

## Austrian Wine: Spreading the Good Word

by Lisa Perrotti-Brown, MW

These days I don't think there's a need to try and persuade any well-informed wine evangelist (journalist, merchant, critic, sommelier or otherwise well-travelled-palate) that Austria produces some heavenly wines. It would be a case of preaching to the converted. But let's face it - we're devoted wine disciples that slavishly exist to discover new vinous interpretations, holy grails and uncharted terroir miracles. Trying to convey this fanaticism and the Austrian message to a world of largely ambivalent alcohol consumers would be a bit like the Pope promoting piety in a Macau casino.

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That most wine consumers just don't "get" Austria is a little unsurprising. Austria is a victim of being a complicated story within that overly long world-of-wine Bible that already contains too many mixed messages. It's as I so often point out when I'm giving lectures - wine religion is seldom like most other religions where a simple pithy parable can succinctly nail the point home like a sanctimonious sledge-hammer. With wine, too little knowledge can be a dangerous thing. Specific to Austria, I'm thinking ethylene glycol (anti-freeze) scandal and knee-jerk associations with neighbouring Germany's wine styles.

Compounding this Austrian wine communicating conundrum - what exactly is Austria known for? Mozart? Skiing? Vienna boys' choir? Most folks would be hard-pressed to even name an Austrian dish let alone a wine. And with good reason - the bottles look German, the grapes are largely indigenous and difficult to pronounce and the delimited regions of quality are a work in progress.

But generally speaking the wines of Austria are unquestionably good and some are a lot more than just that. So while the knowledge of Doubting Thomas general consumers continues to lag behind wine evangelist interest and while we disciples tirelessly seek to wallow in relatively uncharted terroir territory, it was fun to recently have a few Austrian and more renowned supreme beings of the fine wine world put through their paces in a show-down of virtues.

Michael Thurner, formerly of The Austrian Wine Board, has recently taken up residence in Singapore and started his own agency for Austrian wines called, "Austria's Fine Brands". In August 2009 he invited thirteen of Singapore's top wine experts to a blind tasting. In fact, it was sold to us as nothing more than a blind tasting, so sitting down to the wines we had no reason other than to expect that we would taste purely Austrian wines. But a couple of flights into the tasting and the game was up - we were tasting *mostly* Austrian wines with a benchmark super-star label from France added to most flights. Interlopers included: Meo-Camuzet, Didier Dagueneau, Leflaive, Guigal, Mouton Rothschild and d'Yquem. Fun aside, Thurner was in fact conducting an experiment to see how some of Austria's best wines measured-up to France's most highly acclaimed names.

In short, Austria measured up very well indeed. When the 13 wine experts' votes were tallied at the end of each blind flight, of the six flights that featured a non-Austrian wine, only one flight came out as a tie (the one that included Guigal La Turque 2004) and the other five flights had Austrian victors. So Austrian wines won 5 out of 6 matches and drew 1.

HOWEVER this is the abridged, “simple pithy parable” version of the story that I warned earlier does not wholly ring true given the complicated nature of wine. As all wine acolytes intimately know, wines of a certain echelon are singular entities that by nature of their terroir, grape variety and winemaking idiosyncratically develop at individual rates. To drawn out a direct quality comparison based on blind tasting between an Austrian TBA Chardonnay 2005 and Chateau d’Yquem 2005 is misleading and not just because it’s like comparing apples with oranges (or Chardonnay vs Semillon / Sauvignon). By virtue of the terroir and winemaking involved, it’s also like comparing a burgeoning Lolita to a baby. Of course the former is still far too young yet infinitely more precocious and alluring than the latter at this stage. Therefore while the tasting presented some interesting sparring opportunities, I wouldn’t exactly call them fair matches. Nonetheless, it was a thoroughly enjoyable tasting full of revelations for this wine evangelist, cheers Michael!

To follow is a list of the flights / wines that were tasted with the overall choice of the tasting panel for each flight **highlighted in brown** and with two wines highlighted in the case of a tie. My tasting notes for all the wines are also listed.

## **Austrian Wine: Spreading the Good Word**

### **Flight 1**

#### **Jurtschitsch - Grüner Veltliner, Käferberg 2007**

Leflaive - Puligny Montrachet "Les Pucelles" 2007

Huber - Grüner Veltliner, Berg 2006


### **Flight 2**

#### **Huber - Riesling, Berg 2007**

Jurtschitsch - Riesling, Zöbinger Heiligenstein 2007

Reinisch - Rotgipfler, Reserve 2007

Reinisch - Zierfandler, Reserve 2007

### **Flight 3**

#### **Tement - Sauvignon blanc, Grassnitzberg 2007**

Tement - Sauvignon blanc, Zieregg 2007

Didier Dagueneau - Pouilly-Fumé Silex 2006

Tement - Sauvignon blanc, Zieregg 1999

### **Flight 4**

Meó Camuzet - Clos de Vougeot, Grand Cru 2006

Markowitsch - Pinot Noir, Reserve 2006

#### **Reinisch - Pinot Noir, Holzspur Grand Reserve 2004**

### **Flight 5**

#### **Moric - Neckenmarkt Alte Reben 2006**

#### **Guigal - Cote Rotie, La Turquie 2004**

Reinisch - St. Laurent, Holzspur Grand Reserve 2004

### **Flight 6**

#### **T.FX.T. - Arachon Evolution 2004**

Mouton Rothschild - Pauillac 2004

Markowitsch - Rosenberg 2004

Weninger - Dürrau 2004

### **Flight 7:**

Weninger - Blaufränkisch Reserve 2002

Weninger - Blaufränkisch Reserve 1992

### **Flight 8**

#### **Tschida - TBA Chardonnay 2005**

#### **Tschida - TBA Chardonnay 2005**

Chateau Yquem - Sauternes 2005

Tasting Notes

#### **Jurtschitsch Grüner Veltliner 2007**

Käferberg, Austria

91 points

Somewhat mute aromas yielding interesting notes of citrus fruits, chalk and white pepper.

The palate provides very crisp acidity with a pleasant white pepper and dill character. Nice balance. Long finish. Tasted August 2009.

**Domaine Leflaive Puligny Montrachet 1er Cru "Les Pucelles" 2007**

Burgundy, France

90 points

Fragrant aromas of grapefruit, stone fruits, cream and cedar. Nice backbone of high acidity supporting mineral fruit. Somewhat tight and restrained at this stage. Long finish. Tasted August 2009.

**Huber Grüner Veltliner 2006**

Berg, Austria

92 points

Precocious nose providing appealing aromas of melon, peach and a chalky / earthy character plus a hint of yeastiness. Dry, crisp with good concentration and plenty of citrus and mineral flavours. Long finish. Tasted August 2009.

**Huber Riesling 2007**

Berg, Austria

91 points

Floral, honeyed nose with a waft of kerosene and some spicy / white pepper elements. Very crisp acidity countered by a touch of sweetness. Good concentration. Long spicy finish. Enticingly exotic. Tasted August 2009

**Jurtschitsch Zöbinger Heiligenstein Riesling 2007**

Austria

90 points

Restrained aromas of chalk boards, wet pebbles, jasmine and musk. Medium+ acidity with nice intensity of mineral and citrus fruit characters. Long, steely finish. Tasted August 2009.

**Reinisch Rotgipfler Reserve 2007**

Austria

89 points

Earthy / flint scented with an underlying fragrance of lemon-grass, lemon-lime juice and a waft of wet dog. Crisp acidity, medium+ body with good concentration and balance. Long finish. Tasted August 2009.

**Reinisch Zierfandler Reserve 2007**

Austria

87 points

A little mute on the nose giving subtle hints of crushed stones and green apples. Medium+ acidity and a good concentration of citrus fruits. Long mineral finish. Tasted August 2009.

**Tement Sauvignon Blanc Grassnitzberg 2007**

Austria

88 points

Intense aromas of grass and fresh grapefruit juice with a whiff of stuck flint. Medium to high acidity, good concentration of juicy fruit and a long finish. Tasted August 2009.

**Tement Sauvignon Blanc Zieregg 2007**

Austria

91 points

Pure, zesty aromas of lemon, fresh herbs, lime leaf and a touch of cedar. Medium to high acidity and plenty of mouth-filling citrus fruit. The oak is still a little disjointed but should marry with a further 6 months. Very long finish. Tasted August 2009.

**Didier Dagueneau Pouilly-Fumé Silex 2006**

Loire, France

90 points

Pretty perfume of floral aromas – orange blossom and honeysuckle – supplemented by lemon zest and green apple. Very crisp, rasing acidity. Really nervy vibrancy within an elegant, mineral style. Long finish. Tasted August 2009.

**Tement Sauvignon 1999**

Zieregg, Austria

84 points

Evolved Sauvignon nose, going a bit bruised apple and rotten vegetable in character complimented by a more appealing honey / nut element. Medium acidity on the palate with fading though interesting flavours. Medium to long finish. Tasted August 2009.

**Meó Camuzet Clos de Vougeot Grand Cru 2006**

Burgundy, France

91 points

Pale to medium ruby colour. Perfumed nose with floral notes of violets beneath a cherry core, complimented by a touch of beetroot. Crisp acidity, soft to medium level of finely grained tannins. Long, earthy finish. Tasted August 2009.

**Markowitsch Pinot Noir Reserve 2006**

Austria

84 points

Pale ruby with a touch of orange. Slightly medicinal / menthol nose with notes of cranberry, wild strawberry and a touch of herbs. Medium acidity and a low level of chewy tannins. Medium to long finish. Tasted August 2009.

**Reinisch Pinot Noir Holzspur Grand Reserve 2004**

Austria

87 points

Pale to medium ruby. The nose begins a little animal / gamey with a yeasty, marmite aromas and a hint of truffles. This gives way to dark cherry and raspberry scents with a touch of spiciness. Crisp acidity and a low to medium level of tannins with a slight grip of astringency. Medium+ body and a long finish. Tasted August 2009.

**Moric Neckenmarkt Alte Reben 2006**

Austria

89 points

Pale to medium ruby-purple colour. Intriguing nose of Mediterranean herbs, dried plums and sour cherry. Crisp acidity and a low to medium level of finely grained tannins. A tad green but a fair bit of complexity. Long finish. Very interesting wine. Tasted August 2009.

**Guigal Cote Rotie La Turque 2004**

Northern Rhone, France

89 points

Pale to medium garnet colour. Earthy aromas of forest floor, loam and truffles complimented by blackberry, cassia, black pepper and a whiff of cumin. Crisp acidity. Medium level of chewy tannins, a little astringent. Long finish. Tasted August 2009.

**Reinisch St. Laurent Holzspur Grand Reserve 2004**

Austria

90 points

Medium ruby-purple colour. Aromas of black cherry, dark chocolate and a good sprinkling of black pepper with nuances of game and tobacco. Crisp acidity. Medium level of fine tannins. Good concentration. Medium+ body and a long finish. Tasted August 2009.

**T.FX.T. Arachon Evolution 2004**

Austria

91 points

Pale to medium garnet colour with a touch of brick. The nose is predominately earthy with evolving aromas of game, leather and spice. Crisp acidity, good concentration. Medium+ level of firm fine tannins and a long finish. Tasted August 2009.

**Chateau Mouton Rothschild 2004**

Pauillac, France

91 points

Deep garnet colour. Aromas of warm cassis, dried plum, cloves and pencil shavings. Medium+ acidity and medium to firm, fine tannins. Long finish. Tasted August 2009.

**Markowitsch Rosenberg 2004**

Austria

88 points

Deep garnet colour. Savoury aromas – earthy, meaty, gamey with a cherry fruit core. The palate provides a solid backbone of high acidity and medium to firm, grippy tannins. Medium+ body. Long finish. Tasted August 2009.

**Weninger Blaufränkisch Dürrau 2004**

Austria

92 points

Medium to deep garnet colour. Aromas of cassis, graphite and tobacco leaf. Crisp acidity and a medium to firm level of finely grained tannins. Medium to full body. Long finish. Tasted August 2009.

**Weninger Blaufränkisch Reserve 2002**

Austria

88 points

Medium garnet colour. Restrained nose of cherry and plum with some spicy / cinnamon aromas. Crisp acidity. Medium+ level of chewy tannins, a little rustic. Good concentration. Long finish. Tasted August 2009.

**Weninger Blaufränkisch Reserve 1992**

Austria

90 points

Pale to medium garnet colour with a brick rim. Quite a spicy nose with aromas of vanilla, cinnamon, cloves and white pepper supporting evolved red berry and dried cherry notes.

Silky tannins and medium to high acidity. Nice balance. Long, earthy finish. Tasted August 2009.

**Tschida TBA (Troockenbeereauslese) Sämling 2005**

94 points

Intense nose of orange and lemon marmalade, warm pineapple and lime cordial. The palate is very sweet and very rich with great concentration and purity. Lovely backbone of crisp acidity provides just enough freshness. Very long, layered finish. Tasted August 2009.

**Tschida TBA (Troockenbeereauslese) Chardonnay 2005**

93 points

Somewhat restrained aromas of lemon curd, acacia honey and a touch of preserved ginger. A whiff of chalk. Very crisp acidity adeptly lifts the sweetness. Very long finish. Tasted August 2009.

**Chateau d'Yquem 2005**

Sauternes, France

92 points

Somewhat muted floral aromas of jasmine, orange blossom and honeysuckle over candied pineapple. A waft of anise and some cedar. The palate is quite restrained with well balanced sweetness versus medium to high acidity. Very long finish – a mineral character coming through. Tasted August 2009.