

Press Release
May 2017

Vienna – A perfect start to the Championship of the Best Sommeliers from Europe and Africa.

The challenge has begun: the “Best Sommelier of Europe and Africa” competition started on Monday 8 May with the festive arrival of the national delegates and a gala dinner.

A unique spectacle was witnessed yesterday at the Schlosspark Schönbrunn in Vienna. An array of no less than 37 national flags joined in the parade of 34 European and three African top sommeliers. The parade was led by the town chapel of Retz and the competition candidates were accompanied by representatives of the embassies, as well as two Austrian winegrowers and a delegation from other high-ranking sommeliers from Hietzing, and ended at the prestigious Orangery Schönbrunn. Here, the guests were welcomed with a grand gala dinner, which was hosted by the Austrian Wine Marketing Board. The guest of honour was Federal Minister of Agriculture Andrä Rupprechter, and in his opening speech, he emphasised the significance of sommeliers for the wine industry and paid tribute to the performance of Annemarie Foidl, who, as President of Sommelier Union Austria, succeeded in bringing this competition to Austria. The success of the event is ultimately the good cooperation between the Austrian Wine Marketing and the Sommelier Union Austria.

What lies in store for the candidates today?

The first of three hurdles shall begin on Tuesday 9 May at 9am. Beverages shall be placed on individual tables for candidates to identify and to analyse them in detail. These can range from wine to spirits, beer and sake to alcohol-free beverages. Black-coloured glasses to mask the colour of the beverage are to be used, in order to focus the attention on the ability of the nose and palate. There is also a comprehensive written test, which includes detailed knowledge about wine, along with the world of cheese, as well as technical factors that surround tea, coffee, spirits, beer and cigars. This first hard day of the championship is completed by practical tasks in the restaurant area. In the evening the names of the twelve semifinals are to be announced.

At the start for Austria

The Tyrolean diploma sommelier Suvad Zlatic is representing Austria. In the autumn of 2014, he qualified from almost 20 competitors to win the title of “Best Sommelier of Austria” and has been participating in numerous European competitions ever since. Theory, as well as mental training and accurate time management, which is a matter of precision, which is reminiscent of high-performance sports. “Suvad Zlatic is also a certified Sake Sommelier and Master Sommelier Advanced, and was awarded with the title of Champagne Ambassador in 2015/16, and became the “VINEUS Sommelier of the Year” in 2016. Last year, Suvad Zlatic passed the qualifying round to become the Austrian candidate at the Sommelier World Championship in Argentina, finishing 16th from a total of 59. The native Bosnian came to Austria in 1993, lives with his family in Landeck and is a maître at the Geiger Posthotel in Serfaus D'hôtel. His employers are the hoteliers Barbara and Florian Geiger, from whom he receives all necessary support for his commitment.

The World Champion returns

The competition is organised by the Technical Committee of the International Sommelier Association A.S.I. (Association de la Sommellerie Internationale). This also includes Master of Wine Markus Del Monego from Germany. This experience brings back memories for Del Monego, who won the Sommelier World Championship in Vienna in 1998. He remembers the event well, "the great ambience of the Viennese Hofburg as a competition centre was highly impressive, along with the collegiality among us candidates. As a semi-finalist just before the three finalists were named, I was terribly frightened because I had forgotten my cigar cutter. After my name was called and I had to go to the stage, a colleague quickly put a cigar cutter in my hand". Germany will be represented by Torsten Junker from Hamburg this year, what message does the former world champion want to give him? "He wishes him all the best; Torsten Junker is well prepared to show what he can do."

Who is in Semi-final?

From an Austrian point of view, all fingers are crossed for Suvad Zlatic. The non-competing delegates return from their field trip to the wine-growing regions of the Wachau, Traisental, Kremstal and Kamptal regions on Tuesday, and then a joint dinner will take place with the competition candidates, with the names of the semi-finalists being published.

Championship Pop-up Wine Shop and Wine Bar

For all wine lovers, the Austrian fine wine retail group WEIN & CO has established a pop-up wine shop at the Parkhotel Schönbrunn during the Sommelier Championship. From Monday 8 May through to Friday 12 May, some 90 wines from the partners of the Sommelier Championship can be tasted between 6pm and 10pm. A perfect Meet & Greet opportunity with the international sommelier delegations. Tickets are available on the door or in advance at: <https://www.weinco.at/event/sommelier-europameisterschaft-2017-34151>

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Contact

Annemarie Foidl
President of the Sommelierunion Austria
+43 664 3579109 | angereralm@aon.at
www.sommelierunion.at

Press Enquiries

Dagmar Gross | [grosswerk](http://grosswerk.com) public relations & art promotion
+43 1 236 26 64 | werk@grosswerk.com
www.grosswerk.com