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TOP 100
WINES
2021
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TOP 100 WINES OF AUSTRIA 2021

Stuart Pigott, Senior Editor

Austrian winemakers who struggled with too much sun and heat before 2020 ran into a different problem that year when the weather flipped, with frequent rains and moderate temperatures the order of the day. Suddenly, the challenges they faced were the kind their parents also confronted: downy mildew, sluggish ripening of the grapes and ignoble rot. Parts of the Wachau were also hit by hail. Ouch! But the good news is the 2020 dry whites in the Top 100 Wines of Austria 2021 are exciting in spite of the conditions during the growing season and harvest, over which their makers triumphed.

2020 in Austria was a vintage in which the leading producers shone, thanks to an enormous amount of work in the vineyards doing canopy management, cutting out problematic fruit and sorting the better grapes at harvest. It was also a year in which more resilient grape varieties came out on top. Riesling proved itself to be a grape that copes with all the extremes of the new climatic situation: rain in 2020 and drought in years like 2018 and 2017.

Just look at the number of rieslings on this list, beginning with our No. 1 Austrian wine of 2021, the F.X. Pichler Riesling Wachau Ried Kellerberg 2020. This dry white masterpiece from Lucas Pichler has exactly the combination of power, complexity and wonderful balance that we expect from high-end Austrian dry whites.

Pichler's sister Elisabeth and her husband, Erich Krutzler, also broke into the top of our Austria list for the first time with their rich and succulent, late-released Pichler-Krutzler Riesling Kremstal Ried Pfaffenberg Alte Reben 2019. It landed in the 10th spot – a great achievement considering we tasted more than 830 Austrian wines in 2021.

Another grape that copes with the new climatic conditions remarkably well is the red blaufrankisch, which was responsible for our No. 2 Austrian wine, the stunningly concentrated and elegant Moric Blaufränkisch Burgenland Lutzmannsburg Alte Reben 2019. It has the highest rating we have ever given to an Austrian red.

Not far behind in ninth place is the Dorli Muhr Blaufränkisch Carnuntum Spitzerberg-Sptizer EL 2019, a radically fresh and mineral expression of this grape from the little-known region of Carnuntum, which is close to the borders of Hungary and Slovakia. In total, blaufrankisch accounted for almost 20 percent of the Austrian Top 100.

It's also exciting to see a sauvignon blanc among the Top 10 Austrian wines for the first time. For us, the Tement Sauvignon Blanc Südsteiermark Ried Zierreg GSTK 2019 (No. 6, below right) is a world-class example of this grape, with great aromatic complexity. Congratulations are due to Armin Tement, because this is also arguably the best dry white made in the Styria (Steiermark) region in modern times. However, Tement isn't alone, being joined by the Wohlmuth and Lackner Tinnacher wineries from Styria in the Top 20, and a good handful of their Styrian colleagues follow further down the list.

ELEGANT CHARDONNAY

International wine critics sometimes look down at Austrian chardonnay because this grape is planted globally and the wines often lack a clear regional character. But you certainly can't say that about the very elegant and mineral Kollwentz Chardonnay Burgenland Gloria 2019, which placed fifth. For us, it was seriously impressive tasting this alongside the perfectly matured 2009 vintage of the same wine. So many high-end white wines from chardonnay's homeland in Burgundy prematurely oxidize (the so-called premox problem) long before they reach this age.

Many experts would argue that with at least five years of aging in bottle, dry gruner veltliner often tastes remarkably like nicely matured chardonnay. 2020 yielded few high-end dry whites from Austria's signature grape variety because of the rain during the harvest period for this relatively early-ripening grape. For us, the Prager Grüner Veltliner Wachau Zwerithaler Kammergut Smaragd 2020 in 12th position is the star among them, closely followed by the Nigl Grüner Veltliner Kremstal Pellingen EL Privat 2020. Both have the vitality, depth and finesse that are rare in this challenging vintage.

Before Austria switched to varietal white wines during the second half

The Chardonnay barrel cellar at the Kollwentz winery in Burgenland. (Photo by Stuart Pigott)

of the 20th century, cuvees were the norm, often as field blends. This year we tasted the most spectacular and extraordinary wine of this kind we have ever encountered. The Schloss Gobelsburg Niederösterreich Tradition Heritage Cuvée 50 Years NV (No. 3) has a tremendously complexity of mature aromas and radically reinvents this category. The production was also a serious quantity!

Schloss Gobelsberg doesn't only produce non-vintage blends, though. The focus of the winery's production is varietal dry riesling and gruner veltliner wines, and on Oct. 19 in London, the owner of Schloss Gobelsberg, Michael Moosbrugger, staged a very impressive tasting of his dry rieslings from the Heiligenstein vineyard site going back to the excellent 1971 vintage. However, back vintage wines like the stunning Schloss Gobelsburg Riesling Kamptal Heiligenstein EL 2001 don't qualify for this Top 100 list, as only current releases are eligible.

An important long-term trend in Austria is how most of the leading winemakers are placing ever more emphasis on their top vineyard sites. The process of vineyard classification, which is still unofficial, has moved more slowly in Austria than in neighboring Germany. However, the Austrians have been more systematic about this than their German colleagues. The next years will show who made the right call.

The news from Austria is that 2021 is a very exciting vintage for dry white wines, so expect a lot more gruner veltliners and rieslings in next year's Top 100!

27 BIRGIT EICHINGER RIESLING KAMPTAL RIED GAISBERG EL 2020 95 Pts.

Lovely ripe nose with so much stone fruit, floral expression and delicate spice. Very good concentration and harmony on the generous and polished palate, Long, refined finish with a great interplay of ripe peach and wet-stone minerality. Drink or hold.

28 EHN RIESLING KAMPTAL RIED HEILIGENSTEIN EL 2020 95 Pts.

Striking dill, white-pepper and blackcurrant nose that's still very youthful. Quite powerful, yet very sleek with diamond-bright acidity. Such a vibrant and exciting finish that shows a dangerous amount of energy. Drink or hold. Screw cap.

29 GEYERHOF RIESLING KREMSTAL RIED KIRCHENSTEIG EL 2020 95 Pts.

Anything but dramatic, this concentrated and refined dry riesling discreetly introduces itself with tobacco-leaf, wildflower and tangerine-rind aromas. Rather tightly wound on the medium-bodied palate with a long, dry and herbal-mineral finish. Only just beginning to reveal its treasures. From organically grown grapes. Drink or hold.

30 JURTSCHITSCH RIESLING KAMPTAL RIED HEILIGENSTEIN EL 2020 95 Pts.

This 2020 dry riesling makes a bold statement with tons of citrus and basil aromas. Powerful and concentrated with stacks of minerality, this is already so expressive, but also so young. Very long finish. From organically grown grapes. Drink or hold. Screw cap.

31 WIENINGER WIENER GEMISCHTER SATZ BISAMBERG 2019 95 Pts.

This smells like a whole meadow, filled with wild herbs and flowers! Very concentrated yet also very subtle, this has kaleidoscopic notes of yellow, red and white fruit on the finely etched palate. Very long finish, in which the mineral acidity, fine tannins and ripeness are tightly interwoven. From biodynamically grown grapes with Respekt certification. Drink or hold. Glass closure.

32 NEUMEISTER SAUVIGNON BLANC VULKANLAND STEIERMARK RIED MOARFEITL GSTK 2018 95 Pts.

Very complex interplay of lemon-curd, yellow-grapefruit, savory and flinty character. Very concentrated and rather powerful, yet sleek and pristine, the minerality about as intense as it can be. But the wine remains enticing, rather than tipping over into some kind of fundamentalism. The finish flutters as lightly as a flag in the breeze. From organically grown grapes. Drink or hold.

33 POLZ SAUVIGNON BLANC SÜDSTEIERMARK RIED HOCHGRASSNITZBERG GSTK 2019 95 Pts.

A deep and concentrated sauvignon that hasn't lost any of the vegetal and spring-meadow freshness of the grape as a result of the high ripeness. Tons of grapefruit, white-cherry and complex herbal character on the powerful yet very focused palate. Stunning chalky and wet-stone minerality at the exciting finish. Drink or hold.

76 WACHTER-WIESLER BLAUFRÄNKISCH EISENBERG RIED SAYBRITZ RESERVE 2018 **95 Pts.**

Very fragrant, subtle nose with a wide spectrum of floral and spice notes. Concentrated and silky palate that's so lively, but has excellent richness on the mid-palate and a degree of silkiness that's rare in this vintage. Long, refined finish with restrained mineral power. Drink or hold.

77 MACHHERNDL GRÜNER VELTLINER WACHAU FOR FRIENDS ONLY SMARAGD 2018 **94 Pts.**

Super-ripe pear and a touch of caramelized-pear character exude from this rich, concentrated and creamy gruner veltliner, which remains dry and clean through the long, complete finish. You barely feel the 14% alcohol. Still has plenty of years ahead of it! Bottled in magnums. From organically grown grapes. Vegan. Drink or hold. Screw cap.

78 PRIMUS CHARDONNAY SÜDSTEIERMARK RIED ZIEREGG 2018 **94 Pts.**

The deep, smoky and flinty nose is followed by a remarkably elegant and mineral palate for the very warm vintage, the balance of creaminess and freshness spot on. Then comes the stunning minerality at the long finish. And this is just beginning to go through its paces! Drink or hold. Screw cap.

79 NEHRER CHARDONNAY LEITHABERG RIED KRAINER 2019 **94 Pts.**

A whole garden of white flowers. Delicately honeyed with a wonderful balance of ripeness and silky acidity on the medium-bodied palate. Long, refined finish. From organically grown grapes. Drink or hold.

80 FRANZ MICHAEL MAYER WIEN SCHÖNIN 1683 2019 **94 Pts.**

This is so rich and lush that it tastes slightly sweet, although analytically it's dry. Plenty of exotic fruit aromas, but not overbearing or even slightly jammy, this wine keeps a cool head, in spite of 14.5% alcohol, the fine tannins (also from oak) giving it focus and a very clear line. A limited production blend of Mendoza-clone chardonnay, neuburger and gruner veltliner. Drink or hold.

81 GUT OGGAU WEINLAND TIMOTHEUS WEISS 2018 **94 Pts.**

A very pretty, layered white with sliced lemon rind, white pineapple and green apple. White pepper and some crushed stone,too. It's medium-bodied with delicious fruit and a flavorful finish. Pure fruit. Blend of gruner and weissburgunder. From biodynamically grown grapes. Demeter certified. Drink now.

82 NEUMEISTER SAUVIGNON BLANC VULKANLAND STEIERMARK RIED MOARFEITL GSTK 2019 **94 Pts.**

Fresh mint, apricot, yellow grapefruit and cassis pour from the glass. Concentrated and elegant, this has wonderful focus and clarity, the power very much underplayed. Long, very bright finish with plenty of rock-salt character and herbal freshness. From organically grown grapes. Drink or hold.