

WINE AND FOOD



BRIGHT YOUNG THING

ONCE A WALLFLOWER OF THE WINE WORLD, AUSTRIAN GRÜNER VELTLINER HAS BLOSSOMED INTO AN EXCITING, SOUGHT-AFTER FAVOURITE. IT'S ABOUT TIME, SAYS **MARY DOWEY**

A decade or so ago, a brave little band of Austrian wine producers used to make an annual pilgrimage to Dublin. In leather waistcoats and high-collared jackets, they would stand in the Shelbourne pouring samples of their wares. Nobody took much notice. Although the white wines were often enticing, their prices seemed scarily high - and our giddily expanding market was teeming with alternatives. Yet back they would come the following year - their cheerful return to indifferent Ireland constituting one of the great unsolved mysteries of the wine world.

But that was before the sight of Bridget Jones knocking back plonk in her pyjamas made us decide that cheap Chardonnay was pretty uncool. It was before we had gorged on a tsunami of Sauvignon Blanc from New Zealand and Chile. Now the tide has turned. Irish wine enthusiasts are on the lookout for more unusual white wines - especially those that combine the zesty freshness of Sauvignon with a touch of exoticism. Up jumps Austria to help to fill the gap. A recent Austrian tasting here hummed with interest - not just in newly fashionable Riesling but in Austria's own speciality, Grüner Veltliner.

GV (as it is known) is appearing on smart wine lists and the best shop shelves - and it no longer seems madly expensive. GV might even stand for good value, given that the more affordable examples have a lovely pear and grapefruit tang while swankier versions often add a subtle undertow of minerality. But I think it should really stand for glorious verve - because the best GVs are lively wines that give you a lift. Sometimes smelling of spring flowers as well as fresh fruit, they are exactly the sort of thing you'll enjoy over the next few months.

Grüner Veltliner (pronounced *grewner felt leaner*) is versatile, too. Refreshing as an aperitif, it also suits salads and other light vegetable combinations as well as chicken and pork dishes - Chinese stir-fries included. Besides those recommended below, producers with stylish GVs include Höppler (from James Nicholson, www.jnwine.com), Birgit Eichinger (from Wicklow Wine Company, www.wicklowwineco.ie) and Hirsch

(whose fabulously intense Lamm is in The Corkscrew, Chatham Street, Dublin 2 and in Ely wine bars).

Like Sauvignon Blanc, Grüner Veltliner doesn't age well - so look out for the 2008 vintage (and, very soon, 2009) - remembering that a screwcap will have kept the wine fresher than a cork. Although there are exceptions, most of the older wines I've tried have been tired, sad things without a shred of the vitality that makes this grape a gem.

THREE GLORIOUS GVs



DOLLE GRÜNER VELTLINER STRASSETAL 2008.

Peter Dolle is a serious player in the Kamptal region, owning a raft of vineyards on good sites. It's extraordinary that a wine this delicious comes at such a cracking price. Lovely pear and lime flavours with a refreshing bite. From Superquinn, €10.99.



STEININGER GRÜNER VELTLINER KAMPTAL 2008.

Also from a family winery in classy Kamptal, this beauty is worth every cent of its modest price. Very pure, very lively, very likeable (and Steininger Riesling is equally delightful). From Wines Direct (minimum purchase six bottles which may be mixed), €12.80.



LAURENZ V CHARMING GRÜNER VELTLINER, KAMPTAL 2008.

A leap into treat territory. 'Charming' is far too mild a term for this stunning wine. Try it with some mildly spicy food on a Saturday night in and smile. From Donnybrook Fair, Dublin 4; Deveneys, Dundrum, Dublin 16; Hollands, Bray; Greenacres, Wexford; Ardkeen, Waterford; Lynchs, Glanmire; about €24.95.