

AUSTRIA

Just as Austrian sweet wines are richer and fuller than German versions, Austrian eisweins don't have the ethereal character of their German equivalents.

They have the same intense acidity, and the same stunning balance between sweetness and freshness. But they are more earth-bound, closer to the original fruit.

"One of the advantages we have here in Austria is that all our eisweins are made from physiologically ripe grapes," says Markus Huber, whose winery in Traisental, just south of the Danube, made a stunning Riesling eiswein in 2012.

"Before it really gets cold—which hardly ever happens before December—the grapes have had time to really get ripe," he says.

It's this ripeness that makes Austrian eisweins so rich.

Austrians don't want botrytis in their eisweins. So in November, they harvest any infected grapes for dessert wines and leave the rest.

Eiswein is a rarity in Austria. It's less of a tradition than the superbly luscious dessert wines, or local specialties like Ruster Ausbruch. Yet, it can be made all over the country, in the Danube regions (mostly Riesling) and in the Weinviertel to the north.

Weinrieder, close to the Czech frontier, makes occasional eiswein from Welschriesling, but the majority of eisweins come from Burgenland, in the area around the shallow, marshy Lake Neusiedl, which is the spiritual home of Austrian dessert wines.

In the flat landscape, where lake mists bring the annual crop of botrytis, a few brave souls leave a parcel of grapes to hang for eiswein. Some years, the wait can be long—the 2011 eiswein was harvested at the beginning of February 2012.

The grapes are an eclectic mix—Grüner Veltliner, Riesling, Scheurebe, Traminer, Welschriesling and even Zweigelt, which makes a rare red eiswein. Scheurebe makes the purest eiswein, an aromatic intermediary between the over-the-top perfumes of Traminer and the cleaner, more neutral Welschriesling.

As with most ice wines around the world, Austrian examples come in 375-ml or 500-ml bottles. They are not cheap: expect prices up to \$50. While almost every vintage produces some eisweins, the best recent years have been 2009 and 2011. —Roger Voss



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