

» THE FEED
PLATES & POURS



MAKING A NAME FOR ITSELF

By Paul Gregutt

» If a pronounceable name is part of wine-marketing success, then Blaufränkisch must be among the most nomenclature-challenged. While there are often competing explanations for wine names, *Wine Grapes: A Complete Guide to 1,368 Vine Varieties, Including Their Origins and Flavours* states that “the word Fränkisch derives from Franconia, a historic region of Germany,” and was a name given to several varieties. “Blau” is German for blue. The grape is also known by other names, such as Lemberger. Blaufränkisch (Blouw-frahn-keesh) often refers to an Austrian grape, although it has been widely planted in Central Europe over the years.

The grape has been largely unknown in much of the United States, with notable exceptions including Washington state. Walter Clore, the man credited with jump-starting the state’s wine industry half a century ago, believed that Lemberger was an important red-wine grape that could be successfully ripened so far north. He planted test sites and evangelized for the grape for decades.

One of the first people to successfully grow it commercially was John Williams, who planted it on Red Mountain, west of Richland, in the mid-1970s. His Kiona Vineyards remains one of the state’s largest producers of Lemberger, at about 5,000 cases annually. JJ Williams, his grand-

son, says Lemberger is a pleasure to grow. “Our wine from the grape is versatile, with wide stylistic appeal.”

Other producers are obtaining Kiona grapes for their own Lemberger wines. Mike Lempriere, the owner and winemaker for Perennial Vintners on Bainbridge Island, west of Seattle, was introduced to the grape when his Bainbridge vineyard hit a bad weather year in 2011 and nothing ripened. “I had to get grapes from Eastern Washington,” he explains. He found that Lemberger from Kiona Vineyards fit his winemaking needs. Last year, he produced 61 cases of Lemberger wine.

The grape is making inroads in Oregon, as well. Dan Welsh, co-owner and winemaker of Welsh Family Wines in Portland, explains that he needed an entry-level-priced red wine to complement his more expensive Pinot Noir wines. A 2016 search on the Oregon Wine Board’s Grape Matching Service turned up Blaufränkisch, he says. The winery produced 175 cases of the 2018 vintage.

Among the grape’s virtues is its stylistic flexibility, although the classic Northwest Lemberger is a blood-red, lightly peppery wine, with scents and flavors of ripe berries and leathery tannins. It pairs well with everything from fish to grilled beef, to pasta with tomato sauce, and is a unique and flavorful option for wine enthusiasts. ✂

WINES TO TRY

- **Camas Prairie Lemberger, Idaho:** Nonvintage, with grapes from old vines in the Champoux Vineyards in Eastern Washington; evokes candied cherries, pepper and spice.
- **Kiona 2016 Estate Red Mountain Lemberger, Washington:** Claret style; ripe berries.
- **Welsh Family 2018 Blaufränkisch, Oregon:** Rare Willamette Valley bottling; wild berry, sweet spice and a whiff of leather. —P.G.

