

## ON THE GRAPEVINE

### Class by the glass, in a steamy Big Apple

I WAS in a hot and sticky New York last week where the evening temperature, was 30 degrees. That meant the choice for eating was to get an outside table and make the most of whatever breeze the yellow cabs made as they rushed by, or sit and freeze in an over-enthusiastically air-conditioned restaurant.

We chose the outside tables every time but several emergency beers were needed as an aperitif and that was why I was delighted to see a full range of half-bottles and good wines by the glass at the Smith and Wollensky Steak House on 49th East Street. A half bottle of Perrin Côtes du Rhône 2012 went down well with starters, leaving budget for a glass or two of Hess 19 Block Mountain Vineyard from Mt Veeder.

In the UK wines by the glass are sometimes a gamble, depending on when the bottle was opened. Always ask. If they are down to the last glassful, they might just open a fresh bottle for you.

### Game of thorns

MOST vineyards, particularly those that want to attract visitors, plant roses at the ends of the rows of vines. The general story is that they act as an early warning system for spotting mildew but the Austrian growers had a different story to tell. Apparently a thorny rose bush encouraged a horse pulling a plough to take a wide berth around the end post in a vineyard and so it wasn't knocked down. Of course, now the roses just make the vineyards look pretty.

### Chile con chocolate

CASA Silva Los Lingues Carmenère 2012, Colchagua, Chile, Field & Fawcett, £11.95. Delicious deep blackberry and plum flavours, sprinkled with pepper, chocolate and a hint of forest floor. Partner with a steak, straight from the barbecue.

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## wine column

# Austria's own lake superior

**SHORE THING:** Christine Austin drinks in the microclimate around the Neusiedler See while also finding time to enjoy a tippale or two.

I HADN'T realised just how big the Neusiedler See (Lake Neusiedl) is. This shallow lake, in the far eastern part of Austria, is more than 20 miles long and six miles wide, and it runs roughly from north to south, eventually crossing

into Hungary at its southern point.

Despite its vast area it is less than 6ft deep and the edges of the lake are thick with reeds, extending a good kilometre into the lake. Although I have stood along the banks of the lake several times, all I have seen of it has been the tall reeds that sway and chatter in the breeze. It was only when I boarded a boat and travelled out into open water that I could really appreciate the size and the effect of this huge landlocked lake. It took over two hours to travel from the top of the lake at Jois down to Mörbisch and all the while I tasted the wines of the region.

I was in Austria to visit a newly designated area of Burgenland, known as Leithaberg (pronounced Lighter-berg) and Lake Neusiedl is one of the key factors that make this region unique. Other important factors are the hills, known as the Leitha Mountains that are actually the foothills of the Alps. These hills curve around the north and western side of the lake, protecting the vineyards that nestle on the slopes while allowing cooling winds to sweep down from higher altitudes. The lake itself provides a particular microclimate, buffering extremes of temperature and extending the ripening season in autumn.

The result is a sheltered, south-eastern facing vineyard area, with a large body of water close by, tempering extremes of climate. But the most important point about Leithaberg is the soil. When the Leitha Mountains were pushed up 20 million years ago they exposed two distinct types of soil. One is brittle mica and quartz-rich slate and the other is soft

limestone and chalk. These soils lie side by side, and you can step from one to the other as the land tilts between slopes.

Because of these unique factors a group of winegrowers in the region have banded together and created a specific DAC (the Austrian equivalent of the French AOC). They have specified not only the region and grape varieties, but also its taste which must have a "characteristic mineral expression".

The grapes they have selected are, for white wines, Grüner Veltliner, Chardonnay, Weissburgunder (Pinot Blanc) and Neuburger which is a particularly Austrian grape with a soft, nutty taste. For reds there is just one permitted grape – Blaufränkisch which must form 85 per cent of the wine.

Leithaberg may be a new name on our wine shelves, but grapes have been growing in this region for thousands of years. It is known that the Romans and the Emperor Charlemagne valued the wines of this region highly.

Now 70 wineries have signed up to produce Leithaberg wines. They all have vineyards within the designated area of 16 villages from Jois to Mörbisch and they all comply with the rules of aging the wines using large oak barrels to add texture without dominating the taste. I met most of the growers and without exception they are the most lively dedicated winegrowers I have encountered. They may all toe the line initially, presenting their own wines politely, but once you get them to talk about their land and winemaking they almost burst with enthusiasm.

Birgit Braunstein (www.weingut-

**“The rocks absorb the heat of the day and reflect it up to the vines at night.”**



CHRISTINE AUSTIN  
YORKSHIRE POST  
WINE CRITIC



braunstein.at) took me to the top of a hill, overlooking the lake and picked up chunks of slate rock that sparkled in the sun. These rocks absorb the heat of the day and reflect it up to the vines at night. She is also going back to the old ways of making wine and has amphorae buried in the ground where wine is left to mature.

Another grower, Hans Nittnaus (www.nittnaus.at) talked endlessly about organic and biodynamic grape growing, using orange and fennel oils to help prevent moulds.

What really impressed me was the sheer quality and individuality of these wines. The reds in particular have cherry and bramble fruit, clear and fresh with notes of herbs and spice. They go well with a plate of spit-roasted pork or accompanying a picnic of ham and salad.

These wines are still quite difficult to find, but Alpine Wines (www.alpinewines.co.uk) is a good place to start. Based in Bradford, proprietor Joelle Nebbe-Mornod sources a number of wines from Austria and she is looking to extend her range to include some wines from Leithaberg. Don't be confused by the London phone number (020 3151 3454). Apparently she has that so that Southerners are not alarmed by having to ring the North.

Until Alpine Wines has built up a stock of Leithaberg wines then you may need to order them from further afield. Here are some to try.

■ Nittnaus Blaufränkisch 2011 Alte Reben, Leithaberg, Burgenland, Austria, (£23.95, Lea and Sandeman, 020 7244

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**GROWING INTEREST:** Main picture left, Birgit Braunstein, just one of the enthusiastic growers in Leithaberg; above, quality oak vats for top quality wines.

## OFF THE SHELF



**Villemarin Picpoul de Pinet 2014, France, 12.5%, Majestic, down from £8.99 to £6.74 until August 31:** Crisp and crunchy with notes of sea salt and gravel paths. Team this with fish and sunshine.



**Alaia Txakoli 2013, Spain, 10.5%, Marks & Spencer, down from £12 to £10 until September 7:** Pronounce it Chacoli, and enjoy it for its crisp green apple and grapefruit notes and distinct herby, minerally freshness. Try it with grilled mackerel.



**Mirabeau Rosé 2014, Côtes de Provence, 13%, Waitrose, down from £9.29 to £7.39 until September 15:** One of my top rosé wines of the summer, with aromas of wild strawberries and a crisp, elegant style.



**Crinali Nero di Troia 2013, Puglia, Italy, 13%, Morrisons, down from £7.49 to £4.99 until August 30:** Packed with dark, plummy fruit with soft, smooth tannins. Great with game.

0522). Packed with cherry fruit, with depth and fresh-tasting acidity followed by silky tannins and a delicious, clean, fruit-filled finish.

■ **Prieler Blaufränkisch 2012 Leithaberg, Burgenland, Austria. (£28, Clark Foyster, 020 8819 1458).** Black cherry and redcurrant fruit with peppery notes,

backed by fine-grained tannins and an undercurrent of minerally freshness.

So far these are the only producers whose Leithaberg wines are readily available in the UK, but others to look out for include:

■ **Toni Hartl Rosenberg Blaufränkisch 2011, Leithaberg.** Fabulous damson flavours and an elegant, smoky palate.

■ **Birgit Braunstein Blaufränkisch 2012, Leithaberg.** Clean, clear, strawberry and forest fruit flavours with a bite of minerality.

■ **Tinhof Blaufränkisch 2012, Leithaberg.** Peppery-sprinkled red cherry and black fruits with a juicy, clean style.



## YORKSHIRE POST WINE CLUB: August offer

### Whatever the Weather

NO-ONE can predict our summer weather. It swings from glorious sunshine to pouring rain in just a few hours, so make sure you have all the wine you need to enjoy the sunshine, or the rain, in advance.

This case has fizz from Spain, Viognier from Argentina, Pinot Grigio from Italy and lots more. It will happily go with barbecues, summer lunches and picnics.

This case would normally cost £95.83 but we have negotiated a discount to just £79, saving over £16 per case.

Delivery costs £5 for a single case: and if you order two cases to any one address, delivery is free.

Previous wine offers can be found on the website [www.yorkshirepost.co.uk/wineclub](http://www.yorkshirepost.co.uk/wineclub)



This case contains:  
**SPARKLING WINE**  
**Castell d'Olèrdola Brut Reserva, Cava, Spain:** Elegant and toasty  
**ROSÉ WINE**  
**Ca'Tesore Pinot Grigio Rosé Veneto, Italy:** Crisp and floral; perfect in sunshine  
**WHITE WINES**  
**Aristocrate Sauvignon Blanc 2014, Languedoc, France:** Lively, citrus and herbaceous flavours  
**Las Manitos Viognier 2013,**

**Mendoza, Argentina:** Ripe apricot flavours

#### RED WINES

**Albret Cabernet Sauvignon/Tempranillo/Merlot 2010, Navarra, Spain:** Rich, complex and deep flavoured  
**Los Vilos Cabernet Sauvignon 2013, Chile:** Smooth, rounded, cassis flavours

#### How to order

■ **To order this great-tasting case, fill in the coupon, or ring our order line on 01482 638888, Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm. Outside this time, leave a message including your telephone number and we will ring you back.**

■ **Send coupon to: Yorkshire Post Wine Club, House of Townend, Wyke Way, Melton West Business Park, Hull HU14 3HH**

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