

Austria may be on the far side of the planet, but it isn't as far from Kansas City as you might think. Organic produce is on plates at virtually every restaurant. Family-run businesses are loved and supported. And Austrians value their old-fashioned comforts.

Of course, the Austrians have been at everything longer. Kansas City was established in 1838; Graz (Austria's second-largest city and a beautiful university town) has been around since 1128. High in the Styrian Alps, Graz spends the winter in a coat of snow. Walk around, and you'll see families buying scoops of *kastanie eis* (chestnut ice cream); couples at café tables sipping cups of *mélange* (Austrian cappuccino); and groups perusing tiny stalls for gifts and foodstuffs.

In the snowy chill, shared paper cones of freshly roasted chestnuts and steaming portions of *glühwein* (mulled wine) fill the belly, heat hands and faces, and strengthen bonds. But you don't have to be in Graz to take advantage. *Glühwein* is simple to make: Just buy a bottle of unoaked Tailgate Red and a muslin bag of mulling spices from Holy-Field Winery (18807 158th St., Basehor). Mix the two together in a pot, heat to simmering and serve hot. "That's the holidays to me," says Holy-Field winemaker (and co-owner with her father, Les) Michelle Meyer.

ESSAY BY SEÁNAN FORBES

"It's easy to celebrate an Austrian Christmas in KC: Take in the [Plaza] lights. Visit an independent coffee shop. Make a ... Viennese Martini."

As in most KC homes, Christmas Day in Graz is quiet: Cakes and cookies bake. Hand-me-down recipes bubble on stoves. Families gather, and people of all ages wrap themselves in layers for a stroll up to the 16C clock tower in the park. (The minute hand is short; the hour hand is long.) Austrians take the day to appreciate each other, their landscape and their lives.

That makes it easy to celebrate an Austrian Christmas here at home: Take in the lights on the Country Club Plaza. Visit an independent coffee shop. Have friends over, and make local mixologist Ryan Maybee's Viennese Martini—or cajole him into making one for you at his newly reopened speakeasy, Manifesto (1924 Main St.). Here's how he makes it:

Pour one-quarter ounce Laphroaig 15-year Single Malt Scotch into a chilled cocktail glass and set aside. Combine other ingredients (two ounces Monopolowa Austrian vodka, one ounce Hopley Trockenbeereauslese, two dashes Angostura Orange Bitters) into a mixing glass; stir for 30 seconds or until well chilled. Pour the Laphroaig out of the cocktail glass (discarding it) and strain the other ingredients into the same glass. Don't garnish, though; it will take away from the aroma of the Laphroaig wash.

"The sweetness of the dessert wine adds body and richness, but the earthy components and citrus elements work very well together with the Monopolowa," Maybee says. "The Laphroaig also ... [adds] a great, smoky aroma that lingers even while being cut by the sweetness [that] comes through mid-palate. The Orange Bitters keep it from being too sweet."

Need a little something to accompany the cocktails and *glühwein*? Buy some of Aaron Dearing's chocolates at Holy-Field. The Basehor-born Dearing, who learned his trade abroad, makes truffles filled with wine and Holy-Field port, as well as raspberry and blackberry flavors. The latter are also available at Annedore's Fine Chocolates (5006 State Line Road, Westwood Hills), but you'll only find the wine-filled varieties at the vineyard.

You can get something else very Austrian at Annedore's, though: a pig. In and around Austria, candy pigs are considered lucky. Receiving Annedore's spotted, solid chocolate porker as a gift would be lush luck, and, at five ounces, there might be just enough fortune to share.

Like the good people of Graz, Kansas Citians have beautiful reasons to celebrate. But here's a special one: Austrians commemorate Christmas on December 24. That means that you can have an Austrian holiday one day and a Kansas City one the next. *Frohe Weihnachten!* ■

