

Christoph Hoch

Hollenburg, Kremstal, Austria

Press Dossier

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The genealogy of the Hoch family can be traced back to the year 1640: the wine labels depict the original coat of arms. The Hoch family has resided in Hollenburg on the Danube River ever since. The Danube and nature in general have always been the determining factors for the family: in their main occupation as regulators of ship navigation and as winegrowers. The Hochs employ the knowledge acquired through centuries to produce vibrant wines of great finesse.

Christoph Hoch took responsibility for the winery in 2013 and is supported by his family. He has chosen a new and uncompromising path in which he seeks to express the uniqueness of the Hollenburg community. He has studied the terroir of his habitat systematically and compared them to other wine growing regions, in particular the unique geological formation "Hollenburger conglomerate". It is his aim to create exceptional Grüner Veltliner and Riesling with the unique stamp of Hollenburg. To achieve this he employs among others the traditional methods of his ancestors in winegrowing and winemaking. Conversion to biodynamic cultivation and DEMETER certification was the logical next step in Hoch's commitment to long-term sustainability.

His stated goal is, "to produce inimitable wines with superb ageing potential; wines that aren't just 'good', but rather wines that inspire emotion!"





A BRIEF HISTORY

860 Hollenburg was mentioned for the first time in a deed of donation. Until the Napoleonic secularisation 1803, it was property of the Bishops of Freising in Bavaria. The Moor's head on the coat of arms shows signifies the connection to the Abbey of Freising.

1568 Bishop Ernst of Freising gives Hollenburg the right to hold markets on March 17th.

1640 The Hoch family began trading with goods transported on the Danube River. They purchased goods from ships landing in Hollenburg and sold wine to them. At the time, virtually every local family grew and made wine, but at the Hoch estate viniculture went hand in hand with trading. Several members of the family were mayors of the market town.

The Danube was regulated at the end of the **19th century** and regulation and control of river navigation nationalised. The Hochs gave up the shipping trade and concentrated on agriculture. Christoph's great-grandfather Karl Hoch changed the farm to specialize in winegrowing and fruit production after WW2.

The Hoch family practices exclusively viniculture since **2008**.

In **2012** conversion to organic winegrowing begins.

In **2013** the first wines with the Christoph Hoch label are released.

In **2015** the first sparkling wines are released and DEMETER certification is achieved.



Certificate donating market rights, 1568



PHILOSOPHY

Christoph Hoch pursues one goal: the authentic expression of his homeland in his wines. The foundation for this is the rich experience and tradition of his family, which he deeply respects. His parents Harald and Andrea have given him a solid foundation with the oldest and best family vineyards with which he has the opportunity to realise his ideas. His parents and his sister Daniela lend their full support in all his projects. Christoph says, "Tradition is important to me, because it is a rare gift to receive. I am proud of it, but I don't have any dynastic ambitions. I am just one in a long line of ancestors!"

Hollenburg differs fundamentally from the surrounding wine growing regions and is characterised by a geological formation: the Hollenburger conglomerate (see also under GEOLOGY). The flora in and around the Hollenburger vineyards also exhibits peculiarities. When Christoph tried to research what the unique attributes of the region mean for the wines, he quickly exhausted the resources available. "Until today the grape variety has always been in the foreground. No one questioned what the conglomerate soil does for our wines. Very few winemakers tried to highlight the terroir in their wines. This is exactly what I want to do: work with the soil and the climate of Hollenburg to create exciting wines with a background!"

Christoph Hoch began research on his own, "Actually I have no role model, so this was the beginning of finding myself. I don't know of anyone who has delved into the subject of Hollenburger conglomerate. If I want to gain a deep understanding of my roots as a winegrower, I have to try to comprehend conglomerate. It is completely different from anything else around here that I could have used as a model. I had to search myself and develop a foundation. Otherwise I couldn't get where I want to be."

His interest in geology and soils inspired Christoph to travel to several winegrowing regions to learn about the differences between Hollenburger Conglomerate and, for example, schist or limestone soils. "I have scrutinised the rocks and their characteristics. To me it is important not only to touch rock samples, but also to feel the soil!"

Christoph explains that his goal is, "Inimitable wines with ageing potential. I know that a lot of winemakers state the same, but I have to go my own way to accomplish this with as few compromises as possible. I don't want to make wines that are simply 'good'. I want my wines to arouse real enthusiasm – or clear rejection. I want to inspire emotions! With the methods of the past and the knowledge of today I should be able to realise this!"



GEOLOGY

The vineyards of Hollenburg are dominated by conglomerate rock. This is solidified river sediment stemming from the Limestone Alps that were drained by the ancient Traisen River. This soil is comprised of cobbles and pebbles of various sizes that are held together by calcium carbonate. The soils are correspondingly calcareous and alkaline (pH 7.5).

With no regards to climatic influence, this determines the following attributes in wine:

- The high lime content results in higher acidity in the wines.
- This acidity is buffered by the potassium available in calcareous soils and thus tastes smooth.
- It is therefore possible to produce wines that are delicate and rather light in alcohol. In other words, the grapes can be harvested in a phase when it is possible to exploit their full aromatic potential. Crisp spiciness is achieved without wines appearing too meagre. The potassium buffers the acidity and wines that are simultaneously creamy, crisp and multi-layered. A good acid structure is important for wine longevity.

Christoph Hoch states, "The best examples for this are wines from the 1970s and the 1980s. At this time grape ripeness wasn't the big topic. Harvest took place in the second week of October. The wines were rather light in alcohol (10.5 – 12.0% ABV) due to a cooler climate and higher yields. Tasted today, wines from this period that were grown on acidic soils appear lean and unattractive. On the other hand, wines from calcareous soil are still crisp, lively, and exhibit ripe, attractive aromas. The knowledge and methods of production were more or less the same as they are today, which means that in the long term only the origin makes a difference."

*"The roots of a vine are able to create their own environment through interacting with micro-organisms which themselves depend on the bedrock."
(Lalou Bize-Leroy)*





CLIMATE

The climatic conditions of the Hollenburg vineyards are unique. The vineyards are situated at altitudes between 210 and 350 metres above sea level (50 – 200 meters above the Danube River) and are shielded from the west through wooded hills and the Dunkelstein Forest. Atlantic air masses mix with a warm Pannonian climate, which is further influenced by the valleys of the Danube and Traisen Rivers. The average annual temperature is 9.4° C (49° F). The average annual precipitation is 520 l/m²

*"The laws of nature are the same everywhere. The art is to live with it."
(Hans Diwald, Austrian pioneer of biodynamic winegrowing)*



The "Wetterkreuz"



The Danube influences the microclimate



VINEYARDS AND NATURE

Christoph Hoch's primary vineyards are divided into two areas. Those orientated towards the northwest are cooler and yield compact and firm wines. The sites orientated towards the south-southeast are warmer and yield wines with more body and a slightly exotic character.

Christoph began conversion to certified biodynamic viticulture in 2013, a process that takes at least three years. He became a certified "DEMETER" winegrower in 2015. He expects increasing enhancement of terroir character in his wines. "Biodynamic cultivation gives me more options. It has a positive influence on spontaneous fermentation, varietal character, and regional character. Natural things occur smoothly and with fewer complications. If, for example, I were to use fungicides, I would chiefly kill fungi and yeasts and have fewer nutrients available for the fermentation process. In the past, artisanal vintners made stable wines with less alcohol, but with freshness and delicate tannins through simple handwork. They worked with screw presses, wooden casks and nearly no chemicals in the vineyards."

The vineyards and the surrounding areas have a distinctive flora that has evolved on calcareous soils in a unique microclimate. Some of these plants are endemic such as the wild geranium *garland flower* colloquially called the "Wetterkreuznagerl", the *Biscutella laevigata*, and the black pine. Christoph Hoch states, "It is important to comprehend and to protect these plants because origin will always have a high significance in premium products."



"Wetterkreuznagerl"
Garland flower
Daphne cneroum



Brillenschötchen
Biscutella laevigata



CELLAR & VINIFICATION

Christoph Hoch says about himself, "I am highly interested in technical matters and my education was focused mainly on vinification techniques. Despite this, I want to apply the old traditional methods to coax the maximum out of the terroir for my wines."

For certain charges, Christoph even uses a traditional screw press "to extract tannin from the grape skins". He further explains, "Grüner Veltliner is allowed time to macerate after a light crush with the stems, again with the theme of tannin extraction." Afterwards, he lets his wines ferment spontaneously in wooden barrels – some on the mash, some racked.

The single charges are then matured in large, used wood casks – every single barrel with a different approach: some oxidative, some with malolactic fermentation. "Each barrel is a small independent project. There is a certain idea in each of the 40 barrels vinified each year. Some of them are completely different, some of them are similar." Each working step results in two different products. The use of used, clean wooden casks allows the wine contact with oxygen without the sensory influence of new oak.

The wines remain on the lees without additional sulphur until January. "Adding sulphur dioxide late is not a risk if the wine has tannin. I try to do it the same way as my grandfather. He smoked each barrel with sulphur before the harvest, then washed it and again added a little sulphur depending on the size of the barrel. Usually this was sufficient. If it later became necessary to add more sulphur, he racked the wine into a freshly sulphured barrel". Before bottling, the single lots are blended according to Christoph's interpretation of the Hollenburg terroir. The labels give the explanation:

CHH: Christoph Hoch Hollenburger

2014: the vintage making up the principal part of the wine

#15: the number of different charges (barrels = individual projects) which went into the wine. They need not necessarily be from the same vintage. The main goal is to achieve the highest possible complexity in the wines.

"This method of vinification allows me more safety and allows me to make the best possible wine rather than wine defined and limited by one vintage. This makes my wines incomparable, at least to other Austrian wines," says Christoph.

The wines are light or medium in alcohol content (max. 12,5% ABV) with tannins that contribute to structure without astringency; they are full-bodied, vibrant and appetizing with good intensity and depth on the palate.





GRAPE VARIETIES

Grüner Veltliner

Importance and conditions: The most important grape variety in Austria, Grüner Veltliner, achieved international consumer awareness and popularity at the end of the last century. As it is a fertile variety, the soils should not be too heavy or rich in nutrients. If it is too dry, the vine is overly stressed. Grüner Veltliner is sensitive during flowering and is susceptible to peronospora and chlorosis. The most delicate examples grow in cool sites.

Wine: Grüner Veltliner delivers many styles – from light, crisp wines to opulent, late-harvest examples. The site and its cultivation are crucial to quality. Consumers prefer spicy, peppery interpretations or versions yielding stone fruit notes.

Riesling

Importance and conditions: Riesling is an international variety. It has great prominence and importance in the wine-growing regions along the Danube River and its tributaries. The late ripening grape is highly demanding in the vineyards and is very sensitive. It prefers meagre soils and is tolerant of drought.

Wine: Young Riesling wines exude charming fruit with aromas of peach and exotic fruit. It is capable of producing complex wines with tremendous ageing potential. Wines from the Wachau, Kremstal, Kamptal and Traisental often exhibit notes of slate or flint. Riesling ripens slowly and aged wines may display a rose-like scent. When the late harvested grapes are affected by noble rot, then sweet wines of outstanding quality can be the result.



THE WINES

The assortment is concentrated on the essential: one Grüner Veltliner and one Riesling. These two premium wines express the Hollenburg conglomerate and the unique attributes of their origin.



CHH/2014/#15 Hollenburger Grüner Veltliner

A spicy and smoky Grüner Veltliner from terraces with Hollenburg conglomerate and loess soil in the vicinity of Hollenburg, 250 – 300 m above sea level.

Fermented spontaneously in large oak casks. Nice and spicy apple fruit. Smokey mineral nuances, delicate and elegant. Offers fascinating and demanding finesse with splendid drinkability. Pairs particularly well with chicken and pasta dishes, as well as salads.



CHH/2014/#9 Hollenburger Riesling

A very lively and attractive Riesling growing on meagre calcareous Hollenburger conglomerate soils 290 – 360 m above sea level.

Fermented spontaneously in big oak casks. Intense nose with a broad spectrum of aromas like ripe peaches and fresh lemons. Delicate spiciness and a salty mineral touch. Pairs elegantly with Asian seafood specialties.



THE SPARKLING WINES

A sparkling wine project was initiated in 2012 inspired by the Champagne region, which is also characterised by calcareous soils. It was never Christoph Hoch's intention to make another "ordinary" Sparkling wine, but rather something completely unique. For **Sparkling Project** no non-wine additives were desired, so a finished base wine was supplemented with fermenting must similar to "Méthode traditionnelle", but without added yeast or sugar. The carbonation pressure is around 7 bar. Sparkling Project will be released in 2017.

The **Kalkspitz** is a sparkling wine made in the Méthode ancestrale, also known as "Pétillant naturel" or "Pet Nat". This is the most natural method of producing sparkling wine with the least intervention but lots of instinct from the winemaker. Here, the fermenting must, which still contains unfermented sugar is bottled and sealed with a crown cap. The moment of bottling is absolutely decisive, because the residual sugar content determines the level of carbonation as the fermentation process continues in the bottle. This wine will not be degorged will thus retain a slight cloudiness. Because lees and acidity will preserve the Kalkspitz, it is particularly suitable for storage.

According to Christoph Hoch's philosophy, the Kalkspitz is a combination of different grape varieties and lots that impart earthy and fruity tastes. The wine is bone-dry with a maximum alcohol content of 11,5% by volume and carbonation pressure below 3 bar. It is characterised by a crisp acidity that integrate with creamy yeasty components. It pairs well with cheese, white meat, fish, and vegetables.





At the outset of Christoph Hoch's sparkling wines there was criticism of a barrel sample of a still wine. "This wine is so acid, it is only suitable for sparkling wine!" "Why not," thought Christoph and initiated his experiment. After all, chalky soils are the fundament of Champagne. While looking for wineries who would be willing to share information with him, he became friends with the biodynamic Champagne producers de Sousa, Tarlant, and Laherte. Benoit Tarlant gave him 12 used Champagne barrels to support his passion. To house the Champagne barrels, the oldest cellar of the Hoch family dating back to the year 1640 was adapted as sparkling wine cellar. With a temperature of 16°C it is slightly warmer than the cellar for the still wines and possesses a different microbiology.

Together with de Sousa and Laherte Christoph started a vine research project. Scions were taken from various old Chardonnay vines (some of them ungrafted!) in Grand Cru's as Le Mesnil and Avize and grafted on different rootstocks. They are planted in Hollenburg in 2015 and 2016. Diversity is a pillar of biodynamics and is manifested here. To analyse the outcomes there is exact documentation of the development of each vine. Christoph states, "I have only once chance per year to learn. So I want to exploit this opportunity in the best possible way!"

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS: CHRISTOPH HOCH "UNFILTERED"

Which style of wines do you prefer?

I like wines of the purists like Rudi Pichler in the Wachau and individualists like Andreas Schumann from the Odinstal winery in the Palatinate region or Markus Heinel from J.Hofstätter winery in Alto Adige. I like the system and the structure of Burgundy. I also like well-matured wines from my own region.

I prefer white wines and I try to learn something with every wine I taste. I'm afraid that the wines I order in a restaurant are not among the cheapest... In any case, I prefer mature white wines.

When do you consider a wine mature? And what are its quality features?

For me climate, soil etc. should be in the foreground in a well-matured wine, not the variety. This may be after 4-5 years or after 25-30 years, depending on origin and winemaker. But what all these wines have in common is that they are very taut and vibrant.

Reinhard Löwenstein of the Heymann-Löwenstein winery on the Mosel once said while tasting a 15-year-old Riesling, "At last the fruit has gone!" I can really follow him, because only then does the structure, the framework, the soil become apparent. That is why I appreciate a lot of what has been made in the past. I like mature champagne: yeast, wood, slightly oxidised, a border crosser, that's what fascinates me! Sometimes I can find this style in Burgundy – not too mature, but on the border, and combined with acidity. That's it: a thin line between genius and lunacy, wines that are enticing, but not exhausting.



You have talked a lot with older winemakers. What was the most surprising detail they have shared?

In the past, nearly every farm kept goats and cows as a source of milk. Farms were more holistic. The animals were fed the first trimmings from the vine canopy. These young shoots had the best assimilation and were the sweetest of the year; they made the milk sweeter and a high price could be fetched. For me this is proof of how good nature's cycles function, if you only allow them. This was one more detail that encouraged me to convert to biodynamic cultivation.

One experience that I have made is that it is impossible to make heavy wines from our soil. They would get too opulent and clumsy, because they would lack acidity. Here, we have to make delicate and spicy wines!

What kind of food do you prefer?

I am generally open-minded and inquisitive. Besides classic Austrian cuisine I like very detailed and elaborate dishes: Japanese or fine French cuisine – certainly never overloaded.

What do you think about wine and food pairing?

For me the wine should be able to stand on its own. I don't want to burden myself with this highly complex topic. If a wine is called a good 'food companion', that is often interpreted that the wine is not so great on its own, either because food can hone a wine down or a wine will cover a lot of things. It is a very important topic, but not in my focus.

You are a very dynamic person with several projects and plans. What drives you?

As I said before I am an inquisitive person. My desire to learn is huge. Euphoria makes my occupation a passion – perhaps with a slant towards madness!





GENERAL INFORMATION

Vineyards: 5 ha (12.5 acres)

Cultivation: biodynamic according to DEMETER regulations

Wines:

100% white

Grape varieties:

Grüner Veltliner 70%

Riesling 30%

Production: 35,000 bottles per year

70% still wines

30% sparkling wines

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