

WINESTATE

AUSTRALIA & NEW ZEALAND WINE BUYING GUIDE

ADVANTAGE
Austria

Changing
FORTUNES
Marlborough's rapid rise

Italian & Spanish
133 tasted

UNLOCKING
PERU'S
POTENTIAL

New Releases
253 tasted

COLOUR
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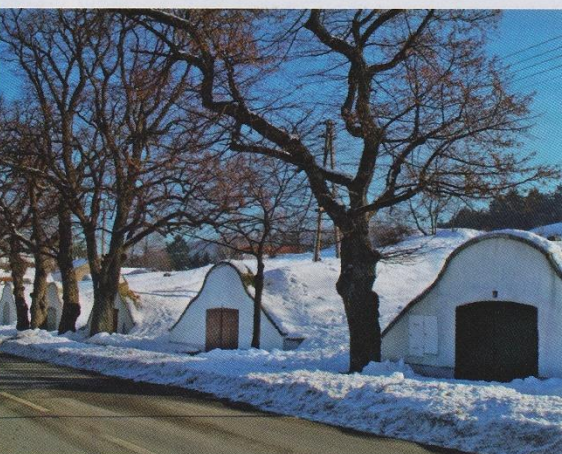
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plus

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ADVANTAGE Austria



DAN TRAUCKI

Since the turn of the century Australia has been drinking more and more imported wine. The statistics show us that we have gone from 5% of all wine consumed being imported to 25% of all wine consumed being imported. Sure, much of that increase has been the tidal wave of New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc which has drenched us over that time frame, however there has been a considerable rise in interest in wines from many other countries. For example today you can find Georgian wines here in Australia, along with some Portuguese table wines and a much wider array of Spanish and Italian wines. One country that is making a significant concerted push into the Australian market is our namesake (minus two letters) Austria. Or as Willi Klinger the head of the Austrian Wine Marketing Board likes to say “we are the ones without the kangaroos”.

Austria has a very long history of winemaking dating back nearly 4,000 years, and until an unfortunate incident in the mid-1980's was seen as the rising star in the European wine industry. As a result of this incident, the government introduced the strictest wine standards and laws in the world, and now at last they are back in the spotlight.

Austria is a small land locked country with a population of around 8.7 million people – just over double the population of Melbourne, in an area less than one third the size of Victoria.

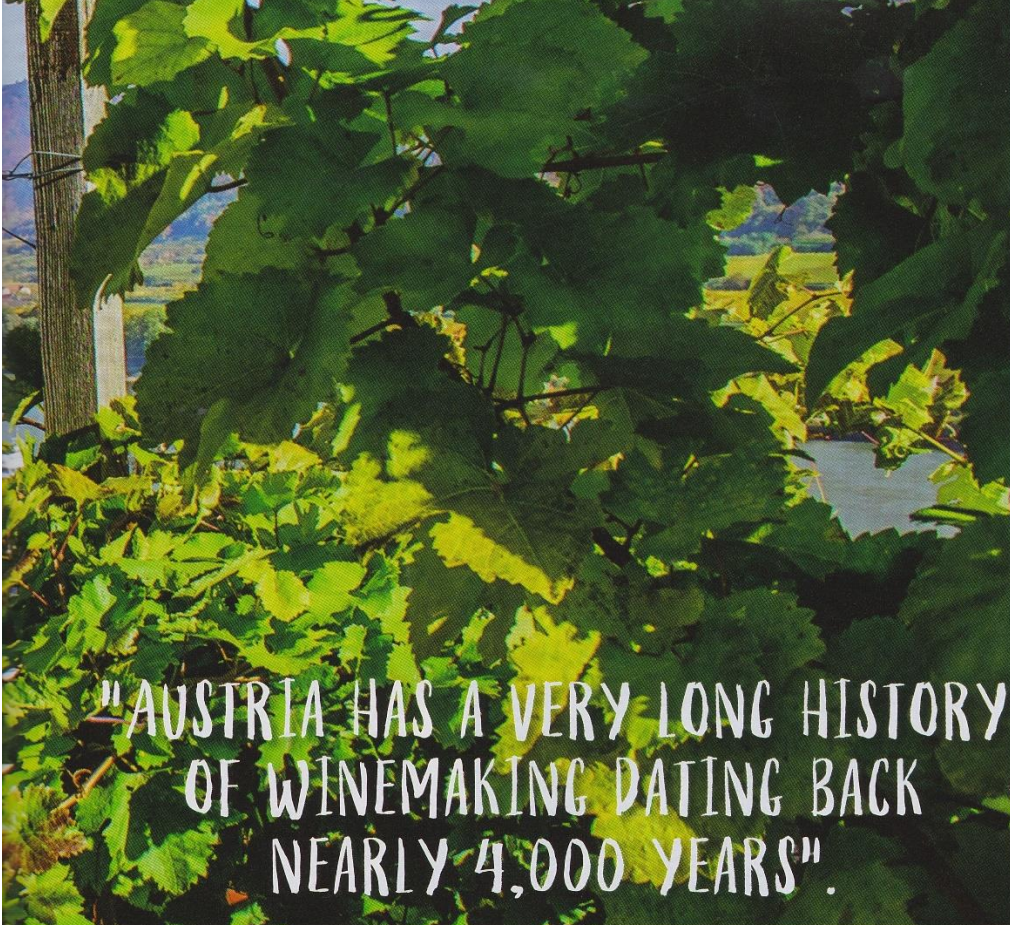
Following on from a significant tasting of Austrian wine in Australia, conducted by

Winestate last year, Willi Klinger paid a visit to Australia, upon the initiative of Advantage Austria/Austrian Consulate Sydney after the Hong Kong International Wine Fair, to help promote Austrian wines here. The visit started with a dinner at the Brisbane Club showcasing some outstanding wines, then there was a Gruner Veltliner tasting in the Adelaide Hills, with local producers followed by a hectic day in Sydney and then finally on to Melbourne.

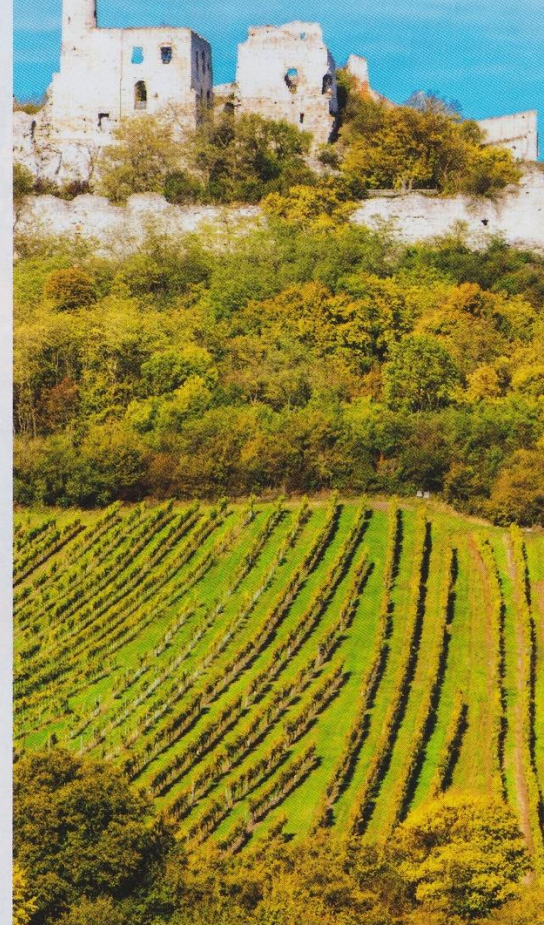
The action packed day in Sydney kicked off with a Masterclass held at the Chiswick Restaurant in Woollahra. The aim of the Masterclass was to demonstrate the impact of vintage conditions on Austria's favourite grape variety, Gruner Veltliner. Gruner Veltliner is a native white grape variety which produces about 30% of all Austrian wine. The tasting consisted of the Gruner Veltliner from four consecutive vintages, from each of four producers coming in three different wine growing regions- one producer from Wachau, one from Kremstal and two from Kamptal. To put the quality of these wines in to context Willi said “Gruner Veltliner is like BMW – there is the 3- 5 & 7 Series, and the wines we are tasting today are all from the 7 Series”.

The tasting showed that the vintage conditions have a considerable impact on the wines, certainly more than what we are accustomed to here in Australia. They were all very good, eminently drinkable wines but the wines clearly





"AUSTRIA HAS A VERY LONG HISTORY OF WINEMAKING DATING BACK NEARLY 4,000 YEARS".



expressed their vintage conditions.

The 2015 wines, from a warm/hot year were the most textural, the 2014 wines, from a rainy year were the most austere of the four vintages, the 2013 from a "semi cool" year were sensational and as Willi suggested "In the groove", whereas the 2012 from another hot year were like the 2015's but with a bit more time to age and develop, turning them into very rich and elegant wines.

At the same time the main importers of Austrian wine into Australia held a trade tasting in the delightful gardens of the restaurant. There were around 60-70 wines on taste in the gardens. All the ones I tasted were very good wines with a few really deserving a special mention. The most fascinating of all, to me, was the 2015 Groiss Gemischter Satz – which is a field blend of 13 white varieties (including a few tongue twisting native Austrian varieties) which are all harvested and fermented together, hence the field blend. This wine was almost as clear as water, had a very subtle and subdued nose but on the palate it exploded with complex flavours and tight acidity leading to a long lingering finish.

The Domaine Wachau Veltliner Doux Naturel was a cracker of a fortified wine, which is made by stopping the fermentation of the Gruner Veltliner grapes through adding grape spirit made from Gruner Veltliner. The resultant wine is lovely and yet contrary to expectation finishes bone dry- very classy.

I have always had a soft spot for the incredibly delicious sweet wines from Austria, especially the sweeter ones ranging from beerenauslese through to their jaw-dropping palate seducing ice wines. A really interesting wine was the Ruster Ausbruch Furmint Saz (375ml), unusually made from Furmint, which is much better known in Hungary than Austria, this wine had a magnificent gold colour with dried apricot and orange rind aromas and a gorgeously sweet palate, which wasn't cloying.

However the star of the desert wine firmament, in my opinion, is Alois Kracher. I have tasted his insanely sweet, yet stunning and balanced sweet wines on a number of occasions, including once standing near to Neusiedler See the massive lake that makes these Eiswein's possible. The Kracher on taste at Chiswick was the Kracher 2011 Eiswein, which was golden yellow, had a really complex nose, was massively sweet, yet superbly balanced so that it did not cloy. If you haven't done so, so far you really ought to taste some Austrian desert wines as they are sublime.

To complete the day, that evening there was an Advantage Austria/Winestate organised, slightly more formal public tasting of 96 Austrian wines at the spectacular Royal Automobile Club in Macquarie Street Sydney. Walking into that magnificent late 1800's building, one felt

like one had been transported back in time to more formal and stately days.

Whilst the predominant variety at the tasting was again their flagship- Gruner Veltliner, there was a wide range of both red and white varieties on taste from across the country, including some from Vienna- the only capital city in the world that has working commercial vineyards within its city limits.

Almost all the Austrian reds there, were interesting lighter style wines made from Blaufrankisch, Zweigelt or St Laurent – all of which can be described as being somewhat like a Pinot Noir that has been seriously working out at the gym. However the one red wine that really stood out for me was the Gesellman 2013 Cuvee, a complex and elegant blend of Blaufrankisch, St Laurent and Zweigelt, which had seen some serious oak making it quite a bit bigger than the usual Austrian red and very classy. It was a very pleasant evening showcasing some truly unique and delicious wines.

So when you are considering wines from the myriad of countries that are trying to ramp up their exports to the Australian wine market, remember this "Advantage Austria", because they have their own unique native varieties which add another perspective to your wine repertoire rather than just mimicking the "mainstream" wines made by other more famous wine countries.

Prost.

