

WINE OCTOBER 2000



Sweet Wine Maker of the Year

Alöis Kracher

Alöis Kracher's wines have become hot property, not least because this self-confessed Austrian wine freak, White Wine Maker of the Year in 1994, then Late Harvest Wine Maker of the year in 1997 and 1998, is the master of the oozingly sweet and luscious botrytis wine.

Known as Luis to his friends, he is always on the lookout for a natural balance of concentration and finesse in his wines, hence the choice for his favourite blend of Chardonnay and Welschriesling. The Chardonnay provides richness – just like Semillon in Sauternes – and Welschriesling does the Sauvignon's job (or indeed that of Hárslevelü in Tokaji) of adding finesse to the blend. In addition to this favourite blend, he uses Scheurebe to produce wonderfully grapefruity, peppery sweet whites and Traminer for exotically spicy ones.

Luis admits to good fortune in the fact that the autumn humidity of the Neusiedlersee at Illmitz close to the Hungarian border, with its 40-odd small lakes, lends itself to the development of botrytis, or noble rot, on the vine. For a wine maker who makes such hedonistic wines, his approach can be surprisingly analytical.

He is meticulous about the length of time the wines spend on the lees and which type of wines are suited to fermentation in 300-litre acacia casks (the varietal Zwischen den Seen range) and which in new French oak (the Nouvelle Vague range).

In July this year, a boxed collection of 25 halfbottles of his varietal TBAs from the great 1995 vintage fetched £850 at Christie's, the London auction house. No wonder he wears a cheeky grin. The comparison of his own liquid gold with that of Château d'Yquem looks far from outrageous. ■

Anthony Rose