



# LOCAL hero

## A focus on exports and the Blaufränkisch grape sums up the ethos of Leo Hillinger

**AUSTRIA HARDLY** has a global reputation for cutting edge winery design, creative marketing and a truly international reach, but that is precisely what Leo Hillinger has pursued since taking over his family business in 1990.

With 50 hectares divided between Rust and Jois, the limestone-slate of Burgenland's Leithaberg DAC and the

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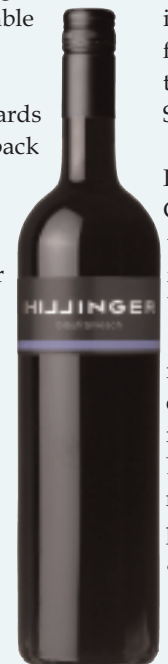
spicy, age-worthy Blaufränkisch form the cornerstones of Hillinger's identity.

It therefore comes as no surprise to learn of Hillinger's firm belief that, despite proven versatility when it comes to successfully producing a range of grape varieties, it is Austria's indigenous

Blaufränkisch red flagship which offers the route to success in international markets. As Hillinger explains: "I'm not interested in producing the same international fashionable wines, I'd much rather create typically Austrian top quality."

Having turned his focus towards building export sales back in 2006, Leo Hillinger currently supplies his wines to 18 countries, which now account for 50% of his winery's total 500,000-bottle production. With Switzerland, the US

and the Far East his main export markets, Hillinger wines can also be found in Poland, Russia and several other eastern European countries, while he has identified strong potential in



### The modern face of Hillinger

- ▶ 1990 - Leo Hillinger takes over the family wine business with 0.86 hectares of vineyard
- ▶ 1997 - enjoys his first international success with Hill 1
- ▶ 2004 - opens a new winery, tasting room and seminar centre in Jois
- ▶ 2005 - unveils his own flagship store in Parndorf, near Neusiedl
- ▶ 2006 - embarks on a major export focus, expanding into 18 countries
- ▶ 2008 - launches The Pink Ribbon action to raise funds for breast cancer care
- ▶ 2009 - opens a second flagship store, the "Hill Lounge" in Salzburg

India for the future. In each part of the world, the focus is on working with specialist retailers and the upper end of the on-trade sector.

The top Hillinger wines, his Hill Series, are made with grapes grown on 30 hectares of vineyard near Rust, where the mineral-rich soil, combined with the moderating effect of the Neusiedlersee, contribute to wines of intense fruit and considerable ageing potential. The Hill 1 cuvée demonstrates the distinctively Austrian character that Blaufränkisch and its more widely planted compatriot Zweigelt can bring to an internationally influenced blend. Blaufränkisch makes a further blended appearance in Hill Side, this time adding an Austrian nuance to a Syrah-dominated wine.

Alongside these Blaufränkisch blends, Hillinger produces a Blaufränkisch Classic, as well as two further single varietal wines: Blaufränkisch Terroir and, for the purest expression of the region, Blaufränkisch Leithaberg DAC.

As Austria moves to develop its reputation in the UK as a producer of excellent quality red wines to complement its now well-established Grüner Veltliner, Leo Hillinger's international reach, modern outlook and committed sense of place make his wines a valuable ambassador for that message. db