

# Chef

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# BURGENLAND AND CARNUNTUM

**Austrian Wine Marketing Board (AWMB)**, the generic body responsible for marketing Austrian wine in the key global markets, recently flew 160 international journalists, social media experts and sommeliers to take part in their bi-annual educational tour, the **Austrian Wine Summit**. Three regions were available to be explored, two white, one red; being familiar with Austrian whites it was time to learn more about the red wine regions.

**Jean Smullen**



Vineyard Valley Mittelburgenland



**Our first stop was to the red wine region, south east of Vienna known collectively as Burgenland, once the ancient Roman province of Pannonia in what is today known as eastern Austria. The warm Pannonian climate helps to define the character of the red wines made here. This is where Austria shows off its red wine prowess.**

We started our tour in the youngest Austrian wine region Burgenland, an area that only became part of Austria in the 1920's, prior to that it was part of Hungary. Burgenland has four DAC regions; **Mittelburgenland DAC** – which back in 2005 was the first red region to be given DAC status, followed by **Leithaberg DAC**, **Eisenberg DAC** and **Neusiedlersee DAC**.

The key red grape varieties here are Blaufränkisch – a robust late ripening tannic grape and Zweigelt – a cross of Blaufränkisch and St Laurent, another Austrian grape which originates in Niederösterreich. Zweigelt has the structure of Blaufränkisch but with softer tannins. Interesting enough, Pinot Noir has been grown in Burgenland for over 600 years, so they consider it to be indigenous, however the focus for this trip was on the native Austrian grapes Blaufränkisch and Zweigelt. Blaufränkisch was first documented in the 18th century in Austria (which at the time was part of Germany), it was then called Limberger; a late ripening variety it has black cherry

flavours and high acidity. It is a tannic red grape so the wines made from this grape have good ageing potential.

Blafränkisch takes centre stage in Mittelburgenland, Leithaberg and Eisenberg as the key red grape variety; Zweigelt is mostly planted in Neusiedlerslee, which is also known for its high quality noble sweet wines, produced in the Seewinkel area of Lake Neusiedl from Welchriesling.

The key red DAC's in the area are **Neusiedlersee** (7,449 hectares) where Zweigelt is the key grape, the red wines here have the additional designation of Reserve and are made from pure Zweigelt or from a Zweigelt dominated blend, and the DAC is for red, white sparkling and sweet wines. In **Leithaberg** (3,576 hectares), the DAC is for red and white wines, the soil here is shell lime and slate which gives the wines a distinctive taste. The **Mittelburgenland DAC** (2,117 hectares) is a 100% red wine region and the clay soil here is ideal for Blaufränkisch. Finally, at 498 hectares, **Eisenberg** is the smallest DAC awarded for both red and white and the Blaufränkisch is grown here on loamy mineral rich soil making red wines that are fruity with an earthy character.

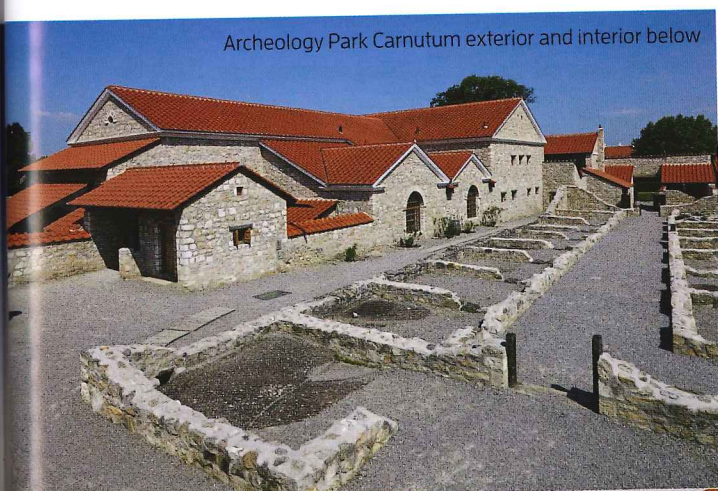
Turning first to Zweigelt, which is the key red grape in Neusiedlersee, we tasted a huge number of very promising wines made from this grape. **Zweigelt** was first developed in 1922 by Dr Fritz Zweigelt who crossed St. Laurent with Blaufränkisch. Today it is one of the most widely planted red grape varieties in Austria. It is capable of producing high quality red wine with potential for ageing. The styles of red wine produced using Zweigelt include young fruity easy drinking un-wooded wines, as well as mature full bodied wine styles that are barrique aged.

Of the Zweigelt we tasted, two are currently available in the UK. Worth looking out for include **2012 Preisinger Reserve Zweigelt** from Neusiedlersee DAC produced at their vineyard in Gols by Georg & Katharina Preisinger – this wine had lovely floral tones and a gorgeous structure, with high acidity and juicy cherry fruit flavours. The **2012 Goldenits Reserve Zweigelt** produced by Robert Goldenits was unfiltered and aged in 100% French oak and showed enormous potential.

We started with a tasting introduction to the Burgenland region presented by Christian Zechmeister the General Manager of Wein Burgenland at the Genussakademie (Food Academy) in Donnerskirchen. Here we tasted the 2012 **Nittnaus Blaufränkisch Reserve** out of a magnum. It had wonderful spice on the nose, high acidity and red summer fruit flavours and was one of the stand out wines of the morning. Later we travelled across Lake Neusiedlersee, from Illmitz to Rust, to the DAC Leithaberg for a vineyard tasting with **Hans & Anita Nittnaus**.

The Leithaberg region is situated on the west shore of Lake Neusiedl and has become a mecca for tourists. The soil here is slate and limestone and the vineyards facing the lake have one of the warmest climates in the Burgenland region. The Leithaberg hills run along the east bank of Lake Neusiedl protecting the region from cold Western winds, making the region perfect for terroir-driven wines. Earthy, mineral tones are a feature of the Leithaberg wines but Blaufränkisch grown here also seem to have a spicy character with herbaceous tones that have potential for ageing.

Archeology Park Carnutum exterior and interior below





The Nittnaus family have been making wine in their hometown of Gols since 1685. On the north-eastern part of the Leithaberg hills, close to Lake Neusiedl you will find their Tanneberg vineyard. This is where the Nittnaus family plant their best Blaufränkisch. The north side of the Tanneberg is climatically cooler, hence their red wines have tremendous elegance. They age their Blaufränkisch for 18 months in 500 litre barrels, with a further 12 months in bottle.

The result is an incredibly elegant red wine with a wonderful structure. Hans Nittnaus considers the 2011 Tanneberg to be one of the best red wines they have ever made. The vines themselves are 30-40 years old and the 2011 Tanneberg Blaufränkisch Nittnaus is a powerful wine with great depth and structure and a lovely balancing acidity, with a surprisingly spicy finish backed with black cherry fruit. The Nittnaus wines are distributed in the UK by Lea & Sandeman [www.leaandsandeman.co.uk](http://www.leaandsandeman.co.uk)

It was terrific to taste Blaufränkisch with such intensity and ageing capacity. We were joined on our visit by a New York "Som" (Sommelier) Michael Dolinski who works for Junoon a modern Indian restaurant on 24<sup>th</sup> Street in New York City. Michael, currently studying for Master Sommelier, is an enormous fan of Austrian red wines and sees huge interest from his customer base for the lighter fruitier styles that he features on his list. He feels they create a point of difference which holds appeal for his cosmopolitan customer base.

We moved on the next day to visit the key vineyards of Mittleburgenland DAC with a Vineyard Rally through three key premium vineyard sites in the region, **Deutschkreutz**, **Neckenmarkt** and **Horitschon**. It was at Horitschon that we tasted Blaufränkisch made by Franz Weinger Winery. With almost 30 hectares, their land includes some of the finest and oldest vineyard sites. The key

to their quality is that Blaufränkisch is grown on a south-eastern facing ridge with heavy loam topsoil that has a high clay content. The clay captures the water which means Blaufränkisch grown here is fresh with delicate acidity. Franz Weinger was named Austria's Wine Maker of the Year in 1995. We tasted both the **2008 & 2012 Franz Weninger Reserve Blaufränkisch** made from fruit grown in the Durrau vineyard and both were absolutely stunning. – 2012 was a warm vintage and was fresh and very fruity with soft tannin, the 2008 on the other hand came from a cooler vintage and was also fresh with high acidity but with an intensity and depth that highlighted its enormous quality. The older vintage illustrated the capacity for Blaufränkisch to age. Franz Weinger wines are distributed in the UK by Astrum Wine Cellars [www.astrumwinecellars.com](http://www.astrumwinecellars.com)

At Horitschon we also tasted wines produced by Michael Kerschbaum with fruit also sourced from the Durrau vineyard. The **2011 Kerschbaum Blaufränkisch Reserve** was his first vintage – he aged the wine in a 500 litre barrel of which 70% of the blend was aged in new wood and 30% in 2<sup>nd</sup> fill. 2011 was a very hot vintage and one of the best in the last decade, so this was a really good wine with enormous potential, the tannin was tight and the acidity noticeable but the dark plum fruit and spice had a tremendous structure and Michael Kerschbaum is definitely an Austrian red wine producer to watch. Not yet available in the UK, more information on [www.kerschbaum.at](http://www.kerschbaum.at)

We ended our Austrian red wine odyssey at the archaeological park at Carnuntum, in ancient times one of the most important Roman towns in the region. Today in the open air museum, at Petronell Carnuntum, the town has been rebuilt using traditional materials and methods as the Roman's would have done two

Vineyard Valley Mittelburgenland





thousand years ago. The city mansion, public baths and houses vividly illustrate Roman life in the 4th century AD and brings this ancient world back to life. It was here we had our final tasting of Burgenland reds in the reconstruction of the Roman Villa. The final tasting of 30 wines featured both Zweigelt and Blaufränkisch from the Carnuntum region.

The Carnuntum region stretches from Vienna in the west to the border of the Slovak Republic in the East and is situated between the Leitha and Hainburg mountain ranges. The soil structure consists mainly of dense loam, loess and sandy gravel. Zweigelt is indigenous to the region which is also widely planted with international varieties, Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot.

Of the many wines we tasted in Carnuntum, I found one from Weingut Hans & Philipp Grassl that is available in the UK. The Grassl family were showing their **2013 Grassl Schuttenberg Zweigelt**, a good example of the soft fruity Zeigelt style from this region, available in the UK through [www.eclectictastes.co.uk](http://www.eclectictastes.co.uk)

Overall, the reds were a revelation, and the soft appealing fruity style with approachable tannin are ideal for restaurant lists. We matched many of the wines with local indigenous dishes and they proved to be very versatile in this respect. With the consumer always searching for new tasting experience I envisage that Austrian red wine will soon start to spread its wings. The US market is already receptive and, as you can see from the table, Austrian wine exports are now firmly establishing themselves on key markets worldwide.

You can find more information about Austrian wine on their excellent, business orientated website, a very good option to learn all you need to know about the producers, their wine styles and most importantly their contact details. [www.austrianwine.com](http://www.austrianwine.com)



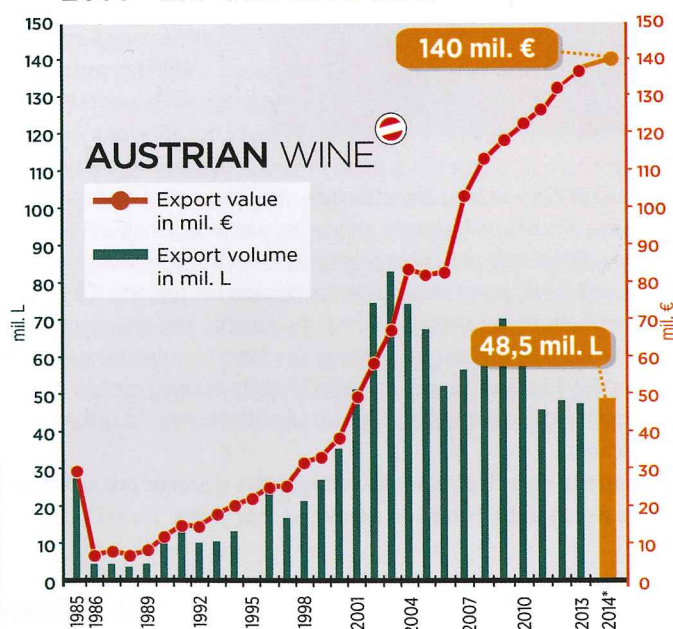
## AUSTRIAN WINE EXPORTS FLY HIGH

2014 was a very successful year for Austrian wine exports. Austrian winemakers achieved a significant increase in terms of their export earnings for the ninth consecutive year. In 2014, export sales grew by €7 million to reach a total export value of €146 million. Germany and Switzerland are the markets for Austrian wine, but growth is also increasing in other important markets, such as the Netherlands, Belgium, Scandinavia, the United Kingdom, the USA and China. This growth confirms the success of the global strategy of the Austrian Wine Marketing body.

Significant wine export growth was also recorded in key European markets including Netherlands, Belgium, Scandinavia and the United Kingdom. **"In all these countries, we have grown through our efforts to grown our distribution"**, said Willi Klinger, Managing Director of Austria Wine Marketing. **"These key markets will continue to develop and will certainly bring us closer towards our goal of an export value for Austrian wine of more than €180 million."**



## 2014 - EXPORT ESTIMATE



\* Source: Statistik Austria; preliminary export figures I-XII 2014, State December 2014; The figures also include reexports of non-Austrian wines.