

Grüner Veltliner 2007: the results

A versatile grape plus a great vintage makes for happy judges, though they did raise concerns about indistinct regionality and character. **OLIVER STYLES** reports

What were your overall impressions?

The wines wooed the panel. Richard Bampfield MW explained the high spirits in the room were due 'partly to the grape and partly to the vintage'. The tasters praised the qualities and individuality of Grüner Veltliner, and described 2007 as a truly great vintage for Austria.

What should we look for in good Veltliners?

Aromatics, drinkability and versatility, said the panel. 'Grüner is a very aromatic variety – if it isn't, then it's wrong,' noted Giles MacDonogh. '2007 was possibly the most classic GV vintage because of its drinkability,' said Jason Turner. 'Veltliner can be drunk on its own and is also a good accompaniment to food,' said Bampfield. 'It's a very versatile grape.' The panel agreed Veltliner could cater for different tastes, though Margaret Rand said the best examples were always 'fresh and racy'.

Were there any disappointments?

Although the overall result of the tasting was positive (80% of the wines getting three stars or above), the panel noted some pitfalls in the production of Grüner Veltliner. Firstly, producers had to be true to the grape. Anthony Barne MW was not alone in condemning a 'lack of character' in some wines. 'There were one or two that weren't bad, just more on the Sauvignon Blanc style. At the other end of the scale an awful lot were overripe. I thought they lost their character and were just big, fat and rather flabby.'

Although bursting with enthusiasm for the tasting, Rand also found wines with too much alcohol. Some, she said, were 'spectacularly dull, particularly among the *Smaragds*, probably the most expensive bottles here. Given that, I found them the most disappointing.' Another word of warning from Ken Mackay, who said that a lot of the original, 'innocent' Veltliner producers had disappeared. 'Desperate' winemakers were now 'trying to make a sort of cold, white wine of the Pinot Grigio school'.

What are the regions to look out for?

This was inconclusive for some. 'I didn't see a lot of regional differences, or

THE SCORES:	
156 WINES TASTED	
★★★★★ Decanter Award	3
Outstanding (18.5–20pts)	
★★★★ Highly recommended	16
Very good to excellent (16.5–18.49pts)	
★★★ Recommended	106
Good (14.5–16.49pts)	
★★	29
Fair (12.5–14.49pts)	
★	1
Poor (10.5–12.49pts)	
Faulty	1

regional styles where I could say this is Kremstal, this is Wachau – and Wachau was the most disappointing,' said Walter Speller. But MacDonogh took issue, saying he found 'considerable differences', even if regions such as Burgenland and the generally hotter Carnuntum were 'cashing in' on the Grü-V fad.

Although question marks still hovered over the brilliance of wines from the GV heartland of Wachau, the neighbouring Kremstal and Kamptal regions shone the brightest. 'If I had to choose a star region, it would be Kremstal,' said Barne. Mackay's highlights were 'Kamptal and then Kremstal'. Rand agreed, saying both regions produced 'basic wines that I like very much'. Bampfield said, 'Kremstal stood out – I probably gave more high marks in that area than in any other – but I found good wines in every region.'

BEST VALUE

SAINSBURY'S, TASTE THE DIFFERENCE, TRAIENTAL (16.5)

★★★★★

£6.99  

'Alluring, ripe, soft fruit and spice. Well-weighted, opulent, yet luscious. A fine example of ripe, but not too ripe, Grüner Veltliner. From 2010.' (HR) **Stockist: Sai**



What are the stylistic differences?

Two *Smaragd* wines found themselves among the Decanter Awards despite Rand's (and others') comments about them often being dull, showing that when it's done well, the style is fantastic. For the panel, there were two distinct camps that many of the wines fell into. 'One is a more drinkable, elegant, floral style; the other is leaning towards over-ripeness and richness in weight,' said Mackay. While he added that the latter wines were 'not effective' in terms of drinkability, alcohol balance and cellaring potential, others debated whether a heavier style of Grüner was necessarily bad.

'I'll make my own plea for the Baroque – those rich, darker styles which we had a few of today,' said MacDonogh. 'These heavier, more extracted wines, which remain rather more pear drop in style, represent the classic Grüner Veltliner that goes well with Austrian food.' When Mackay questioned his support for these heavier wines, MacDonogh clarified: 'You can be a bit Baroque without being over the top, and you can be restrained and elegant without being rigid.'

Are they good partners for food?

For MacDonogh's Baroque-style wines, Austrian food was the perfect match. 'What does an Austrian pair with pork, veal and chicken?' asked MacDonogh, 'They don't choose red, they go for a high-alcohol white like GV.' He added that some of the spritzier styles would go well with lighter dishes like canapés or antipasti. The judges felt most Veltliners also make a good aperitif.

Can these wines age, like Riesling?

Not really, was the message from Austrian expert MacDonogh. 'The flavour turns a musty orange. The wines that do age well need to have an incredible amount of residual sugar.'

Are they worth the money?

While the *Smaragds* boast quite high prices (£25–£30), *Decanter* readers can pick up a very good GV for less than half that. Turner, for one, will be investing in both price bands: 'Most of the wines in this tasting were very good value.'