



Written by
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Wirsching Silvaner trocken 2016 Franken



From €6.80, \$13.99, £12.75

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The other weekend we opened a bottle of Hans Wirsching Iphöfer Julius-Echter-Berg Silvaner Grosses Gewächs 2012, and it reminded me just how unexpectedly brilliant this grape is in the right place and in the right hands. It rarely gets any attention, despite a history of having been, at one point, the most important and widely planted white variety in Germany. I once described it as 'a librarian with a thick plait and glasses who turns out to be a rock musician in her spare time'.

I was partly wrong in that assessment. It's more like the quiet librarian who turns out to be a concert cellist in her spare time. Silvaner doesn't really do loud, attention-seeking rock. It's a quiet, unassuming, reticent grape and if you want anything from it, you need to seek it out. You need to spend a little time with it, not asking too many questions, away from noisy rooms full of clamouring people. It doesn't lead the orchestra and it doesn't fill the stage with flair and drama. But it has depth, it has structure, and it has a unique clarity and resonance of its own.

It originally comes from Austria, although there are barely 40 ha (100 acres) still there, and is planted – in small to tiny quantities – in Eastern Europe, Italy (Alto Adige), Switzerland, Germany (Rheinhessen, Pfalz, Franken) and France (Alsace). The New World, bar one or two producers, seems to be ignorant of its existence. It is in Franken, however, that Silvaner vines seem to find their place. The premier cru and grand cru vineyards of Franken produce astonishingly complex, rich, nuanced, ageworthy wines from this earthy, unobtrusive grape.

However, even in its more humble form, Silvaner can be surprisingly good. Andrea and Lena Wirsching, pictured above with their father Dr Heinrich Wirsching, make a *Gutswein* (estate wine), entry-level Silvaner for less than half the price of their grands crus. It's just 12% alcohol, delicately rather than bone dry with 3.9 g/l of residual sugar and crisp, but not wincingly high, acidity (TA 5.4 g/l). They make it from younger vines, picking the grapes earlier and bottling earlier than their classic-tier wines. They also ferment at lower temperatures to preserve a bit of carbon dioxide and give the wine a little bit of lively spritz.

Perhaps it's the sight of daffodils finally exploding into butter-yellow roadside cheerfulness at the tail end of a particularly long, cold winter here in the UK, but my first thought when I tasted this wine was: 'Proper spring wine!'. [Though see [Richard's suggestions for spring wines](#) published on Monday – JR] It smells of cool early mornings and elderflower cordial, and then, if you give it a chance to open in the glass, a little bit of nuttiness – that cobnut/green almond flavour that goes so beautifully with a bowl of salted pistachios or a plate piled high with steamed asparagus. There's a creamy green nuttiness on the palate as well – like the best ripe avocado mashed on malted whole-grain toast with a squeeze of lemon and a drizzle of grassy olive oil. And now you know what to eat with this wine... #hipsterbreakfastwine?

It doesn't have the broad-shouldered power and complexity of the top Wirsching wines, but it is neat, slimline, and just slots in at the table without a fuss, quietly getting on with just about any unpretentious meal you've plonked in front of it. But ideally, think light, cool, summery foods such as salads with feta or goat's cheese, crunchy parsley tabbouleh, little waxy new potatoes in fresh garlicky pesto, asparagus and soft-boiled eggs, lamb cutlets with minty dressing, smoked mackerel with buttered baby spinach. It's also light enough to enjoy a glass by itself – a summer staple for soaking up evening sunlight after work.

Sensibly, the Wirschings have decided to bottle it in a Riesling-style bottle rather than the charmingly traditional but awkwardly shaped *Bocksbeutel* bottles which their more prestigious wines come in. This makes it easier to chill and easier to store (and easier to pack into a picnic backpack!). It is also stoppered with a screwcap. This is a no-fuss wine.



The Wirsching Silvaner 2016 can be picked up in Germany for as little as €6.80 and from several US retailers at \$13.99 to \$28.99. Although the UK importer WineBarn doesn't feature on Wine-searcher, you can buy it online from them for £12.75. The 2015, which will still be drinking very nicely, is available in Japan and a few other US retailers. If you can't get hold of the Silvaner, the Wirsching's more exuberant, expressive and verbose Scheurebe is also available in Germany, US and UK for a similar price, although the Scheurebe is not as widely available in the US - more's the pity.

It's also worth noting, with Passover beginning today, that Wirsching make a 'kosher for Passover' Silvaner (NB not *mevushal*) under the supervision of Rabbi Mendel Edelman as a part of the Gefen Hashalom initiative, meaning Vine of Peace, which is a collaboration of wineries making high-quality kosher wines in Germany. The WineBarn in the UK sells it on special request for £21.99 a bottle. If you scroll to the bottom of this article, I've included three tastings notes for Gefen Hashalom wines, all kosher for Passover.

Find this wine

- Nik Weis, Gefen Hashalom Ockfener Riesling 2016 SaarBright lemon yellow. Smells of oyster shells and lemons. Sabre sharp and light as a ballerina on point. Lip-smacking citrus with a hint of spring-blossom honey and green apples. Appetite-whetting. (TC)10.5% Drink 2018-2020
16
- von Hövel, Gefen Hashalom Hütte Oberemmel Riesling Kabinett 2014 MoselDeep gold. Waxy and honeyed on the nose. Heady perfume. Fulsome, filling the palate like a violin crescendo, rich honeysuckle, deep grapefruit-zested folds and a keen edge of lemon-lined acidity. There's a fine touch of lapsang souchong tea-leaf smokiness towards the finish. Quite mature already, but rather lovely. (TC)12% Drink 2016-2019
16.5

- Hans Wirsching, Gefen Hashalom Iphöfer Silvaner trocken 2016 FrankenLight, leafy, lime-sherbet nose. All the wonderful creamy white nuttiness and chopped-herbs freshness of Silvaner, perfectly summed up in this wine. There is a delicate softness of ripe pear in the mid palate, a hint of grapefruit-pith bitterness in the framework, and a long tarragon draw on the finish. All I want with this is a huge bowl of *salat yerakot* (Israeli/Arab salad) and some warm flatbread. (TC)12% Drink 2018-2021

16.5