

Weingut Nüsserhof

Visits

This visit at Weingut Nüsserhof took place in April, 2012.



Words by Jules Dressner, photos by Lauren Feldman, Shawn Mean and Ian Becker.

NOTE: Elda Mayr talked about how social media annoys her to no end and how she still likes living in a world of semi-privacy, so to honor her right to not to be flaunted all over the internet (a choice I respect and agree with), there will be no pictures of her in this post.

The Nüsserhof estate is a post-modern anomaly of urbanization. The original 2.5 hectares of vines are located right off the highway, in the center of [Bolzano](#), the capitol Tyrol.



In the background, you can see many of the modern buildings that completely surround the Mayr's farm (most of which were built in the 70's). Before World War 2, the city was much smaller (more like the size of a town), and the area's warm climate favored a traditional agricultural economy of nuts, fruits, grapes and wine. After the war, a train station was built, making access to the far removed mountain town a lot easier. This was the beginning of a complete transformation of Bolzano's landscape.



These photos are featured in the Mayr's tasting room. Both were taken from the same location: the one on the right shows Bolzano a few years after the war, and the one on the left depicts what the city looks like today. You may have to squint a little, but the big highway at the bottom of the left-hand picture is what the Mayr's live next to. As you can see, most of the green got replaced by concrete and, as Elda explained, by the late 70's, farm culture had been almost completely erased to accommodate the ever increasing amount of summer tourists.

This hasn't deterred Heinrich or Elda; they are the latest generation of their family to work this land, where the records date back to at least 1788. The name *Nusserhof* comes from the walnut trees that once lined the house on the river side. Not so long ago they were torn out to put in a municipal bike path. As the years have gone by, the urban environs of Bolzano have encroached the estate, with the city systematically making it harder and harder for the Mayrs to continue their farming. It is believed that the only reason the estate is still in existence is due to the fact that one of Heinrich's relatives was an early opponent of the Nazi occupation and died as a Catholic martyr and conscientious objecter in a concentration camp.

After our history lesson, it was time for a quick tour of the vines.



The 2.5 hectares of vines are a mix of Blatterle, Lagrein and Teroldego, all on sandy soils with granite subsoil. All the vines are equipped with irrigation systems (the norm in this very hot region) but Heinrich uses them only in June/July and if necessary. For example, in 2011 he only irrigated the Blaterle, and very little at that. The entire estate is certified organic by the German association [Bioland](#).

We then checked out the cellar. Everything is fermented in stainless steel, aged 1 or 2 years in 500l barrels for the reds, then 1 or 2 years in bottle. *Blaterle* is all stainless, and Heinrich uses small, Burgundian barrels for the *Tyroldego*. The cellar is tiny so it was a quick visit; we stepped out and it was time to taste!



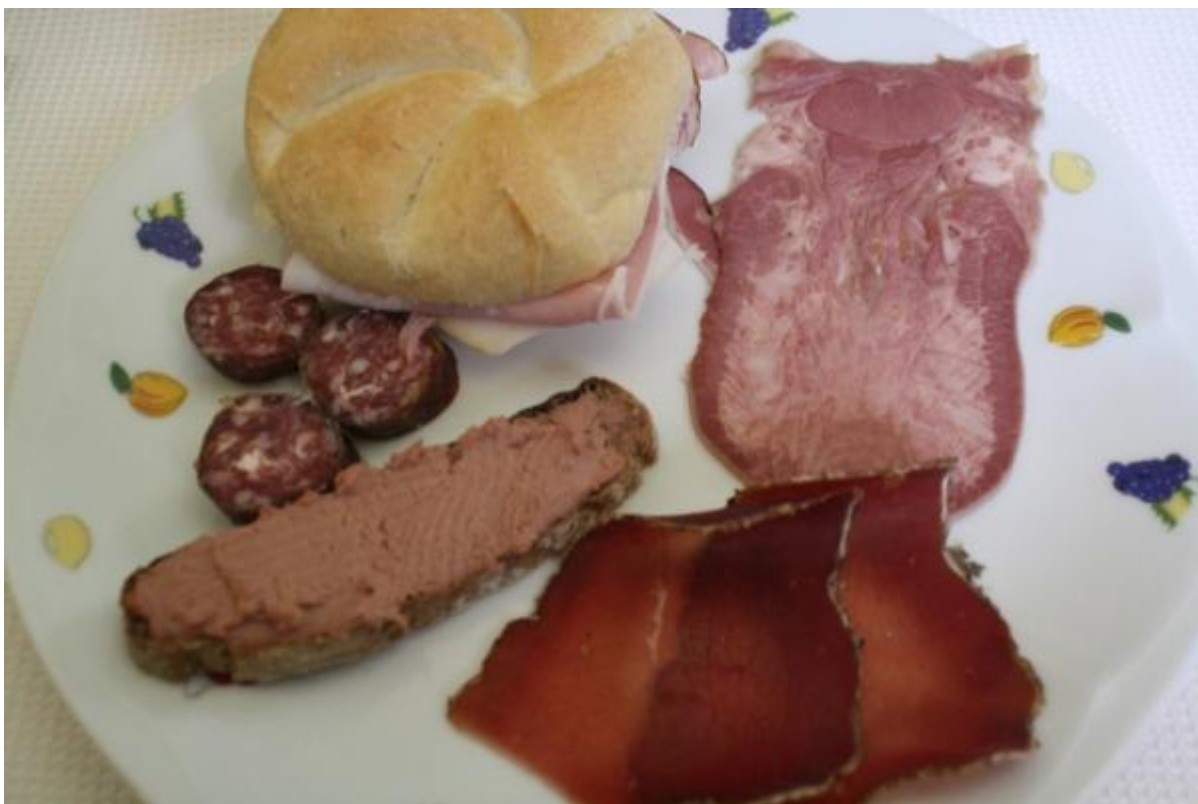
We started with the *Blaterle*: this grape is indigenous to the Bolzano plain, and was traditionally used to make must or sweet, partially fermented wine. Only 3 producers still grow it, and collectively this only represents 1,5 h! In fact, Heinrich is the biggest Blatterle producer in the world! Blatterle is actually spelled with **two T's**, but Heinrich made the intentional typo because up until 2011, you could not put the grape of the wine from his region. This is also the case with the *Tyroldego* (funny aside: the first Teroldego I ever tasted was the *Tyroldego* when I worked at Terroir in SF, so at first I thought [Elisabetta Foradori](#) was spelling it wrong). The law just changed, but Heinrich thinks he's going to keep the typo anyway.

After the grapes are de-stemmed, Heinrich does a 6 hour slow press, then ferments the wine in stainless steel. We tasted 2010, 2011 and 2002, which had evolved beautifully. We then tried Lagrein Rosé from 2010, 2011 (tank) and 2001. The wine had developed with age; it was rounder and more structured but hadn't lost any of its acidity.

Next was the Lagrein Rosso. Elda explained that traditionally, Lagrein (also an indigenous varietal) had always been used to make simple, easy rosé. For better or worst, the Bordeaux influence of the 70's/80's led a lot of local vignioli to start fermenting and aging Lagrein in barrique in hopes of creating structured red wine. So red Lagrein has only really existed for 25 years. Heinrich insists on fermenting it in stainless steel to create a lighter, more elegant wine. We tasted 09, 10 and the 1995!



Overall, the 2010's were the unanimous favorites, but the 09's were also great and 2011 shows a lot of promise. After all that tasting, it was time for some lunch, which was definitely one of the best meals of the trip. Because a picture speaks a thousand words:



Look at that slice of tongue! Not pictured: local bread and cheese dumplings called *canederli*.

Lunch ended with a walnut-centric dessert with a delicious walnut liqueur made by Heinrichs' 89 year old aunt. We still had some time left, so Heinrich proposed we visit the Elda vineyard.



This vineyard is also right off the highway.



The cuvée is named after Ms. Mayr herself, and the grape is Schiava. It's grown on Porphyry (an

iron rich granite) and sand. Heinrich rents this parcel from the same 89 year old aunt who made the walnut liqueur, and she was actually there, hanging out in overalls and plowing the soil! Heinrich told her we'd drink her liqueur for dessert: with a big smile, she brought an imaginary glass to her mouth, made believe to drink, said something that I didn't understand (but that was definitely about drinking her walnut liqueur), and let out a content, hearty laugh. We all thanked her for her good job while she laughed and smiled at us the whole time. I can't blame her: being 89 and having a dozen Americans compliment you on the walnut liqueur they just tasted a half-hour ago is indeed a pretty funny scenario. My biggest regret of the trip is that no one took a photo of her; she was so old yet full of life, and it was an absolute pleasure to meet her.