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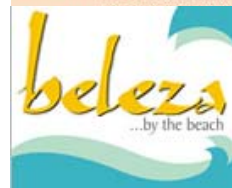
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India Wine Challenge

Austrian Wine : Give me the Green Please

Austria has been historically known for its sweet wines including the exotic eiswein, but it has made strides in dry whites like Riesling and Sauvignon Blanc during the last two decades along with the indigenous Grüner Veltliner that has an impressive versatility, writes Subhash Arora who attended the Austrian Wine Summit 2009 last week.



Tasting Grüner Veltliner in Wachau

'Would you like a red, white or green wine?' goes the story about a sommelier from the Danube Restaurant in New York, asking his clients. He had been to Austria and had been very impressed with the Grüner Veltliner, a white wine made from the indigenous grape which looks distinctively green (grün) in colour, and hence he name. Since it is difficult to pronounce (grew-ner velt-leener) this was his ingenious way of promoting it. It has since become a popular export from the small country, producing only 1% of the total world production but generally of high quality.

Flagship wine of Austria

Today the Grooner, GV, or groo-vee (pick the way you like to call it), is the flagship grape of Austria. About a third of the vineyards in Austria grow this grape, which is almost 20 times the amount grown 60 years ago. Since the last 15 years it has been noticed by the international consumers and producers have improved its quality tremendously. It gives an excellent option to those who don't really want to drink Sauvignon and definitely the ABCs-who would drink Anything But Chardonnay.

It is another matter that in the London Tasting 2002 in October, where a panel of 18 UK judges including Jancis Robinson, Tim Aitkin and Steven Spurrier blind tasted lesser known wines and those from the hitherto 'unknown regions', two of the Top Ten were Austrian Chardonnays.

Top of the Pops

But what surprised many at tasting, was the top two wines from not so well-known indigenous grape, Grüner Veltliner from Austria. In fact, the Grüner grabbed 5 of the top 10 spots, with a 1990 from Knoll (pron. Ca-nohl) being the only one scoring an average of over 18/20 points (18.09), followed by a 1997 from Bründlmayer (pron. Brewn-dul-mahyer)-both well respected estates from Wachau and Kamptal regions (*I shall write about them in the future articles-editor*).

Many styles

As would appear from these two wines, GV can be made in many styles-from young to ageing wines due to the high acidity. They are youthful and vibrant when young and a pure pleasure and elegant when fully mature. Old wines made in the 1940s are known to exist in a drinkable condition. The spectrum of sweetness also is wide-from very dry to very sweet. Some producers make even eiswein (ice wine) using the grape. They can be from light to full bodied, very crisp and vivacious wines with a distinct peppery flavour that are so refreshing in summers that they are sometimes referred to as Sommer Wein in Austria.

I remember tasting a bubbly (called Sekt in Austria and Germany) Groo-vee during a boat ride across Lake Neusiedel, from Rust (pron. Roost) to Illimitz in the Burgenland region. It had excellent mousse, a peppery nose and though a simple wine made in the Champagne style, made the trip even more enjoyable.

Grooner is a cross with Traminer from North Italy as one of the parents. The other partener has recently found to be an unknown grape varietal found in Burgenland, one of the four wine regions of Austria.

Grüner Veltliner can be some of the best quality-price ratio wines. I rated several inexpensive wines from 3/5 to 3.5/5. Even the higher yielding low cost wines are quite tart, tangy, fruity and fresh and very quaffable and would make a sensible wine to be imported for retail sales in the tax-ridden Indian market.

Wine and Food



Young Groo-vee makes an excellent partner with the Indian food due to its spiciness and a unique pepperiness, and the crisp acidity that can handle the fats quite well. Amaya is a chain of Indian restaurants in Toronto, owned by Hemant Bhagwani from Chandigarh, whom I met at the Summit organised by the



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Australian Wine Marketing Board in and around Vienna last week. His flagship restaurant has been one of the 'Top Ten Restaurants of the Year' in Toronto. His wine portfolio of 80 wines has 5 Austrian wines. The star performer though is a Veltliner from Rabl in Kamptal, he says enthusiastically. He is looking to add a couple of more labels, looking at the demand and the beautiful pair it makes with the Indian food.

Several tastings by professional tasters have confirmed that it can be paired well with pork, quail, and chicken dishes. Tandoori lamb and fish are natural fits for the wine. Mushroom, *gucchi* (morels) and chicken biryani are ideal partners for GV. Many of the Chinese dishes seem to be a natural match. Vegetarians would of course be delighted to have it with their dishes- even the chili hot dishes can match well with slightly sweet 'Grooner.'

Needless to add that it makes a perfect match with the lard-laden national dish Wiener Schnitzel, a deep-fried dish made from the salted and pounded veal filet, dipped in egg and bread crumbs and fried in lard, that we even learned to cook (ok-we gave a hand only!). If any of our TV-star chefs could come up with a different oil to keep it crunchy with the flavours intact, it could become as popular as pizza for those having penchant for pork- and a glass of chilled Grüner Veltliner would be heavenly.

Grüner Tastings and L(aur)enz V

Although it may not be proper to admit it was love at first sip, the several wines we tasted at many places during the 5 days, convinced me that it is the signature grape around which Austria can build its reputation and export markets because of the uniqueness.

Knoll, Bründlmayer, Alzinger, Domaine Wachau and Franz Hirtzberger-rated 4.5, (both of whose wines we tasted and also visited the prestigious Singer vineyards of the later, Josef Jamek (where we also had delicious lunch in the 'garden of heaven'), FX Pichler (rated 4.5), Rudi Pichler and Prager are only a few of the names that send shivers up the spine with delicious and groovy Grüners.



But another name that impressed me was Laurenz V (laurenzfive.com) whose Silver Bullet GV, I tasted at the grand finale at the Gloriette of Schönbrunn Palace, Vienna. The low alcohol (12.5%), dry but fruity wine had spicy aromas and mineral character. But what impressed me was the fact that the owner



Laurenz Moser V (who I could not meet as he was abroad) is the grandson of Lenz Moser III who developed the trellis system for the grape in the forties and spent a lot of effort in promoting the wine. Moreover, Lenz believes in the grape so much that he is producing only one varietal and if he has his way, he would have the whole world drinking only GV. And to help the world drink some more, he has developed a 500mL bottle, a stunted Burgundy bottle which is perfect for a pair. Again, an excellent option for India.

The California educated vintner has whacky names like Silver Bullet, Friends, Charming etc for the different wines. And if you believe in what he says or I feel after tasting over 50 of the Groo-vee wines, 'Grooner or later' you would be drinking it too.

Subhash Arora

<There will be more articles coming up on the Wonderful Wines from Austria in the near future- so watch out for this space>

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