

FJ Gritsch winery quits Austria's Vinea Wachau

Leading Wachau winemaker Franz-Josef Gritsch is leaving Vinea Wachau, meaning that from the 2023 vintage onwards, his award-winning wines will be exclusively classified by the DAC pyramid of origin rather than by designations such as Federspiel and Smaragd.

The acclaimed winemaker believes Austria's three-tiered DAC system is better for the future amid a changing climate and offers more clarity to international consumers.

The Gritsch family has been a member of the Wachau regional winegrowers' association since it was formed back in 1983. But from the 2023 vintage, Franz-Josef Gritsch's wines will no longer bear the Vinea Wachau designations Federspiel and Smaragd on their labels. Instead, the Wachau winemaker has decided to classify his wines, which are exported to 13 countries, exclusively using the DAC pyramid of origin.

Alcohol levels do not guarantee quality

"Vinea Wachau's three categories follow the traditional Germanic system, which requires a minimum alcohol content for each quality category. This made sense in earlier times when we still had to worry about ripeness but now, with every year that goes by, we feel increasingly that this categorisation does not stand up to climate change. I think it is no longer up to date," says Franz-Josef Gritsch. *"An alcohol classification says nothing about wine quality".* This is particularly true internationally. *"Our partners and traders in various export markets tell us constantly that it is now obsolete to classify wine by its alcohol level."*

Gritsch sees much greater potential in the internationally recognised DAC origin-based system. *"I regret that Vinea Wachau is not ready for change,"* he says. He believes Vinea Wachau missed the opportunity to adapt to current circumstances when the region was awarded DAC status in 2020. In his opinion, running two parallel classification systems just leads to confusion for consumers.

Wachau DAC

Vinea Wachau was founded 40 years ago as an area protection association, with the aim of securing the Wachau designation of origin. Since the 2020 vintage, Wachau wines with regional typicity have been produced according to the DAC pyramid – regional wine (Gebietswein), village wine (Ortswein) and single vineyard wine (Riedenwein). For the highest single vineyard category, only Grüner Veltliner and Riesling varieties can be used.

"I think this focus on origin is the right one for our area," says Franz-Josef Gritsch. *"A wine with 12.5% alcohol from a top vineyard is usually superior to a wine from non-terraced vineyards, even if it has more alcohol,"* he says, referring to the Wachau's world-famous steep, terraced vineyards in the Danube Valley.

Vinea Wachau's other quality parameters have also been incorporated into the DAC regulation for the region: for example, 100 percent hand harvesting is mandatory in the Wachau (at all three DAC levels) and it is forbidden to add sugar (chaptalisation) to single vineyard wines. *"The Wachau DAC regulation has given the region a new, future-oriented system – in my opinion, that duplication with the Vinea rules does not make sense. Hence my resignation,"* says Gritsch.

Origins with a future

With the new approach, Franz-Josef Gritsch would like to emphasise the uniqueness of the Wachau's vineyards even more effectively and he hopes to continue to have a constructive exchange with the members of Vinea Wachau. *"I hope that my efforts will provide a trend-setting impetus and contribute to the further development of viticulture in my region,"* says the Spitz winemaker.

Franz-Josef Gritsch winery

FJ Gritsch is a traditional family winery in Austria's Wachau region which stands for the highest wine quality and passion for craftsmanship. The Gritsch family has cultivated their vineyards for seven generations. They have approximately 15 hectares located in the Wachau's best locations, including Axpoint, Hochrain, Loibenberg, Klaus, Singerriedel, Setzberg, 1000-Eimerberg, Kalkofen and his exclusive site, Dürnsteiner Burg. FJ Gritsch has established itself as one of the Wachau's leading wineries, exporting its top wines, which have received numerous national and international awards, to 13 countries. The winery's new tasting and accommodation building, completed in 2022, has been won one of Austria's most prestigious building awards for its exemplary and sustainable design.

Press photos available [here](#).

More information about FJ Gritsch: www.gritsch.at/en/