



EATDRINK



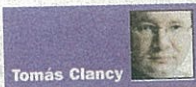
## Grüner revolutionaries

**O**kay, maybe the trousers are a bit too much," says Lenz Moser, somewhat unconvincingly. "My wife, who puts up with almost anything else I do, does warn me. For God's sake, not the purple trousers, Lenz."

Wearing the most vivid of purple jeans seen outside a Bee Gees concert, Laurenz Moser V begins his promotional pitch on the wonders of his country of origin, Austria – the home of "Mozart and The Sound of Music, Red Bull and Schwarzenegger. And wine, of course."

Moser knows about the latter – his family has a wine-

### Wine



making pedigree that stretches back to the 15th century, having created the Lenz Moser estate wines. It is the largest producer of wine in Austria and operates under the motto, 'Lenz Moser is Austria's wine'.

Moser's grandfather, Professor Lenz Moser III, is one of the 20th century's most famous viticultural academics. He invented the

Lenz Moser High Trellis system – a way of spacing and raising vines to avoid the blight that afflicted them for centuries.

Moser III died in 1978, leaving the estate to his son, Lenz Moser IV. The business was badly affected by the anti-freeze scandal that hit German and Austrian wine in 1986. While the Moser estate was not involved, all producers in the area were tarred with the same brush, and Moser IV had to sell the estate in order to save it.

Far from finding himself destitute, Lenz Moser, who had been working for the family firm for 15 years, found himself being headhunted by Californian wine producer Robert Mondavi to head up Mondavi Europe.

### Wine ratings

*This is the international marking system for wine ratings. The 100-point scale works on a percentile, not a percentage scale, which is based on the United States educational grading system*

95-100:	exceptional, of world class quality
90-94:	very good quality
88-89:	average but lacks greatness
85-87:	average to modest
80-84:	below average
70-79:	poor
below 70:	unacceptable quality

Moser had met Mondavi in the early 1970s when, as a young man, he had visited his Californian vinelands.

"I rented a car and stopped off and walked around his vineyard, and he came running out shouting and steaming angry. 'Who are you?'" says Moser. "I stuttered, 'I'm from Austria'. He roared back at me. 'Damn it, I didn't ask you where you were from. I said who are you?'"

"I'm Lenz Moser," I said. Then he stopped in his tracks, and switched his approach instantly. 'I know your grandfather'. That was it, and an hour later we were sitting at his table talking about wine with Moutons and Margaux being pulled and opened," says Moser.

"I have never learned as much about wine as I did from Bob Mondavi. He spoke in such a different way.

Instead of talking about terroir or about the styles of a region, he kept talking about what people want and about trying to make that for them. It completely opened my eyes."

Moser accepted Mondavi's offer, running his European operations for eight years until Mondavi was ousted from his own wine empire.

"For me, it was always about family, with Moser and with Mondavi. I just did not want to work for a corporate entity. I reported to Bob, and with him gone I knew it was time for another change."

Moser decided to begin his own wine venture, calling it Laurenz V. "I wanted to take what Bob Mondavi had told me and make it hap-



**Laurenz Moser V with his daughters, Sophie and Anna: 'It is all about getting as close to the DNA of the vine, of narrowing down your focus, of perfecting the one thing'**

"In the 1950s my grandfather said that Austria needed to do one unique thing and do it better than anyone. He found that the white grape that produced varied and expressive white wine was Grüner Veltliner," says Moser.

However, Grandfather Moser's suggestion was largely ignored. Yet today, the idea that a wine region needs a unique grape to promote has come centre stage. California has zinfandel, New Zealand sauvignon blanc, Australia shiraz, Argentina malbec and Chile carmenere. In Austria, meanwhile, Grüner Veltliner has finally triumphed, and accounts for around 37 per cent of the country's wine crop.

When founding Laurenz V, Lenz Moser took his grandfather's words to heart: his winery produces only one grape, Grüner.

"We want to be the absolute best at this. I am only interested in Austria in this one grape. It is all about getting as close to the DNA of the vine, of narrowing down your focus, of perfecting the one thing. Last year we concentrated on the nose, the year before that on the palate. Focus is everything," says Moser. "For Bob [Mondavi], it all fell apart when he lost focus and started to spread himself around the globe."

Moser emphasises that Austrian wine is all about small, organic, family-run businesses, now backed by stringent production laws.

The Laurenz V stable of wines is deliberately small and single grape orientated. Moser makes just five wines, all Grüner Veltliner. All are quite different from the mainstream Austrian Grüner of their competitors.

"Grüner tends to be made in an angular style, with sharp edges. I wanted to make a more rounded style and polish off those edges. So I begin with a Friendly Grüner, which I hope is round and friendly. I wanted simple names that expressed quickly and directly what I was aiming at. So, Friendly, Sunny, Singing and Charming. Charming is the highest compliment you can pay in Austria. To be a charming man, that is the ideal."

Added to this straightforward line-up is his latest offering, the Silver Bullet Grüner, which is an up-market Grüner from the Kamptal region sold only in half-litre bottles. It is aimed at

pen," he says. "Bob said the wine drinker wanted an enjoyable wine – winemakers can complicate it too much. That's why I wanted to try and make my bottle speak clearly."

"Think about Italy; they have 50 regions, but it's even hard for professionals to name six or seven of them. It's not about simplifying the wine, it is about simplifying the message," says Moser.

## Grüner Veltliner's unique taste

"When I was growing up there was almost no red wine in Austria. We did grow it, but it was of little significance. My father was great friends with Dr Zweigelt [a scientist who produced, through the red Zweigelt grape that bears his name, a crossing of St Laurent and Blaufränkisch grapes], and he and my father agreed that Austria needed a strong red and a strong white, a unique red and white," says Moser.

## 3 wines to try, buy and put by

### TO TRY

**Concannon Chardonnay, Livermore, California 2005, €15.95 from 64 Wines, Glashule Road, Sandycove, Co Dublin; Donnybrook Fair, Donnybrook, Dublin and online at the wineshop.ie (89)**

Californian chardonnay tends to come from cooler Napa plots or sultry Central Valley suntraps. The best, such as Marmar Torres's excellent set of chardonnays, comes from the coastal-influenced Sonoma and, in particular, the Russian River Valley.

However, south-east of San Francisco, in the most stone-filled soils outside the Rhône, the descendants of 19th century Aran Island diaspora make a delicious chardonnay. This Concannon chardonnay has the nose and creamy, vanilla touches of traditional Napa chardonnay, but a happy, restrained clean finish that evokes Chablis. A fine match for confit duck with celeriac remoulade.

### TO BUY

**Ravenswood Lodi, Old Vine Zinfandel 2006, €17 from Wine Online.ie; Booze.ie; Cellars, the Big Wine Warehouse, Naas Road, Dublin and selected O'Briens Wines and good off-licences (89)**

You have to be careful when picking a Ravenswood Zinfandel off the shelf these days, due to the similarity of their labels. Look out for this Zinfandel from Lodi, which should clearly have 'Old Vines' written on the front label. It has freshness, spice and bursting strawberry, with white pepper and melting dark chocolate in its palate.

The cheaper 'Vintner's Blend' is more bland and glutinous. Old Vines is a joyous, seize-the-day kind of wine that is ideal with well-charred barbecue steak. Booze.ie has it on special at €14.10, while wine online is offering a case of 12 bottles for €199 (€16.50 a bottle).



### TO PUT BY

**Duckhorn Vineyards, Merlot, Napa Valley, California 2005, €62.50 from Mitchell and Sons, CHQ building IFSC Dublin 1; Glashule Road, Sandycove, Co Dublin and Grange Road Retail Centre, Rathfarnham, Co Dublin (93)**

Six years after its mauling in the Oscar-winning film Sideways, the merlot grape is surely ready to be rehabilitated. Merlot is at the heart of great complex wines in Pomerol and St Emilion, but when let run freely, as it is in California, it produces

overly alcoholic, soupy and simplistic wines. This was the complaint in Sideways. However, the best of Napa merlot always produces wines of top quality with classic Pomerol ambitions.

This is one such merlot, it is spicy, glossy and generous, but with firm tannins and a savoury undercurrent. It plays on a par with world class Pomerol that commands €200 a bottle. It has years of evolution left, but with long decanting it is enjoyable with sweeter, stickier meat dishes, such as oxtail or cheek and pan-fried parsnips.

restaurant diners and has yet to come to Ireland – though that unavailability is unlikely to last long.

"Janis Robinson talked about Austrian white wines rivalling Burgundy, and I think it is true. Thirty years ago, it was the rare year where you could ripen the grapes fully. Now, with global warming, every year we reach optimal levels. The result can be seen in our wines which are getting better and better. If it continues we will simply see vineyards move up in altitude, that will be how we deal with it," says Moser.

For now, Austrian wine is going through a golden period. What seemed like hyperbole and marketing hype ten years ago is becoming more evident as reality in the best Austrian wineries.

Here are wines that are priced like the New World with the complexity and ambition of Montrachet and Meursault. If you have tried Grüner Veltliner and won-

dered what all the fuss is about, then now is the time to seek out some better offerings, such as Moser's Laurenz V offerings.

Ideally, they should have a year or two of bottle age on them. Tasting in Austria a couple of years ago, I sampled seven and ten-year-old Grüner and found that this was where the Montrachet and white Burgundy claims appeared; they evolve with butter and biscuit tones, rather than with the petroleum of aged Riesling.

## These charming wines

- Laurenz V Singing Grüner Veltliner, Kamptal 2009 €15.99 (88)
- Laurenz V Friendly Grüner Veltliner, Austria 2008 €17.50 (88)
- Laurenz V Sunny Grüner Veltliner, Kamptal 2009 €15.99 (90)
- Laurenz V Friendly Grüner Veltliner 2006 €16.50 (89)

- Laurenz V Charming Grüner Veltliner 2007 €24.95 (91)
- Laurenz V Charming Grüner Veltliner, Kamptal 2008 €23.99 (91)
- Laurenz V Charming Grüner Veltliner, Kamptal 2007 €25 (90)
- Laurenz V Charming Grüner Veltliner, Kamptal 2006 (92) Not yet available
- Laurenz V Silver Bullet Grüner, Kamptal 2008 (90) Not yet available

Several vintages are out there, seeking out older ones offers a fine comparative opportunity.

## Other fine Grüner Veltliners

- Schloss Gobelsburg, Grüner Veltliner Renner, Kamptal 2007 €24.95 (91)
- Schloss Gobelsburg, Grüner Veltliner Grub, Kamptal 2007 €31.95 (92)
- Weingut Brandl, Riesling Heiligenstein, Kamptal Austria 2007 €15.49 (91)

- Birgit Eichinger, Riesling, Gaisberg, Kamptal, Austria 2008 €12.95 (89)
- Birgit Eichinger, Riesling Heiligenstein, Kamptal 2006 €26 (92)

*Wines are available at selected wine shops and off-licences nationwide, including Fallon & Byrne, Exchequer Street, Dublin 2; Donnybrook Fair, 89 Morehampton Road, Donnybrook, Dublin 4; Sweeney's, 6 Finglas Road, Harts Corner, Glasnevin, Dublin 11; 64 Wines, 64 Glashule Road, Sandycove, Co Dublin; Woodberrys, Middle Street, Galway city; Wines Direct, Mullingar at wine-direct.ie; Greenacres, Selskar, Wexford; Rednosewine.com; Wicklow Wine Company, Wicklow town; and The Corkscrew, 4 Chatham Street, Dublin 2*

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