



Schloss Gobelsburg, in the Kamptal region, draws on a unique geological makeup to produce distinctive Grüner Veltliner and Riesling.

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HEARTLAND of QUALITY

**GRÜNER VELTLINER AND RIESLING POWER AHEAD WITH FRUITY AND PURE
VERSIONS FROM THE DANUBE RIVER VALLEY / BY KIM MARCUS**

Just northwest of one of Europe's most historic cities, Vienna, lie three neighboring wine regions that are producing some of the world's most versatile whites.

Wachau, Kremstal and Kamptal are picturesque realms home to dozens of family-owned wineries as well as larger ventures, both of which show an infusion of modernizing energy

while respecting the best of local traditions. The top wines are led by the spicy native Austrian grape variety Grüner Veltliner and dry, powerfully structured versions of Riesling.

The common thread tying these regions together is the Danube River. Steeply terraced vineyards rise from its banks in Wachau, while hills and valleys spread out from the Danube floodplain in

Kremstal and Kamptal, situated just 40 miles or so as the crow flies from Vienna. This varied terrain contains a fascinating geological mix that offers numerous *terroirs* for exploration.

One of the experts in these *terroirs* is Michael Moosbrugger of Schloss Gobelsburg, in Kamptal. Until 1995, Gobelsburg was home to Cistercian monks—the same order that helped build up the great vineyards of Burgundy. Moosbrugger and a group of partners have steered it since under a long-term lease from the monks, transforming it into one of the Kamptal's guiding lights.

For Moosbrugger, what makes this part of Austria special is its combination of unique geology: Some of the primary rock dates from more than 250 million years ago, while glacial deposits of wind-borne loess come from the last ice age, just 15,000 years ago.

"For Grüner Veltliner, you need a good water supply," says Moosbrugger. "It's completely different from Riesling, yet complementary. We have two archetypes here for soils. The terraced vineyards filled with primary rock are good for Riesling, while loess, with its better water retention and mineralization, is good for Grüner. And since we have a [drier] continental climate, with just [16 to 20 inches] of rain a year, we need to retain water in our soils, which is just the opposite of Germany, where they need to get water out.

"In general, the flatter terrain is best for Grüner Veltliners, and on the slopes, Riesling. This is why we have two grape varieties, because we have such a diverse topography."

Two wines made by Moosbrugger bring into focus the glories of Kamptal, and both hail from the slopes of Heiligenstein, a prominent mountain in the region that features numerous terraced vineyards. The Riesling Kamptal Heiligenstein Reserve 2013 (93 points on *Wine Spectator's* 100-point scale, \$66) offers a complex mix of dried mango, baked pineapple and ripe melon flavors, knit together by fresh acidity, while the Grüner Veltliner Kamptal Ried Lamm Reserve 2013 (93, \$66) is filled with plush, creamy flavors of red peach, dried apricot and white pear.

These are two of the highest scorers among the more than 270 Austrian wines I have blind-tasted in the past year in *Wine Spectator's* New York office. More than 45 percent are Grüner Veltliners, by far Austria's most widely planted grape. Another 26 percent are made from Riesling. While amounting to just a small fraction of overall production, Riesling rivals Grüner for quality. Illustrative of that fact is that while 38 percent of the 128 Grüns tasted scored an outstanding 90 points or



Wachau-based Weingut Knoll, overseen by Emmerich Knoll III and his father, Emmerich II, is one of many Austrian estates whose younger generation is bringing new perspective on the expression of Austria's key grape varieties.

higher, almost double that ratio, or 73 percent, of the 71 Rieslings rated outstanding. (A free alphabetical list of scores and prices for all wines tasted is available at www.winespectator.com/121515.)

The highest-scoring dry wine comes from the Wachau, the Knoll Grüner Veltliner Smaragd Wachau Loibner Vinothekfüllung 2012 (95, \$80), which offers rich flavors of baked apple, dried pineapple and roasted peach that are full of exotic spicy notes. Vinothekfüllung, which translates roughly as "cellar selection" and is made only in the best vintages, uses grapes specifically chosen in the vineyard and harvested later for extra ripeness and flavor.

Two wines at 94 points follow it: the effusively fruity Knoll Riesling Wachau Dürnsteiner Ried Schütt 2011 (\$75) and the creamy and rich-tasting Salomon-Undhof Riesling Kremstal Steiner Kögl Reserve 2013 (\$55).

For winemaker Emmerich Knoll III, the three vintages that dominate current releases—2011, 2012 and 2013—provide an interesting quality progression. Of the three, 2011 is the most opulent, while

the '12s are more balanced. The '13s, says Knoll, "are the opposite of '11, straight and elegant, with acid-framed wines. The '13 wines show their *terroir* and varietal character with enough power but not too much opulence."

According to Bert Salomon of Salomon-Undhof, the three vintages were all marked by warm growing seasons. Drought conditions affected 2011 and '12, reducing yields. The drought broke in the winter of 2012–2013, and while 2013 saw a very warm June and July, the replenished soils weathered the heat well. "As the moisture was in the soil and the heat happened during the early growing season, this was no problem at all," says Salomon. "For us I see the wines of 2013 as very approachable, with substance and delicate flavors."





Stefanie and Alwin Jurtschitsch took over the Jurtschitsch family winery in 2012 and have since made sweeping changes to the producer's style, moving from rich, botrytis-affected wines to more precise, clear versions that reflect varietal flavors.

Austria offers diversity and purity of flavor in whites and, to a lesser extent, reds. The whites, with their medium to full bodies, good structure and complexity of flavors, are fine matches for a wide variety of dishes, such as roast poultry, seafood and salads. They are also delicious to sip on their own. Given their technical expertise and deft hands in the cellar, and a largely beneficent climate, Austrian vintners can be counted on to deliver high quality year in and year out.

But vintners are not resting on their laurels. There's a generational change afoot at many of Austria's top wineries, as the post-war veterans and baby boomers give way to their millennial descendants. The younger generation is worldly and well-educated, and many are seeking to redefine the legacy that has been passed to them. Knoll is part of that trend, as are other leading producers where the younger generation has taken over, such as F.X. Pichler, Hirtzberger and dessert wine producer Kracher, among others.

Two of the most ambitious are Alwin and Stefanie Jurtschitsch in Kamptal. Alwin began working in the cellar in 2009, and the couple took control of the winery from three older Jurtschitsch brothers in 2012. Stefanie's family, the Hasselbachs, own Weingut Gunterloch, the famed estate in Germany's Rheinhessen region.

The couple is changing the winery's style to accentuate the clarity of fruit flavors, in contrast to the rich approach pursued by the older generation. "Many wines tasted like the New World" under the old regime, says Alwin. Today's bottlings from the winery are

sleeker and more precise. Alwin has accomplished this by avoiding botrytis-affected flavors in his grapes. Best known for producing sweet, dessert-style wines in France's Sauternes region—as well as Austria's Neusiedlersee district—botrytis, or noble rot, can also result in effusively spicy notes in dry wines by dehydrating the grapes, thereby concentrating sugar and flavors.

Gone from the cellar are stainless-steel tanks and small oak *barriques* previously used for white wines. Instead, Alwin relies on large oak casks that impart little or no flavor to the wines, while allowing some oxygenation. "We kicked out the big-bastard wines, and my parents said it was OK. It's your decision," Alwin says. "This style is becoming more and more rec-

ognized for being precise—we don't fool around with botrytis."

He and Stefanie have taken a focused, laser-beam approach to modernizing the house style. "This is now quite a cool time to be making wine," Alwin adds. "We like tradition, but you always have to ask, 'Is it still working? Is it still right for the time?'"

While the winery has been in the family for 700 years, Alwin notes that change has been constant in the past century. The use of stainless steel and *barriques* was pursued in the postwar era to escape the tradition of large oak casks—the very method Stefanie and Alwin are now returning to in order to achieve what they see as more authentic flavors in the wines.

The results are impressive in their 2012s and 2013s, including the Riesling Kamptal Zöbinger Heiligenstein Reserve 2013 (91, \$31), lusciously fruity and spicy, and the Grüner Veltliner Kamptal Loiserberg Reserve 2012 (89, \$30), with smoky notes to the white fruit and dark currant flavors. They are far removed from the fat, blowsy character often found in the previous generation's wines and are a notable step up in quality. Both bottlings also lie in the sweet spot for value.

Other producers delivering outstanding quality at solid prices include Birgit Eichinger, with the Riesling Kamptal Heiligenstein Reserve 2013 (92, \$35), offering powerful minerality and luscious white fruit flavors; Allram, whose Grüner Veltliner Kamptal Hasel Alte Reben 2012 (92, \$37) shows spicy white fruit flavors, with a finish of cream, lanolin and sage; and Rainer Wess, which made

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the Riesling Qualitätswein Trocken Kremstal Pfaffenberg Reserve 2013 (91, \$36), with rich flavors of baked apple, peach and melon.

At even lower prices, look for Martin & Anna Arndorfer's Grüner Veltliner Qualitätswein Trocken Kamptal Strasser Weinberge Reserve 2013 (91, \$18), Malat's Grüner Veltliner Qualitätswein Trocken Kremstal Göttweiger Berg 2012 (91, \$20), Nigl's Grüner Veltliner Qualitätswein Trocken Kremstal Freiheit 2013 (89, \$21), Willi Bründlmayer's Riesling Qualitätswein Trocken Kamptal Kamptaler Terrassen 2012 (92, \$25), and Hiedler's Grüner Veltliner Qualitätswein Trocken Kamptal Thal 2013 (91, \$28).

In the Wachau, one of Austria's best winemakers, Toni Bodenstein of Weingut Prager, is also a passionate voice for change. Prager's pride and joy is the Wachstum Bodenstein, the winery's highest vineyard. It rests at 1,500 feet of altitude on terraces that provide a panorama of the well-tended Wachau.

First planted in 1998, the vineyard contains both Grüner and Riesling. For Riesling, Bodenstein draws on 25 cuttings drawn from three sources: two from Alsace, four from the Wachau and the rest from Germany. These are not clones—replicas of successful mother vines bred for specific attributes. Instead, these vines have been propagated directly in the vineyard, and Bodenstein views them as a genetic reservoir of quality and diversity in Austria.

"We have only one rootstock and one clone, and this is dangerous for the next generation," Bodenstein says. "We have no science of rootstocks, so I fight for different selections." His warning of future genetic perils is based on what he sees as industry norms in the country that value productivity and consistency in vine sources over diversity.

Besides dry whites, Austria excels with dessert-style sweet wines from the shores of the shallow Neusiedlersee lake in Burgenland, southeast of Vienna. The leading producer is Kracher, which makes a wide range of botrytis-affected wines that rank among the world's top sweet whites. The best of the current crop is the classic-rated Scheurebe Trockenbeerenauslese Burgenland Zwischen den Seen No. 3 2012 (95, \$111/375ml), which is lush and rich-tasting, with concentrated flavors of pear tart, ripe apple and buttercream.

Austria also makes red wines, but their production is small compared with that of the country's whites; they represent less than 20



Kamptal winemaker Birgit Eichinger strikes a sweet spot of value and quality with an outstanding Riesling from the Heiligenstein mountain.

percent of the wines tasted in this report. The best come from regions south of Vienna, which benefit from the warm weather that sweeps in from the Pannonian Plain, extending from neighboring Hungary. Pinot Noir from Burgenland can excel, such as with the elegant and refined Höppler Burgenland 2012 (90, \$22). The native Austrian red grape Blaufränkisch delivers solid values as well, such as the Markowitsch Carnuntum 2012 (89, \$17), minerally and robust, with snappy flavors of berry and plum.

Austria faces some challenges ahead. The 2014 vintage started warm and dry, but untimely rains fell during harvest in September and October. Botrytis spread in many vineyards, and winegrowers had to be extremely choosy to harvest quality grapes. Rot reduced yields by up to one-third of normal averages at some estates in the Danube valley.

Despite the hurdles, the best of Austria's vintners seem prepared to deliver many juicy, fruity whites even from this difficult year, aided by the diversity of growing sites they can tap and their own time-honored and well-honed skills.

Managing editor Kim Marcus is Wine Spectator's lead taster on the wines of Austria.

Rating White Wine Vintages in Austria

2013	92	Vintners needed to work hard to overcome a wet harvest. Small crop produced open-textured, powerful and rich-tasting whites from the best vineyard sites	<i>Drink or hold</i>
2012	90	Hard frost in the spring and drought cut yields. Creamy, full-bodied Grüns; well-structured Rieslings	<i>Drink or hold</i>
2011	90	An easy-to-drink vintage with open-knit Grüner Veltliners; Kremstal performs well	<i>Drink or hold</i>
2010	89	A cool, difficult growing season delivered taut Rieslings and plush Grüner Veltliners; extremely low yields	<i>Drink or hold</i>
2009	92	Fresh and pure-tasting Rieslings and Grüner Veltliners that are primed to age well	<i>Drink or hold</i>
2008	94	Cool and wet summer, but ideal weather at harvest. Monumental Rieslings from the Wachau; lean, powerful Grüner Veltliners	<i>Drink or hold</i>

A score range indicates preliminary analysis based on a limited sampling; many wines of the vintage not yet reviewed.

Vintage ratings: 95–100, classic; 90–94, outstanding; 85–89, very good; 80–84, good; 75–79, mediocre; 50–74, not recommended. **Drinkability:** "NYR" means most of the wines of the vintage are not yet released; "drink" means most of the wines of the vintage are ready to drink; "hold" means most of the ageworthy wines have yet to fully mature.

Kim Marcus' Recommended Wines From Austria

More than 270 wines were reviewed for this report. A free alphabetical list is available at www.winespectator.com/121515. WineSpectator.com members can access complete reviews for all wines tasted using the online Wine Ratings search.

TOP WINES

WINE	SCORE	PRICE
KNOLL Grüner Veltliner Smaragd Wachau Loibner Vintothekfüllung 2012 Offers a rich mix of baked apple, dried pineapple and peach flavors.	95	\$80
KRACHER Scheurebe Trockenbeerenauslese Burgenland Zwischen den Seen No. 3 2012 Lush and rich, this features notes of pear tart, apple and buttercream.	95	\$111 375ml
KRACHER Trockenbeerenauslese Burgenland Grande Cuvée Nouvelle Vague No. 6 2012 Lush, buttery and creamy, with flavors of pear, mango and pineapple.	94	\$112 375ml
SALOMON-UNDHOF Riesling Qualitätswein Trocken Kremstal Steiner Kögl Reserve 2013 Creamy, layered with green apple, peach and lemon-lime flavors.	94	\$55
SCHLOSS GOBELSBURG Grüner Veltliner Qualitätswein Trocken Kamptal Ried Lamm Reserve 2013 Rich, filled with plush flavors of peach, dried apricot and white pear.	93	\$66
SCHLOSS GOBELSBURG Riesling Qualitätswein Trocken Kamptal Heiligenstein Reserve 2013 Spicy, with a mix of dried mango, pineapple and melon flavors.	93	\$66
FRANZ HIRTZBERGER Grüner Veltliner Smaragd Trocken Wachau Kirchweg 2013 Plush, this offers dried apricot, peach and apple compote flavors.	93	\$45
KNOLL Grüner Veltliner Smaragd Wachau Loibner Ried Loibenberg 2012 Shows unctuous flavors of peach cobbler, baked apple and dried pear.	93	\$56
KNOLL Riesling Smaragd Wachau Dürnsteiner Ried Schütt 2012 Lush and full of juicy pear tart, ripe apple and blood orange flavors.	93	\$75
F.X. PICHLER Grüner Veltliner Smaragd Trocken Wachau Dürnsteiner Liebenberg 2013 Offers a lusciously spiced aroma, with ripe, rich, well-crafted flavors.	93	\$68
PRAGER Riesling Smaragd Trocken Wachau Klaus 2014 Plush and creamy, with flavors of peach, pear tart and custard.	93	\$85
SALOMON-UNDHOF Riesling Qualitätswein Trocken Kremstal Pfaffenberg Reserve 2013 Sleek and smoky, with flavors of apple, roast meat and ripe melon.	93	\$55
DOMÄNE WACHAU Riesling Smaragd Trocken Wachau Achleiten 2009 Minerally and rich, with flavors of red berry, currant and white plum.	93	\$50
ALLRAM Grüner Veltliner Qualitätswein Trocken Kamptal Hasel Alte Reben 2012 Offers a spicy aroma, with notes of apple tart, melon and apricot.	92	\$37
JUDITH BECK Blaufränkisch Qualitätswein Trocken Burgenland Altenberg 2011 Filled with olive and chocolate notes, this delivers plenty of character.	92	\$60
BRÜNDLMAYER Riesling Qualitätswein Trocken Kamptal Kamptaler Terrassen 2012 Offers pure flavors of currant, dried white raspberry and gooseberry.	92	\$25
JURTSCHITSCH Riesling Qualitätswein Trocken Kamptal Zöbinger Heiligenstein Reserve 2011 Shows a smoky cast to the ripe apple, wild cherry and currant accents.	92	\$34

TOP VALUES

WINE	SCORE	PRICE
MALAT Grüner Veltliner Qualitätswein Trocken Kremstal Göttweiger Berg 2012 Shows verve to the mineral-infused pineapple and ripe melon flavors.	91	\$20
ALLRAM Grüner Veltliner Qualitätswein Trocken Kamptal Strassertaler 2013 Focused and fresh, with lemon meringue and Key lime pie flavors.	90	\$25
BIRGIT EICHINGER Riesling Qualitätswein Trocken Kamptal Vom Berg 2013 Notes of peach cobbler and apricot are backed by crunchy acidity.	90	\$22
FORSTREITER Grüner Veltliner Qualitätswein Trocken Kremstal Kremser Kögl 2013 This shows good structure, with flavors of pear, apple tart and melon.	90	\$13
HÖPLER Pinot Noir Qualitätswein Trocken Burgenland 2012 Elegant, with forest floor notes to the cherry and raspberry flavors.	90	\$22
ANITA & HANS NITTAUS Blaufränkisch Qualitätswein Trocken Burgenland Kalk & Schiefer 2012 Refined, with crisp flavors of raspberry, red plum and dark currant.	90	\$20
SCHLOSS GOBELSBURG Grüner Veltliner Qualitätswein Trocken Kamptal 2013 Emerald-hued, with lush flavors of apple tart, lemon and dark currant.	89	\$16
STADT KREMS Grüner Veltliner Qualitätswein Trocken Kremstal 2014 This offers a vibrant core of red peach and blood orange flavors.	89	\$16
LOIMER Riesling Qualitätswein Trocken Kamptal Langenlois 2014 Concentrated and crisp, with green apple and lemon-lime flavors.	89	\$22
MARKOWITSCH Blaufränkisch Qualitätswein Trocken Carnuntum 2012 A robust red, with snappy red berry and crushed red plum flavors.	89	\$17
NIGL Grüner Veltliner Qualitätswein Trocken Kremstal Freiheit 2013 Rich, with fresh flavors of red peach, ripe pear and baked apple.	89	\$21
BIOHOF PRATSCH Grüner Veltliner Qualitätswein Trocken Niederösterreich 2014 Offers minerally flavors of Fuji apple, gooseberry and savory herb.	88	\$14 1L
HÖPLER Grüner Veltliner Qualitätswein Trocken Burgenland 2014 Medium-bodied, with structured flavors of ripe pineapple and melon.	88	\$15
LOIMER Grüner Veltliner Qualitätswein Trocken Kamptal Lois 2014 This has concentrated and snappy citrus and green apple flavors.	88	\$16
MALAT Grüner Veltliner Qualitätswein Trocken Kremstal Crazy Creatures 2013 Minerally, with good cut to the green apple and lemon-lime flavors.	88	\$16
HERMANN MOSER Grüner Veltliner Qualitätswein Kremstal Karmeliterberg 2013 Well-spiced and minerally, with notes of dried mango and pineapple.	88	\$16
ANITA & HANS NITTAUS Blauer Zweigelt Qualitätswein Trocken Burgenland 2012 This snappy red delivers fresh raspberry and licorice flavors.	88	\$18