



Basic Juice Article
Austrian Wine is no Joke

by: *Beau Jarvis*

Wow, what a great audience. Has anyone heard the one about the Austrians and their stalled car? OK. What do you call four Austrians gathered around a broken down car with the hood up? A wine tasting!! Ha! <tap, tap, tap> Is this thing on?

So I see you don't get the Austrian wine joke. Let me provide a bit of background on Austria's infamous wine debacle of 1985. A group of winemaking "middlemen" decided to add a little something called diethylene glycol to their wine. Diethylene glycol is essentially antifreeze. Oh, and it tastes sweet too. And it's, umm, also kind of toxic. The scheming winemakers added small amounts of this chemical to sweeten their wine in an attempt to increase its appeal. Inexplicably, one of them claimed his portion of antifreeze costs as a deducted business expense on his tax return. Fortunately for potential customers, the scam was quickly discovered and halted. Alas, this also signaled the end of many a wine comedian's material.

Nowadays it's damn near impossible to joke about Austrian wine. The noble and honest Austrian wine producers used the '85 embarrassment as a catalyst to develop some of the world's most stringent wine laws. Additionally, many prominent Austrian vintners modeled their work after master wine makers in France and Germany. As a result, wine from the land of Mozart is now considered a classic in many circles.

Austrian wines are more "groovy" than classic. By groovy, I mean "Grüner Veltliner," which is the name of Austria's very own native wine grape. And since many wine drinkers can't seem to get the pronunciation straight (say it with me now: *g-roo-nur felt-leen-er*), it is commonly referred to as, "Gru-V" or "groovy." Gru-V produces wine that is best described as Riesling with a lime twist and dash of pepper. In the mouth, it is spicy and tangy rather than sweet. Yet, there remains a fruity-floral bouquet that tickles the nose. Gru-V isn't cheap. Prices usually start at \$20 and climb steeply from there. However, Gru-V is quite dependable; Austria's climate is ideal for this grape, and the wine is consistently made at a high level of quality (lest there be any more Austrian wine jokes). Höppler produces an entry level Gru-V for around twelve dollars (*Höppler Grüner Veltliner, '03*). For twenty dollars, Loimer offers a terrific Gru-V (*Loimer Grüner Veltliner Langenlois, '03*). Now, if you're willing to peel off another few bills, you can delve into Austria's world of stylized wine.

The Wachau is Austria's most renowned wine region. It lies west of Vienna, along the Danube. The region's topography is ideal for vineyards: abruptly rising slopes along the river mated to rocky, vine-loving soil. The Wachau's wine growers produce varying styles of wine. To honor these unique wines, Wachau vintners recognize three distinct wine-style categories: *Steinfeder*, *Federspiel*, and *Smaragd*. These style indicators are only awarded to white wines of the highest quality. *Steinfeder* refers to a soft, delicate grass common on the hills of the Wachau. Wine of this style is light (11% maximum alcohol) and delicate. *Federspiel* wines are dry whites made from riper grapes. Thus the

wine is fuller (alcohol percentage between 11.5%-12.5%). These wines must live up to both Austrian wine standards and Wachau-specific regulations. A fine *Federspiel* example is *Hirtzberger Rotes Tor Grüner Veltliner, '03* (\$28). *Smaragd* is the deluxe style category. The term refers to sun-bathing lizards that hang out on rocks in Wachau vineyards. Sun-bathed grapes go into *Smaragd* wines. As a result, they are big (minimum 12.5% alcohol), bold, and oh-so-beautiful. There are two prime *Smaragd* examples lurking on the downtown wine store's shelves: *Hirtzberger Honivogl Grüner Veltliner, '01* (\$49) and *Weingartner Riesling Achleiten, '01* (\$30). Try one or both. They are sure to get you hooked on Österreichischen Wein. Now, with glass in hand; sit-back, put on *Eine Kleine Nachtmusik*, and enjoy a thoroughly Austrian evening (powdered wig optional). Cheers.

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