

# Alternative wine regions Austria

## Wines with a strong sense of self



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## Making the people happy

Maverick winemaker-cum-marketing guru Willi Opitz is a man on a mission. "We don't want to make the people drunk, we want to make the people happy," he says, pushing the corners of his mouth upwards.

Opitz's marketing spiel is pat but extraordinary. He's repeated the same stories so many times that he often asks "have you heard the story?" before embarking on a tale, and has laminated visuals to illustrate them. "We don't send samples, we like to look people in the eye," he says, "and that's what we call direct marketing."

Perhaps the most unusual story is his mission to break into the US market. Without the budget for advertising or consumer research, he did the next best thing: read the US newspapers to see what everyone there was talking about.

At the time it was 1996 and Bill Clinton was about to be elected to his second term. "So we said, let's go into the vineyard on election day, which was Nov 4, and we can pick grapes and call the wine Mr President," he says. He delivered the wine personally to the White House and afterwards ended up meeting Clinton in Vienna.

For every wine you taste with Opitz he will give you a food match: a teaspoonful of Granny Smith mousse to bring out the zesty green apple in Pole Position Welschriesling 2007; spicy mango chutney highlighting floral, perfumed notes in Muscat Ottonel 2006; and a strawberry that meets its match in Pink Kiss Pinot Noir Rosé 2007.

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## Gastronomy is key to Austrian breakthrough

Markus Huber is the 10th generation working the Traisental vineyards the family has owned since 1778. He has worked there since he was tiny, and studied oenology before spending two years in South Africa at Kaapzicht, Spiceroute and Lammershoek.

When he came to take over the family vineyards – then 4ha – he realised they weren't big enough to live from. Now he has 20ha and buys grapes from growers cultivating some 50ha on top of that.

His wines, designed to express Traisental's unique limestone soils, are fresh and approachable, with spice, green fruit and green pepper notes in the Grüner Veltliners, and a smoky minerality in top wine Grüner Veltliner Berg 2007. "I make purist wines, without too many trappings or unnatural or artificial influences," he says.

The UK is Huber's second-biggest export market, with wines in Oddbins and a Grüner Veltliner in Sainsbury's Taste The Difference range. He is now hoping to get on-trade distribution to match the off-trade. "I think the key to Austria growing its sales in the UK is to give people the chance to try our wines with good cuisine. We have to learn to value these wines, and the consumer must try them somewhere.

"You can't make Austrian wine cheaply, it is an expensive category, and who is going to buy an £8 or £9 wine if they don't know what it tastes like? That is why I think gastronomy is the key," he says, adding: "I see a lot of potential for Austrian wine generally."

**Website:** weingut-huber.at  
**UK importer:** Thierry's  
01794 507100



Willi Bründlmayer took over his parents' wine business in Langenlois, Lower Austria, in 1981 – just four years before the anti-freeze scandal. But when it hit, his wines were quickly cleared: "All the wines which were OK had a harder time before the scandal because they were more expensive – but after the scandal people realised they were expensive for a reason," he says. "It sounds bad but it was a big boost, business-wise."

Bründlmayer started exporting in the early nineties around the time Austria joined the EU, thinking the market would be flooded with imported wines. But remarkably, Austrians continued drinking 90% Austrian wine, while he built up his business abroad.

"The English market is very interesting," says Bründlmayer. "I like it because there are wines from all over the world, great restaurants, wine shops

and agents. There is a very high level of professionalism in the wine trade."

His wines, centred around flagship spicy Grüner Veltliner but also including some excellent Rieslings, are fresh and zesty with plenty of minerality from the stony terraces most are grown on. Vines are trained close to the ground to pick up reflected heat, giving them ripe primary fruit flavours.

"Wine should be about the place of origin, the vintage, the grape variety and that's it," says Bründlmayer. "If the vintage was cooler, it should taste cooler – we never deacidify or chaptalise, so when we have a very hot year like 2003 the wine can be powerful and hot, heavy and baroque. It should taste the way it is."

**Website:** bruendlmayer.com

**UK importer:** Richards Walford  
01780 460451

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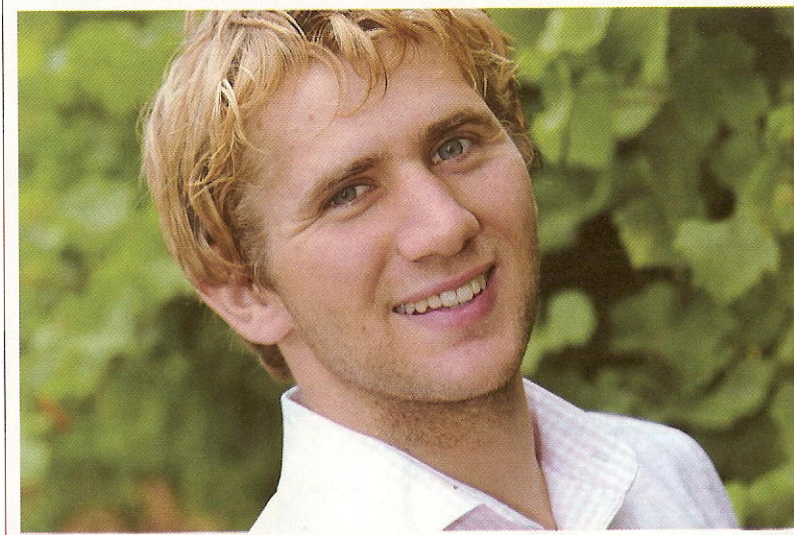
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## Other European newcomers are advancing on the UK

Central and eastern European countries are targeting UK wine drinkers – and with their diverse range of climates, terroirs and indigenous and international grapes they could see a sales boost as the pound weakens against the euro, making traditional European wines more expensive.

Georgia, Macedonia, Slovenia and Moldova are just some of the countries

hoping to gain a foothold here, while Hungary, Bulgaria, Romania and Greece have already made their marks as the 12th to 15th biggest wine-producing countries in the UK off-trade, according to Nielsen.

Sainsbury's buyer Daniel Bracegirdle has this month added a Hungarian Pinot Grigio under the supermarket's own-label range and a Bulgarian Merlot, and says

the region is in a great position because it is able to keep prices low as consumers feel the effects of the credit crunch.

"Our real success has been in Pinot Grigio. We sell quite a lot of Hungarian Pinot Grigio and it is fantastic quality – for the price it is actually better quality than Italian. It is an exciting time and we are seeing some great wine coming out of eastern Europe, and the price to us in

sterling helps with the strengthening of the euro. The wines have stayed sub-£3 which has become increasingly rare on the wine shelves," he says.

Waitrose buyer Ken Mackay MW says: "Given the current euro exchange rate and the squeeze on household budgets, the relatively low production costs of many producers in eastern Europe could well open the door wider for their wines."