

Havant U3A Wine Appreciation Group

7th Lockdown Newsletter 1st June 2020

Welcome

Hello Wine Appreciation members, welcome to the next of our regular emails during the Coronavirus lockdown period.

We hope that they are providing some interest and education whilst our normal monthly meetings are suspended. Those face to face meetings are established as collaborative, with different members choosing the wines and the education topic each session. We would very much like these newsletters to also operate in this way, so we ask for any of the following:

Members to volunteer to produce the next letter

Members to volunteer to provide the content of the next learning topic

Members to provide input about their:

Wine experiences – like the best wine I ever had or the wine I've saved for a special occasion

Wine likes and dislikes – what is your favourite wine or a style of wine and why

Please reply to this letter to offer your services and or to provide your input.

Many thanks

Members News

There's no news as such that I can share, but I'd like to reflect on something related to lockdown.

We've been exclusively shopping in Tesco during these weeks rather than our usual habit of doing a weekly shop supplemented by visits to other shops. This has meant that we've not been able to see the variety of wines the likes of Waitrose, M&S, Aldi and Lidl are currently offering. The effect of this is that I'm more inclined to go online to browse wine merchant's sites and see what they have to offer.

What I've seen is that the independents are alive and well and offering varied and interesting wines. I've only placed a single order, at Tanners of Shrewsbury, but there are lots of others that tempt me! Why am I telling you this? If only to give a message that there's lots out there and we, as adventurous people who appreciate wine in all its many styles should take some moments to search them out.

Study Topics

We have two study topics for you this week, the first more information or possibly advice and the second about the wine of Austria. Enjoy!

1. How much should you pay for a bottle of wine?

You pick a bottle of wine off the retailer's shelf and ask yourself: How much quality will I get?

This is a question that some people don't worry about; they just want the cheapest they can get. But we, as discerning appreciators of wine, should look a bit deeper into the price we pay. So, if you pay £5 or £10 for a bottle of wine, how much value of wine will you get compared to the cost of the glass bottle, the transportation and the tax?

Here's a breakdown of those costs:



You will see immediately that the excise duty, logistics and packaging are same value no matter how much the bottle costs on the shelf and it's these costs and that of VAT, which is dependent on the selling price, which then control how much money is left for the actual wine.

The average cost of a UK bottle of wine is £6.09 and after costs and wholesale and retail profits this leaves just 94p for the wine. However, if we pay a bit more, we get a greater value of wine; which we would hope gives us a better wine!

If we pay £7.50 then we get £1.43 worth of wine and if we pay £10 for a bottle then the wine is worth £2.70 – that's nearly three times as much as the £6 bottle.

You may note that the above chart does not include a line for any Import Duty or Tariff. This is because wine from both EU countries and countries with which the EU has a trade agreement currently attract no tariff for us. However, the EU sets a standard rate for wine from countries for which there is not a trade agreement – for example Australia, New Zealand or USA - of 5p to 7p bottle for still wine, depending on strength, and a bit more for sparkling wine. The tariff is charged on the import price so the tariff will also cause a marginal increase in VAT.

When the Transition period for the UK leaving the EU is ended the UK must define a standard tariff (even if its zero) and it seems that the UK government is currently leaning toward applying a tariff to all imported wines, where there's no trade agreement, at a rate similar to the EU rate, thus if we leave without an EU trade deal then all EU wine will go up a bit for us, but we shall see what happens at the start of 2021...

2. Austrian Wine

Introduction

Austria is 15th in the world for wine production volumes. A lowly place in the global hierarchy but still a significant producer and it is possible to buy a variety of Austrian wines in the UK – unlike for example China and Russia which both produce more wine but can almost never be seen in the shelves. This accessibility makes it worth talking about Austrian wine.

History

Austria has been making wine for many years; there is evidence that the Celts and later the Romans both made wine in the region. In the 1920 it was the third largest producer in the world.

There was a disaster for the wine industry in the 1980s which almost destroyed the industry. This was when some producers were found to be adding the chemical diethylene glycol to their wine in order to add sweetness and mouthfeel. When this was discovered customers quickly stopped buying the wine and the industry almost collapsed. However, this adulteration scandal eventually led to stricter wine laws and a generally better product more suited to the world markets. We can taste the benefits of this today.

Grapes and wines

Austria has at least two native grape varieties – white Gruner Veltliner and red Zweigelt - and it uses a few more which are rarely seen from other countries. A majority of Austrian wine is white – both still and sparkling as Sekt - (about 70%) and the remainder is red (rose is much less common). Here's a table of the different varieties grown by vineyard area:

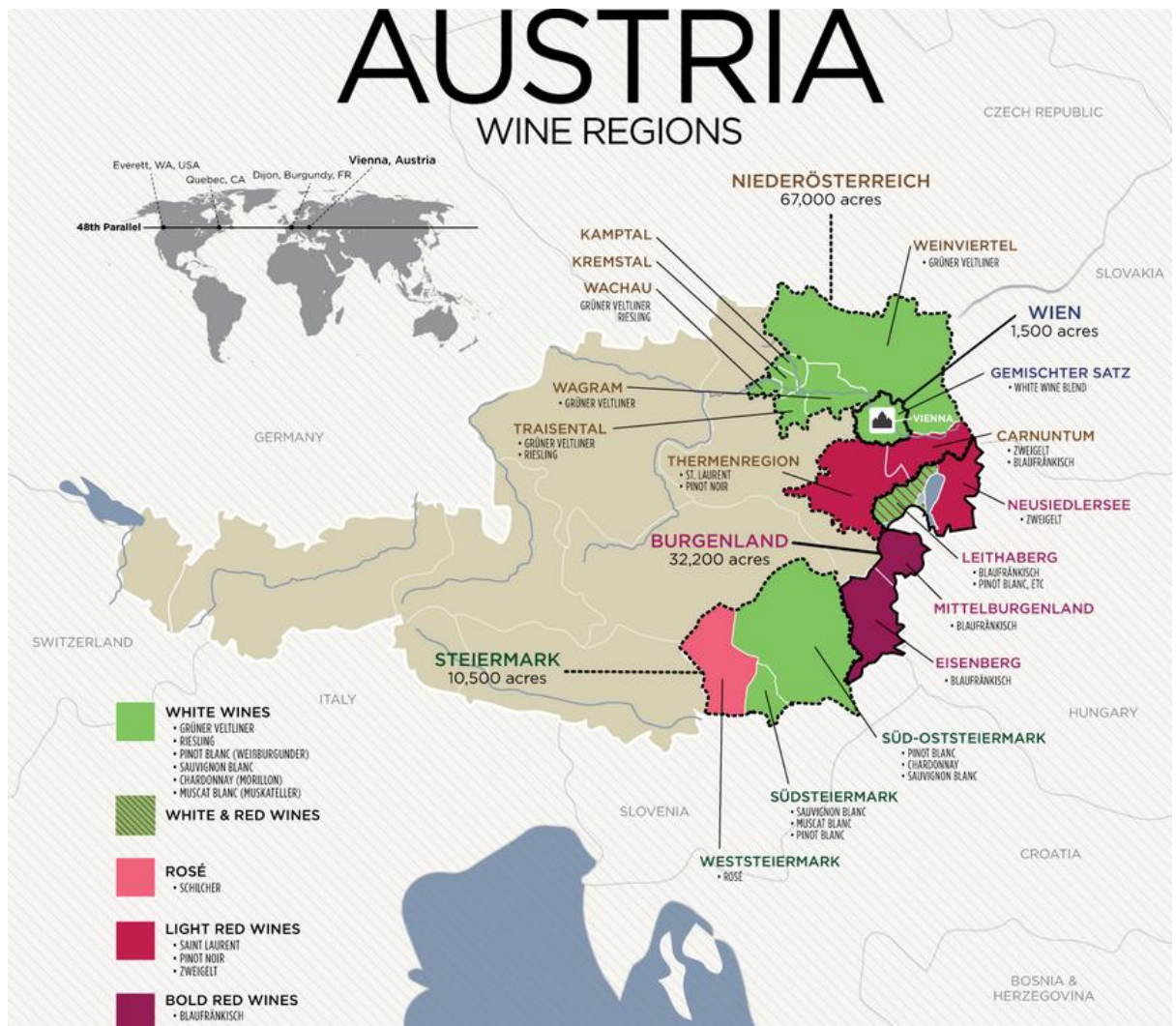
Grape ^[8]	Vineyards
Grüner Veltliner	36.0%
Other white (<2%)	11.1%
Zweigelt	9.0%
Welschriesling	8.9%
Other red (<2%)	8.9%
Müller-Thurgau	6.8%
Pinot blanc + Chardonnay	6.1%
Blaufränkisch	5.5%
Blauer Portugieser	4.9%
Riesling	3.4%
Neuburger	2.3%

As you can see, there are some less recognisable varieties!

The wines themselves are typically varietal wines with the name of the grape shown on the label. The vast majority are dry wines designed to accompany food or as sparkling – Sekt – or as sweet wines following the German system for categorising the sweetness of the grapes (see classification). The sweet wines reach their quality peak in the areas around the Neusiedlsee (Lake Neusiedl).


Vineyard Areas

The quality vineyards are all to the east side of the country which probably explains why many of their grapes are what we might consider Eastern European.



There's some nice text and picture detail [here](#) which tells us about the major white and red grapes and the characteristics of the wine that they can produce.

A short summary of the wine regions is [here](#) and a slightly longer description is [here](#).

For this second video, which has an advert at the start, you may want to turn on sub-titles in YouTube using the  icon at the bottom of the screen.

How good are the wines?

Austria has a wine classification system which, being an EU county, is broadly the same as other European countries with three levels of quality where the 3rd level can be further sub-divided:

Wine without Geographical Indication – Wein

Wine with protected geographical origin – Landwein

Wine with protected designation origin – Qualitätswein DAC

It is wines of the Qualitätswein or DAC designation that we typically see in British shops and restaurants and this is further qualified by the name of the region from which it comes and can show the level of grape ripeness in a similar way to the German classification eg Kabinett, Spätlese, Auslese etc.

The quality of the wines which we see here is typically high and this is reflected in the prices here where prices begin at around £8 and better wines can be had for £10+

Finally, you may also want to watch this video [here](#) which covers both grapes in Austria and wine classification

Where can you buy Austrian wines?

Most supermarkets have a Gruner Veltliner and some will also have a red or two and if you go to on the high street to Waitrose, Majestic and possibly M&S and online to Wine Society you will find a wider range. There is at least one specialist wine merchant which is the [Austrian Wine Company](#).

Lottery (small) Win Wines

The most expensive Spanish wine has never been a wine from Rioja; that may come as a surprise since this is the most well-known wine region in Spain. The price 'crown' belongs to the Ribera Del Duero region, but Spanish purists amongst us will be pleased to know that the Tempranillo grape has always featured! This, however, is a tale of the old overtaken by the new.

The old 'price crown' belongs to the [Vega Sicilia](#) winery which was established in Ribera del Duero in 1864 at the same time as French vineyards were being devastated by the Phylloxera aphid. Don Eloy Lecanda y Chaves planted Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Malbec and Tempranillo and he started to make a Bordeaux style wine in an area where there were no other wineries of any renown. This style included the long ageing that typifies top French reds, with the flagship Unico wine being aged for a minimum of 10 years in both barrel and bottle. The wines quickly became well-known for their high quality and consequently for their high price. The winery was taken over by the Alvarez family in 1982 and now the wines are mostly made from Tinto Fino (as Tempranillo is known in this region) with Cab and Merlot in the blends.

Today the Unico grand reserve sells at around £190 a bottle, its second wine Valbuena (aged just 5 years!) at around half that price.

The 'young pretender' which has succeeded in taking the Spanish price crown is also a winery in Ribera Del Duero; [Domino de Pingus](#). This winery was established in just 1995 by the Danish winemaker and oenologist Peter Sisseck taking over some vineyards planted exclusively with very old Tinto Fino vines. His objective, like that of Vega Sicilia, was to make a world-class wine. He certainly succeeded in that when his first vintage, the 1995, was highly praised by the American wine critic Robert Parker. As an instant hit with a small production volume the prices were high and went higher with later vintages.

Today the top vintage Pingus sells for around £470 a bottle and the second wine Flor de Pingus for around £60

Happy drinking

Nick Haward