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By [Gregory Dal Piaz](#) on September 15, 2010

7 Great Gruners

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Gruner Veltliner, not long ago the darling of wine lovers everywhere, has seemingly been replaced this year by wines that are even more difficult to pronounce (you know I'm talking about you, Txacoli!). While the tides of fashion tend to move inexorably on, some things are worth bucking trends for.

Gruner is definitely one of those things. It's a timeless classic that stood still as the searchlight of fashion passed over it. It was always a great wine, and remains pretty close to perfect when it's on, but it will always be a bit of an outlier. I mean, how can it not be? Consider the details: It's not oaky nor creamy, it's slightly vegetal and spicy at times, with hints of bitter citrus pith augmented by electric acidity and succulent mineral tones. You know what that makes? A recipe for critical acclaim, moderate popular appeal, and absolutely insane food and wine pairings -- not to mention an off-the-charts refreshment factor!



So, what is Gruner Veltliner then? Well, it's the white grape of Austria, that mass of mountains up on the northern border of Italy, accounting for about a third of the country's vineyards. The greatest Gruner vineyards tend to be produced from the steeply-terraced lands of the Wachau, Kremstal, Traisental and Wagram. These vineyards hug the Danube River west of Vienna, where some additional significant plantings can be found. The soils here tend to be loose and poor, lending the finished wines their spectacular mineral component.

That mineral component and the layered fruit notes that never seem to veer off into the cloying end of the spectrum tend to give Gruner their appeal. Truth is there are some amazingly rich Gruners, but for me, the greatest appeal lies in some of the more simple wines.

In the Wachau it's actually quite easy to determine which wines might show this side of Gruner as they have an easy to identify classification. The lowest rung on the ladder are the Steinfeder wines. These wines tend to be particularly light and fragrant, with a maximum alcoholic content of 11.5%. The name comes from the light, fragrant Steinfedergras that tends to grow around the vines on their terraced vineyards.

Move one rung up and you'll find the Federspiel wines, for me the ideal combination of ripeness and approachability. These wines have an alcoholic content of 11.5% - 12.5%. That added time on the vine that allows for this uptick in alcohol, along with better vineyard sites, yields wines that marry the mineral edge of the best Gruners with fine, rich ripe fruit flavors.

At the top of the Wachau's quality scale come the Smaragd wines, named for the emerald green lizards that love to lie out in the sunniest parts of the vineyards! These wines have a

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Wine Wisdom for 9/16/10

At wine tastings, perfume should not be worn or it can affect other people's taste.

minimum alcoholic content of 12.5% and sometimes achieve a noticeably higher level. They are certainly the richest of the Wachau Gruners, and the most complex, but sometime that alcohol gets in the way, and even when finely balanced these tend to be wines that require some time in the cellar to show their best.

The four regions Kemptal, Kremstal Traisental and Wagram all fall within the Weinviertel, Austria's largest wine growing region. In 2003 this region was granted Austria's first DAC (Districtus Austria Controllatus) appellation. Wines produced under this classification, which is distinct from that used in the Wachau must have a minimum of 12% alcohol, show no appreciable new wood flavors or aromas, and exhibit the classic character of the grapes allowed in the appellation. In this case that happens to be Gruner and this DAC ensures that each bottle exhibit the clean, crisp, lightly peppery qualities that Gruner is now famous for.

Going one step further, a group of 23 producers of Traditionsweingüter Österreich (traditional Austrian wineries) have chosen 52 vineyards in the Weinviertel as Austria's first Premier Crus or Erste Lagen. Beginning with the 2009 vintage this small group of vintners, the members of the Traditionsweingüter Österreich, have begun to use this designation, and finding it adjacent to the vineyard name on the label guarantees that you're buying one of the finest expressions of Gruner Veltliner from one of the great producers.

Now whether or not that's what your looking for is a different story but it's great to know that while fashion may be moving on, the Austrians are continuing to focus on their great indigenous grape; Gruner Veltliner! I'm still partial to hose middle of the road Gruners that give me exactly what I'm looking for in a white wine, but with all this effort at classifying and identifying their wines, the Austrians have made it easy for you to do the same. So go out and grab yourself a Gruner or two and test them out. While they're ideal wines for the spring time, (if you're ever looking for the ideal asparagus match...) they really do work well year round.

Oh, and by the way, while the 2008 Wieninger may not be the highest rated wine, it's an amazing ball of nervous wine and was my favorite of the tasting!

2008 Loimer GV Kamptal 12.5%

Very fragrant, very mineral, distinct underlay of white pepper with a touch of mace, toasted pecan, pear fruit with an almost apricot tinge – rich and round on entry, this is really well balanced, firmly medium bodied, richly fruited with an edge of spice and zesty acidity that lends the orchard fruits a fine citrus element with a touch of quince on the moderately long finish which shows a touch of green pear skin and herb on the finale. 91pts

2007 Loimer Langenlois Terrassen 13%

Intense, touch of sulfur, pure steely mineral nose, icy white fruit skins, a hint of muskmelon, honeydew – some trapped CO2 sill, very precise, great purity in the mouth, a bit loose across the mid-palate, this has a lot to like, such clarity, yet it drop out on the palate a bit, the cut is fine, the fruits green with a lime edge and hard mineral/vitamin tones, a great expression of terroir, long finish is mineral, juicy, sweet lime, great focus. 91pts

2008 Wieninger Vienna Hills 12%

Silica, sand, mineral, steel, green citrus peel, a nice vegetal tone, peapod and green peppercorn – zesty and vibrant in the mouth with delicious inner mouth perfumes of green herbs, mineral, crisp, white orchard fruits, lively and lovely this is a fun, nervous wine in the mouth, finishes with good length revealing a nice decisive mineral cut and a final that is laced with notes of peach, lime pith, mineral and vegetal notes that yield to a white cherry finale - super fun. 90pts

2006 Laurenz V Charming Gruner Veltliner Kamptal 13%

Bitter orange, citron, lime, lime leaf, white peach, sandy soil tones, a touch of sage and other nice spice notes, not quite peppery, more herbal peppery like water cress, a little

sweet, lush, richly fruited, nice vein of green herb, almost green peppercorn in the background helping to keep this from being noticeably sweet, the fruit is a bit indistinct on the palate though there are layered notes of bitter orange, lime and apple. Good acidity supports a nice quartz mineral note on the back end and through the moderately long, lightly creamy, cream fruit finish, with a touch of orange pith on the finale. 88pts

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2008 Prager Hinter der Burg Federspiel Wachau 12%

Spicy, flinty nose, intensely mineral with strong floral undertones and golden yellow fruit, a touch waxy, some trapped CO₂, rich, rather powerful and muscular right up front, this is tense, good coiled fruit, compelling freshness with green apple fruit over mineral and spice on the mid-palate, really picks up spice on the backend before reverting to an apple fruit profile. Finishes with a nice, steely mineral edge and a lingering, peppery spice note. 88pts

2008 Weingut Stadt Krems Weinzierlberg 12.5%

Hint of dried lemon peel, apples, apple seeds, touch of celery seed/Old Bay on the nose - a bit sweet, round and easy with plenty of orchard fruits in the mouth, a touch of green pea backing notes, along with a slight grapefruit pith note, short, fruit, and a touch sweet on the finish with a hint of peach syrup. 87pts

2008 Laurenz V Laurenz und Sophie Singing Gruner Veltliner 12%

Dusty, mineral, lightly aromatic, fresh, apple peel and dried tangerine zest – lots of trapped CO₂, disconcertingly so, for most people, especially in light of the bottle being labeled *still* white wine – nice fruit, there's a impression of sweetness in the flavor profile, all peachy and apricot, moderately long, lightly sticky finish with a nice floral note. 87pts

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Chris-Brockmeyer

9

Not an avid white wine drinker but Gruner is one exception -- love its crisp citrusy minerality with nice fruit balance. Many also can cellar well for a number of years. Recommend the following \$20 or under, which I have in my cellar:

Stadt Krems trocken kremstal sandgrube 2006
Hiedler trocken kamtal loss 2007
Gobelsburg trocken kamtal 2008

Sep 15, 2010 at 12:59 PM



ffred

2

Your earlier article on Gruner Veltliner stirred me to action & I've since tried a 1/2 dozen different GV's--all good for their various price points. I thank you for educating me in GV Speak! My earlier likes in white wine were sauvignon blanc & chardonnay, but no more; GV is where it's at. I'll be looking in my local wine shop for the GV's you listed in this article. Thanks.

Sep 15, 2010 at 4:04 PM



kelkeagy

2

I love Gruner with sushi... it's a great combo

Sep 15, 2010 at 4:30 PM



PucknHKY

1

I am a Gruner lover and would suggest that everyone find a Gruner made by either the Mittelback family or the Steininger family. For the Steininger family I would suggest trying the 2007 Steven Holl special edition Gruner Veltliner. It is one of the best ones I have had by itself. If your looking to pair with sushi, you can't best the brite apple and white pepper richness of the Tegernserhof Creation. My local wine shoppe carries all 3 of the ones that I have suggested. If you would like to try them, then call the Hickory Wine Shoppe at (828) 324-4441 and I'm sure their staff will be more than happy to ship you a bottle.

Sep 15, 2010 at 4:55 PM



winecave

21

I agree with Kelkeagy, great with sushi!!!

Sep 15, 2010 at 4:56 PM



Tokaj

1

Wachau is certainly a paradise for acid-lovers - you can get as much as you wish. My personal favourite producer is Holzapfel, their Achleiten G V Smaragd is very enjoyable year after year.

Sep 15, 2010 at 5:02 PM



Wineboy945-

15

1

I just want to let you know that way out here in Napa Valley, we make Gruner also. My name is Rudy von Strasser and I own von Strasser Winery <http://www.vonstrasser.com> in Napa's Diamond Mountain District. I am of Austrian decent, and about 8 years ago thought it was time for someone in CA to try their hand on this variety. The 2009 is my 3rd commercially-released bottling and I think it is very good. I have tried it blind against other Austrian producers and think it fits the spectrum (which is admittedly quite broad). Give it a try! Oh yeah, it only available from the winery, sorry: but you can order online.

Please let me know what you think after you try it.

Sep 15, 2010 at 5:47 PM



racunista

12

Grüner Veltliner is great stuff and some of my favorites have been mentioned here. Weingut Schneeweis is another fine producer in the Wachau, also notable for other wines, like a particularly well-balanced Zweigelt.

As German-speaking US expat I find it odd that GV is referred to by English speakers as "Gruner". This is the adjective of the word pair (green veltliner, to distinguish it from the rare red variety). One wouldn't call "pinot noir" "noir" for short, would one?

Sep 15, 2010 at 6:00 PM



Linda Kay

17

I cook (and eat!) a lot of asparagus. Always looking for a good wine to set off its flavor. The Gruner white sounds like a winner! Thank you!

Sep 15, 2010 at 6:41 PM



BG422

14

I'm a big fan of the Wachau Smaragds. They are extremely versatile in terms of the foods they can cope with, and I love the fact that I don't have to rush to drink the very good ones I find.

Sep 15, 2010 at 10:48 PM



CGESchille-

r

10

Here is a list of what the Falstaff - Austria's leading wine journal - considers as Austria's best Gruener Veltliner <http://www.schiller-wine.blogspot.c..>

Sep 16, 2010 at 1:28 AM



luca-chevalier

222

ciao gregory....you may try also
thomas leithner
Kamptal DAC 2008
Grüner Veltliner Loess trocken..

Sep 16, 2010 at 2:17 AM

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