

# Fusion Wines Ltd.

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## Advice on Selecting Austrian Wines

### for Commercial Wine Lists

#### Overview

This document aims to give some basic advice related to the selection of Austrian wines for commercial wine lists, such as those found in restaurants and retail outlets. It does not recommend specific wines, but provides a framework for such recommendations, which can then be made in the context of the price-positioning required and any culinary matching felt appropriate.

#### Basics

Whilst a relatively small participant in terms of volume produced, Austria is nonetheless an important player on the European wine scene. The majority of production is consumed on the domestic market, and exports, whilst growing, remain relatively small, the largest market by far being Germany. Austria has a distinctive wine culture of its own, and numerous grape varieties, both indigenous and international, are grown in a number of different regions. The result is a very diverse offering indeed, and some time invested in understanding the basics will repay dividends.

#### Principal Grape Varieties

The following table summarises the principal grape varieties grown in Austria; it is not exhaustive. These are not described in detail here; fuller descriptions are provided on our website. Suffice it to say here that the Austrian varieties are very distinctive and will probably be the focus of interest for list-makers, but it would be an error to ignore the stunning wines that Austria is capable of producing from some of the better-known international varieties, such as Riesling, Pinot Blanc, Sauvignon Blanc, Cabernet Sauvignon, Pinot Noir, and Merlot. The varieties shown in bold in the table are those where I feel interest should be focused.

	<i>Austrian</i>	<i>International</i>
<i>White</i>	<b>Grüner Veltliner</b> Gelber Muskateller Neuberger Welschreisling Zierfandler (Spätrot) Rotgipfler	<b>Riesling</b> <b>Weissburgunder (Pinot Blanc)</b> <b>Sauvignon Blanc</b> Pinot Gris Chardonnay
<i>Rosé</i>	<b>Zweigelt, Blauer Wildbacher (Schilcher), Blaufränkisch</b>	
<i>Red</i>	<b>Zweigelt</b> <b>Blaufränkisch</b> St. Laurent Blauer Portugieser Blauer Wildbacher (Schilcher)	<b>Blauburgunder (Pinot Noir)</b> <b>Cabernet Sauvignon</b> <b>Merlot</b>
<i>Sweet</i>	<i>Various</i>	
<i>Sparkling</i>	<b>Grüner Veltliner</b>	

## Regions

There are many different winegrowing regions in Austria and each of them has its strengths and weaknesses, and is best known for one or more varieties/styles. The following table, again not exhaustive, summarises the main regions and what they are known for:-

<b>Region</b>	<b>Wines</b>
<b>Wachau</b> (Danube valley to the west of Vienna)	Grüner Veltliner and Riesling from mineral urgestein soils. Also some Neuberger and Gelber Muskateller. Token limited production of reds. Some of the best whites in Austria and correspondingly expensive.
<b>Kremstal</b> (Danube valley west of but closer to Vienna, east of Wachau)	Grüner Veltliner and Riesling from mineral urgestein soils. Some reds from Zweigelt and Blauer Portugieser.
<b>Thermenregion</b> (south of Vienna)	Powerful reds from Zweigelt, Blaufränkisch, St Laurent, and some international varieties such as Pinot Noir, Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon. Whites from the rare indigenous Rotgipfler and Zierfandler.
<b>Burgenland</b> (Area to south-east of Vienna, up to Hungarian border)	Powerful reds from Zweigelt, Blaufränkisch, St Laurent, and some international varieties such as Pinot Noir, Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon.  Useful whites from Pinot Blanc, Gelber Muskateller.  Huge range of sweet wines from a variety of grape varieties. Auslese, Beerenauslese, Trockenbeerenauslese, Ausbruch, Eiswein, Schilfwein.
<b>Carnuntum</b> (To the east of Vienna, up to the Slovak border)	Powerful reds from Zweigelt, Blaufränkisch, St Laurent, and some international varieties such as Pinot Noir, Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon. Home of some particularly excellent red blends, and also the “Rubin Carnuntum” quality standard. Also some useful whites.
<b>Styria</b> (Southern Austria centred on Graz, near Slovenian border.)	Stunning whites from Sauvignon Blanc; reds from Blauer Wildbacher; Rosé known as Schilcher also made from Blauer Wildbacher.
<b>Weinviertel</b> (To N/NE of Vienna; largest winegrowing region in Austria.)	Principally Grüner Veltliner in a variety of styles/qualities. An up an coming region with DAC status; offers generally good value by Austrian standards.
<b>Traisental</b> (Bordering the Wachau and Kremstal regions, and south of the Danube, west of Vienna)	The majority of wine here is white, principally fresh zesty Grüner Veltliner, but useful reds are made too, mainly from Zweigelt and Blauer Portugieser. Traisental is a relatively obscure region, but makes some fantastic wines, and offers some of the best value for money going in Austria.

## **List Construction**

The difficulty in putting together lists, especially where the number of wines is small, is to reconcile the small number of wines with the abundant choice and diversity on offer, whilst attempting to achieve something that is representative of what Austria has to offer. Ideally one would include a variety of grapes, regions, prices, well-known makers, etc. in a single list – but with a limited number of wines this is not easy. I've put together outline suggestions for small, medium, and comprehensive sized lists.

What is absolutely essential in any Austrian list is the presence of the key Austrian grape varieties – for white this means Grüner Veltliner, and for red Zweigelt.

### **Basic List (approx 2-4 wines)**

A very basic list should typically include at least:-

- a Grüner Veltliner (white)
- a Zweigelt (red)

In both cases the geographic source depends on price positioning. For good value classic wines, Traisental is hard to beat on price – for upmarket wines look to Wachau for whites and Thermenregion/Burgenland for reds. Weinviertel is good middle ground.

It may also be appropriate to include:-

- a rosé – Schilcher from Styria, or Blaufränkisch or Zweigelt based wine from Burgenland.
- a second white, possibly an international variety such as Riesling or Pinot Blanc, or alternatively another white Austrian such as Gelber Muskateller or Welschriesling
- a single sweet wine, such as a Beerenauslese, Eiswein, or TBA – grape variety largely irrelevant.

In all cases the quality level and precise wine selection will depend on price-positioning and any culinary matching required.

### **Intermediate List (5-10 wines)**

I would suggest wines be selected from the following list:-

#### White

- 2 Grüner Veltliners – one entry level (Traisental), one more upmarket (Wachau)
- a Riesling (Wachau)
- a Sauvignon Blanc (good value from Burgenland)
- a Welschriesling or Gelber Muskateller from Weinviertel

#### Red

- 2 Zweigelt wines - one entry level (Traisental), one more upmarket (Carnuntum/Burgenland)
- a Blaufränkisch from Burgenland
- An upmarket international grape wine – to compete with Bordeaux/new world

#### Sparkling

- A Grüner Veltliner or Chardonnay based Sekt

#### Sweet

- A Beerenauslese (moderate price)
- A Trockenbeerenauslese (more expensive)

## **Comprehensive List (over 10 wines)**

With a larger number of wines, it becomes much easier to put together a representative offering.

I would suggest wines be selected from the following list:-

### White

- 2 Grüner Veltliners – one entry level, one more upmarket
- 2 Rieslings – one entry level, one more upmarket from the Wachau/Kremstal
- a Sauvignon Blanc (Burgenland/Styria)
- a Pinot Blanc from Burgenland
- a Furmint from Burgenland
- a Welschriesling from Weinviertel
- a Gelber Muskateller from Weinviertel

### Red

- 2 Zweigelt wines - one entry level (Traisental), one more upmarket (Carnuntum/Burgenland)
- a St Laurent (Burgenland)
- a Blaufränkisch (Burgenland)
- a red blend
- an upmarket international grape wine – to compete with Bordeaux/new world – eg Cabernet/Merlot

### Sparkling

- A Grüner Veltliner or Chardonnay based Sekt

### Sweet

- a Beerenauslese (moderate price)
- a Trockenbeerenauslese (more expensive)
- an Ausbruch
- an Eiswein

**Nick Dobson 15 July 2009**