

FOOD AND DRINK

Austria's answer to white burgundy

One of several prominent Australian sommeliers currently working in London was heard to say at last week's big showing of Austrian wines in London how much better value Austrian Riesling is than Australian Riesling at about £8 a bottle. Praise indeed.

But then Austrian wine producers have become rather used to compliments of late. Fine Austrian Riesling and the native grape Grüner Veltliner have become *de rigueur* on smart wine lists on both sides of the Atlantic - New York has at least two restaurants, Danube and Wallse, that manage to be specifically Austrian and incontrovertibly hip.

Austrian wine producers themselves would love us to be as enthusiastic about their red wines as we are about their whites, and certainly the quality of their various blends of native Zweigelt, Blaufränkisch, Portugieser and St Laurent with more international varieties Pinot, Cabernet and Merlot has been rising dramatically. But wine drinkers outside Austria can choose from such a dazzling array of more obvious red wine sources that, for the moment at least, we will stick with Austria's beautifully pure, full-bodied, food-friendly dryish whites, thank you very much.

Grüner Veltliner has already proved itself a top quality substitute for white burgundy, notably at a blind taste-off reported in detail on these pages in November 2002.

But this grape with its curiously attractive combination of white pepper, canned grapefruit and dill pickle flavours with high alcohol can in some cases get so ripe that it loses its refreshing aromas and is just hot and oily.

The fact that successful Grüner Veltliner production is a delicate

balancing act was evident in the 60 or so I tasted last week. At one end of the scale are wines such as Schäferhof's Grüner Veltliner Klassik 2003 Thermenregion with just 11.5 per cent alcohol. It must have been picked relatively early in this notoriously warm region but, presumably because of this, was rather simple in the middle as well as being bitter on the finish.

At the other end of the Grüner Veltliner spectrum are massive white wines with 14 or even 14.5 per cent alcohol (almost sherry strength) that do not always manage to display any characteristic other than mass. The

Fine Austrian Riesling and Grüner Veltliner have become *de rigueur* on smart wine lists on both sides of the Atlantic

aromas of Nittnaus's 2002 from the shores of the Neusiedlersee, for example, seemed to have been wrestled into submission by sheer alcoholic muscle.

The famous 2002 Grüner Veltliner vs Chardonnay blind tasting included several Gruners that combined maturity with grace, but I was disappointed at how little a 2001 Schütt Smaragd, even from such an admirable producer as Emmerich Knoll, seemed to have left to give. (I am told that 2002s should have a longer life than the 2001s in the Wachau region.) All those quibbles apart, however, I would seriously counsel any wine lover looking for well-made, pure-flavoured, full-bodied white wine

that is genuinely distinctive to seek out one of the following. Alas, most are likely to cost rather more than the £8 price point cited by the Australian sommelier, but then they really are dinner-table alternatives to fine white burgundy - except that they would not be cowed by heavily spiced food.

Some surefire Grüner Veltliners follow. Names of producers are given first, then usually the name of the specific vineyard, except for Alte Reben which means "old vines". Smaragd is the Wachau's name for wines made from the ripest grapes. Region of origin is given after the vintage. UK stockists or importers, where applicable, follow.

Brundlmayer's Alte Reben 2002
Kamptal. Full, broad, rich and a bit like a warm embrace. Transatlantic Wines of Melton Mowbray, +44 1664 565 013
Dörsing Wachau's Achleiten Smaragd 2002 Wachau. Competent, easy introduction at a fair price from the Wachau's ambitious co-operative.

Salew, £19.95

Fritzsch's Schlossberg 2002 Donauland. Explosively rich, then mineral, but it works. franz-hofstaetter@chello.at
Bitritz Eichinger's Gaisberg 2003
Kamptal. Pungent and creamy. Big and bold but, fortunately, not as big as her Goliath [sic] 2001 which, all 15 per cent of it, did nothing to allay my suspicion of oaked Grüner Veltliner.

Hirtzberger's Axpoint Smaragd 2002
Wachau. Extremely concentrated Grüner Veltliner character. Dense and tense. Bmwf Fortnum & Mason £20.95.
Johanschitsch's Spiegel Reserve 2001
Kamptal. One of the most successful older examples I tried, still holding on to a mysteriously smoky nose, a honeyed finish and real interest. Van Duuren

Wines of London W7, £24.65.

Knoll's Vinotheksführung 2002 Wachau. Lots of alcohol and spice. Not shy. This one should run and run. And Knoll's 2002 Schütt seems much livelier than the 2001. Noel Young of Trumpington, £26.99.

Loimer's Spiegel 2002 Kamptal. This example, from a warm loess vineyard and one of Austria's most talented young winemakers, manages to be both smoky and creamy at the same time. The 2001 was oaked, quite successfully, even I have to admit. Noel Young of Trumpington, £19.99.

Nigl's Alte Reben 2002 Kremstal.

Beautifully balanced with a creamy

The fact that successful Grüner Veltliner production is a delicate balancing act was evident in the 60 or so I tasted

texture. Very confident and well-integrated. A bargain to be enjoyed any time over the next three years. Gauntleys of Nottingham, £13.40.

Ott's Rosenberg Reserve 2002
Donauland. Some of wine's most distinctive (woodcut) labels and some excitingly rich wine too. Savage Selection of Cheltenham, £15.54.

Pfaffl's Goldjoch 2002 Weinviertel. This was a revelation for me because the only producer in this large, less-than-glamorous wine region to have set my pulse racing recently was Graf Hardegg (who makes a surprisingly good Viognier). This was rich and distinctive with something of a green fruit flavour

about it and lovely refreshment.

FX Pichler's Kellerberg 2002
Wachau. The celebrated vineyard disappoints with this extremely tightly-furled example from 2002.

Grüner Veltliner. Needs more in bottle. The von Wachau 2002 is really exciting to open. Transatlantic Wines of Melton Mowbray, +44 1664 565 013.

Rudi Pichler's Kollwendberg 2002
Wachau. This would be a good wine to eat with food. Very tense and in need of time to develop its good acidity, giving the bone dry wine which it needs more in bottle. Hochrain Smaragd 2002 is bit too oily. Gauntleys of Nottingham, £18.30.

Prager's Weitenberg Smaragd 2002
Wachau. Full, rich and concentrated. Clay soils. Very concentrated and persistent. The Achleiten vineyard that miraculously produces such distinctly mineral aromas and German as striking as any there, is livelier and racier than ever. Verdin of London SE1, £20.95.

Salomon's Wieden 2003
Wachau. Already admirably complex for a 2003 - a real bargain. Stein 2002 at £14.95 is also spicy, for the price. Le Poer Tocqueville, £14.95.

Schloss Göbelburg's Lichtenberg 2002
Kamptal. Very mineral and nervy, exciting drink with a bite. This producer is on a roll. Tour de London SE1, £20.95.

Tegernseerhof Höhrecker 2002

1 Langenlois

Michaela Ehn

Sie führt mit ihrem Bruder Ludwig in fünfter Generation den Familienbetrieb mit 14 Hektar Weingärten.

2 Straß

Birgit Eichinger

Aus einer Winzerfamilie stammend, hat sie 1992 das Weingut mit acht Hektar Rebfläche gegründet.

3 Furth-Palt

Helma Müller-Grossmann

Am Fusse des Göttweiger Berges liegt das 9,5 Hektar grosse, alteingesessene Weingut.

4 Furth bei Göttweig

Ilse Maier

Sie betreibt mit ihrem Mann Josef das 15 Hektar grosse, uralte Weingut Geyerhof.

Petra Unger

Sie bewirtschaftet mit Lebensgefährten Konrad Hackl 40 Hektar, sieben davon im Gebiet Wachau.

5 Purbach

Birgit Braunstein

Im 400 Jahre alten Familienbetrieb keitert sie seit 1996 auf 18,5 Hektar ihre eigenen Weine.



11 WINZERINNEN UND IHRE 174 HEKTAR REBFLÄCHEN



Weinbauregion
Niederösterreich

Weinbaugebiet
Kamptal

1

2

Weinbaugebiet
Kremstal

3

4

Weinbaugebiet
Neusiedler See-
Hügelland

5

6

7

8

Weinbaugebiet
Neusiedler See

9

Weinbaugebiet
Mittelburgenland

Weinbau-
region
Burgen-
land

7 St. Magarethen

Rosi Schuster

Das neun Hektar grosse Weingut wird von Schuster und ihrer Familie bewirtschaftet.

8 Rust

Heidi Schröck

Sie hat das acht Hektar grosse Gut in besten Lagen Rusts von ihren Eltern übernommen.

Weinpreis Die Kamptalerin Birgit Eichinger überzeugt in Chicago Amerikaner lieben immer mehr Wine from Austria

Beigefügt



Birgit Eichinger: Frauenpower aus dem Kamptal

Die Amerikaner sind weinsüchtig nach österreichischem Rebstoff. Es vergeht fast kein Monat, wo nicht irgendein Winzer einschlägt. Gerade konnte Birgit Eichinger, die sympathische Winzerin aus Strass, beim Beverage Tasting Institut in Chicago kräftig punkten.

Bei den Österreich-Festspielen ganz vorne lag ihr Chardonnay Stangl 2002 (90 von 100 Punkten), in der Gruppe der Sortenvielfalt setzte sich ihre Rote Veltliner Spezialität vom Wechselberg 2002 an die Spitze. Und auch ihr Veltliner Goliath (*nomen est omen*) aus 2001 und ihre 2002er-Rieslinge vom Heiligenstein und

Gaisberg konnten sich als 90-Punkter unter den Top Ten platzieren.

Die Kamptalerin Eichinger zählt heute zu den Besten in der Region, dabei hat sie erst 1992 richtig begonnen, damals mit dreieinhalb Hektar Weingärten. Heute bewirtschaftet sie acht Hektar in besten Strasser Lagen, und ihre Weine finden sich in Deutschland, Skandinavien und Nordamerika. Richtig viel Wind macht sie als Vertreterin der elf österreichischen Power-Winzerinnen und als Mitglied der Innovative-Winzervereinigung (hp)

*Infos: Birgit Eichinger, Strass
www.weingut-eichinger.at*