

WINE COUNTRY: The Goldberg vineyard in Schützner Stein, Austria
Picture: Mike Tipping



In this week's Tipping's Tipples, MIKE TIPPING, reports back from a wine trip to Austria



VISIT some wineries and vineyards in Austria? I thought, that sounds good. I've been once before and the wines suited me well. I absolutely love grüner veltliner, the white grape Austria is famous for and there is plenty of my favourite grape too, as the Austrians produce world class riesling.

If I had looked at my trip itinerary more closely, however, I might have realised that grüner and riesling weren't on the menu. I was visiting the regions of Carnuntum and Burgenland, where red grapes are the major players.

Yes, the Austrians do make red wine and it is good stuff. Commonly these wines are made from blaufränkisch, which is known as kékfrankos, in nearby Hungary, and lemberger in Germany.

There is Zweigelt as well, the principal variety in Carnuntum, it is a crossing of blaufränkisch and St Laurent, a member of the pinot family.

Blaufränkisch makes for characterful, structured wines, usually suggesting black cherry, bramble fruit and nearly always with some peppery spice. If I had to make a comparison the closest would be a Rhône-esque syrah.

Most wineries in Austria are relatively small, family-run affairs, concentrating on quality not quantity; a good example being Weingut Prieler.

I met up with Georg Prieler who has taken charge of the family winery and 20 hectares of vines in Schützner Stein, part of the hilly landscape and micro-climate, along the western shore of Lake Neusiedler. This includes the renowned Goldberg site from which a terrific single vineyard wine is produced, Prieler Goldberg Blaufränkisch.

Prieler's blaufränkisch grows here in mineral rich, slate soils. "We want to transfer the character of the region to the wineglass," said Georg.

His wines are impressive: beautifully balanced, mineral and judiciously oaked. If you want to discover Georg's wines for yourself, they are available through the UK importer, Clark Foyster wines (sales@cfwines.co.uk). You will also find them in some independents and online.

The next day we made the one-and-a-half-hour drive to Eisenberg, in south Burgenland, taking a shorter and more scenic route through

Hungary. There I met German Markus Bach, winemaker and co-owner of Groszer Wine.

Grozer Wine is in traditional Austrian one-litre bottles and will be available, from newcomerwines.com, in the UK in December. The top wines come from the slopes of the Szadary and Saybritz vineyards.

In Carnuntum, I met three winemakers; Robert Nadler, Stefan Ott and Lukas Markowitsch, for dinner. Here I tasted through a flight of Rubin Carnuntum wines, a designation for good quality Zweigelt with strict quality control measures.

Sadly these excellent wines, typified by black cherry flavours, silky tannins and lively acidity, are hard to find on these shores.

But for a taste of Carnuntum, try the highly rated, spicy, cherry-laden, smooth and food friendly, Muhr-van der Niepoort Spitzerberg 2010, made from blaufränkisch. It is available for £27 from Indigo Wine (indigowine.com).

So is blaufränkisch going to do for Austrian reds what grüner veltliner did for the country's reputation for high-quality white wine? Probably not, but I hope we may get to see more of it over here soon. And with a high-profile blaufränkisch trade tasting in London next month, perhaps this could become a reality?

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