

AUSTRIAN WINE

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A good year for Austrian wines

By Dave McIntyre

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Spring is a fun time for wine lovers because retail shelves fill up with new releases of some of our favorite wines. These include the first arrivals from the most recent vintage.

You might have read about the excitement over the 2009 vintage in Bordeaux, about its glowing reviews and soaring prices, and thought: Who cares? Those wines are for collectors, and anyway, they won't be delivered for three years. But last year is being hailed as a superior vintage in many regions throughout Europe and the United States, and value-conscious wine lovers will be scouting out the best.

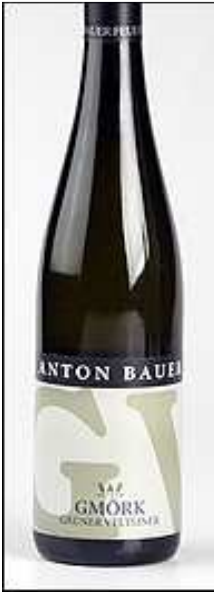
Austria is one place to look for exceptional value. Like Burgundy, Austria claims a "rule of the nines": any vintage ending in nine tends to be superb. There is no logic to that, but for some reason it has held true in Austria since 1959. Last year was no exception. The crop was sparser than average because of poor fruit set in spring and damaging hailstorms in the country's main wine regions. But excellent weather in summer and early fall helped the grapes ripen, and a cold snap during harvest helped maintain acidity in the later-ripening red varieties.

We might have to wait for those 2009 reds, but we can begin enjoying the white wines now. Austria's best-known white varietal is Gruner Veltliner, which resembles Riesling in its citrusy flavors and relatively high acidity. If you don't like Riesling because you think it's too sweet (and we should talk about that), Gruner is a good alternative. The 2009 Anton Bauer "Gmork" Gruner Veltliner leapt to the top of my list of this year's favorite white wines, especially when I saw its modest \$11 price tag. It combines zesty lime with chalky minerality and a soft floral note that carries a whiff of spring. You'll be tempted to drink it now, but it should only get better with age.

So for Austrian wine, think good value, high quality (especially with the 2009s) and a chance to try some unfamiliar wines while drinking in a little history.

McIntyre

Here are some of Dave McIntyre's favorite Austrian wines.



Anton Bauer "Gmörk" Grüner Veltliner 2009

********Austria, \$11 (Great Value)*

This delightful wine offers a fine example of what wine lovers call minerality: subtle flavors of lime zest with a hint of peach and nuances of talc and stone. It conjures an image of vine roots stretching through rocky soil, reaching for the essence of the earth.

Tegernseerhof "T26" Grüner Veltliner 2009

****** *1/2 Austria, \$14 (Great Value)*

Riper and fleshier than the Anton Bauer, this fresh young Grüner has lime zest and grapefruit flavors when cold; warmer, it reveals tropical notes of mango.



Hillinger "Small Hill Red" 2008

****** *1/2 Austria, \$15 (Great Value)*

This red blend, typically half Merlot with the rest an equal mix of Pinot Noir and St. Laurent, keeps getting better with each vintage. The 2008 is fruit-forward in aromas, but it packs a lot of earth, cigar box and raspberry flavors. Nothing subtle about this one; it is rich, spicy and delicious.