

# LEO HILLINGER

more than wine!

Leo Hillinger – the path from wine merchant to top winegrower

*Working with determination & consistency, Leo Hillinger has turned a small family business in Burgenland into an internationally lauded enterprise.*

*Equipped with vision plus the requisite consistency & courage, Leo Hillinger expanded his parents' small family business, acquired vineyards in top sites, and in 2004 set up one of the most modern vinification operations in Austria. Today the Burgenland winegrower cultivates over 100 hectares of vineyards and vinifies wines that have received national & international awards. The entrepreneur himself has also been honoured several times for his commitment & innovation.*

Born in Eisenstadt in 1967, Leo Hillinger grew up in Jois. The path into viticulture seemed to be mapped out for him – his parents ran a wine retail operation and a *Heuriger* – the traditional Austrian wine tavern. He completed his training in Germany as a state-certified economist & master winemaker, then subsequently undertook an internship in California, supported by a grant from the Austrian wine industry. In 1990 Hillinger returned to Austria and entered the family business – with new ideas from the new world, conducting wine events & tastings in his parents' tavern. In 1997 Leo Hillinger bought his first vineyards in Rust, thus laying the foundation for today's much-admired operation.

## **The Estate**

In 2004 Leo Hillinger built his wine cellar in Jois; it was and is regarded as one of the most modern in Austria. He was one of the first winegrowers in the country to marry modern architecture with cellar technology and the total wine experience at his estate, which features both a wine cellar and a tasting lounge. From the lounge, one's glance falls on the barriques in which the wine is maturing in the cellar below. Thus, the wine is always present in its successive stages of evolution – from the view of the vineyards and the wooden casks to the wine in the glass.

## **Vineyards & cultivation**

What began in 1997 with twelve hectares of vineyards has meanwhile grown to over a hundred hectares. The vineyards of the Leo HILLINGER estate are located in Jois, Rust and Oggau, with sixty percent red wines and forty percent white wines being vinified. Leo Hillinger pays attention to careful cultivation and the optimal combination of grape variety and soil type: 'My methods are characterised by deep respect for the grape and the specific nature of the soil, as well as the climatic conditions. The fruit has to be perfect, and should find its way into the bottle unaltered'. In order to fully live up to this aspiration, Hillinger's changeover to organic viticulture began in 2010.

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With the establishment of his estate in 2004, which was also designed as a venue for events & seminars from the very beginning, Leo Hillinger began to further develop his operations, reaching out to areas of activity that relate to wine in its full spectrum – and even go beyond that.

He was the first winegrower to open a flagship store, in Parndorf in 2005; other outlets were to follow in Vienna, Kitzbühel & Munich. With the purchase of the historic Heiligenkreuzerkeller in Winden in 2017, another venue was added to the estate, one that is frequently booked for company events as well as private celebrations such as weddings or birthdays. What all these locations have in common is that everything revolves around wine – the motto ‘more than wine’ accentuates the fact that Leo Hillinger is not only about bottling the best wine, but also conveying the attitudes toward life that stand behind it: ‘Viticulture is also innovation, continuing development, creativity, faith, will and the love of living’, as the grower himself says.

In addition to the continuing development of a world of events & products related to wine, the product group now also includes new lines of trade such as the protein drink Zeus, HILLINGER Cosmetics and the HILLCONT office space & room system.

## Awards & accolades

The success of winegrower Leo Hillinger is based – as he frequently emphasises (and as also appears in the title of his biography) – on ‘consistency, consistency, consistency’. This is reflected in the worldwide recognition of his work: for years now, wines from Weingut Leo HILLINGER have gathered high awards at national & international tastings – for example, from Falstaff, Gault Millau, Parker, Mundus Vini and many others. And the entrepreneur himself has also been honoured on several occasions: in 2012, Ernst & Young voted him ‘Entrepreneur of The Year’ (and the award had never yet been given to a winemaker anywhere in the world). In the following year, the Hillinger operation was voted ‘Best Family Business 2013 Burgenland’ by the business publication *Wirtschaftsblatt*. Leo Hillinger himself received the title of Commercial Councillor in 2016 for his services to the economy, and then a year later Leo HILLINGER GmbH received the ‘Superbrand Austria Award’.

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