

AUSTRIAN GOLD

Some extremely high marks would suggest there is a new challenger to the white wine throne. Words

MARK LANE. Photography ROSA RODRIGO

Four golds, 18 silvers; with more than half the wines scoring 90 points or more – some superb marks for some very exciting wines. Yet Grüner Veltliner is hardly a household name outside its native Austria – partly because the canny nationals snap it up before it has a chance to hit the export market. Scarcity, however, is not preventing its bid for the limelight. In the US, trend-setting top restaurants have given the Groovy to Grüner Veltliner, and with recognition comes demand.


In the UK, a recent tasting organised by fine wine dealer/collector Jan-Erik Paulson, co-hosted by Jancis Robinson MW and Tim Atkin MW saw Grüner pitted against, and beating, some great Burgundy, and top Chardonnays from around the world. Why? This partly lies in the flavour profile – it can be big, opulent, voluptuous, full-bodied – at times, too much so. Hugely-proportioned, exotically-fruited, richly-honeyed, strikingly mineral, vividly-coloured, highly alcoholic and refreshingly acidic are frequent descriptors. Often with noticeable residual sugar and oak treatment the wine also has the ability to age wonderfully, tending towards voluptuous, oily, rich, honey characteristics.

In terms of nobility, some compare Grüner to Burgundy, some say top California Chardonnay, while in flavour and style it tends toward a mix of Gewürztraminer, Viognier and Chardonnay. No wonder this grape is so hot.

Not much is known about the origins of Grüner Veltliner but evidence possibly suggests it being a descendant of the ancient Traminer variety. In Austria, Grüner accounts for a third of all the grapes grown. So why is so little seen? Only minute amounts have been planted beyond its Austrian borders, the domestic markets drinks most of it, some goes to Germany, and thus precious little

gets anywhere else. Importer Lance Foyster explained that 'the wines are popular in Austria and a lot of them are drunk within 12 months of release, resulting in a lack of availability in mature, top wines. It is agreeable both young, and with age.'

Foyster suggested that excess alcohol can be a problem but 'can be moderated with residual sugar and good acid levels resulting in superb balance'. He sees two important factors helping it towards the major league: 'Grüner, in its heartland of Lower Austria (Neiderösterreich), shows that it is able to express both varietal character and distinct *terroir*. Grüner is accessible for the general consumer and complex for the connoisseur.'

The tasting revealed a spectrum of styles – from the light, dry and fresh to the dark, opulent creations of the top producers. There has been an unbroken string of excellent vintages since 1997. We tasted from the recent to the more mature in order to help us track development. As Foyster said: 'There were two main styles, the light fresh, herbaceous, higher acid wines and the rich, heavy, more blousy ones. The best wines combine both to provide complexity, balance, weight, freshness and ageability.' The results speak for themselves. 

The tasters

Lance Foyster MW works for Austrian wine specialist FWW Wines, **Robert Joseph** is publishing editor of Wine Magazine, **Mark Lane** is an International Wine Challenge superjuror, **Charles Metcalfe** is associate editor of Wine Magazine, **Derek Smedley MW** is a wine consultant.

97 **Grüner Veltliner 'M' 2001**
F X Pichler, Wachau
'Bruised white peach. Oily but with cutting acidity and a thick vein of minerality. Massive length.' *ML*
'Dark, honeyed, slate and mineral. Real distillation of primary rock!' *CM*
'Impressive. But is it a show wine?' *LF*
'Big, fat but with great acid. Serious, intense, showy. Mineral and smoke on finish. Age 1-10 years.' *DS*
£35; not available in the UK; contact: +43 2 732 85375 or elisabeth@fx-pichler.at

96 **Grüner Veltliner Höhereck 2001**
Mittelbach, Wachau
'Serious nose. Concentrated and creamy. Big but good balance.' *LF*
'Rich, creamy, exotic but with a herby edge. Great length.' *CM*
'Lovely and stylish. Age 2-10 years.' *DS*
€10.90 ex-cellar; contact: +43 2 711 292

95 **Grüner Veltliner Rosenberg Reserve 2001**
Ott, Donauland
'Dark, rather closed but mineral and intense aromatics. Controlled oaking. Rich intense and weighty.' *CM*
'A big, smoky, rich wine. Mango and lychee backed by a good minerality.' *RJ*
'Perfect balance and poise. Should have a long life except where temptation leads to early drinking! Age 1-10 years.' *ML*
€17.50 ex-cellar; contact: +43 2 738 2257 or bernhard@ott.at

95 **Grüner Veltliner Smaragd 'Steinertal' 1990**
Alzinger, Wachau
'Quite different profile throughout. Clean, limey note, showing its age distinctly but retaining lots of fruit. Excellent.' *LF*
'Toasty, bready, mature. Still has the fruit opulence. Real character, lovely balance. Excellent acid, nutty richness.' *CM*
'Age has encouraged elegance, secondary aromas and complexity in this wine. Age up to 3 years.' *ML*
Contact: +43 2 732 77900 or weingut@alzinger.at

94 **Grüner Veltliner Exceptional Reserve 2000**
Freie Weingärtner Wachau
'Opulent, super-ripe tropical fruit and honeycomb. Good weight and acid.' *CM*
'Typical. Rich and creamy. Good pepper on finish. Voluptuous.' *LF*
'Extremely well-made. Oozes complexity and class. Age up to 6 years.' *ML*
£18.50 @ FWW (very limited)

94 **Grüner Veltliner 'Privat' 2001**
Nigl, Kamptal
'Attractive creamy nose and attack. Balanced to finish. Delicious.' *LF*
'Fascinating. Green pea and exotic fruit – maybe a touch of botrytis?' *CM*
'Crammed with rich, oily fruit, balanced by acid and made more complex by botrytis. Age 1-10 years.' *ML*
€14 ex-cellar; contact: +43 2 719 2609 or weingut.nigl@vwnet.at



Prices in Euros are ex-cellar. Once taxes and merchant's margins are added, the price on UK shelves will be anything up to double that. At the time of going to press, €1 = £0.66.

93 **Grüner Veltliner Honivogl Smaragd 1997**
Hirtzberger, Wachau
'Savoury, rich, almost smoked bacon with an opulent grapefruit fruit.' *CM*
'Lots of spice, touch of residual sugar but nice overall balance. Seems very youthful. Very long. Concentrated finish. Age up to 6 years.' *LF*
£24 @ FWW

92 **Grüner Veltliner Reserve 2001**
Alzinger, Wachau
'Smoky flint. Big and complex. Maybe a touch sweet for some dishes.' *RJ*
'Smoky minerality, pear and quince 'cheese'. Very complex. Higher sugar adds not detracts.' *ML*
'Intense, herby, stoned tropical fruits. Age 1-8 years.' *CM*
€35 (magnum) ex-cellar; contact: +43 2 732 77900 or weingut@alzinger.at

92 **Grüner Veltliner Reserve 2001**
Dr Unger, Kremstal
'Very opulent, exotic, tropical fruit character but still has good acid to allow for ageing. Very good!' *CM*
'Some passion fruit and smoke. Savoury. This is good.' *RJ*
'A creamy, big but fresh example.' *LF*
'Quite rich in style, with good fruit acid, creamy mouthfeel and a slightly mineral backbone. Overall a mid-weight but very typical example. Age up to 8 years.' *ML*
£9.30 @ MPS, M&V

92 **Grüner Veltliner Fumberg 2001**
Litana Söllner, Kamptal
'Excellent concentration and depth of flavour.' *DS*
'Fleshy, tight Burgundy style. Crisp character, again quite savoury/salty. Peaches and mango. Good length.' *RJ*
'Apricot and lemon, quite exotic. Lovely palate. Very weighty and long. Age 1-10 years.' *CM*
€10 ex-cellar; contact: +43 2 738 3201 or kontakt@weingut-soellner.at

92 **Grüner Veltliner Lamm Alte Reben 2001**
Hirsch, Kamptal
'Lively. A bit more residual sugar, but again typical. Fresh, rich and balanced.' *LF*
'Big, ripe luscious flavours of honey, herbs and tropical fruits with excellent acidity to balance. Age 2-10 years.' *CM*
€13 ex-cellar; contact: +43 2 735 2460 or info@weingut-hirsch.at

92 **Grüner Veltliner Ried Lamm 1998**
Bründlmayer, Kamptal
'Herbs vie with tropical fruits (banana, pawpaw, mango) which vie with the toasty texture of this wine. Good acid, sugar and alcohol balance. Mature and complex.' *ML*
'Voluptuous. Bring on the scallops! Age up to 5 years.' *CM*
2001: £25 @ RWD

91 **Grüner Veltliner 'Novemberlese' Exklusiv 2001**
Brandl, Kamptal
'Intense, herby on nose. Herbs and exotic, candied fruit on palate. High acid, high alcohol, excellent intensity. Age up to 10 years.' *CM*
€9.50 ex-cellar; contact: +43 2 734 26350 or weinbau-brandl@zoebing.at



Preconceptions: A grape that has been in this market far longer than many appreciate but even in those days it was a bit like pushing water up hill. The public were not ready for this spice and interest.

Conclusions: The best wines, and there were many, had masses of fruit salad, spice and nutmeg – full of excitement and real character – flavours which need matching with foods of equal character. The disappointments were wines which either lacked fruit interest or had aggressive acidity.

DEREK SMEDLEY MW

91 **Grüner Veltliner Reserve Lindberg 2002**
Salomon-Undhof, Kremstal
'Pear and apple. Excellent texture. Very much in its infancy.' *RJ*
'Herby, fresh and appley. Rich, good acid. Quite closed at the moment but with a rich almondy background and a herby freshness. Age 2-10 years.' *CM*
Contact: +43 2 732 832260 or b.salomon@undhof.at

90 **Grüner Veltliner Smaragd 2000**
Freie Weingärtner Wachau
'Split jury. Very big and fat. Has huge extract and is almost chewy. Ultra-ripe, almost OTT. Has high alcohol – 'hot' – but ripeness is typical of this vintage. Nevertheless impressive: what the wine lacks in elegance it makes up for in presence, richness, oozing exotic fruits and creamy texture. Could be much more balanced though. A big wine for big food! Age up to 4 years.' *ML*
£12 @ FWW

90 **Grüner Veltliner Ried Lamm 1997**
Bründlmayer, Kamptal
'Complex and bready. I might confuse this with a Burgundy.' *CM*
'Pure fruit allied to good development makes for a more complex wine. Secondary aromas (similar to maturing Burgundy) abound in a wine still holding onto its youth. Age up to 4 years.' *ML*
2001: £25 @ RWD

90 **Grüner Veltliner E L Ried Wechselberg 2001**
Johann Topf, Kamptal
'Lemon, mango and pear. This is big stuff with flesh to spare.' *RJ*
'Nutty, intense with an almost Chenin-quince quality but with extra opulence and exotics.' *CM*
'Rich, almost waxy. Balanced by high acidity and pure citrus fruit. Lovely nutty finish that goes on and on. Would be great with crab and chilli linguine. Age up to 8 years.' *ML*
€8.30 ex-cellar; contact: +43 2 2491 or office@weingut-topf.at

90 **Grüner Veltliner Creation 2001**
Mittelbach, Wachau
'Lovely to drink now. Ripe, creamy, highish residual sugar. Perhaps a bit cloying.' *LF*
'Big, fat, heavy, sweet and full. Fragrant and charming. A good mineral palate with some passion fruit acidity.' *DS*
'Very decadent, seductive. Age up to 7 years.' *RJ*
€13.80 ex-cellar; contact: +43 2 711 292

90 **Grüner Veltliner Spiegel 2001**
Loimer, Kamptal
'Quite Burgundian in character. Subtle but complex.' *RJ*
'Sweetish and oaky.' *CM*
'Very concentrated, long length. Quite atypical. Age 2-8 years.' *LF*
£12 @ M&V

90 **Grüner Veltliner Hengstberg 2002**
Litana Söllner, Kamptal
'Obviously youthful. Real purity of fruit. Tastes really complete.' *ML*
'A fresh, lemony-limey wine with mango and passion fruit perfume.' *RJ*
'Rich almondy background and a herby finish. Age 2-8 years.' *CM*
€7 ex-cellar; contact: +43 2 738 3201 or kontakt@weingut-soellner.at

90 **Grüner Veltliner 'M' 1999**
F X Pichler, Wachau
'Golden colour and a nose that combines exotic fruit, pear, apple and marshmallow with a nutty, herby restraint. Toasty, bready and with good acid.' *CM*
'Multi-dimensional and complex. Shows class. Age 1-6 years.' *ML*
Contact: +43 2 732 85375 or elisabeth@fx-pichler.at

90 **Grüner Veltliner Lamm Alte Reben 1999**
Hirsch, Kamptal
'An almost barley sugar-like opulence. Off-dry but with great acid/alcohol to balance this out perfectly. Toast, marzipan, candied fruit and crisp acid. Age up to 5 years.' *CM*
€13 ex-cellar; contact: +43 2 735 2460 or info@weingut-hirsch.at

89 **Grüner Veltliner 'Privat' 2000**
Nigl, Kamptal
'A fleshy wine, slightly smokey.' *RJ*
'Ripe, exotic fruit with a herby freshness. Lovely. Slightly over-alcoholic.' *CM*
'Fresh fruit salad flavours. Good length. Age up to 4 years.' *DS*
€14 ex-cellar; contact: +43 2 719 2609 or weingut.nigl@vwnet.at

89 Grüner Veltliner Zwerithaler 2001 Prager, Wachau

'Serious. Big, fat and creamy. Luscious. Residual sugar again but with cleansing acidity. Tight now, but very promising.' *LF*
'Ripe, honeyed and mineral. Very good. Will develop more. Age 1-7 years.' *CM*
£20 @ M&V

89 Grüner Veltliner Smaragd Achleiten 2001 Prager, Wachau

'Very good, very typical. Juicy, savoury, creamy. First class.' *LF*
'Opulence paired with acidity. Pretty good. Age 2-8 years.' *CM*
£18.99 @ M&V, NYW

89 Högl Grüner Veltliner Smaragd 1999 Wachau

'Palate full of spice.' *DS*
'Toasty, candied, herby with lovely tropical fruits. Excellent balance, not too alcoholic. Up to 5 years.' *CM*
£10.50 ex-cellar;
contact: +43 2 713 8458
or weingut.hoegl@weinserver.at

88 Grüner Veltliner Reserve Lindberg 2000 Salomon-Undhof, Kremstal

'Highly fragranced. Grassy flavours, hints of spice. Has character, fragrance and elegance.' *DS*
'Lighter style, fresh with more acidity. Simple but with everything in balance.' *LF*
'A real crystallised fruits character. Age up to 4 years.' *CM*
Contact: +43 2 732 832260
or b.salomon@undhof.at

88 Grüner Veltliner Honivogl Smaragd 2000 Hirtzberger, Wachau

'Creamy notes on attack. Balanced, rich, savoury with nice concentration and complexity. Hefty.' *LF*
'Oil and spice being cut by fruit acid. Tropical fruit salad, lychee and quince. Excellent length. Age up to 4 years.' *ML*
£24+ @ FWW

88 Grüner Veltliner Alte Reben 2001 Dr Unger, Kremstal

'Lean, mineral but really exotic as well. Definite botrytis. Super-ripe fruits.' *CM*
'Dripping apricots, quince and honey but framed by fab acid and focused minerality. Enjoy now but will age well. Age up to 5 years.' *ML*
£9+ @ M&V, MPS, P&S, VLL, WCW

88 Grüner Veltliner Federspiel Nikolaihof im Weingebirge 2001 Nikolaihof Wachau

'Very fragrant fruit salad and spice.' *DS*
'Impressive. Again very typical. A touch drier but nice aromatics.' *LF*
'Slightly decadent botrytis on nose.' *RJ*
'Immediately enjoyable - oak, honey, touch of botrytis. Big and rich. Age 1-7 years.' *ML*
Contact: +43 2 732 82901
or wein@nikolaihof.at

87 Grüner Veltliner Rosenberg Reserve 2000 Ott, Donauland

'Spicy, rich, big attack. Fresh. Good concentration.' *LF*
'Some ripe pear on nose with white pepper/mace spice. Powerful attack on palate, concentrated, has smokiness and savoury character, slightly overblown. Alcoholic finish. Could be longer. Age up to 3 years.' *ML*
£17.50 ex-cellar; contact:
+43 2 738 2257 or bernhard@ott.at

86 Grüner Veltliner Smaragd Nikolaihof im Weingebirge 2000 Nikolaihof Wachau

'High acidity matched by unctuous glaucé fruits.' *ML*
'Rich, ripe, complex. Peach and apricot. Lovely now. Age up to 4 years.' *CM*
£19+ @ RAE, RWD

86 Grüner Veltliner Exklusiv 'Drei Weingärten' 2001 Brandl, Kamptal

'Delicate, fresh, clean, some spice, nice concentration. Lasts well.' *LF*
'Crisp but generous. Lovely mineral acidity but with honeyed opulence. Beautiful balance. Age up to 4 years.' *CM*
£7 ex-cellar; contact: +43 2 734 26350
or weinbau-brandl@zoebing.at

86 Grüner Veltliner E L Ried Alte Reben Hasel 2001 Johann Topf, Kamptal

'Napa-style GV? This is big, oaky, melon, buttery, tropical. Much like a super-rich Chardonnay.' *ML*
'Big, oaky and malo'd. Does have a tell-tale herby twang.' *CM*
'Very yellow, fat with an evolved nose. Some botrytis. Age up to 4 years.' *LF*
£12 ex-cellar; contact: +43 2 735 2491
or office@weingut-topf.at



Grüner Veltliner Höhereck 2001 Mittelbach

A gold-medal scoring wine, this is rich in style and substance, packed with exotic fruit with a lovely length. Either for cellaring or enjoying now.
£10.90 ex-cellar

Grüner Veltliner Reserve 2001 Dr Unger, Kremstal

A wine scoring 92 points at under £10 which shows typicity, complexity and cellarability is an ideal entry-point into discovering more about this unusual grape.
£9.30 @ MPS, M&V



Pairing with food

Like Alsatian wines, Grüner Veltliner goes well with spicier food. The less oaky styles would match nicely with veal dishes such as Wiener schnitzel, shellfish such as scallops or crab and chilli linguine. The bigger, richer styles would pair well with eggs Florentine, Welsh rarebit, chicken with tarragon sauce, fondue, roast pork, suckling pig, rabbit or salmon. The sweeter versions would complement paté, goose or even lobster thermidor.

84 Grüner Veltliner 2001 Pfaffl Zeiseneck, Weinviertel

'Ooh! Austrian acidity! Fine enough but a little sharp for the UK palate maybe. Well made.' *LF*
'Rich, sweet honey flavours. Age up to 4 years.' *DS*
Contact: +43 2 262 673423
or pfaffl-weingut@netway.at

84 Grüner Veltliner Nussberg 2001 Wieninger, Wien

'Fat and heavy with ripe, peachy flavours. Has bags of character.' *DS*
'A wine of two halves - ripeness and acidity, rich and herby, lemon and oak. But they do not knit well. Age up to 3 years.' *ML*
£12.99 @ NYW

84 Grüner Veltliner Smaragd 2001 Högl, Wachau

'A polemical wine. Love it or hate it. Rich, opulent papaya-laden wine but a little coarse as well. Let down by finish slightly. Time might prove otherwise. Age 2-6 years.' *ML*
£14.90 ex-cellar; contact:
+43 2 713 8458 or
weingut.hoegl@weinserver.at

84 Grüner Veltliner Hundsleiten/Sandtal 2001 Pfaffl, Weinviertel

'Attractive fennel aromas. Pleasant, savoury, herby.' *CM*
'Dry and savoury.' *LF*
'Grassy and closed. Age up to 5 years.' *DS*
Contact: +43 2 262 673423
or pfaffl-weingut@netway.at

83 Grüner Veltliner Hochrain 2001 Rudi Pichler, Wachau

'Promises much on the grassy aromatic nose, doesn't quite deliver on the palate though. Benefit from extra age?' *ML*
'Bordeaux blanc or Loire on nose. Less typical but good. Age up to 4 years.' *RJ*
£17 ex-cellar; contact: +43 2 715 2267
or weingut.rudi.pichler@netway.at

83 Grüner Veltliner Herrenholz 2001 Wieninger, Wien

'Lively, crisp, dry, fresh, correct. I'm looking for a bit more guts.' *LF*
'Grapefruit, lighter than most with high acidity. Age up to 5 years.' *CM*
Contact: +43 1 290 1012
or weingut@wieninger.at

Turn to p84 for a key to stockists

As well as the merchants listed above, others worth looking at are DUU, N&P and BBR, and for a good selection of rarer examples, visit www.rare-wine.com

🍷	Drink now
🕒	Keep for 1-3 years
🕒	Keep for 3-5 years
🕒	Long term ageing
💰	Good value