

AUSTRIAN DRY RIESLING

It may not get star billing, but Austria's Riesling can and often does rank among the very best, with styles ranging from bracingly fresh and fruity to superbly complex. **Stephen Brook** selects 30 to try

Although Grüner Veltliner is Austria's leading white variety, Riesling plays an important role too, with 2,000ha planted, compared to Veltliner's 14,000ha. At its best, Riesling from Austria is as complex and stylish as top examples from Germany, Alsace or Australia. The Austrians know that it only delivers outstanding wines when planted on dry, stony terraces that enhance exposure to precious sunlight.

Its heartland is the Danube valley west of Vienna. Some of those regions, such as Wagram, are better suited to Grüner Veltliner as their loess soils ideally suit the variety. But parts of Kamptal and Kremstal, and almost all of the Wachau, are brilliant territories for dry

Riesling, sharing outcrops of weathered primary rock, including sandstone, schist and gneiss. The large Weinviertel region north of the Danube also has pockets that are good for Riesling, but few examples leave Austria.

The Austrian wine authorities have created an appellation system: DAC (Districtus Austriae Controllatus). It seeks to define the most typical wines for each region: for example, both Grüner Veltliner and Riesling can claim DAC status in Kamptal. The system matters little to wine lovers outside Austria, except to note that when the alcohol level is 13% or above, a grower can call the wine a Reserve. Some do, but others don't bother. In the tasting notes that follow, some wines are technically Reserves but not identified as such.

The Wachau has its own system, introduced in 1983 by the growers' association Vinea Wachau. Its three tiers reflect ripeness levels: Steinfeder is the most basic, Federspiel intermediary, then Smaragd, with a minimum alcohol of 12.5%. Thanks to global warming, Steinfeder is an endangered species, but Federspiel can be refreshing and delicious and is not necessarily an inferior product to a Smaragd, though the latter should offer the ripeness, structure and force to which a Federspiel doesn't aspire.

Exacting standards

A recent innovation is the inclusion of the word Ried to designate a single vineyard. Many regions on the Danube are also part of the Erste Lage classification that seeks to identify the most revered vineyards. However, this is in effect a private club, so the classification has no legal standing. Such sites are not identified in the notes below.

The use of the term 'minerality' has come under fire in recent years. While vine roots may well be incapable of transporting mineral elements in the soil into grapes themselves, some wines do tempt one to invoke the term. I do so myself to characterise a blend of acidity,

steeliness, perceptible grain and extract as well as other characteristics in contrast to simple fruitiness and opulence. Some wines marry the two. Nonetheless, the primary rock soils on which Austria's best Rieslings are grown often convey a distinct mineral cut.

If much of the Wachau is ideal for Riesling, in Kamptal only a few sites are capable of producing outstanding versions, and these include Heiligenstein and Gaisberg. The Kremstal is slightly more complicated. Krems, and its westerly extension of Stein, about the Wachau, and the steep, terraced sites behind the towns – such as Pfaffenberg – are perfect for Riesling. Further inland, away from the Danube's moderating influence, is the Senftenberg area, decidedly hilly and rich in primary rock. The main producers here are Nigl and Proidl, and the wines tend to have more power, tension and longevity than those from the Krems area.

Winemaking standards in Austria are extremely high. Austrians are well-off and well educated, exacting wine lovers with little tolerance for mediocrity. Regrettably, many excellent producers have had to be omitted here, though their wines rival those recommended below.



Stephen Brook is a multiple-awarded wine writer and contributing editor to *Decanter*. The second edition of his book *The Wines of Austria* (Classic Wine Library) was published in November 2019



WACHAU Emmerich Knoll, Ried Schütt Smaragd 2018 96

£51.67 (2013) Blanco & Gomez
Schütt is a relatively low alluvial fan, but it's south-facing and has excellent drainage; Knoll never fails to make world-class wines here. This has a ripe apricot nose, but is spicy, poised and lively. The attack is fresh and intense, with a dry mid-palate despite the evident ripeness. Invigorating acidity gives structure and balance to the exquisite fruit. Mineral, textured and very long. **Drink** 2021-2036 **Alcohol** 13.5%



FX Pichler, Ried Kellerberg Smaragd 2018 96

£89.99 Liberty Wines, VinQuinn
The nose marries apple, apricot and tropical fruit with an impressive stoniness. It's powerful but not overbearing, its creaminess cut by an underlying minerality. Very concentrated and imposing – enjoy now for astonishing primary fruit or, better, wait for its full potential to be realised. Firm balance and a long, stony finish. The Steinertal Smaragd is almost equally magnificent. **Drink** 2021-2038 **Alc** 13.5%



Domäne Wachau, Ried Achleiten Smaragd 2018 95

£29.95 (2017) Carruthers & Kent, Cellar Door Wines
Few would dispute that the stony, terraced Achleiten in Weissenkirchen is one of the Wachau's grands crus, and the Domäne Wachau co-op often makes an outstanding example. The mandarin-apricot nose is still reticent though. Very primary on the palate: taut, austere, firm and concentrated – a wine with grip and depth, and a very long, tangy finish. Needs time. **Drink** 2022-2038 **Alc** 14%



Alzinger, Ried Höhereck Smaragd 2019 93

£36 (2011) Alpine Wines
Father and son, both Leo, produce some of the Wachau's most stylish wines. This terraced site with gneiss soils is not as celebrated as Alzinger's Steinertal, but in 2019 it delivered a cracking wine. A lime-scented nose is strident but ripe, and fine acidity gives zest to the attack. It's very youthful, dry, intense and taut, and needs time to show more complexity. But the structure is racy and energetic with a very long sherbetty finish. **Drink** 2021-2034 **Alc** 13%



Domäne Wachau, Terrassen Federspiel 2019 91

£14.95 Carruthers & Kent, The Fine Wine Co
As well as an impressive range of smaragd wines from single vineyards, this outstanding cooperative produces a reliable mid-weight, entry-level blend from terraced sites that is intended for more immediate drinking. The nose shows welcoming perfume and poise, with charming apple and lime aromas. Fresh and brisk, it exhibits a trace of minerality and bright acidity. A lingering finish shows a mere hint of sweetness. **Drink** 2020-2025 **Alc** 12.5%



Nikolaihof, Ried Vom Stein Smaragd 2015 91

£30 Berry Bros & Rudd
Nikolaihof is both highly traditional, ageing its wines in casks, and a passionate advocate of biodynamic farming. This wine, with its rich stone-fruit aromas, has gravitas and opulence. Svelte and creamy, it's both concentrated and spicy, with the long ageing rounding the edges and pulling the wine into harmony. Its texture is balanced by solid fruit and firm acidity, and the finish is long. Although structured, it does lack a little finesse. **Drink** 2020-2032 **Alc** 12.5%



Franz Hirtzberger, Ried Steinporz Smaragd 2018 95

£56 Clark Foyster
Franz Hirtzberger is the most esteemed grower in Spitz, and his wines can be surprisingly voluptuous. Often Singerriedl is the source of his top Riesling, but in 2018, I prefer the Steinporz, which grows on weathered gneiss soils. The stone-fruits nose is rich and opulent without being blowsy. Creamy, very ripe, it's a touch broad but that ripeness is cut by a stony minerality. Resplendent fruit, fine depth and impressive length. **Drink** 2020-2035 **Alc** 13%



Gritsch, Mauritiushof Ried Kalkofen Smaragd 2019 95

N/A UK www.gritsch.at
Spitz village, at the western end of the Wachau region, is generally cooler than other areas – now seen as an advantage in an age of global warming. Gritsch picked this on 6 November, and the ripeness is evident, with juicy apricot aromas. But the attack is fresh and bright, with tangy acidity and no sense of heaviness. Ample energy drives this taut, lean citric style, with its silky texture and long, mouthwatering finish. **Drink** 2021-2036 **Alc** 13.5%



Johann Donabaum, Ried Setzberg Smaragd 2018 94

£31.96-£36.90 (2015) Connolly's, Hallgarten Wines, Wine Poole
Although the Donabaum vineyards are in cool Spitz, the style is opulent, the nose exuberant with lush apricot and pears. The palate is unusually spicy and fiery, but also creamy with tension and limpidity. The balance is exemplary and the finish long, nutty, stony. For an even more full-throttle style, try the Limitierte Edition, a sumptuous blend of late-picked grapes. **Drink** 2020-2035 **Alc** 13%



KREMSTAL Nigl, Ried Hochäcker Privat 2019 95

N/A UK www.weingutnigl.at
From a cool site in Senftenberg on iron-rich schist. Scintillating nose, apricot and pear fruit, notes of wet stone. It's ripe, bright and racy with razor-sharp edges. Sleek, concentrated, it's oddly effortless and beguiling, balancing mandarins and ripe citrus on the mid-palate with a dry mineral structure. Flows beautifully from the attack to the long, tangy finish. Very long and moreish. **Drink** 2021-2035 **Alc** 13.5%



Proidl, Generation X 2017 95

£61.60 Amazon UK
As well as single-vineyard Rieslings, Proidl produces this blend from late-picked old vines; after brief skin contact, the must is fermented in tonneaux. The result is a magnificent if atypical Riesling style. It displays rich peachy aromas and considerable power and opulence. It's sumptuous, imposing and full-bodied; a hefty wine that avoids overripeness and is balanced too. This forceful wine has fine depth of flavour and texture, and the finish is very long and dry. **Drink** 2020-2032 **Alc** 14%



Stadt Krems, Ried Schreck 2019 93

£25 (ib) Lay & Wheeler
For almost two decades, Fritz Miesbauer has elevated the quality of the wines from the city of Krems' own vineyard holdings to a very high level. Schreck is an exceptionally steep site behind the town of Stein. The nose is bright and lemony, and the palate racy and charming. It's no blockbuster but has tension and clarity, and tangy acidity keeps it in balance. Elegant and persistent, it shows a very long and dry, mouthwatering finish. **Drink** 2020-2032 **Alc** 13% >



KREMSTAL (cont...)
Josef & Philipp Bründlmayer, Ried Moosburgerin Reserve 2018 92

£21 *Stannary Wine*
 Despite the loess and limestone in the soil of this small site in Gedersdorf, Kremstal, it can produce impressive Riesling. The nose is exceptionally lively: aromas of lime, grass and mint, and an underlying mineral bite. It's silky and intense. The high acidity gives the palate a taut and linear character. Very dry, it may lack some flesh but it's vivid and vivacious, with presence and personality. The finish is long and stony. **Drink** 2021-2032 **Alc** 13%



Malat, Ried Silberbichl Reserve 2018 92

N/A UK www.malat.at
 Malat is an important estate across the Danube from Krems. Silberbichl, with its gravel, schist and loess soils, lies close to the Wachau. This has a light almond fragrance, as well as lime fruit and a vibrant stoniness. Suave and full-bodied, despite the moderate alcohol, it shows plenty of grip and weight. The mid-palate is spicy and citric while the finish is assertive and long. The invigorating 2017 Steinbühel from Malat is of similar quality. **Drink** 2020-2032 **Alc** 12.5%



Salomon Undhof, Ried Pfaffenberg Reserve 2018 92

N/A UK www.salomonwines.com
 The Salomon estate is in Stein, a small town that borders the Wachau region. Many of its vineyards are steep and on primary rock, giving their wines an affinity with those of its neighbour. The 2018 Pfaffenberg has great purity of fruit, with rich but vivid lime aromas. There's a splendid attack, with grapefruit and bitter-lemon flavours. It's bracing and direct on the palate, which is slender but shows ample flavour and verve. Long finish, with drive and balance. **Drink** 2021-2032 **Alc** 13%



Loimer, Ried Seeberg 2018 93
 POA *Liberty Wines*

Fred Loimer is one of Austria's most dynamic producers, offering a wide range of wines. Seeberg lies at 300m, its soils containing sand and silt over schist. Tasted from a cask sample, this biodynamic wine is surprisingly tropical on the nose, with mango and peach fruit. Yet the attack is racy and precise, with assertive acidity that gives it punch and piquancy. It's neither aggressive nor sharp as there is fine weight of fruit too. It has a long, bracing, stony finish. **Drink** 2020-2032 **Alc** 13%



Schloss Gobelsburg, Ried Heiligenstein Reserve 2018 93

£55.80 *Hedonism*
 Michael Moosbrugger, Gobelsburg's director, has made this large monastic property the intellectual centre of the region, where he explores different styles of winemaking. His Heiligenstein has a vibrant and exuberant nose, with spicy stone-fruit aromas. On the palate it's very ripe, yet taut and precise. A concentrated wine, it shows clarity and a mineral undertone, yet it's surprisingly accessible, perhaps because the acidity seems a touch low. **Drink** 2020-2034 **Alc** 13.5%



Willi Bründlmayer, Ried Heiligenstein 2019 93

£27-£33.50 (2018) *AG Wines, Christopher Keiller, Philglas & Swiggot*
 From a cask sample, this Heiligenstein from the region's best-known producer is still very primary. The nose is delicate, with apple and apricot aromas. The palate is still discreet and lean, racy and pungent, with an assertive sweet and sour tone. It's not overtly fruity, but has exemplary concentration and minerality, with tension, energy and structure on the long, dry finish. **Drink** 2021-2035 **Alc** 12.5%



Josef & Philipp Bründlmayer, Kaiserstiege 2019 91

£18.90 *Stannary Wine*
 This is not a single-vineyard wine, but an entry-level blend produced from terraced sites around the town of Gedersdorf. It's aged on the lees to give a bit more weight. It's ripe and appley on the nose, while the attack is fresh and quite mineral, with tangy, nutty tones. This is racy and charming, showing ample poise and finesse. It has a long and bracing dry finish. **Drink** 2020-2025 **Alc** 13%



Mantlerhof, Ried Zehetnerin 2019 90

£16.67 (2016) *Buy Great Wine*
 This historic estate makes a broad range of wines from its vineyards in Gedersdorf in Kremstal. Zehetnerin is low but sheltered, producing wines with ready accessibility. There are delicate pear aromas on the nose, and the attack is fresh and crisp, zesty and lifted. There's little complexity but it's very attractive. The 10g/L of residual sugar is not that evident. **Drink** 2020-2028 **Alc** 12.5%



Rainer Wess, Ried Pfaffenberg 2018 90

£21.50 (2016) *The Wine Society*
 Many of Rainer Wess' best wines come from vineyards in the small town of Stein, and this Pfaffenberg is no exception. The nose is still reticent on the 2018, with discreet aromas of citrus and pineapple. There's appealing clarity of fruit but the palate lacks some succulence. The style is lean and lacks some drive, but it's sleek and charming with a lightly mineral finish. **Drink** 2020-2026 **Alc** 13%



Jurtschitsch, Ried Loiserberg Reserve 2018 92

N/A UK www.jurtschitsch.com
 A new generation is fine-tuning the range at this long-established organic estate. High, windy Loiserberg is rocky with a fairly shallow layer of loess topsoil. Lush and opulent rather than elegant, with robust stone-fruit aromas. It's exuberant and refreshed by lively acidity, giving a more citric character than the nose. Upfront and full of fruit, with good length. Aged in large old casks, but without oak influence. The Heiligenstein is of comparable quality. **Drink** 2020-2030 **Alc** 12.5%



Birgit Eichinger, Ried Gaisberg Reserve 2018 91

£23.50 *Lechevalier, Vinoramica*
 Birgit Eichinger has run her family's estate since 1992, and her wines are always reliable. This Gaisberg is a touch austere on the nose, but the apricot and lime aromas are ripe and charming. Bright and juicy on the palate, this is spicy with sufficient tangy acidity to give some tautness. Although the finish is long, it's also fairly soft, so this should probably be enjoyed for its youthful fruit. **Drink** 2020-2028 **Alc** 13%



Hirsch, Zöbing 2019 91

N/A UK www.weingut-hirsch.at
 Zöbing is the village where the Kamptal's top Riesling site, the Heiligenstein, is located. This biodynamic entry-level village wine is admirable if not as powerful or concentrated as the single-vineyard wine. The nose is exuberant, with very ripe apricot aromas. It's lush, juicy and intense, with a hint of sweetness that's balanced by ripe acidity. The finish is long and nutty. **Drink** 2020-2026 **Alc** 12.5%



Stift Göttweig, Ried Silberbichl Reserve 2016 90

N/A UK www.weingutstiftgoettweig.at
 The great monastery of Stift Göttweig lies on the south side of the Danube, and its wines are produced by the same team responsible for Stadt Krems. This has a subdued apple-compote nose, while the palate is creamy and broad, with moderate acidity that makes it drinkable young. It displays ample, ripe appley fruit, but lacks some energy and has a soft finish. Quite long. **Drink** 2020-2025 **Alc** 13%



KAMPTAL Allram, Ried Heiligenstein Reserve 2017 93

£30.25 *Alexander Hadleigh, Slurp*
 Heiligenstein is a large and varied site, known for its primary rock soils, and it is far from uniform, which explains why so many Rieslings are produced here. Delectable pear and apricot aromas, a limpid attack, tangy acidity. Admirable clarity of fruit and precision, but not overtly fruit-driven. Concentrated, discreetly powerful, it exhibits ample extract on the finish, which is balanced, stony and long. A classic Riesling. **Drink** 2021-2034 **Alc** 13.5%



Hiedler, Ried Gaisberg Reserve 2017 93

N/A UK www.hiedler.at
 Gaisberg, a site with gneiss as well as loess soils, is less renowned than Heiligenstein, but can produce exceptional Rieslings too. The nose is dense and appley, while the palate opens fresh and vibrant, with delightful apple and stone-fruit flavours. Yet it's also mineral and tangy, and the hint of sweetness is balanced by fine acidity. It's not overly concentrated, but it's still robust and long. **Drink** 2020-2032 **Alc** 13%



Leindl, Ried Heiligenstein Reserve 2019 90

N/A UK www.weingutleindl.at
 Georg Leindl has only been vinifying his estate's grapes since 2013, so he is a relative newcomer. The nose is decidedly pretty, delicate and citric. The attack is limpid, with appealing purity of fruit if little depth or complexity. Lemony but not tart, this is somewhat one-dimensional but also refreshing and zesty. Not a great Heiligenstein, but a wine of lift and charm. **Drink** 2020-2028 **Alc** 12.5%



Schloss Gobelsburg, Zöbing 2019 90

N/A UK www.gobelsburg.at
 This differs from Hirsch's version of this village blend by showing more breadth and weight. The nose is a delight, with charming aromas of apricots, apple compote and mandarins. It's rich and ripe with a hint of sweetness – a juicy, fruit-laden, entry-level style that may lack a little precision and subtlety, but it's mouthfilling, with good acidity and length. **Drink** 2020-2025 **Alc** 13%



VIENNA Wieninger, Nussberg Ried Preussen 2018 93

£31.99 *Fine Wine Co, Liberty Wines, Selfridges*
 Fritz Wieninger excels with Rieslings grown on Vienna's most celebrated site, the Nussberg. This biodynamic wine is still austere, restrained on the nose, with dried apricot aromas. The attack is svelte and ripe, showing depth and complexity without excessive weight. Its immediate juiciness makes it accessible, but there's plenty in reserve. The long, nutty, almost bitter finish suggests this needs more time. **Drink** 2021-2034 **Alc** 13.5% **D**