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Austria: The Finest 2022 White Wines from the Danube River (Mostly), Plus Vienna, the Weinviertel and the Thermenregion

by STEPHAN REINHARDT, May 23, 2024

The credo of Austrian wine consumers is young wine. So, while in Bordeaux the 2023s are offered as futures that can only be put in buyers' cellars two years from now, in Austria "vintage bests" lists of the 2023s are already being drawn up today, and the white wines of the last vintage produced in a rush are being offered and drunk. This is because nutrition-conscious Austrians like fruit, and they like it best when it is young and crisp. As soon as the Christmas menu has been digested, they are already craving the white wines of the year fermented during the Advent season. Even the great single-vineyard wines, such as from the Vinea Wachau, go on sale in spring after the harvest, while the Traditionsweingüter give them at least another four or even 16 months to develop on the lees or in the bottle. More time passes before these wines arrive in the more-remote export markets, so we are only focusing on the 2022s here, as well as some 2021s, which are already considered old wines by some consumers in Austria. Oh well ...

After the widely celebrated 2021 white wines from Lower Austria—above all, the Rieslings and Grüner Veltliners from this sunny year—the 2022s have a harder time of it. They are generally richer and riper than the 2020s but lack the generosity and inner concentration of the 2019s or 2021s. The fact that the vintage was very dry in parts is evident in the wines, especially where there is no irrigation or appropriate viticultural methods in use to relieve the vines and allow their fruit to ripen more slowly and moderately. Time and again, Rieslings and Grüner Veltliners, in particular, exhibit phenolic notes that are slightly bitter and suboptimal if they appear more emaciated rather than stimulatingly fresh or spicy.

I tasted around 380 white wines last fall and this spring on the Danube (in Grafenegg or at Schloss Dürnstein) or in my home office, as well as around 100 red wines, which I will report on later. Only a few 2022 wines got me excited, even though there are, of course, some outstanding Rieslings and Grüner Veltliners from the 2022 vintage, especially in the Wachau but also in the Kamptal, Kremstal and Vienna. For the first time, domaines from the Thermenregion south of Vienna also presented their single-vineyard wines, especially from the autochthonous Zierfandler and Rotgipfler grape varieties but also Chardonnay, which has been established here for a long time, as well as Pinot Noir. There are also some single-vineyard wines from the Weinviertel and, of course, from the capital city of Vienna.



The 2022 Vintage

Considering the conditions of the vintage in other regions of Europe, which were characterized by constant heat and drought, especially in the summer months, the situation along the Danube and in the regions bordering Vienna was much more relaxed. "After a dry April, we were blessed with many hours of sunshine and well-measured rainfall throughout the entire growing season. The vineyards were healthy and still very vital," said Willi Bründlmayer from Langenlois, Kamptal, summarizing the vintage. "Throughout the year, the vegetation was kept in check with a lot of soil and foliage work. In September, we were a good week ahead of the great 2021 year in terms of ripeness but still in the cool range considering the warm years of 2017, 2018 and 2019."

After a very mild, dry winter with only 35 millimeters of rainfall until March, the start of vegetation, for example, in the Wachau was only delayed slightly by a cold phase in the first half of March. In April and May, just in time for budding, the Danube Valley finally got some rain. Rainfall in June was more abundant, combined with very warm nights, which caused very strong infection pressure from peronospora and occasionally led to noticeable yield losses in Grüner Veltliner. Flowering between the beginning and middle of June went well. July and the first half of August were very dry and, at times, associated with very high temperatures, which led to drought damage in locations where irrigation was not possible. Rainfall at the end of August and a wet September led to considerable rotting pressure, especially in earlier and well-supplied sites, particularly in Grüner Veltliner, and required a very high harvesting effort.

During the harvest, "the changing weather demanded tactical sensitivity, patience and strong nerves," Bründlmayer summarized. "Changes to the program were the order of the day, as the fresh wind repeatedly drove cloud formations over the Kamptal, which rained only locally and for a limited time but quite erratically. We repeatedly had to abruptly stop the harvest, only to resume it shortly afterward elsewhere with different instructions and the same commitment."

This flexibility was crucial in fall 2022 but, obviously, by far not all the producers were that flexible, given the character of their wines.

The smartest producers waited until the last third of October for the single-vineyard Grüner Veltliners to reach the right ripeness. Whereas Bründlmayer finished the harvest on October 25, the harvest in the Wachau began in mid-September and continued, in the cooler Spitzer Graben, until the beginning of November. "Damp weather toward the end of October caused severe rotting, especially in Riesling, which had a major impact on harvest volumes, particularly in the western part of the Wachau," according to the vintage report



of the Vinea Wachau. Shooting stars Michael Linke and Franz Hofbauer from the Grabenwerkstatt in Trandorf, therefore, speak of a "difficult vintage." Everything looked good until late summer, when heavy and prolonged rainfall set in—with early fall fog at the wrong time. "During these weeks, we were constantly busy in the vineyard, meticulously selecting the grapes from each individual vine." The clouds then cleared sometime in October, so that the main harvest of "perfectly ripe grapes" took place under blue skies and was only completed on October 31—after 28 days of harvesting.

In general, the winegrowers along the Danube are very satisfied with the results of the vintage. The best 2022s show a lot of elegance, charm and harmony and are fresh, albeit a little milder than in the previous year. The finest Rieslings, in particular, impress with their freshness, ripe fruit and juiciness, while some Grüner Veltliners seem a little sluggish. I often noted bitter phenolics, which often indicate stress, although the rainfall in late summer could actually have remedied this problem. However, viticulture is a complex matter, and wine is the result of many events and decisions. Harvesting too early and too quickly, with less meticulous sorting, naturally produces less impressive results than a late harvest of healthy and perfectly ripe grapes. Pressing is also an issue and certainly the aging on the lees.

All in all, my preferences are reflected in the ratings of the wines, which are more differentiated than in the previous year. A good vineyard site, whether classified or not, is not enough on its own to produce top wines, as shown by the wines from the Zöbinger Heiligenstein, which was recently divided into different sites (Subrieden), as well as the Spitzberg in Carnuntum, whose red wines we will report on later in the year.

The 2021 Late Releases

More and more wineries along the Danube are starting to sell their best single-vineyard wines a good two years after the harvest. A good idea in itself, although a one-year-old vintage always looks a little "old" next to the fresh one. Nevertheless, this report also shows that the 2021s have excellent potential and can mature over many years.

To summarize the 2021 vintage in a nutshell: The wine year started with unusually late budbreak, which was immediately followed by a long dry phase until the beginning of July in the Wachau. In contrast, there was frequent rainfall in July and August, unfortunately also with hailstorms in some places. Ideal harvest conditions then prevailed in the sunny, dry but cool fall, which provided refreshing acidity levels, especially for Riesling. The long hanging time of the grapes on the vine did the rest and enabled their perfect physiological ripening.



In Kamptal, too, the rainfall was initially not abundant but was sufficient overall until Pentecost to ensure a good supply in the vineyards. Accordingly, the vines flowered very late, in some cases until the beginning of July. This was followed by some pleasantly warm days, but the summer proved to be changeable and cool overall. Only the wonderful late summer days before the start of the harvest in mid-September revived hopes of a good vintage. As a result, the fine weather continued for the entire six weeks of the main harvest, creating the basis for a good vintage. From mid-October, persistent foehn winds provided the final ripening boost and gave the winegrowers a golden finish. The 2021 vintage is, therefore, considered outstanding in Austria.

In some cases, the late onset of botrytis combined with high acidity created ideal conditions for noble sweet wines, including Riesling Trockenbeerenauslese. However, I did not taste any Prädikat wines for this report.

2022 Domäne Wachau Ried Singerriedel Riesling Smaragd **RP 94**



[Check price](#)

2022 Domäne Wachau Ried Loibenberg Riesling Smaragd **RP 93**



[Check price](#)

2022 Domäne Wachau Ried Achleiten Riesling Smaragd **RP 93**



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2022 Domäne Wachau Ried Kellerberg Riesling Smaragd **RP 92+**





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2022 Domäne Wachau Ried Kellerberg Grüner Veltliner Smaragd **RP 92**

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2022 Domäne Wachau Ried Achleiten Grüner Veltliner Smaragd **RP 92**

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2022 Domäne Wachau Ried Kirnberg Grüner Veltliner Smaragd **RP 91**

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2022 Domäne Wachau Ried Axpoint Grüner Veltliner Smaragd **RP 91**

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2022 Domäne Wachau Ried Schön Grüner Veltliner **RP 91**

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2022 Domäne Wachau Ried Brandstatt Riesling Smaragd **RP 88+**

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