

300 views | Jun 19, 2019, 02:04pm

Great Grape Discoveries Along The Austrian Border



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Dining & Drinking

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- Austrian sekt—or sparkling wine—is divine.
- Blaufränkisch, Zweigelt and St Laurent are probably Austria's most famous trio of red grapes.



Austria is home to a slew of grape varieties. Credit: Gerhard Elze. AUSTRIAN WINE MARKETING BOARD

Austria has long made stunning wines. They range from bone-dry whites to oaky reds and intensely caramelized dessert wines. They are made from a mix of indigenous grapes as well as internationally known ones: with Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Cabernet Franc popping up in the mix now and then.

Sadly most of them are consumed on their home turf and rarely make it to the States, so I will highlight some of the examples that are available here.

While Grüner Veltliner may be the country's best-known white grape—thanks to its popularity in the U.S. and how well it pairs with many Asian foods—many other varietals from Chardonnay to the red [St. Laurent](#) can be found in the Eastern wine regions of Austria along its border with the Czech Republic and Hungary. Very few wines from Austria costs less than \$15 a bottle, but they do provide great value when you get in the \$20 to \$30 range for both reds and whites.

Bubbles and More



Photocredit: Getty GETTY

Austrian sekt—or sparkling wine—is divine. 🐦 These classic, and generally dry, sparklers can be made out of anything from Pinot Noir to Muscat grapes and many are blends. So many are a lovely pink color and most of them gravitate around a refreshing 12 percent alcohol by volume so you won't get buzzed on half a glass. My favorites were made of the classic grapes—used in Champagne—such as Pinot Noir and Chardonnay. A similar wine to the ones we tasted that is available stateside, for \$25, is the [Fred Loimer](#) Brut Rosé from [Niederösterreich](#) (or lower) Austria.

These are fantastically dry wines with a blend of appealing fruit and yeasty flavors. It is indeed a pity that the Austrians drink the bulk of them within their borders. Another wine that was delicious—the NV [Jurtschitsch Brut Sekt Rosé Vom Zweigelt](#)—made from the red Zweigelt grape, is fortunately available in New York State for \$30 a bottle.

Austria also produces great Pinot Blancs, which are called [Weissburgunders](#). One outstanding one that can be found here is the 2015 Heinrich Weissburgunder Leithaberg, Austria for \$25. It has lovely green and herbal notes and would pair well with tough-to-stand-up-to vegetables like asparagus and artichokes.

The country is also known for its great dessert wines. [Kracher's](#) Burgenland Beerenauslese is often considered the benchmark for these wines and is priced around \$30 for a half bottle. These dessert wines can be made of an assortment of grapes, including [Traminer](#), Pinot Blanc and Muscat Ottonel. Their honeyed and complex flavors linger on the palate thanks to great ribbons of acidity.

Red Discoveries

Blaufränkisch, Zweigelt and St Laurent are probably Austria's most famous trio of red grapes. 🐦 Lower Austria, on the Czech and Slovak border, and Burgenland to the south are known for producing these wines. Saint Laurent is aromatic and fruity and without a doubt age worthy. It is also grown across the boarder in the Czech Republic and is gaining in popularity in Germany. It is thought to be related to Pinot Noir and can have some of the same dark cherry flavors.



Many vineyards are planted on slopes. Credit: Gerhard Elze. AUSTRIAN WINE MARKETING BOARD

The Zweigelt grape was created almost a century ago and is used in blends as well as the spectrum of light- to heavy-bodied and oaked wines. It is a cross between Blaufränkisch and St. Laurent, that gained recognition after the Second World War. It is the most commonly planted grape in Austria and can be found in almost every single wine growing region. It is named after a professor Fritz [Zweigelt](#), who was a notable Nazi, so the wine industry is currently holding a hot debate on whether to change its name.



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The Blaufränkisch grape used to be known as Lemberger or Limberger, which was derived from the town of Limberg in Lower Austria. In Hungary the grape is known as Kékfrankos. The [2016 Moric Blaufränkisch](#) is available in New York and California for \$26.99. It is bold, intense and juicy and pairs well with [schnitzel](#) and other pork dishes.

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I have been writing, educating and consulting about wine, cocktails and food for more than two decades. I also do innovative wine events for corporate team building and ... [Read More](#)