

Weinberg's Wine Notes #157 - Wine On The Road in Austria Part II



The Neusiedler See in the Burgenland, Austria

Last week I detailed my attendance at the Austrian Wine Summit (AWS) as a guest of the indomitable Willi Klingler and the Austrian Wine Marketing Board (see Wine On The Road in Austria, and you can also find more information on Willi's organization and the AWS at www.austrianwine.com). After the summit, my friend Jerry Kazzaz joined me in Vienna and we immediately headed out for several days of wine travel in the southeast Austrian district of Burgenland, home to 5,000 hectares of vines and an enormous lake (the Neusiedler See). We subsequently ventured an additional 400 kilometers further east to fabled Tokaj in Hungary, but I'll save that story for next week's column.

The Neusiedler See is 75 percent contained within Austria, covers more than 315 square kilometers and is no more than 1.8 meters deep. Such geography promotes warm, wet winds that significantly influence the vineyards that dot the surrounding countryside. I have previously journeyed to this ancient wine region several times (see Tales From The Austrian Wine Summit, Hans and Anita Nittnaus, and Wine On The Road in Austria), but as with all of my vine travels, each visit brings with it new experiences, fascinations and stories. In short, such trips are a large portion of why I became a wine writer in the first place.



Gerhard and Brigitte Pittnauer

Our first stop was at Weingut Pittnauer, where we visited with owners Gerhard and his charming wife Brigitte before heading out to dinner at one of the many lovely lakeside restaurants that ring

the Neusiedler See. Pittnauer focuses on red wine, and none was more delicious that evening than the St. Laurent (a relative of Pinot Noir) Alte Reben (Old Vines). Purple-red in color, this deeply flavored wine threw off aromas of violets and nutmeg while the flavors focused on black cherry, allspice and burnt sugar. The bottle we tried was from 2008, and while this was a tough year in the Burgenland those who made difficult choices and strenuous selections produced terrific wine.

Another top-notch Pittnauer effort was the Altenberg Reserve Merlot, brick-red and smelling of dark chocolate and blueberries. The palate was all red cherry, pomegranate and cassis, classic Merlot flavors that showed the excellent potential of this grape in this region.



Michaela and Gerhard Kracher

Our second tour was at perhaps the most famous winery in all of Austria, Weingut Kracher. While the tale of Alois Kracher's untimely death a few years back has been well-detailed by me and many other writers, to me the story now is how his widow Michaela and son Gerhard have continued to honor his name by maintaining and even growing the domain that he made so integral to the story of Austrian wine.

Kracher is justly famed for its botrytized dessert juice, primarily of Trockenbeerenauslese sweetness ("TBA," the highest classification of such wines in Austria). The various cuvees are numbered, and usually there are 12 or 13 produced each year in ascending order of sugar content. None was better than the gooey, amber-yellow 2008 TBA Welschriesling No. 9, where white peach, green melon, quince, yellow apple and mint vied in a crescendo of swirling sensory impression. This wine was a tour-de-force and in two decades, when it is mature, I recommend it be enjoyed with friends on convivial occasions. Another of Kracher's winners was the gold hued TBA Scheurebe from 2009, too young to have been assigned a number yet but bursting with tangerine, yellow peach and honey on a long, lithe frame.



Hans and Anita Nittnaus

Next up were Hans and Anita Nittnaus, not only legendary winemakers (his family has made wine since at least 1684) but also the folks who provided us lodging during our stay in the Burgenland. Hans and Anita produce a terrific white wine called Leithaberg (named after the newly classified region from which it is produced), which that afternoon promoted white peach and grapefruit at first, followed by a mineral driven finish of tangerine and almond skin. This was high-toned and long on the palate, a serious white wine indeed.

Another great Nittnaus bottle, this time red, was a 100 percent Blaufrankisch also named Leithaberg. Deeply purple in color, this showed dusty cinnamon, cola and black cherry up-front. Then came a ton of red strawberry, black pepper and slate on the tongue, making this one of the more complex wines sampled during the tour.



Gunter Triebaumer in the vineyards

Another charming couple is Gunter and Regina Triebaumer, who constantly exude enthusiasm about their region and its wines. Triebaumer is one more ancient Austrian winemaking family, and Gunter's uncle Ernst is known as one of the five best winemakers in the entire country.

Gunter himself, of course, isn't too bad at his craft, either.

He showed us a delicious Furmint white wine, a mélange of pineapple, lime, banana and yellow pear, as well as a knock-your-socks-off, ruby-purple Blaufrankisch Reserve full of dark chocolate, raspberry, red cherry and cola. The piece de la resistance was a brilliant Ruster Ausbruch (similar to a TBA but made only in the town of Rust), made from Welschriesling, that exuded lime, smoke, caramel, yellow peach and dried apricot jam. Truthfully, most of the

Triebaumer wines we tasted showed such classic flavors and textures, and Gunter is so youthful and enthusiastic that this is clearly a winery to watch for the foreseeable future.



Clemens of Hans Iglar Winery

Our final visit in Austria was at Weingut Hans Iglar, where we met with young, talented Clemens, who is the latest in his family to steer the winery's ship. I had previously spent time with Clemens during the Austrian Wine Summit, and my notes are an amalgamation of both visits.

Many of Clemens' wines were impressive, but one of my favorites was the lime- and papaya-infused Pinot Blanc, an amalgam of the aforementioned fruits as well as pineapple, cream soda and white pepper. The high-toned finish made this lip-smacking in nature, eminently suitable for parties and the occasional solitary summer afternoon on the porch.

Another real beauty, this time red, was the winery's Zweigelt, dark purple and showing tons of blackberry, raspberry coulis, mocha, black tea and black pepper. Spicy and complex, this wine illuminated exactly how far Burgenland Zweigelt has come in the past few years.

While Austria might not be the first country that springs to the American consumer's mind when considering wine choices (particular in red varieties), there is no doubt that this area's dedicated grape growers and vintners have the requisite passion and dedication to craft amazingly elegant yet full-bodied bottles that will please just about any palate. I highly recommend that try some of these wines. They're definitely worth the effort. Also, as with my previous column on Austrian wine, many are not yet available in the U.S. and thus pricing is somewhat approximate.

WINE ON THE ROAD'S SPRING 2012 TOURS



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While our fall 2011 tour of Piedmont is now full, I'm pleased to announce a trip being planned for Tuscany in the spring of 2012 that will focus on the wines of Chianti Classico and Bolgheri (home of the Super Tuscans). Another Tuscan tour, also that spring, will spend time in Montepulciano and Montalcino (home of Brunello). Other trips are in development for Germany, South America and Spain, and you can also check into booking private groups in wine country world-wide by emailing tour@wineontheroad.com.

To secure your place with me on any of these tours or if you would like more information please email me at benweinberg@wineontheroad.com.

Recommended:

White

Hans and Anita Nittnaus Leithaberg White Wine 2009 (Burgenland, Austria) \$15

Gunter Triebaumer Furmint 2010 (Burgenland, Austria) \$15

Hans Iglar Pinot Blanc 2010 (Burgenland, Austria) \$15

Red

Weingut Pittnauer St. Laurent Alte Reben 2008 (Burgenland, Austria) \$75

Weingut Pittnauer Merlot Altenberg Reserve 2007 (Burgenland, Austria) \$75

Hans and Anita Nittnaus Leithaberg Red Wine 2008 (Burgenland, Austria) \$25

Gunter Triebaumer Blaufrankisch Reserve 2008 (Burgenland, Austria) \$50

Hans Iglar Zweigelt 2009 (Burgenland, Austria) \$40

Dessert

Kracher Trockenbeerenauslese Welschriesling No. 9 2008 (Burgenland, Austria) \$75

Kracher Trockenbeerenauslese Scheurebe No. ? 2009 (Burgenland, Austria) \$75

Gunter Triebaumer Ruster Ausbruch Welschriesling 2008 (Burgenland, Austria) \$40

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