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HOW IRISH WHISKEY MAKERS
INNOVATE TO STAY AFLOAT



FROM A TO ZWIGELT

by Evan Saviolidis

While at this year's VieVinum, Austria's largest and most prestigious wine fair – and one of my personal favourite wine events, period – I entered into a debate with a journalist friend of mine as to which indigenous red grape is Austria's best. He was in the camp of Blaufränkisch (Kékfrankos in Hungary) while I was for Team Zweigelt. In my opinion, Blaufränkisch produces great wines, but structurally, it is linear and tannic. Also, if it's not ripe nor respected in the vineyard, it can produce harsh renditions. Zweigelt, on the other hand, can deliver a multitude of styles from light/easy drinking to modern/oaky to plush/rich to structured/ageworthy.



ROBERT PAYR

Ironically, Zweigelt is the progeny of Blaufränkisch and St. Laurent, another Austrian grape. Initially known as Rotberger, this relatively new crossing was created in 1922 by Fritz Zweigelt. It was prized for its adaptability in many soils and climates, its early-ripening nature, cold heartiness, rot resistance (thick skins), high sugar levels and quality coupled with high yields. Still, it remained an experimental grape until the 1950s. Enter Lenz Moser, one of the most famous names in Austrian viticulture. After World War II, the mandate was to plant all types of crops to feed and quench the masses. Moser, after seeing the attributes of the grape, started to propagate Zweigelt. By 1971, there were 1,000 hectares. That number doubled by 1978, with another twofold increase by the mid-1990s. It was also around this time that self-imposed yield control was implemented, which helped to create the first premium renditions.



GERHARD MARKOWITSCH

Today, Zweigelt is Austria's top-planted red grape, finding a home in all wine-growing regions, with the majority of plantings in the central and southern wine regions where the Pannonian (Central Europe's warmest) and Mediterranean climates favour red production. Now up to close to 6,500 hectares, you can find mono-varietal renditions of Zweigelt, which are my personal favourites, and ones blended with other red grapes of Austrian or international provenance.

In the glass, Zweigelt possesses a medium to dark ruby colour with some violet highlights. Aromatically, it is generally Morello cherry that dominates, followed by raspberry, plum and floral qualities. When new oak is added to the mix, chocolate, vanilla and spice complete the package. As for its official identity change from Rotberger to Zweigelt, that was thanks to Lenz-Moser. He promoted the idea back in 1975 as a means to honour Fritz and his creation.

If you were wondering who won the debate, I did! After all, I am writing this story. Finally, a thank you to Master of Wine Anne Kriebel; a portion of her Zweigelt presentation at VieVinum was used to help craft this story.

WEINGUT LETH ZWIGELT GIGAMA GRANDE RESERVE 2015, WAGRAM (\$40)

At first whiff, it is the red fruit that greets the taster, then plum, raisins, cocoa, vanilla, earth and spice round out the package. Nicely balance with both tannins and acidity in harmony. Excellent finale.

WEINGUT HANS & CHRISTINE NITTAUS ZWIGELT LUCKENWALD RESERVE 2015, NEUSIEDLERSEE DAC (\$25)

Almost opaque, this is a serious red and funky red, which features a leather/truffle/dark fruit personality. Tannic and concentrated, this wine will age 10 to 15 years. It is a unique offering that will appeal to a specific demographic of wine lover.

WEINGUT SCHLOSS GOBELSBURG ZWIGELT RESERVE 2015, NIEDERÖSTERREICH (\$40)

From one of my favourite all-around Austrian producers comes this impressive and modern Zweigelt where oak and fruit come together. Cherry, plum, mocha, smoke and graphite are built on fine-grained tannins. Excellent quality.

WEINGUT KISS WALDACKER RESERVE 2015, NEUSIEDLERSEE DAC (\$25)

Lots of oak. Spice, cocoa and vanilla meshes with the plum, cherry and earthy qualities. Full-bodied with excellent length. Drink until 2025.

FRANZ & CHRISTINE NETZL ZWIGELT RIED HAIDACKER GÖTTLESBRUNN 2015, CARNUNTUM (\$15)

Ried means single vineyard. This is a polished offering with morello cherry, plum, raspberry, vanilla, coffee, spice and herbs. Balanced, rich and excellent flavour persistence.



ANGELIKA AND PHILIPP GRASSL

WEINGUT PAYR ZWEIFELT RIED STEINÄCKER HÖFLEIN 2015, CARNUNTUM (\$20)

A powerful and expressive offering with masses of plum, blackberry, dark cherry and mocha on the nose, which meets up with pencil shavings, earth and pepper flavours on the palate. Concentrated and tannic, it should age well for 15 years.

WEINGUT GERHARD MARKOWITSCH ZWEIFELT RIED KIRCHWEINGARTEN HÖFLEIN 2015, CARNUNTUM (\$20)

A singular Zweigelt, which shows its terroir in the form of beef bouillon undergrowth and plum aromas. Once on the lips, the sweet, extracted fruit appears (red and black) alongside spice, which carries until the end.

WEINGUT JOHANNESHOF REINISCH FRAUENFELD ZWEIFELT 2015, THERMENREGION (\$25)

Earth, cherry, raspberry, vanilla, cocoa and mint are built on a medium body with suave tannins and fresh acidity. Delightful stuff!

WEINGUT CHRIST ZWEIFELT BISAMBERG 2015, WIEN (\$15)

From the region of Vienna, this Zweigelt flaunts red fruit, cherry and raspberry, which combines with plum, vanilla and black pepper qualities. Ready to drink with red fruit echoing long.

WEINGUT GRASSL ZWEIFELT RIED SCHÜTTENBERG GÖTTLESBRUN 2015, CARNUNTUM (\$20)

Clean with a forward fruit and oak experience. Plum, dark cherry,

vanilla, cocoa, mint and spice run up and down the senses. There is an undercurrent of tannins that calls for grilled quail or bison steaks with a port wine reduction.

WEINGUT WINKLER-HERMADEN OLIVIN ZWEIFELT 2015, VULKANLAND STEIERMARK (\$35)

A wine of place indeed! From the volcanic soils of Austria's most southern region comes this singular Zweigelt chock-full of leather, herbs, spice and flowers. Grippy, with a distinct saltiness on the lips. Needs fatty protein to make it work.

WEINGUT HANNES REEH UNPLUGGED ZWEIFELT 2015, BURGENLAND (\$30)

Made in an international style and one that will appeal to many. You will find cherry, raspberry, plum, tobacco leaf, chocolate and vanilla. Finale echoes spice.

SCHWARZ WEIN SCHWARZ ROT 2015, BURGENLAND (\$50)

An elegant style that flatters with a bouquet of raspberry, sour cherry, cassis and red flowers. The palate has a tart edge and the fruit brings it all back.

WEINGUT FAMILIE PITNAUER BIENENFRESSER ZWEIFELT 2015, CARNUNTUM (\$25)

An easy-drinking Zweigelt that shows a layered profile of cherry, plum, raspberry, vanilla, earth, red flowers and tobacco. Perfect for those pasta/pizza dinners. *