

weingut josef hirsch

kamptal • kammern

He finished the harvest before many others started, on October 8th, and with “perfect, clean fruit.” Johannes Hirsch is nearly finished his conversion to bio-dynamics, which might perhaps explain how his grapes were ripe earlier than his neighbors’. In any case, the process fascinates him, and the politics . . . well, the politics are an evil perhaps on the far side of necessary.

These ‘07s are derangedly superb, especially the Rieslings, which are the greatest Austrian Rieslings I think I’ve ever tasted. Peter Schleimer had hinted I might like them, and he watched my face as I took the first sip of Gaisberg, which assumed control of my body and was a rush of beauty that almost flattened me—and he sat there grinning insanely like “See? See? I knew you’d like them!”

We tend to like to party with ‘Hannes, ‘cause he’s crazily witty and likes to have fun, but when the party’s over he’s a man with an active and probing mind. And he seems to have no fear. He was the first in Austria to go 100% Stelvin, the first to delay bottling and releasing his Grand Crus, and now that the politics of the bio-dynamic conversion are apparent, I have little doubt he’ll find some novel way through.

Sometimes when you have your kids they lead you back to your soul, and the Johannes Hirsch I know now



Johannes Hirsch

is rather different from the one I met ten years ago, still fun and witty, but entirely more probing and curious, even restless. He seems to want to go back and rethink choices that seemed simple when he made them the first time. He seems to want to decelerate in general. His wines, always *exciting*, are becoming profound.

My wife, who’s a doyenne of the sustainable agriculture movement for some thirty years now, says you gotta tough it out. I’m sure she’s right. But my heart goes out to the lone wolves of the world. Politics always reduces to a lowest-common-denominator. If I were ever asked to join

- **Vineyard area: 24 hectares**
- **Annual production: 10,800 cases**
- **Top sites: Lamm, Gaisberg, Heiligenstein**
- **Soil types: Loess, eroded mica slate topped with brown soil, eroded primary rock with desert sands and volcanic particles**
- **Grape varieties: 60% Grüner Veltliner, 35% Riesling, 5% Other**

some Riesling conclave (like *that* would ever happen . . .) I’d politely decline, even if I agreed with the principles and supported the work. Because my work is *living* the principles, at least I hope it is, and it’s pleasant to consider a world of *individual* people each trying to do the right thing. As opposed to the grim spectacle of a bunch of people quarreling about how much cubic zirconia has to go into the cow horn.



Hirsch at a glance:

Zoom! Went this agency, from out-of-nowhere to the top. Stellar-quality wines from a star-quality vintner at reasonable prices. AND AVAILABILITY IS GOOD.

how the wines taste:

For such great wines these are comparatively “easy” to understand: they’re juicy and spicy and their flavors are candid and animated. Specific nuances are, as always, determined by the vineyard. Frau Selbach would say they have CARAMBA! I, in an uninhibited moment, could imagine myself saying they HAVE BOOTIE AND CAN SHAKE IT.

AWH-065 **2007 Grüner Veltliner “Veltliner #1”**
 CORE-LIST WINE: The first of what became a wave of cheap & cheerful GrüVes now rampaging through the market like the bulls in Pamplona. I remember Hanes and I “conceptualizing” this wine; we knew we wanted something fetching and aromatic, we knew we didn’t mind a few grams of sugar you can’t taste but which elevates the wine, and we knew we’d pay the little bit more it would cost to whole-cluster press it. I didn’t know how witty the wonderful sequence of labels would be, but I love them changing each year. And this is by far the best vintage yet, with ripe, even complex aromas, stylish and classy; acacia blossoms, vetiver, meyer lemons; not just ‘Hannes’ best but maybe the best cheap Grüve of any I’ve offered; certainly stands with the 2006 Gobelsburg, and with many years’ Heiligenstein; the length of texture and solid finish are amazing for a wine so light—11.5%!

AWH-066 **2007 Grüner Veltliner Heiligenstein** +
 AWH-066H **2007 Grüner Veltliner Heiligenstein, 12/375ml** +
 CORE-LIST WINE: *really* gorgeous aromas . . . wassup here? This was the first clue that these ‘07s would assume hitherto unknown forms. A real swoon of blossom, euphoric and sultry; wonderful mid-palate leesy length and finesse; this has such cool spice and the breezy fragrance of blooming fruit trees in a sunny grove.

AWH-061 **2006 Grüner Veltliner Lamm** +
 AWH-061M **2006 Grüner Veltliner Lamm, 6/1.5L**
 Quite different from Gobelsburg’s, and actually more like his *Grub* in its sweetness and clotted-creaminess; black-bready, minty finish and an oddly elliptical length, almost angular; it *seems* clipped until you realize it isn’t. I suspect this may be one of the tardier 2006s.

AWH-067 **2007 Grüner Veltliner Lamm** +(+)
 AWH-067M **2007 Grüner Veltliner Lamm, 6/1.5L** +(+)
 This was from a hastily blended cask sample, from lots that had finished fermenting. Johannes’ wines take time. This vintage looks ripe, “sweet” and stylish, even-tempered, classy and refined, and it seems thick and long but by no means *heavy*. That’s as definitive as I’m willing to get, except to say Hirsch is the most *drinkable* of the grand trilogie-o-Lamms I offer. By the way, though lamb is a signature flavor of the site (along with rosemary, buckwheat and rye) its name derives from a dialect word for “loam.” I’ll take obscure vineyard names for \$400, Alex. . . .

AWH-068 **2007 Riesling Zöbing** +
 Best vintage ever for this starter-Riesling; pure aroma of iris and hedge-berries, smoky and sleek; *what* grip in these wines across the board; this is what *substance* means; it isn’t connected to weight or even power, it’s a palpable sense of *material*, not to mention in this case it tastes fricking great.

- AWH-063 **2006 Riesling Gaisberg** +
 AWH-063M **2006 Riesling Gaisberg, 6/1.5L**
 Oops, I seem to have used a naughty word in my notebook. “Not just stunning nose but *fucking* stunning nose,” I seem to have written. Oh dear, that’s just so not me. Tightly packed mineral and wisteria, molten silver; the palate is almost constricting, crazily tight, ultraviolet; also leesy, and weirdly also chocolate and jasmine and taragon; it’s a wild ride of neon and flower and mineral; it seems to attach jumper-cables from the glass to your palate.
- AWH-069 **2007 Riesling Gaisberg** +++
 AWH-069M **2007 Riesling Gaisberg, 6/1.5L**
 CORE-LIST WINE. By this time I’d learned both the ‘07 Rieslings had some . . . <whisper> . . . *residual sugar*, not a lot, but more than is legally allowed for “Trodden.” What can I say? This wine has an *insane* aroma! Lost for words. The greatest wine I’ve tasted from this Grand Cru. Ultimate Gaisberg; no point in dissecting this ecstasy; you will never meet a sexier or more substantive wine.
- AWH-064 **2006 Riesling Heiligenstein** ++
 AWH-064M **2006 Riesling Heiligenstein, 6/1.5L**
 The first vintage where this has shown better earlier than Gaisberg, and one of the greats in the community of Heiligensteins in this offering. It’s almost pathologically exotic, animal-exotic; peppers and (again) mint; dense, stormy; the palate is haunted, obsessively spicy, incense-y and mineral; a tremendous showing for this usually tardy wine; it takes your palate and slams it against a wall of smoky minerality; it doesn’t finish since it *won’t LEAVE*.
- AWH-070 **2007 Riesling Heiligenstein** +++
 AWH-070M **2007 Riesling Heiligenstein, 6/1.5L**
 The aroma is so dripping with sex and voodoo it could almost be Hiedler. It’s certainly a site archetype, crammed with roasted beets and incense. And the palate is *out of control!* Crazy sorcery of smoke and spice, physio-sweet yet with a lunge toward stone and primordial terroir below an avalanche of fruit, key-lime, orchid and narcissus; astonishing interplay of buoyancy and density; the finish peals like an enormous bell, an echo-chamber of fruit and flowers and “soft” mineral—Riesling does not improve on this: WINE does not improve on this.
- AWH-058 **Riesling Gaisberg “Library Vintages” (1999, 2002, 2003, 2004)**
 Here you’ll get three bottles each of Riesling Gaisberg 1999, 2002, 2003 and 2004.
- 2004:** *This is a devilishly complex thing; spicy-salty aromas, ferrous and showing some of the ‘04s charred smoky notes; a sizzling spicy palate, thickly juicily mineral—don’t ever let anybody tell you “mineral” is a euphemism for “unripe,” because this (and hundreds of wines like it) is about as lavish as wine gets, only its flavor dialect is mineral, not “fruit.” There’s a note of not-quite-fully-ripe blackberry; the palate really swells and billow and sweetens, reaching a crescendo of lavish iridescent intensity. ++*
- 2003:** *Always one the great Rieslings in this offering. The 2003, one of the top-few Riesling of the vintage, has a stunningly expressive nose; wisteria and blackberry and Gyokoru; the palate is just absurd, psychedelically vivid, phosphorescent shimmer, mint and wintergreen and fruit and some sort of stone you’d lick to restore eyesight to the blind; lavish fruit yields to pure ore and spice on the finish. ++*
- 2002:** *The 2002 is just screaming with great sizzling depth of mirabelle and raspberry. High-toned mineral nose and the palate has the usual sizzling precision and wonderful saltiness. ++*
- 1999:** *Greater swell than the 1998 and more undertow of power. Deep internal rich pikant ripeness and the potential for profundity in the muscle underlying the mineral.*