

## 2021, a dream vintage for Austria

**“Crystal-clear wines from perfect grapes” sums up the 2021 vintage – a year that we will be hearing about for many years to come. A glorious autumn brought balanced, elegant white wines with a profound fruitiness and zesty structure, as well as exciting, powerful reds – and this was the case for all of Austria’s wine-growing regions.**

### **Later budding protected against late frosts**

After a winter that saw less precipitation than usual, spring kept us all waiting. April was cool and much too dry, while a gloomy, wet May was far from the traditionally expected warmer weather. However, it did at least bring with it the much-awaited precipitation, even if the amount varied considerably from one region to the other. This naturally delayed bud burst and flowering, which, however, was not without its benefits. Unlike the wine-growing countries to the south and west of the main Alpine ridge, Austria did not fall victim to late frosts.

June finally ushered in some sunshine and warmth. The vines eventually blossomed at the end of the month – during a hot spell – which inevitably resulted in coulure in some vineyards. The warmer weather also brought storms with it. On 24 June, the northern Weinviertel was battered by a huge storm cell accompanied by violent hail that caused serious damage to around 1,000 hectares of vineyards here – even destroying some of them completely. At the end of July, a hail storm also hit the Wachau wine-growing villages of Rührsdorf and Rossatz, certain vineyards in Dürnstein and Loiben, as well as some near Göttweig and in the Traisental. The main red wine-growing centres in Mittelburgenland also suffered severe damage due to hail. Some Rieds (single vineyards) on the Nussberg (Wien), in the Vulkanland region (Steiermark) and in Südsteiermark were also affected, albeit not so badly.

### **An Indian summer raised expectations**

Apart from the localised incidences of hail, July was the type of summer month that dreams are made of, but even this gave way to a dull, rainy and cool August. Thankfully, right on cue on 1 September, the weather took a sudden turn for the better. A bright, sunny phase took hold, lasting six whole weeks with only two days of rain. By the middle of September, the nights had already turned cool, which meant that there was a marked difference between daytime and night-time temperatures. This promoted the formation of outstanding aromas in the white wines and vitality in the reds. A period of föhn winds followed at the end of October, ensuring a final burst of ripening for the Riesling vineyards north of the Danube.

Oidium, Peronospora and unwanted *Botrytis cinerea* didn’t stand a chance against these perfect conditions, and in some regions, veteran winegrowers reported having never before seen such beautiful, completely healthy grapes at harvest. Reports from

the key wine-growing villages in Burgenland and Steiermark claimed that 2021 was the quickest main harvest of all time, completed in one go. Indeed, the best time to harvest could be predicted very easily and precisely.

With a harvest volume of around 2.4 million hectolitres, the 2021 vintage is in line with the long-term average. This is grounds to celebrate, because the rest of Europe enjoyed somewhat less success in 2021. Many German wine-growing regions suffered drastic drops in harvest volumes and the major wine-producing countries of Italy, France and Spain also had to cope with painful losses, largely caused by late frosts.

### **Niederösterreich & Wien: brilliance in white and red**

From Wachau to Carnuntum and from the Weinviertel to the Thermenregion, winemakers are extremely proud of their delightfully harmonious white wines, which owe their intensity to the long vegetation period. This resulted in a high sugar ripeness, which produced wines that are consistently rich in extracts and biting fresh, with an extraordinary range of aromas and a zesty acidic structure. The long vegetation period also proved particularly beneficial for **Grüner Veltliner**, the flagship variety of Niederösterreich (Lower Austria). As well as the obligatory peppery aromas, the 2021 vintage has also produced pronounced notes of stone fruit and a creamy, mellow mouthfeel. The **Rieslings** are very promising too and will probably tend towards lighter fruits – more peach than apricot. Equally impressive are the fully ripe, powerful **Sauvignon Blancs** and **Chardonnays**, not to mention the extremely aromatic **Muskateller**. We can also expect good things of the **Roter Veltliners** from the Wagram region, as well as of the specialities from the Thermenregion, such as **Rotgipfler** and **Zierfandler**.

Analyses have shown that the acidity is notably higher than in previous good vintages. However, the acid is almost entirely tartaric, with hardly any malic acid present. As a result, the acidity does not appear sharp or immature, but harmonises well with the overall character of the wines.

In the Thermenregion and Carnuntum, outstanding **red wines** have been produced from all grape varieties and at all levels of maturity. The late harvest and long vegetation period were particularly beneficial for the delicate Pinot Noir and St. Laurent grape varieties, as this time around there was no issue with premature sugar ripeness and no risk of rot. Just like the white Riedenwein (single-vineyard wines) and Reserve wines, they are expected to have a superb structure and good ageing potential.

In the sweet sector, winegrowers were able to make **Eiswein** again – the first time in several years. In the Weinviertel, the harvest took place just before and shortly after Christmas; in the Kamptal, Kremstal and Wagram regions, between 12 and 16 January 2022.

The wine harvest in Wien (Vienna) yielded similarly pleasing results. We can expect very strong Wiener **Gemischter Satz** wines from the Nussberg, Bisamberg and Maurerberg, and the Grüner Veltliner also looks to be exceptionally brilliant. In 2021, Rieslings from the favoured Döblinger and Maurer Rieds also earned their place among Austria's elite wines. What is also particularly striking is that even entry level wines are of a very high quality.

### **Optimum conditions in Burgenland**

After a fabulous autumn and the latest harvest for many years, Burgenland's winegrowers are likewise delighted by the excellent quality of their young wines. The **white wines** combine freshness and vitality with a profound, crystal-clear fruitiness, while a high level of maturity and a zesty acidity round them off nicely. However, the Pinot Blancs and Chardonnays from the Leithaberg are not the only wines that will bring great enjoyment.

The **red wines** also benefited from these optimum conditions, especially the two flagship varieties Zweigelt and Blaufränkisch. The long vegetation period and late harvest, not to mention the analytical data, promise a red wine of the same calibre as in 2019, with an elegant structure and trenchantly defined fruitiness holding the foreground despite the high degree of maturity. Some winegrowers even believe they have the most promising red wine of all time ageing in their barrels – wines that will compete with those from the exceptional 2011 and 2017 vintages, renowned for their density and sweet extracts. When it comes to the French grape varieties, Cabernet, in both its Sauvignon and Franc varieties, excited considerable attention this year.

After the long, dry autumn, a wonderful *Botrytis cinerea* formed in November, blessing winegrowers in the Seewinkel area and on the western shore of Lake Neusiedl around Rust with **high-quality dessert wines** that also show great promise.

### **Steiermark: small volumes, big wines**

As elsewhere, the budding and blossoming of the vines occurred relatively late in Steiermark (Styria). The much-awaited precipitation that finally fell in May was, however, not enough to make up for the dry winter and spring. This is also considered the main reason why this harvest was the smallest since 2016. Thankfully, the unexpected long period of good autumnal weather brought a happy ending with it and put big smiles onto the faces of wine producers here, too. The critical factor was not starting the harvest too soon, but taking advantage of the whole of that glorious September.

In **Vulkanland Steiermark** and in **Südsteiermark**, the main harvest was completed swiftly, and thanks to the perfect grapes, no further selection was necessary after the preliminary harvest. The combination of sugar gradation and acidity values is optimally balanced and the distinct fruitiness, elegance and zestiness of the young wines is

already impressive. We can also expect great things of the Pinot varieties, as well as of the fully ripe and multi-faceted Sauvignon Blancs. The same holds true for the Gelber Muskatellers, which on this occasion have a rose fragrance that makes them almost Traminer-like, promising a first-class vintage.

Holding off on the main harvest was likewise important in **Weststeiermark**. For the Schilcher Riedenwein (single-vineyard wines), harvesting primarily only started in November. This has resulted in pink elixirs full of juice and power, displaying a rare elegance. The Pinot varieties and the Sauvignon Blancs also grew into expressive wines in which the influence of the terroir is clearly discernible.

### **Bergland: on the way up**

From the wine enclaves of Leonding and Hörsching in **Oberösterreich** (Upper Austria) down to the southern Mühlviertel and the Innviertel, vineyards profited from the same glorious autumn days as enjoyed by neighbouring Niederösterreich. This has resulted in mature, fruit-led wines laden with spiciness and tension. In particular, grape varieties that have been promoted in recent times, such as Chardonnay and Sauvignon Blanc, seem to be very promising.

No other federal state has witnessed such a rapid growth in area under vine over the last decade as **Kärnten** (Carinthia), and the quality of the wines has improved at the same impressive rate. Carinthian winemakers were spoilt in 2021, which brought ideal weather for blossoming and a warm, dry autumn that resulted in healthy, ripe grapes. We can expect juicy, powerful wines with a typically delicate fruitiness from both the Lavanttal and the area around St. Veit, as well as from the sloping banks of the Wörthersee and Längsee lakes.

The growing season proved rather more difficult to the west of the main Alpine ridge in **Tirol** (Tyrol) and **Vorarlberg**. Budding came later than usual and a short hot spell in June was followed by two extremely rainy summer months. In order to counter the significant presence of fungal disease, it was essential to ensure a well aerated canopy; but even so, the yield was down by 30 to 50%. Luckily, September and October were also at their best around Lake Constance and in the Walgau region and ensured a concentrated structure and exceptional aromatic depth in the wines.

**FACTS****Weather conditions**

- A dry winter
- A late, cool spring meant delayed budding (no damage from late frosts)
- Early summer was hot and sunny (some coulure), serious incidences of hail
- From September, an ideal combination of warm, sunny days and cool nights
- Overall, a long vegetation period
- Harvesting took place in perfect conditions
- Estimated harvest volume: 2.4 million hl (5-year average: 2.4 million hl)

**Niederösterreich (Lower Austria)**

- Harmonious, concentrated wines, with a marked aromatic character and freshness
- Grüner Veltliner: typical peppery aromas, profound notes of stone fruit and a creamy, mellow mouthfeel
- Riesling: light fruitiness (peach, apricot)
- Red wines: benefited from the longer vegetation period, high potential for ageing
- Eiswein: harvesting possible before Christmas and early January 2022

**Wien (Vienna)**

- Exceptional quality of Gemischter Satz, Grüner Veltliner and Riesling
- Even entry-level wines are top quality

**Burgenland**

- White wines: fresh, vital, clear fruitiness, high level of maturity and vibrant acidity
- Red wines: elegant structure with well-defined fruitiness despite the high level of maturity
- Sweet wine:
  - *Botrytis cinerea* took hold in November, perfect fruit, potential for long storage
  - Eiswein harvest possible mid-January

**Steiermark (Styria)**

- The smallest harvest since 2016, but excellent grapes
- Vulkanland Steiermark & Südsteiermark:
  - Clear fruitiness, elegance
  - Sauvignon Blanc: fully ripe and multi-faceted
- Weststeiermark:
  - Schilcher: powerful, very elegant, juicy
  - Pinot varieties & Sauvignon Blanc: pronounced influence of the terroir, expressive

## Bergland

- Oberösterreich (Upper Austria):
  - Ripe, fruit-led wines with wonderful tension
- Kärnten (Carinthia):
  - Harmonious, juicy, with a typically delicate fruitiness
- Tirol & Vorarlberg:
  - The significant presence of fungal disease in the summer resulted in a loss of 30 to 50%
  - Concentrated structure and exceptionally intense aromas thanks to the glorious autumn

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