

WINE News

Feierabend! It's time to enjoy classic whites and new-to-you reds from Germany, Austria, and Alsace.



SEPTEMBER 30, 2019 FEATURES

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East of Épernay: Fresh New Wines from Old Regions

By Alex Pross

Some of the oldest wine producing regions in Europe reside in Germany, Austria, and Alsace in the east of France. Yet they often get overshadowed by the more ballyhooed regions such as Burgundy, Bordeaux, Italy, and Spain. Overlooking these historic wine producing regions would be a mistake, since they are making the best wines in their history. The wines of Alsace have never been better, and the younger generations taking hold in both Austria and Germany have brought new enthusiasm. The introduction of better winemaking technology—and the advent of warmer weather—has resulted in better wines. All three of

these regions produce elegant, low alcohol, food-friendly offerings that show minerality, texture, and substance, without being overwhelming. The reds are some of the best-kept secrets, with excellent Pinot Noir coming out of both Alsace and Germany, while Austria has numerous native varieties that offer earthy, fruity alternatives to the more tannic reds made in most other regions. Whether you buy a bottle of Trimbach or Max Ferdinand Richter Riesling, or a unique red from Moric or Rosi Schuster, I can guarantee you will be in for a treat. Have fun discovering the many gems from Alsace, Germany, and Austria.

2016 Trimbach Riesling Alsace (\$19.99)

Maison Trimbach has been in the game in Alsace since 1626, and is now run by the twelfth and thirteenth generations. Their flagship wine is an excellent value. Notes of petrol, wet stone, orchard fruits, and a streak of citrus make this a delightful Riesling. Ian D'Agata of Vinous writes: "To be frank, anyone who can make 350,000 bottles of an entry-level wine this good has simply unbelievable talent. Chapeau!"

93 WE, 91 VN, 90 WS



2018 Dönnhoff Estate Riesling Trocken

Nahe (\$23.99) From one of the greatest Riesling producers in the world, this 2018 estate bottling is a gorgeous example of the character of Nahe Riesling. Fruit and spice intermingle with stony soil tones in an utterly charming wine. The easygoing nature of the 2018 vintage also comes through in the wine's open, inviting profile. You could easily lay this down for a while, but why wait? It's awesome now.



2018 Grüner by Etz Grüner Veltliner

Kamptal (\$13.99) This K&L staff favorite is fresh, minerally and crisp, with that classic Grüner white pepper lift to the nose and tangy green apple and snap pea flavors on the palate. In an easy-to-open, liter-sized bottle, it's a refreshing go-to for a variety of green salads or veggie dishes, and is particularly complementary to dishes featuring asparagus, Brussels sprouts, or artichoke.





Mosel Magic! Max Ferdinand Richter 2018 Riesling

Germany is on a roll! Germany used to have a good-to-great vintage about three times a decade, but now it seems like almost every vintage is at least good—and very often now, very good to even great.

The 2018 Rieslings from Max Ferdinand Richter are some of the best wines of this good-to-very-good vintage. You would be wise to snatch up these wonderful offerings before they sell out, as they represent some of the best values currently available in Germany.

Situated in the Middle Mosel at Mülheim, the wine estate of Max Ferdinand Richter has roots in the seventeenth century, and has been operated by the same family for nine generations. Today, Dr. Dirk Richter runs the winery with help from his son, Constantin.

Many interesting side notes stem from the estate's long history. Wine from the estate's Mülheimer Sonnenlay vineyard was served in the 1920s and 1930s aboard the ultra-modern Zeppelin airships—including the Hindenburg—and a Bauhaus artist was commissioned to create the wine's commemorative labels, which are still in use. The estate's Veldenzer Elisenberg vineyard dates to the Napoleonic era. It seems that back in 1813, Napoleon Bonaparte and the remnants of his Grande Armée were in a cross mood after their defeat at Leipzig, and were inclined to either burn down the town of Mülheim, or tear up its vineyards, or both, until ancestor Franz Ludwig Niessen intervened with a cash payment. The town gifted the vineyard in thanks.

The reviews are already out, and the 2018 Max Ferdinand Richter wines have received high acclaim from Robert Parker's Wine Advocate as well as Mosel Fine Wines. These wines are in small supply, so get them while they last!

We're lucky to have the full range of 2018 Max Ferdinand Richter wines, including one entry-level Riesling and four Kabinetts. The **2018 Max Ferd. Richter Estate Riesling Mosel (\$15.99)** is a beautiful wine with aromas of white flowers and summer pears. The palate is refreshing and lively with notes of pear, apple, and peach. This is killer juice for an entry-level offering and is the ideal Indian summer wine. **91 RP**

Stepping up a notch, we have the **2018 Max Ferd. Richter Brauneberger Juffer-Sonnenuhr Riesling Kabinett (\$19.99)**, an incredibly complex and exciting offering with intense fruit and impressive structure for an under-\$20 Riesling. **94-96 RP, 92 MFW**

The **2018 Max Ferd. Richter Veldenzer Elisenberger Riesling Kabinett (\$19.99)** is a slightly sweeter, richer Kabinett than the structured Brauneberger. This is a wine that is open for business. Ripe orchard fruit, oily texture and notes of spice make this a fun, even hedonistic offering. **92-94 RP, 92 MFW**

The first of two Kabinett offerings from Wehlener Sonnenuhr, the **2018 Max Ferd. Richter Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Kabinett Feinherb (\$21.99)** is a drier, more elegant wine, with aromas of dried apricot and white peach. The palate is more energetic, with classic orchard fruit notes and spice notes and a dry, long finish. **93 RP, 90 MFW**

The **2018 Max Ferd. Richter Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Kabinett (\$19.99)** has an aromatically seductive nose of candied ginger and poached pears. The palate is rich with gorgeous pear, ginger, and red apple notes. This is a delicious and easy to drink Kabinett. **93-95 RP, 91 MFW**

If you're looking for a bit higher octane, then the 2018 Spätlese are for you. With this outstanding trio of wines, you can't go wrong with any of these fine offerings. We start off with the **2018 Max Ferd. Richter Veldenzer Elisenberger Riesling Spätlese (\$24.99)** a fantastic single-vineyard offering that truly highlights the strength of the 2018 vintage. **94-96 RP, 92 MFW**

Next we move onto the **2018 Max Ferd. Richter Brauneberger Juffer-Sonnenuhr Riesling Spätlese (\$25.99)** a powerful, statuesque offering that epitomizes the simultaneous power and finesse these wines are capable of holding. **95-96 RP, 94 MFW**

We end our wonderful trio of Spätlese offerings with the **2018 Max Ferd. Richter Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Spätlese (\$26.99)**, the most approachable and satisfying wine of the trio to drink now. This wine is open and layered, showing sweet orchard fruit, ginger, and dried mandarin notes. **94-96 RP, 93 MFW**



Öst with the Most: Austria Abounds with Values, White and Red

Austria sometimes feels like the forgotten country when it comes to wine and wine values, but that's a huge mistake! When I took over as buyer for the Austrian wines category, I was nonplussed at first, but I quickly began to realize that there were not only startlingly good values, but numerous top-notch offerings of Grüner Veltliner and Riesling. Austria is challenging both Germany and Alsace for the mantle of greatest Riesling in the world. Just as exciting as the white wines of Austria are the reds. They are spicy, earthy, vibrant, the tannins aren't too heavy, nor is the oak, nor do they have the stratospheric alcohol levels found in many red wines.

Austrian Whites

Now is the perfect time to explore the world of Austria's white wines. There are so many amazing values and interesting wines, and they are ideally suited for today's cuisines. Fresh, lively, bursting with fruit, and relatively low in alcohol and oak, these wines will match most of your food choices. The **2018 Nigl "Freiheit" Grüner Veltliner Kremstal Niederösterreich (\$17.99)** is an amazing value. This wine is loaded with fresh orchard fruits, subtle spice notes, and a pleasing palate length that is remarkably long for an entry-level offering. The 2018 Freiheit is a rival for the traditionally more expensive and sought-after Alte Reben and Piri offerings. It is rare to prefer the less expensive offering, but in 2018 the quality of this wine is so high, I think I would rather drink the Freiheit right now.

Another easy-drinking Grüner Veltliner, the biodynamically farmed **2017 Hirsch "Hirschvergnügen" Grüner Veltliner Kamptal (\$16.99)** displays the greatness of the 2017 vintage in Austria with notes of pear and lemon peel on the nose, and a weighty palate of stone fruits, ginger, and biscuit notes. **91 WE, 90 JS**

The **2017 Jurtschitsch Zöbinger Heiligenstein Riesling Erste Lage Kamptal (\$39.99)** is easily on a par with the finest Alsatian Rieslings. Lemon and petrol notes give way to a refreshing palate of citrus and stone fruit flavors. The balance here is excellent, and the wine feels light yet substantial all at once. This feels regal, and if tasting it blind, I could easily see pegging it as an Alsatian Grand Cru rather than an Austrian Riesling. **95 WE, 94 RP**

Bründlmayer is one of Austria's top producers of both Grüner Veltliner and Riesling, and their **2018 Bründlmayer "Kamptaler Terrassen" Grüner Veltliner Kamptal (\$19.99)** is outstanding! Poached lemons and pear notes rise from the glass while the palate is a celebration of orchard fruits and ginger spice. Great length, perfect balance, and a strikingly long finish make this an impressive value for under \$20. **90 WE**

Not to be outdone, the **2017 Bründlmayer "Kamptaler Terrassen" Riesling Kamptal (\$19.99)** clearly demonstrates why Austrian Riesling is garnering more and more acclaim. Petrol and nut skin aromas present themselves almost immediately, then the palate surges forth with peach, mandarin,



and roasted nut flavors. The acidity here is perfect and everything harmonizes, which gives this wine the ideal body, length and complexity one expects from a top-notch Riesling producer.

91 RP, 91 WE, 90 JS

These entry-level offerings from Bründlmayer are so good, you'd be remiss if you didn't check out the amazing Alte Reben (old vine) and single vineyard offerings that really push the envelope and enlighten one as to what greatness Austrian white wines are capable of achieving.

Austrian Reds

There are also some pretty amazing red wines coming out of Austria as well. Honestly, I knew a bit about white wines from Austria, but had pretty much ignored the red wine revolution that has taken place there. Not only have the wines dramatically gotten better in quality, but many of them are inexpensive and partner well with almost any kind of cuisine.

In the past a lot of Austrian reds were hard and tannic. Not anymore. Most are lively, zesty, and easily approachable. The **2017 Erich Sattler Zweigelt Burgenland (\$14.99)** is a delicious little red wine that way over-delivers, considering its price. The nose is loaded with red and black fruits and spice notes, and the palate is rich and inviting, with berry fruit, licorice, and Asian spice flavors. A prime match for pizza, pasta, or burgers, this wine is a great compromise when trying to decide between Cabernet Sauvignon and Pinot Noir.

One of my favorites right now, the **2017 Rosi Schuster Blaufränkisch Burgenland (\$19.99)** starts off with heady aromas of sour cherry, black licorice, Amaro, and spice. On the palate, red fruits dominate, and then give way to a cool rush of menthol and spice. This wine is sleek and elegant, and can pair with a wide variety of cuisines.

91 RP

The **2017 Moric Hausmarke Rot Burgenland (\$22.99)** is an earthy blend of primarily Zweigelt, grown with organic methods, with Blaufränkisch making up the balance of the blend. Showing notes of menthol and earth, this red berry-fruited wine is sure to please lovers of earthy Syrah and Beaujolais.

Stepping up a notch or two quality-wise, we have the **2017 Moric Blaufränkisch Burgenland (\$28.99)**, which is considered to be one of the quintessential reds of Austria, and is made by Roland Velich, who is recognized as one of Austria's greatest winemakers. The nose here is absolutely seductive, with aromas of menthol and white chocolate, and then a palate of pure red cherry and fresh tobacco. The finish is long, and the tannins lovingly grip your teeth for just a second, not enough to detract from the finish, but just enough to remind you of the heft and weight of this wine. A serious Blaufränkisch, and a great example of a fine Austrian red wine.





Altenbourg vineyard in Alsace.

The Artist of Alsace: Maison Pierre Sparr

The Sparr winery has more than a little experience making wine in Alsace, having been founded by Jean Sparr back in the '80s—the 1680s. Nine successive generations labored to maintain and expand their wine estate. In more recent news, young Pierre Sparr, aged 20, assumed responsibilities for the winery in the early twentieth century. With a forward-thinking motto of “invest, progress, and maintain,” Pierre became a pioneer in estate bottling in Alsace. He maintained a sense of determination through World War II, and rebuilt his family’s beautiful domaine after a protracted battle between US and German units destroyed his village of Sigolsheim and its vineyards in late 1944. Today, Maison Pierre Sparr farms 15 hectares (37 acres) of vineyards and sources fruit from another 150 hectares (370 acres) farmed by growers who share the winery’s philosophy.

One exciting new change at Pierre Sparr is the elevation of Alexandra Boudrot to the position of cellar master. Alexandra has worked in Alsace for 12 years and has a degree in winemaking from the University of Dijon. She grew up in Nuits-St-Georges and has a passion for organic and sustainable farming.

The wines of Pierre Sparr represent some of the best values in all of Alsace and we’re lucky to have five current offerings on hand from this producer on the rise. We start with a dynamic duo of sparkling wines, which are starting a buzz in the region of Alsace.

Pierre Sparr Cremant d’Alsace Brut (\$16.99) This blend of 80% Pinot Blanc and 20% Auxerrois Blanc has a light yellow hue with hints of green. Look for aromas of sweet Galia melon, dried mango, and nuts. The soft mousse is accompanied by crisp acidity, and a citrus hint of lemon adds freshness to the finish.

One of my personal favorites is the **Pierre Sparr Cremant d’Alsace Brut Rosé (\$16.99)**, made from 100% Pinot Noir and aged on the lees for 12 months. The wine is a salmon pink color with fresh aromas of strawberry and raspberry. Round and fruity, with hints of peach and red fruit flavors, this wine is nicely framed by the lively acidity, and finishes dry.

With Sparr’s trio of white wines, the value is hard to beat. The **2017 Pierre Sparr Riesling Grande Reserve (\$16.99)** is bone-dry, with layers of citrus fruit as well as notes of wet stone and mineral. The palate is fresh and lively, with impressive complexity for an entry-level Riesling.

The **2017 Pierre Sparr Gewürztraminer Grande Reserve (\$17.99)** is a full-bodied masterpiece, showing aromas of white peach and baking spice, while the palate is a magical blend of orchard fruits, tropical notes, and a racy floral component as well. Great depth and richness make this a traditional Gewürz that deftly combines fruit and spice in a beautiful package.

Lastly, the **2017 Pierre Sparr White Blend “One” (\$16.99)** is a blend of 40% Muscat, 40% Riesling, and 20% Pinot Gris, which gives the wine both lychee and tropical notes while it simultaneously tastes dry and minerally. The wine is light and racy, with a spicy and long finish dominated by clean, refreshing fruit. This is a fun, zesty wine that is incredibly versatile.



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