

## The “Wine-Rabls” in Langenlois

At first sight Rudi Rabl, vintage 1968, doesn't look like a normal winemaker - or at least not like the winemaker we have in mind. His appearance and rather reserved though friendly and correct manners make us think of a solid manager rather than a hard-working vintner. Well, reality shows that he is both. When asked who is in charge of the winery he says: “My father is mainly in the vineyards, while I take care of the rest.” This includes work in the cellar and office work, but also marketing and sales activities. “And whatever time is left after all that”, he adds with a smile, “belongs to my family and friends”.

In 1986 Rudi Rabl jr entered into his father's business, a winery that can look back on a very long tradition. It was first documented in 1750! Since then the original wine-growing area of 20 hectares has been nearly quadrupled. Today, Rudolf Rabl sr and Rudi Rabl jr are the proud owners of 75 hectares of vineyards. And so the winery is one of the “big shots” in the Kamptal region. No wonder that we come across their names more and more frequently in various gazettes and magazines like VINARIA, one of Austria's most prestigious wine magazines. Not only the size of the Rabl Winery has grown, but also its reputation. Today, they can produce much more wine than in the old days and have also put much effort into the quality of these wines. “Already back then they made good wines. They just didn't talk about them as much”, says Rudi, a rather lanky native of Langenlois, adding two examples: Salon Champion in 1991, and Grüner Veltliner vintage 1950 (!), which became Variety Champion of the Kamptal region and the Wachau valley. “We are not people who just blare out everything we do. We work more quietly, you know.” This hits the nail right on the head.

### Success at all levels

Nevertheless, there are countless reasons why it is worth taking a closer look at the details of this success story: the Rabls keep exporting 50% of their wines in spite of their rather big winery and the global financial crisis we are going through; 15% of Canada's wine imports from Austria have a black raven on their bottles and the best known Austrian wine there is Rabls' “Grüner Veltliner Spiegel”. Not to mention the many awards they have received at home and abroad: Riesling Steinhaus, for example, was nominated for Salon Österreichischer Wein for the 6<sup>th</sup> time in a row, several wines became “Salon Champion” or “Lower Austria Champion”, and the Rabls won several trophies in London (Decanter World Wine Awards and others). Many will also remember the legendary wine-tasting of the Langenlois Champions in 2004, when in all five categories the Rabl wines came second. However, poetic justice is done this year – three champions and the coveted title of “Langenlois Winery of the Year”!

We are not talking about pure luck here. There are many factors behind the high quality of Rabl wines. First of all the vineyards themselves — Schenkenbichl, Käferberg, Steinmassl and Steinhaus are some of the best primary rock soil vineyards in and around Langenlois. And Spiegel and Kittmannsberg with their rich loess soils are of the same high calibre. Rudolf Rabl goes into raptures when he talks about his vineyards: “Schenkenbichl has primary rock soils with layers of limestone. This gives the wines their beautiful mineral, creamy and soft nuances. And Kittmannsberg with its loess terraces is a caldera that faces southeast and is probably the best loess vineyard we have here in Langenlois!”

### **Optimal wines**

Excellent soils are essential for producing top-quality grapes. And these grapes are the basis of their premium Vinum Optimum line, which uses only the best grapes from Langenlois' most outstanding vineyards. This is particularly true for the likes of the Grüner Veltliner, Riesling and Zweigelt grown on the old vines found in vineyards such as Schenkenbichl. "Now and again we also use other varieties like Merlot, Pinot Noir, Gelber Muskateller and Sauvignon Blanc that grow in younger vineyards, but we treat them as if they were from old vines." That may sound rather cryptic, but actually means nothing else than rigorous grape reduction combined with painstaking selection by hand.

The Rabls take a slightly different approach in the rest of their vineyards. The philosophy remains the same — that only the best grapes produce high quality wines — but "we don't want to exaggerate and worry about every single blade of grass." What really counts is the vine itself. "Biologically it is a bush, and not an ornamental plant you would cut and trim like espalier fruit", says Rudi smiling. "The vines don't have to look alike; after all, this isn't an English garden!" Their unique foliage treatment goes hand in hand with this philosophy. 'Left-centre-right' is their principle, as it ensures more balanced aeration and exposure to the sun.

In the cellar the Rabls are true advocates of spontaneous fermentation and a long contact with the crushed grapes. Fermentation takes place at a moderate temperature of 20-21°C (68-70°F), and varies from eight weeks to four months. This ensures that the enzymes draw more extracts and aromas out of the pulp and skin. "The only way to make great wines!", says Rudi Rabl convinced. "If you rely on whole-bunch pressing, you practically throw away the marc — and with it all the aromas and contents. These wines may have a high alcohol content, but in the end they are thin." Thin wines are something you will not find at the Rabl Winery. This year's Gelber Muskateller, for example, boasts great juiciness and concentration. It secured a great fourth place out of 140 Gelber Muskateller submitted for tasting. (see Austrian wine magazine VINARIA, 3/09 edition)

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