

# AUSTRIAN WINE

## **Grüner Veltliner – Austria’s Secret Weapon**

Just ten years ago, no one imagined that Austria could top its triumph as a producer of some of the world’s most remarkable sweet wines. But it did - by creating even more of an international sensation with its Grüner Veltliner wines. And now, it is hard to even imagine wine lists in fine restaurants across Austria as well as in Great Britain and the United States not featuring wines of this variety.

The main point of discovery was an anonymous tasting organized by internationally-known wine specialists, traders and journalists in the Fall of 2002; top league Grüner Veltliners and Chardonnays from three vintage classes competed against high-ranking white Burgundy wines and other top-quality Chardonnays from Australia and California. The Grüner Veltliner was extremely successful. In overall point scores, Grüner Veltliner claimed the top two spots; third place went to an Austrian Chardonnay. In fact, the highest-scoring non-Austrian wine was a California Chardonnay, which took fifth place.

Especially fruit and freshness were viewed more positively in the Austrian wines than in the competing wines. Since then, the Austrians – especially Grüner Veltliner - have been valued as flavorful, fruity white variety alternatives and praised as a welcome change from the uniform international-style wines so prevalent today.

According to Jancis Robinson MW, one of the world’s foremost wine writers, the tasting showed that Grüner Veltliner must be taken seriously as a variety. Ms. Robinson, together with another highly respected British wine writer, Tim Atkin MW, participated in arranging the list of “opponent” Burgundy wines for the tasting.

Grüner Veltliner is Austria’s flagship variety, planted in more than one third of the country’s vineyards. The areas where Veltliner is most widely-planted are located in the state of *Niederösterreich*, or Lower Austria. The grape is also common in northern Burgenland and around Vienna. In Lower Austria’s *Weinviertel* - the largest wine growing region in Austria - Grüner Veltliner has been elevated from a wine showing regional typicity to that of a DAC appellation wine. DAC, or Districtus Austriae Controllatus, is the new Austrian wine economy concept of “origin marketing”. The wine reflecting regional typicity most, therefore, is a dry, peppery-spiced Grüner Veltliner, which is marketed under "Weinviertel DAC" classification.

The range of wine styles with this variety are nothing less than remarkable. Not only can it be produced as a light and pleasant, easy-drinking wine, but it can also yield powerful, multilayered wines with tremendous aging potential; like Riesling, the Grüner Veltliner can perfectly reflect terroir in the bottle and ultimately win over wine lovers with its individual

varietal expression. Also highly impressive and complex are the *Prädikat* wines made from this variety. These wines tend to show fruity-spicy notes, with a dash of "*Pfefferl*" - freshly ground black pepper – included.

Grüner Veltliner expresses itself wonderfully according to the soils in which it is grown: racy and powerful from loess; delicately spicy and mineral-toned from primary rock. And from loamy clay soils, it demonstrates a robust character.

Even with its unique aromas and flavors, Grüner Veltliner proves itself to be a truly optimal food companion. Suitable for a diverse range of dishes, it can be paired perfectly with everything from traditional Austrian cuisine to – especially in a rich, full-bodied style - Asian–Oriental foods.

Grüner Veltliner grows so well in Austria because of the ideal soil and climate conditions here. Whether the soils are water-retentive, such as with loess, loam and clay, or are very meager, like the primary rock found in the Wachau, Kamptal and Kremstal regions, it doesn't matter with the Veltliner. This variety is a late-ripening one; it especially loves Austria's mild Indian Summer days, when its wonderful aromas develop best. And whether aging of the wine takes place in "classic" steel tanks or in large wooden barrels, excellent results are obtained.

The origins of Grüner Veltliner are so far not clear. It is not related botanically to Roter-, Brauner- and Frühroter Veltliner, among other namesakes. With the help of DNA –analysis, Traminer has been identified as one of the parent varieties; the other remains unknown. While it is said that even the Romans drank Grüner Veltliner, the name of this variety has been known only since the mid-19th century. Prior to this time, it was called Grüner Muskateller – although there is no relation to the Muskateller variety. Until the 1940s and '50s, Grüner Veltliner was basically a variety amongst several others. But then it really began to come into its own with the development of the Lenz Moser *Hochkultur*, or high culture, training system. Since that period, Grüner Veltliner has been thriving; of course, rigorous yield restrictions are necessary in order to obtain high quality versions of the wine. Proper clone selection is crucial as well.

Grüner Veltliner is truly one-of-a-kind. Like Mozart, Schubert and Strauss, it *belongs* to Austria!