

# AUSTRIA

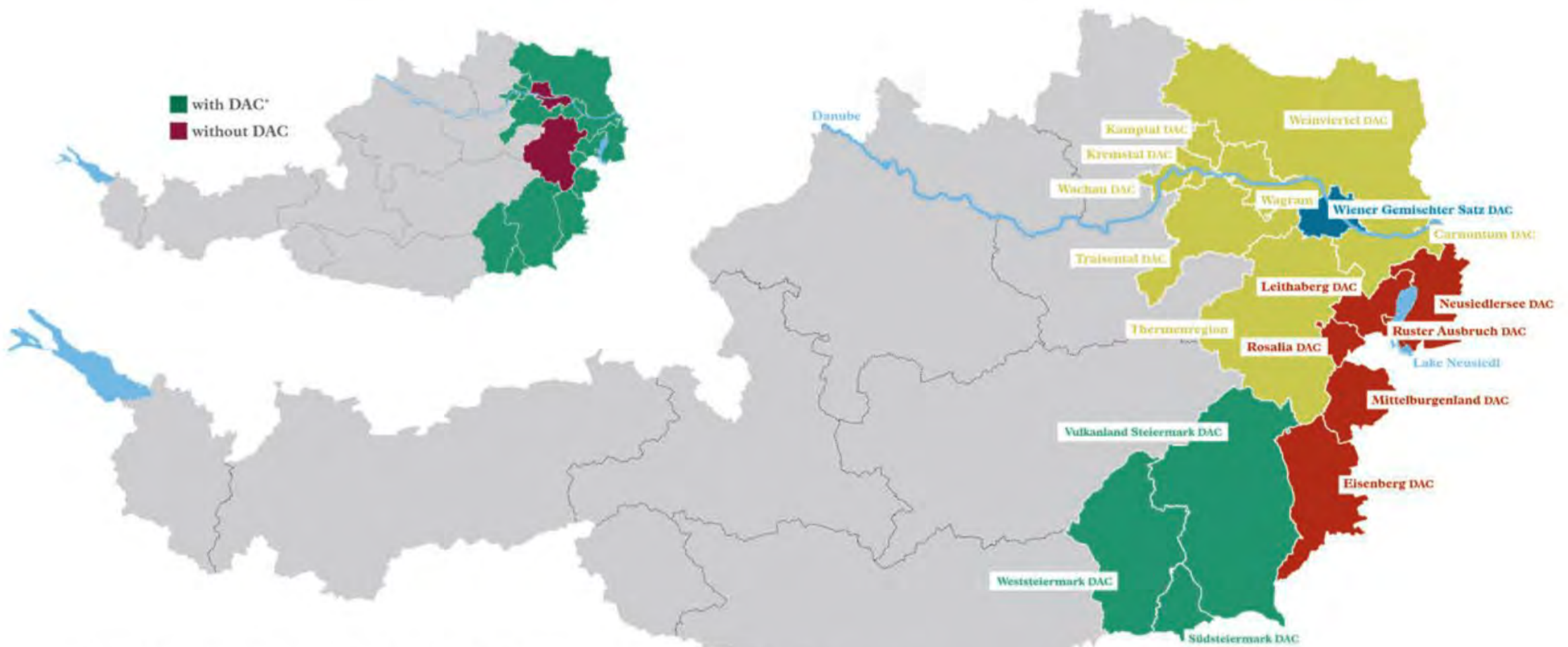
Report 2020

the drinks business



# AUSTRIAN WINEGROWING REGIONS

AND THEIR PROTECTED DESIGNATIONS OF ORIGIN FOR REGIONALLY TYPICAL WINE (DAC)



\*"DAC" stands for "Districtus Austriae Controllatus" and is the legal abbreviation for special regionally typical quality wines. Thus, if a label states the winegrowing region followed by the letter combination DAC (e.g. Kamptal DAC) we are talking about a region-typical quality wine.

## INTERESTING FACTS ABOUT AUSTRIAN WINEGROWING

**46,515 ha** 1 % of worldwide wine production

**15%** Organic & biodynamic farming

**~ 2.4 Mio. hl** Annual average harvest

**12%** Certified sustainable farming

**~ 4,000** Bottlers > 5,000 l

# editorial

**'Austria's beautiful and varied topography gives a huge variety of soils and terroirs, and lying at a crossroads of climatic influences gives the grapes physiological ripeness and great vibrancy'**



**AUSTRIA'S** impressive array of varied and exceptionally high quality, gastronomic wines is seeing it become a hot destination for the international trade. The country has a history of winemaking that dates back to Roman times, but it is in recent years that its wines have started to see a real renaissance. This has been led by producers' meticulous attention to quality, while a raft of younger winemakers have emerged, keen to push the boundaries and impress international sommeliers, retail buyers and consumers with their varied and consistent offer.

One of the notable features of Austrian wine is its wide line-up of styles, and these are increasingly making international markets sit up. An estimated 67% of its wines come from white varieties, from the pure, dry wines of the Wachau and Kremstal in Niederösterreich, famed for its Grüner Veltliner and Riesling, to Steiermark (Styria), where Sauvignon Blanc is making waves. There are also the impressive aromatic whites made from a host of underrated indigenous grapes such as Welschriesling, Roter Veltliner, Rotgipfler, Müller Thurgau and Furmint, while Gemischter Satz, the traditional field blends of Vienna's famous vineyards, is experiencing a genuine revival.

A concerted drive to restore the illustrious history of Austria's sparkling wine, Sekt, is starting to bear fruit, and Pét Nat (Pétillant Naturel) is quietly tapping into the cult trend for natural wines. Meanwhile, Austria's lighter red wine varieties – including Zweigelt, Blaufränkisch and Sankt Laurent – are perfectly in step with today's global demand for refreshing, lively styles. And

Austrian Pinot Noir is hitting the mark with wine lovers who are keen to explore how Austria's wine regions can garner such different expressions from the classic variety.

This is the key to Austria – its beautiful and varied topography lies over a diverse geological structure running throughout the country, giving a huge variety of soils and terroirs. The country also lies at a crossroads in Europe, where influences from the Atlantic, Adriatic coast and Pannonian Basin meet cool air from the north, giving warm, sunny summer and autumn days and cool nights that give the grapes physiological ripeness and great vibrancy.

Although there are vineyards in small pockets in Austria's Bergland, notably Carinthia, in the west, the country's winelands are predominantly focused to the east of Austria, around Vienna, and stretching from the borders with the Czech Republic in the north to Slovenia. Here, the scenery and soils vary hugely, from vineyards perched along the steeply terraced slopes above the Danube in the Wachau, to the flat and sandy shores of the shallow Lake Neusiedl in Burgenland, or the distinctive hill country of the Steiermark in the south west.

And while 2020 may have been as up and down as the landscape itself, and the full impact of the global pandemic has yet to be seen, Austria's wine exports have shown great resilience, and its wine scene is undoubtedly flourishing.

**ARABELLA MILEHAM**  
**REPORT EDITOR**

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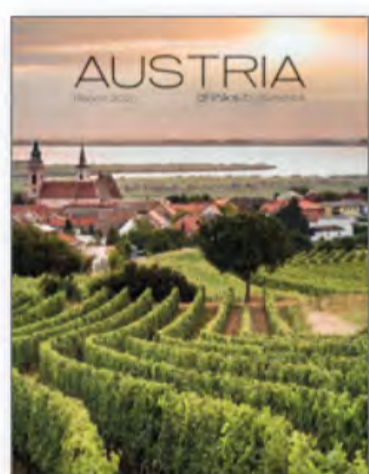
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Plachen, Rust, Burgenland  
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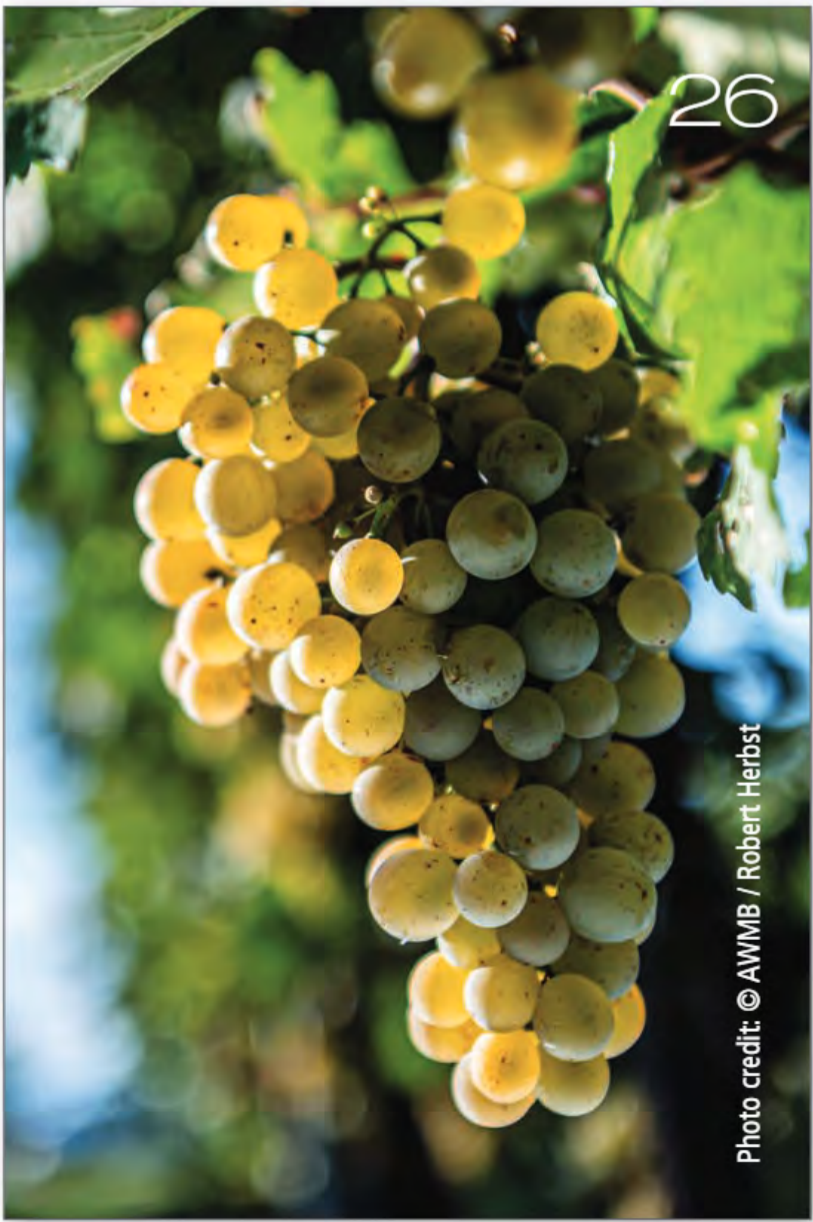


Photo credit: © AWMB / Robert Herbst



The Wachau, photo credit: © AWMB / Robert Herbst

# SEVENTH heaven

If you are looking for a country whose wine is top-notch, varied, and also great value for money, Austria fits the bill. Here, *Patrick Schmitt MW* outlines seven reasons why expressions from this region's wines are such strong offerings

**EVEN WITH** the problems caused by Covid-19, Austria wine has performed strongly worldwide in the first six months of this year. While restaurants were shut down around the globe, consumers of Austrian wine managed to seek out their favourite tipples via other channels,

ensuring it retained its position in key markets, even growing in exports by volume in the first six months of the year (see boxout, page 8). This is particularly impressive if one considers how closely connected Austrian wine is with the shuttered fine dining sector. Be it the

country's whites or reds, this nation's vinous output is adored by sommeliers and other members of the hospitality sector. But what is it about Austrian wine that has lent it such resilience to the trials created by the pandemic? How has it retained its demand? And why is there

such strength to the category? This report has been compiled to consider in detail what I believe are the key strengths of Austrian wine. But here, by way of introduction to the category, if I were to face the question from any wine lover, be they a trade buyer or consumer, why they should consider Austria, I'd give them the following answer, which I've compiled as a seven-part explanation.

## 1. AUSTRIAN WINES ARE THE PERFECT PARTNERS FOR FOOD, FROM ALL NATIONS

All wine goes with food, right? Yes, but some are much more naturally suited to sipping with your dinner, and if there's a key, consistent, general hallmark of Austrian wine, it's an ability to successfully complement food in a broad array of styles. "If I were asked to sum up Austrian wine in one sentence, I would

**'There is balance and elegance in Austrian wine, which makes it a wonderful food partner to Austrian cuisine, but it can match foreign flavours very well, and that makes Austrian wines very exciting'**

say that the wines are gastronomic; they have the character and texture that makes them fit so brilliantly with food, and I would say the same about the whites and the reds," says Patricia Stefanowicz MW, a wine judge and consultant with Austrian roots and a passion for the nation since she won a 12-day trip there in 1994, having completed her WSET Diploma (Austria's Wine Marketing Board has always been a strong supporter of wine education).

Whatever the colour or character of the wine, there's a lovely refreshing acidity to Austrian whites, reds, stickies or sparklings that ensure they clean the palate as you eat, so, while the styles can vary widely, there's a common theme of food-friendly brightness to the bottlings from this nation.

For Austrian-born Stefan Neumann MS, director of wine at Dinner by Heston Blumenthal, the wines from this nation can be best summed up in three words: "dry, charming and inviting". And, Austria's ability to craft wines that are "balanced" – whether it's the character of the oak, alcohol or tannins in reds, or texture and acidity in the whites ensure they "complement food" – as well as pairing with a wide variety of dishes.

As Roman Horvath MW points out, speaking about the whites of Domaine Wachau, it's connected to the range in character. "We do have extremely concentrated full-bodied white wines at the really high end, then we have Federspiel wines that are lighter."

But the range is also closely linked to region and soil type, he says: "In the Wachau we have rocky soils that give extra energy to the wines; in the Kamptal, where there is a lot of loess, and deeper soils, the wines are more opulent," he says.

Andreas Wickhoff MW, the general manager at Bründlmayer winery, similarly comments on the food-pairing possibilities of Austrian Wine. "There is balance and elegance in Austrian wine, which makes it a wonderful food partner to Austrian cuisine, but it can match foreign flavours very well, such as Thai or Japanese, and that makes Austrian wines very exciting."

## 2. AUSTRIAN WINES ARE RELIABLY EXCELLENT

If there's a further key trait to Austrian wines, it's their reliable excellence. The combination of strict and strictly enforced wine laws, and a natural, prevalent pride in the hand-crafted high-quality nature of the product, means that there's no such thing as bad wine from Austria. "There is an unwavering dedication to quality," says Freddy Bulmer, Wine Society buyer for Austria. "It's remarkable and admirable. I've been struck by Austrian wine producers' dogged determination to put quality first, because they knew it was the right thing to do."

Stefanowicz adds: "The quality across the board is so good, whether its

Welschriesling to top-class Grüner Veltliner or Riesling from the Wachau. I've hardly ever tasted a wine from Austria – starting with 1988 onwards – that I would kick out of my glass. The producers are meticulous from a technical perspective, and the DACs are meticulous about putting the rules in place and enforcing them," she says, by way of explanation for the consistent excellence of Austrian wines.

Referring to quality and style, Neumann adds: "Despite the diversity of regions and producers, when you pick up a bottle of Austrian wine, you know what you are going to get," especially because every region "has a clear identity".

Combine the safety factor of Austrian wine's reliable quality with its style, and you have a powerful proposition, believes Neumann, who notes that high proportion of relatively low-alcohol wines, along with those made to organic or sustainably principles, or 'natural' approaches, means that "Austrian wines are on the pulse".

Helping the Austrian wine cause further is the open-minded, hard-working nature of the producers, "who are helpful, and understanding of the conditions of the market, and visit their customers", says Lance Foyster MW, director at Clark Foyster Wines, a specialist in Austrian wines, and the importer who launched labels such as Schloss Gobelsburg and Felsner into Waitrose. But for Foyster, the appeal of Austria extends back to this idea of reliable excellence. "The quality is uniformly high, and the style is delicious. I love the freshness of the wines – which is not to say they are light – they have real weight and texture, sometimes viscosity, but they always have a lovely seam of energy, brightness and acidity – reds, whites and sweet wines."

It's also a notable advantage for Austrian wine today. "We find as a market in general today that there is a demand for less extracted and overripe wines, and Austria is really well positioned to provide those," he says.



Golden gate: Autumn in the Wachau, Spitz an der Donau

### 3. AUSTRIAN WINES HAVE AN UPMARKET IMAGE

While Austrian wine offers great value for the drinker, it doesn't serve the bottom end of the market. For example, it's a struggle to find much on the shelves of UK retailers below £8, although the entry point of the Austrian wine scene is impressive (such as The Society's Grüner Veltliner at The Wine Society or the Blueprint Grüner Veltliner from Waitrose).

But this failure to supply the world with cheap wine is good for Austria's positioning, entrenching its reputation for fine wines. After all, this is not a cheap place to make wine, and a network of small, usually family-owned, and quality-oriented producers, with a strong domestic market, has encouraged Austria to develop a premium place in the world market. And, with more embracing organic and biodynamic viticulture, while bearing the lower yields (and quality benefits) of increased vine age, along with isolating specific parcels – Riedenweine – the country is moving further upmarket. Importantly, customers are following such a development.

Neumann says: "The prices are always fair, and you can pick up an Austrian wine for around a tenner and be very happy – but if you spend three or four times that it will be world class, which is impressive compared with other areas, such as Burgundy, Bordeaux or Napa, where at £30-£40 you would be just mid-field."

Similarly, Bulmer says: "From £8 to £50, if you put an Austrian wine

alongside any other at that price then Austria will overdeliver."

It's this relative value, even at higher prices, that means Austria is finding a new market among knowledgeable fine wine collectors. Foyster, who supplied top-end, single-vineyard Rieslings and Grüner Veltliners for an offer with The Wine Society and Lay & Wheeler this year, said it would be "something we may offer on a regular basis".

More generally he says that top-end Austrian wines are "finding a niche with collectors", noting the demand for Blaufränkisch from Moric at £60-£70 bottle. "Lay & Wheeler, Fine & Rare and The Wine Society have cracked open a seam of private collectors that we can mine," he says.

Bulmer speaks of his experience of The Wine Society work with Schloss Gobelsburg, which marked the

**"The prices are always fair, and you can pick up an Austrian wine for around a tenner and be very happy – but if you spend three or four times that it will be world class"**

merchant's first en primeur offer from Austria. "It was a leap of faith that surpassed even our wildest expectations; it was such a success, we will do it every year," he says.

More recently, Bulmer was thrilled to announce that a release in October sold out in two hours. Using wines from Grabenwerkstatt in the Wachau, he described the biodynamic wines from this producer, which was founded in 2014 by two men in their early 30s, as "stunning".

Bulmer says: "The wines are seriously classy, fresh and vibrant, age-worthy, and it's a really interesting story... I had to scramble for more stock." He lists the wines of Grabenwerkstatt and Kremstal's Rainer Wess as "ones to watch".

But there's a further key aspect to Austrian wines, particularly its fine whites, that make them so suitable for collectors, and that's their ability to age slowly over time in bottle, and gain complexity. "There are not that many places in the world that produce genuinely age-worthy white wine for under £15, but Austria can do that very well: whether it's Grüner Veltliner or Riesling, you can find age-worthy wines without breaking the bank," says Bulmer.

### 4. AUSTRIA IS HOME TO DISTINCTIVE AND DELICIOUS WHITE WINES

No mention of Austrian wine is complete without discussing Grüner Veltliner, the country's most famous single wine offering. It may be a native Central European grape, but it's almost entirely unique to Austria, with a distinctive and delicious character, and the ability to produce fine dry wines, as well as outstanding sweet ones, along with very good traditional method sparklings too. "It's Grüner that makes Austria's wine offering unlike anywhere else in the world," begins Bulmer.

"It has this ability to be on the one hand complex and interesting, and on the other hand very approachable and drinkable – when often you find only one or the other.

"So it's a crowd pleaser in best way possible – you can give Grüner to wine nuts or people who know nothing about wine, and both will love it."



For Chris Yorke, CEO of the Austrian Wine Marketing Board, having a reputation built around something so singular has been good for the nation's wine industry. "We are definitely known for our Grüner Veltliner, and it's always better to be known for something than not at all, and once people get their head around Grüner Veltliner, then you can tell the Riesling story, which is different, or introduce the Sauvignon Blancs from Styria, which are a revelation."

So, while Grüner Veltliner has been Austria's most powerful unique selling point, there are other varieties to consider that augment the distinctive nature of the nation's white-wine offering.

Among these is Austrian Welschriesling, which is undergoing a revival, according to Josef (Pepi) Schuller MW, who is director of the Austrian Wine Academy, based in Rust. He also mentions the blends of the Thermenregion, based on Zierfandler and Rotgipfler, and the rising profile of Wiener Gemischter Satz DAC, a field blend of grapes from Vienna.

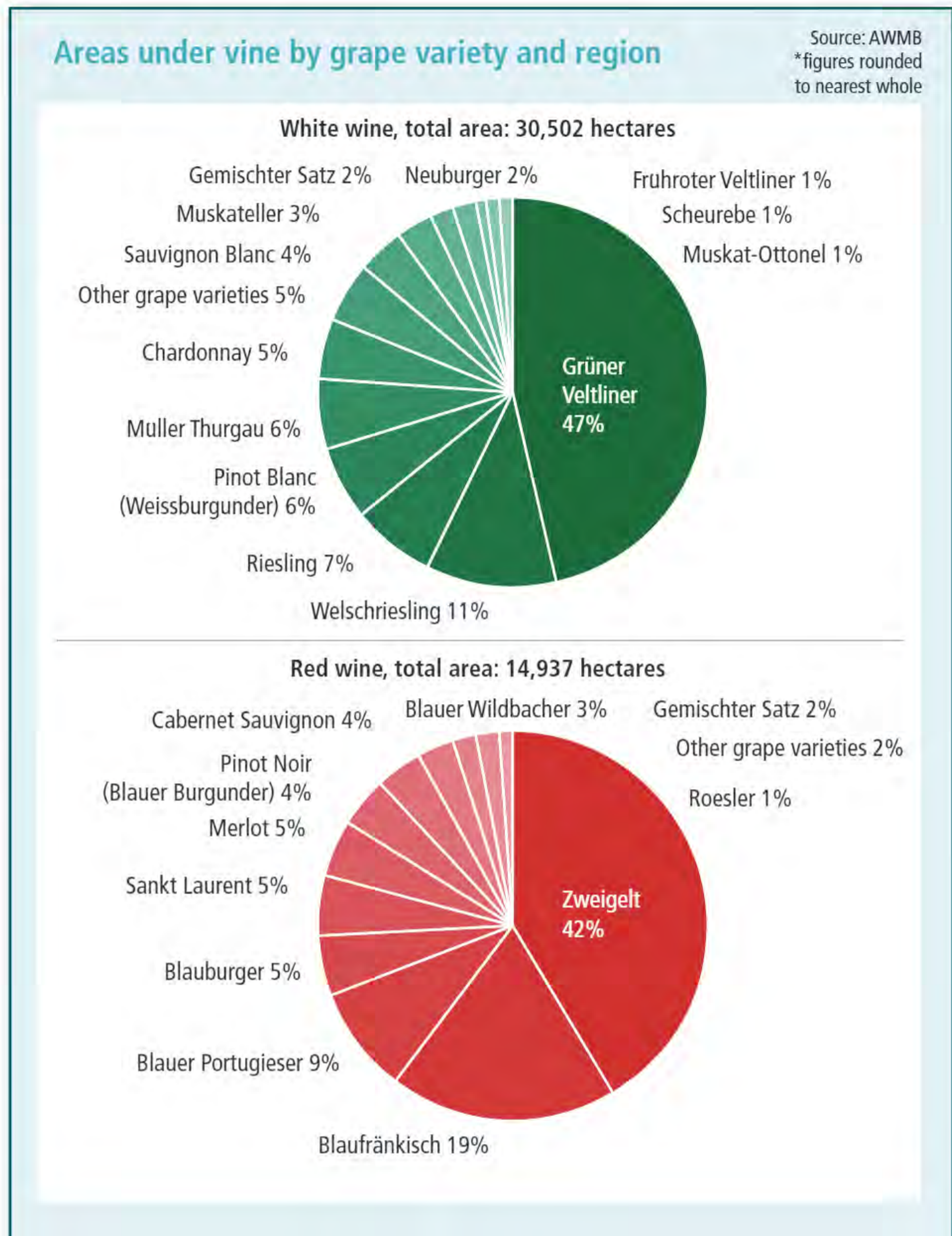
Neuburger is another grape to look out for, says Schuller, describing it as "a brilliant variety but a bastard in the vineyard", noting that "there are 20 to 30 producers who really believe in it".

Another grape is Furmint, which "used to be a Rust phenomenon", says Schuller, but now you see it planted in all parts of Austria, especially Styria."

In short, exciting Schuller, and enticing for any wine lover, is the fact that Austria is rich in "rediscoveries".

## 5. AUSTRIA IS A GLOBAL LEADER IN GREEN-MINDED WINE PRODUCTION

Did you know that Austria has the highest proportion of certified organic vineyards of any country in the world? With more than 15% of its plantings farmed in this manner, it is a global leader, according to Yorke. And when it comes to organic grape production, although it appears Italy has a higher total, Yorke adds that a significant part of that is for table grapes, leading him to believe that Austria is also "number one in organic wine grapes". Its Sustainable Austria programme is strict, with more than 12% of productive vineyards



**While Grüner Veltliner has been Austria's most powerful unique selling point, there are other varieties to consider that augment the distinctive nature of the nation's white wine offering**

certified. Yorke notes: "The Scandinavian monopolies are tough on greenwashing, and last year they did a detailed review of 300 sustainable certifications, and Sustainable Austria was one of just 14 to meet their criteria." More generally, he says: "If you go to a winery, you won't see brown strips, there is biodiversity – if you want to grow grapes in Austria then you have to meet minimum standards, and those are quite high." So Austria is a leader in organics, among the leaders for sustainable management, and has a high base line for viticulture.

For Wickhoff at Bründlmayer, which became 100% certified in 2018, managing >



Photo credit: © AWMB / Herbert Lehmann

### Ready to buy: Austrian wine

a vineyard organically is just another part of a “hands-on” philosophy, that extends to riddling its sparkling wines by hand. “We want to maintain a more artisanal approach,” he says, although he adds that being certified does increase one’s chance of getting a tender with a Scandinavian monopoly.

Meanwhile, Domäne Wachau is “100% sustainable”, according to Horvath, with 80ha of its 400ha now certified organic. “We are convinced that being organic is the right way in the long term, and that it brings that extra little dimension on quality and style.” He sums up: “We can pick earlier with lower alcohol but still with good complexity and ripeness.”

## 6. AUSTRIA IS A GLOBAL LEADER IN WINE TOURISM

Developing facilities at wineries or creating attractions to entice wine lovers is fashionable today, but wine tourism has a long history in Austria, ensuring the country is a leader in this field. Key to the nation’s attraction is Vienna, a magical

**‘I think Austria is the number-one wine tourism destination in the world – you can stay in Vienna and in one hour’s drive you can be in 13 different regions’**

## Austrian wine holds up in 2020

Despite the challenges of early 2020, exports of Austrian wine remained strong in the first half of the year, with only a small drop in value and actually good growth in volume.

In the six months from January to June 2020, Austria’s wine exports by value fell 1% (much less than feared) and even rose 7.4% by volume.

Austria’s leading export markets, Germany and Switzerland, proved highly dependable, recording volume increases of 14.3% and 31.3% respectively and value increases of 0.4% and 3.5%.

In Germany, Austrian wine is strongly out-performing Italy, Spain and France which have all seen sales declines over this period.

Exports to the US have been less good, down by 9.4% in volume and 11% in value, although, again, this is less drastic than the declines seen by other major European wine producers. The value declines for French and Spanish wines in the US from January to June has been reported at over 50% each.

Three other markets that have performed well so far this year are the ‘monopoly’ markets of Sweden, Norway and Canada, which have all seen big jumps in volume and value sales. In Canada in particular the results have

been striking, volume up by 58.9% and value up by 47.7%.

Despite these largely encouraging results, the Austrian Wine Marketing Board did note that some 23 million litres of wine has remained unsold due to the widespread closure of the on-trade, and the impact on the tourism industry has also been pronounced.

CEO Chris Yorke said: “So far, our wines have performed well in export, which of course makes us very happy. Unfortunately, we are not yet able to make a forecast for the next year because the global situation remains too uncertain.

“As always, it is intriguing to take a closer look at individual export countries; so far, Germany and Switzerland have demonstrated positive growth. In the US we have indeed suffered downturns, but far less severely than the wine exporters France or Germany.

“The situation of Austria’s winegrowers currently depends heavily on which and how many channels they use to market their wines. This demonstrates how effectively a diversified distribution structure – utilising multiple channels – minimises risks. This will become ever more important in the future.”

city that offers so much for those who appreciate architecture, museums, art galleries, churches and restaurants, but also, with 600ha of vines, and almost 200 wine-focused taverns – called heurigen – it is truly a city for wine drinkers.

“They say that Vienna, with less than two million people, is the most liveable city in the world, and when I lived in New Zealand, you had to fly one or two hours to see the wine regions, but here the distance is so much less,” says Yorke, comparing his roles at the Austrian Wine Marketing Board with his previous appointment at New Zealand Winegrowers, which has its headquarters in Auckland.

“I think Austria is the number-one wine tourism destination in the world – you can stay in Vienna and in one hour’s drive you can be in 13 different regions,

and in two hours drive you have all the wine regions covered,” says Yorke.

Not that the wine regions have to be visited by car. There’s the Vienna Heurigen Express, that will take you on a tour of the vineyards and estates of the city and its suburbs by train. Or, there are routes for cyclists, with Yorke recommending exploring the Wachau in this way, travelling along the banks of the Danube.

Horvath says: “Tourism is so important for us, especially from Germany, and they say that wine exports to Germany are almost as high in trunk of cars as it is via the official channels.”

Saying that all of Austria is now “very well set up for wine tourism”, he adds: “We have the heurigen, which is an ancient form of wine tourism, and we’ve seen a renaissance in guesthouses at

wineries, which has encouraged even more people to visit the wine lands.

Crucially, during the pandemic, he highlights the vital role of wine tourism in connecting producers with their consumers. "In the summer, tourists and Austrians fled to the wine lands, and so many wineries were selling to them direct, proving how important it is to have a facility for your loyal, private customers," he says.

## 7. AUSTRIA IS HOME TO DISTINCTIVE AND DELICIOUS RED WINES

As any Austrian wine enthusiast is quick to point out, don't forget the country's reds. "Austria produces fantastic red wines," says Bulmer, mentioning the "very good" Birgit Braunstein from Leithaberg, which The Wine Society uses to source its Blaufränkisch – a grape that, like Grüner Veltliner in whites, is native to Central Europe, and has become a flagship variety for Austria.

Stefanowicz says: "Zweigelt, Sankt Laurent and Pinot Noir can all be excellent but if I had to pick one Austrian red grape then it would be Blaufränkisch. It can be Beaujolais in style or something serious with tannin and oak."

Looking back to his first buying trip to Austria in 1998, Foyster says: "The only red I bought was a Sankt Laurent from Pittnauer, because it was in a lighter style, and that was closer to my taste." Nowadays, however, Foyster handles a host of reds made with Blaufränkisch, as the approach to winemaking has become gentler, leading to less heavy, tannic styles. In Foyster's view, a leader in this progression was Roland Velich at Mittelburgenland producer Moric, who is "a very sensitive winemaker" and

**'If had to pick one Austrian red grape then it would be Blaufränkisch. It can be Beaujolais in style or something serious with tannin and oak'**

## Austrian Wine Marketing Board: new leader, new plans

Wilhelm Klinger led the Austrian Wine Marketing Board from 2007–2019, as its sixth and longest-serving managing director. In December 2018, he gave a year's notice for his departure from the position, allowing for an orderly generational change.

In May 2019, after a thorough selection process, Chris Yorke was named by the AWMB supervisory board – from more than ninety candidates – as the next head of the Austrian wine industry's service organisation.

Yorke, a Brit, who had previously held the position of global marketing director at New Zealand Winegrowers for 15 years, took office at the start of this year. Yorke's main focus has been considering the perception of Austrian wines in export markets, making sure that the country is associated with a strong environmental positioning, while promoting the new generation of young winemakers.

But it's also about being "strategic", through identifying the strongest and most immediate growth opportunities for Austria, which may lie within broadening the reach for the nation's wines within existing strong export markets, rather than developing new ones.

Beyond Covid-19, the challenge for Yorke is getting people to try Austrian wines, because he knows that once they do they will be converted. "We call it the glass-in-hand strategy, because we have to get glasses into people's hands, and, as soon as we do, then we win... so we will be ramping that up," he says. As part of this, Yorke is looking for "more partners in export markets". He says: "As an organisation we have relied quite heavily on doing everything from here", but believes there are advantages in outsourcing activities about Austrian wine to people based in the target market itself. More generally he says there are three pillars to the Austrian wine brand: "Freshness, premium excellence and environmental consciousness."



Austrian Wine's CEO  
Chris Yorke

Photo credit:  
© AWMB / Anna Stoecher

presented the idea that Blaufränkisch is a cool-climate grape variety, comparing his wine style to Northern Rhône Syrah, red Burgundy, or Nebbiolo from Piedmont.

Velich doesn't use any new oak, and handles the wine gently, so there is an energy about it, and he's influenced other growers. As a result, Blaufränkisch is a fabulous grape: it reflects terroir, different philosophies of winemaking, and it ages well; it can be taken seriously, and I love it now; it's been a great success."

Celebrated producer Dorli Muhr, in Carnuntum, similarly notes an appealing delicacy in the production of Blaufränkisch, giving greater recognition for the variety among critics and wine collectors. "If you look for heavy, bold red wines, with a lot of oak, then maybe Austria is not your best choice, but if you like Nebbiolo and Pinot Noir, then Blaufränkisch will offer the right

experience for you," she says.

Like Velich, she prefers a gentler approach, and the combination of Carnuntum's warm, dry conditions, rocky soils and 60-year-old vines has just secured her the highest rating for any Austrian red from the *Wine Spectator*, achieving 94 points for her Ried Spitzerberg Erste Lage from 2017.

Such a success has come about, believes Muhr, thanks to a warming climate in Austria, which has resulted in riper tannins, as well as her having taken a gentler approach to the grape that has yielded lighter styles.

Such changes have meant something important for Austria, as they are boosting the country's recognition for producing fine reds as well as whites. Not only that, but in both cases the stylistic hallmark is the same: there's a freshness to the wines. *db*



# EXTREME sports

**The steepness and altitude of some of Austria's wine lands can be offputting to all but the most determined of producers. But some winemakers look at these conditions as a challenge, and make stunning wine, reports *Anne Krebiehl MW***

**'EXTREME' IS** not an attribute we readily associate with Austrian wine – bucolic and artisanal seem more fitting for this fragmented, mainly family-operated wine sector that is concentrated in the east of the country: Austria's vineyards begin where the majestic Alps have already given way to a far gentler landscape. Yet there are extremes both in altitude and attitude – and steepness.

Austria's highest wine estate lies at just above 900m in Tyrol. Planted by oenologist Claus Aniballi in 2001, there is just one hectare of vines. He grows Grüner Veltliner, Chardonnay, Gelber Muskateller and Sankt Laurent – all of which easily reach 12.5% ABV, and “need not fear comparison with other Austrian wines,” he says. But far from being a bloody-minded freak trying to prove a point about altitude, Aniballi and his

**'One parcel is terraced, is extremely steep and has extremely poor soil. But we wanted to recultivate this cumbersome historic site.**

**Economically this isn't plausible but it is a matter of the heart'**

wife, Hannelore, dreamt up the idea of this high-altitude vineyard looking out on the meadows from their terrace “one balmy evening”. Aniballi's worst-case scenario, in case the wine turned out to be terrible, was to make balsamic vinegar.

“I was completely free,” he says about his project – which he started alongside a career in drinks sales. The wines are sold locally and reach respectable scores in Austrian wine guides. But what Austria refers to as its 'Bergland' vineyards in Alpine settings such as Carinthia, Vorarlberg and Tyrol, amounts to just 237ha or 0.5% of the country's vines, according to the latest Austrian Wine data.

The real contender for extreme Austrian viticulture is the Steiermark, or Styria, on Austria's southern border with Slovenia, especially its southern sub-region, Südsteiermark. The Styrian Chamber of Agriculture says 10% of Styrian vineyards are at a gradient of between 40% and 50%, and 2.4% of them are at more than 50% – the provenance of Styria's most famous single-vineyard wines.

### STEEPNESS AND ALTITUDE

Steepness combined with altitude and a cool, often damp climate makes for challenging viticulture but unusually expressive wines. In Austria, these single-vineyard bottlings already have cult status; internationally they still struggle for recognition. Unusually, Styria's flagship variety is Sauvignon Blanc, until the 1980s still referred to as Muskat-Sylvaner. Introduced to the region more than 150 years ago by Archduke Johann of Austria (1782-1859), an effective agricultural moderniser, it finds supreme expression here. Next to Sauvignon Blanc, the chief varieties are Riesling, Gelber Muskateller and Chardonnay, in Styria called Morillon.

“Our vineyards lie between 400m and 600m,” says Gerhard Wohlmuth of Weingut Wohlmuth in Fresing. “As of about 550m the exposure has to be full south so that grapes reach physiological ripeness.”

The labour involved is extreme, but these sites unite three crucial elements: “High altitude means coolness, steepness means the sun has real power in summer and autumn, and constant ventilation means there is no disease pressure. These three things combine so we can harvest really late. The exciting thing is the long vegetation period. Flowering is the same as down in the valley but we harvest a fortnight later.”

Wohlmuth's most extreme recent project is the extension from 1.5ha to 4.5ha of the historic Dr Wunsch site, a steep vineyard

### Feature findings

- > Although making up a relatively small proportion of its total vineyards, Austria's extreme vineyards – in terms of altitude and attitude – certainly pack a punch.
- > Vertiginous vineyards can be found in Austria's 'Bergland' of Carinthia, Vorarlberg and Tyrol, but the majority lie in the Steiermark, or Styria, in the South East of the country.
- > Despite their cult status, many single-vineyard wines from these steep slopes struggle for recognition in the international market.
- > The high altitude, exposure and constant ventilation gives the vines a long vegetation period, good exposure to the sun, less risk of disease and a later harvest – but labour costs are high and much work has to be done by hand.
- > Austria is seeing a rising tide of young, wild winemakers, keen to bend traditional rules to better express the land.

between 500m and 560m. The producer had 9,500 Riesling and 2,000 Sauvignon Blanc vines planted by hand. “Until the vines have developed a proper root system, everything has to be done by hand,” he says. It is only later that special light tractors can be used for some of the work. “One parcel of Dr Wunsch is terraced, is extremely steep and has extremely poor soil,” Wohlmuth says. The site had been a vineyard for more than 1,000 years but parts of it lay fallow for the past 30 years as it is so steep. “But we wanted to recultivate this cumbersome historic site. Economically this isn't plausible but for us it is a matter of the heart,” Wohlmuth says.

Bernhard Schauer of Weingut Schauer in Kitzreck agrees: “The extreme thing

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Photo credit: © AWMB / Marcus Wiesner

Close encounters: Vienna's vineyards are part of the city

generally in Styria is that we work in rough terrain, on various small steep parcels and everything is done by hand."

He notes that topography and the Styrian cool climate "with relatively high precipitation" throughout the year exacerbate each other, making access to vineyards difficult at times. The Schauers farm otherworldly old-vine Weissburgunder on Ried Höchtemmel at up to 570m. The vineyard lies on southern Styria's highest elevation, the Demmerkogel, where the terraces are so

**With expressive aromatics, slow ripening, moderate alcohol and high acid, these wines are real winners of climate change, with their inherent elegant coolness and crystalline flavours**

narrow that no tractor can pass. The wine is emblematic of Styria's style. With expressive aromatics, slow ripening, moderate alcohol and high acid, these wines are real winners of climate change, with their inherent elegant coolness and crystalline flavours. For now, they are still exceptional value.

But extremists are also at work right on the Danube in the Wachau region. Viennese property developer Robert Wutzl had heard about the Atzberg, a vineyard abandoned more than 70 years ago in the western Wachau because of its steepness. In 2007 he got together with local winemaker Franz-Josef Gritsch, and Hans Schmid of the Viennese Mayer am Pfarrplatz estate, to start buying up vineyard parcels. "The challenge was to do something where many others had said 'why do this to myself?'" Wutzl says. And as it is hard to find a crew who are prepared to work the



Photo credit: © A Gotz Schragger

City living: Jutta Ambrositsch is Vienna's only garagiste winemaker

vineyard, everything has to be done by hand. Spraying means going on foot with a canister on your back and covering 80m every time you go up and down, he says, and the same goes for pruning, tying in and harvesting. Even getting to the point of planting Grüner Veltliner vines was "extremely cumbersome" because the vineyard was so overgrown – the first vintage was in 2012.

### LONG-TERM PROJECTS

Not satisfied with one extreme vineyard, Wutzl partnered with Gritsch on another Wachau vineyard, the Kalkofen site in the Spitzer Graben, the western and cool lateral valley of the Danube. Here only Riesling grows, and the first vintage was in 2015. Gritsch and Wutzl have one permanent employee just to restore and rebuild the drystone walls of the ancient terraces. "These are long-term projects and of course there is effort and there is cost," Wutzl says. But the wines, in all their stony glory, are worth it.

Where attitude is concerned, Austria has no shortage of fizzy pét-nats and cloudy, skin-fermented, amphora-aged wines. Austria's young, wild winemaker scene is lively and progressive with an ever-greater focus on expressing land and site. One particularly pure and therefore extreme approach takes us back to Styria and Weingut Schnabel. The biodynamic practices mean, like many places elsewhere, that nettle and yarrow are collected on the farm, and cows roam in the vineyard. But Karl Schnabel, who has not used any additives at all in his wines



Photo credit: © Weingut Schnabel

Bladerunner: Karl Schnabel

for 13 years, has a far more integrated approach that goes far beyond any Demeter standard. This means a hand-held scythe to mow just underneath the vines to keep the fruit zone ventilated, and living, wild grass between the rows.

### CLOSED-LOOP FARMING

“Working with nature means that where nature helps us, we let it,” Schnabel says about his “colleagues, the insects”. Wines are bottled by hand, the bottles rinsed with local spring water, and no inert gases are used because putting the wine through a bottling machine would “violate” it.

This is not crankiness but absolutely consequent and heartfelt practice according to Kreislaufwirtschaft, or closed-loop farming, envisioned by biodynamics. This, much more so than any moon phase, defines this farm. For Schnabel the integrity and “stability” of his wines are key.

Yet another vision of extremism is espoused by star winemaker Jutta

**‘This is extreme, this narrow path between all the advantages the city of Vienna has to offer and the beauty of the vineyards. I live this every day’**



Photo credit: © Johannes Sommer

Difficult to access: Weingut Schauer in Kitzbeck

Ambrositsch: the clash of city life and vineyard that is Vienna. “This is extreme, this narrow path between all the advantages the city has to offer and the beauty of the vineyards. I live this every day,” she says. Vienna is the only world capital with a sizeable wine industry in its city limits – currently there are 637ha of vines – and Abrositsch is Vienna’s only *garagiste* (the controversial winemakers group that emerged in Burgundy in the 1990s to challenge the traditional style of red Bourgogne).

She started with “a teeny, tiny” vineyard in Burgenland in 2004 while still working in advertising, before scouting for vineyards in Vienna. She now makes wine from almost five hectares made up of eight parcels, five of which are old Viennese field blends (see pp14-17 for more on Vienna’s wines), including a rare red blend that goes into her snappy, light, chillable red called *Rakete*, or ‘rocket’. The wines are made in cellars of long-established

Viennese wine estates, and have clear-cut labels with imaginative names that try and do justice to each wine’s personality: *Kosmopolit*, *Revision* or *Ringelspiel*. Today they are served in cool London and New York bars, but while the bold labels stick out, this winemaker’s name only appears in small print, modestly styled as ‘sender’. “The bottles are supposed to be beautiful, plain,” she says. “The contents are the most important thing.” But it was also Ambrositsch who asked: “What does ‘extreme’ actually mean? I always think of extreme exertion.”

She is right – extreme exertion is widespread in Austria – for countless tiny family estates who make the very best wine they can every year. Is there any other country where even the entry level is at such a high standard? Now that is truly extreme. db

# LOCAL hero

Vienna is one of the few cities in the world that has a thriving wine scene within its borders, its vineyards specialising in Gemischter Satz, a traditional field blend.

*Rupert Millar raises a glass to Austria's capital*

**IN THE** Middle Ages many European cities were closely ringed by fields and orchards and vineyards. Those vines around Paris produced wines that graced the table of the king of France. But urban sprawl and economic factors have largely seen these agricultural landscapes built over in the intervening centuries.

Today, most city vineyards are regarded as something of a novelty. There's a small patch of vines in Montmartre, for example, and a more sizeable (and notable) vineyard in Worms, by the Rhine, from which the original

Liebfraumilch was produced. Parts of Pessac-Léognan in Bordeaux and Maipo in Chile are starting to see cities encroach into their domaines, but in general we tend to think of vineyards as distinctly rural enterprises far away from the buzz of modern metropolises.

But then we come to Vienna, a rare city (and European capital no less) with not just a couple of hectares of vines within its city limits but over 600ha, and on both sides of the beautiful blue Danube too.

The city's walls, which held the Ottomans at bay in 1529 and 1683, may

have eventually succumbed to Napoleon's engineers and 19<sup>th</sup>-century planning authorities but the peripheral vineyards are still very much part of the urban landscape of Vienna.

It may not be the biggest of Austria's regions, accounting for perhaps 1% or so of the country's total harvest, but 637ha is still quite a substantial vineyard area.

And not only does Vienna still have vineyards overlooking it, it's also the main bastion of a very particular style of Austrian wine - Gemischter Satz. This is a traditional field blend of a



sort that used to be found all over Austria but today is mainly made in the hills surrounding Vienna – especially the Nussberg on the south bank of the Danube.

It's a throwback to the days when farmers had mixed smallholdings, vines as well as livestock and other crops. Earlier- and later-ripening varieties would be planted together to help mitigate the risk of frost, hail and other bad or challenging weather.

### CULTURAL LANDSCAPE

And many of the vines around Vienna today are still smallholdings with a good part owned by dedicated winemakers such as Christ, Edlmoser or Mayer am Pfarrplatz but others are owned by all manner of people who live there. Furthermore, as Chris Yorke, the Austrian Wine Marketing Board's CEO makes clear, those vineyards are protected by state law as both a national and cultural landscape.

**'Gemischter Satz is a very good wine to show the terroir because no single variety is dominant. It's like an orchestra; no single instrument is heard over another; it's a single symphony'**

"If you own vines you have to use them as vineyards, you can't sell them [for development]," he says.

Although there are red varieties planted around Vienna, the vast majority are white, and all Gemischter Satz is white too. In 2013 Gemischter Satz was given Districtus Austriae Controllatus (DAC) status, which stipulated that Gemischter Satz must come from a vineyard co-planted with at least three varieties where the greatest proportion of one cannot be more than 50% and the smallest proportion must be at least 10%. But up to six varieties tends to be the most common, and there are blends that

contain as many as 10 varieties or even more. The varieties must be co-fermented together as well.

Riesling, Weissburgunder (Pinot Blanc) and Grüner Veltliner are the most common varieties used but Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc, Gelber Muskateller and others are also used frequently.

Rainer Weiss for instance uses Grüner Veltliner, Gelber Muskateller, Sauvignon Blanc, Frühroter Veltliner, Müller Thurgau, Chardonnay and Neuburger in his blend.

This makes Gemischter Satz an intriguing 'style' of wine because, in truth, there is no real style at all, and wines can be highly singular and distinct from one another depending on who made it, where and from which varieties.

Gerhard Lobner, one of the six winemakers that make up Wien Wein (Vienna Wine), an organisation of leading Gemischter Satz producers, says, nonetheless: "It's a very good wine to show the terroir because no single variety is dominant."

And in a very Viennese take on things, he adds: "It's like an orchestra; no single instrument is heard over another; it's a single symphony."

And Vienna has a diverse array of soil types and potential terroirs. There are steep hills and terraces close to the river, which itself has cut away and exposed the underlying rock while also bringing with it all manner of alluvial deposits that have created a patchwork of soils over the millennia.

The vineyards on both sides of the river, to the west and north of the city, starting from Ottakring and Dornbach in the west and moving clockwise through Döbling and over the Danube, are planted on Penninian 'flysch', a calcareous and quartz-rich sandstone, along with marl and clay, as well as occasional pockets of solid limestone.

There are also old terraces to the north in Stammersdorf and in Oberlaa to the south, where loamy top soils (known locally as 'Tegel') give way to quartz-rich gravel.

To the west-south-west of the city, in

### Feature findings

- > Today, most city vineyards are regarded as something of a novelty, but Vienna has 637 hectares in total, 30% farmed organically.
- > Vienna specialises in Gemischter Satz, a traditional field blend. In 2013 it was given Districtus Austriae Controllatus (DAC) status.
- > Although it comes in many forms and uses many grape varieties, Gemischter Satz is actually good at presenting the varied terroirs around Vienna as no single variety dominates the wine.
- > It is an important wine because many visitors to the country will stop in Vienna, and it may be the first Austrian wine they drink when they are there.
- > Austrian Wine is pushing the country as a top European wine destination.

Mauer and Kalksburg, meanwhile, there are more sedimentary, sandy, gravelly soils.

This in turn tends to influence the sort of varieties one will find from place to place. The quartz-heavy soils on the north of the Danube, on the Bisamberg, for example tend to be more favourable to those grapes in the Pinot family, while the more limestone-influenced soils from Ottakring to the southern bank of the Danube around Nussdorf are better suited to white varieties such as Riesling, Grüner Veltliner and Weissburgunder, and it is where a good proportion of Gemischter Satz is produced too, especially on the Nussberg.

The south and south-west of the city are good for opulent and powerful red and white wines.

Because all the varieties have to be co-planted, only a small proportion of the vineyards, 178ha (which is still 28% of the total vineyard), are used to make Gemischter Satz, but it's a wine with an enduring tradition and appeal.

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Photo credit: © AWMB / Robert Herbst

City life: the gap between country and metropolis is a small one in Vienna

Lobner says that this particular Viennese wine specialty is growing in popularity throughout the country, which is a testament to the renewed vigour and skill of the region's winemakers.

There has been a big leap forward in quality since the 1980s and '90s when Gemischter Satz ran the risk of becoming more of a novelty wine. Like Beaujolais in French bistros or Chianti in a Tuscan osteria, Gemischter Satz is at heart a 'tavern wine', which in Vienna are called heurigen.

They serve food and wine and are found in the city and out among the vines, the latter being known as Buschenschank, and which tend only to open for a few weeks every year. These are the places where Viennese gather in the afternoon and early evening, to chat and drink, and where street sweeper rub shoulders with students and lawyers. "After a few

glasses all are equal," remarks Lobner.

This is also where the wines of Vienna begin to have an impact that goes far beyond the size of the vineyards they come from. Although relatively little Viennese wine is exported, and even less Gemischter Satz among that, Vienna is the main hub through which tourists and travellers arrive in Austria, and a visit to a heuriger usually follows as a result.

It may seem a small detail but for the Austrian wine industry it's a vital one because the first taste many people might have of Austrian wine is not something from the Wachau, Burgenland or Styria but a relatively little known blended wine produced on a hill a few kilometres away. As Lobner says, Gemischter Satz may be a niche product but it has "a nice story that can open the door for Austria's white wines in general".

It would be wrong to think of

Gemischter Satz as 'just' a wine to drink in a heuriger, however. Yes, the base level of the DAC is meant to be for "light, easy-drinking wines", but as Lobner explains, the top tier of the classification allows for single-vineyard Gemischter Satz as well, with a little more body and alcohol, capable of ageing for many years.

Although it may never find a broad market abroad because of

the limitations of its production, Lobner also says the popularity and success of Wiener Gemischter Satz is encouraging other producers around the country to start reviving this tradition in their own regions.

It is still all very small scale for now but, given a few years, perhaps Gemischter Satz can re-emerge as an exciting and original category within Austrian wine as a whole.

### IMPORTANT MARKET

Vienna's heurigen have been rather less visited of late because of the Covid-19 pandemic, which has had a direct impact on the wine industry, which relies heavily on the domestic market.

Yorke explains: "There is a real culture of eating and drinking out [in Austria], and more wine used to be sold in restaurants than at home."

With the coming of Covid-19, however, there has been a "lot of reticence to go out" to bars and restaurants in the cities for much of this year, and while there has been an increase in home consumption as a result, it's still not enough to make up for the shortfall caused by the drop in on-trade consumption, especially in the big cities

It has not been a year bereft of successes though. The Austrian authorities have laid out plans for this year's ski season, another important market for the country's wine industry.

There will be a lot of restrictions, says Yorke; none of the big party places will be open, for example, and tables will have to be booked for lunch and evening meals. That said, he continues, that's "not a bad environment for wine".

But the real success has been over the summer and a new tourism campaign designed to encourage Austrians to visit the country's wine regions.

Although Austria has a good handle on the Covid-19 situation, there has, obviously, been a steep drop-off in the number of international visitors this year.

Austrians too have felt constrained in

**'There is a real culture of eating and drinking out in Austria, and more wine used to be sold in restaurants than at home'**



Photo credit: © AWMB / Daniel Gebhart de Koekoek

### Rustic charm: a traditional heuriger

their travel options. Despite being a landlocked Central European country that borders eight nations, with many of those applying their own restrictions of varying strictness to battle the pandemic, more Austrians than ever have stayed at home in 2020. Austrian Wine, in partnership with the Austrian Tourism Board, used this opportunity to launch a new campaign championing the country's wine regions, which is also the largest such campaign that it has ever run.

Backed up by radio, television, posters, magazine adverts and online ads, Yorke says the material was viewed an estimated 70 million times.

He explains that they broke down visitors by a 'type', then created a website that suggested how each region could cater to that type.

Obviously those who enjoy food and wine on holiday were a key audience but

**'It was the first summer of wine we've had in Austria, and it was hard to get hotel rooms in wine regions; you had to book if you wanted to go to a cellar door. We had full restaurants and lots of sales'**

## Five wine-related things to do in Austria

**Visit a heuriger** – an obvious place to start as these traditional wine taverns are found across the country. Vienna has a particularly strong heuriger tradition, and you can find them in the city and out among the vines serving local food and wine. You can tell they're open by the crown of fir (called a 'Heurigerkranz') hung outside.

**Visit Vienna's vineyards** – don't just stay in the tavern, go and see where the wine you're drinking is actually made. A protected national landmark, Vienna is the sole European capital with such a thriving viticultural industry, 637 hectares, literally on its doorstep, with the wine drunk, for the most part, locally. It's also the chief area of production for the traditional Gemischter Satz field blends.

**Use Vienna as a base** – It might seem more sensible to base yourself in a wine region if that's the purpose of your visit but, in truth, as Austria's regions are in the east of the country, and are much closer together than they are in, say, France or Spain. You can reach all of them in, at most, two hours' drive from Vienna, and as many as 14 regions are within an hour to an hour and a half away. Depending on the length of your visit you could simply base yourself in Vienna then visit them to your heart's content.

**Hike and bike** – One misconception would be that going to an Austrian wine region merely means visiting vineyards and wineries. Outdoor activities such as hiking and cycling are extremely popular in Austria, and there are many places that provide both the equipment and scenery required for a memorable experience. Depending on what you're after, you might prefer the more leisurely routes along the Danube or around Lake Neusiedl or you might relish the challenge presented in the more mountainous areas of Styria.

**Experience a local festival** – Austria's regions play host to all manner of festivals throughout the year. There are wine-focused events in the spring and autumn throughout the country, as well as all sorts of regional festivals celebrating local cuisine, art, literature, music and even architecture, many of which incorporate local wine into the festivities.

they tend to be a small one. The idea behind the website and campaign therefore was to say to holidayers that they might enjoy walking or cycling around Styria, for example, or take a cultural trip to Eisenstadt or Vienna, or attending a series of music festivals in the Wachau, then they would be in the wine region in question and would be in a position to visit a winemaker too if they wanted, and at least be eating and drinking locally.

The result, says Yorke, was wildly successful. Like many wine-producing countries Austria has a strong tradition of post-harvest festivals in the autumn but this was the "first summer of wine we've had in Austria", and it was "hard to get hotel rooms in wine regions; you had to book if you wanted to go

to a cellar door. We had full restaurants and lots of sales."

Following this success, Yorke said there will be a number of campaigns in "key markets" in 2021 using the same model.

As he says, there's "heaps to do" when it comes to Austria and its wine regions; regional festivals, "quirks and traditions" – such as heurigen indicating they're open for business by hanging a bundle of spruce, fir or pine twigs above the door – and everything is so close to Vienna too.

Yorke adds: "If you want to spend three to four days in a country and really have a wine experience there are very few that can compete with what Austria has to offer." db



# RED LIGHT means 'go'

**Austria's red wines may sit outside the UK mainstream, but they have an important role to play in future export growth. Even better, their style is a perfect fit for the current trend towards lighter, refreshing reds, finds *Gabriel Stone***

**THE WORLDWIDE** demand for lighter, refreshing lively red wines is throwing a new light on Austria's reds, which have been forced to play second fiddle to the country's better-known whites for too long.

Accounting for just over a third of the country's vineyard area – only a little more than is covered by Grüner Veltliner on its own – Austria's red grapes display a distinctive style and consistency of quality on a par with its white. Austria's future growth is likely to depend on broadening its appeal, and its red wines stand out as an obvious and essential part of that push.

The good news is there are signs that sales are already moving in this direction in the UK. "Lighter reds are driving growth," says Nik Darlington, director of distributor Graft Wine Company, on the

### 'People want lighter styles of red and that's perfect for Austria. For a long time we sold more Zweigelt than Grüner Veltliner'

performance in his own Austrian portfolio. "People want lighter styles of red and that's perfect for Austria. For a long time we sold more Zweigelt than Grüner Veltliner."

Key to the appeal of Zweigelt, too often disregarded in favour of the more aristocratic Blaufränkisch, is its stylistic versatility, not to mention relatively prolific plantings. However, the two act as counterpoints, perfectly complementing each other in the various styles. As Darlington explains: "Zweigelt can do lower alcohol, a little bit lighter and works chilled for summer but has styles that are great for winter too."

And Zweigelt is winning friends in high places. Two-Michelin-starred restaurant Dinner by Heston in London's Mandarin Oriental Hotel recently gave a Zweigelt from Umathum, one of Austria's most highly regarded red wine producers, a coveted spot on its by-the-glass list. Perhaps it helps that Dinner by Heston's wine director Stefan Neumann MS is himself Austrian, but he is enthusiastically clear about the suitability of this "crowd-pleaser" for his clientele, "newbies and veterans alike", citing its "immediate charm and perfumed style paired with lovely fruit intensity".

#### MORE FRESHNESS

Neumann also confirms the "clear trend" in recent years "towards more freshness, less oak and, in general, less interference," a move he believes "feeds right into our

hand for Austria's lighter and more peppery styles". It is hardly a coincidence that he currently lists no fewer than 10 Austrian reds.

At The Wine Society, whose Austrian sales are up by an impressive 50% on last year, there is a sense that the time is right for the country's reds to make more of an impact. Buyer Freddy Bulmer highlights a general UK consumer shift "towards crisp, crunchy red wines", which he views as a perfect match for the "bright, fresh acidity and juicy fruit" of Austria's reds. Indeed, Bulmer confirms: "We are starting on a bit of an Austrian reds mission this year, and hope that continued banging of the drum will make people more aware." In Bulmer's view, the challenge for Austria is primarily one of visibility rather than quality. "I think the main factor holding back the public is the sheer lack of availability," he says, putting the onus on the UK trade to list more of these wines.

One barrier Austria faces is the relatively high entry price point for its wine, but in context of its small-scale

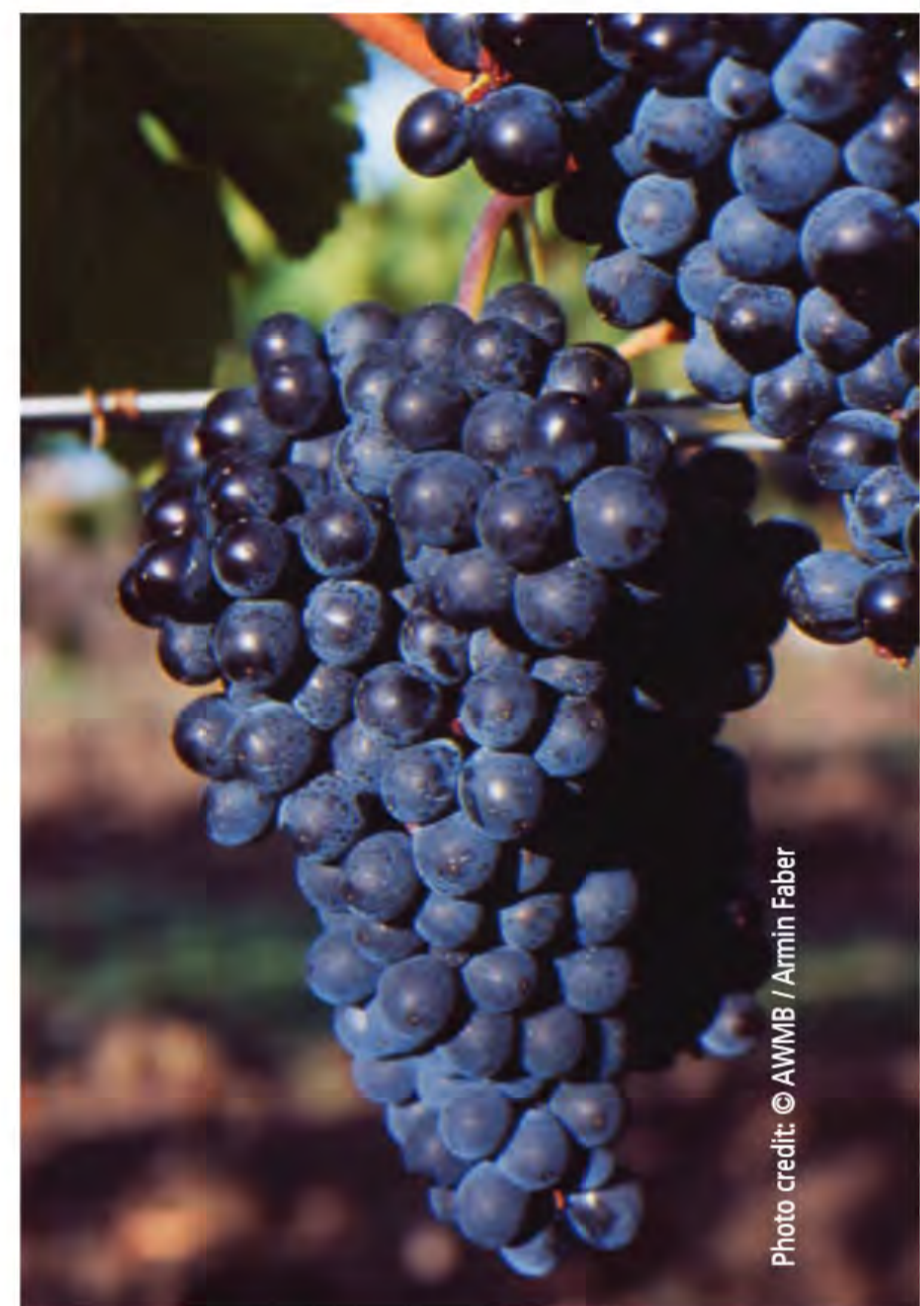
#### Feature findings

- > Austria's array of lighter red varieties are perfectly placed to answer the increasing demand for fresher, crunchy red wines.
- > Red varieties account for only a third of Austria's area under vine. Leading varieties include intensely fruity Zweigelt, 'aristocratic' Blaufränkisch, Sankt Laurent and Pinot Noir.
- > One barrier for entry is Austria's comparative high price because of the smaller production, dependence on manual labour and the excellent quality of entry level. But savvy producers are looking to bring this cost down with innovations such as KeyKeg.
- > There is more scope for Austrian Pinot Noir to carve its own niche in UK and international markets.

production, dependence on manual labour, and the high quality of "entry" wines, it is comparable with other popular light reds such as Beaujolais or New Zealand Pinot Noir. While the country's excellent co-operatives may be able to help improve its competitive edge, some forward-thinking wineries have also come up with helpful solutions. For example, Wagram-based producer Eschenhof Holzer is available to the on-trade in 20-litre KeyKegs, which significantly brings down the price. As Darlington explains: "You can offer Eschenhof Holzer by the glass for about £10 or in KeyKeg for more like £4 or £5 so the economies of scale are very useful." Before the onset of Covid-19 and its hit on the bar and restaurant sector, Graft saw sales of KeyKeg grow from zero to 20% "in no time at all".

Zweigelt may be leading the way, but Austria has plenty of other red grapes that merit serious attention. Neumann picks out a 2012 Sankt Laurent Rosenberg

&gt;



The global trend for fresher reds plays to Austria's strengths

Vine time: Sankt Laurent grapes

from Gerhard and Brigitte Pittnauer, which he is selling by the glass. He describes the wine as being “like a powered-up version of Pinot Noir with a spicier edge and more structure, which makes a pretty stunning combination with our duck-and-turnip dish, which is served with buttered black turnip, truffle and a civet of duck”.

Pittnauer, who farms biodynamically in Gols in Burgenland, specialises in Sankt Laurent, which his wife Brigitte says is gaining in popularity internationally as

**‘Sankt Laurent is physiologically ripe with little sugar, little tannin and concise acidity, which makes this wine more elegant, finer than other wines, but also more stockable because of the acidity’**

people look for wines with less alcohol. “It is physiologically ripe with little sugar, little tannin and concise acidity, which makes this wine more elegant, finer than other wines, but also more stockable because of the acidity,” she says.

#### A FASCINATING GRAPE

For longstanding Austrian specialist Lance Foyster MW, director of Clark Foyster Wines in the UK, if there’s one variety that deserves a higher profile in the UK it is Blaufränkisch. “It’s a

fascinating grape, ages well, shows terroir, takes oak nicely and can have great complexity,” he enthuses.

The Wine Society clearly shares his belief that the grape merits a wider audience, recently adding a Blaufränkisch to its standard-bearing Society own-label range. And according to New York-based Austrian sommelier

Aldo Sohm of Le Bernardin and Aldo Sohm Wine Bar, the variety is increasingly ticking the boxes for a specific clientele in New York who like its richer style.

Notable Blaufränkisch producers include Roland Velich of Weingut Moric in the Leithaberg region of Burgenland, whose small quantity of ‘terroir’ wines have reached cult status. Velich’s ruthless grape selection and minimalist intervention during vinification allow the grapes to express the rich minerality of the mica slate, clay and limestone hills in the communes of Neckenmarkt and Lutzmannsburg around Lake Neusiedl.

Amid all these exciting native grapes lies one very familiar, highly desirable international face: Pinot Noir. With hundreds of





Photo credit: © AWMB / Philipp Forstner

### Rock star: the Leithaberg region in Burgenland

years' history in Austria, it effectively counts as a local, and, more importantly, is capable of delivering the level of quality and original expression that Pinot fans generally accept does not come cheap. "I'd like to see Austria put more effort behind Pinot Noir," says David Gleave MW, managing director of UK distributor Liberty Wines, who reports strong sales of the limited quantities he is allocated from leading Vienna-based producer Wieninger.

"It can cover a lot of the spectrum, from fresh and lifted with great purity to some styles that now have richness and complexity without losing that aroma."

#### A HEALTHY NICHE

Bulmer also believes Austrian Pinot Noir has what it takes to carve, if not a mainstream following, then certainly a healthy niche among UK wine lovers. He says: "It's the sort of thing we would buy a single parcel of a year and it would be snapped up by a few very engaged members, rather than a major listing."

Meanwhile, Foyster is such a fan of Austrian Pinot that he waives his standard policy of focusing solely on producers' indigenous offerings. "I think it's great," he enthuses, outlining the breadth of stylistic spectrum that can successfully be achieved with Pinot Noir in this corner of the globe. "The Lower Austria versions are nice in that very cool, Northern European model," Foyster explains.

And he draws a contrast with expressions from the warmer Burgenland,

**'Pinot Noir can cover a lot of the spectrum, from fresh and lifted with great purity to some styles that now have richness and complexity without losing that aroma'**

which are "generally a bit plumper with dark, plummy fruit as opposed to fresh and crunchy".

Whether indigenous or more international, Austria's red wines may still not have fully permeated the UK public consciousness, but it's clear that when customers do have the opportunity and open-mindedness to try them, they generally hit the mark in terms of both style and quality.

The key challenge now is for the trade's gatekeepers to shake off the mindset that by listing a Grüner Veltliner the Austrian box has been comprehensively ticked.

As Neumann puts it from a consumer's perspective: "If you are convinced by the quality and consistency of Austrian white, it's likely that you will at least try an Austrian red."

The more visibility these wines have, the easier it is for people to make that rewarding leap. db

# BUBBLING under

Austrians know how good their country's flagship fizz, Sekt, is, and producers are keen to fly the flag for the quality liquid around the world.

*Phoebe French* looks at how they are planning to make their mark globally



Photo credit: © AWMB / R.Anzeige



**DESPITE AN** illustrious history dating back to the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, Austrian sparkling wine, known as Sekt, has fallen under the radar. It is estimated that Sekt, as well as semi-sparkling wine called Perlwein, accounts for just 10% of the 2.4 million hectolitres of wine made in Austria each year. Fully-sparkling wine accounts for only 1.4% of the total volume of Austrian wine exported. But in the past decade a concerted effort has been made to restore the underappreciated wine to prominence.

The effort began with creation of Austrian Sekt Day in 2009. Each year, on 22 October, Austrian Wine holds an annual celebration to showcase the quality and variety of sparkling wine being made in the country. While Sekt is often used to mark special occasions, the initiative showcases its diversity. With suggested food pairings and cocktail recipes, it demonstrates that Sekt isn't merely a wine for toasting.

According to a report published last year by Sekt producer Schlumberger, the idea is paying off. The report found that

## A report found that an increasing number of Austrians are drinking Sekt more regularly, rather than reserving it for celebrations

an increasing number of Austrians are drinking Sekt more regularly, rather than reserving it for celebrations. In 2014, 67% of those surveyed only consumed Sekt to mark a special occasion. Last year this figure dropped to 48%.

The creation of Austrian Sekt Day was followed by the establishment of the Austrian Sekt Committee, in April 2013. This organisation, which has a legal status comparable with the existing 12 regional wine committees, represents sparkling wine production in the whole of Austria.

The Austrian Sekt Committee aided the introduction of a three-tier quality pyramid for Austrian sparkling wine

with protected designation of origin (PDO) status (Austrian Sekt g.U.) in 2016 (see boxout, page 25). The system stipulates the minimum ageing requirements and a production method similar to Champagne. For example, the Reserve and Grosse Reserve levels require Sekt to be made using the traditional method, with the wine aged on its lees for a minimum of 18 months and 30 months respectively.

### WORK COMMITMENT

The committee, which has even worked with Riedel to produce a glass specifically designed for Sekt, holds an annual tasting, which this year featured 70 wines from 31 producers.

Schlumberger's Sekt report noted a growing awareness of the committee's work in Austria. Since 2017, knowledge of the country's three-tier quality system has doubled, with 50% of domestic Sekt drinkers stating the system was an important decision-making aid. Sekt Committee spokeswoman Dagmar Gross says the system made Sekt easier to understand and gave it "identity and dynamism".

"Sekt has gained respect from sommeliers and restaurateurs," she says. "At a recent event with Sommelier Union Austria, sparkling wine in all three quality categories was served with each course. It showed how well Austrian sparkling wine can be paired with food."

This year, despite the challenges of Covid-19, the Austrian Sekt industry has been granted a reprieve: the abolition of the country's sparkling wine tax. Introduced in 2014 at a cost of one euro per litre, it resulted in a 25% drop in production.

Herbert Jagersberger, chairman of the Austrian Sekt Committee, highlighted the positive development of the sector after the tax was abolished, noting the double-digit growth (32%) of rosé Sekt in supermarkets since 1 July this year.

The committee said that this year's harvest was later than it has been in previous years, with "ideal" conditions allowing the grapes to ripen while maintaining acidity.

### Feature findings

- > Austrian Sekt was widely exported in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it fell under the radar.
- > In the past decade, the Austrian Sekt Committee was formed and a three-tier quality system was introduced.
- > There are now around 200 Sekt producers, and while sparkling wine only accounts for 10% of total wine production, it is on the rise.
- > The committee is working to increase awareness of Sekt's diversity in terms of style, food-pairing ability, and the grapes used to make it.

With a growing appreciation for its wines, and the removal of the domestic tax barrier, Austrian Sekt also has history on its side. Once served aboard luxury cruise liners and at Buckingham Palace by Queen Victoria, Austrian Sekt has a star-studded past. Robert Alwin Schlumberger, the founder of the Sekt producer of the same name, was a former cellar master at Champagne Ruinart. Swapping Reims for Bad Vöslau, Schlumberger started producing sparkling wine in Austria in 1842. His wines subsequently picked up medals in Munich in 1854, Paris in 1855, London in 1861 and Dublin in 1865.

In 1848, Johann Kattus began making sparkling wine that was served in imperial palaces throughout the Austro-Hungarian empire.

And it is believed that Emperor Franz Joseph of Austria enjoyed a bottle of Kattus Sekt every Sunday. Kattus was known for his trademarked Sekt called Hochriegel, named after his best vineyard. Today, that trademark belongs to Schlumberger.

Austrians are even behind a patented closure for sparkling wine bottles. It was invented by restaurateur Joseph Winkelbauer and landlord Johann Winkler in 1851, and was made out of wire, replacing the traditional cast iron clamp that often caused bottles to burst. Both World Wars brought tough times for >



Riddle me this: wine maturing in Bründlmayer's cellars

Photo credit: © Bründlmayer



Sparkling appeal: Marion Ebner-Ebenauer

Photo credit: © Christof Wagner



In the pink: Schlumberger rosé

Photo credit: © Schlumberger

the industry, and it was not until 1976 when Malat winery resumed quality-driven Sekt production.

Now, with around 200 Sekt producers in the country, Austria's home-grown sparkling wine is attracting attention and

**'Today, we are listed in traditional grand café-style restaurants, upmarket restaurants, private clubs and Michelin-starred eateries'**

is being made by larger wineries such as Bründlmayer, Steininger, Madl, Schloss Gobelsburg and Loimer as well as smaller operations, such as Ebner-Ebenauer and Diwald.

Andreas Wickhoff MW, general manager of Bründlmayer, which was founded 100 years after Kattus, believes there's been a steady increase in interest in Austrian Sekt over the past 20 years. "Our sales director, Thomas Klinger, has seen an increase in interest in both the national and global markets," he says. "Originally, Bründlmayer

Sekt was a kind of 'local hero', but in markets with a high number of Austrian expats, as well as among global sparkling wine aficionados, the interest was there. Today, we are listed in traditional 'grand café-style' restaurants such as The Wolseley in London, upmarket restaurants like the Wallsé in New York, private clubs such as the Union League Club in Philadelphia, and Michelin-starred eateries like Sur Mesure par

Thierry Marx in Paris or the Mandarin Oriental in Beijing."

Bründlmayer exports 25% of its production. All of its Sekts, which are made using the traditional method, fall into the new Reserve and Grosse Reserve categories. Wickhoff believes the creation of the three-tier system for Sekt with protected designation of origin was a "positive move", but says the category should have an "even clearer" profile. "Currently, Sekt g.U. Klassik can still be produced using any method, whether that's tank, transfer or traditional," he says.

Organic wine producer Martin Diwald, who is based in Wagram, believes diversity is important. "People are always surprised by the quality of our Sekt," he says. "The base wine





## sparkling wine

### Austrian Sekt quality pyramid

- > Three-tier system applies to Austrian Sekt g.U. Each level encompasses further quality assurance standards.
- > **Klassik:** Grapes harvested in a single Austrian federal state; all methods suitable for sparkling wine production allowed; maturation for a minimum of nine months on lees.
- > **Reserve:** Grapes harvested and pressed in a single Austrian federal state; traditional method only; minimum of 18 months maturation on lees.
- > **Grosse Reserve:** Grapes harvested and pressed in a single municipality; traditional method only; minimum of 30 months maturation on lees.

Pyramid: Sekt production is governed by a three-tier system, as illustrated above

for our Sekt is 100%-Grüner Veltliner, which is pretty unusual. We perform well in England, particularly with the younger generation, who are often more open-minded."

Diwald, who exports around 50% of his wine, believes Austria should concentrate on premium Sekt.

"To succeed, you have to be able to take a share of the £15-£40-a-bottle market," he says. "Austria is too small to compete at the lower end, but it can play a role in the categories above."

Nik Darlington, director of Graft Wine, which imports Diwald's products into the UK, believes Sekt would have a wider audience if more smaller producers began making it.

"At the moment, Austrian Sekt isn't readily identifiable with the most on-

trend producers," he says. "There could be a lot of cachet in this connection if more of the 'new wave' crowd were seen to be making Sekt."

There are some smaller producers leading the charge. Renner & Rennersistas in Neusiedlersee, Fuchs und Hase in Kamptal and Christoph Hoch in Kremstal are all making Austrian pét-nat, a style of fizz made using the so-called ancestral method, whereby grape must is bottled before it has finished fermenting.

Renner makes a biodynamic example from red grape Sankt Laurent; Christoph Hoch produces a variety of white and rosé expressions with Grüner Veltliner and Zweigelt; while Fuchs und Hase is a pét-nat specialist, crafting examples from varieties such as Müller-Thurgau, Muskateller, Grüner Veltliner, Zweigelt, Welschriesling, Riesling and Cabernet Sauvignon.

There is hope that Sekt's strong performance in the domestic market will translate to increased sales abroad. According to the Austrian Sekt Committee, brut, extra dry and rosé Sekt are experiencing double-digit growth, both by volume and value. There are now 1,300 people employed in the domestic sparkling wine industry, and the

**'People are always surprised by the quality of our Sekt. We perform well in England, particularly with the younger generation, who are often more open-minded'**

### Key facts about Austrian Sekt

- > Forty grape varieties are permitted for use in Austrian Sekt.
- > Sekt made in Austria must have at least 3.5 bar of pressure.
- > Austrian Sekt and Austrian Sekt g.U. can be made using any method, while Reserve and Grosse Reserve must be produced using the traditional method.
- > Austrian Sekt g.U. means Sekt that has a protected designation of origin (PDO).
- > In 2019, Austrian Sekt g.U. achieved the highest price per bottle after Champagne in the multiple retail sector.

Austrian Sekt Committee has set a goal of increasing the market share of Austrian Sekt from 30% to 50%. It seems Austrian Sekt is set for salvation. db



# WHITE magic

Photo credit: © AWMB / Robert Herbst

**Austria's talent for making dry, attractively aromatic whites is not limited to its star act, Grüner Veltliner. *Gabriel Stone* finds many producers are now championing lesser-known whites, feeding into younger consumers' thirst for novelty**

**WITH GRÜNER** Veltliner, Austria's most widely planted white grape, the country has established a distinctive and affordable star that has steadily permeated the UK public consciousness via just about every self-respecting wine list.

The progress of the country's reputation and export presence over the past 20 years has seen Grüner Veltliner become "the foot in the door" for Austria's aromatic white wines. After becoming more familiar with one particular grape, people feel easier about the region it comes from, which opens doors to others. This trajectory bodes well for the host of "understudy" grapes waiting for their chance to savour the limelight with the growing number of fans who appreciate

the consistent quality and individualism of Austria's leading varieties. Some of these are grown widely in Austria, such as Riesling, Welschriesling and Muskateller. Others, including Rotgipfler, Zierfandler and Roter Veltliner, are highly localised specialities – but all combine varying intensities of aromatic appeal with a consistent freshness.

The UK on-trade has proved a particularly natural and receptive home for Austria's characteristically food-friendly, lively wines. Romain Bourger, head sommelier of luxury hotel and restaurant The Vineyard at Stockcross, Berkshire, presides over a particularly extensive range. While acknowledging that "in general it's the lighter, easier-drinking style of Grüner

Veltliner that's more successful", he also highlights the richer, more textured examples of both Grüner and Riesling that can be found once you upgrade to single-vineyard or Smaragd expressions [the top category in the ripeness classification of white wines in the winegrowing region, Wachau].

Austrian Riesling, centred in Wachau, Kamptal, Kremstal and Weinviertel in Niederösterreich, and the Steiermark, are generally fuller-bodied than their German counterparts, and steelier, fresher and livelier than those from Alsace. Urban and Dominique Stagård, an Austro-Swedish couple based in Kremstal are a prime example of the new wave making "thrilling, electric" Rieslings, according to Anne Krebiehl MW. Urban took over

Lesehof Stagård winery from his parents in 2008 and has devoted his time to make wines that are anything but mainstream.

Chris Parker, the head sommelier at Lime Wood Hotel in the New Forest, notes that this desire for novelty is driving the millennial market.

He argues that people may be put off by more traditional styles because of their preconceptions about traditional wines or wine regions, preferring to seek out regions that have a more creative outlook and cater for a diversified varietal palate, he says. "People don't like saying 'Federspiel' or 'Smaragd', especially when they're ordering in a restaurant, so more progressive regions are helping to open up Austria," he says.

It's not just the younger generation at the consumer end that's boosting Austria's fortunes but also the country's own healthy crop of young winemakers who are in tune with the international market and keen to make their own mark. "What's driving the success of Austrian

### **'What's driving the success of Austrian wine more than anything is the exciting new wave of younger people in the industry'**

wine more than anything is the exciting new wave of younger people in the industry," says Parker. "A new generation has come in, and they're looking to make wines that are appealing to consumers."

He thinks the most exciting developing region is Steiermark, on the country's south-eastern border with Slovenia, which he says "shows a side of the country you don't see so often". He picks out Weingut Sattlerhof in Südsteiermark as a prime example of the type of producer driving this shift, adding that "the explosion of Sauvignon Blanc shows how much producers here are looking towards the global market."

And the Steiermark is undoubtedly gaining recognition internationally.

Events such as the Steiermark masterclass organised by the Austrian Wine Marketing Board in New York in 2019, which was attended by 65 key players from the city's hospitality industry, trade and press, has helped raise its profile. Meanwhile the region's winemakers are increasingly winning medals - this year saw a record 39 awards at the prestigious Concours Mondial du Sauvignon white wine competition, building on success in 2017 and 2018 when Südsteiermark wines were named the best of the competition. Award winning winemakers included Peter Skoff of Domäne Kranachberg, Weingut Daniel Jaunegg, Weingut Krispel and Weingut Tschermonegg.

#### **LIGHTER, FRESHER STYLE**

These accolades highlight the lighter, fresher, more commercially savvy style of Sauvignon Blanc now coming out of Steiermark, which offers a real point of difference to other styles on the market.

"Stylistically it fits the British palate; it's a little more subtle than Marlborough," Parker says.

These same winemakers are also embracing Austria's already world-leading sustainability credentials which has extended enthusiastically into the natural wine scene. "Consumers today are looking for traceability and accountability," says Parker. "The Austrians have that in spades."

Weingut Gsellmann from Gols in Burgenland, a member of the dynamic Respekt organisation, a European group of 23 biodynamic producers, is one such example. Andreas Gsellmann's family has been making wine since 1800, and farms 21 hectares of vineyards in Gols, in the Pannonian basin.

Gsellmann likes to give old varieties such as Welschriesling a light maceration because "the apple and pepper notes are really incredible, and when spontaneously fermented the wine really shows the soul of originally Austrian wines without intervention in the cellar". But the more aromatic varieties, such as Traminer and Scheurebe, benefit from skin fermentation, he says, "because you can push back a little bit the aromatic side and get more dimensions in flavour".

#### **Feature findings**

- > Austria's success with its native white grape, Grüner Veltiner, is opening doors for other aromatic white wines, including Riesling, Welschriesling, Roter Veltliner, Sauvignon Blanc, Rotgipfler, Zierfandler, Müller-Thurgau and Furmint.
- > Innovation is being driven by a new generation of winemakers who are responding to international demand with wines that appeal to modern consumers.
- > Customers' desire for novelty is also driving demand, although aromatics remain a tough sell in some markets, such as the UK.
- > White wines account for 67% of Austria's vineyards, with key regions including Niederösterreich, Wien, Steiermark and Burgenland.

This warmer corner of Austria, where the climate is particularly influenced by the nearby Lake Neusiedl, lends itself well to varieties including Gelber Muskateller and Welschriesling - which is widely used as a base wine for Sekt - as well as insider tip, Furmint.

Nearby Rust used to be the only place in Austria where you could find the indigenous grape, according to Burgenland winemaker Heidi Schröck, up until a few years ago when other wineries started to take an interest.

"Furmint from Rust is definitely characterised by the soil and by Lake Neusiedl, so we have the aromas of camomile and linden blossom, yellow apple and quince, but it is not as fiery as those from Tokaji's volcanic soils," she explains. Although some producers are experimenting with new oak or an 'orange' style, Schröck focuses on fruit, soil and character, picking at "the perfect

&gt;

## aromatic whites



Family business: Andreas Gsellmann

time”, and using neutral acacia barrels. “It’s like walking on the tightrope between reduction and oxidation, but gives us the possibility to discover the vintage’s ‘soul’ every single year,” she says

Another star is Heinrich Hartl, who, with his wife, Marie-Sophie, now manages his family’s 16-hectare wine estate in the Thermenregion, just south of Vienna. Their broad portfolio of reds and whites features not only popular Grüner Veltliner and Riesling but also far more niche varieties, such as Traminer, Rotgipfler and Zierfandler.

Hartl admits to a particular fascination with these local varieties, and, as a result, he has dedicated time to understanding how to coax the most interesting expression from them. In viticultural terms he compares Rotgipfler with Grüner Veltliner as a grape that “needs richer soils with better supply of water

**‘It is a big challenge in the vineyard to get fully ripe and healthy Roter Veltliner grapes to harvest but the effort is worth it’**



Rust never sleeps: Heidi Schröck

and nutrients”, while “both Riesling and Zierfandler like it more austere, and cope better with dry conditions”. To get the best aromatic expression from Traminer he suggests “a long ripening period is important, and cold nights”. Hartl has also experimented with longer maceration time for the grapes, not in pursuit of a trendy orange wine but rather “a distinct expression of fruit”.

Another aromatic white making its mark on the international scene is Roter Veltliner, despite accounting for only 0.4% of Austria’s overall production.

Generally found in Wagram in Niederösterreich, to the west of Vienna, the red-tinged grape is making international sommeliers and retailers sit up. For example, the Wine Society recently added a Roter Veltliner from Weinviertel producer Familie Mantler to its list.

Thomas Mantler admits that because of its small total hectareage, Roter Veltliner is likely to remain niche in international markets (the tiny family-run winery in Austria’s northernmost region mainly caters for the domestic market). But he insists that although it is “a big challenge in the vineyard to get fully ripe and healthy grapes to harvest” the effort is worth it. “All our Roter Veltliner bunches are cut in half after veraison to control the quantity

and get the best quality. But in the end the vineyards reward us with wonderful grapes that mature to crisp and fruity wines with low alcohol content (11.5%ABV),” he reports.

### SOMETHING NEW

Müller-Thurgau, a grape historically prized more for its ability to ripen early with a high yield than for any exciting quality statement, has also caught the eye of UK-based sommelier Bourger. He points to an example from Kamptal producer Nibiru that is made with fruit from old vines whose fruit undergoes a seven-day skin maceration and hits a refreshing 11% ABV. “Even though it’s a little different it sells very well,” he reports, noting the wine’s particular popularity among younger guests. “A lot of people are ready to see something new,” he adds.

There is no escaping the fact that aromatic whites from any country remain a tough sell in the UK and the US, although consumers’ unwavering thirst for Marlborough Sauvignon Blanc suggests this is not an insurmountable stylistic hurdle. But there is evidence they are gaining traction, for example both Hartl’s Rotgipfler and Zierfandler have achieved the mainstream coup of listings at Waitrose Cellar.

This availability, coupled with Austria’s track record for reliable quality, makes them an attractive option for more adventurous wine lovers.

Sometimes in life there’s just no quick fix; patience and persistence is needed until the tide changes in your favour. After all, Grüner Veltliner has slowly but surely worked its way onto all respectable UK wine lists by dint of its distinctive character and consistently high quality. That performance should spark confidence in Austria’s other white grapes, and, with a young generation of producers and consumers actively relishing new experiences, the stage is set for new stars to make their mark. db

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