

Zweigelt is different in a good way. Ever wonder why movie critics pick outlandish movies for critical acclaim? When questioned, they always say they have seen so many movies, they want to see something different. The same phenomenon occurs when you taste wine after wine. You begin to seek out "the different." But not crazy different. High quality, finessed, different different different. Zweigelt is just that, new with an old heritage, or as they say on TV, it's new to you. This red grape, Zweigelt, was the invention, yes, invention of a researcher named Fritz Zweigelt.

It was a dark and stormy night when Zweigelt crossed two other Austrian grapes, one of which has similar characteristics to the Pinot Noir grape we know and love, and gave life to this aromatic medium bodied grape. Enormously popular in Austria and throughout Europe, Zweigelt is best served slightly chilled to bring up the raspberry and cherry nose and palate. Bottled with a cap, *a la beer*, (ask us about the story there!) our Zweigelt comes in a liter bottle adding a few extra glasses to the table and making this a world class bargain!

But don't take my word for it, read Eric Asimov in the New York Times:

WINES OF THE TIMES

By ERIC ASIMOV

A GRAPE and a wine that go by the name Zweigelt have immediate obstacles to overcome on the path toward popularity. First and foremost is the fact that the American wine-drinking public is attracted to melodious wine terminology drawn from the romance languages. Chardonnay and merlot and Chianti and Rioja flow beautifully from the tongue, with connotations of captivating pleasures. Germanic words like zweigelt, blaufränkisch and, yes, rotwein, do not.

That has been true for years, but you know what? It's time to get over it. The pure pleasures available by being open to some of the less familiar Germanic wines are now too great to allow a little matter like language to stand in the way.

Today we're talking specifically about Austria. If Austria is known at all for its wines, it's for whites. Its dry, minerally rieslings are more full-bodied than Germany's, while its peppery grüner veltliners have actually achieved a modest vogue of their own. Yet as delicious as Austrian whites can be, the real excitement these days is in the discovery of its reds, most notably zweigelt (pronounced TSVYE-gelt) but also blaufränkisch.

The two grapes are linked by geography and by heritage, so the wine panel tasted them together, 12 bottles of each, along with one that was largely a blend of the two, for a total of 25 bottles.

For the tasting, Florence Fabricant and I were joined by Fred Dexheimer, a former sommelier who is now a manager at T. Edward Wines, an importer and distributor, and Aldo Sohm, wine director at Le Bernardin, who is not only Austrian himself but was selected best sommelier in the country this year by the American Sommelier Association.

Zweigelt and blaufränkisch are among the most widely planted red grapes in Austria. Blaufränkisch is the older, and it theoretically has the potential to make wines of greater depth and ageability than zweigelt, but it is also more difficult to grow and make into wine.

In Germany and in the United States, blaufränkisch is known as lemberger, and in fact our tasting coordinator slipped one American lemberger into the otherwise all-Austrian sample. We found some blaufränkisches that we liked very much, but we also found a stolidity in some of the wines that contrasted greatly with the lighter, more agile zweigelts.

Zweigelt is a relatively new grape, developed in 1922 when an Austrian scientist, Fritz Zweigelt, crossed blaufränkisch with St. Laurent. The grape was originally called rotburger, but mercifully, for English speakers at least, the name was changed to honor its creator. A few of our bottles came from areas associated mostly with white wines, like Kamptal, Kremstal and Donauland, but most were from the red wine territory of Burgenland, in eastern Austria, south of Vienna and along the border with Hungary.

It is no exaggeration to say that we were greatly excited by the zweigelts. They had a freshness and grace that marked them as wines that would go beautifully with a wide range of foods. What's more, they had an exotic spice and floral character, predominantly aromas of cinnamon and violets, that made them distinctive and unusual.

Fred compared the zweigelts to Côtes-du-Rhône. They reminded me of lighter Bierzos or spicy Beaujolais.

What helped make the zweigelts so good was the consistency of style among the producers. Unlike the blaufränkisches, which for the moment seem to have some identity issues, only one zweigelt among those we tried strayed from the lithe, nimble model.....

In comparing wines made from the two grapes, it's immediately apparent that blaufränkisch makes bigger and deeper wines, but they are not as graceful. The best blaufränkisches have a fullness that can be very satisfying, but some that we tasted seemed clumsy, as if the producers were unsure how to get the most out of this grape.....As for zweigelt, these wines are ripe for discovery right now. Their lightness makes them fine reds for summer drinking, while their spicy, floral flavors should sustain them in colder weather. Their price is right year round.....As for the name, well, take a tip from somebody whose own name could be Exhibit A in an alphabetical list of hard-to-pronounce words: zweigelt's not so bad.