

Austria's best single-vineyard wines: All about *Ried*

Simon J Woolf reports from the 2022 Austrian Single Vineyard Summit and shares his notes on the best of the “wines of place” he tasted



One of the most significant shifts in Austrian wine over the past few decades has been the move away from a “Germanic”-style wine classification—based around must weight and sweetness—to a pyramid system related to origin, just as with French AOCs or Italian DOCs. The formalization of the word *Ried* (meaning a specific vineyard site) in 2015 was a key stage in this process. Now the term can be used only with one of the 5,000 or so officially recognized single-vineyard sites in the country.

Yes, that's a big number, and it includes many obscure sites and monopolies that will be of limited interest to the consumer, in addition to heavy-hitters such as Heiligenstein in Kamptal or Achleiten in the Wachau. Choosing based on region, grape variety, or producer is still more important in such

cases. But this is where the private winemaker's associations such as Vinea Wachau, the Österreichische Traditionsweingüter (ÖTW), or Steirische Terroir & Klassikweingüter (STK) come into the picture. Their work in cataloging and (in the case of the ÖTW and the STK) ranking their respective region's vineyards is designed to help signpost the top sites to the consumer.

Although Vinea Wachau is the largest of the three associations, the ÖTW is foremost in terms of promoting the single-vineyard concept. It's for this reason that it organizes an annual tasting at Grafenegg Castle in Kamptal every September, allowing members of the press, sommeliers, wine importers, and distributors to taste the newly released vintages of its members' single-vineyard wines. In recent years, this mammoth

and superbly organized event has grown even more, to include an increasing number of guest regions. The ÖTW itself currently covers the regions situated along the Danube (with the exception of the Wachau): Kremstal, Kamptal, Traisental, Wagram, Carnuntum, and Wien. Additionally, a small group of winemakers from Thermenregion joined in 2022, and a bigger group from the Weinviertel is projected to join in 2023.

The Grafenegg tasting—now renamed the Austrian Single Vineyard Summit—includes what are perhaps the two most prestigious DACs in Burgenland—Leithaberg and Eisenberg (Südburgenland)—plus the members of the STK in Styria. A first for 2022 was an additional day organized by

Above: Grafenegg Castle in Kamptal, home to the ÖTW's Austrian Single Vineyard Summit.

All photography by Anna Stoeber, courtesy of the ÖTW

TASTING

WACHAU

There are two very clear stylistic factions here. The more old-school version is the riper, botrytis-influenced style, which still has its fans. But an increasing number of growers prefer to exclude any botrytis influence and aim for a more elegant, pure-fruited style. 2021 was considered to be a near-perfect vintage, after the significantly cooler and more challenging 2020.

Johann Donabaum Setzberg Riesling Smaragd 2021

Wachau DAC

Fresh lemon peel on the nose and lots of salty, mineral energy and detail on the palate. A refined and elegant style of Riesling, with delicious lime- and lemon-fruit that feels focused, restrained, and characterful. | 95

Weinhofmeisterei Hirtzberger Bach Riesling Smaragd 2021

Wachau DAC

Very textured and leesy, with a lovely spiciness and delicate citrus and salt notes, which add freshness. Lots of complexity and length without feeling heavy. Has the Smaragd richness without getting too big or dense. | 92

Domäne Wachau Achleiten Riesling Smaragd 2021

Wachau DAC

Compare this to the domaine's Achleiten Grüner, and it's clear that Achleiten was born for Riesling. Elegance and lift, with spicy, zesty citrus tones and freshly made lemonade. Notes of crushed herbs, lemon verbena, and thyme. Nicely concentrated but with elegance and refinement as well. | 94

Klaus Prager - Riesling Smaragd 2021

Wachau DAC

Bright acidity and a note of dried apricot and mango, giving a feeling of concentration but with no sacrifice in freshness. A subtly creamy texture, staying lifted and fresh to the very end. A complex style with depth and energy. | 91

Domäne Wachau Kreuzberg Grüner Veltliner Federspiel 2021

Wachau DAC

A refreshing and crisp Federspiel, with quite considerable concentration and length. Refined and elegant, with pear and white peach. Fair play to the domaine for proving that top sites do not have to be expressed only through Smaragd. | 92

Georg Frischengruber Kreuzberg Grüner Veltliner Smaragd 2021

Wachau DAC

Strongly characterized and very lively and fresh. Some pear fruit on the palate, with peppery, salty, and mineral notes providing the excitement. Attractive weight, good length and concentration. From a site on the so-called right bank of the Wachau. | 93

KAMPTAL

An increasing number of growers are choosing to show wines from the previous vintage. This is welcome, since tasting single-vineyard bottlings that have had only nine months to get themselves together can be frustrating. 2020 was a cooler, more mixed vintage, whereas 2021 was optimum.

Hirsch Ried Gaisberg Riesling 2021 (13% ABV)

Kamptal DAC

Delivers effortlessly on acidity and freshness, but also has body and complexity. There's a wonderful mineral interplay with the citrus and gooseberry notes, and some mango hints, too. Lots going on, great aging potential. | 92

Jurtschitsch Ried Dechant Grüner Veltliner 2020 (12.5% ABV)

Kamptal DAC

There's a lovely feeling of concentration here, despite the light body and wonderfully elegant weight. The fruit majors on ripe pear with a hint of apricot pith and a lick of salt. So refined; it stays typical to the variety but with the poise expected from this estate. | 95

Schloss Gobelsburg Ried Lamm Grüner Veltliner 2020 (13% ABV)

Kamptal DAC

A lifted, spicy character that suggests mild botrytis. The freshness and energy is wonderful, and a sweet candied note on the finish adds to the charm. Doing just great with a further year after vintage. As ever for this estate, it's a refined and restrained style. | 93

Birgit Eichinger Ried Heiligenstein Riesling 2021 (13% ABV)

Kamptal DAC

Candied lemon and lime peel, a seriously tangy and quite ripe style that fizzes with energy and has plenty of depth. The mineral refinement is there on the finish. Although very young, this has what it takes to become a great Heiligenstein. | 92

Schloss Gobelsburg Ried Heiligenstein Riesling 2020 (13% ABV)

Kamptal DAC

Tight and mineral, still with its youthful nerviness, but that extra year of aging reveals more elegance and depth. Expressive lime and passion-fruit flavors, with exceptional balance, length, and structure. | 95

Bründlmayer Ried Loiserberg Grüner Veltliner 2021 (12.5% ABV)

Kamptal DAC

A filigree style of Grüner from a site with stony soils mixed with a little loess. Bründlmayer's reading shows beautiful acidity, notes of candied citrus peel, and fresh herbs. It dances across the palate with great refinement, while never losing its nervous energy. | 95

Jurtschitsch Ried Loiserberg Riesling 2021 (13% ABV)

Kamptal DAC

Loiserberg achieves even better results than Heiligenstein at this biodynamic-certified estate. The nose offers promising notes of lime and mineral salts, and the palate fizzes with energy and excitement, finishing on a lick of smoked honey. Glorious verve and energy, one to age. | 97

KREMSTAL

Sepp Moser Ried Breiter Rain Grüner Veltliner 2021 (13% ABV)

Kremstal DAC

Focused and nuanced, with buttery, green capsicum notes nestling in next to pithy apricot fruit. More fruit-driven than in previous years—and all the better for it. Attractive and expressive, with great balance. | 93

Petra Unger Ried Gaisberg Riesling 2021 (13.5% ABV)

Kremstal DAC

Refined and delicate, with a stone-fruit character in addition to some lime and mango notes. Unfolds to a wonderfully stony, mineral finish. | 92

Geyerhof Ried Kirchensteig Riesling 2020 (12.5% ABV)

Kremstal DAC

Limey and fruit-driven, with passion-fruit notes that make you salivate and go back for another sip. The nose is expressive, filled with citrus essential oils. A delicious, lightweight style that nonetheless packs a punch. | 94

Mantlerhof Ried Moosburgerin Grüner Veltliner 2020 (12.5% ABV)

Kremstal DAC

Nicely developed after an additional year's aging, with a candied fruit core and delicate saltiness. A light and refined Grüner, with subtle pear-fruit notes and great length. | 92

Malat Ried Pfaffenberg Riesling 2020 (13% ABV)

Kremstal DAC

The nose reminds me of freshly made lemonade—lemon peel offering up all of its essential oils. Lively mango and passion-fruit notes on the palate. An expressive style with focused fruit and a bright future for the next few years. | 93

Familie Proidl Ried Ehrenfel Riesling 2021 (13% ABV)

Kremstal DAC

Sensational energy. The acidity is off the charts, but it doesn't feel over-the-top due to the beautiful mango and passion-fruit notes. This is a wake-up call, a wine that uplifts and makes you plead for the next sip. Sure to improve given another year and more. From a site rich in slate, gneiss, and marble. | 96



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TRAISENTAL

Markus Huber Ried Berg Grüner Veltliner 2021 (13.5% ABV)

Traisental DAC
Compared to Markus's Alte Setzen, there is more mineral energy here—the lick of salt, the feeling of dried apricot. Great concentration and good balance. A very attractive, fruit-driven Grüner. | 93

WAGRAM

Diwald Ried Eisenhut Riesling 2020 (12.5% ABV)

Wagram
Delicate on the nose, with fresh tarragon, chamomile, and zesty lime. Lots of mineral nuances to enjoy in this light yet subtly textured wine. A real charmer that has surely benefited from an extra year's aging. Organic-certified, wild-fermented, and unfiltered. | 93

Fritsch Ried Mordthall Riesling 2021 (12.5 ABV)

Wagram DAC
Delicate and yet energetic and brilliantly fresh. The nose shows preserved lemon and perfumed lime, while the palate is filled with little mineral details and nuances. Such a pretty wine, with that perfect combination of uplift, complexity, and refinement. | 97

VIENNA

Overripeness is starting to be an issue in some vintages here, but the 2020s seem to have hit a sweet spot, at least for those growers who exercised care with the harvesting date.

Christ Ried Wiesthalen Gemischter Satz 2020 (13% ABV)

Wiener Gemischter Satz DAC
No divinity here—just divine wine from Rainer Christ (rhymes with mist). Pithy and tangy, with mouthwatering acidity and a real lift to the palate. Plenty of concentration and that lovely complexity that good Gemischter Satz achieves, but here in a lighter frame than some. | 93

Wieninger Ried Ulm Gemischter Satz 2020 (14% ABV)

Wiener Gemischter Satz DAC
From a steep Nussberg parcel, Ried Ulm always seems the freshest of the three single-vineyard Gemischter Sätze. A super-satisfying feeling of big texture, complexity, and power, but with grace and balance. A field blend of nine varieties, with a panoply of ripe orchard fruits, a splash of dried apricot, and Mediterranean herbs. Aging recommended. | 95

CARNUNTUM

This region has opted to focus purely on reds when it comes to single-vineyard wines. Spitzerberg is undoubtedly the top site, though other high scoring wines came from Schüttenberg, Haidacker and Rosenberg. The transition to the next generation is a key theme for many estates, as this region is still finding its feet.



Pelzmann Ried Spitzerberg Blaufränkisch 2020 (13.5% ABV)

Carnuntum DAC
A big jump in quality from previous vintages, and a resounding vote of confidence in son Klemen Pelzmann. A stalky, peppery Blaufränkisch with nice acids and a lick of delicious sour cherry. Quite tannic at the moment but with the freshness and fruit to overcome that in time. | 92

Dorli Muhr Ried Spitzerberg-Kobeln Blaufränkisch 2019 (13.5% ABV)

Carnuntum DAC
I'm unsure about Dorli's decision to vinify and bottle her four Spitzerberg parcels separately. An ad hoc blend of all four bottlings felt more harmonious to me. Kobeln is the most accessible and charming of the four, with spiced red fruits on the nose, and sour red cherries on the palate. Creamy and nutty tannins, restrained extraction. Elegant, medium body. | 94

BURGENLAND

With the huge winemaking diversity in this region, it's hard to make generalizations. The past two years were at times disappointing, with some established names underperforming. The trend of some producers to an increasingly lean, austere style can be an issue.

Prieler Ried Steinweingarten Weißburgunder 2020 (13.5% ABV)

Leithaberg DAC
Perfumed on the nose, with notes of white-currant and fresh thyme. Fresh and crisp, but with good body and an airy openness to the texture, which I associate with the variety. Well worth aging for another two years, it surely has more to give. | 92

Birgit Braunstein Ried Thenau Blaufränkisch 2019 (13% ABV)

Leithaberg DAC
Cherry compote and a fiery schnapps hint on the nose, with an expressive palate: a belt of sour cherry and lively acidity. A lean and thirst-quenching style that strikes a great balance between fruit and the more herbal, textural notes of the variety. | 93

Feiler-Artinger Ried Oberer Wald Blaufränkisch 2019 (13.5% ABV)

Leithaberg DAC
The beautiful cassis-and-blackcurrant-leaf perfume catches the attention first. With very bright acidity, this is a light and deft style that shows wonderful freshness. It also pulls off the trick of feeling lean and refreshing, but without lacking concentration. | 95

Erwin Tinhof Gloriette Blaufränkisch 2019 (14% ABV)

Leithaberg DAC
Less noticeable new wood than in previous vintages. Tinhof's Gloriette (Ried Setz) is a real overachiever. The wild-cherry fruit is very appealing. Sensational fruit definition and focus, with ripeness and roundness but also elegance and restraint. Accessible now but can age. | 94

SÜDBURGENLAND

Thom Wachter Ried Szapary Alter Garten Blaufränkisch 2019 (13% ABV)

Eisenberg DAC
Thom's signature style, with some whole-berry maceration to enhance the cassis perfume. It's irresistible when it creates a wine of such elegance and fruit purity, but it's also well structured, with creamy tannins that don't intrude or mask the fruit. | 94

Weinbau Weber Ried Ratschen Blaufränkisch 2019 (13.5% ABV)

Eisenberg DAC
A lovely lick of sour black cherry on the nose, and a bit of that almond/maraschino thing, too. True to the variety, with creamy tannins, good fruit focus, and everything in balance. Excellent value. | 91

THERMENREGION

Gebeshuber Rotgipler Ried Student 2019 (14.5% ABV)

Gumpoldskirchen
Charming up-front fruit, showing some salted peach and pear notes. The exuberance of the variety speaks clearly, but the fleshy apricot and peach fruit feels elegant and harmonious. Nice evolution, too, more than justifying Johannes Gebeshuber's policy of holding back the release for two or more years after the vintage. Wild-fermented in 400-liter barrels, certified organic in conversion to Demeter. | 91

Stadlmann Zierfandler Ried Mandel-Höh 2020 (14% ABV)

Traiskirchen
Typically Stadlmann, with a feeling of classicism, restraint, freshness, and a nice acidic lift—not something one takes for granted with this opulent, high-alcohol variety. Some almond, almost marzipan-like notes on the nose. At first sip, this 2020 feels straightforward and fruit-driven, but it quickly reveals more nuance and complexity with air. | 90

STYRIA

1STK = Erste Lage
GSTK = Grosse Lage
Most producers showed the 2020 vintage, which, while marred by rain during harvest, demonstrates great freshness and typicity, especially for Sauvignon Blanc.

Gross Ried Nussberg FR Sauvignon Blanc GSTK 2017 (13.5% ABV)

Südsteiermark
Expressive citrus tones on the palate. Red grapefruit on the nose, really mouthwatering, with delicious acidity. In a good place right now. Johannes Gross's move to wild fermentation and large-format oak barrels is paying dividends, creating a style that feels terroir-driven rather than winemaker-driven. | 95

Lackner Tinnacher Ried Flamberg Morillon GSTK 2020 (13.0% ABV)

Südsteiermark DAC
A delicate and shy creature. Little details of tangy citrus and minerals, and some peach and ripe apricot on the nose. Very elegant and restrained, with wonderful freshness and nuances on the finish. Should age nicely over the next 3-5 years. | 94

Neumeister Ried Saziani Grauburgunder GSTK 2020 (13.5 ABV)

Vulkanland Steiermark DAC
Expressive, herbal and earthy on the nose, with some salted peach. Deliciously spicy on the palate, feeling creamy and textured, without any feeling of heaviness. Somehow fleshy, hinting at red berries, but also lifted and mineral. Really shows off the volcanic terroir. | 95

Polz Ried Grassnitzberg Licht Sauvignon Blanc 1STK 2020 (13% ABV)

Südsteiermark DAC
Very fine and filigree, with delicate lemon-zest accents and some white flowers on the nose. Subtle hints of mineral salts. A refined and expressive wine. | 93

Sattlerhof Ried Sernauberg Sauvignon Blanc 1STK 2020 (12.5% ABV)

Südsteiermark DAC
Extraordinary refinement and lightness of touch, with no compromise on ripeness or concentration. Despite its light body and alcohol, it delivers on every level—ripe citrus peel, some herbal expression on the nose, a hint of passion fruit on the palate, and effortless mineral interplay on the finish. Graceful and elegant, a candidate for long aging. Certified biodynamic. | 98

Tement Ried Zieregg Vinothek Reserve Sauvignon Blanc GSTK 2019 (13.5% ABV)

Südsteiermark DAC
Nice herbal expression on the nose, with a subtle hint of hay. Spicy fruit, with beautiful freshness and definition. Long length and a real feeling of restraint and refinement. Certainly not a typical Sauvignon but a very successful style. The blend contains a tiny bit of Chardonnay. | 93



Vinea Wachau. Thus, for those with enough time and sufficiently resilient tastebuds, it was possible to taste more than 500 single-vineyard wines from 11 different regions, covering all major viticultural areas of Austria with the exception of the Weinviertel.

Cream of the crop

In my report, I've selected 40 of the highest-scoring wines. Rather than simply select the top-scoring half-dozen wines from each region, which would sometimes have resulted in three or more listings per producer, I've chosen a range to show as much diversity of producers, grape varieties, and styles as possible. This is a selection of only 40 wines out of more than 500 tasted, so it should not be a surprise that scores are high. This does not signify score inflation on my part, merely that this is the cream of the crop.

For similar primeur tastings in other parts of the world, you might expect some thoughts on vintage conditions and overall quality. This is tricky for the Grafenegg tasting, due to differing policies on release dates and vintages presented. I've included additional notes for those regions where there is an adequately consistent approach on which to comment.

The opportunity to taste so many wines from almost every corner of Austria provided plenty of food for thought. Stylistically, Wachau, Kamptal,

Above: Stefanie Böheim of Weingut Böheim pouring at the meticulously organized tasting.

and Kremstal still represent the more classic, even conservative, side of Austria's wines. Quality and consistency in these regions is exemplary, arguably sometimes at the expense of experimentation or innovation. Burgenland presents a smorgasbord of differing styles and winemaking philosophies—from avant-gardist, to post-Parker traditionalist. Sometimes frustrating to navigate, it is nothing if not stimulating. Styria, or at least the small group of winemakers in the STK, has quietly raised its game to an extraordinary level over the past decade.

What does this tasting show in terms of vineyard classifications? The Kamptal's top sites, such as Heiligenstein, Lamm, and Loiserberg, featured prominently in my top scores, as always. In the Wachau, Achleiten sits head and shoulders above the rest for consistency. Other theoretically top Wachau sites such as Loibenberg seem more producer-dependent. Setzberg and Kreuzberg (in Rossach) both impressed me this year. Spitzerberg in Carnuntum always shines through, even with more mediocre producers. Beyond this, it is hard to evaluate specific vineyard sites independently of the producer, when there are only one or two references to compare. Perhaps that makes a mockery of the single-vineyard focus? It remains useful as a means to home in on what should be Austria's most terroir-specific wines of place. Right now, that selection is not only convincing but also ever-increasing. ■