



LIQUID GOLD

AUSTRIA'S SWEET WINES

AUSTRIAN WINE

The Art of Wine. *Down to Earth.*





AUSTRIA'S LIQUID GOLD

Austria is famous for its wide range of sweet wine specialities: Spätlese and Auslese (fruity sweet wines), Beerenauslese, Trockenbeerenauslese and Ruster Ausbruch (nobly sweet wines), as well as Eiswein (ice wine) and Strohwein (straw wine) capture the imaginations of wine lovers around the world.

Nobly sweet wines in Austria have a remarkable and expansive history. Already in **1526**, the **first Trockenbeerenauslese**

was produced in the Pannonian region. At the von Leisser baronial estate in Donnerskirchen, a large quantity of shrivelled, raisin-like berries were harvested and pressed into an excellent wine.

More than a century later, in 1653, Prince Paul Esterházy acquired – together with the estate – this same wine and had it decanted into small casks. Whenever the wine was served – especially at noble festivities – boiled pebbles were added to the barrels so that their contents would once again be full; this was done in order to help prevent the remaining wine from oxidising. The last drops of this wine were tasted at the Forchtenstein Castle in 1852: for no fewer than 326 years, generation after generation of wine lovers was able to experience the pure pleasures of this legendary Prädikatswein.





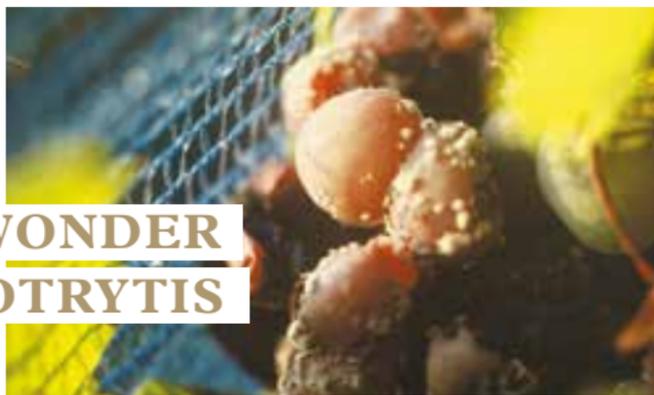
NATURE'S SWEET PLAY

Around Lake Neusiedl, the Pannonian climate works together with the abundance of humidity to set the scene for the production of great sweet wines. The 320 square kilometres of water comprising the lake, plus the numerous nearby tiny lakes dotting the Seewinkel area, contribute to a special microclimate that allows for a beneficial, or ‘noble’, fungus to develop on the grapes. In some years, this process can occur rather rapidly. Still, noble Prädikatswein can be found in other winegrowing regions as well.

All of these wines have many components in common: alcohol, residual sweetness and fruit acidity that together form a harmonious and multilayered mosaic. The wines can develop over an extended period of time and go on to enjoy a long life as well after achieving maturity. Moreover, natural flavour components often are revealed fully because of ageing and storage in small wooden barrels.

Ripe grapes taste sweet. But how is this sweetness expressed in the wine? When the grapes hang from the vines as long as possible in fall, the natural sugar in the grapes becomes concentrated. For the Spätlese- and Auslese-level wines, this concentration takes place mainly without any noticeable changes to the grapes, while for the nobly sweet Prädikat-level wines, a wondrous change in the clusters can be observed.

When ripe white wine grapes are infected during favourable conditions by the *Botrytis cinerea* fungus, the so-called



THE WONDER OF BOTRYTIS

‘noble rot’ develops. The growth of the fungus is nurtured by humid air while, at the same time, the water in the grapes evaporates. This occurs especially during fall, when early morning fogs are followed by warm, dry afternoons. These conditions are ideal in the Pannonian region around Lake Neusiedl, for example, because of the balancing effect provided by the enormous volume of water in the lake.

It begins with the outbreak of Botrytis in the healthy, ripe grapes. Gradually, more and more berries become infected. The fungus penetrates the grape skins and feeds on the liquid while water evaporates through the holes; eventually the grapes shrink to a raisin-like state. The remaining contents, such as sugar, acidity and extract, become extremely concentrated.

The harvest requires the utmost in attention and care, as grape selection in the vineyards must be carried out in more than one step. This is necessary in order to acquire the optimal grapes for the **Beerenauslese**, **Trockenbeerenauslese** or **Ruster Ausbruch** quality categories. The higher the must gradation – along with this, the natural sugar content in the must – the more difficult it is for the yeasts to convert

sugar into alcohol. Therefore, the fermentation can last for several months. These intensive efforts pay off nicely, though. The wines exude unique aromas and flavours, thanks to the wonder of Botrytis. Its magic produces expressions of honey and dried fruits, as well as exotic and even Christmas-time fragrances and flavours.

The speciality Ruster Ausbruch is at home in the historical free town of Rust on the western shore of Lake Neusiedl. This wine is steeped in tradition: its first-known documentation goes back to the mid-16th century. In 1681, the Reichstag in Ödenburg declared on 3 December that the market town of Rust would be elevated to the status of a Free Royal City. And for that privilege, the citizens of Rust had to pay Emperor Leopold I (1640–1705) ‘real and liquid gold’ – specifically, the enormous sum of 60,000 Guilders as well as the entire vintage – some 30,000 litres – of Ruster Ausbruch wine.

These traditional sweet wines eventually made their way from Rust to the imperial and royal courts of Europe – even all the way to St. Petersburg. Today, these wines are enjoying a new kind of renaissance.



FROZEN AND DRIED

Producing Eiswein demands a great deal of patience. Grapes which are ripe – but not botrytised – wait on the vines for the arrival of the first frosts. Ultimately, temperatures that are at around **minus 7°C** (for at least several hours) will freeze the water contained in the grapes. This is when the grapes must be harvested and pressed. In the press, the water crystals remain as clumps of ice, while only the concentrated must flows out. Eisweine are recognised by their elegant, piquant fruit and racy acidity. Plus the varietal character is still clearly present as well.

The youngest of the Prädikatswein group are Strohwein and Schilfwein. However, their method of production actually has been known since Roman times: Ripe, unbotrytised grapes are air-dried on mats of straw or reeds for three months, and then pressed and fermented. Taste-wise, these wines are usually in between that of a botrytised wine and an Eiswein. Also, they show elegant fruit, but generally low acidity.



In the past, the sweet wine segment often featured only Welschriesling. Now, especially in the Seewinkel area of Burgenland, the variety spectrum is much broader. Most of the vines cultivated in Austria are qualified for the production of sweet wines: from Chardonnay and Weissburgunder to Bouvier (a generous sugar producer) and aroma-rich varieties like Muskateller, Muskat-Ottonel, Traminer, Sauvignon Blanc and Sämpling 88 (Scheurebe). Also, Riesling from the Danube valley – even despite the small quantities – is quite exciting. And Grüner Veltliner continues to demonstrate its impressive qualities even in the Eiswein style – with Großriedental am Wagram established as an important center of production.



THE SPECTRUM OF SWEET SEDUCTION

Dessert wine lovers often prefer cuvées made from two or three different various grape varieties; this can provide for an excitingly harmonious and adventurous taste experience!



CULINARY AND CREATIVE

Great sweet wines often have unimagined potential, especially when it comes to culinary matchmaking. The classic and most frequent pairing is with desserts. Austria's sweet dishes in particular demonstrate how a great Prädikatswein makes the ideal partner.

But that's not all. Poultry liver – for example, roasted or as a paté – longs for sweet wine. And the piquant, zesty edge and intense flavour of blue cheese, such as Roquefort, Stilton or Gorgonzola, finds the perfect balance with a smooth, elegant Prädikatswein. Then there is Asian cuisine, which requires an

aromatic Auslese wine with an elegant structure and harmonious interplay of fruit and acidity.

The real character of sweet wines is best shown when they are served at the appropriate temperature; our recommendation is 10°C. In general, dessert wines should be drunk from small glasses with smaller rims. These tulip or apple-shaped glasses tend to concentrate the aromaticity. Also, in order for the wines to maintain their coolness and not warm up too quickly in the glasses, only small amounts should be poured.





GREAT VINTAGES

Nature determines for each vintage its potential of producing sweet wines. It is not possible for large quantities of botrytised wines to be produced every year.

Many Beerenauslese and Trockenbeerenauslese wines were produced in 2015, 2010, 2005, 2004, 2001, 1998, 1996 and 1995. Famous great vintages from the past were 1991, 1981, 1973, 1969 and 1963.

In contrast to the sweet wine vintages, there were some outstanding ‘dry’ vintages: even though the grapes remained practically Botrytis-free, Eiswein was still able to be produced – such as in 2009 and 2003.



STYLE AND FLAVOUR

Residual sugar content specifications have been established for Austrian Qualitätswein – and therefore also for Prädikatswein – and are strictly enforced according to the wine law.

► **Trocken (dry)**

A residual sugar content of up to 4 g/l, or a maximum of 9 g/l if the overall acidity level is not lower by more than 2 g/l. For example: a wine with 8 g/l sugar must have at least 6 g/l acidity in order to be declared ‘trocken’. Or, expressed as a formula: acidity + 2, up to a maximum of 9.

► **Halbtrocken (half-dry)**

When the wine passes the residual sugar limit for ‘trocken’, without going beyond the following values, it is designated as ‘halbtrocken’: 12 g/l or 18 g/l residual sugar content, as long as the total acidity is lower than the residual sugar content by a minimum of 10 g/l. For example, a wine with at least 8 g/l of acidity may contain up to 18 g/l of residual sugar and still be declared ‘halbtrocken’. To express this as a formula: acidity + 10 up to the limit of 18 g/l.

► **Lieblich (mellow)**

is a wine in which the residual sugar content surpasses the upper limit cited above, but does not exceed 45 g/l. In practical terms this means that a wine that has between twelve and eighteen grams per litre of residual sugar can (depending upon total acidity) be either ‘halbtrocken’ or ‘lieblich’.

► **Süß (sweet)**

more than 45 g/l



PRÄDIKATSWEIN IN THE WINE LAW

Prädikatswein is a Qualitätswein (quality wine) that has been produced by means of a particular type of harvest technique and maturing process. The following requirements must be met:

- Yield per hectare is limited to a maximum of 9,000 kilograms of grapes / 6,750 litres of wine

- Enrichment of the harvested grapes is not permitted
- Sweetening is also not permitted (residual sweetness remains only with regard to an eventual interruption of fermentation)
- Minimum alcohol content of 5.0% vol.
- Must weight confirmation
(official control of harvested grapes)
- Federal Inspection Number
- Eiswein and Strohwein must not carry another Prädikatswein designation (e.g. Beerenauslese)



PRÄDIKAT LEVELS

► Spätlese

Minimum must-weight of 19° KMW, from fully ripened grapes

► Auslese

Minimum must weight of 21° KMW, a Spätlese from carefully selected clusters

► Beerenauslese

Minimum must weight of 25° KMW, from overripe grapes and/or grapes with noble rot

► Eiswein

Minimum must weight of 25° KMW, from grapes that were frozen when harvested and pressed

► Trockenbeerenauslese

Minimum must weight of 30° KMW, Beerenauslese mostly from extremely shrivelled, Botrytis-affected grapes. For Trockenbeerenauslesen produced in the Free City of Rust, the term 'Ausbruch' may also be used; correspondingly, the product designation 'Ausbruch' may only be used in connexion with the geographical indication 'Rust'.

► Strohwein

Strohwein or Schilfwein is a wine made from fully-ripened sugar-laden berries, which are either dried on straw (Stroh) or reeds (Schilf) for at least three months before vinification, and whose juice demonstrates a must weight of at least 25° KMW. In the event that the grape juice achieves a must weight of 30° KMW or more after a minimum of two months, the vinification process may begin at this juncture.



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