

WINE OVERVIEW



AUSTRIA

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Closely review the syllabus for this wine level to determine just what items require your attention in each of the region/country overview documents.

Austria is, by world standards, a tiny wine producing nation, with only some 1% of world output. Today Austria produces world-class dry white wines that are widely praised by the wine press the world over. There are also serious reds being made by talented growers who take their lead from Burgundy and Bordeaux, and some of the best sweet wines on earth.

AUSTRIAN WINE REGIONS

WACHAU

The Wachau is the region along the banks of the Danube at the Eastern end of the larger region known as Niederosterriech (Lower Austria). It stretches along the Danube for almost 30km. Undoubtedly one of the most treasured of Austria's winegrowing areas, the Wachau produces some of the best white wines in Austria.

The Wachau is internationally known for its dry white wines made from the Gruner Veltliner and Riesling grapes. The region accounts for less than 3% of Austria's total wine production, but leads the way in quality.

The Wachau region has its own quality classification – "Vinea Wachau Nobilis Districtus", which is separate from the rest of Austria's classification system. The three classes are:

Steinfeder – Named for a local grass grown in the vineyards. Mostly used for local quaffing wines. Alcohol must not exceed 11.5%.

Federspiel – Named for a falconry device. Roughly equivalent to kabinett, the wines range from 11.5% to 12.5% alcohol.

Smaragd – Named for an emerald colored lizard that lives in the vineyards. Some of the best dry whites in Austria, Minimum 12.5% alcohol with a maximum of 9g/liter residual sugar.

KREMSTAL

Kremstal lies along the banks of the Danube, bordering and to the east of the Wachau, and centered around the town of Krems. The 2,170 hectares of vines in the Kremstal produce wines dominated by Gruner Veltliner and Riesling, with characteristics very similar to those of the Wachau. In addition to the whites, Kremstal also produces some very good reds, primarily made from the Zweigelt grape.

KAMPTAL

Kamptal, which takes its name from the Kamp River, surrounds the city of Langenlois. As with the Wachau and Kremstal, the primary grape varieties are Gruner Veltliner and Riesling, grown on 3,800 hectares of primary rock, loess, and clay soils. The steep sandstone slopes have just a thin layer of soil, along with very high sun exposure, making it an excellent location for Riesling.

NEUSIEDLERSEE

NEED CONTENT

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WEINVIERTAL

The Weinviertel is located in the Northeastern part of Austria, near the border with the Czech & Slovak Republics. Weinviertel is the largest winegrowing region in Austria, with more than 15,000 hectares of vineyards. The predominant grape varieties are Grüner Veltliner and Welschriesling, although other white varieties such as Riesling, Weissburgunder and Chardonnay are also grown. Reds are made from Zweigelt and Blauer Portugieser.

NEUSIEDLERSEE

Technically, the sub-zone known as Neusiedlersee extends around the Eastern side of the lake of the same name. Nuesiedlersee - Hugelland is the region around the Western side of the lake. The area around the Neusiedlersee, a shallow steppe lake straddling the Hungarian border, is one of the most amazing places on earth for the production of sweet botryt is affected wines. Only here, around the lake on the flat, sandy shores, and in Hungary's Tokajhegyalja does the Botrytis cinerea, or noble rot, attack grapes so reliably every year. Other great sweet wine regions in Germany and France also make superb sweet wines, but not as dependably every year. A variety of other top-quality red and white wines are also found here, from both Austrian and international varieties.

MITTELBURGENLAND

Located in the far east of Austria, alongside the Hungarian border to the south of the Neusiedlersee, is the district of Mittelburgenland. This is a region of forested hills, with deep clay soils. Red wines are the focus here, particularly made from Blaufränkisch. The area produces so much of the varietal that it has earned the nickname "Blaufrankischland". Other reds are also grown here, in smaller quantities: Zweigelt, Cabernet Sauvignon, and Merlot. Those varietals are often blended with Blaufrankisch.

SUDBURGENLAND

Sudburgenland is directly south of Mittelburgenland. Blaufrankisch and Zweigelt are the predominant grapes grown in the iron-rich soils. Sudburgenland is also known for the regional speciality "uhudler" - a simple wine made from a near extinct grape variety vitis labrusca.

SUDSTEIERMARK

Sudsteiermark is a hilly region in southeast Austria, bordering Slovenia. A wide array of wines are made from both Austrian and international varieties. Classic Styrian wines include fresh, fruity Welschriesling, aromatic Gelber Muskateller, racy Weissburgunder, and fragrant Sauvignon Blanc.

WEIN (VIENNA)

Vienna is the only major capital city in the world with significant wine production nearby. The vines still extend into parts of the city itself, as they have done for hundreds of years. Today, in and around Vienna are some 680 hectares of vines, planted mainly on slate, gravel, loam and loess soils. Main varieties are Gruner Veltliner, Pinot Blanc, Chardonnay, Riesling, Zweigelt, and Cabernet Sauvignon.

NATIONAL CLASSIFICATION

Austria's wine classification system is based on the German classification system. Instead of using the Ochsle scale, they use Klosterneuberger Mostwaag, or KMW. Like the German system, it is based on sugar content of the grapes at harvest.

COMMON WHITE GRAPE VARIETIES

GRUNER VELTLINER

Gruner Veltliner is an indigenous grape that accounts for over 35% of the vines planted in Austria. It makes many different styles of wines, ranging from basic lightweight wines to world class wines. It is not a highly aromatic variety. Is often described as being spicy, with aromas and flavors of freshly ground white pepper, meadow flowers, under ripe melon, green vegetables, freshly mown grass, and a flinty minerality. Depending on where it's grown, there may also be tropical and stone fruit characteristics. Gruner Veltliner also ages extremely well – many say it ages even better than Riesling.

RIESLING

Most of Austria's greatest dry whites are made from Riesling. It thrives in many locations in Austria, mainly where planted on primary rock. In Austria, fine Rieslings are typically dry and substantial, some with as much as 14% alcohol, yet maintain their raciness and delicacy. Often they have pronounced citrus aromas and flavors, and sometimes complex tropical fruits. Riesling is found in many Austrian wine districts, but the best Rieslings come from the Wachau, with the Kremstal a close second.

GELBER MUSKATELLER

Not be confused with the inferior high-yielding standard Muscat (Muskat-Ottonel), this is an altogether better variety, but one that is hard to cultivate. The wines are highly fragrant, with an intense floral bouquet. There are records of the Gelber Muskateller grape being grown in the Wachau as long ago as 1400, although there is also a long tradition of its cultivation in Styria and Burgenland.

WEISSBURGUNDER (PINOT BLANC)

Weissburgunder is an international variety that is widely grown around the world. The quality of Austrian Pinot Blanc wines is outstanding. In Austria, even mid-range Pinot Blanc are stylish, with flavors of almonds and good acidity. The best are concentrated, amazingly complex, and age well in bottle, some in excess of a decade.

WELSCHRIESLING

Welschriesling is the second most widely grown grape variety in Austria after Gruner Veltliner, with approximately 9% of vineyards planted with it, mainly in Burgenland, Lower Austria, and Styria. It typically produces fresh, fruity wines with some spicy notes.



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SAUVIGNON BLANC

Sauvignon Blanc was first planted in Austria over 100 years ago. It produces a fresh, racy, acidic wine with good structure. Sauvignon Blanc is mainly grown in Styria, but can also be found in small quantities in Wachau.

COMMON RED GRAPE VARIETIES

ZWEIGELT

Zweigelt is a cross of St. Laurent with Blaufrankisch, developed in 1922 by Professor Fritz Zweigelt. It makes wines that are a deep red, with aromas of cooked sour cherries, and sometimes chocolate. They are dry, with pronounced cherry and raspberry flavors and often a spicy earthiness. It is generally considered the best Austrian red grape.

BLAUFRANKISCH

Blaufrankisch is a dark berried variety, which produces wines that are rich in fruit flavor. They also have good acidity and tannins. Excellent Blaufrankisch is made in Burgenland.

ST LAURENT

St Laurent is believed to be related to Pinot Noir, and shares many characteristics with that grape. It is most commonly found in Burgenland.



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