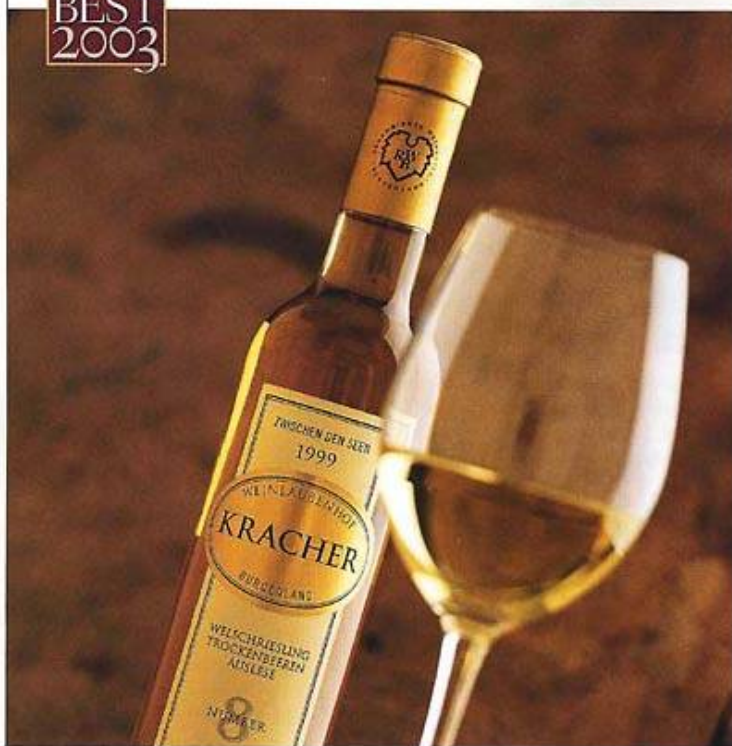


WORLD'S
BEST
OF THE
BEST
2003

International White Wines



1999 KRACHER WELSCHRIESLING TROCKENBEERENAUSLESE, ZWISCHEN DEN SEEN #8, NEUSIEDLERSEE *A taste of Austrian opulence.*

From his birthplace in Austria's Burgenland region, not far from the Hungarian border, Alois Kracher makes some of the best sweet wines in the world. These late-harvest stunners sit neck-to-neck with other botrytis-influenced wines such as Yquem, Hungary's finest Tokajis, and the superb botrytised Semillons of Australia. Austria has made remarkable progress in quality—and marketing—over the past dozen years, and Kracher is now at the head of an elite class of Austrian winemakers who are attracting international attention to their country's wines.

Known locally as Luis, Alois Kracher is a second-generation winemaker whose 73-year-old father, Alois Sr., still works the vineyards. Kracher studied as a chemist and worked in the pharmaceuticals industry before returning to the family estate in 1986. Within just five years, he created a sensation in Austria by crafting sweet wines in which style and finesse play as important a role as sugar.

Kracher makes two distinct series of wines: Nouvelle Vague (new wave) and Zwischen Den Seen (among the lakes). The French-inspired Nouvelle Vague line is *barrique*-fermented, but

the Zwischen Den Seen wines follow more traditional Burgenland techniques. Fermented in 300-liter acacia vats, the wines are low in alcohol and high in residual sugar.

The name "among the lakes" refers to the vineyard's flat, pond-dotted landscape near Lake Neusiedl, a popular destination for vacationing Viennese. Warm, humid summers ensure that the desirable botrytis fungus attacks the grapes every year. In any given vintage, Kracher will make as many as 10 different wines, each with its own distinct character. Most are varietally labeled (from grapes as diverse as Pinot Noir and Muskat Ottonel), but occasionally Kracher makes a blended *cuvée* as well.

Taking the term *Trockenbeerenauslese* (selection of dried berries) at face value, Kracher has pickers make as many as eight passes through the vineyard in a given harvest, selecting botrytised grapes at the optimum moment—after the noble rot has shriveled the berry and concentrated its juices, but before the grape develops an excess of volatile acidity.

Welschriesling is unrelated to the more famous Riesling grape, but this varietal is popular, under a range of names, in Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and Slovenia. About two-thirds of Austria's plantings of Welschriesling are in the Neusiedlersee region, where the high acidity makes it a perfect candidate for late-harvest treatment.

Kracher's 1999 Welschriesling *Trockenbeerenauslese* is velvety and luscious with a firm backbone of penetrating acidity. Lovely spice, dried fruit, and herb flavors play across the palate and segue into a long, exquisite finish. Austrian wines have received increasing recognition over the past few years, led by their finesse and purity of fruit. The Kracher wines are the ultimate expression of Austrian winemaking.

—ANTHONY DIAS BLUE

Vin Divino, 773.334.6700; \$60