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Austrian Wine

Diverse Terroir, Exceptional Quality

The Road to Quality • Austria's Export Market • The New Generation • Top Producers + Much More

Introduction



On our recent trip to Austria, we were impressed with the progress made by wineries throughout the country in producing wines of high quality and distinctive character from its unique and diverse terroir. We visited wineries and winemakers from the Wachau in the west to Neusiedlersee in the east and attended Austria's impressive biennial wine trade fair VieVinum in Vienna and found exciting wines and talented winemakers making wines equal to the best in the world. To demonstrate just how far Austria has come in developing a first class wine industry, we have compiled an extensive list of top producers, found immediately after this introduction, and extensive wine reviews and ratings of over 500 wines with profiles of the wineries and winemakers.

In our previous report, *The Wines of Austria*, written eight years ago, we alerted our readers to the impressive advances in Austrian winemaking. Since then, the industry has made further important strides that are discussed throughout this report. The changes in Austrian winemaking over the past decade are impressive. Not only has a new generation of winemakers arrived on the scene, but notable progress has been made in identifying and certifying Austria's best wine terroir. Of particular note is the new visibility of Austria's red wine producers and their Zweigelt and Blaufränkisch wines. This report gives attention to Austria's red wines in addition to its already well known white varieties, especially Grüner Veltliner and Riesling.

In the initial section of this report we provide readers a comprehensive review of Austria's varied terroir and grape varieties. Notwithstanding its small size, Austria has several different growing regions, each with its own soils, climate, indigenous grape varieties, wine history and culture. In the following section,

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we examine Austria's "road to quality" from its earliest days when winemaking was centered in monasteries to modern times. Noteworthy in this discussion is the emergence of the regional DAC classification system, which identifies wines of particular grapes and wine styles typical of each wine region. We also introduce the "new generation" of Austrian producers, young people who have entered the industry to carry on the work of earlier pioneers and winemaking families. They are a distinguished group that shows great promise for Austria's wine future.

The main section of this report is on the regions, vineyards, and wines. We focus on each of Austria's regions and analyze the changes and improvements that have taken place over the last decade. Improvements in viticulture and winemaking have been more evolutionary than revo-

lutionary over the last decade. Organic farming has become the norm among the best growers, and biodynamic farming is becoming more common, which is only fitting since an Austrian, Rudolf Steiner, established its precepts in the 1920s. Most producers are also following natural, non-interventionist methods in their winemaking, including using ambient yeasts, fermenting without temperature control, and dialing down the use of oak aging. We pay special attention to these practices in our winery profiles and tasting notes at the end of this report.

The single largest change in recent years is the focus on terroir. Seven of Austria's appellations (DACs) were created over the past decade. At the same time, there has been an important effort led by winemakers of the Danube to identify and document the country's most important vineyards, some of

which have been growing grapes for a thousand years since the arrival of the monasteries in the middle ages. Consistent with these trends, this report gives special attention to Austria's wine regions, the newly created appellations, and the ongoing process to certify the country's special vineyards.

In the concluding sections, we focus on Austrian food and wine and on the Austrian wine export market. As we discovered in our travels, Austrian wines are magnificent with food. They pair superbly with a wide variety of dishes from hors d'oeuvres to entrees, cheese, pastries, and sweet desserts. We discuss the styles found in Austria's principal grape varieties and provide a wine-food pairing table. Wrapping up the report, we examine Austria's export market for its wines, including the slow, steady growth in exports to the US.

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