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Impressions, Experiences and Insights - a Review of the VieVinum Cross-Mentoring Programme 2024

Since the beginning of this year, 13 young, aspiring winemakers have each been personally mentored by a successful personality from business and society as part of the Gerd A. Hoffmann Academy. With the beginning of VieVinum just around the corner, the tandems have taken stock of the fruits of their collaboration in a final presentation.

The young winegrowers approached their work with their assigned mentors with a mixture of hope and cautious expectation. Right from the start, each of the mentees were encouraged to actively engage with their mentor with clear ideas and goals. The M.A.C. Hoffmann team accompanied the tandems during their collaboration, provided advice and recorded their special moments in an online diary. The young winemakers also introduced themselves with profiles:

<https://www.vievinum.at/aktuelles/gerd-a-hoffmann-akademie/mentees-steckbriefe-jahrgang-2024/>

Certainly it was all a special time for Alexandra Graski-Hoffmann, organiser of the VieVinum wine fair and initiator of the Gerd A. Hoffmann Academy. "When VieVinum was founded by my family in 1998 and wine presentations like this were following new concepts, the guiding principle was to bring people together at trade fairs," says Graski-Hoffmann. "I was lucky that my own family and professional environment have provided the sense and enthusiasm for supporting winemakers with potential. And that philosophy lives on in this programme. Being part of this academy is something that will last forever. A community that will hopefully stay in touch and support each other with advice and assistance."

Stefan Gilg & Brigitte Handlos

"I wasn't aware that mentoring programmes were common in other fields," says Stefan Gilg from Hagenbrunn, Austria. "It didn't exist in the wine industry. So I appreciate all the more what Alexandra Graski-Hoffmann has created here." Stefan is one of the young winemakers who qualified for the Gerd A. Hoffmann Academy. He's had discussions with his mentor, Brigitte Handlos (freelance journalist and media coach, *everything media*), primarily about online marketing and the future direction of his winery. Handlos commented: "It's important to know where you want to go with your product." She added that it's wise to be aware that "there's a tendency to idealise or glorify the winemaking profession, but it is, in fact, very demanding and complex work."



Alexander Artner & Silke Sztatecsny

Alexander Artner, from Deutschkreuz, Austria, was taken under the wing of Silke Sztatecsny, Head of Marketing at ORF (Austrian Broadcasting Corporation) Vienna. "I'd been waiting for this programme!", says the enthusiastic Alexander. "This is my first time taking part in VieVinum, and it's fantastic to have such a great mentor. She supports me especially in the area of marketing." Silke Sztatecsny returns the praise: "Alexander is a self-confident young man who stands by his wines, and I'm impressed by how inquisitive he is. I'm also delighted that he's now making a pet nat alongside his red wines."

Florian Adam-Lieleg & Dr. Alfred Hudler

Florian Adam-Lieleg, from Leutschach, Austria, had as his mentor Dr. Alfred Hudler, Managing Director of the renowned Spanish Riding School in Vienna. "I had a professional view of things from the outside with a focus on developing sales channels and addressing target groups," says Florian. "I'm very happy to have received such valuable support." Dr. Hudler adds: "My mentee is very solution-oriented. We began by taking three steps back and started from there – to see where he wants to go and what is his USP. We will definitely stay in touch."

Michael Bayer & Günter Griesmayr

Michael Bayer from Donnerskirchen, Austria, formed a tandem with Günter Griesmayr, Chairman of Division II AMA - Agrarmarkt Austria. "My mentor has a huge network and knows practically everyone," enthuses Michael. "Even the first meeting in his office was exciting. We will continue to focus on our top vineyard, Himmelreich, and already have plans for how we want to continue after the official part of the mentoring programme is complete." Says Günter Griesmayr: "I was impressed by the tradition at the Erbhof winery. We can build on this for the future, and I will continue to support Michael in this."

Julia Eichberger & Willi Klinger

"I had an excellent experience with Willi Klinger as my mentor," says Julia Eichberger from Eibesbrunn, Austria. "He did an all-around evaluation and advised me on how I could continue in a Weinviertel winery and what I could specialise in." Willi Klinger, brand ambassador & strategic consultant, was equally impressed: "Julia already has an international horizon. We were in the vineyard and we tasted the wines. Her own wine line, 'Ich bin Ich', is the starting point for the future."

Thomas Magerl & Rainer Pariasek

Thomas Magerl from Fels am Wagram, Austria, formed a tandem with sport presenter Rainer Pariasek. "I was delighted to have had such a great mentor," says Thomas. "One of my goals is to make my winery better known. The two of us exchanged thoughts and ideas in this direction and forged a concrete concept." Rainer Pariasek says: "Although I was at home in the wine region, I didn't know the



[Magerl] winery and was surprised to find such a beautiful, large estate with state-of-the-art facilities. And the wines are really good!"

Alexander Paul & Elisabeth Zehetner-Piewald,

Alexander Paul from Leobendorf, Austria, found his mentor in Elisabeth Zehetner-Piewald, Managing Director of *oecolution austria*. "I wanted to expand my network and make new contacts," explains Alexander. "And that's exactly what happened. Elisabeth has a completely different view of the wine business, which is very exciting. We also share a common interest in sustainability." Mentor Zehetner-Piewald is just as impressed: "The winery is certified sustainable and includes a beautiful *Heurigen* [wine tavern]. A high-quality business. And Alexander Paul is going to be great!"

Daniel Pfeifer & Professor Oliver Kitz

Daniel Pfeifer from St. Anna am Aigen, Austria, had as a mentor Professor Oliver Kitz, former Head of Gastronomy & Events at Casinos Austria, founding member of *emba*, and father of the Austrian Event Hall of Fame. "I took away valuable tips from my mentor, and these are focused on positioning," Daniel says. "And I was able to expand my network with valuable contacts. He also supported me in the area of press relations."

Susanne Riepl & Thomas Neusiedler

Susanne Riepl from Gols, Austria, formed a tandem with Thomas Neusiedler, Chairman of the Board of Helvetia Versicherungen (Helvetia Insurance) AG Austria. "Our collaboration focused on expanding our network and how I can better position myself by specialising in a particular wine area," Susanne explains. "And I found it fascinating how quickly the time always passed during our meetings."

Paul Schabl & Marion Pelzel

Paul Schabl from Königsbrunn am Wagram, Austria, was matched with Marion Pelzel, Brand General Manager, Estée Lauder, MAC and Bobbi Brown. After the first meeting with his mentor, Paul reported on a very productive discussion about brand development and brand management. Although he was unable to attend the final mentoring presentation, he was nevertheless supported by Marion Pelzel there as well. In summarising their mentoring time together, Pelzel says: "I went to Paul's winery, captured the atmosphere there and tasted the wines. And I heard about his philosophy and goals. We've worked on several topics - and now he has the basis to move forward."

Alexander Schruiff & Dr. Petra Stolba

Alexander Schruiff from Oslip am Leithaberg, Austria, had Dr. Petra Stolba, Head of Cabinet of the First Vice-President of the European Parliament, Dr. Othmar Karas, at his side. "I could ask my mentor anything - it was like sitting opposite of Google, only more profound," Alexander effuses. "She



supported me regarding sales and the future direction of the winery." For Dr. Petra Stolba, it was her second mentoring role at the Gerd A. Hoffmann Academy. "Once again, it was great to see a young, hopeful person working together with his family. He's created his own wine and wants to expand the accommodation area. This collaboration has been truly wonderful."

Alexander Türk & Lilian Meyer

Alexander Türk from Stratzing, Austria, was matched with Lilian Meyer, Managing Director of Alstom Austria. "Having one of the most successful managers in the country as a mentor surpasses everything," says Alexander. "I received important outside perspectives, and I was shown new opportunities in sales and for the internationalisation of the winery." Lilian Meyer shared Alexander's positivity: "What we have in common is the topic of innovation. I've been inspired by my mentee's youthful drive to change things while maintaining pride in what his father had already created."

Paul Zimmermann & Marc Zimmermann

Paul Zimmermann from Ziersdorf, Austria, was delighted to have Marc Zimmermann, Managing Director of POPUP TV Film Produktion GmbH and Falstaff TV, as his mentor. "This programme began with a perfect briefing from the M.A.C. Hoffman team, Paul says. "We winemakers are often in our bubble - but to get ahead, a network is necessary. That's where my mentor was able to give me great support." In his summarisation, Marc Zimmermann notes: "This collaboration began with a laugh, because also my son's name is Paul Zimmermann! A great friendship has developed with my mentee. He is full of enthusiasm and passion for winemaking and he's also tradition-conscious. Simply exemplary!"

Masterclass at VieVinum

As part of VieVinum, the young winemakers will be holding a masterclass on Sunday, 26 May 2024. In the masterclass, moderated by wine expert Nicole Retter (Agentur für Wein & Strategie, Germany), the winemakers will introduce themselves individually with their own wine while providing insights into their thoughts and goals for the future.

<https://www.vievinum.at/school-of-wine/gerd-a-hoffmann-akademie-wie-tickt-die-naechste-winzergeneration/>