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# The State Of Austria

by David Bowden

For a small wine producing nation, Austria punches well above its weight. The Austrian Empire was once one of the most powerful in Europe and while its wine industry dates back many centuries, it has only just started to be noticed by most wine connoisseurs.



Above (from the top). The crops and vines of Burgenland 8091: Grüner Veltliner Höpfer

**W**ith total annual production of a little over 2.2 million hectolitres, Austria produces just 1.12 per cent of the world's total production. It lags well behind the three main wine producing nations of France, Italy and Spain but also behind wine minnows such as Russia, Romania, China, Moldova, Greece, Hungary and Brazil. But this boutique star performer has successfully focussed on quality to capture the attention and imagination of the world's leading sommeliers and connoisseurs.

Bringing 'new' indigenous varieties to the world is never easy but the Austrian Wine Marketing Board (AWMB) is leading the charge. With varieties such as Grüner Veltliner, Welschriesling, Weissburgunder, Neuburger, Zweigelt, Blaufränkisch, St. Laurent and Blauburgunder you can appreciate the challenges confronting the AWMB. However, under the dynamic leadership of Willi Klinger, the AWMB is sensibly leading with the much acclaimed Grüner Veltliner (a very old variety with Traminer heritage) in the knowledge that the other varieties will eventually receive their due recognition.

With 72 per cent of the local production being consumed locally, many may wonder why the Austrians are keenly promoting the export of the remaining 28 per cent. Like many other wine-producing nations, wines are a fantastic national ambassador and a great way to promote the country and the many aspects of wine tourism. The numbers of boats cruising along the picturesque Danube River around the UNESCO-listed Wachau wine-producing region will attest to this.

Undoubtedly the most innovative winemaking developments in central European are happening in Austria. Austria's wine industry has transformed itself over the past 15 years and now exhibits a vibrant and creative force: dedicated young winemakers, private estates bottling their own wines, and premium dry wine styles suitable for those seeking quality wines.

### Notable Styles

Over 50,000ha of vines are planted mostly in eastern and southeastern Austria. Approximately 70 per cent of the production is white varieties and 30 per cent reds and this includes more than 20 white and 13 red varieties. Red wines are slowly making their impact which is good news for those Asian consumers who have a preference for lighter reds.

Another important jewel of Austrian wines is their range of sweet dessert wines. These are mostly produced around the Neusiedlersee area; a large, shallow lake on the eastern border with Hungary. Eiswein, Beerenauslese and

in a lower harvest of between 2 to 2.2 million hectolitres. However, the quality in those areas that were not affected by the damage is exceptional. These wines harvested in early September will be characterized in the main by full ripeness, higher alcohol and lower acidity.

Many experts believe that Austrian wines are perfect for the various styles of Asian cuisines. As such, an increasing number of importers are adding Austrian wines to their portfolio. Höppler Wines are produced in Winden situated beside the large inland lake of Neusiedlersee in Burgenland just to the east of the Austrian capital Vienna.

luenheng.com) as well as elsewhere in Asia. Other Austrian labels are imported by Sip or Slurp (Shop B-0-7, Plaza Damas 3, 63 Jalan Seri Hartamas, Taman Seri Hartamas, T: +603 6211-4386). Michael Thurner operates Austria's Fine Brands (www.austriasfinebrands.com) from Singapore and represents several of the countries better producers (Huber, Jurtschitsch, Tement, Markowitsch, Johanneshof Rienisch, Juris, Weninger, T.F.X.T. and Tschida).

Austrian Labels such as Hillinger, Hartl, Netzi and Palser are imported into Malaysia by A & L Adventure & Leisure (www.a-and-l.com). **ha**



Trockenbeerenauslese are the sweet wines for which Austria is well known. Most of the Eisweins, for example, are sold at a fraction of the cost of the heavily marketed Canadian equivalents.

In Austria, a warm summer and a mild autumn combined with the moist air from the mists around the lakes and rivers offer ideal conditions for the development of Botrytis cinerea (noble rot) which is important for many wines to sweeten.

The production of Eiswein involves a lengthy and often risky procedure. After two or three frosty nights and a dawn temperature below minus 7°C, the grapes are sufficiently frozen to hand harvest and press into Eiswein.

### Vintage 2012

Frosts and hailstorms at the beginning of the growing season have resulted



Jöst and son Christof Höppler produce their wines from Grüner Veltliner, Pinot Blanc, Chardonnay, Riesling and Sauvignon Blanc, Blaufränkisch, Zweigelt, Pinot Noir and St. Laurent grape varieties.

They also produce a range of excellent dessert wines. Höppler wines are distributed in Malaysia by Luen Heng F & B (www.

*Above: The view of Burggarten from Kastner & Ohler Restaurant*

*Top row (from left to right): Pouring wines Via Vinum Austria; Lenz Moser Trockenbeerenauslese; Erwin Sabathi of Sabathi Wines Styria Austria*