

UP AND RISING

Austrian winemaker Markus Huber of Weingut Huber reveals the fine examples of his region's whites

TEXT SHASHA RENEE



ASSUMING THE MANTLE OF WINEMAKER AT

Weingut Huber 10 years ago, 10th generation vintner Markus Huber has proven his mettle in his commitment to expressing the regional characters of Traisental (the smallest wine growing region in Lower Austria) in his wines. In fact, the thirtyone-year-old has gone beyond being recognized as the region's leading lion. Under his helm, Weingut Huber received the gold medal for the 'Best Austrian White Wine Producer' at the London International Wine And Spirit Competition in 2006 as well as numerous other awards, propelling the winery onto the international stage. "We want to be representative of what we have [in the region], to make dry, crisp white wines with good acidity and clear, focused minerality," he says. The family winery in Reichersdorf (situated 32 kilometres from Vienna) started in 1548 as a cooperage. It was only in the last 10 years that Markus Huber has been concentrating on the wine business, and was recently joined by his younger brother.

"Austria is still undiscovered. It's never going to be a mass market product as production is limited and family-owned vineyards make the wines themselves and don't hire wine consultants. Wines are still handcrafted and grape selection done by hand," he explains. Lying along the same latitude as Côtes de Beaune

in Burgundy, the vineyard area is limestone-rich and experiences extreme variance in daytime and nighttime temperatures due to the warm air currents coming from the Donau Valley counterbalanced by the cool air flowing down the Alps. These ideal climatic factors allow for the pronounced clarity of fruit expressions and minerality. It is no surprise that Huber is focused on making single-variety wines particularly from Grüner Veltliner (75 percent of total production) and Riesling (15 percent of total production)—the two grape varieties permitted under the *Districtus Austriae Controllatus* (DAC) designation in Traisental—followed by Sauvignon Blanc, Zweigelt and Gelber Muskateller. Sticking to the classic style of these grapes, his Grüner Veltliner wines maintain their "aromatic spicy, fruit-driven elegance" while mineral notes shine in the Rieslings.

Within the Traisental region itself, he explains that there is "enough diversity in microclimates for different vineyards. We choose the ones we believe are really special," he adds. The grapes grown are located in vineyards known for producing long-lived whites, such as Berg and Alte Setzen. The Alte Setzen vineyard is one of the oldest vineyards within the area. Coupled with the limestone mix soil upon which fine wind-blown silt known as Loess has accumulated

TOP PICKS

HUBER RIESLING "ENGELREICH" TRAISENTAL DAC 2009

\$50 (without GST)

White peach with delicate hints of lemon on the nose, with vigorous finish with a touch of stone fruit.

HUBER GRÜNER VELTLINER "ALTE SETZEN" ERSTE LAGE TRAISENTAL DAC 2008

\$59 (without GST)

Intensive yellow with a wide spectrum of aromas ranging from delicate herbal spice to tobacco and ripe fruits. Good balance with nice acidity.

HUBER GRÜNER VELTLINER "BERG" ERSTE LAGE TRAISENTAL DAC 2008

\$72 (without GST)

Intensive yellow with ripe pear with hint of honey and a powerful finish.

All wines are available at Artisan Cellars (390 Orchard Road, B1-01 Palais Renaissance, Tel: 6838 0373)



for thousands of years, Grüner Veltliner thrives there, producing wines with "more weight and concentration." The high altitude, east-facing limestone terraces providing utmost sun exposure of the Berg vineyard is counterbalanced by the shade given from the nearby forest, ensuring a longer growing season and wines with "more pronounced acidity and crispiness."

Having worked abroad in countries like Australia and South Africa, Huber feels that those experiences have been very educational. "It makes you have an open mindset and creative," he says. "In the past, winemaking is passed on from generation to generation based on experience only. Now, you need to have a good formal education," says the viticultural engineering graduate from the HBLA university in Klosterneuburg. Embracing the new doesn't mean negating the old, and he continues to honour age-old traditions. "For example, I don't try to experiment with new French oak but stick to acacia wood which we have been traditionally using," he explains.

Weingut Huber is a member of the *Traditionsweingüter Österreich* (Association of Austrian Traditions Vineyards), a select group of 20 vintners from Danube areas in Lower Austria dedicated to terroir-oriented viticulture and classification of vineyard locations. **WD**