

Kracher 2006 TBAs

by Stephan Reinhardt

After Alois Kracher passed away in December 2007, his 27-year-old son Gerhard took over responsibility for the entire production of the family estate that is located in Illmitz at the Neusiedlersee lake in Burgenland. Here, at the warmest and lowest spot in Austria, the extremely flat lake, as well as countless slopes, guarantees the appearance of *Botrytis cinerea* nearly every year.

Gerhard Kracher had been his father's assistant and consultant for many years—"Gerhard has a much finer nose and palate than I have," Alois told me once. So while the premature succession has been tragic and unforeseen, it was not in any sense a leap in the dark when the young man had to continue the historic work his father had begun more than 20 years before.

The Kracher wines culminate in an annually impressive series of Trockenbeerenauslesen—the so-called Kracher TBA collection. For the most recently released 2006 vintage—together with 1995 the best in the family's history—father, grandfather, and son picked and pressed together. But it was Gerhard who did the crucial tastings of the wines from each parcel before blending them in early summer 2008. The result is an outstanding series of 12 TBAs, the same number as in 2002. Only in 1995 have there been more TBAs, when 15 were produced. The 2005 and 2004 each had ten, and in 2003 there was only one.

The 2006 vintage was "an extremely good one," says Gerhard. "We began picking the first grapes (Scheurebe, Chardonnay, and the first of the Welschriesling) on October 20, stopped during a rainy week at the beginning of November, and then continued with Muskat, Traminer, and Welschriesling until the end of the month." Botrytis

appeared very late in 2006, at a time when the grapes were fully (if not over-) ripe and the acidity levels were very good. There was no gray or green botrytis—just the perfect noble variety. As a result, the 2006 collection contains a series of mostly very deep and concentrated wines, with brilliant fruit aromas, a beautiful balance of sugar and acidity, as well as mineral complexity. They are extremely plump and rich but retain a noble elegance. They taste very well now but will gain additional complexity with further time in bottle. "It needs ten years to lose the primary fruit aromas and get more tea and milk aromas," says Gerhard. "Strong tea, coffee, and caramel aromas will appear only after 20 to 25 years."

Vineyards

Kracher's vineyards cover two fundamentally different spots. The one in Illmitz is very close to the shore of the lake and is on very sandy soil. The other is closer to Podersdorf, where the vines are on more gravelly soils. The 2006 vintage was very dry and warm (there are also some great Austrian red wines this year), and as an exception, the grapes grown on gravel ripened earlier than those from the sandier soils. Normally, each wine of the collection combines the two soil types, the gravel giving more acidity to the wine, and the sandy soils more concentrated fruit. In the 2006 collection, there are three exceptions. The Rosenmuskateller (Moscato Rosa) TBA—produced for the first time—sends its roots through gravel. In 2009, Kracher will also plant this Italian grape variety on sandy soils, to give the wine more complexity. Two of the 2006 Scheurebes have also been bottled separately. The Scheurebe No.11 has its origin in the gravelly Podersdorf parcel, the Scheurebe No.12 is from sandy Illmitz. "They were both too perfect on their own, so it was not necessary to blend them," explains Gerhard.

Winemaking

As always at Kracher, there are two different styles of TBA. Zwischen den Seen ("Between the Lakes") is the

"traditional" Austrian style of sweet wine. Fermented and aged in stainless-steel tanks, these TBAs are made of traditional Austrian grape varieties with thin skins, such as Welschriesling, Scheurebe, and Muskat Ottonel. The more modern style is called Nouvelle Vague—wines such as Zweigelt, Traminer, and Chardonnay that have been fermented and aged in new barriques (mostly Allier but also Caucasian oak). From No.1 to No.12, the sugar and concentration levels get higher and higher, though at this stage the most complex, balanced, and perfect wine in 2006 seems to be the Chardonnay No.10. On the other hand, we will see in ten, 20, and more years that other wines in the 2006 collection will be equally exciting and long-lived.

2006 Zweigelt TBA No.1 Nouvelle Vague

(11.5% ABV, 165g/l residual sugar [RS], 7.9g/l total acidity [TA], 15 months in new barriques) Light-colored red to orange. Delicate fruit aromas of red berries, cherries, candied oranges, and plums, with noble hints of smoke and caramel. In the mouth, middle weight and very elegant, with good concentration of everything (ripe fruit, noble sweetness, sophisticated acidity, fine tannins). A distinguished wine, with some toast and caramel on the aftertaste. Should match chocolate and cigars very well. 2010–30. 18

2006 Muskat Ottonel TBA No.2 Zwischen den Seen

(10% ABV, 170g/l RS, 6.3g/l TA, 15 months in stainless steel) White gold. Purest botrytis, as well as finest aromas of healthy Muskat and gentle citrus fruit. Nobly rotten, but also elegant and fresh. Dense and very delicate on the palate, with great finesse and intricacy, at once raisiny and racy. A sophisticated and elegant wine with beautiful length. Drink to 2025. 18+

2006 Rosenmuskateller TBA No.3 Zwischen den Seen

(10% ABV, 220g/l RS, 6g/l TA, fermented and aged for 12 months in stainless steel) Because Rosenmuskateller is not an officially permitted grape variety, this debut release is declared not as a *Qualitätswein* but as an Austrian *Tafelwein* (table wine). It is for this reason that no vintage is indicated, though it is certainly a 2006. Grown entirely on the gravel soils of Podersdorf. Light perfume of roses, heather, and cooked strawberries. Flavorsome palate, with fine and fresh raspberry aromas, as well as rose petals. Fragile, delicate taste, good acidity, spicy aftertaste, nice length. A Kabinett-styled TBA, if you will. Nice. Drink to 2020. 17.5

2006 Chardonnay TBA No.4 Nouvelle Vague

(12% ABV, 190g/l RS, 7.3g/l TA, fermented and then aged for 18 months in new barriques) Yellow-gold. Complex nose with aromas of tropical fruit, white chocolate, toast, and cooked rice; still yeasty and somewhat New World in style at the moment. On the palate, still young and fresh, with excellent structure and length. Sappy and savory, very good concentration, lush pineapple, vibrant acidity, very long. A great TBA that can be drunk quite early but will also age very well over many years. 2011-30. **18.5**

2006 Scheurebe TBA No.5 Zwischen den Seen

(11.5% ABV, 183.2g/l RS, 7.3g/l TA, aged for 20 months in stainless steel) Intense yellow-gold. Brilliant grapefruit aromas with tropical notes such as passion fruit, papaya, and pineapple. Wonderful concentration and very good grip on the palate. A salty taste, the piquant acidity giving a welcome contrast to the very sweet fruit. Very long and stimulating aftertaste to finish. 2010-30. **18**

2006 Grande Cuvée TBA No.6 Nouvelle Vague

(11.5% ABV, 190.7g/l RS, 7.1g/l TA). As always, the Grande Cuvée is the plummiest as well as the best balanced wine of the collection. In 2006, it is a blend of barrique-fermented Chardonnay (70%) and Welschriesling that was fermented and aged in a large 1,200-liter cask of Slavonian oak. Yellow-gold. Complex nose, with more spicy (toast, yeast) than fruity aromas at this early stage, still somewhat closed but very elegant. Very good concentration on the palate, with brilliant yellow-fruit flavors now; noble, mellow, and rich, still creamy thanks to the long yeast contact, but displaying a piquant acidity and spiciness. Superb, elegant wine that expands in the mouth and finishes with a very long and wonderfully balanced aftertaste. Great TBA. 2012-35. **19**

2006 Welschriesling TBA No.7 Zwischen den Seen

(11% ABV, 206.1g/l RS, 6.8g/l TA, stainless-steel tank for 20 months) Pale gold. Brilliant bouquet, with fresh and zesty fruit aromas of young white peach, white pepper, and tobacco leaves. Sweet and spicy on the palate, showing firm fruit, concentration, sophistication, and a delicate interplay between the ripe fruit and racy acidity. Still young and vibrant on the finish, with a very long and stimulating aftertaste. Still needs some years to become more relaxed and settled. 2013-35. **19**

2006 Traminer TBA No.8 Nouvelle Vague

(10% ABV, 245.6g/l RS, 6.3g/l TA, fermented and aged for 18 months in new barriques)

Light gold. Brilliant nose, cooler, fresher, and spicier, than a typical tropical Traminer symphony at this stage. As a Traminer, atypically distinguished, delicate, and fine. Very sweet attack on the palate, and very good concentration, with an almost oily texture, but also with a remarkably fine acidity. Overall, therefore, a very delicate, elegant, and balanced wine with a very long and noble aftertaste. 2015-35. **19+**



2006 Welschriesling TBA No. 9 Zwischen den Seen

(8.5% ABV, 290g/l RS, 7.1g/l TA, in stainless-steel tank for 20 months) Intense yellow-gold. Very precise fruit on the nose, aromatic

and spicy in a very fine way, with purest botrytis, white peach, baked apple, cooked pear, and orange flower. In the mouth, rich, very sweet, and voluptuous—again, with finest botrytis raisin and honey flavors but nevertheless delicate and gracefully built. Impressive elegance and finesse overall, and already perfectly balanced. It needs a very sweet dessert or, better still, the many years required for it to reach its peak. 2015-40. **19.5**

2006 Chardonnay TBA No.10 Nouvelle Vague

(9% ABV, 293.1g/l, 8.1g/l, fermented and aged in new barriques for 22 months) Intense yellow-gold with a light-green shimmer. Aristocratic nose of enormous depth and complexity, still a little yeasty to smell, but also with finest and detailed hints of fresh pineapple, orange blossom, camomile, white pepper, and caramel. On the palate, dense and very rich, with a fantastic sweetness but also a stunning lightness, thanks to fresh lemon flavors and the perfect performance of an extremely fine acidity. Very long and very stimulating on the finish, and it does not appear nearly as massive as the analytical figures alone might suggest. A sublime and very elegant wine of mind-blowing beauty. Perfect. 2015-45. **20**

2006 Scheurebe TBA No.11 Zwischen den Seen

(9% ABV, 299.4g/l, 7.9g/l TA, stainless-steel tank for 22 months) Grown only on gravel soils and picked a little earlier than the more creamy TBA No.12. Which of them you prefer is less a question of quality than of style and personal taste. For drinking (whenever!), I prefer this one because of its super-precise aromas of grapefruit, lime, and pineapple, as well as for its more athletic body, zestiness, and spiciness. Light gold. Fresh and spicy fruit aromas. Very rich and concentrated, with an oily texture; extremely sweet and lush but countered by a savory spiciness and refreshing acidity. Endless aftertaste. 2015-45. **19+**

2006 Scheurebe TBA No.12 Zwischen den Seen

(6% ABV, 373.3g/l RS, 7.5g/l TA, 21 months in stainless steel) Grown on sandy soils and therefore even more concentrated and creamy than No.11. Intense golden yellow. Fresh and cool on the nose, very distinguished and somewhat reserved, but at the same time very precise and mineral, again displaying typical aromas of grapefruit, lime, and pineapple. Extravagantly rich and concentrated on the palate, with an oily texture and a honeyed sweetness, plump and subtle at the same time. Perfectly balanced, very noble and elegant, this is an exclusive and immortal Scheurebe. Drink 2015-20. **19.5**