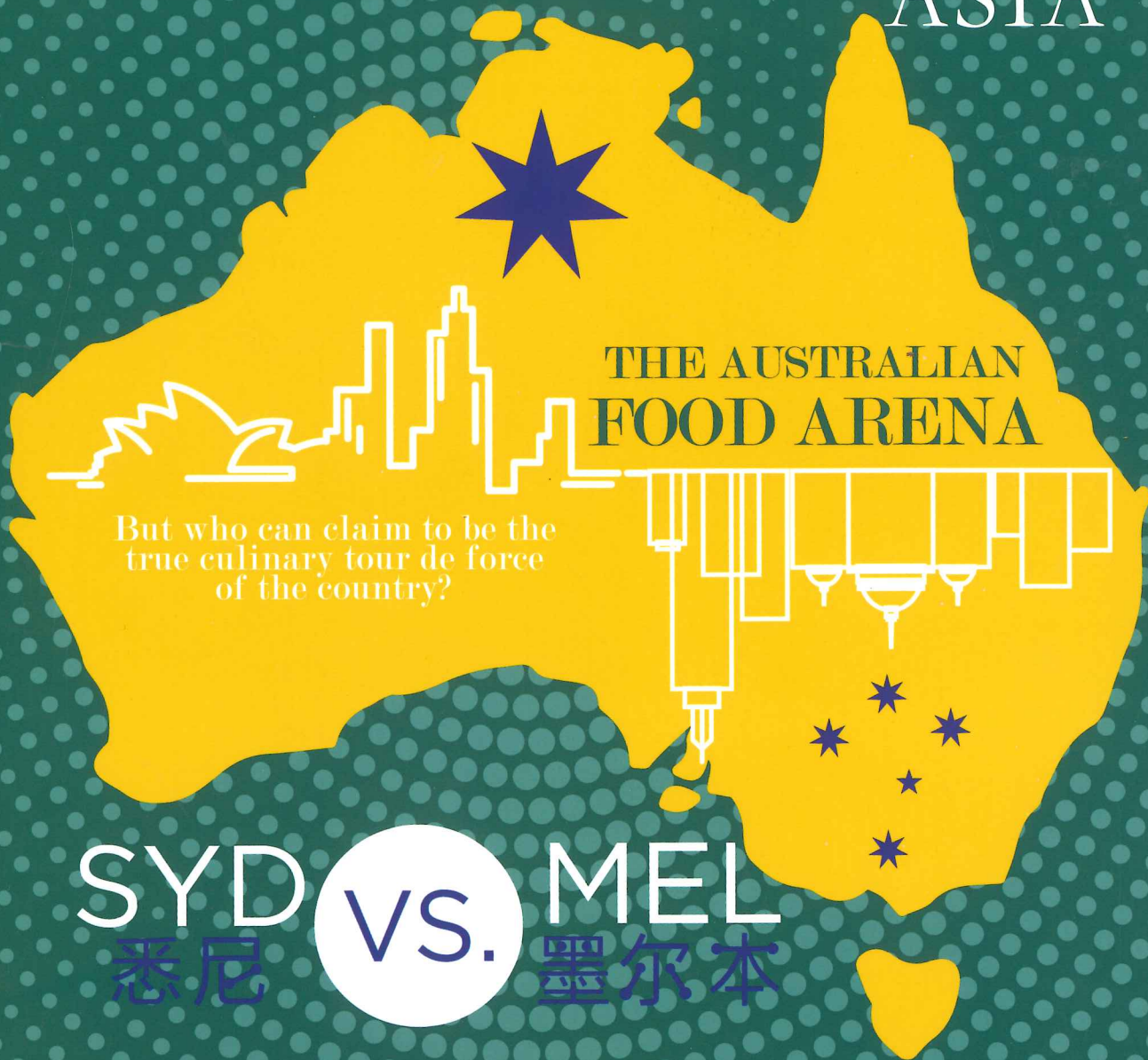


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11 Reasons We Love VieVinum

By Kurt Ganapathy



One of the world's great wine events marks its 20th anniversary with its eleventh edition in 2018, and we celebrate the occasion with eleven highlights from three days of Austrian wine and more. At the invitation of the Austrian Wine Marketing Board (AWMB), we were fortunate enough to join 15,000 visitors from close to 50 countries for VieVinum, held at the spectacular Hofburg palace in Vienna.

*Photography courtesy of Kurt Ganapathy

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1 The Newly Classified Sekt

It's no secret that very good sparkling wine is made in Austria, but it was only in 2015 that a quality pyramid was established for Austrian sekt. The first sekt of the "Klassik" (grapes harvested in one state and produced by any sparkling wine method with a minimum of nine months on lees) and "Reserve" (grapes harvested and pressed in one state and produced via traditional bottle fermentation with a minimum of 18 months on lees) levels was released in the autumn of 2017 and the "Grosse Reserve" wines (grapes harvested and pressed in one municipality and produced via traditional bottle fermentation with a minimum of 30 months on lees) will be unveiled this autumn. We sample a selection of traditional method wines from Schlumberger, an Austrian sekt pioneer established in 1842, among which the 2012 Blanc de Noirs and 2013 Prestige Cuvée (70 percent chardonnay, 30 percent pinot noir) Reserves are highlights – the former offering delicate berries on the nose and fresh red fruit on the palate and the latter with complexity to rival vintage champagnes. The more straightforward but refreshingly citrusy and spicy 2015 grüner veltliner Klassik is also a treat.



Austrian sekt

2 The Junge Wilde Winzer

If you're looking for a real wine adventure, simply look for the name Junge Wilde Winzer (Young Wild Winegrowers). The association is made up of young, charismatic and exuberant winemakers from across Niederösterreich (Lower Austria), Burgenland and Steiermark (Styria) who, in their own words, want to go against the grain and open up new sensory worlds for wine lovers. Ready for some orange wine, we call on Alexander Zöller, but his stable of a dozen or certified organic wines surprises in more ways than one. Before the orange, we sample the aptly named Poolside, a Kremstal DAC grüner veltliner which is somewhat traditional, but crafted to be enjoyed by a pool with a group of friends. Then we revisit Zöller's first wine, the 2007 Wachtberg grüner veltliner that remains vibrant with notes of apples. Finally we get to a pair of remarkable orange wines. The 2016 MT Free Solo is a funky Müller-Thurgau with herbaceous, spicy and savoury flavours from its six-month maceration. The 2016 neuberger, which also undergoes six months of maceration, is another journey altogether, delivering cloudy apple and guava flavours with prominent tannins. In other words, it's pretty wild.



Alexander Zöller

3 The Sauvignon Blancs Of Steiermark

While Steiermark is typically known for varieties like welschriesling, gelber muskateller and weissburgunder (pinot blanc), their sauvignon blancs – a focus in more recent times – are also worth writing home about. Over the course of two tastings, we experience five that are particularly noteworthy. The 2015 Tement Berghausener from Südsteiermark is a well-balanced wine with more of a lemon character than stone fruits. The 2016 Lackner-Tinnacher Ried Flamborg, also from Südsteiermark, takes things even further, changing your perceptions of sauvignon blanc with its yuzu flavours. The 2015 Josef Scharl Auron Alte Reben from Vulkanland Steiermark is elegant and velvety, with an 18-hour maceration and élevage in wooden casks on lees; it has a hint of apricots. The 2015 Frauwallner Straden Ried Steintal and the 2012 Werlitsch Ex Vero II, both with the Steirerland designation, are some of the most interesting wines of the entire trip: the former is gamey, herbaceous and spicy (it's fermented on skins with élevage in oak and earthenware kvevris) and the latter is very approachable with familiar sauvignon blanc notes topped with malolactic characteristics (it spends two years in oak casks after spontaneous fermentation).

4 The Breadth Of Burgenland

Three days simply isn't enough to uncover all that VieVinum's exhibitors have to offer. In fact, it's barely enough to truly dive into Burgenland. Burgenland winegrowers occupy around 140 tables at VieVinum in 2018 filling the cavernous Hofburg Festsaal to the brim. From the fruit-driven blaufränkisch of Mittelburgenland to the complex chardonnays, grüner veltliners and weissburgunders of Leithaberg and the sweet wines from the shores of Neusiedlersee, the width of the spectrum here is incredible. In the Festsaal, we taste the wines of Günter & Regina Triebsauer, who hail from Rust, home of Ruster Ausbruch. Before we get to that famous noble sweet wine, there's the 2017 furmint, big on lychee with mouth-watering acidity; the 2015 Ried Gillesberg cabernet franc, a rarity, which is fresh and fruit-filled with dark chocolate notes; and the spicy, toasty 2015 Ried Oberer Wald blaufränkisch. Finally, the main event: their 2015 Ruster Ausbruch, made with welschriesling grapes, is a versatile and adaptable wine with just the right amount of sweetness balanced by a sturdy backbone of acidity and tannins.



Rustam Baiatov & Vlad Bejenaru introducing Moldovan wines

venerable bottles of Mantlerhof grüner veltliner



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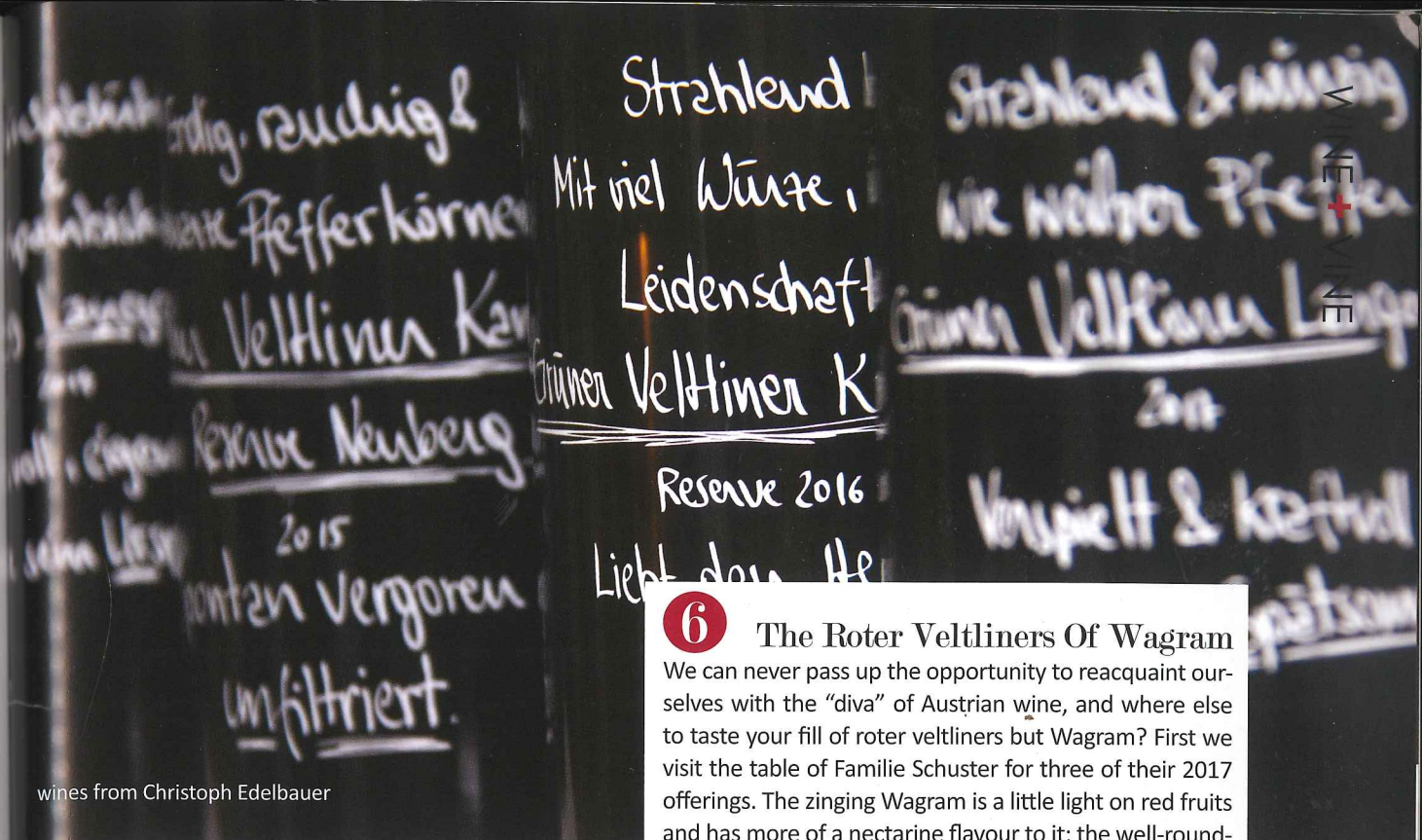
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wines from Christoph Edelbauer

5 The Österreichische Traditionsweingüter Verticals

One of the most popular sections of Hofburg during VieVinum 2018 is the Forum, and with good reason. It's where the members of Österreichische Traditionsweingüter (the Association Of Austrian Traditional Wine Estates) are located. Just 72 vineyards hold the association's Erste Lage ("premier cru") designation, accounting for 62 big-name producers from Kamptal, Kremstal, Traisental, Wagram, Vienna and Carnuntum. The vast majority from the first four regions are represented here, providing the unique opportunity to taste verticals of their incredible rieslings and grüner veltliners. No flight goes further back than the Ried Spiegel grüner veltliners offered by Kremstal's Mantlerhof, going all the way to 1976. The 1976 has a greenish gold colour and is still lively with light dried fruit flavours along with honey and pears. The 1985 is more earthy – mushroomy even – with a bit of honey and mellow lemon. The 1999 and 2001 offer the best mix of fruit and tertiary characteristics, the former with more fresh fruit and the latter calling to mind candied citrus peel. Tasting the 2016 allows you to see the wine at the beginning of its potentially long journey; it's all about fresh apples and pears.

6 The Roter Veltliners Of Wagram

We can never pass up the opportunity to reacquaint ourselves with the "diva" of Austrian wine, and where else to taste your fill of roter veltliners but Wagram? First we visit the table of Familie Schuster for three of their 2017 offerings. The zinging Wagram is a little light on red fruits and has more of a nectarine flavour to it; the well-rounded and concentrated Ried Altweingarten has lots of plum and fresh apples; and the luscious Ried Berg Eisenhut has red berries and apples. Then we catch up with a friend from our 2015 visit, Josef Fritz. His Ried Steinberg Privat roter veltliner is as memorable as ever – aged in a mix of oak and acacia barrels, it's brimming with fresh, exotic fruits like mango with a hint of cream.

7 The Rieslings & Grüner Veltliners Of Kamptal

Hailing from Langenlois, Austria's largest wine-producing town, Christoph Edelbauer provides a window into the Kamptal DAC region. Their opening 2017 Langenlois grüner veltliner is fresh and fruity upfront – an easy-drinking wine on the peachier side – and their 2017 Langenlois riesling is similarly big on fruit, with notes of kiwis and peaches. Moving to Kamptal DAC Reserve territory, the 2016 grüner veltliner is a big wine – honeyed with those same peach flavours and a bit more spice. It spent eight months on lees after 30 percent of it had undergone spontaneous fermentation. If you want 100 percent spontaneous fermentation, the 2015 Neuberg grüner veltliner is your ticket – this dark gold single vineyard wine brings more peach and a hint of lychee.

8 The Sommelier Edition Wines

What happens when Austria's best sommeliers work together with some of the country's top wine producers? You get Sommelier Edition wines. Introduced to us by Sommelier Union Austria president Annemarie Foidl and vice president Brad Knowles – a transplant from South Africa whose energetic and entertaining introduction to Burgenland wines we recall fondly from our previous visit to Austria in 2015 – these wines were created with three key elements in mind: they had to be approachable, they should highlight lesser-known varieties and they should give people a good idea of what Austrian wine has to offer. They've certainly fulfilled their goals. The 2017 Prieler blaufränkisch rosé is a good example, with big red fruit (sweet strawberries) and big acidity, as is the 2017 Domäne Wachau neuberger, which is a complex, nutty white wine with inviting peach flavours. To top it off, the profits from Sommelier Edition wines are helping to educate the next generation of Austrian sommeliers.

9 The Guest Countries

Austria's central location in Europe – and the esteem in which it is held by wine professionals – makes it the perfect ambassador for wines from its lesser-known neighbours. VieVinum hosts a main guest country, and this year it's Switzerland taking centre stage. The Swiss showcase a distinct mix of wine styles from their neighbouring countries, but stride out on their own with local grape varieties like petite arvine – particular to the canton of Valais – which we uncover in the tropical 2016 Alpenwein Jean des Crêtes, and diolinoir, which teams up with syrah in the earthy and vegetal 2016 Alpenwein L'Arc du Ciel. But the Swiss wines are only the beginning. Elsewhere around VieVinum are wines from "New Europe": Croatia, Hungary, Romania, Slovenia and Moldova.

Palais Niederösterreich



the AWMB team personalising gifts for guests



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"Great Sauvignon Blancs and Pinots" tasting

10 The Side Events

Despite the wealth of exhibitors and thousands of wines to choose from, side events are a big part of the reason to attend VieVinum. We revisit Palais Niederösterreich for a fittingly spectacular "Great Sauvignon Blancs and Pinots" tasting where we encountered some of the memorable Steiermark sauvignon blancs mentioned earlier. Then at Hofburg itself, we discover the many faces of blaufränkisch from around the region and beyond at the invitation of Wine & Partners. Around 60 producers from seven countries are represented at "United by Blaufränkisch" in addition to Austria: the Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Romania, Slovenia, Slovakia and the United States. The wines vary in every imaginable way. By name (Lemberger, Frankovka and Modra frankinja to name a few), by colour (from deep, dark purple to the lightest red and even a white wine) and by profile (from vegetal to juicy and fruit-driven). And, of course, one of the best parts of a visit to Vienna is seeing the familiar faces of the AWMB team led by the one and only Willi Klinger. And they certainly know how to throw a party. From the welcome get-together at Summerstage, by the Donaukanal, to the Big Austrian Wine Party at Kursalon, AWMB's events showcase everything that is great about Austria and give you the opportunity to return to wines from earlier in the trip – and to discover new ones you might have missed, like the 2015 Migsich Fat Boy from Burgenland, a big and tannic 100 percent blaufränkisch wine bursting with dark fruits and chocolate.



11 The Austrian Spirits, Beers & Ciders

Should you ever need a break from the wine, VieVinum also celebrates other quality beverages from across Austria. There are classic CulturBrauer beers including the aptly named Austrian Lager. There are crisp and fresh ciders from Goldkehlchen. And there are plenty of spirits to go around, particularly those on offer from Gölle. Originally a distiller of fruit-based spirits and vinegar producer, they now also make a great bourbon-style whiskey (called Brexit, amusingly) and Hands On Gin, which would be right at home at any of Singapore's reputable gin bars. KG