

Austria

SUMMER SIPS, CLASSIC AND UNEXPECTED

There's no question that Austria's top two signature white grapes are Grüner Veltliner and Riesling. Their best expression is found in the Danube Valley, west of Vienna, and in the regions to the north of the Danube. The relatively cool climate, with cold winters and summers that can range from hot and searingly dry to cool and decidedly damp, gives us deliciously intense wines, full of fruit, but also crisp and refreshing.

This month's Buying Guide focuses on the Kamptal. The main city of the Kamptal, Langenlois, Austria's largest wine town, is about half an hour north of the Danube, in the valley of the Kamp. It's become the new Austrian wine destination, with the opening of the Loisium wine museum (designed by American architect Steven Holl), and an adjacent luxury hotel.

The whole Kamptal is dominated by the Heiligenstein hill, shaped like a beached whale

and covered with some of the most famous Riesling and Grüner Veltliner vines in Austria. The wines are spicy, but with an intense minerality.

There is one other signature Austrian grape in this Buying Guide, an unexpected one, from an unexpected place. In the mountains of Styria, in Austria's deep south, Sauvignon Blanc, first planted here over 100 years ago, produces some of Austria's most sought-after wines. They are every bit as full-bodied and concentrated as New Zealand's, and every bit as racy as Sancerre. From the basic Klassik (unwooded) style to the richer barrique-aged wines, these are full of herbaceousness, grapefruit, tropical fruits and spice.

These wines come from two vintages. While 2006 was a great year for white in Austria, producing low yield, rich, fully-ripe wines in every grape-growing region, 2007 was more of a challenge. Those wines, while balanced, are more crisp and fresh.

—ROGER VOSS

90 Neumeister 2006 Klausen Sauvignon Blanc (Südoststeiermark); \$29. This wine's elegant, ripe, grapefruit and tropical fruits are concentrated and suggest 2–3 years aging. Its lively acidity, layered with green apple skin tannins and richness, gives the true pungency of Sauvignon Blanc.

89 Neumeister 2006 Steierische Klassik Sauvignon Blanc (Südoststeiermark); \$20. This herbaceous, grassy, grapefruit-flavored wine bursts in the mouth with intensity. This is a fruit bomb, showing New World richness and concentration, very fresh and ripe. There are some tropical fruit elements, but more of green pear and apples.