



The charming town of Kitzbuehel with its brightly painted Alpine chalets

Drinking Austrian Sunshine

Young wines by young winemakers with a passion for quality was the leitmotif at the Kitzbuehel Wine Festival. **Kishore** and **Smita Iyengar** tasted boutique Austrian wines and discovered some outstanding gems

Kitzbuehel in the Tyrol is an enchanting Alpine wonderland and the beautiful venue of the Kitzbuehel Wine Festival, a two-day celebration of the finest varietals and blends. Tucked away in the valleys around the Hahnenkamm Ranges, enveloped by undulating green pastures and fairytale Alpine timber chalets, nothing could have been more perfect for our tryst with some out-of-the-box, gastronomic experiences. The snow speckled the high ranges with a smattering of white, and brilliant sunshine elated our spirits as we gazed at the breathtaking, 360° view from the Kitzbuehelerhorn Summit.

In the immaculately preserved medieval Old Town area of Kitzbuehel, the cobbled streets lined with boutiques and cafés added to the festive atmosphere of the Wine Festival. Tasting counters at the quaint Hinterstadt Square offered excellent limited-edition wines produced by a new breed of boutique 'weinguts' (winemakers). Coming from Burgenland, Niederosterreich, Kamptal and Wachau, these young and exuberant red and white wines have blazed their way into prominence, thanks to the efforts of the winemakers who are dedicated to making the most of the sunshiny *terroir* of eastern Austria.

EXCEPTIONAL INDULGENCES

The most celebrated of the young winemakers from Andau-Burgenland – Erich Scheiblhofer whose Scheiblhofer has been consistently rated 'Winery of The Year' since 2004

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– presented his outstanding offering, The Legend. A fine blend of 2007 Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot matured for 16 months in French barriques, its bouquet of spice, moist pine and leather is complemented by distinct flavours of mushrooms, mild tobacco, clove and black currant.

Manfred Gruber, the unassuming and mild-mannered weingut from Lagenlois presented his smooth and floral 2009 Riesling Auf Der Setz from Kamptal, his 2009 Gelber Muskateller Kreuzberg from Niederosterreich with a surprising nectar finish, and the deeply fruity and stoutly woody 2008 St Laurent.

The enthusiasm of two other boutique winemakers drew our wine quest further to Ewald Diem and his wife and Josef and Maria Reumann from Mittelburgenland. Also from Niederosterreich, Ewald Diem's 2006 red Blauburger Exklusiv presented a fine nose of heather and moist wood with a lingering palate of oak and truffles. His 2009 Grüner Veltliner Gossripp was lemon-tinged with a lily and rose palate.

BOLD ENTERPRISE

But perhaps one of the greatest finds was Josef and Maria Reumann's truly outstanding limited-edition Vinum Sine Nomine 2006 Red from Burgenland with Merlot-Cabernet Sauvignon – a grand wine with an earthy, terracotta nose and prominent charcoal and tobacco flavours. Their Phoenix Cuvée 2008 Red, also from the same wine region, offered bold expressions: moist earth and roasted coffee, coming alive on the palate with cigar, charcoal and cinnamon flavours.

Our quest for interesting labels took us next to the Wachau region. Winemaker Lagler with his smooth Riesling Selection 2009 Spitzer 1000 from Eimerberg-Wachau offered superb floral and fruity flavours of passion fruit and nectarine. The sunshine-fresh Smaragd 2009 – Grüner Veltliner Spitzer Steinborz – was almost silky lemony with hints of juniper. The Lagler 2006 Zweigelt Spitzer Hartberg was a classic Zweigelt – Austria's cheery yet assertive red wine with a woody, cassis palate.

Rounding up our wine tasting evening, we concluded with winemaker Gertrude Seidl's 2009 Riesling Ried Kalkofen from Spitz in Wachau: provocative aromas of lime and light jasmine, with flavours of honeysuckle and melon. The friendly and chatty winemaker also presented her well-blended 2008 Cuvée from Spitz-Wachau. Its oaky, mild tannins with a lingering burnt wood aftertaste were uplifting on the palate.

ECLECTIC PLATTERS

In the evening, the town square was lively with the Kitzbuehel Band performing Mozart's compositions. The

Tyrolean signature dish, Spinach Nudel-Cheese Nudel and Pumpkin Ravioli in Butter Cheese Sauce was perfect with a 2008 Grüner Veltliner 'Das Beste' from Weingut Malat Hoehelgraben from Krennstal.

The next day, a brisk 60-minute uphill trek to celebrated singing chef and restaurateur Rosi of Sonnebergstübn was a good way to get up an appetite for her traditional Tyrolean delicacies. Roast potatoes with Tyrolean 'Kasespatzle' (cheese noodles)* and Egg pastry filled with fried onions and corn paired wonderfully with the light, citrus flavours of a fine Riesling Smaragd 'Singeriedel' 2007 from weingut Hirtzberger Spitz-Wachau. The Alpine hills in the distance changed tones with deep blue flashes and amber shadows as the hillock restaurant came alive with Rosi's spirited yodeling and springy guitar.

CELLAR CLASS

In the evening, a visit to a wine cellar was on the cards. Patrick Gruber, restaurant manager and sommelier of the luxury Hotel Weisses Roessl in Kitzbuehel had made sure that the underground stone-and-brick 'weinkeller' (wine cellar) was perfectly dressed with soft candlelight for our journey through some of his fine labels.

Gruber's first offering was an exemplary label, a 2006 'TO' (meaning 'Lake' in Hungarian) made by Winery Roland Velich in Apetlon, the only white wine maker from Burgenland on the Neusiedel Lake. The crisp blend of part barrel-aged Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc and Welschriesling came across with flowering aromas of passion fruit, orange rind and citrus-honey, the second fermentation revealing apricot on the palate.

Gruber's next choice was a 2007 'Bienen Fresser' (Bee Eater) Blauer Zweigelt classic Trocken from winery Hans Pitnauer-Camuntum with fruity, velvety sherry, and light berries as sensations, yet finely dry. Very exciting on the taste buds. The 1999 Cardinal from winery Giefing in Rust-Burgenland had been aged 26 months in barrel. Powerful flavours resulted from the late blending of Blaufrankisch+Zweigelt+Cabernet Sauvignon. We savoured the smoked, peppery, cardamom and spice flavours with a herbal nose and long finish. Gruber's grand finale was the exemplary 2008 Welschriesling Eiswein (ice wine) from winery Pirwi in the Thermen region. Freeze-harvested at 11°C at six o'clock in the morning, this honey-steeped and vanilla-laced wine was literally poetry on the palate. ♦

IF YOU GO

Qatar Airways flies to Munich via Doha from Mumbai and several other Indian cities. Lufthansa flies direct to Munich from Mumbai and Delhi. Kitzbuehel is just under 90 minutes drive on excellent highways from Munich's Franz Josef International Airport.



Clockwise from top left: Colourful facade of Alpine chalets; Gastronomic offerings at the signature Michelin star Neuwirt hotel enhance the wines; Tyrolean Spinach Nudel and Pumpkin Ravioli in butter cheese sauce, Hotel Zur Tenner; A selection of fine Austrian wines; Patrick Gruber offers exclusive wine tastings at the Hotel Weisses Roessl; Boutique winemaker Erich Scheiblhofer and his wife of the Legend Wine Fest, Tyrol

