

WINE

Spicy, seductive wines from Austrian valleys

By Sandra Shoji

Special to The Daily Yomiuri

In Austria, tourists exhausted from reliving the highlights of the singing Von Trapp family's gallop across the Alps, relax in beer halls washing down wiener schnitzel with steins of beer.

Austrians themselves are more inclined to lift a glass of Austrian wine to accompany dishes of dumplings, wild game with mushrooms, blood sausages, spaetzle noodles or trout.

Austria's first wines were made by the Celts 3,000 years ago during Europe's Iron Age. Later, the Roman Empire traded slaves for Austria's golden wines.

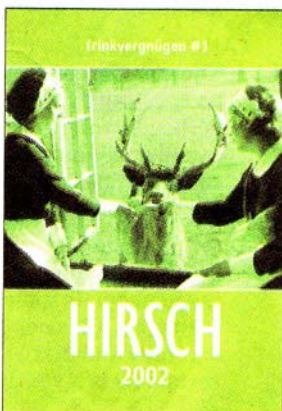
Over the millennia, vineyards were created by parent vines sending out underground shoots that would result in growing new vines. Wild vines and cultivated wine grape vines cross-pollinated, creating mixed vineyards.

The introduction of the horse-drawn plow in the 18th century led to the earth between vines being turned up, severing baby vines from their mother plants.

Suddenly farmers found themselves needing to plant seeds or cuttings to reproduce new vines. By the end of the 19th century, vineyard owners began to study which single grape varieties suited their land.

Today, 30 percent of Austrian grapes grown is the indigenous white Gruner Veltliner, meaning "green grape from the village of Veltlin." The grape is thought to have originated 300 years ago, and possibly is a descendent of Germany's spicy Gewurztraminer grape.

In recent blind tastings in London between top white Burgundies and Gruner Veltliners, nonpartisan wine judges have consistently chosen the latter as the top wines.



Top chefs love unoaked Gruner Veltliner, as it flatters food beautifully. It is the Gwentyth Paltrow and Grace Kelly of wines. Glowing, fresh and eager in youth—as seductive as a summer's afternoon. As it matures, it gains sophistication, becoming multi-dimensional with honey and smoke, a mineral backbone and an acidic edge.

Star Picks:

■ **Hirsch Gruner Veltliner, '02, Kamptal.** (¥1,554)
Brilliant summer wine goes well with a plate of mild cheeses and melon while watching the sun set. Flavors of peaches, minerals and spring flowers wrap around your tongue, melting any stress away.

www.rakuten.co.jp/wassys/430152/511485/

■ **Gruner Veltliner Breiter Rain, '02, Sepp Moser, Kremstal.** (¥3,150)
Lenz Moser, who revolutionized Austrian vineyards, wrote, "Wines are here to serve man, therefore they must grow up to serve man."

Previously, tending stubby grape vines was backbreaking labor, but Moser trained his vines to grow to chest height for easy picking.

However, grapes growing higher off the soil need powerful vines to carry minerals up to the grapes. This single vineyard wine was aged in small oak barrels with vanilla aromas that mingle with tropical fruits and white pepper for a long, elegant finish.

<http://www.rakuten.co.jp/wassys/430152/>

■ **Nigl Privat, '02, Kremstal.** (¥4,030)

Complex and dry with a huge finish of baked pears, honeydew melons, smoke and white pepper. The balance of fruit and acidity makes it magic with tempura, roast pork or baked fish.

<https://netwine.co.jp/engshop/>

■ **Jurtschitsch Sonnhof Steinhaus Gruner Veltliner, '01, Kamptal** (¥1,774)

Jurtschitsch's rocky Steinhaus vineyard produces fresh, lemony young wines that age into honeyed, lanolin and grapefruit peel gorgeous blockbusters that are a perfect match with foie gras or smoked salmon.

www.pieroth.jp