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Fans of the organic wine movement need to take a closer look at Austria in particular, where most producers are small family-run operations farming at least organically if not biodynamically. Their crisp Grüner Veltliners are exceptional, and their Rieslings, world class.

Germany is in the midst of a three-year hot streak of great-to-greater vintages that it has rarely—if ever—seen. Rieslings of depth, power, and poise abound, with your choice of the regally dry Grosses Gewächs or the sweeter Kabinett, Spatlese, or Auslese styles. The extraordinary run of great wines coming out of Germany means you can find a wine that will blow your mind at a price that won’t hurt your wallet.

Old and venerable, the wines of Alsace continue to stun and surprise me with elegance, refinement, and amazing structure. The classically styled Rieslings and pretty Gewürztraminers continually display a consistently high quality almost unparalleled in the world.

These regions offer an array of fun and affordable offerings that give you a great alternative to Chardonnay and Sauvignon Blanc. Aromatic whites match most cuisines and can easily elevate a dish to otherworldly levels. Producers like Trimbach in Alsace; Dönnhoff and Joh. Jos. Prüm in Germany; and Brundlmayer, Hirsch, Nigl, and Nikolaihof in Austria have given us an embarrassment of riches for you to buy and learn more about their styles. In stock and ready to go, these wines offer a great daily drinking experience for both the wine novice or aficionado.

Overlooked Wine Regions of Europe
By Alex Pross, K&L Alsace, Austria, and Germany Buyer

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2016 Trimbach “Cuvée du Troiscentquatrevingtdixième (390th Anniversary)” Riesling Alsace $49.99 95WE 94VN In his book Best White Wine on Earth: The Riesling Story, Stuart Pigott says, "Nobody has been doing high-quality dry Riesling longer and more consistently than the Trimbach family." This bottle is a testament to that history, made from the family’s very best holdings, and an ode to the family’s epic, multi-generational tradition of excellence. It’s a little bit of history in the glass, marking Trimbach’s 390th anniversary! From the first taste, you’ll agree that this is truly a celebratory wine. The nose is beautiful, with aromatics of petrol, spice, nut skin and iodine giving way to a vibrant palate of citrus, apricot, dried hay, and ginger notes. It is a full-bodied and deeply powerful Riesling. It displays impressive complexity and unfolding layers on the palate from start to finish.

Trimbach: Transcending Time

You cannot have a conversation about the history of winemaking in Alsace without discussing the impact Domaine Trimbach has had on the region. Its history goes back to 1626, and it is now under the direction of the thirteenth generation. Domaine Trimbach is an example of longevity meeting greatness. With a lineup that goes from impressive execution at a humble price point to the regal heights of arguably the greatest wine in Alsace, Trimbach hits high note after high note. We are lucky enough to have both an enviable in-stock array as well as wonderful, hard-to-find wines on pre-arrival. With some of the best pricing you’ll find anywhere, you owe it to yourself to grab a few. And if you haven’t had the opportunity to try many of these wines, now’s the time to see what all the fuss is about.

One of the factors that makes Trimbach so wonderful is the quality of their entry-level offerings. For example, the 2018 Trimbach Pinot Blanc at $18.99 is a bright, refreshing, delicious white wine loaded with notes of orchard fruits, white flowers, and subtle minerality. Next up in the category of reasonably priced and ridiculously delicious is their bread-and-butter wine, the 2018 Trimbach Riesling for $23.99 92 WS 91 VN 91 JS 91. It is a great Riesling with classic notes of petrol, wet stone, almonds, and orchard fruits. The palate is pure, with nice length and balance between the tannins and acidity that seamlessly leads to a clean, mouthwatering finish.

Easily one of my favorite Gewürztraminers, the 2017 Trimbach Gewürztraminer $27.99 91 VN 91 JS 91 WS has beautiful aromas of peach blossoms and fresh apricots while the palate is awash in fresh peach flavors sprinkled with nutmeg and mineral notes. This is a beautiful Gewürztraminer. The 2017 Trimbach “Sélection de Vieilles Vignes” Riesling $42.99 96 WE 95 JS 93 VN 93 WA 92 VN comes from two rigorously selected plots of very old Riesling vines in Hunawihr by Pierre Trimbach. It feels like a shimmering version of the entry-level Riesling on steroids. Dry, crisp, layered with power and depth, this is a fantastic Riesling that absolutely dazzles.

A very special cuvée, the 2016 Trimbach “Cuvée du Troiscentquatrevingtdixième (390th Anniversary)” Riesling $49.99 94 VN, is a celebration of Trimbach’s longevity and is sourced from a collection of great plots throughout Alsace. Incredibly complex and deep, this wine slowly unfurls to reveal beautiful notes of petrol, iodine, orchard fruits, and citrus. A literal celebration in a glass! Lastly, we have the 2011 Trimbach “Cuvée Frédéric Émile” Riesling $69.99 94 JS 93 WS 93 WA 92 VN, which I think the critics have underrated! This is a fascinating wine. Designed to be aged, it perfectly showcases a benchmark aged Alsatian Riesling with notes of petrol, almond skins, and an intriguing oxidative sherry note. There is wonderful acidity and a tightly wound core of orchard fruits and citrus notes that mingle with the hint of oxidative notes. This is the quintessential example of an age-worthy Alsatian Riesling.

We also have two very special pre-arrival offerings that are due to arrive in July 2022. Both of these wines are scarce in quantity and sure to sell out. The 2014 Trimbach “Cuvée Frédéric Émile” Riesling $89.99 96 JS 94 WA 94 VN is another stunning offering and the latest in a long line of must-have Cuvée Frédéric Émiles. There is no other wine in Alsace that quite showcases the greatness of Alsatian Riesling quite like Trimbach Clos Ste-Hune. It ages both glacially and gracefully and takes on attributes often associated with great white Burgundies and fine white Bordeaux. The 2017 Trimbach “Clos Ste-Hune” Riesling $249.99 97 WE 96 VN 92 VN 92 VN is the latest and greatest Clos Ste-Hune offering from Trimbach.
The winemaking team at Dönnhoff features the third- and fourth-generation father-and-son duo of Helmut and Cornelius Dönnhoff, who are arguably fashioning the best dry Rieslings to come out of the Nahe region in Germany—some say they are responsible for putting Nahe on the winemaking map. The family has a deep history there that can be traced back over 200 years, beginning with livestock and vegetable farming until they finally turned their attention full-time to grape growing and winemaking. The wines of Dönnhoff have reached their greatest heights ever since Helmut Dönnhoff took the reins in 1966.

Today he works in tandem with his son Cornelius to produce wines that showcase the marvelous terroir of Nahe. Dry- and organically farmed and hand-harvested, the wines are a true representation of their bucolic estate—25 hectares of steep hillside Grand Cru vineyards. Known primarily for making Trocken (dry) and GGs (Grosses Gewächs) grown from Gross Lage (Grand Cru) vineyards in a dry style, the wines of Dönnhoff compete with the very best dry Rieslings of not just Germany but of the world.

The 2020 vintage is now the third strong vintage in a row that Germany has enjoyed. It’s a true rarity to string consecutively this many good-to-great vintages. The 2020 vintage has power, depth, complexity, yet astonishingly bright and vivacious fruit notes. You’ll also find ample acidity even though this was once again a “solar” vintage.

Along with Max Ferdinand Richter, the wines of Dönnhoff, in my humble opinion, represent the best values today in German Riesling, especially dry German Riesling. Cornelius, who has been in charge since 2007, puts it this way: “The basic wines are the wines that most people will taste first, so we have to make them as good as they can possibly be.” A great place to start is the 2020 Dönnhoff “Estate” Riesling Trocken (dry) Nahe $22.99 92WA 92JS shares many similarities with the Estate Riesling but with a slightly drier and sleeker packaging. It is perfect for those who prefer a drier German Riesling.

Going a step up the price ladder, we have the 2020 Dönnhoff Oberhäuser Leistenberg Riesling Kabinett Nahe $26.99 94JS 93WA is such a great Kabinett with pure, clean fruit flavors and aromas all seamlessly blended into a perfectly balanced Riesling.

Drier and crisper, the 2020 Dönnhoff “Tonschiefer” Riesling Trocken (dry) Nahe $27.99 93WA 93JS crackles from the glass with tension and verve as well as beautiful tangerine and citrus flavors. Wonderfully dry and complex, this is a benchmark example of a Trocken Riesling.

Where Dönnhoff really excels is Grosses Gewächs, which are dry, Alsatian-style Rieslings made from Gross Lage (Grand Cru) vineyard-sites. These wines represent the best of the best that Germany makes, and we have a wonderful trio of wines. The 2020 Dönnhoff Krotenpfuhl Riesling Grosses Gewächs Nahe $69.99 95JS 93WA 92MFW is gorgeously structured with firm tannins and lively acidity that showcases the pure citrus, spice, and pear notes. Firm and complex, this is a fantastic introduction to the GG genre.

A bit more complex is the 2020 Dönnhoff Felsenberg “Felsentürmchen” Riesling Grosses Gewächs Nahe $79.99 98JS 95WA. It is powerful and layered with grapefruit, saline, and mineral notes.

The last of our trio of GGs, the 2020 Dönnhoff Höllenpfad Riesling im Mühlenberg Grosses Gewächs Nahe $79.99 97JS 94WA is extremely zesty with mineral notes and fresh aromas of herbs with a touch of pineapple. A young wine that is just scratching the surface of its potential, it is a prime candidate for a 5+-year nap in your cellar.

Get complete tasting notes at KLWines.com
The Prüm family has been in Germany’s Mosel region for over 400 years. The Joh. Jos. Prüm winery was established in 1911 when Johan Josef Prüm split from his family winery, S.A. Prüm. In the 1930s and 1940s, the winery’s reputation and style were largely established by Johan’s son, Sebastian Prum, who directed the winery until his death in 1969. His sons Manfred and Wolfgang then took over, and today Manfred runs the winery with his daughter Katharina, making some of the most iconic, age-worthy, and expressive German Rieslings around. These terroir-driven wines showcase the heights that German Rieslings can achieve.

Kabinett

The wines of Joh. Jos. Prüm go from strength to strength, and the Kabinets are fantastic. The 2020 Joh. Jos. Prüm Bernkasteler Badstube Riesling Kabinett Mosel $39.99 comes from a vineyard that borders the Graacher Himmelreich vineyard on the southern slope, with deep soils and a western exposure that provides longer access to the sun. The wines of Bernkasteler Badstube are lighter and more elegant in style than their counterparts in Graacher Himmelreich and Wehlener Sonnenuhr.

Easily one of my favorites year in and year out, the 2020 Joh. Jos. Prüm Graacher Himmelreich Riesling Kabinett Mosel $49.99. From a vineyard bordering the southern edge of Wehlener Sonnenuhr that is known for producing incredible wines, especially in hot years like 2020. This boasts characteristics of racy minerality, crushed rock, and citrus-leaning fruit flavors.

The last of our amazing trio of Kabinetts is the 2020 Joh. Jos. Prüm Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Kabinett Mosel $49.99. It comes from one of Mosel’s most famous vineyards, which routinely produces some of the greatest wines in all of Germany. The 2020 is a great vehicle for fruit from this stellar site, showing excellent structure, depth, length, plus gorgeous stone fruit accents. The Wehlener Sonnenuhr vineyard has once again excelled.

Spätlese

For those who prefer more powerful and richly textured wines, we have a quartet of amazing Spätleses. The 2020 Joh. Jos. Prüm Bernkasteler Badstube Riesling Spätlese Mosel $44.99 echoes all the hallmarks of its Kabinett counterpart, but is more focused and concentrated with intense fruit notes.

Auslese

The incredibly complex Ausleses from Joh. Jos. Prüm can age gracefully for decades and reveal an unparalleled depth and complexity. The amazing versatility of these wines is they can be both enjoyed in their youth, where they feel much like a young Sauternes, or aged, when they become complexed and nuanced. The 2020 Joh. Jos. Prüm Graacher Himmelreich Riesling Auslese Mosel $59.99 feels like the Graacher Himmelreich Spätlese on steroids—more vivid and structured with an unctuous feel and richness that never veers too sweet.

Not to be outdone the 2020 Joh. Jos. Prüm Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Auslese Mosel $69.99 is a monumental wine that showcases the incredible terroir of Wehlener Sonnenuhr in a richly textured opulence that unfolds ever so slowly on the palate. A stunner that you’ll regret not owning.
The Austria Dilemma: Why Aren’t You Drinking These Wines?! 

Austria has a long and impressive history for fashioning amazing wines—that many people have unfortunately never tasted. Sometimes erroneously lumped together with German wines, the wines of Austria tend to resemble those of Alsace more closely. Further, Austria easily boasts one of the most impressive organic and biodynamic resumes in the world. Gifted with rocky soils of gneiss, quartz, gravel, loess, and sand on hilly, terraced vineyards, it is the perfect place to grow stunning Riesling and Grüner Veltliner grapes. Austria is dominated by small, family-run wineries instead of large corporate entities, which have overrun many other wine regions.

There is no other grape more associated with Austria than Grüner Veltliner. Fun to say and even more fun to drink, Grüner Veltliners are incredibly versatile and can pair with almost any cuisine thanks to their acidity and structure. If you’re looking for an alternative to Chardonnay or Sauvignon Blanc, Grüner Veltliner is affordable and delicious. As important as Grüner Veltliner is to Austria’s wine industry, their Rieslings may be their greater wine. With arguably a climate and terroir more ideally suited to growing great Riesling than any other place in the world, Austria is just scratching the surface with its potential for making world-class Riesling. There are a ton of Rieslings available in the $50–$100 range but I would rather focus on two of the best values I have found.

The 2020 Bründlmayer “Kamptaler Terrassen” Riesling Kamptal $22.99 93JS is a worthy successor to the stunning 2019. White pepper, petrol, and orchard fruit notes greet the nose while the palate is awash in wet stone, orchard fruits, crisp tannins, and zesty acidity leading to a long, vibrant finish. If there is a better Riesling for the price out there, I would welcome someone showing me it!

The 2019 Hirsch Zöbing Riesling Kamptal $27.99 91JS 91DC is certified organic with apricot and lemongrass aromas. Notes of citrus and fresh nuts zoom across the palate with vibrancy and energy. Great complexity and harmony make this a wonderful entry-level offering.

Lastly, we have some very allocated wines from coveted producers soon to arrive, but, because of the scarcity, I have not written about them in detail. Nevertheless, please be sure to look for the 2019s arriving soon from F.X. Pichler, Pichler-Krutzler, and Hirtzberger.