

Austrian Grüner Veltliner

This country's signature white variety is a great food partner and is wonderfully versatile, says Stephen Brook, offering different styles for early and mature drinking

TWENTY YEARS AGO Grüner Veltliner was all but unknown. It had long been Austria's hallmark white grape variety, but lacked a clear identity for wine lovers to latch on to. Even today it is perceived as a racy, dry white wine, zesty and uncomplicated, with high natural acidity; generally unoaked and usually inexpensive.

But like its Austrian stablemate Riesling, it can shine in a range of guises. It's ideally suited to the mineral loess soils in Wagram, but can do equally well on loam in Kamptal, or on the primary-rock soils of much of Wachau and Kremstal. It's not a choosy variety in terms of soil types, though it does not show well in the warmest areas such as Burgenland. On the international stage Grüner Veltliner has always been in Riesling's shade, but in the right soils and the right hands Veltliner can certainly be its equal. And like Riesling, it can age superbly.

About half the plantings are in Weinviertel (see map and fact box, right), and while there are some very good producers here, more complex wines are usually found on either side of the Danube, from Wagram to Wachau.

Appellations and styles

Austria's unique appellation system, the DAC, applies to Grüner Veltliner from Weinviertel, and also to other Lower Austrian examples, except from Wachau, which has its own internal appellation system. DAC allows for a Reserve category that must have at least 13% alcohol and up to 9g/l residual sugar. Even Austrians find the DAC system difficult to master, and it has made little impact beyond its borders. However, the Wachau's own version of the Reserve category, called Smaragd, has achieved some recognition, especially since quality tends to be very high, while wines generally from 12% to 12.5% are labelled as Federspiel. About 25 growers in Lower Austria have founded the Traditionsweingüter, with their own system of Erste Lagen (first growths), labelled IOTW, but this has no official standing.

Grüner Veltliner isn't the most overtly fruity of grapes, being bookmarked more for its white-pepper tones than for any rich fruitiness, although it can display citrus, apple or stone-fruit aromas and flavours depending on where it is grown and on its ripeness levels at harvest. When picked super-ripe it can veer towards the tropical.

It first came to worldwide attention in a blind-tasting in Vienna in 1998, when it was pitted against top white Burgundies, Montrachet from Domaine de la Romanée-Conti included. Veltliner took the top three places. Austrian wine estates with an eye on the export market rightly exploited this triumph, but some did so in the wrong way, devising embarrassing labels such as GruVe (geddit?), which didn't exactly suggest a noble variety.

But word has spread, aided by Grüner's admirable versatility with food, including oriental cuisines. It has also become increasingly popular in New Zealand, even if few examples as yet display any convincing typicity.



Map: Maggie Nelson

Grüner Veltliner: know your vintages

2015 Hot summer with rain at the right time delivered a fine vintage. Hail damage reduced the crop.

2014 Heavy rain from mid-August to mid-September. Some good wines were made after rigorous selection. But not a top year.

2013 Poor flowering led to a small crop but quality was high, with great acidity. Long-lived.

2012 Hot summer from late July, so very ripe grapes but acidity is lower than ideal.

2011 Lower than average acidity, but a ripe year after an Indian summer. Good quality.

2010 Late vintage, but those who held their nerve had elegant wines with moderate alcohol and racy acidity.

2009 Hot summer marred by heavy rain in September giving rot. Fine weather returned and quality was good.

2008 Cool year, so ripening was slow. Some green wines and others with rasping acidity, so variable quality.

Grüner Veltliner: the facts

The variety accounts for 14,900ha of Austria's 47,000ha of vineyards. While Weinviertel has about half the plantings, the following are the most important regions: **Kamptal** 2,018ha **Wagram** 1,330ha **Kremstal** 1,310ha **Wachau** 805ha **Leithaberg** 745ha **Traisental** 464ha **Carnuntum** 181ha

*Stephen Brook has been visiting Austria and following its wines for more than 40 years. His latest book is **The Wines of Austria (Infinite Ideas, 2015)** ➤*

The results

Vintage and style variation made this a hard tasting to sum up, especially as many wines were from the tricky 2014 vintage. Tina Gellie reports on the highs and lows

GIVEN THAT 42% of wines submitted were from the tricky 2014 vintage, this was actually a very positive tasting – despite what the results might suggest.

The two Masters of Wine, Andreas Wickhoff and Sarah Knowles, said while it was disappointing that no wine rated more than 91 points, they were impressed with the overall quality. Knowles said: 'We had very few bad wines – not one was unappetising or lacked freshness or fruit. So that's one of the huge positives in this tasting of 85 Grüner Veltliners: the consistency of good quality.'

Stephen Brook recalled being in Weinviertel at end of the 2014 vintage. 'Fritz Rieder said to me he had two options that year: hang himself or shoot himself. Rot was so rampant that most growers threw out half their crop. So I was surprised by how good some of the '14s were here, as getting ripe fruit was not easy.' He suspected that if retasted next year, this vintage would show better.

By contrast the 2013 and 2015s were widely praised, Brook highlighting their 'delicious clarity of fruit and vibrancy'. Wickhoff was particularly impressed by the 2015s. 'I thought they'd be out of balance as it was such a hot vintage, but they had lots of refreshing acidity and certainly enough fruit concentration.' For Knowles, the '15s from Wagram and Kremstal stood out. 'The easier conditions allowed for clean, fresh aromatic whites with slightly lower alcohol because of the bigger yields.'

The tasters felt the wines were ready to be broached now, but would improve over the next few years – and the best would still be drinking well for a decade.

Wagram and Traisental stood out as the best regions, and Wickhoff was excited by how clearly the high loess content of the Wagram soils shone through in the wines. Brook revealed they were his 'go-to' whites. 'They aren't hugely ambitious but have tremendous fruit. I have more serious Austrian wines in my cellar too, but when I'm looking for a wine to drink on a warm evening I'll grab something from the Wagram.'

Weinviertel underperformed in the judges' eyes,

'That's a huge positive in tasting 85 Grainers: the consistency of good quality' Sarah Knowles MW

particularly the 2015s, and Wachau was deemed 'wildly inconsistent' by Brook. 'Maybe we didn't get some of the top producers because they sell their wines so easily or because most were from the tricky 2014 vintage?'

Each of the judges also highlighted what was for them an issue with Austrian Grüner Veltliner. For Knowles it was high alcohol, while Wickhoff's bugbear was sulphur-dioxide levels. 'They're often far too high and it masks the fruit expression,' he complained. 'If you work the vineyard properly and vinify accordingly there's no reason for that high use of SO₂.'

Brook took issue with residual sugar. 'Like high alcohol, I'm not bothered by it unless I taste it, and there were far too many wines where there was 6g/l or 7g/l of residual sugar. I know you need to balance out high acidity, but when the overriding impression is of a cloying sweetness on the finish, that's not right in what's meant to be a dry white wine.'

'Yes you can have blocked fermentations and in certain years there's a lot of botrytis and it's difficult to get your wine fully dry, but it seems it's almost the norm in some regions to have 3g/l or 4g/l of residual sugar. It detracts from the clarity of the wine and that's the USP of Grüner Veltliner: clarity, fruit purity, directness, freshness and terrific racy acidity. If you cover all that up with sugar, what's the point?'

But it wasn't all bad. All three judges remarked on the food-friendliness of the wines and Wickhoff enjoyed the clear vintage variation. 'It's actually a great thing from a consumer's point of view that there's not a consistency in vintages: I like that excitement, and even in a bad year you know the top producers will shine.'

The scores

85 wines tasted

Exceptional

0

Outstanding

0

Highly Recommended

16

Recommended

54

Commended

11

Fair

4

Poor

0

Faulty

0

Entry criteria: producers and UK agents were invited to submit their latest-release, UK-available, dry Grüner Veltliners (retailing at £7.99 or above), from the DAC regions of Kamptal, Kremstal, Traisental and Weinviertel, plus Federspiel and Smaragd Wachau wines and reserve or single-vineyard Wagram wines

Highly Recommended 90–94pts



Alzinger, Steinertal Smaragd, Wachau 2013 Decanter average score: 91/100pts Individual judges' scores: Stephen Brook 94 Sarah Knowles MW 88 Andreas Wickhoff MW 91

£33 Alpine Wines

Juicy stone fruits, honey and floral nose. Vibrant palate, very good density and ripe fruit concentration; there is plenty of spice and nice grapefruit peel bitterness, with a long finish. **Drink** 2016-2025 **Alcohol** 13.5%



Leth, Brunnthal 1OTW, Wagram 2014 91 SB 91 SK 88 AW 94

£22 Vagabond Wines

An intriguing and nicely reductive nose; this is quite a rich and concentrated wine lifted by the bright acidity together with the fresh peppery elements from the loess soil. Great texture with a mineral tang on the finish. **Drink** 2016-2024 **Alc** 13%



Buchegger, Gebling, Kremstal 2015 90 SB 90 SK 90 AW 90

£16 Alpine Wines

A perfect spring or summer wine! Bright lime and apple nose with wonderful balance of intense green apple characters, peppery notes and lemon fruit. It has vivid structure with a good length, compelling immediacy and charm. **Drink** 2016-2020 **Alc** 13%



Huber, Obere Steigen, Traisental 2015 90 SB 90 SK 90 AW 90

£10.99-£14 AC Gallie, Astrum Wines, City Wine Collection, Love Wine

Vibrant peardrop and spicy lime nose, and a refreshing acid structure underlying the ripe quince fruit palate. A lively, wonderful spice component, and a long peppery finish. Not complex but tasty. **Drink** 2016-2020 **Alc** 12.5%



Birgit Eichinger, Wechselberg, Kamptal 2015 91 SB 92 SK 90 AW 91

£12 Armit Wines

Aromatic pear and peach on the nose, this has a good deal of spice with a refreshing acid structure. With a full body that is vibrant and expressive in style, this is a vivid wine with a persistent finish. **Drink** 2016-2020 **Alc** 12.5%



'That's the USP of Grüner Veltliner: clarity, fruit purity, directness, freshness and terrific racy acidity' Stephen Brook

Familie Schuster, Alte Reben, Wagram 2015 90 SB 91 SK 89 AW 91

£11.50 Savage Selection

A restrained nose of lime and apple. The palate is rich and succulent with spice and a fine acidity. Concentrated and zesty, it has real lift, energy and density without a cloying feeling. This is an elegant wine with a lengthy finish. **Drink** 2016-2022 **Alc** 13%



Johann Donabaum, Kirchweg, Smaragd, Wachau 2013 90 SB 94 SK 86 AW 89

£19 Hallgarten Druitt & Novum Wines

Subdued, developed and earthy apple-pie nose with plenty of spritz, roasted nuts and white pepper on the palate. Concentrated and punchy with ripe acidity and lots of peppery spice. Power and tension, and a good length. A real statement. **Drink** 2018-2025 **Alc** 14.5%



Hager Matthias, Alte Reben Reserve, Kamptal 2013 91

SB 94 SK 88 AW 90

£20 Kipferl

Developed aromas of bruised apple, apricot and melon candy, it has a lush, full-bodied palate with good concentration and weight of fruit. Layered and dense with grip and some spice on the lengthy finish. **Drink** 2016-2024 **Alc** 13%



Loimer, Langenlois Käferberg 1OTW Reserve, Kamptal 2013 91 SB 92 SK 88 AW 92

£45 Liberty Wines

Super-ripe stone fruits and pear on the nose lead to a floral, complex palate balanced by refreshing, bright acidity. There is a fine spice nuance to this wine, which is perfectly integrated into the lovely, long finish. **Drink** 2016-2023 **Alc** 13.5%



Hirsch, Lamm 1OTW Reserve, Kamptal 2013 90 SB 88 SK 92 AW 91

£40 Indigo Wine, The Good Wine Shop

White floral and Golden Delicious apple aromas, with an intense lemon, peach and pepper character on the palate. It has a juicy sour apricot acidity but yet is very elegant with a spice-driven, medium-length finish. **Drink** 2016-2020 **Alc** 13%



Josef Ehmoser, Georgenberg, Wagram 2013 90 SB 89 SK 89 AW 92

£16.15 Berry Bros & Rudd, Carruthers & Kent

Developed ripe pear and candied citrus nose. Very good concentration and tight acidity preserving the still fresh lemon and apple fruit. The typical peppery components are present from start to finish. Exuberant; the texture is supple and the finish is long. **Drink** 2016-2023 **Alc** 13.5% ➤

The judges

Stephen Brook



Brook has been a contributing editor to Decanter since 1996 and has been visiting Austria and following its wine industry for more than 40 years. The author of more than 30 books, his

latest work is *The Wines of Austria (Infinite Ideas, 2015)*.

Sarah Knowles MW



Knowles is a buyer at The Wine Society, responsible for Austria among other regions. She joined the team in 2014 and became a Master of Wine in 2015. Knowles started in the wine trade

working for wholesaler Arthur Rackham, before moving to Amathus Drinks as a buyer.

Andreas Wickhoff MW



Wickhoff is managing director at Weingut Bründlmayer in Austria's Kamptal and was previously MD for a group of premium Austrian wineries. Prior to 2004 he worked as a

sommelier and wine buyer in Corsica, France and Colorado. He received his MW in 2012.

Highly Recommended (continued) 90–94pts



Laurenz V, Friendly, Kamptal 2014 90 SB 90 SK 90 AW 89
 £13.95–£14.95 Bibendum PLB, Drinkmonger, Le Vignoble
 Vibrant mineral nose with fine typicity of ripe lemon and apple fruit, and herbal notes. Juicy palate with refreshing acidity that continues all the way towards the finish. Plenty of spice, nicely balanced and long. **Drink** 2016–2020 **Alc** 12.5%



Ott, Der Ott, Wagram 2014 90 SB 90 SK 90 AW 90
 £19.80 Savage Selection
 Waxy apple and apricot nose in a slightly reductive style. There is pineapple, lemon and lime coming through and a good deal of spice on the palate. Mouthwatering yet well-balanced, it is lean with a refreshing and vibrant finish. **Drink** 2016–2020 **Alc** 12.5%



Rabl, Dechant Alte Reben Reserve, Kamptal 2014 90 SB 91 SK 91 AW 89
 £24 Merry Widows
 Roasted poppyseed aromas along with white pepper and apple plus a fine touch of high-quality oak. There is plenty of fruit weight and good concentration, balanced with refreshing acidity and leading to a persistent finish. **Drink** 2016–2022 **Alc** 14%



Rabl, Käferberg Alte Reben Reserve, Kamptal 2013 90 SB 93 SK 89 AW 87
 £24 Merry Widows
 Heady apple compote nose with some tropical fruit; good density of melon and pear fruit on the palate, and a fine peppery note. This is a wine with elegance and fresh acidity, ample mineral grip and a long, toasty finish. **Drink** 2016–2024 **Alc** 14%



Stift Göttweig, Göttweiger Berg, Kremstal 2015 90 SB 88 SK 90 AW 91
 £14.50 OW Loeb & Co
 Wet stone and apple notes on the expressive nose. The palate is quite rich with a bright acid structure – a great, fresh style showing upfront lemon and green apple fruit. It is elegant and refreshing with a pointed, long finish. **Drink** 2016–2020 **Alc** 12.5%

‘It’s actually a great thing from a consumer’s point of view that there’s not a consistency in vintages: I like that excitement
 Andreas Wickhoff MW

Recommended 86–89pts

Wine	Score	SB	SK	AW	Tasting note	Alc	Drink	Price	Stockists
Buchegger, Leopold Reserve, Kremstal 2014	89	88	89	90	Lush, focused fruit nose yet slightly reductive. Ripe citrus acidity and great concentration of fruit, with lots of spice and good length of flavour.	13.5%	2016–2020	£14	Alpine Wines
Domäne Wachau, Terrassen Smaragd, Wachau 2015	89	92	87	89	Austere now, but has ample fruit lurking. Crisp palate of concentrated juicy lemon and pepper, it is fruity rather than mineral but has precision and clarity.	14%	2016–2024	£14–£15 (2014)	Carruthers & Kent, Corks & Cases, The Drink Shop
Eschenhof Holzer, Altweingarten, Wagram 2015	89	90	87	89	Restrained fruit nose, but lovely linear lemon and spice on the palate. This has juiciness and weight too, with good vibrancy and a fine length.	12.5%	2016–2022	£12.99	Added Ingredients, Grape & Grain, Hack & Veldt, Last Drop Wines, Red Squirrel Wine, Ten Green Bottles, Wolsley Wine Loft
Felsner, Reischenthal, Kremstal 2013	89	89	87	91	Shy pear nose that is a bit earthy. Present acidity and intense peach and melon fruit with a good deal of spice. Not complex but well structured.	12.5%	2016–2020	£15.49	Clark Foyster, Park & Bridge
Mehoffer, Wadenthal, Wagram 2014	89	90	86	91	Developing, savoury apple and spice nose and zesty acidity. It is textured and layered with spice and great concentration. Well balanced and quite long.	13%	2016–2022	£13	Whirly Wine
Petra Unger, Oberfeld 1OTW AR Reserve, Kremstal 2014	89	91	87	89	Expressive apricot and pear nose with lively acidity and a full-bodied lemon, apple and floral palate. There is some minerality and spice. Ambitious.	14%	2016–2022	£18	Fields Morris & Verdin, Woodwinters
Stadt Krems, Kremstal 2015	89	90	89	89	Lean, tangy citrus nose that is brisk and mineral. Green apple fruit and bright acidity backed by lots of spice. Fresh and elegant with a long finish. Stylish.	12.5%	2016–2022	£14	Clark Foyster
Allram, Renner 1OTW Reserve, Kamptal 2013	88	92	87	85	Rich, dense nose with a bit of spritz; this has power. Ripe citrus, honey and apple fruit of good concentration; silky texture and spice notes to finish.	13.5%	2016–2024	£23	Thirsty
Birgit Eichinger, Lamm 1OTW Reserve, Kamptal 2014	88	87	89	89	Developed nose of melon and oaky notes and spiced pear on the palate. Broad and juicy, with a creamy texture and bright acidity. Complex.	13.5%	2016–2022	£27.85	Armit Wines
Bründlmayer, Loiser Berg 1OTW, Kamptal 2013	88	87	88	90	Vivacity, density and refreshing lemon rind and apricot acidity with green apple fruit. Balanced with some zip – drinking very well now.	12.5%	2016–2020	£21.50	Define Food & Wine, Fields Morris & Verdin, Oxford Wine Co, Raeburn, Selfridges, Windsor Wines, Woodwinters
Dürnberg, Alte Reben, Weinviertel 2015	88	87	89	87	Fresh grassy, citrus nose and a palate of mouthwatering, raw lemon acidity, some mineral and peppery notes. Lively, unpretentious and tangy.	12.5%	2016–2019	£11.95	The Vintner

Recommended (continued) 86–89pts

Wine	Score	SB	SK	AW	Tasting note	Alc	Drink	Price	Stockists
Ewald Gruber, Röschitz, Weinviertel 2015	88	86	88	89	A ripe apple and peardrop nose, good liveliness and plenty of mouthwatering lemon fruit. Great balance and an elegant finish. Enjoyable early drinking.	12.5%	2016–2020	£11.69	Amathus Drinks
Franz Hirtzberger, Honivogl Smaragd, Wachau 2013	88	91	86	88	Voluptuous and seductive honeydew melon: rich and lavish with lots of concentration and ripe acidity. Long and lingering – a classic Wachau.	14%	2016–2022	£59.50	Clark Foyster
Geyerhof, Steinleithn 1OTW, Kremstal 2014	88	85	88	90	Reticent pear and passion fruit with delicate floral hints. A bright spine of acidity balances the spice notes: good tension and vibe plus a juicy finish.	12.5%	2016–2019	POA	Genesis Wines
Leth, Scheiben 1OTW, Wagram 2014	88	85	88	90	A ripe nose of mango and honey blossom, then a rich, creamy palate with rounded acidity and white peach, lime and green apple fruit concentration.	13%	2016–2022	£25	Vagabond Wines
Nastl, Steinmassl Reserve, Kamptal 2014	88	86	88	90	Savoury spiced apple and floral aromas, this is creamy and full-bodied with vivid ripe pear and bruised apple acidity. Great spice and a lengthy finish.	13%	2016–2024	£13.99	Character Wines
Nastl, Veltliner Gigant, Kamptal 2011	88	88	85	90	Light toastiness and stony, peardrop nose; this is fresh and simple with ample weight, ripe acidity and a peppery character. Balanced, long finish.	14.5%	2016–2020	£15.99	Character Wines
Schloss Gobelsburg, Lamm 1OTW Reserve, Kamptal 2014	88	90	86	87	Peardrop, white flower and pepper aroma. Concentrated and grippy palate of ripe citrus and firm underlying acidity. Quite long.	13.5%	2016–2020	£35	Clark Foyster
Schmelz, Loibner Federspiel, Wachau 2015	88	89	87	88	A lime and pear nose with refreshing lemon acidity aided by some spritz. A lively peppery note on the palate with lime and herbal hints. Tight finish.	12.5%	2016–2020	£14.90	GK Wine House
Sepp Moser, Breiter Rain 1OTW Reserve, Kremstal 2012	88	87	88	88	Almost white Burgundy aromas – a complex, well-integrated palate with plenty of solid lemon and bruised apple fruit and a lengthy, warm finish.	13.5%	2016–2019	£18.95–£21	Boutinot, D Byrne & Co, Drinkmonger, Hangingditch, Woodwinters
Siedler Alex, Tradition, Traisental 2015	88	90	87	86	Subdued though very ripe melon nose, this is deliciously fruity, peppery and beguiling with zesty acidity that provides balance. Light bodied and fresh.	12.5%	2016–2022	£10–£13	Department 33, The Grape Escape
Waldschütz, Reserve, Wagram 2014	88	85	88	91	Juicy apple and pear nose with hints of ginger and cucumber. Broad and rounded with bright acidity and a saline element. Tension, texture and length.	13.5%	2016–2024	£16.80	Alpine Wines
Allram, Hasel, Kamptal 2015	87	87	87	87	Delicate pear and floral nose. Forward spice, rich and weighty, with mouthfilling sweetness and a lovely, slightly bitter finish.	13%	2016–2019	£12	Thirsty
Anton Bauer, Rosenberg, Wagram 2014	87	87	86	87	A splendid, youthful nose of tropical fruit and white flowers. A light, fresh body, vibrant acidity and nice spice tones finishing with a sherbet tang.	12.5%	2016–2020	£18	Salisbury Wine Store, Top Selection
Diwald, Alte Weingärten, Wagram 2014	87	86	88	88	Spiced pear and herbal nose, this is youthful with savoury white pepper and mineral notes, lively acidity and ample freshness. Persistent lemon rind finish.	13%	2016–2020	£21.99	Red Squirrel Wine
Eitzinger, Löss, Kamptal 2015	87	84	90	86	A spiced and exotic white fruit nose, this is very elegant with bright acidity and peppery notes, good balance and an appealing sweet ‘n’ sour finish.	12%	2016–2019	£9.90	Co-op, Guy Anderson
Fritsch, Schlossberg 1OTW, Wagram 2014	87	86	85	89	An elegant, floral yet developing nose of white peach. Bright acidity on the palate with melon, peach and ample spice. Modest but well-made and long.	13%	2016–2021	£19.99	The Flying Corkscrew
Fritsch, Steinberg, Wagram 2015	87	87	86	89	Shy nose of white flowers and lemon. Fine concentration of ample fruit with ripe acidity. Elegant and tight, it finishes juicy with a vibrant texture.	12.5%	2016–2020	£13.50	The Flying Corkscrew
Gritsch Mauritiushof, Singerriedel Smaragd, Wachau 2013	87	83	87	91	Classic for its region, it’s developed, earthy and mushroomy, with ripe citrus and stone fruit. Rich, sumptuous and peppery with fresh acidity; ambitious.	14%	2016–2020	£22.54	Savage Selection
Knoll, Ried Loibenberg Smaragd, Wachau 2013	87	85	85	91	Intense, apple and apricot fruit and a slightly saline nose. Complex and concentrated with spice and lively acidity. Nicely balanced; lengthy finish.	13.5%	2016–2022	£40	Fine & Rare, Roberson
Knoll, Ried Schütt Smaragd, Wachau 2013	87	83	88	89	Bright, fresh, stony nose but muted. There’s ripe acidity and concentration of pear, apple and white pepper. Well-balanced with a persistent finish.	13.5%	2016–2020	£32.95–£40	Uncorked, Hangingditch
Kohl, Kittl, Weinviertel 2015	87	85	86	91	Restrained fruit and oak nose, this shows real Weinviertel style: peppery with lemon fruit and lean but lively refreshing acidity. Long with great tension.	13%	2016–2021	£13.99	The Real Wine Co
Müller, Neuberg, Kremstal 2015	87	90	85	85	Grassy, herbal notes and a tropical nose. Broad and concentrated opulent candied melon fruit, bright acidity and lively peppery spice. Good length.	13%	2016–2022	£12.50	Austrian Wines Direct
Nikolaihof, Im Weingebirge Smaragd, Wachau 2013	87	82	87	92	Rich, nutty apple nose and a lactic component. Atypical for Grüner and for Wachau. Bruised apple and vanilla notes but has vibrancy and character.	12.5%	2016–2021	£38 (2012)	Fields Morris & Verdin
R&A Pfaffl, Hundsleiten Reserve, Weinviertel 2015	87	89	85	88	Restrained nose of hay and herbs. Ripe lemon and grapefruit acidity along with expressive peppery and savoury hints. This is complex; one to watch.	13.5%	2016–2020	£20	Astrum Wine Cellars
Schloss Gobelsburg, Renner 1OTW Reserve, Kamptal 2014	87	90	87	85	Fresh aromas of white pepper, melon and lemon and a palate of overt apricot and zesty acidity. Not hugely complex but balanced and long.	13%	2016–2022	£23	Roberson

Recommended (continued) 86–89pts

Wine	Score	SB	SK	AW	Tasting note	Alc	Drink	Price	Stockists
Stadt Krems, Ried Wachtberg IOTW Reserve, Kremstal 2014	87	86	89	87	Inviting floral nose with a herbaceous character. Plentiful ripe lemon and pear fruit on the palate with juicy acidity and a good deal of spice. Finish is lengthy.	13%	2016-2019	£23	Clark Foyster
Stift Göttweig, Ried Gottschelle IOTW Reserve, Kremstal 2014	87	84	88	88	Floral, herbal and lemon aromas and an expressive palate of pear and candied lemon fleshed out by the residual sugar. Refreshing acidity retains balance.	13%	2016-2019	£23	OW Loeb & Co
Türk, Kremser Sandgrube Reserve, Kremstal 2015	87	89	87	86	Youthful character: simple ripe apple and lime fruit with sprightly acidity that gives drive and a great spice punch. Charming, if still a bit raw.	13.5%	2016-2019	£19.25 (2014)	Carruthers & Kent, New Generation McKinley, The Oxford Wine Co, Somerset Wine Co, Vagabond
Weszel, Schenkenbichl IOTW Reserve, Kamptal 2013	87	87	85	89	Subdued pear and apricot nose with vanilla oak. Seamless, gentle texture with a great spice and body which is mouthfilling. Lengthy, warm finish.	13.5%	2016-2020	£36	Newcomer Wines
Aigner, Privat Reserve, Kremstal 2014	86	84	85	90	Intriguing vegetal nose. Intense spice and fresh acidity on the lively, dense palate and showing great concentration for the vintage. Long finish.	13.5%	2016-2021	£16.67	Hamer Wine
Atzberg, Obere Steilterrassen, Smaragd, Wachau 2013	86	83	86	88	Restrained aromas of melon and pear. The rich and juicy lemon fruit palate is elegant and spicy though distinctly sweet. Some minerality remains.	13.5%	2016-2020	£40	Savage Selection
Bründlmayer, Alte Reben, Reserve, Kamptal 2013	86	84	85	88	A shy nose with delicate floral notes. Bright lemon and great spice joins moderate but ripe lime acidity. Straightforward wine with a persistent finish.	13.5%	2016-2020	£33	Fields Morris & Verdin
FX Pichler, Dürnsteiner Kellerberg Smaragd, Wachau 2014	86	86	87	86	Muted herbal nose but has poise. The fruit is not as expressive as it could be due to the apparent high use of SO ₂ , but there's some spice and a fine finish.	13%	2018-2022	£43 (2014)	Fields Morris & Verdin, Woodwinters
Felsner, Alte Reben Reserve, Kremstal 2014	86	86	86	86	Lush apple compote and developed stone fruits on the nose. This is full bodied and backed by good acidity, leading to a warm and nutty finish.	13.5%	2016-2019	£19.88	Clark Foyster
Geyerhof, Hoher Rain, Kremstal 2014	86	84	88	85	Developed aromas of ripe pear and spice. The palate is firm and taut, with intense spice and character and refreshing acidity.	11.5%	2016-2018	£13.70	Genesis Wines
Hirsch, Heiligenstein, Kamptal 2014	86	84	86	89	Zesty quince and citrus nose showing an appealing note of reduction. Vibrant acidity and spice on the palate – a wine with heart and soul.	12%	2016-2019	£19	Highbury Vintners, Honest Grapes, Indigo Wine, Ten Green Bottles, The Good Wine Shop, Whole Foods
Huber, Berg IOTW Reserve, Traisental 2013	86	83	85	89	A developed nose of ripe apples and pears, with a medium-bodied palate of mango and melon. Great spice and a persistent finish.	13.5%	2016-2020	£30	Astrum Wine Cellars
Machherndl, Kollmitz Smaragd, Wachau 2015	86	88	85	85	A simple lime and apricot nose is followed by ripe acidity and grippy texture on the palate that lends structure, though the finish is a little swift.	14%	2016-2020	£19.95	Carruthers & Kent, Enotria & Coe
Pichler-Krutzler, Kellerberg, Wachau 2014	86	89	84	84	Layered, developed aromas of white peach, florals and earthiness. Lean and taut palate with a ripe lime note. Minerality, tension and a moderate finish.	13%	2016-2024	£39.80	Raeburn
Salomon Undhof, Von Stein Reserve, Kremstal 2013	86	88	85	86	Opulent apple and apricot nose with more apple on the palate backed by a round acid structure. Imposing and powerful, it has a long, smooth finish.	14.5%	2016-2020	£23	Lea & Sandeman
Waldschütz, Stangl, Kamptal 2014	86	82	86	89	Shy nose of delicate floral and almond characters and a plump, rounded apple and lime palate showing poise and the coolness of the vintage.	12.5%	2016-2019	£14	Vinothentic
Zull, Weinviertel 2015	86	83	86	89	Suave lime, apple, florals and white pepper. This is still at a young stage with tight, bright acidity and a spicy texture. Lovely finish.	13%	2016-2018	£15	Alpine Wines
Zuschmann-Schöfmann, Weinviertel 2015	86	85	86	86	Lean, tangy lime and mango nose. Fresh acid backbone and mouthwatering lemon fruit. Spicy notes accompany a hint of grip which dominates the finish.	12.5%	2016-2018	POA	Grape Dann

Commended 83-85pts

■ Anton Bauer, Grande Reserve, Wagram 2014 85, 13.5%, 2016-2020, £28.99 Top Selection ■ Loimer, Langenlois, Kamptal 2014 85, 12%, 2016-2019, £15.99 Carruthers & Kent, Highbury Vintners, Liberty Wines, North & South Wines, The Secret Cellar, Stainton Wines, Valvona & Crolla, Wright Wine Co ■ Machherndl, Kollmitz Federspiel, Wachau 85, 12.5%, 2016-2019, £11.95 Carruthers & Kent, Enotria & Coe ■ Pichler-Krutzler, Supperin, Wachau 2014 85, 12.5%, 2016-2020, £27.50 Raeburn ■ Zull, Außere Bergen Reserve, Weinviertel 2014 85, 13%, 2016-2018, £25 Alpine Wines ■ Steininger, Grand Grü Reserve, Kamptal 2014 84, 13.5%, 2016-2018, £14 Enotria & Coe, Dulwich Vintners ■ Weingenuss Elisabeth Hausgnost, Mitanaund, Weinviertel 2015 84, 12.5%, 2016-2018, £13.50 Alpine Wines ■ Domäne Wachau, Achleiten Smaragd,

Wachau 2013 83, 14%, 2016-2018, £25 Alliance Wine ■ Familie Schuster, Eisenhut Reserve, Wagram 2014 83, 13.5%, 2016-2018, £15.50 Savage Selection ■ Mantlerhof, Mosburgerin IOTW Reserve, Kremstal 2014 83, 13%, 2016-2020, £20 Bibendum PLB ■ R&A Pfaffl, Haidviertel, Weinviertel 2015 83, 13%, 2016-2018, £14.50-£16.99 Astrum Wine Cellars, Carruthers & Kent, The Solent Cellar

Fair 76-82pts

■ Christoph Edelbauer, Kamptal 2015 82 ■ Rainer Wess, Weinzierlberg Reserve, Kremstal 2014 81 ■ Proidl, Ehrenfels IOTW Reserve, Kremstal 2014 79 ■ Rainer Wess, Kögl IOTW Reserve, Kremstal 2014 79

For full UK stockist details, see p111

Next month's panel tastings
Chianti (£8-£30), German Riesling Trocken 2014 and UK sparkling wine

My top three
Stephen Brook

■ **Alzinger, Steinertal Smaragd, Wachau 2013** The Alzingers, father and son, have made superlative wines without always getting the acclaim they deserve. For me they have always been in the top tier, and this beautifully mineral and effortlessly balanced wine shows why. **94 Drink** 2016-2025

■ **Birgit Eichinger, Wechselberg, Kamptal 2015** Eichinger has been running her family estate since 1992. This isn't her greatest bottling, but this vibrant wine shows just how delicious an unoaked Grüner can be from a winemaker with an instinctive touch. **92 Drink** 2016-2020

■ **Buchegger, Gebling, Kremstal 2015** Walter Buchegger is little known outside Austria, but much admired within it. Leopold, his top wine, struggled in 2014, whereas this gloriously zesty basic 2015 is pure pleasure. **90 Drink** 2016-2020

My top three
Sarah Knowles MW

■ **Eitzinger Löss, Kamptal 2015** At £9.90, this is a steal! It has the hallmark traits of classic Grüner – white pepper and spiced pear, bright acidity and long, mouthwatering lemon and apple flavours. **90 Drink** 2016-2019

■ **Ott, Der Ott, Wagram 2014** One of the '14s that really stood out. Bernhard Ott has created a special wine where the bright acidity is balanced by the intense, tropical fruit. An expressive wine that shows what can be produced with care in tricky years. **90 Drink** 2016-2020

■ **Stadt Krems, Kremstal 2015** On a visit in January it was clear to see that Fritz Miesbauer has given this historic winery new life, renovating the cellars and focusing on purity. This elegant style relies on precise citrus flavours, made more complex by wet stone minerality. **89 Drink** 2016-2022

My top three
Andreas Wickhoff MW

■ **Nikolaihof, Im Weingebirge Smaragd, Wachau 2013** One of the true biodynamic pioneers in Austria, the Saahs family offers a unique example of Grüner with this 2013, resembling a fine Chablis. The fresh acidity gives lots of vibrancy and the long lees contact a characterful texture. **92 Drink** 2016-2021

■ **Stift Göttweig, Göttweiger Berg, Kremstal 2015** This wine comes from a beautiful hilltop abbey winery managed by Fritz Miesbauer of Stadt Krems and Franz-Josef 'Goose' Gansberger. Their wines have improved consistently over the last years. A fine, lightweight 2015 of great density and fresh, saline notes. **91 Drink** 2016-2020

■ **Fritsch, Schlossberg IOTW, Wagram 2014** This single-vineyard wine from biodynamic producer Karl Fritsch offers elegant floral and white peach notes. Lots of varietal typicity in this lively and well-balanced 2014. Perfect for the summer. **89 Drink** 2016-2021

NB: the tasters' top wines are not necessarily their top-scoring, rather those which, on learning the wines' identity, they feel are the most notable given their provenance, price or other factors

Expert summary: Stephen Brook

Mother Nature 'jinxed' our tasting, skewing what should have been some very good results from Austria's best producers, thanks to the 'truly awful' 2014 vintage



Stephen Brook has been visiting Austria and following its wines for more than 40 years. His latest book is The Wines of Austria (Infinite Ideas, 2015)

THE RESULTS OF this tasting were at first glance unexpected. With some of the great names of Austrian wine presenting their wines, one would have expected higher scores. Overall the tasters did appreciate and enjoy the wines, but failed to be dazzled by more than a few. The explanation is simple: the tasting was skewed by the high number of wines from the 2014 vintage.

It was a truly awful year, with endless rain from mid-August well into September. This forced growers either to pick early just to save the crop from total wipeout by rot, or to hang on in the hope of gaining a bit more sugar, while removing rotten bunches with vigorous sorting. That's not to say that all 2014 wines are poor and should be avoided – we had four Highly Recommendeds from the vintage. The acidity is often striking and refreshing, and the best wines have clarity of fruit. But it's not a year to look for succulence or complexity. Many growers decided not to produce their usual range of single-vineyard wines, but to blend their best grapes together.

The tasters often preferred an essentially simple – but vibrantly fruity – 2015 to a 2014 composed of less-than-satisfactory raw materials. The 2014s aren't necessarily bad wines, but they tend to be blown away when tasted alongside riper vintages. The 2015s were

without exception simpler bottlings, as we will need to wait until later in 2016 for the Reserves and Smaragds.

Legendary producers such as FX Pichler, Hirtzberger, Bründlmayer and Schloss Gobelsburg languish with scores averaging 88 or lower because they presented wines from the 'wrong' vintage, having presumably sold out of the often glorious 2013s. Perceptible residual sugar may also have driven down some scores.

Wachau should have delivered a sizeable proportion of wines to our top 16, but in fact only two made it: splendid 2013 smaragds from Alzinger and Donabaum. So the results need to be taken with a pinch of salt simply because there were so many jokers in the pack.

Other wines from top producers may have been underestimated – Domäne Wachau's Achleiten Smaragd, fabulous in my previous tastings, received modest scores from all three tasters. By and large, our tasting was jinxed by Mother Nature. **D**

'The results need to be taken with a pinch of salt because there were so many jokers in the pack'