

WINEARCHITECTURE. The winery boom

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Today internationally active star architects are designing and building spectacular new wineries around the world. In return, in the east and south of Austria a unique new scene has consistently drawn attention to a symbiosis between contemporary architecture and wine-making. The exhibition 'WineArchitecture. The winery boom' presents a detailed survey of this architecture in Austria for the first time, supplemented and set in context by examples from around the world.

WineArchitecture – The Genesis

The Architekturzentrum Wien has been observing the exciting development of the relationship between wineries and architecture over a period of several years. France and the Californian Napa Valley heralded in a new era of WineArchitecture in the 1980s: An exhibition at the Centre Pompidou in Paris entitled 'Chateau Bordeaux' (1988) was the first to address the contribution to the mediation of wine in a cultural context that could also be achieved through architecture. At the same time, in California wine-growers were looking for new and effective concepts for their offensive marketing strategies and marketing supported by architecture began. The key message was: wine is not an alcoholic beverage, wine is culture. While this was happening, in 1985 the wine scandal in Austria was making headlines around the world. The result was that those wine-makers who aimed for quality strengthened their international profile to boost the reputation of Austrian wines. In addition, a new generation was taking over many of the vineyards and adjusting to meet international standards of production and quality, with a restructuring of the businesses (from a part-time to a full-time occupation) and grants being provided both on a regional and an EU level additionally motivating many wine-growers to enlarge or convert their existing premises. Marketing considerations and architectural corporate identity did not play a significant role here, the aim was more to find appropriate architectural and functional enhancements geared to the production of high quality wines.

The Austrian Wine Miracle

With the exhibition 'WineArchitecture. The winery boom', the Architekturzentrum Wien is proclaiming the emergence of a new Silicon Valley for wine in Austria. The garage no longer serves the creation and dissipation of fine wines from Gols to Gamlitz, instead it is elegant fair-faced concrete halls and well-designed wooden boxes that provide venues for optimised production, stylish wine-tastings and intense discussion. The hallmark and the astonishing feature of the Austrian situation is the large number of high quality projects to have been completed over the past 20 years. In no other branch has such an exceptional density of successful alliances with contemporary architecture been undertaken than is to be found among the Austrian wine-growers. Just as in the 19th century it was the industrialisation with its factories that redefined whole stretches of land with its own types of buildings, so today it is the Austrian wine industry that is creating an identity with a regional culture of building.

The collaboration between vintners and architects is based in part on the fact that changing technical standards called for new spaces to cope with the high level of logistical and technological complexities involved, and professional assistance was sought to deal with the large number of factors. However it can also be traced to the fact that, having completed their studies in Vienna or Graz, young architects were looking at their rural origins and bringing contemporary architecture to the regions they came from. In some cases, architects were brought in after customers and vintners had held conversations about wine-appreciation and the profession in general.

Three Austrian architects (Hempel + Fonatti, Anton Mayerhofer and Werner Schüttmayr) played a decisive role in the formulation of new types of building and in establishing a cooperation with vintners based on their example. The projects have developed from the early functional buildings of the early 1990s, which conformed precisely to the production organigrammes formulated by the wine-makers, to increasingly innovative and experimental buildings. The broad basis for the architecture commissioned by the wineries is what has made the outstanding achievements we have today possible. Around 60 projects by architects committed to their profession completed to date in Lower Austria, Burgenland, Vienna and Styria provide a translation of the emergent self-confident wine culture in spatial terms. WineArchitecture today is illustrative of recent contemporary architecture production in the east of Austria.

The Exhibition

The leitmotif of the exhibition addresses the central factor in bringing wine and architecture together as a unity: the landscape. Regional topographical features and differences are responsible both for the diversity of subtle nuances of Austrian wines as well as for a broad spectrum of site-specific and individual architectural concepts. An artificial landscape of showcases recreates the linear structure of a vineyard as a display for the exhibition at the Az W. Large mirrors on the end walls of the space visually extend this abstract and illuminated landscape ad infinitum. A focus on different regions and themes provides an introduction to the individual buildings and architectural interventions, which are presented using a large range of different materials – such as plans, photographs, models and sketches, but also wine bottles, print runs of labels or the graphics employed to represent the vineyards concerned.

Alongside a detailed inventory of the cultural situation and economic conditions in Austria since the 1980s, a survey of around 20 buildings for wine from other countries provides information on the development from chateau-production to high-tech factory.

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