

WINE TIM WHITE

Get into the groove with Austria's trendiest drop

Austria invented the g'spritzer before it made Red Bull. One gives you wings. The wine will floor you.

Let's get the pronunciation right first: it's GREW-NER VELT-LEENER. That's grüner veltliner as it is spelled in its homeland, Austria. Most people familiar with this distinctive and trendy white grape just call it grüner, although some wag dubbed it gru-v. Geddit?

Whatever they call it, I love it. In fact you could say I've got "a gru-v kind of love". Apologies for both the awful pun and for any images evoked of Phil Collins warbling.

Like the name, grüner as a wine can be taken seriously or not. In Austria the most basic grüner is diluted with soda to make the g'spritzer - Austria invented the g'spritzer long before it came up with Red Bull. In regions such as Kämtal, Kremstal and the Wachau it can make wines that will age for 10 years or more.

I've tasted them going back into the 1960s and in one, a Freie Weingärtner 1969 from the Wachau, the most lauded vineyard area on the Danube, I tasted characters that I described as being like roast sweet potatoes combined with lemon meringue: this in an old dry white wine! As a young wine, gru-v does show root vegetable flavours plus sweeter pear things going on. In the most distinctive ones you will also find a sniff or two of white pepper: I kid you not.

Like I say, grüner can be taken seriously or less so and one Austrian producer who's doing a bit of both is Lenz Moser who visited Australia recently. As Moser put it to me: "I think in terms of the consumer - I want to get the mystique out of wine but still keep the magic". The last part of this quote he readily attributes to the late Californian supremo of wine, Robert Mondavi. Moser ran Mondavi's operations in Europe until that wine company was bought out by Australian behemoth Constellation.

More importantly in the gru-v scheme of things, Moser's grandfather was the man who revolutionised viticulture in

Austria and went on to create Austria's largest and eponymously named wine producer, although the family is now no longer involved.

Post Mondavi, Moser decided to create his own label, Laurenz V, with the first vintage in 2004. Now a few years old it produces 35,000 cases, all of them grüner veltliner. The wine is produced in a surprisingly new world way in that he owns no winery but buys grapes from 50 growers and the wines are vinified in two separate winemaking facilities.

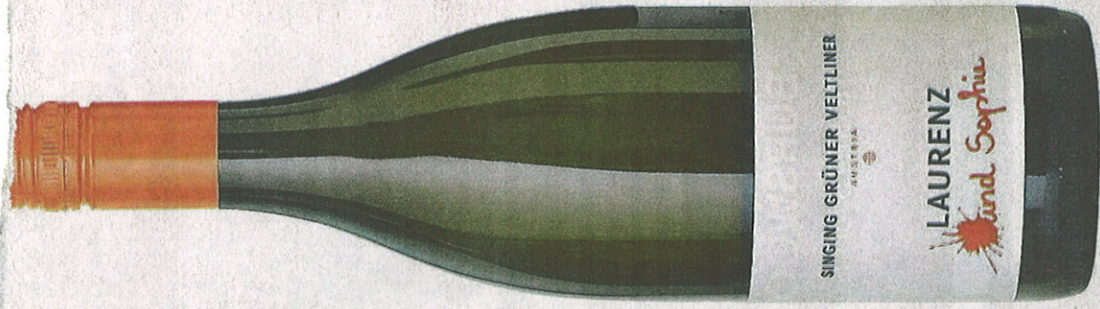
He eschews regional labelling preferring to brand his three grüners as Singing, Friendly and Charming. In Australia, Sydney,

Queensland and Tasmania prefer the Singing; Melbourne and Adelaide buyers go for the Friendly.

Overseas the Austrians themselves prefer the Friendly, while the US is all about the Singing and the Charming (although these are pre-Obama figures).

When I tell Moser a few winegrowers in Australia and New Zealand have planted the variety he beams "this is good news". As he's travelled around the world selling his wine he's encountered only a few growers planting the cultivar in the US, Argentina, China and Germany.

This surprises me as grüner is one classy grape and is established in Australia. Stoney Rise in the Tamar Valley of Northern Tasmania has 1000 vines planted and will, vintage permitting, make some this year. There's also a 0.8 of a hectare planted in the Adelaide Hills at Hahndorf Hill Winery with a further 2.8 hectares going in next spring. Winemaker Larry Jacobs says all the material planted has come from clones imported from Austria. The first fruit is expected to come online in 2010.



Grüner veltliner is a classy grape packed with flavours ranging from fruit to root vegetables.