

The wine group that I belong to arranged a wine tasting for last Saturday evening. The theme was “alternative whites” for summer drinking. The intent was to call attention to the fact that there is life beyond chardonnay. The group brought in Sancerre, Fume Blanc, Viognier, and Vernaccia. These wines are good selections, however I felt like such a dummy when I realized I’d forgotten to suggest an excellent choice from Austria, a wine made from the Gruner Veltliner grape. (Gru-Vee for short) It would have been a perfect addition as the wines made from this grape are affordable and plentiful in the Lowcountry.

There are approximately 12 varieties of grapes planted in Austria. Of those 12 varietals, Gruner Veltliner is the dominant varietal, taking up nearly 40% of all acreage under vine. This is obviously the result of the demand for the dry wine produced therefrom, and the reputation that the wine has for being food friendly. Other varietals planted of importance are Muller-Thurgau(7%) and Riesling(4%).

There is evidence from archaeological digs in Austria that wine production of some form took place almost 4000 years ago. Fast forward to 276 AD and we find that the Emperor Marcus Aurelius endorsed the growing of Gruner Veltliner grapes north of the Alps. This helped viticulture to thrive for an extended period until the fall of the Roman Empire. This was followed by invasions of Bavarians and Slavs in the fourth and fifth centuries, causing serious damage to the crops and wine production facilities. This was followed by a roller coaster pattern of peace and prosperity, war and destruction, and back to peace and prosperity well into the 1800’s. Then, in 1872 the phylloxera root aphid wiped out most of the vineyards of Central Europe. Although it took several decades for the wine industry to bounce back, this recovery in Austria focused on replacing lower quality grapes with better varieties, particularly Gruner Veltliner. The post recovery period from the Phylloxera disaster saw Austria become the third largest wine producer in the world.

Now that we know that the Gruner Veltliner Grape survived war, biological invasion, peace, and God only knows what else... where are we today? In my opinion, we are where we were 4000 years ago. Gruner Veltliner is still here. We can still enjoy this wine, young or aged, by itself or with food. Modern winemaking technology has given Gru-Vee a boost, thus enabling the wine to age for the long term.

Now for an experiment. Try a tasting of Gruner Veltliner side by side with a Riesling from Austria. Gruner Veltliner is by far the largest wine produced in Austria. However Austrian Riesling, although only 4% of all the wine produced in Austria, is still a pretty tough competitor.

Both wines possess the ability to age well. I will say no more. Just have fun and enjoy!

The producers of Gruner Veltliner wine have done a terrific job marketing their product in the US. Gru-Vee is plentiful, and is available in stores and restaurants in Low Country.

Lets' take a sidebar. Austria is home to the very famous Riedel Wine Glassware. The Company is home based in Kufstein, Austria. Riedel was originally established in Bohemia in 1756 by Johann Riedel. 12 generations later, the Company is still in the hands of the Riedel Family.

Riedel is the originator of the concept of having many different glasses with characteristics designed to enhance specific types of wine. These range from the short, narrow-mouthed port glass, holding around 250 ml, to the balloon-shaped Burgundy glass, capable of holding an entire bottle of wine. In theory, the different shapes direct the wine to different parts of the mouth, emphasizing the best characteristics of the class of wine. Another characteristic of Riedel glasses is that they are designed to hold a SMALL amount of wine relative to the volume of the glass, allowing the aroma of the wine to collect in the bowl. Typically a normal glass of wine will take up only about a third or less of a Riedel stem. It is best that I refer my readers to the Riedel website for the proper glass to use with Gruner Veltliner. Please allow me to use the expression "works for me." I own a few Riedel glasses that are for Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon, and I am able to notice a big difference in the "nose" and "taste."

## Winespeak

Wines produced from the Gruner Veltliner grape need a bigger boost here in the USA to be considered a good white alternative to Chardonnay. However I can attest to one location in Vermont that has seen to it that Gru-vee has a place on their wine list; the superb dining room of the Trapp Family Lodge located in Stowe, Vermont. "Trapps" has the Gruner Veltliner wine produced from grapes grown in the Kremstal region of Austria. Chefs and wine critics alike agree that Gruner Veltliner is very food friendly. Next time that you are in Vermont, stop by the Trapp Family Lodge in Stowe and experience a "little bit of Austria."

Next stop: Oregon. We will taste some Pinot Noir.

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