



Look to Austria for fine Riesling

Austrian Riesling is dry and filled with vivid fruit. It's not cheap, but it's perfect with pork, fish and shellfish

THE AUSTRIANS CAME to town recently in the form of a mini trade fair. Despite the economic downturn, it appears that sales of their wines are enjoying a healthy growth here in Ireland. Two of my favourite producers (Malat and Bründelmeyer) were present, but sadly they are not yet represented over here. Nonetheless, there were plenty of excellent dry whites, some good reds too, and, to finish off, some great dessert wines. As is usual with Austria, where the overall standard of wine making is very high, there were very few poor wines.

I have mentioned Grüner Veltliner before. Austria's indigenous white is well worth seeking out. It is a grape variety that really comes into its own with food; the combination of textured fruit and fresh acidity seems to work really well with a wide variety of dishes, including fish, chicken and pork. On the evening of the fair, I had the opportunity to taste a range of Austrian white wines with Indian food in my local branch of Jaipur; both Riesling and Grüner Veltliner provided a perfect foil to the spicy food with a little heat. The Grüner Veltliner mentioned

'Grüner Veltliner, Austria's indigenous white, is a grape variety that really comes into its own with food'

below, served with seared scallops with cauliflower foam, was just one highlight of the evening.

Austrian Riesling is very different in style to that of its neighbour, Germany. Like the Grüner Veltliner, Austrian Rieslings are always dry, and usually filled with vividly defined, textured fruit. You can find some of the world's greatest Rieslings in Austria; look to the regions of Wachau, Kamptal and Kremstal for the very best. They will not be cheap, but compare favourably with white Burgundy at the same price. Once again, pork works well, but I find full-flavoured fish and shellfish work even better.

I have always found the red wines more difficult; possibly just my palate, as others really like them. The indigenous Zweigelt and St Laurent have distinctive flavours. The best exponents are not yet available here, but if you visit Austria this summer look out for names such as Kollwenz (a real star) and Judith Beck. Pinot Noir is enjoying deservedly good press, often made in a style not unlike that of the Côtes de Beaune in Burgundy.

In addition to the wines below, look out for the following names, all available here in Ireland, and all wines of real quality: Müller (Mitchell & Son); Altzinger, Steininger (both Wines Direct); Schloss Gobelsburg (Wicklow Wine); Hirsch, Dolle, Kracher, Sepp Moser, Winzer Krems, Wohlmuth, and Laurentz V.

BOTTLES OF THE WEEK

Höpler Riesling 2008 Neusiedlersee, Burgenland, 11.5%, €18.82

This is lovely fresh, clean Riesling, with crisp green apple fruits and a lively, dry finish. The Höpler wines are all models of their variety, including a mouth-watering, gingery Grüner Veltliner, and a wonderful Pinot Blanc, a variety that does not always offer the wine-drinker much in terms of flavour. Nicholson's has only a few cases left, but it is well worth trying.

Stockists: James Nicholson, jnwines.com.

Birgit Eichinger Grüner Veltliner Wechselberg 2008, Kamptal, 12.5%, €17.95-€18.95

Birgit Eichinger is one of the few female winemakers in Austria. She makes an impeccable range of white wines. Most are from single vineyards, and offer a fascinating array of flavours. This Grüner Veltliner, from the Wechselberg vineyard, has luscious pears and apricots, with a honeyed touch, but backed up with good acidity with a little orange peel. Great with fish and seafood, especially with spices or herbs. **Stockists:** 64 Wine, Glashule; Corkscrew, Chatham Street, Dublin 2; Martin's off Licence, Fairview; Gibney's, Malahide; Redmond's, Ranelagh; Wicklow Wine Co, Wicklow.

Markowitsch Carnuntum Cuvée 2006, €15, 13.5%, €16.99

Carnuntum lies south-east of Vienna in an old Roman town. Gerhard Markowitsch is one of the leading red winemakers in the region. The Carnuntum Cuvée, a blend of Zweigelt and Pinot Noir, is justifiably popular in Austria, and deserves more attention here. I am not a great fan of Zweigelt but it harmonises nicely with the Pinot Noir, giving a lovely, medium-bodied wine with plum-pie fruits and a refreshing, slightly herbaceous finish. Great with pork dishes.

Stockists: The Corkscrew, Chatham Street, Dublin 2; Jus de Vine, Portmarnock; Gibney's, Malahide; The Hole in the Wall, Blackhorse Avenue, Dublin 7.

Johanneshof Reinisch Pinot Noir 2006, Thermenregion

Austria produces some very tasty Pinot Noir and Johanneshof Reinisch are the best I have come across. Delightful, delicate, soft, savoury Pinot, an alluring mix of dark cherry and *sous-bois*. Perfect with duck, preferably wild, or chicken.

Stockists: Terroirs, Donnybrook; Mitchell's, Glashule and CHQ; Morton's, Ranelagh, Dublin 6; Partridge's, Main Street, Gorey, Co Wexford.

TWO UNDER €12

Goats Do Roam White, Western Cape, South Africa, 14%, €8.99

Made from a Rhône style blend of Viognier, Grenache Blanc and Roussanne, this is a very pleasant, plump wine with ripe, rounded, almost sweetish melon and tropical fruits. Try it with grilled chicken.

Stockists: O'Brien's; Supervalu; Centra; Harvest, Galway.

B&G Pinot Noir Réserve 2008 Vin de pays de l'île de Beauté, 12%, €8.99

Given the recent scandal regarding Pinot Noir in the south of France, I thought I would try out this version. The *île de Beauté* is in fact Corsica, which has a growing reputation for its wines. While this would never compare to a Burgundy, there is some pleasant, slightly jammy, dark fruits, and a good, solid centre-palate. Very fair value, and pleasant drinking.

Stockists: Tesco; Supervalu.

jwilson@irishtimes.com

