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2009 BURGENLAND BLAUFRANKISCH INDIGENOUS, INDIVIDUAL, INCORRUPTIBLE

Stephan Reinhardt profiles Austria's most fashionable red grape variety and, together with Tim Atkin MW and Alex Hunt MW, tries to find out whether Blaufränkisch is a great grape variety or merely a very good one. After the tasting of 31 prominent Austrian examples from the highly rated 2009 vintage (and a Hungarian "ringer"), the trio's findings could not have been more diverse

As recently as 1999, white grape varieties made up 74.5 percent of Austria's total area under vine of almost 46,000ha (114,000 acres). Today, Austria, like Germany, seems to have "turned red": less than two thirds of the total area is now planted to white grapes, whereas red varieties, mainly Zweigelt and Blaufränkisch (but also St Laurent, Pinot Noir, Merlot, and Cabernet Sauvignon), account for 34.4 percent. The country is proud to produce white, sweet, and red wines of excellent international quality. Burgenland in particular has built a good reputation for reds during the past 20 to 25 years, but some of the finest red wines are also produced in Carnuntum, the Thermenregion, the Wagram, and the Kamptal, especially from St Laurent and Pinot Noir. Whereas the former bread-and-butter variety Grüner Veltliner started its international career as "Groovy" in the 2000s, there is no red pendant with a similar reputation so far. But the one that has been chosen by producers and communicators to enhance Austria's prestige for red wine is Blaufränkisch.

Being an indigenous, individual, and—as we will learn—"incorruptible" grape variety that can impressively reflect the special place where it is

grown, Blaufränkisch has become a star in Austria this century. The variety—which, according to *Wine Grapes* (Robinson, Harding, and Vouillamoz, 2012), has a parent/offspring relationship with Gouais Blanc and is a parent of Gamay Noir—is the base of some of Austria's most prestigious red wines, including Ernst Triebaumer's Ried Marienthal, Prieler's Goldberg, Krutzler's Perwolff, Paul Achs's Ungerberg, Weninger's Dürrau, Moric's Lutzmannsburger and Neckenmarkter, plus Jagini's Zagersdorfer. Born, most likely, within the area now demarcated as Dalmacija, Austria, and Hungary, Blaufränkisch (Kékfrankos in Hungary, Borjonja in Croatia) is now Austria's second most important red grape variety after the pop star Zweigelt in terms of quantity. In ten years, the early-budding, late-ripening grape variety raised its area under vine from 2,641ha (6,526 acres) in 1999, to 3,225ha (7,969 acres) in 2009—an increase of 22.1 percent—and now constitutes 7 percent of the total vineyard area.

This vigorous variety, with its large, conical, V-shaped grape clusters, needs a relatively warm climate. So sunny Burgenland, and particularly the wine regions around Lake Neusiedel and the Mittelburgenland, is its most important

growing region in Austria. The variety produces deeply colored, peppery, racy, often somewhat "wild" wines full of character and earthy flavors. The aroma profile includes dark berries and cherries, but also brushwood, while the structure is always firm. The finest, raciest, and most elegant wines come from limestone or slate soils in cooler areas such as Leithaberg, Neckenmarkt, or Eisenberg, whereas those from deeper loam soils as in Zagersdorf, Horitschon, or Deutsch Schützen can be impressively deep, powerful, and rich.

Many ambitious red-wine blends and pure Zweigelts, St Laurents, and Pinot Noirs, and also many of the most prestigious Austrian Blaufränkisch are matured in new barriques, though less toasty and larger casks generally give purer, fresher, and perhaps more classic, if not necessarily more authentic, wines. For a couple of years there has been a trend away from small new barrels towards used barriques with little or no toast and/or bigger barrels of 500 liters or larger. The goal is to achieve a "pure," "true," "unmasked" Blaufränkisch style. Producers, such as Günther Schönberger in Mörbisch, use only old barriques, which add neither wood aromas nor wood tannins to his

wines, whereas vintners, such as Roland Velich (Moric, Jagini), Hannes Schuster (Rosi Schuster, Jagini), Uwe Schiefe, or Christian Wächter (Wächter-Wiesler) predominantly use larger barrels and casks ranging from 500 liters up to 1,600 liters for the "crus." Others, such as Ernst Triebaumer, still use a high proportion of new oak. Wines that are designated as Mittelburgenland DAC Reserve must be aged in small barrels.

Not less crucial than the use of oak is the harvest date and a sensitive vinification that is adapted to the vintage. Blaufränkisch styles are therefore very diverse, and Blaufränkisch withstands almost every style. "Blaufränkisch is an incorruptible grape variety, in that its inherent character shines through even in the most heavily manipulated wines," believes Roland Velich, adding that the grape can be "an engaging ambassador for the exciting terroirs of Burgenland, in which the variety has developed over hundreds of years—even though there has never been a tradition of "great" Blaufränkisch wines."

Are "great" Blaufränkisch wines produced today? Some wine lovers outside Austria say yes, while others remain skeptical. In this tasting, we attempted to go some way towards determining whether Blaufränkisch is a great red grape variety in the same league as Pinot Noir, Syrah, Tempranillo, Sangiovese, or Nebbiolo. The tasting, which was blind, was held in London in October 2013, and included 32 top varietal wines from the excellent 2009 vintage. Apart from one wine from Carnuntum and a "ringer" from Sopron/Hungary, they were all from Burgenland.

The selection was partly personal, partly with respect to top scorers in several wine guides inside and outside Austria, but also to the different styles of Austrian Blaufränkisch. Since the newest vintage to taste would have been 2010 or 2011 last fall, and a more matured vintage generally shows more of the wine's than the winemaking's characteristics, I tried to select samples from the outstanding 2006 vintage. Unfortunately, there were not enough wines left in the estates, so finally I had to choose the excellent, even great, 2009 vintage, though it still tasted quite young four years on.

AVERAGE AND RANGE OF SCORES		
	Average	Range
TA	15	10-17.5
AH	13.5	11-17
SR	16	14-18

STEPHAN REINHARDT'S TOP WINES:	
Ernst Triebaumer Rust Blaufränkisch Ried Marienthal Trocken	18
Jagini Blaufränkisch Zagersdorfer	17.5
Weninger Spérn Steiner	17.5
Moric Blaufränkisch Alte Reben Lutzmannsburg	17
Moric Blaufränkisch Alte Reben Neckenmarkt	17
Blaufränkisch Perwolff	17

IN THIS TASTING, WE ATTEMPTED TO GO SOME WAY TOWARD DETERMINING WHETHER BLAUFRANKISCH IS A GREAT RED GRAPE VARIETY IN THE SAME LEAGUE AS PINOT NOIR, SYRAH, TEMPRANILLO...

The 2009 vintage was warm, giving powerful, rich, well-structured wines with comparatively high alcohol levels. The harvest was early, so the grapes in Rust or Zagersdorf were already picked in the second week of October. Since the berries had enough of everything—color, sugar, tannins, acidity—it was advisable to extract the musts gently in order to protect the wines from overextraction and massiveness and to keep the drinkability. Even so, many 2009s need a couple of years to come into balance.

When we tasted the wines, it was obviously not the very best moment for them. The wines tasted quite powerful and rich, and the alcohol levels often showed. Even six months later, when I retasted some of the wines in Germany, they were much better balanced, with greater elegance and refinement.

We used Zalto's Pinot Noir glasses during the tasting because I consider them to be the best glasses for top Blaufränkisch wines. Of course the extremely fine rim and the way the wine flows on to the palate is as incorruptible as the grape variety itself. These glasses do not forgive any imbalance, and especially not in Blaufränkisch.

My colleagues Tim Atkin MW and Alex Hunt MW, who both admitted not having that much experience with Blaufränkisch wines, told me after the tasting that they would have preferred a more standard glass like Riedel's Vinum Chianti. Tim and Alex both found the Zalto glass, with its broad bowl, too large and felt that it rather unbalanced the wines. Both found an imbalance among the high levels of alcohol, acidity, and tannins, and reasoned that this was a general defect of the grape variety itself.

I look forward to sharing some 2009s with them after another couple of years. I believe now more than ever that Blaufränkisch is a "great" grape variety, albeit one that may not deliver particularly "noble" wines. But by the same token, is Nebbiolo a noble wine, or Baga?

Austria's producers are well on their way to revealing the full potential of Blaufränkisch, and I am sure that they will adduce conclusive and positive proof very soon.

17 Ernst Triebaumer Rust Blaufränkisch Ried Marienthal Trocken (13.5% ABV)

TA | Bright ruby/purple. Still comparatively unyielding on the nose, but showing a hint of wild mushroom and a chalky undertone beneath the red fruits and subtle spice. Serious wine that's made to last but is already well balanced. Fresh, focused, minerally, and subtly oaked, with some summer-pudding flavors and a core of tangy acidity. Lovely, harmonious winemaking. | **17.5**
AH | The nose here shows an impressive mixture of opulence and focus, with quite lush black fruit and expensive oak, but still retaining vigor and tension. Firm and youthful in the mouth, with a savory/rocky aspect that underpins the whole. Good cohesion and length. | **16**
SR | Very dark purple-violet. Slightly reductive on the nose, but this is a pure fruit (and terroir) expression of Blaufränkisch: dark and ripe and concentrated fruit flavors of black berries and dark cherries, with earthy aromas and tar—very intense. Rich and round on the palate, but also with a certain strength and aristocratic character. The tannins are firm, and there are also some refreshing green aromas in combination with good grip on the palate, which might come from the stems and will help the wine keep its freshness as well as structure over the years. This wine is big, powerful, and rich but also has complexity, intensity, and purity. It will definitely get better and better with bottle age. | **18**

17 Weninger Spérn Steiner [Soproni Kékfrankos] (13.5% ABV)

TA | Dense, concentrated. Rich, peppery, and concentrated nose. Almost Italianate. Herbal, spicy notes, very fresh, focused, and serious. Bitters, clove spice. Rich wine with very focused acidity and length. Complex, stylish, and savory. Alcohol a little too marked? | **16**
AH | Rich, ripe nose of apple and blackberry; a little bit of spice, even juniper. Poised and focused in the mouth, with no undue alcohol, and a completely appropriate piquancy. One of the most coherent wines here, as well as one of the most elegant. | **17**
SR | Dark and deep ruby. Very ripe, rich, and intense on the nose (quite cooked if not burned flavors), a powerful wine with aromas of shoe polish. Rich and long on the palate, not big but impressive; there is finesse and a silky elegance due to a slaty soil, I suspect, but also power. The question is whether the acidity and the power are well balanced. I would say both are prominent here, as in Barolo or Bairrada, and I like the pure soul of this wine, which has tremendous length. Very powerful indeed. | **17.5**

16.5 Umatham Joiser Kirschgarten Blaufrenkisch [glasscap] (13.5% ABV)

TA | Dense, almost inky purple with some pink at the rim. Rich, vibrant, youthful nose, with well-integrated oak. Red fruits with a hint of "good" reductive adding complexity. Serious, racy, refreshing palate, with medium-weight tannins, sweet raspberry fruit, some pepper,

and that same touch of reduction. The oak seems less marked on the palate, suggesting older barrels. The emphasis is very much on fruit, with good length and a balanced, tapering finish. Drink over the next five years. | **17**
AH | Deeply colored, with quite a complex nose, showing a fine balance of fresh black fruit, toasty oak, floral notes, and some sous-bois evolution. The palate is quite marked by acidity, though it shows good depth; there is an impression of focus, though the flavors are actually not that clearly defined. At an adolescent stage, this wine seems to need a bit more time to open out texturally. | **15.5**
SR | Dark ruby. Intense and elegant aromas of ripe blackberries and cherries and earthy notes; also some hints of leather. All in all, the nose clearly announces a big and powerful wine. Rich and round on the palate, with intense flavors of dark cherries and black forest berries, quite silky tannins, and a very good and fresh length with some mineral undertones. Well balanced, in a rather international style. | **16.5**

16.5 Wellanschitz Blaufränkisch Sonnensteig (13.5% ABV)

TA | Saturated, dense color. Rich, oaky, and concentrated on the nose, with red fruits, some forest-floor notes, and plenty of sweet, toasty oak. The overall effect could be clumsy, but it's sustained by acidity and freshness, with attractive Asian spices, a hint of smoky reduction, and good length. Serious wine. | **16.5**
AH | A dense color, but more garnet than some, and aromas that are heading resolutely into mature, forest-floor territory, with appealing autumnal fruit (plum, apple) behind, adding an impression of succulence. There is a touch of creamy-caramel sweetness on the palate, but otherwise the aromas carry through. Overall, a wine of delightful harmony. | **16.5**
SR | Dark ruby, seemingly more mature than the other 2009s. Quite sweet and rather plummy flavors dominated by chocolate, and nutty but also earthy flavors. Quite alcoholic and very rich to smell. Very chocolatey, powerful, and rich on the palate, too, but also silky and vibrant, with remarkable freshness and minerality. Good aging potential. | **16.5**

16 Schiefer Blaufränkisch Reihburg (13.5% ABV)

TA | The densest wine of the tasting. Very concentrated. Aromatic, spicy, and slightly reductive, with pepper spice and clove. Fresh acidity, some ginger notes, very mineral, with subtly integrated oak. Good length. Smart wine. Dense and compact and well balanced. | **17**
AH | Some sleek black-fruit aromas, but also a distinct rubbery/latex character. Tough, bitter palate—strikingly so, as if Campari had been added. Coherent on its own terms, but a hard-core example. | **14.5**
SR | Deep and dark ruby. Leather aromas, slightly reductive, but intense in its dark fruit aromas. Vibrant, grippy, very powerful, yet reductive, extremely ripe fruit flavors, silky, very long and powerful, might have good potential. Still seems very young. | **16.5**

16 Wachter-Wiesler Steinweg Blaufränkisch (13.5% ABV)

TA | Big, dense, profound color. Clove and pepper spice on the nose. Classic Blaufränkisch. Rich, plush, and textured, Austria-meets-Bordeaux style. Ambitious, with lots of oak and concentration, sweet, brambly fruit, spice and acidity and texture. Modern, well-balanced winemaking. | **17**
AH | Not particularly vivid, but rich, ripe, attractive aromas of plums, apples, blackberries—autumnal fruit style. Nicely succulent, balanced palate, with some grip but no harshness and a little leafy lift on the finish. | **15.5**
SR | Dark purple. Somewhat oxidized on the nose; very ripe fruit flavors. Extremely rich and powerful on the palate, quite elegant, with ripe tannins and very ripe fruit flavors. Nice purity in the finish, but quite massive in body and structure. | **16**

15.5 Paul Achs Blaufränkisch Altenberg (13.5% ABV)

TA | Dense, concentrated color. Youthful, lots of smoky oak on the nose, with a hint of greenness and geranium. Mid-weight, high acidity, quite green on the palate, too, but with some redeeming notes of tangerine and pomegranate. Needs time, given the chalky minerality. A sleeper of a wine. | **16.5**
AH | This is quite hard to read on the nose. There are some grassy, underripe elements, as well as heady black-fruit aromas. A slightly tense, exaggerated freshness pervades the palate without quite being matched to the flavor, which remains soupier than the structure would suggest. Not very coherent. | **13.5**
SR | Dark ruby color. Very sweet and plummy on the nose, also alcoholic, black-tea pot. Silky, quite well balanced initially, but then very powerful and rich, with massive tannins, so it dries out on the finish. Quite alcoholic aftertaste. | **16**

15 Judith Beck Blaufränkisch Altenberg (13% ABV)

TA | Mid-ruby/purple. Spice and clove on the nose, red fruits, sweet oak. Bramble and blackberry, sweet oak, fleshy, well balanced, good acidity. A well-balanced wine with subtle oak integration, medium weight, and nice length. Poised and complete, with a lovely combination of fruit sweetness, acidity, and oak. | **17.5**
AH | Youthful color, but not really a fruit-driven nose: more tarry and medicinal—vitamin pills. Dry and rather bare on the palate; not enough fruit, flesh, or nuance here. | **12**
SR | Dark and dense ruby. Very ripe fruit flavors, rather plummy and slightly burned. Sweet and powerful on the palate, quite silky and well balanced, but lacks complexity. | **15.5**

15 Jagini Blaufränkisch Zagersdorfer (13.5% ABV)

TA | Youthful, vigorous purple. Dense, tightly wound nose, compact and still closed. Slightly reductive, but this is a serious wine, made to age for another three to five years. Sweet, brambly fruit, good acidity, with an overlay of sweet oak, firmish tannins, some clove spice, and the

potential to develop in bottle. Lacks a little charm for now. | **14**
AH | Initially, lovely freshness and aromatic precision here, with fresh blueberry, apricot, and herb notes. Herbal-vegetal notes start to dominate over time, and the herbal aspect is a little prominent up front, though fruit reemerges on the mid-palate. Fine-grained and keenly textured, but something medicinal and farmyard (Brett?) is skewing this. | **13**
SR | Dark purple. Very reductive on the nose, but also intense and ripe aromas of dark fruits with fascinating earthy flavors, as well as tobacco leaves and black tea. There is a certain purity but the reductive style of this wine demands a lot of patience. Very pure on the palate, silky and elegantly textured, very intense (reminds me of Matassa), with licorice and leather in the long and pure finish. Does not show well now but I am sure this is a wine with a great potential. | **17.5**

15 Kollwentz Blaufränkisch Setz (14% ABV)

TA | Youthful ruby/purple. Serious, savory, complex, almost balsamic nose. Dense and concentrated, quite firm tannins, lots of sweet oak, good acidity. A little hollow on the finish but plenty of interest and flavor. Slightly too much alcohol. | **16.5**
AH | Creamy, peach-yogurt style nose. And the palate is also exaggeratedly thick and creamy: all puddingy sweetness, no savory qualities or angles. | **12**
SR | Dark ruby. Very intense, deep, and ripe on the nose, quite alcoholic. Silky palate, very powerful and rich, some coconut flavors, extremely powerful on the finish, with somewhat burned flavors. The tannins are quite dry, and I fear they will dry out the wine soon. So have fun with it now until 2018 or 2020. | **16**

15 Moric Blaufränkisch Alte Reben Lutzmannsburg (13.5% ABV)

TA | Big, powerful, deeply colored. Richly oaked, suggesting a wine aimed at an international audience. Dense, yet sweet, lots of plum and bramble fruit, and the oak seems better integrated on the palate, backed up by medium weight but supple tannins, fresh acidity, and good length. The oak is just a little drying on the finish. | **14.5**
AH | Quite an interesting nose, which starts simple and raisiny, but then more layers emerge, including a smoky Islay quality, licorice, and herbs. The palate is round and generous, but here the raisins do threaten to overwhelm, and I was wishing for a bit more freshness, vigor, and length. | **14**
SR | Dark and dense ruby. Excellent ripeness of fruit, slightly sweet, with some graphite notes. This appears to be a Blaufränkisch from a warm, if not a really hot, spot, and cool-climate, wine hunters might criticize a certain super-ripeness or plummy of the grape material. The palate is velvety, very intense and well balanced; the fruit is sweet and tends toward licorice and nuts. But here is acidity and a silky freshness. The finish is succulent and very attractive. This is a rich and very powerful wine of elegance and great potential. (From slate soil?) | **17**

15 Moric Blaufränkisch Alte Reben Neckenmarkt (13.5% ABV)

TA | Inky purple. Very youthful. Clove and orange peel on the nose, with quite a bit of sweet oak and aromatic, brambly fruit. Spicy, peppery palate with sweet oak, medium concentration, good acidity, and medium length. Modern style, with quite a bit of alcohol, but a sense of hollowness. | **14.5**
AH | Very heady, ripe fruit—almost kirsch-like—and yet something a bit mossy-vegetal, too, on the nose. The palate is rather exaggerated, with palpable alcohol and simple fruit. Overall, a bit of a blunt instrument. | **13.5**
SR | Dark and unfiltered ruby. Deliciously dense, sweet, and harmonious on the nose but also powerful and maybe a little bit burned for purists. Dark, sweet-fruit aromas, leather, some herbal and earthy flavors. Rich, intense, and powerful on the palate, which is not only sweet but has a certain finesse and freshness. The tannins are ripe and silky, while the finish displays licorice and earthy flavors again. This is already starting to mature, and most of the other wines in this tasting seem younger. | **17**

15 Claus Preisinger Blaufränkisch Buehl (14% ABV)

TA | Ink bomb. Very dense color. High-toned, aromatic, very youthful, with a hint of underlying

greenness. Strange wine: a mixture of chalky acidity, deep color, lots of oak and brambly fruit, but slightly lacking in backbone and structure. That slight hollowness again... | **14**
AH | Intense, youthful purple color, and a heady blueberry/kirsch nose. The palate, while a little bit hot in alcohol, does have a firm, very fine-grained tannic structure. The flavor at this point is slightly one-dimensional, but it's a satisfying mouthful nonetheless. | **15**
SR | Deep and dark violet. Rich and sweet, dark, and concentrated ripe fruit flavors, with earthy undertones; also raw meat. Rich and powerful on the palate, but also pure and elegant, this is a still-young yet well-balanced wine from an excellent terroir, probably dominated by slate soil. Very good length, very complex, very pure and powerful. Will become better and better over the next five to six years, when it will probably score 17. | **16.5**

15 Wachter-Wiesler Pfarrweingarten Eisenberg DAC Reserve (13% ABV)

TA | Mid-ruby red, with some development at the rim. Some reduction on the nose, but this is a complex wine. Mid-weight, refreshing, balanced, with crunchy red fruits, little or no (new) oak and refreshing minerality. Classy winemaking, with understated intensity. | **17**
AH | Green, resinous oak dominates the nose.

TIM ATKIN'S VERDICT

Even ten years ago, I'd have invented a pressing appointment with the contents of my sock drawer rather than attend a tasting of Austrian reds. There were one or two good producers, but they always seemed a bit overrated to me, more favored by Austrians than international critics or consumers. When you put the country's reds up against its dry and sweet whites, it was a mismatch.

But things have got a lot better since then, as winemakers have learned how to make the best out of the grapes at their disposal: Zweigelt, Pinot Noir, St Laurent, Blaufränkisch, and (mostly in blends) Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Cabernet Franc, and Syrah. Better sites, superior viticulture, and climate change have all helped, as have vine age and experience.

I was impressed by the quality of the best wines I sampled at the 2012 Vie Vinum fair in Vienna, where a tasting of Austria's "great" 2009 vintage was one of the centerpieces of the event. Some of my best scores went to Zweigelt- or Blaufränkisch-based blends—what Austrians call *cuvées* for some reason—but the pure Blaufränkisch wines, especially

from Leithaberg and Burgenland, came out on top as an overall group. This is undoubtedly Austria's best variety.

How would these wines (all from the 2009 vintage) fare in London on *The World of Fine Wine's* tasting bench? Pretty well, as it happens. There were some disappointing wines—with green oak, excessive acidity, Brett, and a sense of hollowness occasional failings—but the best ones were impressive, showing an appealing combination of deep color, clove and pepper spice, lively fruit, and sensitively judged oak.

I'm not convinced that Blaufränkisch is a world-class variety, but it's much more than a Central European curiosity in the hands of producers such as Ernst Triebaumer, Umatham, Wachter-Wiesler, and Schiefer, all of whose wines performed well in the tasting. Ripeness levels are a lot better than they were a decade ago, and the temptation to confuse intrusive oak aging with high quality is far less prevalent than it was. Overall, this was an encouraging and even enjoyable tasting. My sock drawer will have to wait.

TIM ATKIN'S TOP WINES

Ernst Triebaumer Rust Blaufränkisch Ried Marienthal Trocken **17.5**

Judith Beck Blaufränkisch Altenberg **17.5**

Ernst Triebaumer Rust Blaufränkisch Ried Oberer Wald Trocken **17**

Schiefer Blaufränkisch Reihburg **17**

Umatham Joiser Kirschgarten Blaufrenkisch **17**

Wachter-Wiesler Pfarrweingarten Eisenberg DAC Reserve **17**

Wachter-Wiesler Steinweg Blaufränkisch **17**

There's some attractive red fruit in here somewhere, but it is swamped by foxy/piney/potpourri notes that don't belong. | 12
SR | Dark ruby, unfiltered. Interesting nose that speaks more of Carmenère than of Blaufränkisch at the moment. Slightly greenish cassis aromas. Firmly structured, quite green and pure, apparently due to stems during the fermentation. Not that complex, yet authentic. | 16

15 | Weninger Dürrau (14% ABV)

TA | Dense, compact ruby/purple. Savory, mineral, focused nose. Very chalky. Palate similarly fresh and nuanced, with brightness, vivacity, and concentration. Slight bitterness, with a saline note, good focus and freshness on the palate. Alcohol a little higher than one expects. | 16.5
AH | Soupy, diffuse, alcoholic nose, with some tarry blueberry-jam notes. Leaner and more poised on the palate than expected, with quite a lot of spice but still prominent alcohol. | 13.5
SR | Deep and dark ruby. Very ripe and intense fruit flavors in combination with woody aromas; rather plummy, lots of oak and chocolate. Sweet and rich on the palate but also drying out in the finish. Very powerful and rich, with quite burned fruit flavors. Very big. | 15.5

14.5 | Paul Achs Blaufränkisch Ungerberg (13.5% ABV)

TA | Thick, dense purple/ruby. Dense nose, too. Lots of concentration, well-integrated oak, and notes of damson and plum. Mid-weight palate, sweet fruit, chalky minerality, and a fresh finish. Swerves toward austerity, but the wine carries it, due to the plush, textured fruit and sweet end. | 16
AH | This nose blends various elements—rich, plummy fruit, animal fur, tomato—without achieving much definition. The palate has firm acidity, and this helps give the impression of focus but also upsets the balance, as there is not enough substance to match it. Overall, a bit weedy. | 13
SR | Dark ruby. Sweet and ripe dark-fruit aromas, then slightly jammy, nougat flavors. Sweet and soft, well balanced, and concentrated—but this is a taster's reality. If I had a sip or two, I would find it quite attractive, but I probably wouldn't pour a second glass. Lacks tension. Still quite well done. | 15

14.5 | Gesellmann Blaufränkisch Hochberg (14% ABV)

TA | Dense, concentrated color. Faintly overripe, jammy nose. Big, bold, and very Barossa, with high alcohol, overripe fruit, high acidity, and that hollowness. The alcohol is marked on the finish of the wine, too. | 12
AH | A very rich, oak-dominated style on the nose, with intense cassis/blackberry-jam fruit and an element of tar. While a bit of a bruiser in the mouth, it is coherent, with acid-balancing fruit, and alcohol in check. | 15
SR | Dark ruby color. Very pure and intense in fruit and alcohol at the same time. Silky textured, well balanced, big body; some coconut aromas (due to barrels?); very good length due to its power. Needs some years. | 16

14.5 | Toni Hartl Blaufränkisch Eisner (14% ABV)

TA | Dense, muscular color. Oaky, almost Barossa Valley-like nose, with lots of vanilla and coconut sweetness. High alcohol, ripe (for Blaufränkisch) flavors, which are saved from ponderousness by a backbone of (limestone-derived?) acidity. Lots of flavor, lots of oak, but a little over the top. | 14
AH | Very Pinotesque in its aromatic mixture of precise, almost tart berry fruit and sweetly spicy oak. Supple and fluid in the mouth, with almost imperceptible tannin. All very pleasant, but the finish lets it down, being rather sweet and caramelly. Had it ended tauter, the generosity up front would have been neatly resolved. | 15
SR | Dark ruby. Very oaky on the nose, which announces a ripe, rich, sweet, and powerful wine for an international market. I don't get much Blaufränkisch character here. Silky and elegant in texture, with a powerful finish, evident alcohol, and a chocolaty, sweet aftertaste. Overdone. | 14.5

14.5 | Moric Blaufränkisch Reserve (13% ABV)

TA | Dense, oaky, and concentrated color. Slight greenness on the nose, with plenty of oak squatting on top of it. Sweet and oaky palate, with slightly green fruit, high acidity, and a slightly thin, scrawny finish. Too much oak for the weight of the wine. | 11.5
AH | Engaging fruit richness and an individual aromatic character: forest-fruit compote, with a very slight piney/floral note that lends freshness. Fluid and multilayered on the palate, with a good blend of density and lift. | 16
SR | Dark ruby. Interesting nose, since it combines the richness and ripeness of 2009 with a remarkable purity and precision. Mocha-flavored dark berry and plum aromas are melted with earth and tar aromas. All in all, there is also a certain Vintage Port character, because the nose is so concentrated and ripe and sweet and also alcoholic. Silky, very rich and powerful, with fine tannins and good freshness, but this wine is really massive. Good length, though I fear you wouldn't drink a second glass so quickly. Cassis, graphite, and tobacco on the finish. | 16.5

14.5 | Rosi Schuster Blaufränkisch Rusterberg (13.5% ABV)

TA | Saturated, dense color. Rich, oaky, and a little marked by high alcohol on the nose. But backed up by plum and damson fruit, some raspberry sweetness and fresh acidity. Slightly lacking mid-palate weight but appealing minerality. | 15
AH | Advanced color for four years old—slightly bricky in comparison to the rest. A neat aromatic mixture of sweet plummy fruit and savory/rocky notes. The palate is maturing rapidly, though, and seems a little threadbare. | 13
SR | Purple color. Wild and pure nose, musty, still young and reductive, with dominant earthy, pure dark-fruit flavors; a rather cool climate Blaufränkisch, deep and complex yet far from being at its peak. Silky, very pure and well balanced, concise yet fine acidity; a little bit of Brett toward the finish, very spicy and still extremely young. Needs to be decanted or stored for another five years or so. | 16

14.5 | Ernst Triebaumer Rust Blaufränkisch Ried Oberer Wald Trocken (13% ABV)

TA | Youthful, vibrant purple/crimson. Appealing, aromatic, savory nose, with plenty of fruit concentration, some clove spice, and well-handled oak. Lovely, classic Blaufränkisch that nods toward the northern Rhône in style. Medium-bodied, spicy, attractive, with rose petal and red fruits, mineral acidity, a touch of oak and a sweet, lingering finish. Not a blockbuster, but nuanced. Attractive now but will develop. | 17
AH | Some horsey/medicinal aromas that suggest Brett but quite sensuous blackberry/blueberry fruit underneath. Furry-textured on the palate, with a dry, farmyardy aspect. This feels essentially like an good wine compromised. | 11
SR | Dark and dense ruby color; obviously this wine is unfiltered. Warm and rich on the nose, with sweet and ripe dark-fruit aromas, as well as earthy, nutty, and heavy oaky scents. Rich and full-bodied on the palate, this silky yet meaty wine is structured by fine, slightly powdery tannins and a ripe and elegant acidity. The finish is big and sweet but also slightly astringent; I am not sure if the wine will stay balanced over the years. | 16

14.5 | Weninger Blaufränkisch Alte Reben (13.5% ABV)

TA | Ruby/crimson-hued. High-toned, with quite a bit of oak and some volatility. Marked acidity on the palate and slightly overripe, jammy fruit. Something of a two-half wine, with acid up front and jammy sweetness on the finish. | 13
AH | Interesting aromas of slightly roasted fruit and biscuits—but a lot of alcohol apparent, too. Hollow palate, with spicy acid, tannic bitterness, and little focus or real core of flavor. | 13.5
SR | Dark ruby. Ripe if not overripe fruit aromas, quite jammy and very powerful, licorice flavors. Silky and elegant, well balanced, with good length and a refreshing acidity, quite pure and firm. Not everybody's darling but a serious wine for purists. Should age another couple of years. | 16.5

14 | Krutzler Blaufränkisch Perwollf (13.5% ABV)

TA | Dark and brooding. Dense, almost opaque color. Reductive, smoky, sausage-like nose, possibly from underseasoned oak. Oaky, rather dry, with a faintly musty note beneath. High acid finish, with something of a hole in the middle. A wine that may come around in the bottle but is a little oak-dominated at present. | 11.5
AH | A lot of oak aroma, over some quite Cabernetesque, leafy blackcurrant fruit. Licorice emerges with air. Fine-grained but hollow-structured on the palate, with marked acidity, rigid oak, and, at present, insufficient depth or succulence of flavor to fill out the frame fully. | 14
SR | Dark purple. Warm and intense fruit flavors of ripe black- and blueberries, some earthy and spicy (peppery) undertones, and raw meat. Rich and elegant on the palate, the fruit (with some leather aromas toward the finish) is well balanced by silky tannins and a nice freshness, so the wine has complexity and length but is far from being big or fat. An excellent Blaufränkisch with great aging potential. Very long. | 17

14 | Markus Altenburger Blaufränkisch Jungenberg (14% ABV)

TA | Dense, saturated color. Hint of greenness on the nose, with slightly underseasoned oak, dry and smoky and savory, extracted with slightly too much wood tannin. | 12
AH | Quite Bordeaux-like in its combination of smart toasty barrels and leafy/cassis fruit aromas. That impression continues on the palate, which offers a fine blend of succulence and symmetry. What's missing is a sense of personality. | 15
SR | Dark ruby. Green and peppery aromas, perhaps due to the stems during the fermentation? Ripe cherry and blackberry scents behind; also cassis with more aeration. Intense and powerful on the palate, also quite sweet and silky, but the finish dries out a little due to greenish barrels. | 15

14 | Prieler Blaufränkisch Goldberg (13.5% ABV)

TA | Opaque, dense. Concentrated and firm. Serious, high acidity, quite extracted, with high-toast oak. Rich, savory, sweet. Youthful. High acid, surrounded by plush fruit. Minerally finish. | 16.5
AH | An uncomfortable blend of jammy, almost raisined fruit with dusty, vegetal notes. Quite smoky, ashy—like a spent cigarette. Hard texture in the mouth. Not a lot of appeal here. | 11
SR | Dark ruby. Very ripe and plummy on the nose, chocolate and cocoa flavors. Attacks the mouth with salt, like a salted water for pasta. Rich, sweet, and intense, firm tannins, pure on the finish, very powerful, but slightly drying out. Irritatingly salty without being mineral. | 15

14 | Schönberger Blaufränkisch Kräften SC (13% ABV)

TA | Mid-ruby/red. Aromatic, but slightly marked by reduction and alcohol. Faintly soupy, alcoholic palate, too, with bramble and damson fruit, fresh acidity and the slight hollowness that seems to be a feature of (some) Blaufränkisch. The acidity on the finish makes the wine a little scrawny. | 13
AH | Heady, jammy, pleasant, but ill-defined nose. Some depth up front, but after that, lean and tough. Doesn't find a consistent voice. | 13
SR | Dark purple. Rather pure and earthy on the nose—some VA?—but also quite intense. Silky, vibrant, grippy palate, pure, not yet developed. Firmly structured and slightly drying for now. | 15.5

13.5 | Braunstein Leithaberg Blaufränkisch Reserve (13.5% ABV)

TA | Mid-ruby/red. Youthful. Sweet, aromatic, rose-petal perfume. Pleasant, soft, and fruity, with some wild-strawberry notes, but on the light side with a slight lack of profundity. Savory, good acidity, but faintly confected. | 14
AH | Unusual and off-putting nose: vivid red peppers and cream—a bad combination. Sour, vegetal flavors despite a certain richness and charm when it comes to texture. | 11
SR | Mid-purple. Pure ripe-fruit flavors, quite fresh, earthy/stony aromas on the nose. Silky textured, rich, very powerful but well balanced, with good length and lots of chocolate on the finish, if not that complex. | 16

ALEX HUNT'S VERDICT

This was a tough tasting. Although it wasn't a huge flight, the wines' high acidity had a cumulatively sensitizing effect more powerful than any other grape variety I have tasted in quantity. That said, there was a consistent pattern throughout the tasting: Blaufränkisch only works when the balance is impeccable.

That pronounced acidity provides a seemingly unwavering challenge. It is not going to go away, so it needs to be balanced out by sweetness of fruit and suppleness of texture. Wines that cleared this hurdle bloomed with interest. Exotic, complex, sweet, and savory aromas were corralled into focus by the acidity, which became neatly integrated, appearing, if at all, as piquancy rather than sourness. But too many wines failed to present sufficient fruit, appearing instead as frames waiting to be filled by generous, less structural varieties.

Oak in particular contributed to this impression—in some instances by adding dry tannins and suppressing fruit, and in others by contributing a sweet coconut or vanilla layer that jarred with the acidity: an incompatible collision of structure and flavor. This is not to say oak was always problematic. When properly proportioned and of high quality, it brought a welcome extra layer of aroma. But caution is clearly required, since Blaufränkisch has that tricky combination of delicate aroma and assertive structure. Giving each its voice within a wine of harmony takes considerable finesse. Even then, the best of the wines here were merely very good—never great.

ALEX HUNT'S TOP WINES

Weninger Spérrn Steiner [Soproni Kékfrankos] 17
Wellanschitz Blaufränkisch Sonnensteig 16.5
Moric Blaufränkisch Reserve 16
Ernst Triebaumer Rust Blaufränkisch Ried Marienthal Trocken 16

13.5 | Muhr-Van der Niepoort Spitzerberg Carnuntum (13.5% ABV)

TA | Mid-ruby red. Youthful, but showing some development. Strange tomato-leaf notes on the nose, with undergrowth and earthy hints. Fresh acidity, but a greenness that doesn't quite integrate, giving a slightly scrawny finish. The high alcohol adds to the sense of clumsiness. | 12
AH | Pretty strawberry-fruit aromas here and some mossy, vegetal character that is a little prominent. The palate has a certain dank, diffuse flavor that the fairly prominent acidity fails to bring into focus. Not especially refined or winsome. | 12.5
SR | Unfiltered dark ruby, with a purple rim. Very pure and wild on the nose, which is currently dominated by earthy aromas, whereas the fleshy

dark berry (cassis!) flavors are slightly reductive at the moment. Nonetheless, this is a fascinating, natural, and pure aroma, with some herbal scents as well. On the palate, this is silky and fresh, much less extracted and powerful than the [Umatham Joiser Kirschgarten Blaufränkisch] or [Ernst Triebaumer Rust Blaufränkisch Ried Oberer], more on the earthy, terroir side. Since there is almost no meat but acidity and finesse, it is most likely from a cooler spot and from slate soils, so displays a pure expression of its origin, which you might like or leave. I currently find it a little lean and not yet as complex as Blaufränkisch can be, but it still has the promise of its purity. | 15.5

13.5 | Anita & Hans Nittaus Blaufränkisch Tannenberg (13.5% ABV)

TA | Inky, youthful color, with a hint of development at the rim. High alcohol, jammy, reductive, and a little scrawny at the same time. A wine where there is no there there... | 12
AH | A lot of spicy-caramel oak here, to the exclusion of all else on the nose. The fruit seems watery, slightly overripe, and very soft. A loose, low-energy wine. | 12
SR | Dark purple color. Very pure and still musty on the nose, with polished cassis aromas, nice concentration, spicy and natural, ripe dark-berry and earthy scents. Silky and powerful, with lots of cassis flavors, good acidity (from slate soil?), and vibrancy. Terroir-driven, well balanced, and with good length. Seemingly from a cool climate. | 16.5

13.5 | Schönberger Lehmgrube SC (13.5% ABV)

TA | Mid ruby/purple. Floral, aromatic nose of rose petal and jasmine. Red fruits, alluring, appealing. Attractive palate, too: sweet, quite forward, but with lovely poise and acidity and minerality. Low-key winemaking, allowing the fruit to speak and (hence) expressing the best of the variety. Floral and well balanced. | 16
AH | Resinous wood dominates this nose and palate. Tough and compact in the mouth, this fails to express any fruit sweetness or personality aside from toasted-coconut, sawdusty oak. | 11
SR | Dark purple. Reductive nose with Brett aromas. Silky texture, good freshness and concentration, quite firmly structured. Not that long, though. | 14

12 | Thomas Schwarz Kloster am Spitz Blaufränkisch Eisner (13.5% ABV)

TA | Mid-ruby/red with some pink at the rim. Reductive nose that's verging on cooked vegetables. The reduction continues on to the palate, subduing the fruit. High acid, with some sweet, raspberryish notes and a confected finish. Not a success. | 10
AH | Plump, late-summer fruit aromas here: apricot, strawberry, currants. Pleasantly succulent up front, but a tough, sweaty finish (a bit of reduction, possibly). Sweet and sour; hot alcohol, too, since there's insufficient intensity to cover it. | 12
SR | Mid-ruby. Very up-front cassis fruit, with earthy aromas, rather lean and not very complex, also quite reductive. Silky and well balanced, with good fruit character; quite sweet on the finish but lacks complexity. A rather simple wine. | 14