

WINE News

The red, the white and the Grüner of Austria, Alsace and Germany.



APRIL 9, 2018 FEATURES

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Groovy Grüner Is Green in More Than One Way!

Germany, Austria and Alsace are all famous for their bright white wines, especially Riesling and Pinot Blanc (“Weissburgunder” in German), which can be found in all three regions. We’ll look at a selection of our favorite new offerings from those categories in the following pages of this newsletter, plus a few eclectic reds—some of them not as unfamiliar to you as their German name might suggest! Yet Austria remains the sole provider of the world’s best Grüner Veltliner—the “Green Veltliner,” their national grape.

Grüner, as it is lovingly called by its fans, is an internationally popular varietal wine because of its fresh profile and modest cost. The wine bursts with juicy acidity and typically expresses citrus notes with a white

pepper spice. Great for food pairings at the table, Grüner is endlessly versatile and typically low in alcohol at plus or minus 12% alcohol by volume, and can even benefit from aging in the cellar.

The wines of fourth-generation winegrower Bernhard Ott are a fitting lot to start with this April, the month of Earth Day and Arbor Day. After taking the helm of the family estate in 1995, Ott, who has been named “Winemaker of the Year” by Austria’s premier food and wine magazine *Falstaff*, adopted a “green” approach by transitioning the vineyards to Biodynamic farming practices.

2016 Bernhard Ott “Am Berg” Grüner Veltliner Niederösterreich (\$17.99)

Wine Advocate’s Stephan Reinhardt: “A light, bright, fresh and crisp Veltliner with clear and intense white fruit, fine acidity and a delicate mineral backbone. It weighs in at just 11.5% alcohol, is bone dry and really stimulating. Drink young and crisp and with fish!”
92 WE, 91 JS



2015 Bernhard Ott “Fass 4” Grüner Veltliner Wagram (\$24.99) *Wine & Spirits*: “A textbook Grüner, this is clean, clear and green-fruited, with a whiff of white pepper and enough sense of minerality to keep it svelte.” 91 VN, 90 RP, 90 WS, 90 WE, 90 W&S



2015 Bernhard Ott Spiegel Grüner Veltliner Wagram (\$43.99) David Schildknecht of *Vinous.com* says: “This combines glycerol-richness and an expansive sense of fullness with cut, refreshment and underlying stoniness. Honeydew melon mingles with rhubarb, scented by cinnamon basil, and the long, mouthwatering finish displays a fascinating mollusk-like meld of nuttiness, salinity and deep sweetness.” 92-93 VN, 92 WE



Hugel: Alsace Grand Cru by Any Other Name

By Elsa Baez

As the recently assigned liaison for wines of the Alsace region at K&L's Redwood City location, I am thrilled to sample and learn more about Alsace wines. Alsace got on the map as a phenomenal wine region around 2,000 years ago, but it's had a tumultuous history since. Alsace rose up from decline to become one of the most world-renowned wine regions today.

The Hugel family's winegrowing goes back to 1639 in Riquewihr, making Hugel one of the most long-established Alsace houses. Despite Hugel's non-participation in labeling their wines as Grand Cru, mostly boycotting the idea of the current set boundaries, Hugel wines are backed by over 370 years of winemaking and 13 family generations, and current winemaker Marc Hugel continues to combine tradition and innovation in each wine. Anyone interested in tasting the benchmark of Alsace wines should start with Hugel.

Let's start with the **2015 Hugel "Gentil" Alsace (\$11.99)**, a blend of Gewürztraminer, Pinot Gris, Riesling, Muscat and Sylvaner grapes. The wine is fermented in temperature-controlled vats and rested on its lees through the spring. The time on the lees provides body and texture, and along with its dry and crisp notes, this blend provides a fantastic mix of great flavors! I would pair this wine with sushi or a stir-fry dish.

Another not-to-miss Hugel wine, the **2012 Hugel "Estate" Riesling Alsace (\$34.99)** has aromatics of minerality, citrus and peach with the concentrated flavors of Honeycrisp apple, balanced acidity and a hint of petrol typically found in Rieslings. This Riesling is made with grapes from carefully chosen plots of the Famille Hugel estate (also known as "parcelleire") in Riquewihr, which are regarded as Grand Cru caliber, however, not noted on the Hugel labels. If you're looking for a more linear, light yet concentrated Alsace Riesling, this is it! Great with any spicy Thai or Indian dishes. **93 WE**

The **2015 Hugel "Classic" Riesling Alsace (\$17.99)** comes from a vintage that is considered exceptional, and made with ripe, supple and acidic grapes thanks to the late bud break and early blossom in Riquewihr. The patience to hold off on grape picking a few days later than the rest of Alsace certainly paid off with this bottling. Dry and elegant, with an exceptional showing of the fruit, this Riesling will be a great pairing with seafood dishes. **90 RP**



Get to Know Austrian Reds

By Lilia McIntosh

To a majority of wine drinkers, Austria is mostly known as white wine-producing country, with Grüner Veltliner being the reigning varietal. However, one-third of Austrian vineyards are planted to red grapes (14 varieties are classified for production), and Austrian red wine is incredibly food friendly, versatile and exciting. Zweigelt, created in the 1920s by Professor Fritz Zweigelt by crossing Blaufränkisch and St. Laurent, is the most successful and widely planted variety for red wine.

2015 Umathum Zweigelt Burgenland (\$18.99)

Full of spicy red cherry aromas, on the palate this wine has lots of black cherry, raspberry and pepper notes with bright acidity, low tannins, light texture and a long-lasting finish. Being aged in large neutral oak casks, it doesn't carry any wood influence at all, and is just a pure expression of Zweigelt fruit unmasked.



Another traditional Austrian grape variety, and second in terms of popularity after Zweigelt, is Blaufränkisch. One of the classic examples comes from producer Rosi Schuster. She and her son Hannes (who now mostly runs the winery) make elegant, yet structured wines. Their **2015 Rosi Schuster Blaufränkisch Burgenland (\$19.99)** is aged in large oak barrels for 18 months. It is a firm

and polished, full-bodied wine with the high acidity typical for this variety, and which makes it age-worthy. Forest berries, earth and spice dominate the palate. The structure is dense. This wine is powerful yet doesn't feel heavy and comes with a modest 13% alcohol level.

Another grape variety worth mentioning is Pinot Noir. Despite not being native to Austria, it is experiencing quite an upswing in popularity there, with many producers making beautiful, noteworthy wines in a Burgundian style with moderate price tags. One of them is Malat from Kremstal region. Their **2015 Malat Pinot Noir Kremstal (\$19.99)** is so shockingly Burgundy-like that in blind tasting it could be easily mistaken for Pinot Noir from villages Volnay or Nuits-St-Georges. I love its remarkable, savory tones of forest and underbrush in combination with juicy red cherries and mineral notes. It has such breathtaking finesse and balance, one is stunned by how little it costs. **93 WE**

Tasting wines like this and the wines listed above makes you really wonder why they are not as well known as other fine wines of the world. But here at K&L we are so happy that we can unearth these hidden treasures and bring them to you for a very reasonable cost.





It's never soon enough for the next vintage of "Late Burgundy."

Going Sideways for Germany's Top Red: Spätburgunder

By Morgan Laurie

I'm going to let you in on a little secret: German Pinot Noir is the wine world's next big trend. Generally called Spätburgunder (pronounced SHPAYT-bur-GUHN-der) in Germany (but also, often labeled as Pinot Noir), these delicious reds defy broad categorization, turning each new bottle into a journey through Germany's varied geography and geology. Spätburgunder has quietly been gaining attention from wine writers, sommeliers, enthusiasts and geeks for some years now, but still lives in relative obscurity when it comes to the larger discussion of quality Pinot Noir and the regions that produce it. One reason I wanted to write about Spätburgunder for this newsletter is the reactions I frequently receive from customers when I attempt to bring them over to Germany while they're shopping for Pinot Noir—usually something like, "I had *no* idea that there were great Pinots coming out of Germany," or "Germany makes Pinot?!"

Until fairly recently, German Pinot Noir had a reputation for being thin, tart and bland. But those days are no more. Experimentation is abundant, as winemakers search for the best way to make their Pinot Noir shine. Vintners are freeing themselves from ideas about what Spätburgunder should be and are instead employing their intuition. Over the past few decades winemakers throughout Germany have undertaken a massive overhaul of their Pinot Noir production, making huge strides in a short time by planting better clones, utilizing higher-quality barrels, using barrel aging to derive texture versus flavor, cutting yields, adopting vinification techniques learned abroad and finally, from climate change—perhaps one of the most significant developments for the production of German Pinot Noir and something completely out of the winemakers' control. But it's (fortunately and unfortunately) helping, and Germany is just now entering into a climatic sweet spot. Pinot Noir ripens best at 57–60 degrees Fahrenheit. Oregon and Burgundy will be reaching the upper threshold of this temperature range by the year 2030, while Germany is just entering this narrow window. Even with careful placement of vineyard sites, it was still hard for Pinot Noir to ripen until the onset of warmer temperatures brought about by global warming. As recently as a decade ago, Spätburgunder was still made using under-ripe grapes. With current conditions, Germany is positioned to become a region consumers can find high-quality Pinot Noir at a fraction of Burgundy's prices.

While Spätburgunder has the potential to age beautifully, German Pinot Noir can be an impatient wine drinker's best friend.

Spätburgunders can be enjoyed much younger than some of their French counterparts, and I've tasted some 2015s that are ethereal, delicate and highly enjoyable, especially with an hour of decanting.

With the increase of vineyard plantings, Germany is now the third largest producer of Pinot Noir in the world, behind France and the United States. Germany's southernmost winegrowing region, Baden, has more Pinot Noir planted than either New Zealand or Australia. So why aren't you seeing more of? Well, Pinot Noir consumption in Germany has risen steadily over the past 30 years alongside the increase in plantings and higher quality production. Most Spätburgunder is consumed with in Germany and only a small percentage of the wines are exported stateside. This, in a way, makes the wines more intriguing and enchanting: they are a rare gem to be sought out and savored, and when you come across the great ones, they're magical.

One of Germany's Pinot rock stars, Friedrich Becker has an entry-level Pinot Noir that outperforms some wines twice the price. The **2013 Becker Estate Pinot Noir Pfalz (\$16.99)** shows spiced strawberry, bright cherry, fresh tobacco and notes of forest floor with layers of complexity and finesse. The estate uses old Romanée-Conti barrels to age their cru offerings such as the **2013 Friedrich Becker "Kammerberg" Spätburgunder Pfalz (\$134.99)**. **95 JS, 93 RP**



The **2015 Fürst "Tradition" Pinot Noir Franken (\$29.99)** is stunning: complex, yet subtle, with a slight flinty, smoky quality, sour red cherry, rose petals and a woody, fresh soil note of earthiness. The tannins are supple, and with a little spice on the palate, the wine has bright acidity and tons of freshness.

Last but not least is the **2014 Franz Keller "Franz Anton" Spätburgunder Baden (750ml \$34.99; 1.5L \$64.99)**. Replete with bright red berries, bay leaf, subtle toast and white pepper, this is a bolder, firmer, more structured wine with the power behind it to age for at least a decade more. Now that I've spilled the beans on Spätburgunder, I hope you explore the beautiful and budget-friendly wines Germany has to offer. **94 WE**

Vintage 2016: A Bumpy Road to a Smooth Result

The wine regions of Germany, Austria and Alsace all fit nicely into a tight geographical box that is only three latitudinal degrees high (from 47° to 50°), and a little more than 400 miles end-to-end. Typically their individual vintage fingerprints will be 25% different from each other's, but in 2016 they all suffered together in a long duration of pain. Theirs is a happy ending, however!

Weather extremes plagued the white wine belt of Europe from early spring till mid-summer. April was cold, and it just would not loosen its "frosty" grip all month. Icy weather and overcast skies kept the vines dormant for longer than average, and regular frost threatened bud break whenever it got a start. When the mild temperatures of spring did inevitably arrive they brought with them heavy rains. May and June saw more precipitation in two months than all of 2015. In a region famous for steep slopes, broken rock soils and the extreme gymnastics needed to farm the land, slippery mud and wet rock challenged even the most seasoned vigneron.

Then just as quickly as it came, the rain was gone and summer started in July. Yet again, Mother Nature was not done. It did not sprinkle one more drop of moisture from the sky for two months thereafter. Eventually, in September, when the vineyards had suffered just enough, they were rewarded from late summer and through an extended fall, pure euphoria for grapes and those who tend them. Occasional showers were perfectly timed, days were warm and nights were breezy and cool. No one had to pick early and some harvesting went well into November. The season turned out perfect for Trocken (dry) and Kabinett (slightly off-dry) styles. Late harvest wines that benefit from botrytis (a welcome fungus that shrivels the grapes but also adds an accent of honey to the juice) were not made in any great volume due to the dry end to the season. However, the grapes were so healthy into November that more of the typically ultra-rare Eiswein was made than usual!



Alsace

2016 Domaine Weinbach "Cuvée Théo" Gewürztraminer Alsace (\$39.99) 91 WS: "Smoky mineral and spice notes underscore lychee, candied pink grapefruit zest and tangy star fruit flavors in this lively, light- to medium-bodied white. Dry and creamy, with a floral finish. Drink now through 2025."

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2016 Meyer-Fonné Pinot Blanc "Vieilles Vignes" Alsace (\$18.99) Meyer ages his carefully blended lots on the lees in large, neutral cooperage in the old tradition of Alsace. *Wine Enthusiast*: "An earthy overtone sits on the nose. The palate has a similarly earthy ring but adds gentle pear and lemon notes to a very light, dry body."

Germany

2016 Joh. Jos. Prüm Wehlener Sonnenuhr Kabinett Riesling Mosel (\$29.99) Fine 2016 Kabinett from one of the top names and top Riesling regions in Germany. Richard Hemming of JancisRobinson.com says: "Pretty much the perfect Mosel Kabinett."
93 VN

2016 Leitz "Eins Zwei Dry" Rheingau Riesling Trocken (\$15.99) A K&L favorite, vintage after vintage. *Wine & Spirits*: "Tangy, lean and fresh, this practically sparkles with mineral tones, a tonic-and-lime without the sweetness or bubbles. But that sounds austere, and this wine isn't: It has enough extract to give it body, a roundness that would complement a coconut-milk fish curry." 90 JS



Austria

2016 Schloss Gobelsburg Ried Gaisberg Riesling Kamptal (\$37.99) *Wine Enthusiast*: "With a few swirls of the glass, tender hints of blood orange zest pervade nose and palate, alongside spiky, bright lemon notes. The body is slender and taut but brims with gorgeously citrus aromas. Lovely now but sure to last." 95 JS, 94 WE

2016 Laurenz V. (und Sophie) "Singing" Grüner Veltliner Kamptal (\$14.99) This lively, harmonious wine "sings" on the palate! Richard Hemming: "Generous and well-defined with ripe lemon flavours, some grapefruit and even a touch of oily flavour. Refreshing acidity, good persistence—this is a really good introduction to the variety."

