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The logo for MORIC, featuring the word "MORIC" in white, bold, sans-serif capital letters on a black rectangular background.

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MORIC, BURGENLAND AUSTRIA: CURRENT

RELEASES

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There's nothing I love more in the world than being knocked on my ass by some new thing I learn about wine. I especially love those moments when I realize I've been wrong about something, or when I taste a wine that puts all the others in perspective.

The last couple of years have been an education in German and Austrian wines for me. I went from knowing very little about them to tasting hundreds every year. While I certainly don't consider myself extremely knowledgeable yet, I feel like I've got a decent handle on what's out there, and what's good. Perhaps most importantly, I know that I've never met an Austrian red wine that I really liked.

Until today.

Tasting the wines of **MORIC** are a revelation of the best kind. I had completely and utterly dismissed the varietal Blaufrankisch as a mere viticultural curiosity, something that made passable, quaffable reds that I could easily never drink again and suffer no regrets. But in these stark and mysterious wines from winemaker Roland Velich is a sign of potential (or, perhaps, just mad genius on his part) that made me sit bolt upright in my chair.

Velich is my favorite type of obsessive, fanatical winemaker driven by a vision to go to great lengths in pursuit of some potentially unattainable ideal in his winemaking. With the simple goal of making a world-class red wine in Austria, Velich spent decades immersing himself in the techniques and wines of Burgundy, pursuing the keys to greatness.

With vine density, reduced yields, and old vines on the brain, Velich explored Burgenland, the appellation in central eastern Austria, whose viticultural history owes more to its former Hungarian heritage than to its Austrian identity. In three select hillside areas, Velich found his jackpot: old-vine, head trained Blaufrankisch planted at historical densities three times those of current planting standards. These scraggly vines, some of them more than 110 years old, produce miniscule amounts of fruit, some of them only enough to make a few hundred bottles of wine per acre.

Blaufrankisch (known as Lemberger in Germany and here in the United States) is Austria's most commonly planted red varietal. It is known for budding early and ripening late, and consequently has been treated more like a warm climate variety, cultivated and grown like Syrah. With that in mind, most Austrian producers tend to pile on the new oak and push its extraction and fruit.

Velich, of course, thinks this is precisely the wrong thing to do. He grows it like the cool climate Gamay and Pinot Noir of Burgundy, and vinifies it accordingly. The grapes are grown without pesticides or herbicides of any kind to promote and retain their natural yeasts in as large quantities as possible. These yeasts are the only fermentation aid, which sometimes means very long initial fermentations, and quite often a wait of a year or more for the wine to go through secondary (malolactic) fermentation on its own. After the first fermentation, and while waiting for the second, the wine is stored in large neutral oak barrels on its lees. When malolactic fermentation is complete, the wine is then transferred to a mix of Slovenian and French oak barrels, most of which are neutral, with an occasional new barrel thrown in the mix.

Blaufrankisch is rumored to age extremely well, though I have never heard of anyone drinking aged Austrian reds in this country. Perhaps there are deep cellars in Vienna which house proof of this aging capacity. No matter. It's not hard to believe that Velich's wines will last for years, and it would be exciting indeed to see how they develop over time. I suspect that anyone willing to hang on to them for a decade or so would find themselves in possession of an Austrian national treasure.

Full disclosure: I received these wines as press samples.

TASTING NOTES:

2003 MORIC "Neckenmarkter" Blaufrankisch, Burgenland, Austria

Medium ruby with flashes of purple in the glass, this wine has a nose of wet dirt, crushed mulberries, and other slightly grapey aromas. In the mouth it is well balanced with good acidity and nice light tannins that support mysterious flavors of mulberry, kirsch, hints of black licorice, and other difficult to pin down flavors. The overall effect of this wine is quite unsettling in the best sort of way -- it comes off as a fruit that you've never tasted, though it ends up more fruity than complex. **8.5/9**. Cost: \$28.99. [Where to Buy?](#)

2003 MORIC "Alte Reben Neckenmarkt" Blaufrankisch, Burgenland, Austria

Medium to dark ruby in color, this wine has a deep rich nose of wet dirt, wet redwood bark, and a light floral scent that at times might be described as lilac. In the mouth it offers a supple pleasing texture and weight on the tongue with flavors of cherry, wet wood, and mixed exotic spices. Light tannins carry the wine through a long and very pleasing finish. Burgundian in quality to be sure, with a complexity and personality that I never for a million years would have thought was Blaufrankisch. Rocked my world. **9/9.5**. Cost: \$76.99. [Where to Buy?](#)

2003 MORIC "Alte Reben Lutzmannsburg" Blaufrankisch, Burgenland, Austria

Medium ruby in the glass, this wine has a supple, velvety nose of cherry, redcurrant, and mixed herbs. In the mouth it offers a gorgeous mix of woody cedar and forest floor flavors, with notes of anise around a core of tart raspberry flavor. The tannic structure is very light, but enough to give the wine some grip in the mouth as it sits perfectly balanced on the tongue, with excellent acidity that propels the wine to a lovely finish. To an inattentive taster this might be a dead ringer for a great Pinot, but the wine has something darker and mysterious going on that prevents you from betting your life savings that it's a Burgundy. **9/9.5**. Cost: \$76.99. [Where to Buy?](#)