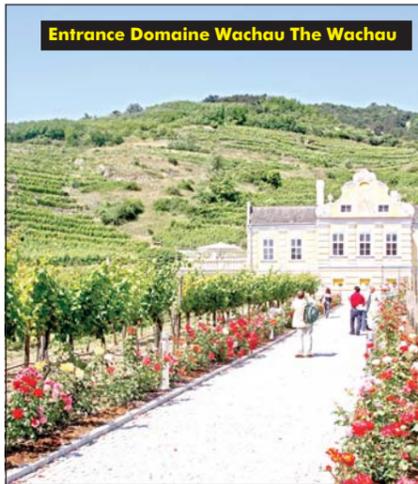


Wine cruising on the Danube the Wachau

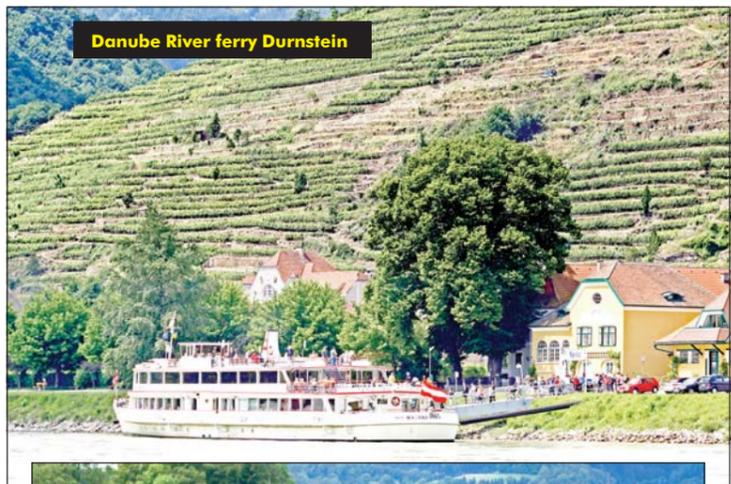


Entrance Domaine Wachau The Wachau

The Austrian Wine Empire



Steep vines Styria



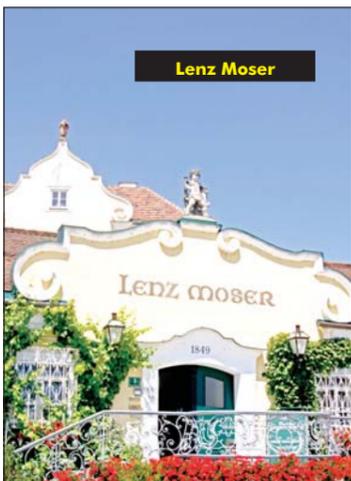
Danube River ferry Durnstein



Vineyard above Danube River Vienna



Pouring wines Vie Vinum Austria



Lenz Moser



Enjoying Austrian wine



Buschenschank Styria Austria



Sabathihof and vines Styria

By DAVID BOWDEN

For a small wine producing country, Austria punches well above its weight. The Austrian Empire was once one of the most powerful in Europe and while its wine industry dates back almost 2,000 years, many of its wines have only just started to be noticed by wine connoisseurs.

With total annual production of a little over 2.2 million hectolitres, Austria produces some 1 per cent of the world's total wine production. It lags well behind the three main wine producing nations of France, Italy and Spain but also behind mostly unknown wine nations such as Russia, Romania, China, Moldova, Greece, Hungary and Brazil. But this boutique star performer has successfully focussed on quality to capture the attention and imagination of the world's leading sommeliers and wine con-

noisseurs.

Wine has always played an important role in the economic activity of the nation's capital Vienna and it is one of the few large cities in the world where grapes are grown within the city limits (Adelaide in South Australia is another place where wine production occurs within the city). Over 700ha of grapes are grown in Vienna and the famous heurigen or wine cellars serving delicious Austrian fare and fresh young wines are an important part of the social landscape for the locals as well as tourists.

Indigenous Varieties to the World

Bringing 'new' indigenous varieties to the world is never easy but the Austrian Wine Marketing Board (AWMB) is leading the charge. With varieties such as

Grüner Veltliner, Welschriesling, Weissburgunder, Neuburger, Zweigelt, Blaufränkisch, St. Laurent and Blauburgunder you can appreciate the challenges confronting the AWMB. However, under the dynamic leadership of Willi Klinger, the AWMB is leading with the much acclaimed white variety called Grüner Veltliner (a very old variety with Traminer heritage) in the knowledge that the other varieties will eventually receive their due recognition.

With 72 per cent of the production being consumed locally, many may wonder why the Austrians are keenly promoting the export of the remaining 28 per cent. Like many other wine-producing nations, wines are a fantastic ambassador for the country and a great way to promote the nation and the many aspects of wine tourism. The numbers of boats cruising along the picturesque Danube River around the UNESCO-listed Wachau wine-producing region of Austria will attest to this.

Undoubtedly the most innovative winemaking developments in central Europe are occurring in Austria. Austria's wine industry has transformed itself over the past 20 years and now exhibits a vibrant and creative force of dedicated young winemakers, private estates bottling their own wines and premium dry wine styles suitable for those seeking quality wines.

Notable Styles

Over 50,000ha of vines are planted mostly in eastern and southeastern Austria. Approximately 70 per cent of the production is white varieties and 30

per cent reds and this includes more than 20 white and 13 red varieties. Red wines are slowly making their impact which is good news for those Asian consumers who have a preference for lighter-styled reds.

Another important jewel of Austrian wines is their range of sweet dessert wines. These are mostly produced around the Neusiedlersee area; a large, shallow lake on the eastern border with Hungary.

Eiswein, Beerenauslese and Trockenbeerenauslese are the sweet wines for which Austria is well known. Most of the Eisweins, for example, are sold at a fraction of the cost of the heavily marketed Canadian equivalents.

In Austria, a warm summer and a mild autumn combined with the moist air from the mists around the lakes and rivers offer favourable conditions for the development of Botrytis cinerea (noble rot) which is an important ingredient for producing sweet wines.

The production of Eiswein involves a lengthy and often risky procedure. After two or three frosty nights and a dawn temperature below minus 7°C, the grapes are sufficiently frozen to hand harvest and press into Eiswein.

Wine Touring

More and more travellers are including wine related activities in their travel plans. Austria is well set up for those who want to combine premium wines, gourmet food, some breathtaking scenery, spa treatments and golf. Being a small country, travelling around Austria is easy with its very efficient rail system but for visiting vineyards, a car is the

best way to explore the countryside. Some of the finest wine touring regions are Burgenland and Styria. An extensive range of travel material is available from the Austrian Office of the Commercial Counsellor in Kuala Lumpur.

Wines for Asia

Many experts believe that Austrian wines are perfect for the various Asian culinary styles. As such, an increasing number of importers are adding Austrian wines to their portfolio. Höppler Wines are produced in Winden situated beside the large inland lake of Neusiedlersee in Burgenland just to the east of the Austrian capital Vienna.

Jöst and son Christof Höppler produce their wines from Grüner Veltliner, Pinot Blanc, Chardonnay, Riesling and Sauvignon Blanc, Blaufränkisch, Zweigelt, Pinot Noir and St. Laurent grape varieties. They also produce a range of excellent dessert wines. Höppler wines are distributed in Malaysia by Luen Heng F & B (www.luenheng.com) as well as elsewhere in Asia.

Other Austrian labels are imported by Malaysian companies such as Sip or Slurp (Sri Hartamas, T: +603 6211-4386) and A & L Adventure & Leisure (www.a-and-l.com). In Singapore, Michael Thurner operates Austria's Fine Brands (www.austriasfinebrands.com) and represents several of the countries better producers (Huber, Jurtschitsch, Tement, Markowitsch, Johanneshof Rienisch, Juris, Weninger, T.F.X.T. and Tschida).

Contact: The Austrian Wine Marketing Board (www.austrian-wine.com) and the Austrian Office of the Commercial Counsellor in Kuala Lumpur (T: +603 2032-2830) for details on Austrian wine and travelling to Austria.