

## Austria

7 Aug 2008 by Jancis Robinson

**In a nutshell:** Reliably high winemaking quality. Great dry Rieslings, Gruner Veltliners, reliably botrytized sweet wines and improving reds.

**Main grapes:** Grüner Veltliner, Welschriesling, Riesling, Müller-Thurgau (white); Zweigelt, Blaufränkisch, St. Laurent (red).

Austrian wine is some of the best made in the world – a fact that is increasingly recognised worldwide as wine lovers, and especially sommeliers, come to value its dry, full bodied, characterful whites that pair so well with many foods. They can also develop well in bottle. Austria probably has the world's strictest wine regulations, and its wine producers are making some of the world's purest, highest-quality white wines, which range from dry and piercing to sweet and racy. Reds are coming on apace. DAC is a relatively new initiative designed to emulate France's Appellation Contrôlée system by emphasizing geographical provenance over a particular, geographically determined style of a specified vine variety. Weinviertel Gruner Veltliner was the first combination to be regulated and **Weinviertel** DAC may now be applied only to light, crackling GV. Many others have followed.

Wachau

**In a nutshell:** Steep terraces, fine, pure white wines.

**Main grapes:** Grüner Veltliner, Riesling (white).

The Wachau is a heartbreakingly beautiful stretch of crags above the Danube upstream of Vienna and is probably the Riesling grape's most consistent showcase (The Mosel and Rheingau in Germany have similar potential, but Austria's wines tend to be fuller, denser and spicier.) On terraced vineyards, Riesling and Austria's own signature grape variety, the crackling white Grüner Veltliner, provide long-ripened grapes which small, family concerns (such as Alzinger, Hirtzberger, Jamek, Knoll, Nikolaihof, F X Pichler and Prager) transform by punctilious winemaking into powerful yet fragrant, fine, dry whites that are all too rarely seen outside Austria. Its most concentrated wines are called Smaragd. Federspiel is one category less ripe, while Steinfeder is the lightest category of wines for drinking as fresh as possible. There is also some experimentation with producing sweet Beerenauslese and Trockenbeerenauslese wines (see [Understanding Austrian labels](#)), but dry whites are the Wachau's strength Rieslings and 'Gruners' are the Wachau's strength. The co-op here, whose wines are now sold under the Domane Wachau label, is one of the best wine co-ops in the world.

Kremstal and Kamptal

**In a nutshell:** Similar to the Wachau but with a wider range of styles and a very strong sense of history.

**Main grapes:** Grüner Veltliner, Riesling (white).

**Kremstal**, centred on the ancient town of Krems, and **Kamptal**, whose chief wine town is Langenlois, are to the Wachau's immediate east and produce wines of almost as much finesse which tend to cost rather less. The best producer is Bründlmayer; Salomon and Nigl are two more among many high achievers. Kamptal is a little further from the influence of the Danube and can produce wines with particularly bright fruit from the likes of Schloss Gobelsburg, Jurschitsch, Loimer and Steininger. Kamptal DAC is exclusively applied to Riesling and Gruner Veltliner.

### Donauland/Wagram

**In a nutshell:** Aromatic, spicy whites.

**Main grape:** Grüner Veltliner.

To the immediate west of Vienna and divided by the Danube, Donauland is home to the most famous of Austria's many wine abbeys, including the research institute and winery Klosterneuburg. Thermenregion is the new, post-1985 name for the district responsible for the plump, fiery whites of Gumpoldskirchen. The Weinviertel, or 'wine quarter', is the extensive, fertile, Danube plain stretching north from Vienna to the Czech border, which produces most of Austria's everyday wine, its sparkling Sekt and some interesting red wine too. Müller-Thurgau and Welschriesling are the common grapes here. Eiswein is possible. Most of the wine produced here is consumed within Austria itself.

### **Carnuntum**

**In a nutshell**: Fruity reds.

**Main grapes**: Zweigelt, Blaufränkisch.

This region extends from east of Vienna to the border with Slovakia and includes the rolling hills south of the Danube, notably the Leithagebirge. Warming influences from the east and from the nearby Neusiedlersee provide sufficient warmth to ripen red grapes fully and local varieties are sometimes blended with Cabernet and Merlot. Gerhard Markowitsch stands out in Carnuntum.

### **Thermenregion**

**In a nutshell**: Rare white varieties; growing interest in reds.

**Main grapes**: Zierfandler and Rotgipfler (white); Blauer Portugieser (red).

South of Vienna, Thermenregion is named after its hot springs in the town of Baden. It is the district responsible for the plump, fiery whites of Gumpoldskirchen and has turned more recently towards Pinot Noir and St-Laurent, particularly in the vineyards south of Baden.

### **Weinviertel**

**In a nutshell**: Fresh, fruity whites and sparkling wine aplenty.

**Main grapes**: Grüner Veltliner, Müller-Thurgau, Welschriesling (white); Zweigelt (red).

The Weinviertel or 'wine quarter' is the extensive, fertile, Danube plain stretching north from Vienna to the Czech border which produces most of Austria's everyday wine, its sparkling Sekt and some interesting red wine too. The Weinviertel was the first region to be awarded DAC status for its Grüner Veltliner. (DAC or Districtus Austriae Controllatus, similar to France's *appellation contrôlée* system, generally links a region to a particular grape variety and style.) The Weinviertel is home to half of all the Grüner Veltliner vines planted in Austria. Müller-Thurgau and Welschriesling are also common here and the red Zweigelt is successful in the hands of producers such as Pfaffl. Other notable producers include Graf Hardegg, Setzer and Zull.

### **Vienna**

**In a nutshell**: Suburban vineyards and the famous *Heurigen*.

**Main grapes**: Riesling, Chardonnay, Pinot Blanc, Neuburger (white).

Austria has the only capital city in the world in which wine-growing, as well as wine drinking, is seriously important. Vienna has some fine vineyards in its suburbs, as well as the unique *Heurige* tradition whereby the city's vintners are allowed to sell their wine, straight from the fermentation vat, in their own taverns, most famously in the suburb of Grinzing. Edlmoser, Franz Mayer (whose son-in-law is an ebullient Australian) and Wieninger are three of Vienna's best producers. Gemischter Satz, a wine made from several varieties that are planted in the same vineyard and harvested together, is another local speciality.

### **Burgenland**

**In a nutshell**: Serious reds and sweet whites.

**Main grapes**: Blaufränkisch, Zweigelt (reds); a wide range of whites.

This flat, quintessentially Middle European region is almost as Hungarian in spirit and landscape as it is Austrian, and produces almost all of Austria's great sweet white wines and most of the best red.

**Neusiedlersee** is the most important sweet white wine district, named after the large, shallow lake that dominates it (although so flat is the landscape that visitors have to climb towers to see the lake beyond the reeds). This large body of

water is partly responsible for reliable, annual [noble rot](#) infections that shrivel the grapes, concentrating the sweetness,

and making wines rich enough to qualify as Beerenauslesen and Trockenbeerenauslesen (see below), rivals to great

Sauternes. The fact that many of the best vineyards are surrounded by land designated as a bird sanctuary makes life

particularly difficult for growers such as Angerhof-Tschida, Kracher, Nittnaus, Velich, Willi Opitz, Stiegelmar and

Umatham, who grow an unusually wide variety of grapes including Weissburgunder (Pinot Blanc), Traminer, Scheurebe,

Chardonnay and Welschriesling, which performs particularly well here. Producers such as Gernot Heinrich have shown

that Neusiedlersee can produce rich, spicy reds as well as sweet whites.

**Neusiedlersee-Hügelland** is on the western shore of the lake and produces similar wines to Neusiedlersee. The historic local speciality is Ausbruch wines, made in the postcard-pretty village of Rust. Feiler-Artinger, Kollwentz, Ernst Triebaumer and Heidi Schröck are particularly widely admired.

**Mittelburgenland** is celebrated as Austria's red wine district, where hot summers help to ripen such grapes as the lively central European Blaufränkisch especially, plus Pinot Noir, Cabernet Sauvignon and Austrian specialities Zweigelt and the Pinot-like St Laurent. Producers such as Gesellmann and the late Hans Iglar have shown that Austrian winemakers are capable of producing ambitious, deep-coloured, well-structured red wines too, though some have been tempted to use too much new oak. In 2005 Mittelburgenland DAC (see below) was created for the typical Blaufränkisch wines of this region.

**Südburgenland** is best known for refreshing red Blaufränkisch with the iron-rich soils of Eisenberg producing one of Südburgenland's relatively few wine specialities. Good producers include Krutzler and Uwe Schiefer.

**Steiermark**

**In a nutshell**: Arrow-like whites and eye-watering pinks.

**Main grapes**: Sauvignon Blanc, Chardonnay (white).

Steiermark, or Styria in English, is the mountainous south east of the country, producing relatively little but often extremely exciting varieties - notably aromatic Sauvignon Blanc and some variable Chardonnay sometimes labelled Morillon. The wines are less characteristically Austrian and more closely related to those piercing grape essences made in neighbouring [Slovenia](#), or even [Friuli](#) in north-east Italy. It is officially divided into south, south east and west (Süd-, Südost-, and Weststeiermark respectively). The most important of these in terms of quantity is **Südsteiermark** (southern Styria) where on relatively high-altitude vineyards round Liebnitz, producers such as Alois Gross, Reinhold Polz, Sattlerhof and, particularly, Tement make pure, mainly white varieties. **Weststeiermark**'s speciality is the high-acid pink Schilcher, made from the local Blauer Wildbacher grape, and Traminer does especially well in **Südoststeiermark**.

See also [Understanding Austrian labels](#).

See [Wines from Austria](#) for more information on this region.