needless to say, a thorough search for coinciding festivals, concerts, exhibitions and other cultural events should precede any visit to the Austrian capital. But regardless of what’s happening while you’re there, be sure to leave an hour or so to wander **Naschmarkt**, the thoroughly international outdoor market that’s been around for nearly five centuries. Pick your way through the colorful stalls, nibbling as you go. (Okay, you can’t nibble vinegar—but that’s no reason to miss the memorable **Gegenbauer** stand, home to a mind-boggling variety of vinegars.) For a proper dinner after all that snacking, **Steirereck** in **Stadtpark** offers renowned cuisine (150 cheeses alone!) in an eminently photogenic setting. Which, as a matter of fact, is Vienna in a nutshell. To learn more, visit www.vienna.info.

✓ MIX YOUR WINE WITH CULTURE

> VIENNA FESTIVAL MID-MAY TO MID-JUNE

Vienna: The city’s late-spring festival is a global performance smorgasbord. Stumble on inspiring opera, mesmerizing ensemble drama, compelling solos. Expect extreme talent and household names—Philip Seymour Hoffman performed here in 2009. To complete your cultural immersion, catch a symphony or chamber recital at the International Music Festival, concurrently at Vienna’s Konzerthaus. www.festwochen.at

> VIEVINUM LATE MAY TO EARLY JUNE

Imperial Palace, Vienna: The cream of Austria’s wine community comes forth every two years, to show the world its best. VieVinum is all New World, in one of the Old World’s most nostalgic, aristocratic settings. Of 500 producers, 400 can lay claim to truly “boutique” yields. Next showing, 2010. www.vievinum.at

> HEURIGEN SEASON THROUGHOUT FALL

Regional: A *Heuriger* is an Austrian tavern: rustic, earthy, and pure. *Heurigen* are also rightfully renowned for their food: honest fare, such as oven-fresh bread, savory salads, and hearty roast meats. Connect to the heurigen by way of Viennese wine country, stopping at Rainer Christ (www.weingut-christ.at), Mayr am Pfarrplatz (www.pfarrplatz.at), Stefan Hajszan (www.hajszan.com), and Wieninger (www.heuriger-wieninger.at).

🛏️ DESIGN GEMS

> RATHAUS WINE & DESIGN

8th District, Josefstadt: Start your wine education in one of this hotel’s 39 gemlike rooms—each named after a leading Austrian winemaker, decorated with vineyard photos, and stocked with his or her wines. The hotel’s wonderful, minimalist wine bar highlights a select winemaker every month. Don’t miss out on the breakfast—it’s divine. www.hotel-rathaus-wien.at

> ALTSTADT VIENNA

8th District, Spittelberg: This restored 19th-century patrician house is a careful blend of old and new. Each of the 42 rooms tells a story—even those made completely modern with cutting-edge design (renowned architect Matteo Thun designed nine). Every afternoon brings complimentary tea and cake in the Red Salon. www.altstadt.at

> HOTEL SACHER

1st District, Vienna: The Sacher is a Viennese institution in the city’s lovely heart. The rooms and suites are utterly royal; no two are created equal. Enjoy dinner (with piano) at Rote Bar, the award-winning restaurant whose “winter garden” provides great people-watching of those hurrying to a performance at the Vienna State Opera. www.sacher.com

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