A Perfect Balance

25/06/2018 Cuvée 356 is its name: a wine specially commissioned by Porsche in commemoration of its sports-car anniversary. This exclusive symphony of wine was composed in Austria—where, some seventy years ago, the first Porsche sports car came to be.

Ever so carefully, Armin Tement measures out a small amount of wine into a graduated cylinder and pours it into a glass that's already half-full. He swirls, inhales, and takes a sip. Then he pours a bit of the blend into each guest's glass. With his look of concentration under a dark shock of hair and the measuring device in his hand, Tement looks like an alchemist on the verge of a breakthrough. But turning iron into gold isn't the source of Tement's fame. Rather, he's a master of that magical process that transforms grapes into wine.

Tement is one of Austria's best-known and most sought-after vintners. In the 1980s his father Manfred made a success of the family-run winery in southern Styria. When it comes to tasting and creating a cuvée—in other words, a perfectly balanced wine blended from a mixture of several varieties that's even finer than its individual components—Manfred Tement's skills are almost legendary. And in some circles, his son Armin is thought to have even greater talent. Today, the younger Tement is working on a very special blend. Various wine bottles have been set out on an old wooden barrel in front of him. Standing next to him are Alexander Baron von Essen, one of Germany's most prestigious wine importers, and Holger Schramm, sommelier and manager of Porsche's Christophorus restaurant in Stuttgart. They're here in the Tement wine cellar to join Armin's father, Manfred, and Josef Arweck, Vice President of Porsche Communications, to decide how the wine produced specifically for Porsche should taste.

The occasion for this exclusive wine creation is a festive one: in the early summer of 1948, the brand's first sports car—designed by Ferry Porsche, son of Ferdinand Porsche—made its road debut. To mark this anniversary, the company decided to commission its own wine: the Cuvée 356. And because Ferry Porsche was Austrian and the Porsche 356 "No. 1" Roadster was produced in Gmünd, Carinthia, it only made sense that the wine should be Austrian, too. And since only one of the best wineries could be considered, the choice went to the Tements.

Their property is located in Ehrenhausen, along the wine trail and right on the border between Austria and Slovenia, roughly 250 kilometers from Gmünd. The south Styrian wine region is often compared to Italy's Piedmont or Tuscany regions: a seemingly endless vista of gently rolling hills interrupted time and again by steep, nearly perpendicular walls. The hillsides are largely covered by vineyards. In the valleys, streams gurgle through small forests; old farmhouses perch proudly along the ridges. Narrow roads meander through their midst, as though tailor-made for rally legend and southern Styria fan Walter Röhrl. In the spring and summer, the hills are a lush, verdant green; in the autumn they glow in a blaze of red, brown, and gold. Wisps of fog often hover in the valleys while the sun beats down from above—even in November.

Southern Styria is renowned not only for its scenic beauty but also for its exceptional wines—or as Manfred Tement puts it: “In a landscape as special as this one, something special has to grow.” Once considered a lesser wine, the sauvignon blanc now reigns supreme in this region. Thirty years ago, Tement was one of the first to recognize this grape’s potential. “I was always convinced that it’s not a question of the best varietal, but that it all depends on the wine region,” he says. “A sauvignon achieves perfection here in southern Styria.” And experts have long since agreed with his assessment: wine authority Robert Parker awarded Tement’s Ried Zieregg 2015 sauvignon blanc ninety-seven out of one hundred points.

That particular sauvignon was also the wine that brought Porsche and Tement together. Alexander Baron von Essen has known the winemaking family for a long time. “In my estimation,” he says, “the Tements produce one of the world’s finest sauvignons.” In December 2017 he and Porsche brand ambassador Walter Röhrl visited the winery for an initial sampling of potential cuvées—and declared the results to be highly promising.

Their preselection is now arrayed on the barrel in front of Armin Tement. The experts are joining forces to perfect the anniversary wine. After three rounds of testing, the group decides on a blend of pinot blanc and chardonnay, plus a touch of sauvignon blanc and pinot gris. Then, Tement carefully trickles another 2 percent sauvignon into the vial and, hopeful once more, pours the new blend into everyone’s glass—and lo and behold, that tiny amount is all that’s needed to breathe even more vivacity into the wine.

Appreciative “oohs” and “aahs” reverberate off the high walls of the cellar. Sommelier Schramm places his nose deep into the glass once more, then nods approvingly. “That’s good—that’s really good! Hats off to you!” The alchemist has found the perfect blend.

Steeped in tradition, this wine-producing area is located in southern Austria on the Slovenian border, roughly 350 to 600 meters above sea level. Warm days and cool nights mean particularly aromatic grapes, while the many hills ensure a diverse terroir. The soil consists in part of weathered primordial coral reefs, in which burgundy varietals flourish, and partly of clay, marl (known locally as opok), and sand. White wines enjoy special renown. Of these, the most important are sauvignon blanc, muscatel, pinot blanc, and chardonnay, referred to locally as morillon.

The wine in honor of the Porsche anniversary was first served on June 8, 2018, at the official celebration held at the Porsche Museum in Stuttgart-Zuffenhausen. Museum visitors can order the Cuvée 356—a blend of 65 percent pinot blanc, 18 percent chardonnay, 12 percent sauvignon blanc, and 5 percent pinot gris—at the Christophorus restaurant in Stuttgart. It’s also available in the museum shop. In addition, the wine importer Baron von Essen supplies selected restaurants with this superlative white wine. But private individuals with a German address can also order the anniversary wine from him at €19.50 per bottle (including tax, minimum order of eighteen bottles, free shipping of thirty-six bottles or more).

For more information visit: www.cuvee356.com

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