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The Wine Column Wines and Vines

By Laurie Forster



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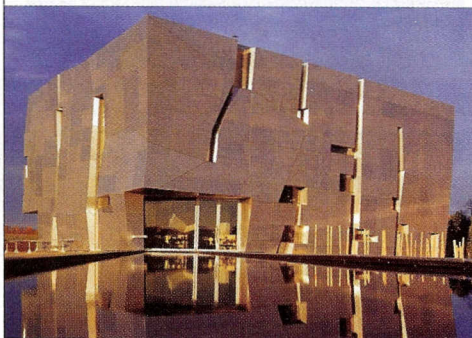
Austrian Wine

Vibrant, fun-loving, interesting, and great to eat with—this is a great description of the wonderful people I met in Austria this past January. But it also describes their wines. Austria might not be the first country that comes to mind when you think of fine wine, but it could be. The combination of Austria's long history of wine-making and the food-friendly style of its wines, makes them a favorite with sommeliers around the world.

Evidence suggests that wine has been made in Austria since as early as 700 B.C. Wine-making continued through the Roman occupation and later, with much support from the Catholic Church's monasteries and abbeys. It was after World War I that Austrian wine came into its own, when Austria became the third largest wine producing country in the world. A wine scandal in the mid-1980s stopped Austrian wine dead in its tracks and inspired Austria to create some of the strictest wine laws and regulations that exist today. The result is an unwavering commitment to creating high-quality wines with minimal intervention and a focus on organic wine-making. So why haven't you heard of Austrian wines? Well, one reason is that Austrians drink lots of wine, so most are con-

sumed domestically. Over the last decade, more and more Austrian wines have made their way to our shelves; however, supply is still limited because most Austrian wineries are small family businesses with an artisanal focus on quality rather than quantity.

Austria is divided into four main wine regions, which are mostly situated in the east and are roughly the same altitude as Burgundy, France. The regions are *Lower Austria* in the north, *Vienna* for the wineries located in the capital city, and *Burgenland* and *Styria* to the south. There are 37 grapes that are approved for wine-making in these regions. They include very familiar varietals, such as Chardonnay and Pinot Noir, and



The Loisium spa hotel and wine museum in Langenlois, Austria.

more exotic, indigenous, tongue-twisting varietals, such as Grüner Veltliner and Zweigelt. No matter which variety you choose, there is one quality that all these wines have—food friendliness.

This affinity for food has a lot to do with the continental climate in Austria. During the growing season warm, sunny days ripen the grapes and cool nights allow the grapes to retain their acidity. This results in a delicious range of medium-bodied wines with reasonable alcohol levels, fresh fruit flavors, and crisp acidity that stands up to most foods. It seems fitting that these wines shine best with food since the Austrians love to eat and rarely do it without wine. Grüner Veltliner, the most widely grown white wine in Austria, was also recently named one of the best pairing wines



If you want to experience the beauty of Austrian wines, here are some wines to try, along with some food pairing suggestions. You won't be disappointed.

Steinger Grüner Veltliner (Lower Austria)

Retails for about \$17

Steinger, located in the city of Langenlois, is an amazing example of a top-notch family-run winery. Owned by Karl and Brigitta Steinger and their daughters Eva, Anna, and Lisa, Steinger is one of three wineries that sponsored the Loisium hotel and wine museum (www.loisium.com), which was designed by New York architect Steven Holl. The wine's label uses the original sketch Holl drew depicting the hotel project.

This Grüner Veltliner (pronounced grooner veltleener) has mouthwatering acidity with flavors of citrus and tangerine and a hint of minerality. Try this Grüner with sushi rolls, salad, or soft-shell crabs.

Strauss Sauvignon Blanc (Styria)

Retails for about \$13

From the southernmost region, Styria, this is a delicious and affordable example of Austrian Sauvignon Blanc. Ripe lemon aromas, with a touch of herbs, dance on your palate along with a crisp, clean finish. A bit more reserved than New Zealand style, this Sauvignon is more similar to those of the Loire Valley in France. Seafood is a natural pairing for this wine but it could also be a great partner for roasted chicken or grilled pork.

Hillinger Eveline Pinot Noir (Burgenland)

Retails for about \$20

If you love red wines, there are plenty of Austrian wines for you! This Burgundian climate has inspired more than a few winemakers to experiment with Pinot Noir, with great success. The Hillinger Pinot Noir has cherry, cranberry, and spice aromas that join a hint of earthiness and food-friendly acidity on the palate. Try this Pinot with grilled vegetables, mushroom risotto, or salmon.

for Asian cuisine by the International Congress for Chinese Cuisine and Wine.

Laurie Forster, the Wine Coach, is a wine educator and author of the award-winning book The Sipping Point: A Crash Course in Wine. Laurie's specialty is creating unique corporate keynotes, teambuilding events, and group tasting seminars. For more information on Laurie's services or her book visit www.thewinecoach.com.