

SUSTAINABILITY

For several years now, we have been setting new standards in promoting biodiversity and lived sustainability. Our numerous initiatives and measures today shape the entire Wachau region. A cooperative leading the way in sustainable and organic viticulture? That may sound paradoxical, but it's actually our daily business – and the regional impact is enormous!

Our Domäne Wachau growers, with their countless small vineyard parcels, are largely responsible for maintaining the landscape of the Wachau. Today, we are Austria's leading estate with organic vineyard area. The average age of our vines is typically between 50 and 70 years. Working in the extremely steep terraced vineyards is challenging, labour-intensive, and mostly impossible to mechanize. The advantage: due to the minimal use of machinery and the 100% hand harvest, CO emissions, soil compaction, and the overall stress on vines, soil, and nature are kept to a minimum.

Through regular seminars, training programs, and vineyard inspections with national and international experts, we ensure that our growers stay up to date – whether in questions of effective cover cropping and soil health or topics such as organic viticulture and gentle pruning.

"All our work takes place within a protected landscape area and the Natura 2000 network. The Wachau region is a UNESCO World Cultural and Natural Heritage Site, as well as a fauna-flora-habitat and bird protection area. Our growers are aware of their responsibility for generations to come and work in every single parcel with the utmost craftsmanship, precision, and care. Our mission in recent years has been to give their valuable traditional agricultural thinking and work a modern strategic direction," says Roman Horvath.

Since the 2018 vintage, we have carried the "Sustainable Austria" seal, developed by the Austrian Winegrowers' Association. This certification made our long-standing path toward responsible, resource-efficient management visible. Once again, we had to break new ground, as the certification was originally not designed for a structure like that of Domäne Wachau. In collaboration with the University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences (BOKU) in Vienna, a concept was developed for sustainability

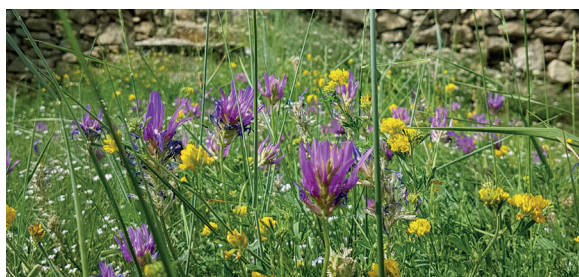
certification of a collective working in steep vineyards (in which each individual Domäne Wachau vigneron must be certified). Domäne Wachau initiated and demonstrated the model – today, the entire Wachau is comprehensively "Sustainable Austria"-certified. For us, this certification was an important milestone on the way to uncompromisingly sustainable viticulture – from organic vineyard care to fair cooperative structures and energy-efficient processes in the cellar.

The concept of "sustainability" is very broad and often misused. Essentially, it means that ecological, social, and economic goals are not played off against each other; rather, a balance between them is sought in order to achieve long-term stability and continuous development. This approach can and should include the principles of organic viticulture but goes beyond them for us. Instead of dogmatic focus on individual measures, it is about a holistic perspective. Equally essential are continuous written records and documentation of all actions, including regular external audits.

The ecological aspect is central to our vineyard work. Our focus lies on promoting and preserving biodiversity, and on the conscious and sparing use of available water resources.

Regenerative viticulture is at the core of our philosophy. It aims to improve and restore the health and diversity of the vineyard ecosystem through sustainable and environmentally friendly practices. Natural mechanisms are used and strengthened to increase soil fertility and achieve higher biodiversity. This goes beyond organic farming – while organic certification prohibits synthetic fertilizers and systemic agents, for example, it does not require soil cover crops, composting, or manual work.

Each spring, special cover crop mixtures are sown in our vineyards. With a variety of flowering plants (e.g. vetch, camelina, phacelia/bee pasture, white clover, buckwheat, crimson clover, serradella, oil radish), biodiversity is promoted, soil structure and soil life are improved through deep-rooting plants, and humus formation, water retention, and nutrient availability are enhanced. Not to mention: cover crops also reduce soil erosion.



Furthermore, cover crops lower soil temperature and reduce water evaporation – a crucial factor in times of increasing drought. The cooler, moister soil surface helps maintain active soil life, which further improves soil structure.

Another advantage lies in the habitat cover crops provide for beneficial organisms: insects, spiders, and microfauna find food and shelter, strengthening natural cycles and improving pest control.

The Domäne Wachau growers' vineyards are small-scale and diverse. Many are surrounded by mixed forests or located next to dry grasslands, apricot orchards, and other fruit gardens. In many places, almond and peach trees grow directly among the vines. Dry-stone walls – around two million square meters exist throughout the Wachau, one-third of which are in Domäne Wachau vineyards – provide habitat for countless insects, small creatures, and plants. Bird perches, nesting boxes, and insect hotels in the vineyards support endangered species such as the hoopoe and wryneck. This special ecosystem extends into the neighbouring dry grasslands and mixed forests above the vineyards. All this creates a unique and fragile ecological network that must be preserved. Every measure we take is therefore guided by the principles of sustainable, ecological vineyard management.

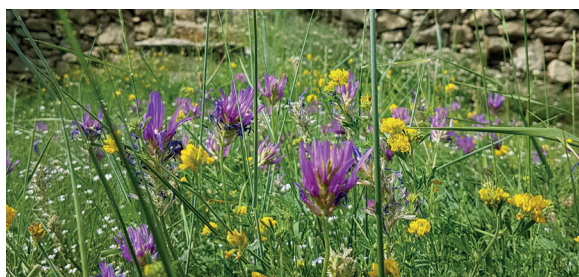
We are also absolute pioneers in the region when it comes to avoiding herbicides. Instead of insecticides, we use pheromone traps to combat the grapevine moth, the only harmful moth species in viticulture. The mating disruption technique, introduced by Domäne Wachau, is now used throughout the entire Wachau. Furthermore, we operate Austria's largest biodynamically prepared permanent composting project using our own grape pomace, stems, and green cuttings to continuously increase humus in the vineyards – some of this compost is applied entirely by hand using traditional backpack vats. Optimized and diverse canopy management ensures sufficient shade and ventilation, reducing the need for crop protection agents such as copper

and sulphur. Thoughtful hedgerow and shrub maintenance and maintaining covered soils are also standard practice for us. Currently, we are running an innovative under-vine cover project aimed at further strengthening the vineyard ecosystem by identifying plants that can naturally provide "ground cover" under the vines. The ideal plants must emerge quickly, have shallow roots, grow low, require little water and nutrients, and help suppress weeds – for example, thyme, clover, and fescue species.

The connection to nature, to the wine, and to our team is part of our identity and culture. For us, the continuous promotion of biodiversity and the preservation of ecological balance are self-evident – both for improving quality and out of respect for nature and the vine.

With the restructuring of our 300-year-old baroque cellar, located over ten meters underground, we have also created the foundation for gentle and energy-efficient vinification using gravity alone – requiring only minimal additional cooling. Years ago, we installed a large photovoltaic system that feeds sustainable energy into the grid. Our goals are to improve our CO₂ balance, move consciously toward climate neutrality, and create a balanced, vibrant, and healthy environment for both our people and our vines. Even aspects like the extensive use of lightweight glass bottles play an important role. In all cases, it's about strategically planned packages of measures – not isolated actions.

Long-term economic success in both regional and international contexts is essential in connection with these approaches. All sustainability-oriented measures must ultimately be part of a strategy that ensures fair recognition for our employees and the labor-intensive work of our growers.



Domäne Wachau has a deep and far-reaching impact on the region. Whether described as biodynamic or regenerative – the idea is a holistic, regional perspective, not one focused solely on a single business. It's about a regional organism. The Domäne Wachau growers are like many small acupuncture needles, setting impulses across the region and thereby contributing to transformation as a whole. They are true farmers, deeply connected to nature.

Alongside our strong international presence through extensive exports, regional positioning through wine tourism and our comprehensive direct sales concept in the tasting room and shop in Dürnstein is a key part of our business activity. For our efforts, we are regularly recognized as the only Austrian wine producer among the "TOP 50 World's Best Vineyards." This award honours the world's best wine destinations – those that combine compelling wine tourism concepts, outstanding quality, and global recognition.

Only when all these areas – from vineyard and cellar to the happiness of employees and winegrowers, as well as economic success – work together in harmony and balance can the criteria of sustainability truly be fulfilled.

