



**PLUMPJACK**  
WINES

PlumpJack Wine Club

## April 2008

As Winter gives way to Spring, temperatures start to warm - although you wouldn't know it with 34-degree temperatures in Sonoma County last night! The selection of fruits and vegetables changes, and we are no longer bound to a diet based on stews, apples, potatoes, and other root vegetables. Dishes that include such items as green garlic, spring onions, asparagus, fava beans, pea shoots, spring lamb, and salmon grace the table. My organoleptic sensors that were in a state of semi-hibernation requiring big, full-throttle wines now awaken and seek bright lively wines that will compliment the new seasonal menus and won't overpower these fresh springtime flavors.

At the same time, I am not willing to forgo the strict requirements (remember the WOW factor from last month?) that a wine should meet, i.e. attractive aromas that jump out of the glass, well-defined flavors, intensity, complexity, balance, acidity, and structure. Our two wines this month meet all requirements, and should not be limited to springtime consumption only. They are vibrant in their youth, but both the white and the red will continue to evolve and improve over the next few years. Make sure to buy an extra bottle or two for the future, but don't let the season pass before enjoying the freshness these wines display right now.



The wine regions of Austria are divided into 4 areas: Lower Austria (Niederösterreich), Styria, Burgenland, and Vienna (Wien). Each of these regions is then further divided, for a total of 19 designated winegrowing areas. To try and take on a detailed knowledge of all these regions is a daunting proposal, so don't panic, this month we will only focus on one. Niederösterreich, is divided into 8 sub-regions: Wachau, Kremstal, Kamptal, Danubelands, Traisental, Carnuntum, Weinvertel, and Thermenregion. The Wachau, while not the largest region, is perhaps the best known of the 8 sub-regions. Kremstal and Kamptal produce some wines that are equal in quality to those of the Wachau, which isn't surprising since the western part of Kremstal is geologically identical to its better-known neighbor. The triad of Wachau, Kremstal and Kamptal are the source of many of the high-quality dry Rieslings and Grüner Veltliners that have fuelled the Austrian wine renaissance. Named for the river Krems and the medieval town of the same name, whose school for viticulture has been going strong since 1875, the Kremstal experiences some of the country's most dynamic temperature swings throughout the year. Scorching summers and bitter cold winters are said to lend a brilliant edge to the region's wines. The 62-acre Weingut Nigl is one of the most respected wine estates in Austria's Kremstal region. Martin Nigl is a man focused relentlessly on quality. From the way he kicks the rocks in his vineyards to his recent decision to cap all his wines with screwcaps, Nigl effortlessly juggles traditional winemaking techniques and new technology. While he may have moved to modern closures, for instance, he still insists that every grape that goes into his wine is harvested by hand at the peak of ripeness. Only natural yeasts are

*2006 Weingut Nigl  
Grüner Veltliner Kremser Freiheit  
Senftenberg, Austria*



*2005 Domaine Filliatreau  
Saumur-Champigny  
"La Grande Vignolle"  
Saumur, France*

used to ferment in temperature-controlled tanks. He doesn't chaptalize (increasing a wine's finished alcohol by adding sugar during fermentation,) and his musts settle by gravity. After fermentation the wines are racked twice, never fined, and bottled in the morning while they and the ambient temperatures are cool. Importer Terry Theise writes: "Nigl is unambiguously among the elite in Austria, yet within that small group his are perhaps the most intricately difficult wines. They do not pour a saucy blast of charm, nor do they have the explicit (perhaps even obvious?) intensity of certain famous Wachauers. On the other hand they're so precisely detailed and crystalline you feel your IQ increasing while they're on your palate. What impresses me about Nigl is his depth of texture. There are layers upon layers of the loveliest raw-silken fruit-mineral jazz, a little nubby and not so smooth the palate can't adhere, and just as you fall happily through all those cirrussy layers, you notice how crystalline it all is." The 2006 Nigl Grüner Veltliner Kremser Freiheit has inviting aromas and flavors of yellow apple, spring meadow herbs, juicy apricot and honeydew melon. The fruit flavors are surprisingly intense for a wine with such a light body and crisp acid structure. Minerals, apple, and a touch of peppery spice linger on the finish. Grüner Veltliner pairs beautifully with savory spices and nutty flavors. For a real treat, a traditional Moroccan chicken tagine that incorporates cumin, caraway, and coriander is a perfect match. It also works well with a simple pasta al pesto.

**The 2006 Weingut Nigl Grüner Veltliner Kremser Freiheit is \$21.99/bottle, \$237.50/case.**



The Loire has been a site of viticulture since Roman times, although the region has changed immeasurably since then. Viticultural regions have shrunk and expanded, new grapes have been introduced in the vineyard, and new methods have been utilized in the winery. The Loire is a vibrant and pulsating wine region which offers an abundance of whites in all styles, ranging from crisp and refreshing, rich and oak-influenced, fine and mineral, to the sweet, hedonistic and botrytised, as well as reds ranging from fine infusions of raspberry fruit perfect for summer drinking, to structured wines that demand years in the cellar in order to show their true worth. Saumur-Champigny is an appellation located in the central Loire. The vineyards are to the east of Saumur on a chalk and limestone plateau 200 feet above the left bank of the Loire River. Although the vine has been cultivated here for centuries, the Saumur-Champigny appellation we know today was only created in 1957. There are just eight communes qualifying for the Saumur-Champigny appellation, closely concentrated to the southeast of the city of Saumur itself. The appellation permits only red wines from Cabernet Franc, Cabernet Sauvignon and Pineau d'Aunis, although many are pulling up this latter variety in favor of the two Cabernets. Paul Filliatreau is largely responsible for the style of Saumur-Champigny wines as we know it—a vibrant, fresh, mineral-stony-perfumed red or, less commonly, a darker, more serious, old vines cuvée that does well in the cellar for a few years. Domaine Filliatreau is the largest single estate, about 124 acres, in the Saumur-Champigny appellation, and it is significant in terms of quality as well as size. Currently run by father-and-son team Paul and Frédrik Filliatreau, it is Paul that has pushed the envelope, constantly innovating and improving the wines during his tenure, bringing Domaine Filliatreau to the head of the Saumur-Champigny pack. They produce a number of special cuvées, and Domaine Filliatreau was the first to bottle separate expressions of Saumur-Champigny in this fashion. Their vineyards are managed along organic guidelines. The vineyard of La Grande Vignolle rests atop a tufa-stone outcrop that runs along the Loire River for a number of kilometers. During the 16th and 17th centuries, the stone, a creamy colored limestone, was quarried for building some of the great monuments and châteaux of the Loire. Cave dwellings and a few formidable houses were actually carved into the cliffs. The cuvée of the same name comes from a 17-acre vineyard at the site, with vines up to 40 years of age, resulting in naturally low yields. The soil and subsoil of the vineyard are highly calcareous, which produces Cabernet Franc grapes with juicy flavors and good acidity. The wine is vinified in stainless-steel and bottled unfiltered. The 2005 La Grande Vignolle is 100% Cabernet Franc. It has an intense and very typical nose - a blend of cherry fruit with sweet strawberry notes, sprinkled with a little black pepper. It is rich in red fruit flavors, has some ripe, peppery tannins, with a touch of tobacco and licorice in the finish and balanced acidity. It's a great accompaniment to grilled salmon, broiled or grilled chicken, steak and lamb chops.

**The 2005 Domaine Filliatreau Saumur-Champigny La Grande Vignolle is \$19.99/bottle, \$215.90/case.**