

THE WACHAU QUARTETS

The Wachau always specialized in elegant dry whites. But, in the 1940s, there was a brief period of experimentation with chaptalization (the addition of sugar to the unfermented must) to try to raise the wines' alcoholic content. During the early 1960s, opposition to this method, and to exploitation of the region's name by its neighbours, united the first "Wachau Quartet" of leading wine-growers: Josef Jamek, Franz Prager, Wilhelm Schwengler (director of the region's co-operative), and Franz Hirtzberger Snr. Through dedication and political savvy, they achieved those goals. Since the founding of the regional wine-growers association Vinea Wachau in 1983, leadership has been in the hands of another "Wachau Quartet": Emmerich Knoll, Franz Hirtzberger, Franz Xaver Pichler, and Toni Bodenstein (of the Prager estate). They introduced the Wachau Categories – in ascending order of body: Steinfeder, Federspiel, and Smaragd – and opposed the use of must concentration to increase the alcoholic content of wines as chaptalization had done before. The question now is what balance the Wachau will strike between these traditions and innovation.

Josef Högl Wachau

From his house almost 300m (1,000ft) above sea level in the Spitze Graben, a side valley of the Danube, Sepp Högl's vines climb the steep slope of the Schön site another 150m (500ft) in 57 narrow terraces. This is where Högl's finest Grüner Veltliner Smaragd grows. His equally rich and complex, yet clean and uplifting, Riesling Smaragd Brück hails from a similarly extreme site nearby. Högl is an extremist in the best sense, making excellent-quality wines at fair prices right across the range. ★ **Rising star**

Viessling 31, 3620, Spitz
www.wein-plus.de

Josef Jamek Wachau

Hans Altmann and his wife Jutta run the historic Josef Jamek estate, which is also one of the nation's most famous restaurants. The Riesling from the precipitously steep, terraced Ried Klaus – here the traditional Austrian word for a vineyard, "ried", is still very much alive – is legendary, but also the region's most exquisitely elegant dry Riesling. These are gastronomic wines that eschew the race for journalists' points in favour of achieving perfect harmony with food. The delicately honeyed, nutty Weissburgunder Smaragd from old vines in the Hochrain site is the finest example of this grape in the region.

Joching 45, 3610, Weissenkirchen
www.weingut-jamek.at

Jurtschitsch Kamptal

Everything changed at the famous family-owned Jurtschitsch estate back in 2006. The family switched their more than 72ha (180 acres) to organic viticulture and wild-yeast fermentation. The transformation is still somewhat a work-in-progress. Some of the dry whites are brilliantly expressive and intensely mineral. Others are suffering from a slight lack of freshness or broadness (which is perhaps due to over-long fermentations). There is no denying the ambition of the new generation here though, most importantly of young Alwin. Jurtschitsch remains best known in Austria for the impeccable Grube, a dry white nouveau from Grüner Veltliner. The solid reds lag behind the whites. ★ **Rising star**

Rudolfstrasse 39, 3550, Langenlois
www.jurtschitsch.com

Kurt Angerer Kamptal

Precise work in the vineyard, keep-it-simple cellarwork, and no unnecessary frills. These are the principles that enabled Kurt Angerer to become one of Lower Austria's leading producers of dry Grüner Veltliner in the space of a decade. These are big, bold, and expressive wines of which the Loam is the most succulent, Kies the lightest and most straightforwardly fruit-driven and Spies the most mineral and austere. The Riesling Ametzberg belongs in the same league and is likewise capable of long ageing. ★ **Rising star**

Schickenberggasse 4, 3552, Lengenfeld
www.kurt-angerer.at

Lagler Wachau

Karl Lagler has been making consistently fine dry Riesling and Grüner Veltliner for decades and is now assisted by his son, Karl Jr. The wines are full and ripe

with good balance particularly the Riesling from the Tuasendeimerberg and the Grüner Veltliner Smaragd from the Steinborz. Attached to the four star Hotel Garni Weinberghof

Rote Torgasse 10, 3620, Spitz
www.weingut-lagler.at

Laurenz V Kamptal

Though based in downtown Vienna, this innovative winery founded by Laurenz Moser V in April 2005 works exclusively with grapes from the Kamptal region. The most important product is the mid-weight, fruit-driven Charming Grüner Veltliner, though the recently introduced Silver Bullet in 500ml (17fl oz) bottles is the top wine. The ambitious goal is a global Grüner Veltliner brand that does for this grape what New Zealand's Cloudy Bay did for Sauvignon Blanc. ★ **Rising star**

Mariahilfer Strasse 32, 1070, Wien
www.laurenzvine.com

Leth Fels

Franz Leth makes bold and succulent dry whites that are hard not to enjoy. His consistency of style with Grüner Veltliner, Roter Veltliner, Blauer Burgunder, Sauvignon Blanc is impressive. More recently, a surprisingly powerful Zweigelt Gigama has attracted a lot of attention, since this is not a region with a red wine tradition. ★ **Rising star**

Kirchengasse 6, 3481, Fels
www.weingut-leth.at

Loimer Kamptal

In recent years, Fred Loimer's wines have been transformed – from high-quality mainstream to individuality with no concessions made to the demand for fruit-driven charmers. The fruit-driven whites are the intensely spicy-mineral Grube from almost 50-year-old vines in the Spitzgraben, ripe, yet cool Riesling from the high altitude site. The black-box-modernism of the new wines is equally uncompromising. In 2005, Loimer took over the well-known Schellmann estate in Gumpoldsdorf, Thermenregion whose top wines – the complex textural Chardonnay Gumpold and the soft Pinot Noir Anning – belong to the nation's best of these grapes. ★ **Rising star**

Haindorfer Vögerlweg 23, 3550, Langenlois
www.loimer.at

Ludwig Ehn Kamptal

The Ehns are a complex phenomenon. It may be simplification, but the extrovert Michaela is the face of this small estate, while her brother Ludwig is the introvert winemaker. With a few exceptions (the Grüner Veltliner Titan and Chardonnay/Titan blend Incredible), these are extremely elegant wines designed for the dining table. The Gemischter is a rare example of a site of mixed plantings where grapes are fermented together. But the Riesling from the Heiligenstein, with its floral and mineral character, is the star.

Bahnstrasse 3, 3550, Langenlois
www.ehnwein.at