

## How to become a Weinakademiker



After I passed my Vinologist's diploma (wine expert level 4) in February 2017, I soon began to feel the urge to continue my studies. I didn't feel confident enough to go on the Magister Vini diploma (Dutch level 5) so I was looking to get more depth. That's how I came up with the idea to follow the international wine WSET Diploma Course. Also because that will probably expand the possibilities to teach. WSET stands for Wine and Spirits Education Trust. To be able to start with Diploma Course (WSET4), the WSET advanced level 3 is mandatory. I then subscribed for a "Fast track" course to get the "Advanced" diploma. It was quite a tough exam, and actually it were 3 exams that all had to be passed. A tasting exam, a multiple-choice exam and an exam with open questions. Luckily I passed it all in one go and in December 2017 I got my "Advanced" Diploma (WSET3). Level 4 also included a "Spirits" exam until now, but I knew that from August 2019 that it would be a fully wine oriented diploma. That appealed to me because "Spirits" is not my cup of tea. Now you can also take the Diploma Course in the Netherlands and later on, after having obtained level 4, you can still obtain your "Weinakademiker" title elsewhere. Mario Tertschnig of the Winestudio pointed out to me that you can also do this in Austria and that includes the Weinakademiker track. So I informed myself about the possibilities in Austria. It turned out that this was the start of the process in May, in which the new structure will also be followed. The entire study is given in three blocks. A block of 10 days at the Weinakademie in the Austrian Rust located on the Neusiedler See. Then again on October a block of 7 days; 5 days of Rust and 2 days in Vienna in the Palace of Coburg. This palace has one of the largest and most extensive wine cellars in the world. The Dutch Master of Wine Frank Smulders was responsible for the realization of this collection. Then a last block of 8 days in Tuscan Florence. The lectures are interspersed with excursions and wine tastings. Rust lies in the middle of a wine region and the other Austrian wine regions are not far away. This appealed to me enormously and would

give me the opportunity to get to know an international group of wine lovers. Always good for your “wine network”.



## Bursary

You could also apply for a bursary of 1000 euros. For this, an essay had to be written about why you started this course and why you should get this scholarship now. I did and to my surprise I was awarded a scholarship by the Austrian Marketing Bureau.

Diploma Course consists of 6 parts:

- D1 Exam wine production: viticulture, wine making, wine maturation and bottling.
- D4 Exam fortified wines.
- D5 Exam sparkling wines.
- D2 Exam wine business.
- D3 Examination wines of the world.
- D6 A written assignment on a fixed research topic.

Once you have completed all of this, you can receive your Diploma Course Diploma.

Then, and of course you can start earlier, writing a thesis of a free research topic, which must also be defended in order to obtain the title "Weinakademiker".

The D1 exam is done directly in May, in October D4 and D5 and possibly D2, D3 in May next year and D6 can be worked on separately and that is also the case for the Thesis. If I have achieved and finished everything before August 2020, it is possible to receive my Weinakademiker title next year (2020) November on the platform of Palace Esther Háze. We'll see.

This blog is about the experiences from the first block in Rust to the results of the D1 exam (or Unit2).

## **Day 1 at Rust, Wednesday 8 May 2019.**

The day before I already travelled to Rust to be on time for the next day at the Academy. I found a simple apartment within walking distance. After the flight and taxi from Vienna to Rust I was pleasantly welcomed and I quickly unpacked my suitcase to be able to continue learning at the D1 exam. It is now Tuesday and next Monday is already the Exam. The next morning, when I walk through the streets of Rust, I notice two things. Every 5 meters there is a wine shop and on many chimneys there are storks' nests, some of which are actually populated with storks. After the registration the managing director of the Weinakademie, Dr. Josef Schuller MW (also called Pepi) welcomes us. At the presentation round I find out that my 20 classmates come from all over the world. Mainly Asia (A surgeon from Taiwan, a 2 traders from Hong Kong, Two winemakers from Turkey and a lady from South Korea who now lives in Berlin) and Europe (Sommeliers of a 2 Michelin star restaurants in Barcelona, restaurants in St. Peterburg, Moscow and Zurich, a winemaker from Tokaji, a trader from Latvia, IT specialists from Switzerland and Germany, a banker from Poland) and that I am the only person coming from the Netherlands. Then, in the morning, we got tasting training from Pepi. At lunchtime we have lunch (which will be on the agenda almost every day) in the Seedorf hotel across the street, where an extensive hot and cold buffet was waiting for us. In the afternoon we were lectured by Weinakademiker Ferdinand Mayer about the international grape varieties, which of course were also tasted. Ferdinand Mayer is a winemaker himself.

## Winetasting in a Heuriger

After the lesson of Ferdinand two groups were merged. This group follows the program in a different way in shorter blocks. Here are more local students who participate, and even someone of the Netherlands who lives in Vienna. Pepi explained the unit 2 exam and then gave us a lecture on Austrian wine. At 18:00 there was a short tour through Rust and a bite to eat so we can get to know each other.



A "Heuriger" is a place where the winemaker may serve his wines with some cold snacks. So there are many of them in Rust because we are in the middle of the wine-growing area. It was nice to get acquainted with some of the fellow students. After this event we had dinner together with a large group. Very nice, but then quickly back to my apartment to dive back into the unit 2 books.

## Day 2 at Rust, Thursday 9 May 2019.

In the morning we continued the lessons about the international grape varieties. At the beginning of the afternoon we got a lecture from Mag. Wilhelm Klinger, Managing Director of the Austrian Marketing Board. He talked about the trends in the wine business and shows a series of photos of him with all kinds of wine celebrities. After the lecture I had a picture with him to record the official award ceremony of my 1000 euro bursary. At three o'clock we got in the bus to go to castle Esterházy in Eisenstadt. It is a beautiful castle with a beautiful entrance to it and inside it is also provided with all kinds of paintings on the wall. Here I hope to be able to experience my graduation ceremony of my Weinakademiker title next year. I remain optimistic. We are here to witness a wine tasting of the "The great sites of Burgenland" of the renowned wineries of Burgenland. followed by a dinner buffet. The wines that stood out for me are:

- Feiler-Artinger 2017 Gustav Neuburger chardonnay, a beautiful wood-matured wine as well as the Juris 2017 chardonnay reserve and the Kollwentz 2017 chardonnay Gloria.
- Krutzler 2017 alter weingarten blaufränkisch and zweigelt: really a beautiful wine with structure and finesse.
- Paul Rittsteuer the 2018 grüner veltliner alte reben; beautiful fresh wine with great taste and the chardonnay ried Lehmgruben, a beautiful elegant wine.
- Ernst Triebaumer the 2016 chardonnay ried Bandkräftn, really super and the 2009 Maulwurf Blaufränkisch, merlot, cabernet sauvignon; beautiful wine with good balance.
- Umathum de 2015 ried Halle buhl zweigelt; a soft elegant wine and the 2013 Vom Stein sankt Laurant also a beautiful soft wine with refined taste.

It is striking that there is a lot of chardonnay in my favourites of this tasting. Not really a native variety.



### **Day 3 at Rust, Friday 10 May 2019.**

The whole day vinification of Professor Dr. Monika Christmann of the University of Geisenheim. Quite a long time, but this lady knows how to keep everyone awake. At 18:00 there is a wine tasting of the "Best of Austria" in the courtyard of the Weinakademie. Actually too many beautiful wines to mention. So limited to the wines that a scored 9/10:

- Krispel (Vulkanland Styria): 2017 Grauburgunder "Ried Hochstrandl".
- Jamek (Wachau): 2017 Riesling Beerenauslese "Ried Klaus" really a super wine.

- Geyerhof (Kremstal): 2016 Kremstal DAC grüner veltliner "Ried Steinleirhn 1öt" and the 2011 grüner veltliner, lots of taste.
- Peter Schandl: 2015 Ruster Ausbruch.
- Schwartz: 2017 Rot (zweigelt) beautiful elegant wine and the 2015 Schwartz.
- Heidi Schröck: 2014 Ruster Ausbruch, wow what a flavors!



#### **Day 4 in Rust, Saturday 11 May 2019**

A whole day about viticulture from Professor Dr. Manfred Stoll also from the Geisenheim University. This day was a bit more difficult to stay awake because of his somewhat monotonous way of speaking. Also a lot of interesting information about the sapflows in a plant. But less relevant for the exam. In the meantime, we get to know each other better and asking questions to each other about the unit2 subjects in order to get ready for the exam.



### **Day 5 in Rust, Sunday 12 May 2019.**

In the morning we go into the vineyards to take a closer look at everything. Peter Schandl takes our group to his vineyards. First we arrive at a place where you have a beautiful view over the Neusiedler See and the rest of the vineyards. Then take a closer look at the vines. We see that the fruit is already setting itself. After looking at the vineyard we went to Peter Schandl's Heuriger where a tasting of his wines awaits us. The 2017 chardonnay Ried Umriss and the 2017 pinot gris Ried Kreften were my favorites. And the red wines weren't bad either. But then a series of "Ruster Ausbruch" arrived. Because of the influence of the lake, you have ideal conditions for botrytis wine the so-called noble rotting as is the case with Sauternes. The Ausbruch 2015 was very tasty, but the 1981: what a wealth of complex flavours. The 1997 we tasted couldn't compete. After lunch we had a trip to the wine cellar of Ester Háy. Nice to see how wine is made there, how it is pressed, filtered and bottled. Once back we went for dinner with a group and afterwards the last opportunity to learn.



### **Day 6 in Rust, Monday 13 May 2019.**

Yes, then the time has come: exam unit 2. This is an exam with 100 multiple choice questions of which 55 have to be at least right. If you don't pass it, you have to take the new D1 exam. This new exam consists of open questions. Probably a bit more difficult than it is now. I took the exam and it was a bit disappointing. Counted: of 58 questions I was 99% sure that I answered them correctly. Pff had hoped that it would have been some more. But at least it gives me enough confidence that I made it. At the end of the morning Pepi gave us some more information about the exams and the planning. After lunch it is time for the lessons of Master of Wine Frank Smulders about sparkling wine. Funny to go all the way to Austria to get lessons from a Dutch teacher. The sparkling wine exam is scheduled for October. I have to say that I always find it difficult to disassemble and recognize these wines properly. So pay attention! After these lessons we go out to dinner with the whole group: relax a bit after the exam. It was a pleasant evening and many wines were brought along to be tasted including the wines of the winemaker from Turkey.



### **Day 7 in Rust, Tuesday 14 May.**

Not everyone was fresh again, but we continued with the lessons. After some further explanation about the upcoming exams of Pepi we continue with the sparkling wines. The day ends with a test exam. That didn't went so bad. After the lesson we had dinner at Gasthaus Stickler. After dinner we tasted the wines of Giovanni. Giovanni is marketing manager at Cantina Toblino. Cantina Toblina is located in Trentino, a little bit above Lake Garda. They are beautiful wines from indigenous grapes such as the nosiola and the rebu. But also traminer, teroldego, schavia, pinot gris and many other grape varieties. And finally a Vino Santo.



### **Day 8 in Rust, Wednesday 15 May.**

At half past eight we got on the bus to Sloss Gobelsburg Winery in Kamptal for a tasting of the company itself, Bründlmayer from Kamptal and Markus Hober from Traisental. The most beautiful wine of Gobelsburg Castle was the 2017 Ried Lamm 1ötw Erste lage Kamptal DAC grüner veltliner, a golden yellow wine with freshness of lime and green apple, but also apricot, peach and vanilla. Then Markus Huber: there is the 2013 Ried Gertzersdorfer Berg 1ötw Erste low Traisental DAC grüner veltliner, also such a beautiful wine with lots of flavor, but also some more ripening tones. And of course the wines of Bründlmayer: The 2012 Ried Langenloiser Käferberg 1ötw Erste lage Kamptal DAC grüner veltliner. Also such a beautiful soft full wine but now with a little more pepper. After the tasting we get a delicious three course lunch in a beautiful room of the castle, with other beautiful wines. Then, after lunch, we hurried back into the bus on our way to Wachau.



## Wachau

At some point, Master of Wine Roman Horvat gets in. Roman is the Managing Director of Domaine Wachau. While driving along the banks of the Danube Roman explains where we can see which vineyard and what is so specific about it. After the tour we arrived at Domaine Wachau where another panel tasting is waiting for us. We start with the wines of Stadt Krems of Kremstal. We have a flight of three beautiful Rieslings all Erste Lage. They are different because of the different soils and year. Then Fred Loimer of Langenlois, Kamptal, again 3 Rieslings. The first two are very nice, but the last one is an example that every harvest year has its own characteristics. 2010 was a fresh year here and this Riesling has 10 grams of acid, but by letting in 10 grams of sugar it is still in balance. It is off dry, but your experience is dry. The flavours of grapefruit, pineapple, lime and green apple are pronounced. This was the Langenlois Ried Seeberg 1. ÖTW Erste Lage Riesling. Then the wines of Domaine Wachau: three Rieslings Smaragd. Two of 2017 and the last of 1996 Ried Achleiten Riesling, a beautiful wine with in addition to the already mentioned flavours also honey and mango, but still a fresh wine. As last weingut Knoll from Wachau several vintages of Ried Schüt Smaragd Riesling. 2017, 2014 and 2012, 2014 has the most acid (8 grams) wines makes it here a bit sharp, but also had honey tones. 2012 had the lowest acidity (6.5 grams). This wine gives a much more mature impression, but strangely enough less honey tones. After that we had a tour through the underground corridors where the fermentation and maturation take place. An impressive amount and types of fermentation tanks made of stainless steel, wood, granite, concrete and even clay. After the tour we went to the table in a beautiful room of the wine castle where traditional dishes were served with some other wines. After dinner we return home to Rust.



## Day 9 in Rust Thursday 16 May.

This day is dedicated to fortified wines. Somehow I have fewer problems with this because it is quite unambiguous: Port Madeira, Sherry, Banyuls, Muscat de Baume de Venise etc. After this day it will be our last evening together, at least for me because I have a flight home tomorrow. We dine in a more fancy restaurant than we are used to and had a pleasant evening again. It is very pleasant to be in an international group of people that has the same passion. That creates a bond and I wouldn't have missed it.



## Day 10 in Rust Friday 17 May.

Continue with fortified wines with Frank. Early in the afternoon we do an exam training and that doesn't go bad at all. We say goodbye to each other and while enjoying a beer this time I wait for the taxi that I take with one of the students. Once at the airport I think back with melancholy on the past 10 days. An intense experience and longing for home again. The journey continues well and at half past eleven I turn the key in the lock of my own house again. A few weeks later I receive the result: passed with merit! Luckily the first step has been taken and before I continue in October I will have to study at home. So far is everything according to plan.

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