

GERMANY 2016

TERRY THEISE ESTATE SELECTIONS

THEISE MANIFESTO

Beauty is more important than impact.

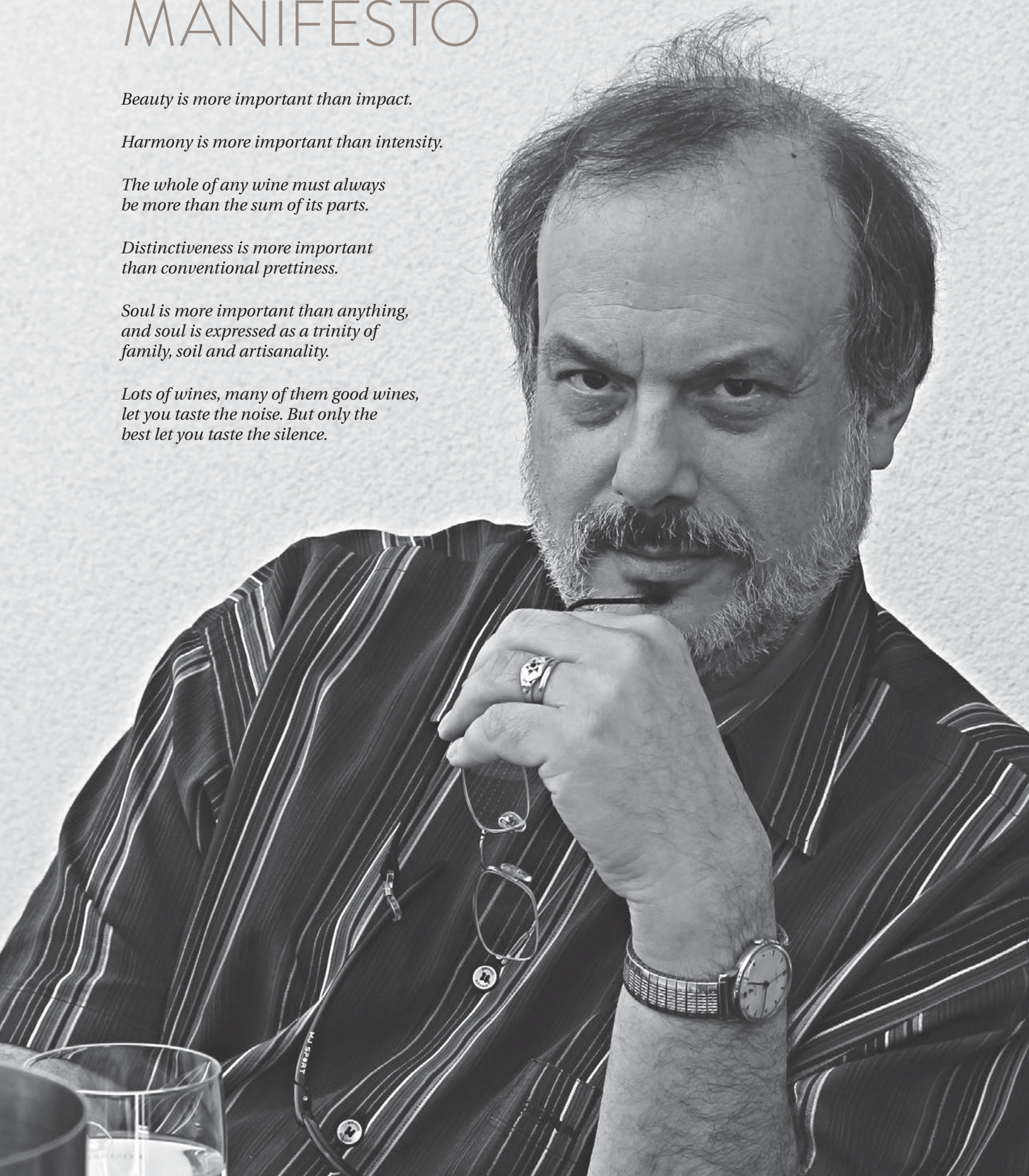
Harmony is more important than intensity.

*The whole of any wine must always
be more than the sum of its parts.*

*Distinctiveness is more important
than conventional prettiness.*

*Soul is more important than anything,
and soul is expressed as a trinity of
family, soil and artisanality.*

*Lots of wines, many of them good wines,
let you taste the noise. But only the
best let you taste the silence.*



CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1	THE RHEINGAU	55
The Shit you Gotta Understand...	2	Spreitzer	56
Old Site-Names Return	2	Künstler	59
THE 2015 VINTAGE	3	Weingut Goldatzel	62
<i>Whither Auslese?</i>	5	George Breuer	65
<i>Highlights and Superlatives</i>	5		
A Glance Back At 2014	7	MITTELRHEIN	67
German Bubbles	7	Weingart	68
Feinherb	7		
How I Select	8	MOSEL	70
What's With The Plusses?	8	Selbach-Oster	71
A Few Words About Tasting Notes	8	<i>J&H Selbach Regionals</i>	76
Notes On My "SOS" Scale	9	Meulenhof/Erben Justen Ehlen	77
Regarding Organics	9	Alfred Merkelbach	79
<i>Sommelier Alert</i>	10	Joh. Jos. Christoffel	82
		Willi Schaefer	84
PFALZ	11	A.J. Adam	87
Müller-Catoir	12	Reuscher-Haart	90
von Winning	15	Carl Loewen	92
Eugen Müller	19		
Herbert Meßmer	22	SAAR	95
Theo & Regine Minges	25	Vols	96
Kurt Darting	28		
RHEINHESSEN	31		
Strub	32		
Geil	34		
Gysler	37		
NAHE	39		
Dönnhoff	40		
Jakob Schneider	43		
Hexamer	46		
Kruger-Rumpf	49		
Schlossgut Diel	52		

INTRODUCTION



“I am crazy about Riesling. I don’t order it all the time because not everybody gets crazy about it. I don’t know why. I don’t know what’s wrong with these people.”

– PETE WELLS, *The New York Times*

“As an utter Riesling nut myself, I have come to the conclusion that Riesling remains a minority sport, an obsession for acid freaks with fairly advanced adult tastes.”

– ANNE KREBIEHL MW

Returning from Germany again, now for the 31st time, I’m more convinced than ever of two things: Riesling is the greatest grape from which wine—of either color—is made, and Germany is the place from which the most miraculous and maddening Rieslings come.

Let me answer Pete Wells’ implied question—what’s wrong with... people (who don’t like Riesling). Here’s what’s

wrong with them. They have very poor taste. That doesn’t make them bad people, but it creates a bad (or unfortunate) thing: poor taste decides the market for the greatest wine grape of them all. But why isn’t Riesling cherished as I think it ought to be? There are many reasons, chief among them that drinkers have decided that any wine with sweetness is *infra dig*. A wine that shows a fruit or flower-driven aroma must be sweet, or it wouldn’t smell that way, they suppose.

But, <sigh>, well OK. More for us. When have I *ever* had “popular” taste? Would I even recognize myself if I did? Still, I often think that people who love Riesling could be a little more helpful. For example, why does Ms. Kriebiehl harp on acidity as she does? The caricature of Riesling lovers as “acid freaks” tends to ghetto-ize us as people with truly geeky taste who ought properly to be marginalized. Many years ago I heard Hans Crusius—Peter Crusius’ father and the proprietor of the legendary Crusius

estate in Germany’s Nahe valley—remark to the effect that “We need to get rid of the notion that Riesling is great *because* of its acidity.” My (much) younger self thought the old man had three screws loose. Now I know he was right. Acidity is inherent to Riesling, but that doesn’t make it a fetish object. Too much acidity is nasty. If you can taste it blatantly there’s probably too much of it, or too little of something else, such as fruit or extract.

And then there are the Germans, and their wine culture. I am not going to hash out the hoary dry-versus-sweet thing yet again. I am going to make one simple point, a point I find to be self-evident. Riesling is very rare among white-wine grapes in that it makes beautiful wines at every point along the continuum of dry to sweet. *Every point*. But the Germans themselves tend to bi-polarize their wines into either very dry or very sweet, ignoring the many points of beauty and usefulness in between. Last Fall the *Wine Advocate*’s Stephan Reinhardt wrote me:

“Terry, I think there is just one really problematic issue: wines that are neither dry nor sweet but something in between (the “neither fish nor meat” wines). These wines (with residual sweetness of, say, 10-20+ g/l) are absolutely delicious for themselves and with food (and the sort we’d choose when we share a bottle one day). They also reflect their origins and are probably the most natural wines (when the fermentation is not forced) but they don’t have a lobby: they don’t have the Trocken brand and they don’t wear a Prädikat which are more and more reserved for nothing but—often excessively—sweet wines. That’s stupid marketing with respect to the nature of wine, to nature at all (though clever with respect to the needs of certain markets).

But you are right: there is something wrong with the knee-jerk German demand for dry wines or rather the bearish attitude against wines that are not dry. The result is that top wines with sugar levels of 10-30 grams have become very rare. And that’s a shame indeed.”

I am fully aware that any statement beginning with words like “The Germans...” is misleadingly categorical, yet with that caveat I also observe their signal blindness to that which is most unique (and therefore most precious) about their Rieslings, as well as their tendency to dither around the fringes of salience. Considering the basic struggle to give Riesling the stature it deserves, the German wine culture isn’t helping. For all its good intentions, it pisses in the pool.

We who love the wines, or we who’d like to love the wines, need a quick way through.

THE SHIT YOU GOTTA UNDERSTAND ABOUT GERMAN WINE TODAY

The single most important word on the label is TROCKEN. It means DRY. This isn’t because dry wines are better—they aren’t—but this one word will tell you the single most salient thing about the basic nature of what’s in the bottle.

If you do not see “Trocken” on your label, the wine will contain at least some sweetness. If it is just a teensy bit of sweetness, so little you can’t even be certain it’s there, you’ll probably see the word FEIN-HERB.

Germany’s prevailing wine law was enacted in 1971. It was a piece of shit then and it still is. Today’s growers observe just enough of it not to expose themselves to prosecution, and they ignore the rest.

The law, written before global warming, mandated ripeness as the only factor in quality. A line was drawn between chaptalized and unchaptalized wines. The latter were assumed to be made from grapes ripe enough to go it alone. There was a kind of ladder of increasing ripeness, and as you climbed it you passed Kabinett, Spätlese, Auslese and finally the dessert wines, Beerenauslese (a.k.a. BA), Trockenbeerenauslese (TBA) and Eiswein.

Spätlese was riper than Kabinett, and Auslese was riper than Spätlese, and because we associate riper things with sweeter things—think strawberries or peaches; the riper they are the sweeter they are—an Auslese was usually sweeter than a Spätlese, which in turn was usually sweeter than a Kabinett. This is why the “Kabinett” category has remained so popular; it is presumed to be the least sweet of the top category of wines. It also costs the least.

That category of unchaptalized wines is now called “Prädikatswein.” The word appears on the label. That is the old system in essence, and vestiges of it are still used. There’s more—isn’t there always?—but that’s for German-Wine 202.

A parallel system has arisen, thanks to the activities of a grower’s association called the VDP. It is a group of superior producers. Most of its members are in the top rank, though there are top-rank growers who choose not to join, for reasons of their own. The VDP has recast German wine along a Burgundian model. Pending an entire European Union re-draft of each country’s wine laws (sure to entail a nightmare), the VDP’s innovations are quasi-officially accepted.

VDP’s system is simple. It establishes three or four tiers of quality. You have estate-wine, village-wine, and both Premier and Grand Cru wine, or just Grand Cru alone. This is decided by each wine producing state. (If you’re curious, I personally favor the 4-tier model.)

The actual classification of vineyards is inevitably tendentious and controversial, but the system is a huge boon to consumers, because we now can know that if a vineyard site appears on a label it is an important one. Otherwise the wine simply carries a village name or just the estate’s name.

These wines from classified vineyards can be made in different styles. If they are DRY and among that category, the TOP dry wine from the estate, they’re called Grosses Gewächs. (Try “grocer’s g-vex.”) Until this year certain regions called them Erstes Gewächs, which means the same thing and will soon become uniform in

any case. If the classified site’s wine has SWEETNESS then it falls into the Prädikatswein quality-ladder.

The Nahe estate Schlossgut Diel is a classic example. They produce a Grosses Gewächs called Goldloch which is serious and dry. They also produce Kabinett, Spätlese and (usually but not inevitably) Auslese from the same site under its full name Dorsheimer Goldloch, which means “Goldloch of Dorsheim.” All of these wines carry the little insignia for classified sites on the label. So, if you want to be decently professional, I would argue this is all you need to know. There’s a lot more you could learn, were you so inclined, but I promise that if you master what I’ve outlined here, you’ll be equipped to handle 90% of what Germany throws at you.

OLD SITE-NAMES RETURN

Old-timers will recall that the 1971 German wine law collapsed what were some 20,000 single-vineyard names into an ostensibly more manageable 6,000. In so doing they wreaked quite a bit of mischief, blotting out a large number of useful important names and retaining or adding a lot of garbage-names that were either unimportant or misleading.

In many parts of Europe, every piece of land has a name. It’s not “block 37” or whatever; it has a name, and having a name, it has an identity, and having an identity it has a validity and an existence as real as that of the person who owns or tills it.

In Germany these are called Cataster names, sometimes spelled “cadaster,” and explained on this site: <http://www.fao.org>.

After 1971 the cadaster names were forbidden from use, but a few seditious souls among the growers kept using them, by means of some disguise, such as initials, visual symbols or “fantasy” names. I myself am deeply curious about the origin of my wines, and I’m pleased when they’re designated as specifically as possible. But one can fall down a rabbit-hole with these things, and I don’t need to know that any given wine came from “rows 16-21” or any such otiose detail. However, given that a large number of post-71 single sites were slovenly in their definitions and flabby in their dimensions, I was heartened when the old names started to show up again. While the EU reviewed the situation the names were “tolerated,” but now it appears they’ll receive explicit approval.

This makes me very glad, and here’s an example of why. Back in 1996 the



Strubs bottled two Niersteiner Hipping Spätlesen, one from the steep section and one from the flat section—which blatantly points out the stupidity of the disparate sections having the same name. How would we tell them apart? We couldn't use the cadaster names. We couldn't call one "steep" and the other one "flat," because the law said that whatever wasn't explicitly permitted was forbidden. In desperation we put the steep one in a green bottle and the flat one in brown. Today Sebastian and Walter can use the old cadaster names (Thal and Flächenhahl in this instance) and now we can see exactly where our wines came from.

This is just one of the ways the garbage-y '71 wine law is chipped away at until it becomes a relic that no one uses any more. And not a day too soon.

* THE 2015 VINTAGE *

It is the perfect vintage for its moment. And it was a perfect harvest for all the growers who suffered through the daunting challenges of 2014 and 2013. I'd sum up the consensus thus: "In 2015 we could pick when we wanted to, not when we had to. We could plan and calculate and get things just right."

The quick-and-dirty headline is, 2015 is *very* good, and it contains many great

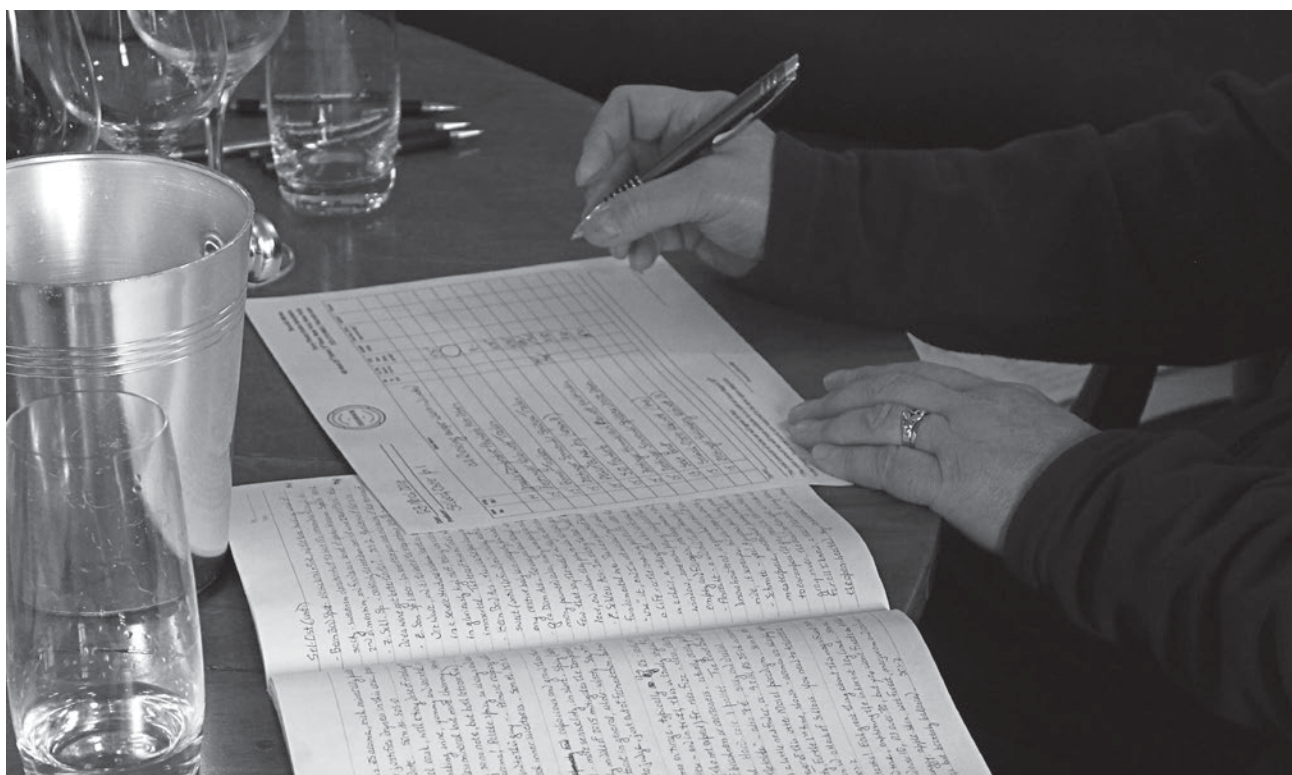
wines. I was pleased to see Michel Bettane observe recently that (paraphrasing) the presence of individual great wines, even a decent number of them, doesn't signify a great vintage, but only shows that great wines were possible within the conditions of that year. No one among the growers was hyping 2015 as the stuff of legend, though a couple growers were thrilled to the toenails with their own wines, and deserved to be. But we're all grown up enough not to need "OMG, best wines ever-r-r-r!" in order to be interested, right? Messrs. Trump and Cruz have troubled what faith I ever had in humanity, but I do hope that we needn't froth a volley of superlatives to get anyone interested at all.

The little sub headline would be "2015 crop just what the Doctor ordered." As indeed it is. How? After two vintages than ran along the "green" spectrum—that is, tensile, herbal citric wines that aficionados (like I) call "classic" and others with more hedonic tastes would call "lean"—2015 presents as a strong, even robust vintage, muscular and ripped. It's easy to see into, easy to grok, but while the wines are sturdy they are rarely brutish. They show Big Flavor. They're what we used to call "restaurant wines" because they come right at you and make an impression even in a distracting environment. As a rule they aren't lacy or filigree, though they are often seriously complex. But it is

a complexity born of extroversion. These mesomorphs like to party, but they have their share of quiet moments and they don't mind an evening with nothing but a good book.

They are the children of a very hot dry summer—but not only that. Still, anyone who looked at weather reports last July was wincing at the ghastly heat over there, above 100° in some stretches and for days on end. Experienced observers knew two things: those conditions favored water-retaining soils and/or old vines, and that many vineyards would basically shut off assimilation in order to hunker down and withstand the searing heat. You couldn't assume accelerated ripeness or low acidity; you could only hope the vines would manage. At least the heat was dry (in fact it was a series of Saharan warm fronts that gave rise to the conditions, so the growers were spared most struggles against mildews).

After adequate precipitation in late Summer, the crop enjoyed a remarkable October of steady sunshine but also cool temperatures. The grapes were ripe, small berried and very dry—"You really had to hunt for botrytis, and even then you barely found it," said many growers. Though there were plenty of bunches, and though bunches had plenty of berries, the skin to juice ratio was very high and so the crop size was on the small side of average. But no one was complaining, because at last it



was healthy and allowed you to calibrate your picking. Still, I heard several tales of irresolute growers who panicked during the September rains, fearing a repeat of '14-'13, and who had clipped, stunted wines from prematurely picked fruit. I also heard of (and tasted) wines picked *too* late, especially as one ventured south, and which were cloddish and almost brutally over-alcoholic. One grower showed me a Trocken wine with 15.1% ABV, which elicited exactly the repugnance one might have expected, and which he said he wouldn't bottle after all. Still, these were the exceptions, and every vintage has a shadow side.

After all this we could have assumed the wines would be replete with yellow-fruit flavors. But not really. The *average* 2015 is strong in impact but not especially dramatic in flavor as such. That said, I'm not someone who deals in "average" wines. It only helps to explain the platform on which the best wines are standing, which helps us appreciate them more. So, no baskets-of-peaches in 2015 (or not many) but a really fascinating aspect of *verbena* as a vintage marker. I was also surprised to see that extracts were high – not as high as in 2014, but higher than average and markedly generous from such a hot summer. I had been alerted that the vintage was "crunchy," and yes, its acids are prominent across the board. Geezers

will remember the 1990s, to which 2015 compares, though '15 benches an extra 75 pounds. Even more curiously, acidity was sometimes prominent even when it wasn't analytically high. The standard explanation of low extract (which buffers acidity) wouldn't work; extracts were generous. There is some reason why acidity displays conspicuously in many '15s, but I don't think I'll ever know it. I rather expect that every grower will have his/her own explanations, and trying to build a case from them all will drag us deeper into obscurity and metaphysics.

But let's contemplate acidity. After all, this is supposedly the *sine qua non* of Riesling. It certainly has its place and does many helpful things. The markedly long finishes of the best 2015 are at least assisted by high acidity. But I myself have become both pragmatic and holistic about acidity, as I have about every other single component of wine flavor. I appreciate acidity as long as there isn't too much of it. And there's too much of it when it's crudely assertive, when it dominates the structure and especially the last impression on the palate. The acids of 2015 might seem to mitigate against the success of dry Rieslings—and often that was indeed the case—but a lot of the wines were the best they have ever been because they were ripe. Alternately, the marked acids of 2015 might be seen to favor wines with

sweetness, as many growers theorized. And yes—sometimes! At other times one tasted attempts to balance a vulgar excess of acidity with an equally vulgar excess of sweetness, and those luckless growers are too close to the trees to see the forest.

So does 2015 favor dry wines or sweet ones? Neither! There are stunningly good dry wines and stunningly good sweet wines, and there are clunkers in both idioms. What I can say is, the sadly blinkered destiny of too many German Rieslings to be dry *at all costs* made for some truly dreadful wines, and one wishes those growers could wriggle free of the strait jacket they've had forced upon them. And yet, I have two growers from whom I only buy dry wines—Künstler and Von Winning—and both of them had consistently superb vintages. All of which adds up to the platitude; the best ones figure it out. A font of wisdom, that's me.

Considering the climactic extremes of 2015, the wines are surprisingly heterogeneous. Each time a sort of hypothetical "vintage norm" was identified there'd be an entirely exceptional and atypical collection that left me shaking my idiot head. Catoir, Dönnhoff, Spreitzer, Diel, Selbach—how did they make such wines?

I don't find significant distinctions among regions. Based on tastings at four domains, the Rheingau looked to be markedly and consistently outstanding.

The Pfalz veered between scintillating and (at times) overblown. The Mosel is where the vintage's acid-profile was most visible, but this wasn't a bad thing when vintners knew how to buffer. It was quite a relief to see healthy Mosel wines, after two years when too many of them tasted like goat-ass.

WHITHER AUSLESE?

A common theme of the vintage is... Auslese. Ah yes, the vinous love that dare not speak its name. *Auslese*, the wine no one wants (except the Chinese, who are keeping it alive from what I hear) yet everyone adores *while they are drinking it*. The inexplicable one.

Auslese suffers when one approaches it by demanding it prove its utility. "How do I use it?"

Auslese suffers from being the eternal lost-sheep in the flock, the one in the middle. Buyers who must have only the rare and sublime will gravitate toward the ultra-concentrated dessert wines, the TBAs—and my blood ran cold when several growers complained they couldn't even sell *Beereauslese*—compared to which the (mere) Auslese is seen as some sort of thin gruel of not-really-dessert wine.

Dudes, you're looking at it all wrong. Each angle you're viewing it from is wrong, and your entire conception of it is also wrong. Yet I sympathize, because there are way too many Auslesen that actually are feeble dilutions of the profound elixirs BA-TBA, too many which are kind-of-botrytisey wines, too many of which are both too sweet and not sweet enough.

But there are also miracles of beauty and rapture to be found here, and when you find one you couldn't care less about how you might "use" it, you're just glad it found you and will catch you when you swoon.

The secret, maybe, is to see Auslese not as a BA or TBA that "failed" but instead as a Spätlese that stretched to an even higher height. Those are the best kinds of Auslese, because they don't lose vinosity, they continue to be virile, compact and driven by fruit and mineral. And 2015 is full of such wines. And this is incredibly stirring, because here is an entire wine culture making a kind of wine we greet with a collective yawn, because.... why? It seems perverse on its face. Yet what I see is a type of wine that expresses gratefulness for a gift of nature. I also see a noble observance of an aspect of human culture; you do not spurn nature's gifts. One grower told me, "I see it as a kind of

duty, to make a beautiful thing when nature presents the possibility, and if I don't sell it then it stays in the cellar and my kids will drink it."

And here we are, scratching our heads thinking "Waddaya do with this stuff... maybe with a cheese course..." and I propose to you that you have the cart before the horse. The wine is a being of beauty and love. *It comes first*. You pay it the obeisance it deserves, you stop your busy life just long enough to be amazed you have a soul that can melt, you hear yourself saying "People have to taste this," and then, because you really are a genius, you figure out how to bring that about.

I'll tell you this. I don't like very "sweet" wines. Mostly I am bored by them. I want any wine I select, with whatever degree of RS it contains, to show *as a whole* and that sweetness be absorbed, assimilated and in perfect inconspicuous balance. Those are the kinds of Auslesen I selected. I overrode every bit of my mercantile hesitation in the faces of these wines. I probably won't sell them very much. I'm sad about that, but I also have a debt to the cause of beauty, and my small voice admonished me: How will I live with myself if I walk away from this wine? Have I really become *that guy*?

AGING THE 2015s

I suggest you err on the side of youthfulness with this vintage. I have no fear of premo, and I am certain the wines will "last and develop" for the expected 50+ years, but I have learned to be wary of vintages with prominent acids, which sometimes seem to decouple from fruit and create asymmetries I find awkward, and from which some wines do not recover. Among my many youthful errors was to make the common assumption "Oh wow, what electricity; these wines will live forever!" And yes—but what kind of life?

Some of these concerns might echo things we talked about when we considered the 2010 vintage. Indeed some growers compare '15 to '10, which it resembles superficially but to a much less freaky degree. It's always riskiest to make judgments on vintages like these, massively endowed and concentrated young bucks, sizzling with acidity and bulky with ripeness, and when you taste them in their baby-fat stage you forget that those chubs and dimples don't live very long. 2015 is a vintage to favor the classics, the growers with long track-records of balanced deliberate aging. And even then, to watch the wines closely. In that sense it's an ideal vintage for Somms, because

you guys seldom worry about whether a wine will go-the-distance unless you're buying for your own cellars. For the resto the vintage is perfect.

HIGHLIGHTS AND SUPERLATIVES

There are a lot of really fucked-up great wines in this vintage. I'll try desperately to remain disciplined.

THE WINERY OF THE VINTAGE IS:

It could be any of half a dozen names. Seriously. If we take **Dönnhoff's** name out of "retirement" then it is clearly him, and I think this is really Cornelius' ascension-vintage, the one where he starts to work a tactile alchemy. Similarly I can make a strong case for **Selbach-Oster**, but they're scooped the kudo so often of late that it may be time to retire their number also. Still, one stands in mute awe when faced with what they've both achieved.

Yet no one would be surprised if they see **Dönnhoff** and **Selbach-Oster's** names again. Yet again. Oh them again. Yes the wines are great, but we already know this.

I have a surprise for you. It was a surprise for me too. It's not as big a winery, and so the achievement doesn't denote the same degree of virtuosity or craftsmanship, and yet it was at least as miraculous and maybe even more so, especially following two very difficult crops. It's a sentimental beloved of mine, and I allow for that when I taste. But even then I was overcome. So, sybarites, give it up for the teensy little estate of **Merkelbach**, who slipped into some sort of apotheosis in 2015.

So I'll cheat a little. The "winery" of the vintage is actually three wineries. The larger ones are **DONNHOF** and **SELBACH-OSTER**, both of whom gave stunningly brilliant collections across a wide range, both at the summit of their powers. And the smaller one is **MERKELBACH**, who offered what is simply their best vintage since I have known them, over 30 years now.

OTHER MARKED SUCCESSSES:

(In the order in which I tasted them)...

Diel was incisive, articulate, gorgeous, craftsmanlike, and the dry wines were the best I've tasted there.

Spreitzer keeps improving, and one wine in particular was among the most pro-

found they've ever shown me.

Müller-Catoir was markedly strong in the RS-segment, especially with two toe-curling Rieslaners.

Minges showed me their best-ever vintage for white wines.

von Winning almost goes without saying now, having become one of the most significant estates not just in the Pfalz, but in all of Germany.

Adam was supreme in the dry and Feinherb idioms.

THE WINE OF THE VINTAGE IS:

(With Dönnhoff and Selbach included...)

Dönnhoff Hermannshöhle Riesling Grosses Gewächs

-or-

Selbach-Oster Riesling *Schmitt*

(without those two)...

Actually....**Adam** *Sängerei* Riesling Feinherb, an explosive and classic example of the future of German Riesling, endowed with every possible complexity and concentration.

RUNNERS-UP INCLUDE:

Schneider Niederhäuser Kertz Riesling Feinherb

Goldatzel Johannisberger Hölle Riesling Auslese

Spreitzer Winkeler Jesuitengarten Alte Reben Riesling Feinherb (this represents an apex both of the domain and the Rheingau in general, as great as it can be in its particular way.)

Müller-Catoir Gimmeldinger Schlössel Rieslaner Spätlese

von Winning 2015 Sauvignon Blanc "1"

Merkelbach Uerziger Würzgarten Riesling Spätlese #10

Selbach-Oster Zeltinger Sonnenuhr Riesling Spätlese 1-star

HIGH SPOTS AMONG ROSÉS:

(Insofar as more and more growers are producing Rosés, these are the conspicuous successes among them, YEAR-ROUND Rosés with stuffing and vinosity.)

Diel Pinot Noir Rosé (best vintage ever for this perennially classy wine.)

Schneider Spätburgunder Feinherb (mind-blowing!)

von Winning Pinot Noir (the most intense and driving wine among this category.)

Adam Pinot Noir (the most *interesting* and improbable.)

THE GREATEST TROCKEN WINES:

(In a category whose successes continue to grow both in number and in stature, which makes me *very* happy...)

Diel Goldloch "GG"

Dönnhoff Höllenpfad (not to mention Felsenberg "GG")

Spreitzer Rosengarten "GG"

Künstler Domdechaney

von Winning Langenmorgen (subjectively; I adore this vineyard) and/or Kirchenstück (objectively, as this is clearly *hors classe* among their range.)

THE GREATEST FEINHERB WINES:

(The most versatile, useful and ridiculously delicious dry enough wines, demonstrating the principle that "The perfect dry wine is often not perfectly dry.")

Schneider Niederhäuser Kertz Riesling Feinherb

Dönnhoff estate Riesling

Müller-Catoir "MC" Riesling

Selbach-Oster Graacher Domprobst Riesling Spätlese Alte Reben Feinherb

THE VERY GREATEST VALUES:

(In various price ranges, the wines that most impressively punch above their weight.)

Schneider Riesling Kabinett LITERS

Dönnhoff estate Riesling (in my opinion, the greatest white-wine value ON EARTH)

Minges Rieslaner Spätlese (a truly insane value for a total masterpiece!)

Merkelbach simply put—Every. Single. Wine.

von Winning "Winnings"

THE BEST AMONG A RANGE OF EXCELLENT MUSCATS:

(The sap is running. Buds begin to swell. Nature is dripping and melting. In the afternoon you can take off your jacket for the first time since October. Migrating birds reappear. This isn't the moment for drinking all those bosky complicated

wines you drank all Winter. This is the moment for letting your own sap run, and drink a wine you can *make out* with. Simple, stupidly delicious, salivatingly vital, dancing in the glass with ridiculous energy and spiciness. Like a great kisser who's also funny and wicked-smart, a young Muskateller won't make you write poetry, it'll make you tell raunchy jokes. It awakens dormant hungers. It is simple in the best way, and while there are examples that achieve complexity, and wines you can keep for up to a decade, the manifest destiny of Muskateller is to peep like a baby bird. If your wine-life doesn't include this most exquisite of basic pleasures, then man, you've forgotten what *fun* is.)

Müller-Catoir Haardter Bürgergarten (the absolute best in the offering, and the first time they've separated this from the general cuvée offered. This wine touches profundity, and shouldn't be missed.)

THE GREATEST AMONG AN EXCELLENT VINTAGE FOR SCHEUREBE:

Minges Gleisweiler Trocken

Minges (estate) Feinherb (This man is becoming the wizard of Scheurebe, and seems to go from strength to strength.)

THE GREATEST AMONG THE MANY GREAT AUSLESEN:

(In essence any Auslese I offer had to surmount my reluctance to clutter the portfolio with unsalable wine. But these were the utter best, and if they don't curl your toes you should check your feet to make sure you actually still have toes.)

Geil Riesling

Diel Dorsheim (and the Pittermännchen is equally good)

Hexamer Schlossböckelheimer In Den Felsen

Dönnhoff both Brücke and Hermannshöhle show this category at its most sublime.)

Müller-Catoir Haardter Herzog Rieslaner (the very best of them all!)

Minges Rieslaner (almost as stunning as the Catoir.)

Eugen Müller Forster Kirchenstück Merkelbach Uerziger Würzgarten Riesling #8 (The single greatest wine I have ever tasted from Rolf and Alfred.)

Selbach-Oster Zeltinger Schlossberg (A thrall of meditative Mosel perfection.)

A GLANCE BACK AT 2014

But only a glance, as this small-volume vintage is now largely sold through. In shorthand, this is a substantially better vintage than 2013, except along the Mosel where it is usually a lot worse. It's a complicated year, full of light and shade and qualifiers, and I see in myself a desire to whisk it off the stage to make way for the vrooming '15s. I don't approve of this, and as a self-examination I insisted on revisiting every '14 I could still obtain. Even allowing for the appeal of the yearling—tasting little baby-wines creates a context wherein the actual wine with some time in the bottle seems immediately more *interesting*—I find a lot to love about the best '14s. They have a fine-ness of texture the '15s don't have, and may never have. 2015 is more boisterous, which emphasized the placidity of '14 in contrast, but that calmness allowed a great deal of intricacy to be visible, and I kept thinking of chefs using tweezers to put teeny little micro-greens on the plate, and I will argue that such attention to tiny detail is numinous in itself. 2015 is an album full of loud songs, passionate and even breath-taking, but when the breathy little ballad comes along it's a kind of relief. Ease it back a minute; let me catch my breath. I loved '14 *more* in contrast to '15, and this doesn't always happen.

So I offer a few for the first time, and re-offer the few that still remained. They are finely chiseled and pensive, less ingratiating than '15 but arguably more friendly.

GERMAN BUBBLES

Two growers sent me new "Sekt" cuvées over the Winter. *Sekt* is what they call sparkling wine. For most of my life it wasn't taken seriously, but that is changing. Slowly, but changing.

The issue with both the bubblyies I received was the same; good interesting base-wines were (in effect) disrespected by thoughtless conceptualizing and not enough time on the lees. The first issue is one of paradigm; too few growers really consider the parameters of fine sparkling wine. They tend to use a barely ripe high-acid base, run it through tirage too soon after the vintage, and disgorge it too soon. (Very few actually do this work themselves; they send their wines to Sekt operations to do it for them based on the instructions the grower provides.) There is very little blending, and very little thought is given to the texture of the *vin clair* be-

fore it goes into tirage. Nor is there much thought given to dosage, and very few tasting trials.

The ones who do think about these things are able to offer something I think we need. Champagne is becoming a difficult proposition for by-the-glass, and smart Somms are all over the alternatives—other French Cremants (especially and justifiably Jurasien) and to a growing extent, German Sekt. So a few years ago I started to survey the landscape, and I found a few surprises along the way. Even our friends at Dönnhoff have some Pinot-based cuvées *en tirage*.

Which brings me to a second issue; what do they use to make Sekt? Riesling, much of the time, and this makes sense. But more and more of them are working with Pinots (Noir and Blanc, and sometimes also with Chardonnay) to try to make something "toastier." It's a good time to be watchful. Meanwhile, these are the ones that excited me, with detailed notes inside each grower's profile.

Meßmer The Brut Rosé 2010, 100% Pinot Noir, disgorged (for the final time) in late 2015, is among the most remarkable wines *PERIOD* in this offering, and is seriously wonderful fizz by any reckoning. Minges 2012 Riesling Extra Brut is like a modest BdB from Avize.

von Winning The new Extra-Brut is '14-based, and needs time to recover from disgorgement, but it's among the most ambitious I tasted.

Selbach-Oster 2013 Riesling Brut is actually a masterpiece and a *very* high-water mark for the genre. I greedily grabbed it. (There's also a Pinot Brut 2008 in tiny quantities; ask us if your interest is piqued.)

FEINHERB

I'll define Feinherb. These are classic examples of (yet) another adage I've coined: The perfect dry wine is often not perfectly dry.

In practice "Feinherb" can be used for anything from 10 grams/liter of RS (and most palates taste sugar discretely starting at 12g/l. "Brut" goes to 15) to somewhere in the high 20s. It's the zone where sugar is stealthy and as good as invisible. It's extending the fruit, increasing the aroma, moderating the alcohol, and dancing with the sweetness already in your food. But you do not taste it. That is, unless you're that pathologically bitter ghoul who hates any surmise of sweetness. Put another way, a good dry Riesling is

wonderful; a Feinherb Riesling is insanely wonderful, and is more flexible.

I'll list them here. Note that some don't actually say "Feinherb" on the label, but it's how they taste. And if you really want to be the hippest Somm in town, these bottles of liquid perfection will be infinitely hipper with your food than that Micronesian amphora Vitovska you want everyone to be jealous of you for scoring.

MÜLLER-CATOIR 2015 "MC" Riesling

MESSMER 2015 Riesling Feinherb

MESSMER 2015 Riesling Kabinett Feinherb "Muschelkalk"

MESSMER 2015 Muskateller Feinherb

MESSMER 2015 Scheurebe Feinherb

MINGES 2015 Scheurebe Feinherb

STRUB 2015 Niersteiner Hipping *Thal*/Riesling Feinherb

STRUB 2015 Niersteiner Oelberg
Roter Schiefer Riesling Feinherb

GEIL 2015 Bechtheimer Riesling Feinherb

JAKOB SCHNEIDER 2015 Niederhäuser Kertz
Riesling Feinherb

JAKOB SCHNEIDER 2015 Spätburgunder Rosé Feinherb

HEXAMER 2015 Riesling Feinherb "Porphyrt"

KRUGER-RUMPF 2015 Estate Riesling Feinherb

SCHLOSSGUT DIEL 2015 Riesling Feinherb "Von der Nahe"

SPREITZER 2016 Hattenheimer Englemannsberg
Riesling Feinherb

SPREITZER 2015 Winkeler Jesuitengarten
Riesling Feinherb Alte Reben

SPREITZER 2015 Riesling "101"

GOLDATZEL 2015 Johannisberger Goldatzel
Riesling Kabinett Feinherb

GOLDATZEL 2015 Johannisberger Hölle
Riesling Spätlese Feinherb

GOLDATZEL 2015 Geisenheimer Kläuserweg
Riesling Spätlese

WEINGART 2015 Spay Riesling Kabinett Feinherb

WEINGART 2015 Bopparder Hamm Engelstein
Riesling Spätlese Feinherb

WEINGART 2015 Bopparder Hamm Engelstein "Am
Weissen Wacke" Riesling Spätlese Feinherb *Anarchie*

SELBACH-OSTER 2014 Graacher Domprobst
Riesling Feinherb Alte Reben

SELBACH-OSTER 2015 Graacher Domprobst
Riesling Spätlese Feinherb Alte Reben

SELBACH-OSTER 2015 Riesling Feinherb

SELBACH-OSTER 2015 Zeltinger Sonnenuhr
Riesling Spätlese Feinherb Uralte Reben

A.J. ADAM 2015 Riesling Im Pfarrgarten Feinherb

A.J. ADAM 2015 Riesling Feinherb *In Der Sängerei*

REUSCHER-HAART 2015 Piesporter Goldtröpfchen
Riesling Spätlese Feinherb "Überschwang"

CARL LOEWEN 2015 Riesling Feinherb 1896

EUGEN MÜLLER 2015 Forster Pechstein
Riesling Kabinett Halbtrocken

MINGES 2015 Riesling Halbtrocken

DARTING 2015 Dürkheimer Feuerberg
Riesling Kabinett Halbtrocken

GYSLER 2015 Silvaner Halbtrocken

HEXAMER 2015 Spätburgunder Weissherbst Halbtrocken

WEINGART 2015 Bopparder Hamm Ohlenberg
Riesling Spätlese Halbtrocken

SELBACH-OSTER 2015 Zeltlinger Himmelreich
Riesling Kabinett Halbtrocken

HOW I SELECT

The first principle for me is to tell you the truth.

If I offer a wine it's because I liked it and think you should buy it. I'm fallible, wine is changeable, and I can make the isolated mistake, but I won't suggest you buy a wine I don't think you should. Period.

This entails a risk with producers, who are correctly proud of their wines and who themselves have favorites they hope will be sold in the States. The risk is exacerbated by my laying everything out in writing, and though this text is written for you, it's also read by them.

Do I pull punches? Never. I may seek to write diplomatically, and I will always be humane and respectful, but I've built a covenant of trust with my customers for 29 years now, and it could be squandered in six months if I started dissembling or broke faith with my core values.

Entering my fourth decade doing this, it's easy—fatuously so—for colleagues/competitors to see this portfolio as “conservative,” but I don't think it is. The German Riesling scene in general is “conservative,” because there is something of abiding and enormous value to be conserved. The high priests of Riesling, the guardians of its eternal value, are not conservative in social or political terms; they are classicists for whom the very notions of “trendiness” or “cutting-edge” are absurd and irrelevant. The deacons of Riesling, the young growers with their young visions and their willingness to shake things up, are often the ones who get shaken up themselves as years go past and they see the basics of the ground more clearly, and learn to measure time by decade rather than by news-cycle. Certainly I offer growers who are conspicuously *on-the-move*—von Winning, Schneider, Kruger-Rumpf, Adam, Vols come to mind—but they're not moving

toward some *recherché* re-imagining of Riesling. Rather the opposite; they're doing what they feel is necessary to create even more profound and classic Rieslings.

I don't really “design” this portfolio, but if I'm true to myself, my values and my tastes, a design becomes apparent. I find myself to be flexible and tolerant within classical perimeters. I won't be interested if someone does Riesling in Amphora. That is demonstrably unnecessary. I work with natural yeast guys and with cultured yeast guys, with whole-cluster guys and skin-contact guys, with steel tank and wooden cask, with ambient ferment temperatures and with controlled, and believe me, all of it is fascinating and none of it matters. None of it will ever yield to yours or my wish to form value judgments. What I want, at the very least, is delicious wine, with character, balance and distinctiveness. I try very hard to find and offer such wines at the “low end” of the market, because I see no reason why we should diss people who don't treasure wine enough to spend more than \$25 a bottle for it. They should have the most kick-ass wine that amount of money will buy. Please understand, I'm delighted to contribute to your Hermannshöhle Spätlese verticals, but it's the good cheap wines that let me sleep at night.

Finally, if I satisfy those criteria, I increase my odds of encountering the transcendent, the soul-shakers, and the heart-openers. That experience is never available among the novel or quirky. You find it exclusively among the classics, and then you experience the most evanescent and glorious thing of all: each time a wine shakes you to your core it is happening for the *first time ever*. No matter how many times it's happened before. No matter that you're familiar with “this type of wine.” When you encounter a great one, it erases you. You're back to *tabula-rasa*. You are the first human, drinking the first wine. You baptize your soul.

These experiences are profound; there is no other word for them. And when profound experiences accumulate, that becomes what we call “classic.” That which is capable of delivering profundity. The highest striving of its kind. So yeah, if you want to call my portfolio “classic,” I'll sign on to that.

WHAT'S WITH THE PLUSSES?

Here's what they mean. Every wine in this offering has made the cut; they're all excellent. The plusses draw your attention to what I felt were especially note-

worthy. One plus should go on your short list. Two plusses start to tickle the realm of the stellar, and should not be missed. Three plusses, very seldom given, are for the transcendently great wine, the ones that invade you with silence. You can, if you like, compare them to Michelin stars, by which you will understand that non-starred restaurants can also be fabulous places to eat. So, one plus = don't miss. Two plusses = don't miss on pain of death, and three plusses = prepare to be melted down to your primordial soul.

A FEW WORDS ABOUT TASTING NOTES

My notes are spontaneous. I clean them up a little, mostly for the sake of sense and syntax, but I never juice them to make the wines more seductive. The notes are all, obviously, enthusiastic because these are the wines I liked enough to select.

Most people's notes go down the same few roads. The first of these is **cognates and associations**, i.e. the other things a wine might taste and smell like. I won't write such things unless they come to me immediately; I never grope for them. This approach has several pitfalls, as you know. Sometimes the cognate is obvious and everyone would agree; certain wines smell like cherry blossoms or licorice or whatever, and we know what those things smell like. The problem is, there are times when wines taste and smell like rare or unusual things, and then the reader is lost if she's never smelled “osmanthus” or “chamomile” even if those are dead-accurate descriptors. It is also tempting to throw a lot of esoteric descriptors around, to impress your reader with how acute your palate and schnozz are. “My God; that man remembers the smell of *everything!* I must lob my panties at him right away!” I really seek to stay clear of this syndrome. If I use, say, flowers in tasting notes I'll usually stay with common ones, violets, iris, roses, wisteria, hyacinth, peony. But my own imagination betrays me. I might discover some new fragrance, and then it squats in my notes because suddenly everything smells like linden or verbena or anise-hyssop or aloe vera.

I like when I use texture words, because I think these are more vivid than to simply recite a noun (raspberry, etc.); things like “creamy,” “crisp,” “snappy,” “gooey” or “rocky” create a more electric connection between writer and reader. It also avoids the scenario of someone not *getting* what you write—“I'm sorry but I do not smell key-lime in this wine!” Who's

ever said “I don’t find this at all *smooth*.” Very rarely, if at all.

The logical continuance of texture-language is to go deeper into image and metaphor. This of course is dangerous. It can become self-indulgent and twee, but I allow myself to do it if it is the most compelling way to depict the wine, and if it comes naturally and instantaneously. It’s my truth, it can’t be helped, and I hope that you get it but I can’t be certain. If I describe a wine as “pensive” I know just what I mean by it, but will you? I fear not, especially if you’ve come up through the various certification protocols, by which wine is made into a specimen, an object to be mastered instead of a being to be known. So I take the chance that we’ll be on different frequencies, so that I can honor the spontaneous impulse and say the most salient and powerful thing about the wine. Or try to....

Lately there’s a new thing happening more often to me; I taste a wine and I *get* it immediately, I *grok* it before I even know it consciously. This is a non-linguistic impulse, and if I have to pause to try and summon up words for what has just happened at light-speed and with no discernible effort, it pisses me off. It’s also difficult, because there are a lot of wines that can quickly be *known* but the condition of knowing them is to banish language. Here’s an example: Dönnhoff’s Hermannshöhle is a great wine that will yield to description and deconstruction, whereas his Brücke will not. At least, not to me. Brücke is entirely intuitive and imagistic; Hermannshöhle is explicit. Hermannshöhle is a splendid and gorgeous explanation, but Brücke is a Truth.

And so my faith, my probably-unwarranted faith, is that if I write as the spirit moves me and as the wine demands, at least the notes will convey a force even if they don’t make sense to someone else.

NOTES ON MY “SOS” SCALE

The impression of sweetness is only obliquely related to the amount of sweetness, as measured in grams-per-liter. Put another way, 8g of RS will show in a low-acid Pinot Gris or Gewürz but will be undetectable in a Riesling. Furthermore, a reading of 20g might obtrude upon a Pfalz Riesling but be invisible in most Mosel Rieslings. The sense-of-sweetness is a function of the components and the *balance* of components in a wine’s basic structure. Body, acidity, dry extract, the presence or absence of bitter elements, all these (and more) things play a role.

In the EU a wine is “dry” (Trocken) if it has less than 9g of RS. (Exceptions exist but now’s not the time to be so granular.) Placed in context, a Champagne is Extra Brut if it has no more than **6g** RS, and Brut itself goes to 12g (and even to 15 if you exploit the loopholes...)

Between 9-18g RS the (German) wine is “Halbtrocken,” or *Feinherb* if that’s the word the grower prefers to use. Another benefit of *Feinherb* is that—for now—it has no bureaucratic strait-jacket on it; in practice it can go up into the high-20s in RS as long as its flavor is decidedly **on the dry side**. Again, the 25g that would stand out in a Rheinhessen wine would be swallowed up by many Mosels.

To hack a clear way through, I go empirical: what does each wine actually taste like? Thus my sense-of-sweetness number, which disregards any formal categorizations and tells you simply what you may expect.

So – **ZERO** is basically the absence of any discernible sweetness.

ONE indicates a sweetness that is barely present, so subtle you can’t be entirely sure it is there. At times I’ll use this number for a technically dry wine because some wines convey a sense of sweetness even if they haven’t any. (Just as some wines taste dry even when they *do* have RS.)

TWO signals that sweetness is present and taste-able but not obtrusive because it is in harmony with everything around it. It is apple-sweet, not cupcake-sweet.

THREE signals that sweetness is a key component in this wine’s makeup, as it would be in a perfect ripe peach.

FOUR is used for true dessert wines, signaling a honeyed sweetness.

Then there are also degrees of dryness. A wine to which I give a ZERO is entirely dry but a wine with MINUS-ONE is a wine where one *notices the utter absence of sweetness*. Such wines are often called austere. They are balanced on a particular frequency to which I am not drawn, but if the wine is otherwise compelling I will sometimes include them.

REGARDING ORGANICS

Germany in general is a markedly “green” oriented society, and quality wine growers are moving firmly in that direction, if they aren’t already there.

No conscientious grower is thinking “I’ll just use any old chemicals just like my Daddy did.” We applaud and encourage every step they take toward (or beyond) organics, but we do not shame them for the steps they feel they cannot take. That would be the height of arrogance.

But we do apply one strict principle. If someone says they are “working organic” but they are not CERTIFIED, then we will not trade upon the marketing value of “organic” in those instances. We understand a grower’s reluctance to lock the door behind him and not be able to intervene on an emergency basis to save his crop. We appreciate that (s)he will work organic 99% of the time. As we see it, there are two choices: one, throw caution to the wind and certify organic (or bio-dynamic) - you obtain the marketing value, at the cost of the risk. Or the risk is too great – which we understand – but in that case we won’t trade on “organic” without certification.

Please understand what this means. Someone who isn’t “organic” is probably 95-99% there. That is true of 95-99% of all of these growers. I can live in that world.

SOMMELIER ALERT!



Flex and a comradely wish to be helpful are what matter most to me in the winefood nexus. Clarity, grace, moderate alcohol, good acidity, minerality and a focus on balance and fruit will give the highest odds of a pleasant melding of flavors.

I hit upon the SOMMELIER ALERT idea after I found myself on the phone at great length with restaurant buyers, walking through the offering to find the wines I thought were best for your purposes. No one has that kind of time, so I codified it. And the first thing I'd like you to know is, this isn't a list of "the best wines" and also that wines not flashed as Somm-Alert are also going to be nice with your food. In some cases you buy the most exciting wine-qua-wine and worry about the food matching later. That's cool; I'd probably do it too. But, the wines I put on the list

are part of a mise-en-scene whereby I envision a big-ish table, a 6-or-8-top, and there's all kinds of food being ordered, and what possible wine will be flexible enough to pivot among the whole unruly circus of tastes? "This'll go with damn near anything," is what I'm thinking.

My criteria, to the extent I even have them (this being more intuitive than anything else) are, vivid up-front flavor—I'm not convinced the restaurant experience is strictly conducive to subtle wines—a lot of scent, a refreshing and attractive personality that has your guest reaching often for the glass, and most of all a stealthy sense of sweetness. That is, not a taste of sugar that's somehow disguised, but an actual ration of sweetness that corresponds to the sweetness in many of your savory courses. I offer plenty of bone-dry

wines Sommelier Alert! and I know there are times they are perfect, just less often than not-entirely-dry wines.

There's also a sense of embedded sweetness/richness that arises from physiological or phenolic or aromatic ripeness—the seeds and skins are no longer bitter—that can make a very dry wine seem to feint toward sweetness. Mischief can ensue, especially if the wine smells flowery or fruity; some drinkers will infer sweetness that actually doesn't exist, and if they object to "sweetness" then you can insist all you want that it's not there. It won't matter.

Mind you, these are not compromise-wines. They're simply amazingly flexible and accommodating wines. Some of them are quirky, some of them are angular, but all of them arrive at the table asking "How can I help?"

PFALZ

The German wine region that most resembles what we call “wine country” gets very busy as soon as the almond blossoms open in mid-March. Many of its visitors are excursionists from the close-by cities of Mannheim, Heidelberg, Ludwigshafen and Frankenthal, and for whatever reason these folks insist on dry wines and especially those from the Pinot varieties, which have less acidity. So the Pfalz is preponderantly a Trocken wine place, which damages the cause of diversity but which is at least “viable” because the dry wines can easily be good and sometimes be great. Extremely hip in the 90s, it has settled into its identity as a kind of anything-goes wine region, with plenty of decent to excellent reds and outstanding examples of the “fragrant” varieties such as Muscat and Scheurebe alongside the psychedelic Rieslaner and the (too often) banal Sauvignon Blanc. Still, one of Europe’s very finest Sauv Blancs hails from the folks at Von Winning, who have single-handedly proven that great wines can come from this often loutish variety. Pfalz Rieslings are spice-bombs of ginger and pineapple, yet none of that is incompatible with great class and refinement in the top wines, whether dry or not-dry. If you’re a German Riesling buyer, this is what you can expect: more body and more alcohol. *Softer (but not soft) acidity. Overt flavor along spice and tropical lines. Savory character. Generosity.*

MÜLLER-CATOIR



REGION / SUB REGION

Pfalz / Haardt

VINEYARD AREA

21 hectares

ANNUAL PRODUCTION

12,500 cases

TOP SITES AND SOIL TYPES

Haardter Bürgergarten and Herzog
(*sandstone*);
Haardter Herrenletten
(*loam, clay, marl, limestone*);
Gimmeldinger Mandelgarten
(*loess, sandstone gravel*);
Mußbacher Eselshaut
(*gravel*);
Bruemel in den Mauren
(*sandstone, gravel*)

GRAPE VARIETIES

65% Riesling
10% Weissburgunder
5% Grauburgunder
5% Muskateller
5% Rieslaner
5% Scheurebe
5% Spätburgunder

FARMING PRACTICES

Certified Organic

From 1962 to 2002 this estate employed a man who would become the seminal cellar master of his era. Hans Günter Schwarz's are the shoulders upon which an entire generation of German vintners stands. And during that time, Müller-Catoir was widely regarded as the best estate in the Pfalz. I myself felt they were the best estate in all of Germany. Schwarz is warm and avuncular and unpretentious, and so he was widely beloved. Anyone who had to fill his shoes started at a serious disadvantage. All the more reason to admire not only what Martin Franzen has done, but the sangfroid with which he did it.

He's about the most agreeable guy you'd ever want to meet, and the students and stagiaires he hosts at the winery are in awe of his knowledge and helpfulness. The chattering classes talk about how the wines have changed. They say that the Mosel-born Franzen makes them to emulate the cooler style of that more northerly region. They are indeed less overt than many of their peers in the Pfalz, because this vintner is most interested in overtone, nuance and penumbra, and he chooses not to make the fleshpots that would get him "high scores."

2015 is delightfully curious here, as I've never known (cellar master) Martin Franzen's wines to be so ethereal and gleaming in any vintage, let alone the forthright '15. After several years of inexplicable critical disregard, I hear murmurings this may be changing within Germany, as a decade-plus of such quality and scrupulous vision can't just be written off. Franzen has never wanted to make

blockbusters that "show" well in their first year. He is more attuned to overtones of flavor that peel and buzz, more attuned to wines that fascinate rather than wines that shake your shoulders. A shallow taster may see such wines as aloof. A more attentive (or simply introverted) taster will be thrilled that any wine can reach the itch (s)he's never quite been able to scratch. I won't say that Catoir is "the best" estate in the Pfalz, but I will say there's no one better.

NON-RIESLINGS

2015 "MC" Scheurebe Trocken +

12/750ml | GMC-229 | SOS : 0 | **SOMMELIER ALERT!**

MC denotes the estate-wine level (as opposed to village, 1er and Grand Crus), and this is quite a fragrant beast! Pe-e-e-ek grapefruit to the max, key lime, smells actually like wild-ass Saar Riesling; the wine is light but hyper, ludicrous fun; you want to put it in a bucket and pour it over your head.

2015 Haardt Scheurebe Trocken +

12/750ml | GMC-226 | SOS : 0

This village wine is the next level up, and the wine is more mannerly and cordial, but this after all is Scheurebe, so it's still kinky but just not blatant. It demonstrates how *fine* the grape can be, how reasonable and even how complex; it has a long fine farewell of currant-leaf, salt and hyacinth.

2015 Haardt Muskateller Trocken +

12/750ml | GMC-219 | SOS : 0

Germany's (and thus among the world's) greatest Muscat has been divided into two wines this year. This one's zingy and primordial; ludicrous "green" flavors; solid and direct, minty and mizuna; a clamorous yet crystalline beauty.

2015 Haardter Bürgergarten Muskateller Trocken + +

12/750ml | GMC-227 | SOS : 0 | **SOMMELIER ALERT!**

For the first time, a single-vineyard old-vines (55-plus) Muscat is being made as a stand-alone. It's the very epitome of the opal basil flavor of MC Muscat; it's a profound aroma, no less; entirely arresting, even stunning. The palate has density and preposterous length, like a pudding of Muscat. Has there ever been a better one? You have to go to ZH's Goldert to find its equal.

2014 Haardt Spätburgunder Trocken

12/750ml | GMC-222

I have issues with '14 reds in Germany, but this was the best one I encountered. Even at cellar temp the fruit leaps from the glass in waves of tight cool blueberries, but a mid-palate savor trickles warmly into a fabulously charming and long finish of elegant sweet fruit.

2015 Gimmeldinger Schlüssel Rieslaner Spätlese + +

12/750ml | GMC-232 | SOS : 2

Great Rieslaner can leave you lost for words, as this one did. And you need a lot of words to even start describing a wine as intricate and profound as this. Let's say power, mentholated brilliance, elegance, seems drier than its brothers among the Rieslings, and super-salty on the back palate.

Rieslaner is a crossing bred in Franken, presumably to create a grape which would give Silvaner expression in Franken soils and bring Riesling acidity and frost-resistance along. It does seem to make the best Franken wines and good to stunning wine anyplace else it's grown. Which isn't often, unfortunately. Other growers report its acidity is obstreperous in unripe years, but Hans-Günter Schwarz loved it for just that reason. I find it an innately fine variety, which gives more acid than Riesling of similar ripeness. Its inherent varietal flavor is lime-grass and berry rather than apple or peach. It can produce the most singular great wine on earth, the only great wine of its type. But make no mistake, this is "supernally" great wine; nothing else even comes close. Rieslaner is more widely planted than one might suspect, though little of it is bottled as is. Many growers have it planted as a kind of secret-weapon to be blended with Riesling! Even five percent Rieslaner will galvanize a decently good Riesling, or so I am told, by someone who would never himself do such a thing...

2015 Haardter Herzog Rieslaner Auslese

+ + +

12/375ml | GMC-233H | SOS : 3

You can't miss this! You don't dare. It gets 13 out of 10 points on the priapism meter. Structure as firm as steel rod just leeches away the sweetness; the mutual orgasm of concentration and transparency is astonishing; the candied banana aromas are head-shaking, and the whole thing is a goddamn peyote high of power both seething and weirdly tender. An unfathomable masterpiece.

(There are also BA and TBA from Rieslaner, too infantile to evaluate, but I emphasize that the Auslese is not merely a dilute version of those monster concentrates, but an amazing wine all in its own perfect right.)

RIESLINGS, FROM DRY TO NOT-DRY

2015 Haardt Riesling Trocken

12/750ml | GMC-221 | SOS : 0

Needed about 60 seconds in the glass but then became wild, sweetly herbal, with tropical fruit showing (as guava); detailed and articulate; a little saline like sweet fresh mussels. Curious how strong yet how whispery. Lovely, absorbing, studious.

2015 Herrenletten Riesling Trocken

12/750ml | GMC-223 | SOS : 0

If you like minerality, buzzing energy, almost unnerving clarity and a rich toasty finish, well my friend, this is *your* wine. Jasmine and talc complete the portrait.

2015 Bürgergarten "Im Breumel" Riesling "GG"

6/750ml | GMC-224 | SOS : 0

Markedly more accessible this year in its youth, and again toasty and crusty; ginger and meyer lemon and (even!) white pepper lead into a lavishly mineral fragrance; the palate is an exegesis of mineral, strong and generous albeit portraying an entire quarry of rock-crush. It satisfies every demand of Important Wine, but don't approach it looking for flowers or fruits.

2015 "MC" Riesling

+

12/750ml | GMC-220 | SOS : 1 | **SOMMELIER ALERT!**

This is a Feinherb bottling custom-made for me. And it is perfect Riesling. Stupidly salty. Wonderfully long. Riper and nubrier (phenolically) than the '14 but otherwise, you literally can't not love it.

2015 Gimmeldingen Riesling Kabinett

+

12/750ml | GMC-230 | SOS : 2

Fantastic complex aroma, grain and green and pêche-de-vigne; the palate is maniacally zippy and spicy; verbena and wintergreen; sweet grain, a racy Kabinett.

2015 Mandelgarten Riesling Spätlese

+ +

12/750ml | GMC-231 | SOS : 3

As brilliant as the Kab but, obviously, deeper, and with even more fervor and complexity; it feels crustier and more solid but also has a lovely *gelée*-like texture; a whirligig of fruits playing against this pie-crust floury-buttery savor. It is markedly sweet but hyperactively animated and transparent.

2015 Bürgergarten "Im Breumel" Riesling Spätlese

(+) +

12/750ml | GMC-228 | SOS : 2

I love that they're making "sweet" wines from the "GG" vineyard. Not many others would. It's softer-seeming, with a deeper register, more of a *demi-glace*; lychee; an emphatic complex wine in every way; the acidity is softer but there's a tart edge of wild-plum standing in its place.

von WINNING



REGION / SUB REGION

Pfalz / Deidesheim

VINEYARD AREA

40 hectares

ANNUAL PRODUCTION

23,000 cases

TOP SITES AND SOIL TYPES

Deidesheim Mäushöhle, Paradiesgarten
(*loess, loam, red sandstone*);
Ruppertsberg Reiterpfad
(*sandy loam, red sandstone, marl-lime*);
Deidesheim Grainhübel,
Langenmorgen and Kieselberg
(*loam, red sandstone, limestone*);
Forst Ungeheuer
(*loess, loam, sandstone, basalt*);
Deidesheim Kalkofen
(*limestone, marl, loam*);
Forst Kirchenstück
(*sandy loam, red sandstone, basalt*);
Pechstein
(*black volcanic basalt with sandy loam*)

GRAPE VARIETIES

Riesling, Sauvignon Blanc
Weisserburgunder, Chardonnay
Grauerburgunder, Pinot Noir
Muskateller, Scheurebe
Gewürztraminer

I just finished listening to a music mix I made, combining The Unthanks and The Gloaming, two groups who take traditional Scotch/Irish songs and jigs and pivot off them into harmonic sensibilities one could call “modal jazzy” or even “ambient.” The music is amazing; charming, tender, shimmering, miraculous. I came upstairs to the laptop, wondering at the human desire to create beauty, which becomes harder to explain and more obscure the older I get. In many cases it isn’t conscious at all. One doesn’t wake up saying “Today I shall create beauty, for I am thus roused.” It’s more like a force that urges from your body.

I think of it now as I consider what’s taking place at Von Winning. As many of you know, this estate was acquired around 2009 by an idealist magnate (named Niederberger), who then installed a wine nut and retailer named Stephan Attmann to go all-out for the utmost quality. Attmann himself is, in the best sense, a wild man, a happy beast, and he is indeed obsessed with greatness in wine and spares no effort to bring it about. He’s not an aesthete as perhaps I am. But the effect of what he does is to wring enormous beauty out of his vineyards. I know he is aware of the impact of his actions, but I wonder whether he sees it through a prism of beauty. I don’t know. I sense he discerns force, power, and expressiveness, and that these things satisfy him richly. I only ask to add to the equation, and say the wines are beautiful. It isn’t a charming or lyric beauty; the Pfalz is maybe too masculine for that. It has nothing to do with prettiness. It is, rather, a rare thing that arises

from determination and enterprise, to wring every bit of passion from one’s land, to assume that land can also be passionate, that it wants to be heard, and to say “Right, I get it; let me help.”

There have now been four fully culminated vintages. 2012 and 2015 fall into the “strong” group, while 2013 and 2014 fall into the (relatively) delicate group. In those vintages the “GGs” really stand out, while in the rowdy vintages the “lesser” wines are more expressive.

There are a lot of wines. I broke it up into two visits, one early on when I tasted everything *except* Riesling, and another at the very end where I tasted only Riesling. Trying to do it in one go tended to make me rush too quickly through the last ten wines, and these are significant creatures and I wanted to be fair to them. But that final tasting was interesting, because it was quiet and we were fragile. Andreas Huetwöhl (the executive sales director and a powerful force in his own right) was coming off a bout of mononucleosis complicated by an allergic reaction to an antibiotic he’d been given, and he was easing back into working full time. I’d been up the night before with what can only be described as digestive Armageddon. The tasting room was quiet, unusually calm, and we talked about feeling vulnerable. We also talked about the wines, of course, but not as obsessively as we usually do. Personally, I liked it. I want to bring a whole man into the tasting room, not just a “wine-guy.” I think that a couple of pale gentlemen tasting a gorgeous group of Rieslings over a quiet midday is actually kind of perfect.

The vintage, as I mentioned, is a strong one. The issue of “Rieslings-with-oak” is really not pertinent any more, as the casks get less expressive over time.

These are simply classic forceful Pfalz wines. And Attmann wants everything he does to reach for the outermost limits of expressiveness, which is why I sought to

devote particular attention to the “other” varieties—among which one, the astonishing Sauvignon Blancs—are among the finest in the world.

LET’S DO THOSE OUTLIERS FIRST...

2015 Spätburgunder Rosé +

12/750ml | GDD-134 | SOS : 1 | **SOMMELIER ALERT!**

(Dr. Deinhard label: this was the estate’s name when it was taken over, and it still used for “everyday” wines) I figured I’d use it to prep my palate, but it halted me; an explosively rich and round Rosé, year-round vinosity and big fruit; robust and firm; for sheer torque and drive this is the best Rosé I offer.

2014 Pinot Noir “II” +

12/750ml | GDD-133 | **SOMMELIER ALERT!**

2014 reds tend to feel a little “forced,” as though they needed excessive extraction (and tannin) to mitigate a lack of ripeness. I’d started to be wary of them. But this had the best pure fruit of any I had tasted, almost an espresso savor; a little char but not to excess; it works like an earthy Pommard; a country wine, seriously long, less soy than dried porcinis.

2014 Weissburgunder “II” +

12/750ml | GDD-135 | SOS : 0 | **SOMMELIER ALERT!**

This is how to do oaky wine. Very leesy and scallop-y; the wood is like sweet straw; there’s some saline mineral and a salty savory finish. One of us said “sea-spray nori.”

2015 Sauvignon Blanc “II” +

12/750ml | GDD-122 | SOS : 0

Streamlined and elegant, showing a kind of *jus* of spices (clove and cardamom) and otherwise unsurprising in its red-pepper and gooseberry twang, but it’s the mid-palate juiciness that catapults this wine above mere varietal correctness, that and the warm savory finish. Not bad for the entry level!

2013 Sauvignon Blanc “I” + + +

12/750ml | GDD-118 | SOS : 0

I thought tasting this ‘13, with the ‘12 still available, was mere lip-service, or that I’d register when ‘12 would be gone and we’d move to its lighter lesser sibling. But no. This is a high-water mark not only for German Sauv-Bl but for any Sauv-Bl, a wine of amazingly intelligent craftsmanship; deft, almost delicate, currant and (again) seeming “sweet;” the smartest imaginable use of cask; an entirely seductive, graceful intelligent wine. Don’t even THINK of missing it. It’s world-class, and very stirring

2015 Sauvignon Blanc “I” (+) + +

12/750ml | GDD-136 | SOS : 0

This will ship for the autumn, and it is certainly explosive and potentially great. Lemon and guava and sweated fennel; power, spice and focus; wild lavender mid-palate; herbal smoky finish. These amazing wines are patterned more on Grand Cru white Graves than on Loire wines—I suppose Stephan wants to make his Pfalz version of Haut-Brion Blanc; it would be like him—but I find them seriously comparable to the *very* best from Styria, and I doubt anyone in Europe is making *more* compelling Sauv-Blanc at the moment. Catnip for hipsters!

2014 Sauvignon Blanc “500” + +

6/750ml | GDD-137 | SOS : 0

“500” denotes wines vinified in 500-liter casks, half-piece or double-barrique, as you prefer. I often wince at oaky wines, but this was strangely moving. It’s big, dense, intensely herbal, very long and *not* especially woody, but instead intensely savory and juicy. It’s the voodoo-wicca Sauv-Bl.

Riesling Sekt Extra Brut, N.V.

12/750ml | GDD-083

It's 2014 based now, and while it's brash from very recent disgorgement it's slowly getting there, knitting, letting the fruit emerge. It's more lemony than the '12. Just needs time, but it shows the class that drew me to it originally.

RIESLINGS!

2015 Riesling Trocken

12/1L | GDD-124L | SOS:0

(*Dr. Deinhard label.*) Talk about punching above your weight, I mean, <whew>.....It's very Pfalz-y this year, almost burly, but balanced as a firmly yet genially dry wine.

2015 (estate) Riesling

12/750ml | GDD-125 | SOS:0 | SOMMELIER ALERT!

This on the other hand is *charming*, mirabelle-y and dry, a tasty useful by-the-glass wine; seems to feint in Weingart's direction with a wet-cereal loessy-ness. Craftsmanship and thought went into this, and excellent judgment as regards the matter of balance.

2015 Paradiesgarten Riesling Trocken, 1er Lage

12/750ml | GDD-126 | SOS:0

Until Von Winning I don't think anyone knew the potential of this upslope vineyard in Deidesheim. It's an amazing *value* considering what it offers for the pittance it costs; wry, grainy and excellent, open-armed and *terroiré*, but terroir detached from "mineral," more ginger, guava and pineapple; hints at woodiness and resolves into a suave finish of pink peppercorns.

2015 Reiterpfad Riesling Trocken 1er Lage

12/750ml | GDD-127 | SOS:1 | SOMMELIER ALERT!

This Ruppertsberg site could easily justify a "GG" bottling, as other estates have indeed done. It's the juicy *grande dame* among the 1er Crus, very close to the "GGs" in stature and in that ineffable sense of *Important Land*; a warm basket of yellow fruits and a solid yet texturally complex finish. No need to work to "get" this wine; it's overtly dee-lish!

RIESLING GROSSE GEWACHS

(note; there were eight of these in all, four each from Deidesheim and Forst, all of which deserved to be offered. I only restrained myself for reasons of tidiness, and culled it down to five. I think there will be a core group every year—Langenmorgen, Pechstein, Kirchenstück among others—and I'll twiddle around the edges to offer the utmost terroir/stylistic variation.)

2015 Riesling Grainhübel "GG"

6/750ml | GDD-128 | SOS:0 | SOMMELIER ALERT!

Many observers find this tied for top-site in Deidesheim (with Hohenmorgen, which only has two owners) as these things are debated. In this case it isn't the strongest among the Deidesheim "GGs" but it's definitely the most interesting, many-faceted, graceful and long. It's really gingery and wild-plummy, seductive and exotic, soursop and mint and wild herbs; it winks toward Sauvignon Blanc in fact—as if you hadn't rinsed your glass—until the classic wisteria finish of pure Riesling. So piquant and stylish. It's the moist *delightful* among the range.

2015 Riesling Langenmorgen "GG"

6/750ml | GDD-129 | SOS:0 | SOMMELIER ALERT!

It's the nerd among the "GGs" of Deidesheim, and it's my personal favorite; the stoniest and most focused, complex and digital; it pulls you in, it's introverted and numinous and insanely flowery, *sous bois*, thinly stony like what you skip on the surface of a pond. Chinese 5-spice comes on. *How does wine do this*, refer to four different families of flavor within one perfect structure?



2015 Ungeheuer Riesling “GG”

+

6/750ml | GDD-130 | SOS:0

Larger production = lower price. It isn't that hard to pronounce but you have to know how. Think *Oonga-Hoyer*. Now repeat after me: *OONGA! HOYER!* There, that's it.

In some ways the prototypical Pfalz wine, earthy, fiery and caramel-y, bone-brothy and savory....yet this one is focused and almost flowery; physio-sweet, with a finish that is monstrous indeed, a wine with a bone-breaker handshake.

2015 Pechstein Riesling “GG”

(+) +

6/750ml | GDD-131 | SOS:0

I'm almost certainly underrating this wine, but my initial sense was that the power of '15 had masked some of the angular floweriness that makes this great Forst wine so beloved. It was almost demure, though atypically fierce and not especially floral. The basalt twang is riding a vein of pepper and spices and an overt stoniness.

2015 Kirchenstück Riesling “GG”

(+) + +

6/750ml | GDD-132 | SOS:0

The Great One, the Clos-Ste-Hüne of the Pfalz, is an absolute blockbuster in '15. The fragrance is *strong*, the wine is strong. It's blatantly great. Wicky, mineral, licorice-y, imploding fruit and ore, nothing very mystic here, just a wickedly curvaceous writhing mélange of power with the nth degree of intricacy.

2015 “Winnings” Riesling

(+) + +

12/750ml | GDD-123 | SOS:1 | **SOMMELIER ALERT!**

If you loved the 2014—and if you didn't we need to send out a search party for your heart—you'll find this one happy, happy, happy. Stronger than '14, it's also both drier and richer. And that's as it should be; the pittance of sweetness it contains will rise and fall with the structure of each year's wine, because that's what sensible vintners do. The others just set up a formula and the wine “has—XY—grams of sugar and zat's zat.” Nuh-uh, not us. This will always be teasingly dry and teasingly sweet so you'll keep changing your mind (“Wait, it's a dry wine, no, it's a sweet wine, no wait, it's a dry wine again...”) while the bottle empties faster than you could have imagined. I am very proud of this wine, because it was made in friendship and with a ton of heart, and it's as smart and yummy as a wine can be.

EUGEN MÜLLER



REGION / SUB REGION

Pfalz / Forst

VINEYARD AREA

17 hectares

ANNUAL PRODUCTION

14,000 cases

TOP SITES AND SOIL TYPES

Forster Kirchenstück
(*limestone, sandy loam, basalt*);
Forster Jesuitengarten
(*sandstone, sandy loam, basalt*);
Forster Ungeheuer
(*sandstone, gravel, basalt*);
Forster Pechstein
(*basalt*);
Forster Freundstück
(*sandstone, gravel, limestone*)

GRAPE VARIETIES

80% Riesling
10% Grauburgunder
and Weissburgunder
10% red varieties
(mostly Spätburgunder)

Another world here than up the road at von Winning. Müller is an old-school German estate selling mostly to a base of private customers, and to local taverns and restaurants. They aren't "trendy." But the current proprietor Stefan Müller's father, Kurt, was also cellar master at a venerable Forst estate, long out of business (but whose wines I sold in my early days) called Wilhelm Spindler, and when the old gentleman died his widow leased the best vineyards to Kurt as a reward for his service and loyalty.

It helps to have truly exceptional land. And when you find a grower like this, you can score terroir-saturated wines of impeccable aristocracy, yet the prices are most gentle and the folks are super down to earth.

Thus Müller was able to offer every great Forst Cru—Freundstück, Ungeheuer, Jesuitengarten, Pechstein, Kirchenstück. And still is. So we walk in the door at an unfussy domaine with unfussy prices and are greeted with an array of Crus that boggles the mind—and at prices that boggle the mind. To me this is more important than what the VDP calls "price-politics," which is a fancy term for Charge whatever you can get—it's how you communicate how Important the vineyards are—but by no means less than —X. Müller, not a VDP member, probably never to be a VDP member, charges what he needs in order to support a family and has no need for "symbolism," and because of that he's a hero of mine and a boon to you

This is a solid vintage for this nicest-of-nice guy producers, in the typical 2015

fashion of having, at times, more strength than it knew how to manage. However—and this is a huge caveat—I tasted many of Stefan's dry Riesling just 10 days after they were bottled, the worst possible time. And if as I suspect the wines' fruit was hidden, then it stands to reason that all I'd taste was a hefty vinosity that could have seemed ungainly. Three dry Kabinetts, from great sites (Kieselberg, Ungeheuer and Jesu-itengarten) were as good as opaque on the day. So, sigh.

Just a reminder that Müller is of a different type than most estates with lordly vineyards in the core of the Pfalz. His business is largely with a private clientele, and thus he has no need to price "symbolically," based on maintaining a certain metaphor for the stature of his land. Still, his wines are more precise and polished than his Dad's were, and it pleases me to offer such excellent value from such a true family estate run by the nicest possible people.

2015 Forster Pechstein Riesling Spätlese Trocken

(+)

12/750ml | GEM-154 | SOS : minus-1

It is, you guessed it, the very same Pechstein as is otherwise bottled as “GG” from VDP estates. Here it is a dry Spätlese, which means that *unlike* the “GG” category, this *cannot* be chaptalized.

This will be insider geek stuff, so if you’re an outsider (or not a geek) just skip on ahead, but can *anyone* conceivably justify how this grandest of all categories, the *GRAND CRU* dry Riesling, could allow chaptalization??? “They do it in Burgundy” is, sorry, no fucking excuse. Not to mention, the letters “VDP” stand for Verband Deutscher *Prädikatsweingüter* which derived from its original name of *Naturweinversteiger*, which in both cases quite clearly denoted **unchaptalized wines**. Now obviously chaptalization is not an inherent evil, but what is evil is to diddle the very rules on which your organization was founded in order to indulge the convenience of chaptalizing your top dry wines when you happen to feel like it.

(One prominently placed VDP gentleman informed me, tongue perhaps in cheek, that “VDP” was also the acronym for “Verband Deutscher Pudelnzüchter” or The Organization of German Poodle-Breeders. I only hope these things are not confused, though I suppose poodles are actually more intelligent than VDP officers.)

Back to Pechstein. Tasted through the periscope, it seemed to be hyacinth-y and a crackly spice-driven wine, almost minty and almost austere, but the finish was interestingly smooth, balanced and long. A wine for Riesling-lovers who don’t mind wines that aren’t cuddly.

2015 Forster Kirchenstück Riesling Spätlese Trocken “Cyriakus”

(+)

12/750ml | GEM-155 | SOS : minus-1

The prime section of the best site in the Pfalz; this was so embryonic that you should basically disregard this note as anything more than a blurry impression. That said, I’m confident there’s more primordial minerality here, and the wine is powerful to the point of throbbing. It’s long and incipiently complex, and justifies the stature of the land.

2015 Forster Pechstein Riesling Kabinett Halbtrocken

+

12/750ml | GEM-156 | SOS : 0

Rare to still see someone using “Halbtrocken” these days. The wine is effectively dry but infinitely better balanced than the actual-dry wines above; wildflower aromas not to mention wisteria and plum-blossom; finely delineated spiciness and brilliant shimmer seems to accent the stoniness of Pechstein; angular and rippling, sexy but compellingly aloof. Or so it seems; this was also in bottle ten days.

2015 Riesling “Vom Basalt,” Forster Mariengarten Riesling Kabinett

12/750ml | GEM-157 | SOS : 2

Basalt is of course (and famously) the soil of the Pechstein, from which this wine indeed hails, but it’s bottled under the name of a small privileged *Grosslage* because it’s the “item” Müller’s private customers recognize. It is also a super-aromatic lot fermented with a less vigorous yeast strain that guarantees an incomplete result, i.e., residual sugar. It’s more gentle than to intervene to stop fermentation by chilling, filtering or sulfuring. So if you’re someone for whom the very notion of cultured yeast fills you with dread...well, um yes: actual *thinking* is hard.

This wine also snakes its way around the palate but this time it’s all flowers and gloss; starts out musky but firms up and becomes sleek and lithe with a refined dialogue among herbs, pebbles and blooms.

2015 Forster Ungeheuer Riesling Spätlese

12/750ml | GEM-158 | SOS : 2

Appears to be a salty beast—over 100° Oechsle ; less bone-brothy than bright and salty and mentholated. Even the finish is flowery. I wonder if it will revert to its fundamental dragon profile. The wine is excellent in any case.



2015 Forster Kirchenstück Riesling Auslese

+ +

12/500ml | GEM-159H | SOS : 2

Perhaps the single greatest “legacy” wine in this entire offering, and in my entire career. I have selected it in every vintage from which it was made, and I don’t recall if/when it wasn’t made. Nor can I remember a time when it wasn’t great. *Great.*

It runs in two distinct profiles, and 2015 is the powerful one. Zero botrytis but bigger than it often is. But <wow!>....this is hugely complex, easily and clearly magnificent; more salts and stones than “sugar” and it’s still got all its black-cherry juju lying in wait. In its unpretentious way, this is a Pfalz monument, indispensable to anyone who cares about Riesling.

2015 Gewürztraminer Spätlese “Reiterpfad”

12/750ml | GEM-160 | SOS : 2

This is quite delicate, both for a 2015 and for the variety. You could call it discreet, more lychee and salt than roses. Has “sweetness” but isn’t very sweet, and unlike many Alsace examples, which also have sweetness but also 3-4% higher alcohol, this one you can actually drink, and not worry about keeping away from open flames.

HERBERT MEßMER



REGION / SUB REGION

Pfalz / Burrweiler

VINEYARD AREA

25 hectares

ANNUAL PRODUCTION

26,700 cases

TOP SITES AND SOIL TYPES

Burrweiler Schäwer
and Weyhrer Michelsberg
(*slate*);
Burrweiler Schloßgarten
(*loam, limestone*);
Burrweiler Altenforst
(*sandstone*)

GRAPE VARIETIES

Riesling
Grauburgunder
Weißburgunder
Gewürztraminer
Muskateller
Spätburgunder
St. Laurent

FARMING PRACTICES

In conversion to
biodynamic viticulture

Meßmer is the kind of estate I like and no one else cherishes the way I wish they would. The wines are scrupulously clear, perhaps a little cerebral, kind of wire-rimmed-glasses kind of wines. That kind of clarity and judiciousness scratches an itch for me, but others might yearn for more sensuality and hedonism. There's also the problem that you don't know Gregor Meßmer, because he hates to fly and doesn't speak English, so he's never been here. But, if you're a wine lover whose tastes extend past the party-hearty, I know you'll like these and also that you'll find them rare. It takes courage to make such wines, and we who like them are underserved.

Gregor Meßmer initiated biodynamic viticulture starting with vintage '11. "I'm the sort of man who deliberates a long time, but once I decide I implement immediately," he says. So let's watch and see what happens. The transition, as you know, is the hard part. But when I asked him how it was going, he said "Maybe less difficult than I thought. After all, I had paved the way over many years while I was considering it. So that when we took the final step, it wasn't such a radical change."

"What nature gives, we want as much as possible to preserve," says Gregor. "The most important factor is the soil, its composition, its mineral content. We ferment in small parcels, without any fining, and with the gentlest possible handling. We rack only once between fermentation and bottling. Our goal is the conservation of fine individuality of each grape variety, the production of wine with a fruity and

Herbert Meßmer piquant acidity, that needs time to reach its peak. It's also very important that the wine be pleasant and usable, wines for drinking." "The most beautiful wines are those which have had the least 'winemaking.'" That's the reductionist credo as clearly as it has ever been stated. It gives Gregor the kind of wine he most likes to drink: "Clear wine with a clear line of flavor, wine with a fruity acidity, sleek wine that doesn't make you full, but that you can drink the entire evening; I want the taste of ripe sweet grapes in the wine, even if it's dry. Finally I like wine with the greatest possible number of uses."

A consistently good group of '15s here, as I expected. Gregor does well in big-muscled vintages, where his cerebral scrupulous style can contrast against the prevailing power.

No one likes a word such as "cerebral" when you want to sell wine. At least until there's a glass in your hand, and you get blasted away by how impressive the contents are. What would you call wines like these, then? Not "sensual," not "hedonistic," not "gushing fruit-bombs leering seductively at you." Cerebral—which doesn't mean "cold" and doesn't mean "bloodless" and doesn't mean "geeky." It means they taste not only like a smart person made them; they taste as though they themselves are smart. They have a surgeon's calm and poise. Or rather, most of them do. Every once in a while there's a wicked rogue who slips off the leash. There's one of them here, and it has bubbles in it...



2010 Sekt Rosé

12/750ml | GMS-196

Without question the most wacked-out gorgeous weirdo-wine in this offering. The base wine ferments in used barrique and ages six months before tirage. It spends three-plus years on the lees and emerges as a serious wine that tastes for all the world like a Vilmart Cuvée Rubis, without quite the elegance and polish of the Champagne. Hibiscus and rhubarb jelly, echoes of wood, a finishing kiss of rosewater. Defeat even the most cocky blind taster! Amaze your somm pals! Put something on your list that no one else has, or even dreamed of! And finally, serve a three-eyed alien wine that's not only without flaws: it also tastes good! As the wine is disgorged as-needed every few months, this final contingent has had really long lees time—four-plus years. We bought all the rest of it; the wine is indelible and amazing.

2013 Spätburgunder

12/1000ml | GMS-208L

Still an unfiltered cask sample, which is pretty amazing when one considers that most of the “serious” PNs are already into 2014. This has some tannin to shed but a fine fruit below. Otherwise no note was possible as it was in mid-malo.

2015 Riesling Feinherb

12/1000ml | GMS-209L | SOS : 1

On the drier side based on the norm over the years. Steady as she goes; my most carefully articulate Liter Riesling. You could have served it at Malcom Gladwell's bar mitzvah, assuming he had one and that you were invited.

2015 Riesling Trocken “Einzig & Artig”

12/750ml | GMS-212 | SOS : 0

In effect the “2nd-wine” from the GG Schäwer, a new cuvée, and a cask sample when I tasted it. This smells completely delicious, all in the mineral balsam family; the palate is powdery, elegant and complex; evenly balanced, a dry wine that succeeds entirely; animated, suggestive, cerebral but richly satisfying; the empty glass smells like tarragon. Bravo! This is how it's done.



2015 Riesling Kabinett Feinherb “Muschelkalk”

+

12/750ml | GMS-210 | SOS : 1 | SOMMELIER ALERT!

It means *fossil-bearing limestone*, not what you think it means. It's a common soil in this part of the Rhineland; Boxler's GC Sommerberg is largely Muschelkalk, for example. It's one of my very favorite among our CORE-LIST wines, but perhaps it's too expressive and spicy to be ingratiating. 2015 is a fine rich vintage, showing star-anise and clove and mint and mineral; taut but not tense; generous but not sprawling.

2015 Muskateller Feinherb

+

12/750ml | GMS-211 | SOS : 0 | SOMMELIER ALERT!

Perennially among my most beloved Muscats, the '15 actually has a musky aroma; it's drier-feeling than usual but shows a powdery cling on the palate; juicy and nearly roasty; a wine of a hundred melting rivulets. Not the longest vintage ever but *really* friendly.

2015 Gewürztraminer Spätlese

12/750ml | GMS-215 | SOS : 2

Meßmer's is perhaps the glossiest and most refined Gewürz I know. The '15 is lithe and salty for such a low-acid year (only Riesling had higher than normal acids); it's on the dry side with "just under 30 grams" of RS, and shows his usual lychee exotics and calm polish. Improbably fine.

2015 Scheurebe Feinherb

+

12/750ml | GMS-213 | SOS : 1

Well it *tastes* Feinherb even with more than 30g/l of RS; a kinky grapefruit-y Scheu, sage butter; angular and mischievous and salty; rich yet a grassiness seems to yank it around; really seductive end-palate. Not a "great, serious" wine but a keenly yummy one.

2015 Rieslaner Spätlese

(+)

12/750ml | GMS-214

North of 100°, and its final blend pending, as it's not sweet enough. As it is, a fiery dramatic powerhouse, but it will lose the jalapeño-heat it's currently showing when it gets the fruit it requires.

THEO & REGINE MINGES



REGION / SUB REGION

Pfalz / Flemlingen

VINEYARD AREA

25 hectares

ANNUAL PRODUCTION

15,000 cases

TOP SITES AND SOIL TYPES

Flemlinger Zechpeter
and Burrweiler Schlossgarten
(*loess-loam*);
Gleisweiler Hölle
(*sandstone, limestone*)

GRAPE VARIETIES

Riesling
Scheurebe
Muskateller
Gewürztraminer
Grauburgunder
Spätburgunder

FARMING PRACTICES

Practicing organic viticulture

In the last few years I've had several people tell me, when discussing the "names" of the southern Pfalz, that "The one few people talk about but who is really among the best if not the very best is Minges. Have you heard of them?" Ah yup!

These are also the kinds of wines you say you like. Theo would fit right in with the natural-wine crowd, at least by temperament. He's a practicing Buddhist and is constantly talking about energy fields and how to transmit them from the vineyard to the cellar to the glass. It's part of the reason he doesn't rack the wines, as he feels the gross lees are like "mother's milk". He leaves several wines to age at considerable length, on their gross lees and without sulfur, until bottling. This is all in the quest for a sort of vibrant force; Minges wants his wines to quiver.

But I don't want to imply he's one of the naturalistas, albeit the basic sympathies align. He's my kind of "natural" wine grower, as we agree about the excesses afflicting some of that community's wines. "They wanted to go back to the roots, but found themselves in the mud," he said—wisely. He's also one of the very few growers in the southern Pfalz who will still make Rieslings with sweetness. They take their place alongside the dry wines, as they should.

Lately I'm finding Minges to be the spirit-kin of Nikolaihof, not because the wines are similar—though some are—but because the ways of life are aligned. There's a kind of respect shown to wine in each house, an assumption that wine is an equally valid being. This isn't the same

as the way one might regard wine as an aesthetic object, how good or how great it tastes. That's like judging a dog by how many tricks it can do. They are both the classicists and the radicals of the region. They hew to a conservative line in their choice of grapes but they're entirely singular in their cellar work, which is based on highly extended gross-lees aging. They'll be certified organic any day now, and Theo is quite the proud and lucky Dad to have a spark-plug daughter like the impassioned Regine.

Minges doesn't have "off" vintages, but 2015 was superb even by their standards. One of these days I want to do a tour of the country with a series of tastings of this estate along with Karl Loewen, as these are the two sleeper agencies in the portfolio, both (frequent-ly) stellar and both (always) noteworthy and fascinating.

2012 Spätburgunder “Kalkmergel”

12/750ml | GTM-186

It means limestone-y marl, and is a “reserve” cuvée.

The baseline wine, called “Tradition,” was excellent in 2012, but I was unmoved by the ‘14 and seem to have missed the ‘13, perhaps because I was watching baseball? I’ll offer the ‘15 a year from now. Currently we have a trade-up to contemplate.

The wine was bottled last September, alc is 13.5% without chaptalization. A roast-y yet mineral fragrance, marrowy and fruit-driven; a stern stony length on the palate, notable tannin (I’m tasting it at cellar temp) but a bona-fide limestone-y finish, resolving into a roasted tomato perfume. This is a true *mineral Old World PN that doesn’t taste like Burgundy and has nothing it needs to “prove.”*

2012 Riesling Sekt Extra-Brut

12/750ml | GTM-185

Unlike most purveyors of Sekt, Minges does all the work themselves; tirage, riddling, disgorging. The wine is really pure and racy—the connection to Champagne is tangible; indeed it smells like Avize – it’s streamlined and dry (a Brut felt a touch too sweet).

Sometimes tasting *vins claires* in Champagne you could swear you’re tasting young Riesling. Sometimes Rieslings at Minges smell a little like Champagne. The two places are almost identically located latitudinally, and are about three driving hours apart. There is a thread uniting them, sometimes translucent and other times vivid—like now.

2014 Riesling Spätlese Trocken “Kalkstein”

12/750ml | GTM-190 | SOS:0

‘14 is the *current* vintage; this wine is always a year-after. Both ‘12 and ‘13 were really perfect dry Rieslings, as though they had fermented with oysters floating in the cask. This particular wine tends early on to be stern and rock-dusty, but with a year in bottle it gets all leesy and scallop-y and semolina-sweet. Now it’s like oyster shells, later it’s Basmati rice; earlier it’s seaweed salad, later it’s langoustine and lemon zest. Very, very impressive.

2015 Riesling Halbtrocken

12/1000ml | GTM-191L | SOS:0 | **SOMMELIER ALERT!**

Not many plusses in the Liter category, but this is exciting stuff; balsam-y, herbal, tart-apple but not a tart wine; impeccably balanced, an oolong floweriness and a lip-smacking Riesling. Pour it!

2015 Gleisweiler Scheurebe Trocken

12/750ml | GTM-188

This and its friend/sibling (coming right up below) were *THE BEST SCHEUREBES I TASTED FROM 2015*, and you’d be a fool to miss them—either of them. This one is cassis to the nth degree, a classic beautiful Scheu, strong, juicy, salty, simply perfect, and leading into a finish of currant-leaf and woodruff.

2015 Scheurebe Feinherb

12/750ml | GTM-187 | SOS:1 | **SOMMELIER ALERT!**

Ostensibly the “lesser” wine (estate-versus-village quality) it’s tasted second by dint of its (basically invisible) sweetness. It’s more grapefruit and less cassis now; similarly long; there are other uses for this, and more of them, but I’m helplessly in love with both.

And by the way, if you’re looking for wines with *every possible* “originality” and kinkiness but you’re tired of weird spoiled wines that taste like donkey-ass, all is not lost my friend. You can get your freak on and have a clean, competent wine.

2015 Pfalz Scheurebe Spätlese

12/750ml | GTM-180

Of the trilogy-of-perversion a.k.a. my ode to Scheu, this one’s the most oblique because it had just been bottled. It’s a Martinet, this one, and it smells like mandarins and satsumas; behind a veil of RS right now, but ask me again in June when I’m sure to be all puddle-blissy.

2015 Pfalz Goldmuskateller

12/750ml | GTM-194 | SOS: 2

Different from Gelber Muskateller, this hails from an experimental vineyard; compared to its cousin the Gelber this has a looser cluster and ripens later, though on this evidence the wine feels softer. There's a fine spice, more orange-blossom than elderflower; the 30 grams of sweetness aren't obtrusive but makes the wine less racy. Good length, it's satisfying if not galvanizing.

2014 Pfalz Riesling Kabinett

12/750ml | GTM-179

Spicy and zippy; lemon, talc and eucalyptus; precise aromas really thread the needle; a tangy Kabinett that feints dry and has a ton of Pfalz ginger and pineapple. +

2015 Pfalz Rieslaner Spätlese

12/750ml | GTM-189 | SOS: 2

A masterpiece! The best they've ever made. Rich, complete, powerful, insanely delicious, almost intimidatingly intense, yet capacious. **AN INSANE VALUE!!!!** So enter ere please: you can afford entry into this magic, amazing world. + +

2015 Rieslaner Auslese

12/500ml | GTM-192H | SOS: 3

Dramatic, staggeringly impressive and monstrously intense; 128° Oechsle with almost no discernible botrytis; this wine is impeccable and god-like. To repeat an old trope, you don't drink *it*, it drinks YOU. Actually it eats you. It's like the 3rd or 4th orgasms, wrenching and almost severe, exquisiteness squeezed inside out. + +

2015 Gewürztraminer "Edition Rosenduft"

12/750ml | GTM-193 | SOS: 2

As good as it can be in a sweet low-alc idiom. It has their leesy fluffiness yet with the clearest varietal outlines; glossy and powerful. +

KURT DARTING



REGION / SUB REGION

Pfalz / Bad-Dürkheim

VINEYARD AREA

25 hectares

ANNUAL PRODUCTION

20,800 cases

TOP SITES AND SOIL TYPES

Spielberg and Herrenberg
(*limestone-marl*) ;
Hochbenn
(*sandy loam*)

GRAPE VARIETIES

Riesling
Gewürztraminer
Muskateller
Scheurebe
Pinot Noir
Pinot Meunier
Rieslaner
St. Laurent
Dornfelder

When I first introduced this estate back in 1992, they were seen as mini-Catoirs, offering a similar primary-fruit-driven vivid style of wine at really low prices, from a young vintner who trained and remained pals with Hans-Günter Schwarz. The wines are still delicious, the prices are still low, but there's nothing else for the hipster to grab on to—as if tasty wines at low prices weren't enough. I'll put it this way: say you'd spent a bunch of consecutive evenings eating cutting-edge food, very edgy and compelling. (Lucky you; I love that kind of food too, and wish I were your BFF and could have joined you.) Then one evening you're in a more mainstream restaurant and you're served a perfect piece of wild turbot, cooked correctly and garnished sensitively. And you take the first bite and think, ah, FOOD. I forgot what FOOD tasted like, and how good it could be.

That's Darting. Everything is delicious in any zone of sweetness, and the wines are charming and arrive at the table eager to be helpful. Perfect wines when the nth degree of complexity isn't warranted. And they are not contrived – just honest!

The 2015s surprised me. They showed more acidity than any previous vintage—which doesn't mean they actually have it, only that it showed—and they were very, very ripe. The dry wines, especially, were yowling beasts of ripeness. That said, the vintage is botrytis-free and if there's a little less charm there's also a little more muscle.

2014 Pinot Meunier

12/750ml | GDR-248

Quite a vogue built around this, to my unending delight. I have to alert you, though, that this 2014 is less *yummy* than either the '13 or the '12; like most '14 German reds, it's tannic and stewy—the alc is 14%—but the fruit is strong and the aroma is appealing. Don't buy it sight-unseen based on the last vintages; taste it and satisfy yourself you like it.

2013 St. Laurent

12/750ml | GDR-260

The pick-o-the reds this year, and it exemplifies the variety along its dark edges. The finish is savory and fine, and the tannin is balanced.

2015 Dürkheimer Schenkenböhl Weissburgunder Trocken

12/750ml | GDR-269 | SOS : 1 | SOMMELIER ALERT!

Stopped me in my tracks. It's a powerhouse, with big scallop-y fruit, roasted corn; a ton of impact here, clearly and easily impressive. Not many P-Blancs this good—at *this* price.

2015 Dürkheimer Fronhof Riesling Kabinett Trocken

12/1000ml | GDR-256L | SOS : 0

I want to put this on the CORE-LIST but we need to wait for a more typical vintage. This usually suave wine has a lot of angles and snap in '15; more size and impact but less juice and charm. Not remotely cloddish, mind you, but less easy and "inevitable" than normal years. It also feels drier, though it isn't.

2014 Ungsteiner Weilberg Riesling Kabinett Trocken

12/750ml | GDR-250 | SOS : 0 | SOMMELIER ALERT!

It's just above the Spielberg and is a Grosses Gewächs site for Pfeffingen among others, on limestone terraces. Darting's parcel is along a terrace wall, thus warmer and more sheltered. The aromas and attack are in a form of refined and esoteric citrus fruit, talc and mineral; the mid-palate is salty and a little herbal, with nuances of balsam and mirabelle; the finish has the initial abruptness of some '14s, but a lemon-ginger note clings and deepens.

2015 Dürkheimer Feuerberg Riesling Kabinett Halbtrocken

12/1000ml | GDR-270L | SOS : 0 | SOMMELIER ALERT!

Ginger and pineapple Pfalz aromas; a spice-driven juicy palate—but not too juicy; the wine has 'tude. It's serious, firm and dry, and (in this vintage) it's both better and better balanced than the Trocken.

2015 Dürkheimer Nonnengarten Riesling Kabinett

12/1000ml | GDR-259L | SOS : 1

This is balanced ideally, and doesn't taste sweet, though there's no end of freesia, and the RS makes the wine saltier; a sort of mineral dust on the palate, the phenolics are softer here. The best of these in many years.

2015 Dürkheimer Hochbenn Riesling Kabinett

12/750ml | GDR-264 | SOS : 2 (barely)

THE MOST IMPROVED WINE IN THIS OFFERING. And another example...what was gnarly in the dry wines is good in the sweet ones; the density and solidity. They're solid, not stolid. This is by *far* the best-ever vintage of this wine, drier-seeming, very long and salty.

2015 Dürkheimer Hochbenn Muskateller Kabinett Trocken

12/750ml | GDR-262 | SOS : 0 | SOMMELIER ALERT!

Back to normal life, 12% ABV. It's varietally discreet but still attractively spicy and juicy. Hyper hyacinth, almost mineral and certainly herbal. I love it.

2015 Dürkheimer Steinberg Muskateller +

12/750ml | GDR-265 | SOS: 2 | **SOMMELIER ALERT!**

Fine, lovely, confounding. Just 86°, and sporting a largely invisible 42g of RS, it actually tastes *more* varietal than the dry one, with more orange blossom and peach, swelling into a solid, salty finish. It only sounds *recherché*; actually it belongs as a pairing in a tasting menu.

2014 Dürkheimer Nonnengarten Gewürztraminer Kabinett

12/750ml | GDR-253

Some botrytis, but the palate is more scrupulously varietal; smoky and firm and almost meaty; salt and lychee finish. Potentially quite impressive.

2015 Dürkheimer Fronhof Scheurebe Auslese +

12/750ml | GDR-266 | SOS: 2

105° Oechsle with zero botrytis, from a virus-affected vineyard resulting in tiny intensely concentrated grapes. Not overtly Scheu, more lychee, Satsuma and star-fruit; a powerful dryish palate gets drier as it moves around the mouth, into a bone-dry yet salted-buttery finish.

2015 Dürkheimer Nonnengarten Rieslaner Auslese +

12/750ml | GDR-267 | SOS: 2

This is unsurprisingly superb—'15 is a *killer* vintage for Rieslaner—and it's the best single wine Dartings have made in many years; complex and adamant and fantastically salty, as if some wall of jewels and minerals were dissolving in your mouth. What sweetness it actually has just sizzles away like a drop of water in a hot skillet. Stiletto precision, and the implied threat that it will compel you to *obey*.

2015 Dürkheimer Nonnengarten Rieslaner Beerenauslese +

12/500ml | GDR-268H | SOS: 4

125° now with botrytis, not a gigantic acidity but still snappy below its fabulous richness; a persimmon marmalade fined with titanium, gorgeously decadent yet entirely contained and structured. Massive but smart.

RHEINHESSEN

The young growers—most of them anyway—are energetic and idealistic and passionate about producing high-quality wines, and ridding the region of its reputation for mediocrity. To a large extent they've succeeded, thanks in great measure to Messrs. Keller and Wittmann, who've made and justified bold claims for Rheinhessen's potential to give great wines.

One wishes for three things. One, that we could somehow superimpose this fraternity of fine vintners over the Rheingau, where under-achieving from great land is still the general rule. Two, that we could wrest the mentality of today's young Rheinhessen grower away from the schizoid and rigid division of his production into wines-too-dry and wines-too-sweet. And three, that we could somehow restore the tarnished reputation of the Rhine-front, i.e., Nierstein and Oppenheim.

There's an opinion to the effect that Rheinhessen, with its limestone and clay soils and its mild climate, is somehow predestined to give dry wines, or at least dry Rieslings. My answer is as always empirical and pragmatic: It should give dry Rieslings when they taste good, off-dry Rieslings when they taste good and full on RS-Rieslings when they taste good. If one insists that dry and only dry Rieslings are this region's manifest destiny, one must argue that off-dry and full-on RS-Rieslings never taste good, which is patently ridiculous. One also needs to get

one's nose out of the lab analyses. You'll hear that these (relatively) low acid Rieslings don't require sweetness to balance them, but that seems to be a blinkered narrow view. It says that the only reason RS might be desired in Riesling is because it's "needed" to balance acidity, and such arguments derive their obtuseness from a kind of self-administered blindness. There are indeed wines in which sweetness confers an otherwise unobtainable balance, among the many ways RS acts to a wine's advantage: reducing alcohol, adding nuance, lengthening the finish, providing the perfumes of fructose, extending aging capacity—to name a mere few.

If I were you, dear reader, I'd be suspicious immediately if a person was in a "camp" of some kind, a dry-wine camp or a sweet-wine camp, because that person is anxious to stake out a POSITION on an abstract issue, which he then warps a universe of wines to fit within. What can possibly be more sensible than to treasure the many different ways Riesling can taste beautiful? Sometimes dry, sometimes dry-ish, sometimes sweet-ish and sometimes sweet, each as best suits that wine, chosen by the drinker to best suit the occasion, the mood, the grub. Such a posture seems at least humane and grateful. So enough with the Diktats and the dogmas; get them the fuck away from my wine.

STRUB



REGION / SUB REGION

Rheinhessen / Nierstein

VINEYARD AREA

15 hectares

ANNUAL PRODUCTION

7,500 cases

TOP SITES AND SOIL TYPES

Niersteiner Orbel, Oelberg, Hipping, Pettenthal and Rosenberg (*red slate*); Niersteiner Paterberg and Brückchen (*limestone*)

GRAPE VARIETIES

85% Riesling
6% Müller-Thurgau
3% Grüner Veltliner
3% Weissburgunder
3% Spätburgunder

As always I taste these wines twice, nearly four weeks apart. They are late-developers, and when I taste them on my jet-lagged dehydrated 2nd-day, I can read them wrong. Mind you, I'm aware of that very risk, and allow for it. It's rare that a Strub wine strikes me as radically different on the second visit.

Nierstein, as you may know, includes the famous Rhein-front sites under the rubric of *Roter Hang* (the red hillside) because of an unusual soil structure, red sandstone over a base of slate. The wines are generous, classy and refined, with charming fruit over a firm yet lacy structure. The site *Pettenthal* most exemplifies this. *Hipping* is more robust, *Oelberg* is the yummiest and juiciest one, and *Orbel* is the most sere and rocky. Lately Walter and Sebastian have been making Feinherb wines here, which I think is perfect. They'll make dry wines when the fruit is sufficiently generous, but the truly sweet wines come from across the valley on limestone vineyards. The estate-Riesling they call *Soil to Soul* is a mélange of the two.

2015 is a typical good year from Strub; the wines are vivid and (sometimes) pointed.

2015 Grüner Veltliner Trocken

12/750ml | GST-200 | SOS : 0

The most fruit and poise of any vintage thus far. I saw it as a cask sample and wrote that “bottling will focus this,” and then I saw it just-bottled and yay me, I was right. It’s lentil-y and spicy and shows a charming semolina richness. It’s true, viable GV, not just a curio.

2015 Niersteiner Oelberg *Im Taubennest* Riesling Trocken

12/750ml | GST-201 | SOS : 0

The cadaster name for what is probably the best plot on the entire red slope and certainly the sirloin piece of the Oelberg. It was on the fine lees (with *battonage*) until January, and now it rests in a steel tank until bottling. It shows a nuance of fennel-seed, and the fruit, length and scope augur a genial future once it sheds its baby-phenolics.

2015 Niersteiner Hipping *Thal* Riesling Feinherb (+)

12/750ml | GST-202 | SOS : 1

Racy and more zingy than yielding, but it has a sideways salty length and great refinement of fruit.

2015 Niersteiner Oelberg *Roter Schiefer* Riesling Feinherb (+)

12/750ml | GST-203 | SOS : 1

“Roter Schiefer” in this case is a brand-name and not a cadaster name. It’s usually juicier than the Hipping, as it now is, and the RS balance is more seamless. The aroma is gorgeous, and the palate twirls among green and smoke, maple and pancetta. It has a whip of puppy-sharpness to shed, but there’s a ton of potential here. As it sat in the glass it started tasting like candy-cap mushrooms with their uncanny scent of maple-syrup.

2015 Niersteiner Hipping *Flächenhahl* Riesling Spätlese (+) +

12/750ml | GST-206 | SOS : 2

This very small production is usually destined for blending away. The Germans—or “The Germans”—won’t even taste a “sweet” Riesling, and Strub’s Japanese importer prefers a drier wine too. The last couple years the wine’s been so good I have stamped my petulant feet and scowled, that such a beauty would be squandered. Strubs will give me the wine as it is, but I already offer a sweet Spätlese as a core-list wine. These dilemmas are pathetically typical of doing business in modern Germany.

So to the wine; a wonderful aroma that’s an apex of red-slate. There’s nothing quite like it. A surmise of slate, green melon, lime, maplewood bacon, like (the Nahe site) Kirschheck with a slice of Parma ham; the spiciness makes sense here, the length is serpentine, and the wine, with its moderate RS, is a Riesling Ideal.

2015 “Soil to Soul” Riesling Kabinett

12/750ml | GST-204 | SOS : 2

A good spicy vintage of this wine; a little brash-seeming but juicy and crisp; still knitting together but likely to be balanced on the zingy side.

2015 Niersteiner Brückchen “Herzstück” Riesling Kabinett

12/750ml | GST-199 | SOS : 2

The “heart-piece” of the vineyard is almost pure limestone, and this is a salty and mineral wine; nice end-palate tang, with lovely balance both front-to-back and side-to-side; only free-run juice (Herzstück), so markedly clear and graceful, among the best vintages of this perennial favorite.

2015 Niersteiner Paterberg Riesling Spätlese +

12/750ml | GST-205 | SOS : 2

50+ vines, grown on limestone in a high windy plateau, so there’s never botrytis, which in turn permits a very long hang-time. Here’s where a perfect cognate appears, because this wine smells and tastes exactly like lemon-grass. There’s always a zippy length, but this ‘15 is really balanced on a buzzing steel wire.

GEIL



REGION / SUB REGION

Rheinhessen / Bechtheim

VINEYARD AREA

30 hectares

ANNUAL PRODUCTION

20,800 cases

TOP SITES AND SOIL TYPES

Bechtheimer Geyersberg
(*limestone*);
Bechtheimer Rosengarten
(*carbonate-rich loess*)

GRAPE VARIETIES

35% Riesling
15% Weissburgunder
15% Spätburgunder
4% Rieslaner
4% Scheurebe
27% other

FARMING PRACTICES

Practicing organic viticulture,
working towards certification

This laudable estate would be much more conspicuous on our trendiness radar if they'd do the usual things, such as raise prices, put their wines in stupidly heavy pretentious bottles, create a label effulgent with high solemnity, and make all their wines dry, except for a token couple of cloying over-sweet sweeties. If, in other words, if they became like nearly every other Rheinhessen estate. I sometimes hear myself thinking, "Why can't any of these deluded clowns be sensible once in a while; why can't they bottle wines in various balance zones, why can't they charge prices commensurate with their lower production costs, why are they all so rigid and doctrinaire...?" and then I realize: oh wait a minute, one of them is already doing all those smart things, and they're not rigid nor doctrinaire.

That's what I want Geil to mean to you. The ne-plus-ultra of complexity is not to be encountered here. What you'll find are classy and delicious wines, wines of the country but also with polish; juicy wines but also with clarity and focus, and all from one of the few young Rheinhessen vintners to have his head on straight. They're a kind of Riesling tabula-rasa, before the perquisites of terroir.

Here's some of what this sensible chap has to say about his vineyards and winery: "Quality grows in the vineyard, not in the cellar. The art of the cellar master is to preserve the available quality and refine it."

"Vines have it good in Bechtheim. They don't have to drill through ten meters of rock for a little water. They deal with three meters of permeable loess at which point they can drink as well as the citizens of Bechtheim!"

"No year is like another, and wine-making by recipe doesn't bring the best results. Naturally modern techniques such as cool fermentations are generally advisable. The question of whether less is more should be asked!"

"For me aroma is the most important factor; it's the first impression, and should be clear, varietally typical and express its origin."

"We prune to a single stalk, and do a green-harvest in August. Normally we press immediately without time on the skins, but experimentation is acceptable; we sometimes have a 12-hour skin-contact if the grapes are ripe and healthy. Clarification is a must; we do it by gravity. We're in the midst of a strong experimental phase on the matter of wild versus cultured yeasts. We'd prefer any residual sugar in the wines to be natural, but we do keep a little Süsreserve on hand for adjustments if necessary. The wines are racked immediately after fermentation but they lie on the fine lees for another month or two. We bottle early, to preserve CO²."

Bechtheim lies just where the hills begin, on the west flank of the Rhein plain. The key sites for Riesling are Geyersberg—the best one—made up of chalky loess and tertiary marl. The Rosengarten is above the village, on gravelly sand and clay, and the Hasensprung rolls off to the west on similar soil.

2015 was the best vintage I've yet tasted here; indeed for this grower it was close to perfect. Beamingly generous fruit with excellent structure, and successful across varieties and styles; they'll be talking about this year for a long time to come.

2015 Grüner Silvaner Trocken

12/750ml | GGE-095 | SOS:0

Ripe, compact and salty, like a Weinviertel GV! Almost minerally; wet cereal, wholesome wine. But not bland in the least. And strong, 12.9% ABV.

2015 Bechtheimer Grüner Silvaner Trocken

12/750ml | GGE-098 | SOS:0 | **SOMMELIER ALERT!**

Now up to the “village” level—and a couple things to say. One is, for somms searching for the unusual, this is a completely healthy and delicious wine that’ll give you some bragging rights. Two, though I’m usually tepid toward Silvaner, the 2015 alchemy of ripeness *with* structure are borderline miraculous for this variety.

The wine itself...if the estate wine was reminiscent of Weinviertel, this one sends us to the Kremstal. He did it in hogsheads of which 30% were new; it’s markedly focused and long; ore-like; a bit looser-textured than GV but with a toasty gravelly finish.

2015 Bechtheim Riesling Trocken

12/750ml | GGE-099 | SOS:0

Stern, adamant, fervent yet with a roasted fero and bone-broth savor; sorrel and balsam and marjoram; a generous but not indulgent dry Riesling.

2015 Geyersberg Riesling “GG” Trocken

6/750ml | GGE-100 | SOS:0

The most esoteric, cressy aromas, all black pepper and a warmth that almost carpets the cool tapioca below; green tea (Sencha) takes us into the kind of darkly herbal Riesling I cherish; cerebral but not aloof.

2015 Scheurebe Trocken

12/750ml | GGE-101 | SOS:0 | **SOMMELIER ALERT!**

For the first 30 seconds this is a considerate, almost polite Scheu. But then it launches a parade of sage, a marching band of grapefruit, and while it’s not exactly *rad*, it’s angular and tangy and e-z to luv.

2015 Muskateller Trocken

12/750ml | GGE-093 | SOS:0

Juicy. Not catty nor pointed, instead it feels refined, with spice below a silk blanket of “winey” fruit; exposure to air lets the opal basil emerge, albeit the wine is a kind of pulp concentrate, as if it made its own collagen, or like Muscat coated with rice pudding. A good example for novices.

2015 Bechtheimer Riesling Feinherb

12/750ml | GGE-103 | SOS:1

Now the whole panoply of floral Riesling aromas; sweet grain, peony and white flower; creamy but sleek, with multiple rivulets of nuance.

2015 Bechtheimer Rosengarten Riesling Kabinett

12/750ml | GGE-094 | SOS:2

A perfect, polished Rheinhessen Riesling Kabinett, or in other words, an endangered species. I dare *anyone* to taste this and claim “This type of wine should cease to be.” Cherry and rose-hip, an unfussy Riesling pleasure.

2015 Bechtheimer Scheurebe Kabinett

12/750ml | GGE-096 | SOS:2

A tangy tropical Scheu, none too sweet and with a good acid tooth; spearmint and ginger and lemon zest; a zingy exotic wine with a surprising amount of tension.



2015 Bechtheimer Riesling Auslese

++

12/750ml | GGE-104 | SOS: 2

Yes, this is where I took leave of my senses and slipped away from consensual reality. *<ulp>*...an Auslese and two BAs, what was I thinking?!?

Made from mostly dehydrated grapes with little botrytis but with a whopping 117° Oechsle, the wine is massive but not “sticky,” and in fact it’s a pure elevation of utter fruit, a potion of concentration that is rich but not sugary. It’s indeed a cultural and aesthetic touchstone, and hugely impressive.

2015 Rieslaner Beerenauslese

(+) +

12/375ml | GGE-105H | SOS: 3

Surprisingly moderate and *drinkable*. Not absurdly concentrated; a complex classic Rieslaner; singed banana, incipiently explosive and not collapsed under a quilt of botrytis.

2015 Riesling Beerenauslese

++

12/375ml | GGE-107H | SOS: 3

All Geyersberg—in fact the “inversion” of the GG, all the fruit that didn’t go into the dry wine. It’s a sort of soaring anvil of Riesling, and *pure*, almost no botrytis. Just a joyous mass of primary *fruit* with muscle and scope. It’s very rare for wines like this to be made.

GYSLER



REGION / SUB REGION

Rheinhessen / Weinheim

VINEYARD AREA

12 hectares

ANNUAL PRODUCTION

8,000 cases

TOP SITES AND SOIL TYPES

Weinheimer Hölle and Mandelberg
(red sandstone)

GRAPE VARIETIES

85% Riesling
6% Müller-Thurgau
3% Grüner Veltliner
3% Weissburgunder
3% Spätburgunder, Riesling, Silvaner,
Scheurebe, Pinot Gris, Pinot Blanc,
Pinot Noir, Huxelrebe

FARMING PRACTICES

Demeter Certified Biodynamic

When you drive into his village from the north, you descend from a plateau and down into a bowl of vines facing south, and giving every appearance of being clement and mild and sheltered. But Weinheim is actually among the coolest microclimates in Rheinhessen, and the wines have the low pH and high acids of Mosel wines. And sometimes even more. Alex Gysler has also gotten decidedly hands-off in the cellar. The wines are left alone from fermentation until bottling, and fermentation is—wait for it—with ambient yeast. Like, yay, right? It's what many of you say you want. Spontis! But let's consider the question more deeply. A vineyard that has only recently undergone transition to organic/biodynamic is often still in a phase of nitrogen-depletion—if nitrogen fertilizers had previously been used, of course. They tell me that a nitrogen-depleted soil makes for somewhat feeble wild yeast populations. If that's how you ferment, you may end up with some exhausted yeasts, which in turn means a slow or even sluggish fermentation. Which in turn favors the development of so-called "Böckser" aromas (hydrogen sulfide) along with the naturally caroby sponti note. This may be exacerbated if your wines are done in stainless steel and if you bottle under screw caps. Mind you, it's still a manifestly better world under these regimes, but the wines can show inconveniently funky in the 1-2 years after bottling—just when we're tasting them and deciding whether to buy. Will anyone give these wines the needed 3-4 minutes of swirling? How can we, especially in one of the huge tast-

ings? I can, and did, but I had the time. A vintner can eliminate H₂S with a copper fining but maybe he doesn't want to fine at all, or maybe he hesitates to reintroduce copper, as it's all he was permitted to spray in the vineyards. So he sends some stinkers out into the world. Into a world that judges a vintage and makes snap buying decisions when the wines are unruly infants. Fine, I get it: it's our world. But I have a harder time accepting a customer's hesitation for wines like these if that customer is relishing all kinds of funky wines from elsewhere—oxidized, repulsively phenolic, borderline unclean (borderline?), and excusing it by citing the wines "naturalness" as if to say "If you don't use deodorant you better expect to smell, and to like the way you smell." The estate is Demeter certified biodynamic, and Alex is all over those cadaster names, and has a foxy new label too.

Either I or the wines were in a sour mood, because I couldn't wrap myself around Alex's dry 2015s. Maybe I saw them too early; the '14s tasted much better in June than they'd done in March. The abbreviated assortment here is a sign of my erring on the side of caution. A larger offering might well be made in early 2017.



2014 Riesling *Klangwerk* “Vum Helle GG”

12/750ml | GGY-119 | SOS : 0

Though I liked this wine from the start, it's really come into its own now. It's a cerebral woods-in-the-mist Riesling, showing a purity I think is deeper than hedonism, though some might find it diffident. For me it is subtle, nuanced and refined.

2014 Weinheimer Riesling Kabinett “Feldgeflüster”

12/750ml | GGY-121 | SOS : 2

It means “whispering fields,” and I just know you're going to call for it starting in about 2023, when you figure out how it's pronounced. It does have a Mel Brooksian ring to it. The wine was 78° Oechsle and has 8% Silvaner to lower the acidity without intervening technologically to do so. It's more wholesome and less spiky than it has been, even from riper years.

2015 Silvaner Halbtrocken

12/1000ml | GGY-126L | SOS : 0

In this vintage it tastes dry, and is markedly racy and vigorous, even mineral; a fennel-y brassica, sorrel-y sort of thing, with a clinging mouthfeel and a satisfying finish that's almost crusty.

2015 Huxelrebe Beerenauslese “Lichtspiel Vum Helle”

12/375ml | GGY-128H | SOS : 4

Bigger and more fundamental than the tres-exotique 2013; clean botrytis, clean overall; more white raisin than chestnut honey; the most classically rendered version of this wine in many years.

NAHE

The Nahe isn't really "obscure" any more, thanks in large part to the Dönnhoffs as well as the Diels and (Schaefer)-Fröhlichs, but you may not know where it is or why it's so remarkable.

You get there quickly from most other German wine regions, and yet it is really a corner, a little spot of peace. There isn't an obvious artery such as RN74 in Burgundy. All the roads are narrow and the landscape is steeply hilly and gently chaotic. Even if you're stressed when you get there, you won't be for long. You feel enclosed in a cool green peace.

The region is the center of production of semiprecious stones, which suggests its intricate geology. It's also the secret of the wines. A little village like Niederhausen—which despite its renown is dead-still and silent—has over sixty distinctly different soil types, which can change every few steps. And which, obviously, are reflected and conveyed in the wines. It is an inhospitable place for a person who denies the truth of terroir, or even the skeptic who insists there are no "minerals" to be tasted in wine.

In essence all Nahe soils are conglomerates with different points of emphasis. So if you say so-and-so vineyard is on "porphyry" it means it is predominantly thus, but may also contain slate or other primary rock. Hermannshöhle is an interesting case in point; the upper parts are visibly slatier and the lower parts visibly more volcanic, but lower down it's all mashed together. Dönnhoff's Brücke, actually the bottom-slope detritus from the slate-dominated Hermannsberg, is a mélange of four or five soil types you can see with the naked eye as you stroll a hundred yards along the rows, as they change every few steps. If a wine is complex, it is because of its basis in the ground; not for any other reason.

The upper Nahe (where we find Hexamer and Schönleber) really feels like the end of the earth, it's so quiet. Soils here are mostly marls and red sandstones, but

a site like the Rheingrafenberg is in fact sandy loam yet also with a pathway of weathered byproducts of Tholeyer slate, sandstone and conglomerates.

The middle Nahe—Schlossböckelheim, Niederhausen, Norheim, Traisen—is more volcanic: porphyry, melaphyr, granites, rhyolite, and produces the most bewitching wines. Hexamer has land in both sections, so you can compare.

The town of Bad Kreuznach is the border between the middle and lower Nahe, below which we find the floodplain running eventually into the Rhine at Bingen. The vineyards occupy small lateral valleys moving towards the west, into the Hunsrück hills. One of these is the "Trollbach Tal" where we find the Diels, whose three Grand Crus occupy undulations in one single hillside, on three entirely different soils. As a rule there's more quartzite in these parts, as we're closer to the Rhine and to the Rüdesheim mountain, but volcanic traces and sandy slates can still be seen.

The best Nahe Rieslings seem to give us everything we could possibly ask for in white wine; brilliance, complexity, freshness and lightness, and a sense that they form a flavor hologram on our palates, that shifts and alters with each instant of thought and of time. You feel like you're eating food cooked by someone who has every spice in the world in the kitchen and knows exactly how to use them.

For me the place is entirely mystic. It's the Galapagos Islands of wine, some place where strange birds and turtles roost and peer out from heavy-lidded eyes. It casts a theta spell and changes what we know about the world. You feel like if you stay there long enough your hair will start growing in another color. The wines can have an odd shamanic force, and in those cases it's helpful to have a person who can explicate them, both in words and in flavors.

Which is where a certain Messrs. Dönnhoff enter the picture...

DÖNNHOFF



REGION / SUB REGION

Nahe / Oberhausen

VINEYARD AREA

25 hectares

ANNUAL PRODUCTION

17,000 cases

TOP SITES AND SOIL TYPES

Niederhäuser Hermannshöhle
(grey slate);
Oberhäuser Brücke
(grey slate, loess);
Oberhäuser Leistenberg
(slate);
Schlossböckelheimer Felsenberg
(porphyry);
Norheimer Kirschheck
(slate);
Norheimer Dellchen
(porphyry and slate);
Kreuznacher Krötenpfuhl
(gravelly loam);
Roxheimer Höllenpfad
(red sandstone)

GRAPE VARIETIES

80% Riesling
20% Weissburgunder
and Grauburgunder

FARMING PRACTICES

Fair'N Green Certified Sustainable

We had day upon day of dreary weather that week, but that morning the clouds parted for a few hours and we managed the hike up the Lemberg. Even if you saw my DVD—which began and ended with footage from that spot—nothing really prepares you for the vast green silence. The physical world falls away below you, and you're floating in pure spirit. We stood there and breathed and marveled and took pictures. For a couple of us it was the first time, while for me it was more times than I can count any more, a return to a home of the soaring soul.

Cornelius came to fetch us in his rad new wheels, and then it started to snow. First it was just the top of the hills, and then it started mixing with rain all the way down in the valley, and then it was all snow and by dusk it looked like we were in the Alps.

I don't recall a Dönnhoff vintage better than this one, but of course it's easy to get swept up. Still, and of this I am entirely certain – there has never been a better vintage *for the dry wines*. Which are, literally, astonishing.

I also sense this is really *Cornelius'* vintage. Not that Helmut was invisible, but just that there's a moment where the core of the energy transfers, not all of it, but the generative force. Naturally there is a tandem of father and son and the wines combine the energy of one with the wisdom and perspective of the other. But, for whatever reason, I felt that these '15s were indelibly marked by Cornelius, and in a new way. The wines of this family have given me more exalted spiritual and sensory and emotional experience

than any others in the world. And they have also driven me half mad. They are curiously resistant to language, and it's hard to explain or depict them. They are meltingly easy to *feel* but any time I try to portray them my words feel trite. They live in the Whole, even while they're perhaps the most intricately detailed wines in existence. You can break them down into every constituent part, yet something still eludes you.

For my contemporaries, Dönnhoff has occupied the summit for so many years that it's only "news" if someone else climbs on, or if they themselves falter. We humans like to topple the king, however much we have loved him. For my younger readers and customers you are probably not aware of the exalted place these wines occupy, or if you are aware you haven't tasted why. So let me try to help.

When you drink Dönnhoff's wines, you are joining them in a nexus of the very purest beauty. They are sometimes "intense" but that isn't crucial. They are almost always "incredibly complex" but that also doesn't matter. They are, quite simply, divine. If they find you in a quiet moment, you will know that the world is holy, and that beauty is not what you thought it was.

THE DRY WINES

2015 Riesling Trocken

12/750ml | GDH-390 | SOS: minus-1

This wine was the only one to confound me. It's smoky, snappy and has a spiny tail of radicchio sourness by which I was taken a bit aback. An esoteric porphyry-driven spiciness arrives as an umami, and the wine is curiously long. The empty glass smells minty. I wonder if I read it wrong. All the others seemed to love it.

2015 Riesling Trocken "Tonschiefer"

12/750ml | GDH-391 | SOS: 0

The dry wine from the sandy slate hillside *Leistenberg*, and it is euphoric in '15—a ridiculous aroma! Has the grip, torque and stature of a "GG" along with a woody note and a texture at once adamant and breathy; the fullness of its flavor seems to flow around the hill before it returns and envelops you. Tender, incisive, redolent, thoughtful.

2015 Kreuznacher Kahlenberg Riesling Trocken 1er Lage

12/750ml | GDH-394 | SOS: 0 | SOMMELIER ALERT!

This is the charmer; delicious and juicy; semolina and tapioca; yielding at first but finishes firmly. Again an allusive perfume and an almost creamy mid-palate. With no *particular* terroir statement it constitutes a kind of tabula rasa of Riesling.

2015 Roxheimer Höllenpfad Riesling Trocken

12/750ml | GDH-396 | SOS: 0 | SOMMELIER ALERT!

"This is the taste I wanted from Höllenpfad," said Helmut. Well yeah! A complex portrait of sandstone and ore, balsam and laurel. Sencha and savory, with an almost Kremstal-like sappiness—and completely delicious. The first time I've "gotten" this wine, and certainly the best it has ever been.

2015 Felsenberg Riesling "GG"

6/750ml | GDH-400 | SOS: 0

Oh man the fur is flyin' now. It's like the sleekest spiciest version of *Heiligenstein* you ever tasted. Elegant, fresh, absurdly spicy; ginger, cardamom, candied violets; entirely and delicately magnificent!

2015 Riesling Dellchen "GG"

6/750ml | GDH-398 | SOS: 0

The wine always seems to be pure umami, pure inference; it's often riddlesome, and always hard to "write a note" about. But this '15 is atypically open. It's the most phenolic wine yet in the sequence but nothing (yet) has been "done" to it; it's drawn directly off the gross lees in cask. Relatively inscrutable, it goes a little wild in the glass and shows a high-pitched mineral sparring with a bone-brothy mid-layer typical of Dellchen.

2015 Riesling Hermannshöhle "GG"

6/750ml | GDH-401 | SOS: 0 | SOMMELIER ALERT! (if you work in a Buddhist monastery)

The best vintage since 2005, and a stunning masterpiece of dry Riesling, and of the complexities that wine—any wine—can attain. The aroma is an apotheosis of Hermannshöhle. The palate is majestic, proud, minty, racy and solid. Darjeeling tea and duck *jus*, in a deep note that rises and curls around the savory middle and soaring high register. Literally astonishing.

NOT-DRY WINES

2015 Riesling

12/750ml | GDH-389 | SOS: 1 | SOMMELIER ALERT!

A fantastic vintage of *the world's greatest wine value*. Juicy, plummy, long, slinky and seductive and perfectly balanced.

2015 Kreuznacher Krötenpfuhl Riesling Kabinett +

12/750ml | GDH-402 | SOS:1 | **SOMMELIER ALERT!**

Savory, caroby, not so much “long” as *unending*; brown bread and smoke and salts.

2015 Oberhäuser Leistenberg Riesling Kabinett (+) +

12/750ml | GDH-392 | SOS:2

Vigorous aroma and vigorous palate, high-toned and gingery, cox-orange (pippins, the greatest variety of apple) and vanilla; I’m waiting to see the mid-palate step up to redeem the acidity, but it’s already a thrill and a half.

2015 Norheimer Kirschheck Riesling Spätlese + +

12/750ml | GDH-403 | SOS:2

The most loveable vineyard at *its* most loveable, at least until the veritable invasion of minerality, the almost wasabi-greenness and the Margarita finish.

2015 Schlossböckelheimer Felsenberg Riesling Spätlese (+) +

12/750ml | GDH-424

Amazingly zingy, its acids almost constricting; in any case it’s Felsenberg at its most manic and aerial – but this has the longest distance to be traveled of any of the wines on the table.

2015 Oberhäuser Brücke Riesling Spätlese + + +

12/750ml | GDH-404 | SOS:2

Energy again. These Späts are not sedate, but this has the juicy mid-palate of the Kahlenberg but with infinitely more mineral. Perfect balance both in gross elements (sugar/acid) and fine elements (body/vigor/juice/texture); the juice of a hundred heirloom apples, and at the end, one last needle-brush of acidity.

2015 Niederhäuser Hermannshöhle Riesling Spätlese + + +

12/750ml | GDH-405 | SOS:2

Perfect, and for people tolerant of expressive acidity- beyond perfect. Amazing in the rush of green, granny-apple and fresh-plucked verbena leaves, all of which pours into the anis and black-cherry of the site.

AUSLESE AND HIGHER

(Culminating in a Hermannshöhle TBA that took 40 pickers two days to gather 60 liters’ worth of wine...)

Not much sense to try and “depict” these babies. Like most Dönnhoff Auslese I’ve ever had, these are intensifications and refinements of the Spätlesen, and not dilute-BA, and not rendered anonymous by the overweening botrytis flavors everyone else’s wines have. They will be scarce, and blissful. Please see your Fall Direct import offer for the multiple formats these wines will be bottled in.

2015 Niederhäuser Hermannshöhle Riesling Auslese (+) + +

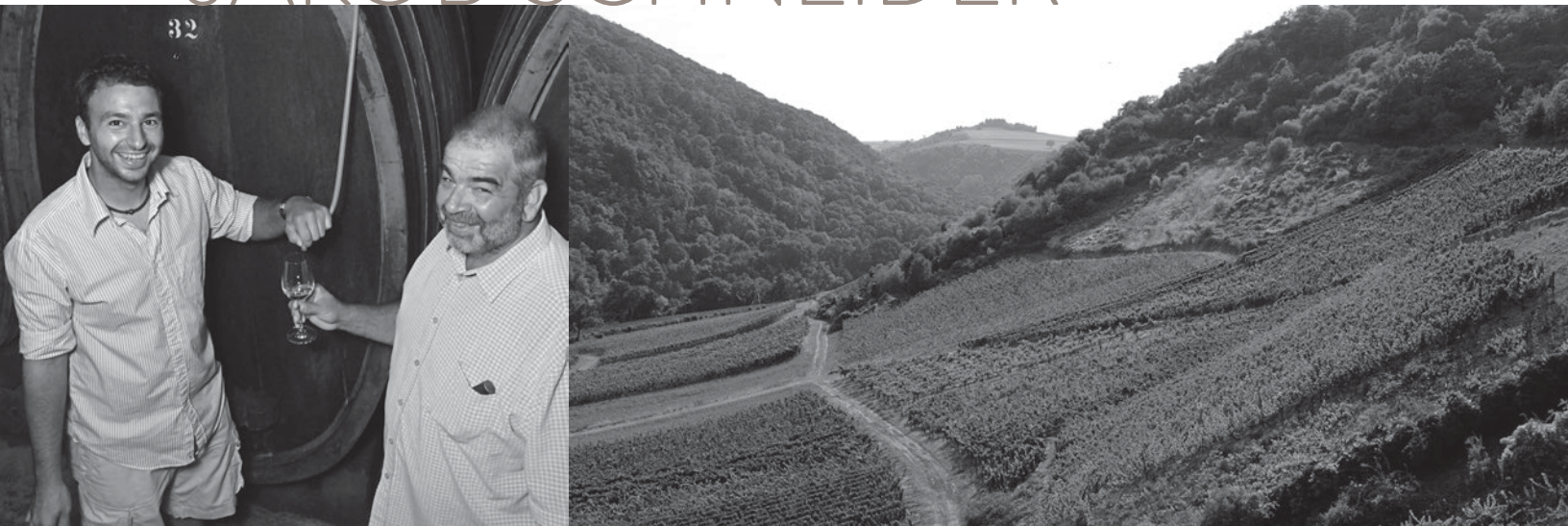
12/750ml | GDH-407H

2015 Oberhäuser Brücke Riesling Auslese + +

12/750ml | GDH-406H

There’s also a still-fermenting Hermannshöhle BA (GDH-409H), as well as a Brücke Eiswein (GDH-410H) picked in the middle of January....I pity your 401K is all I can say....

JAKOB SCHNEIDER



REGION / SUB REGION

Nahe / Niederhausen

VINEYARD AREA

19 hectares

ANNUAL PRODUCTION

10,000 cases

TOP SITES AND SOIL TYPES

Niederhäuser Hermannshöhle
(*volcanic soil, gray slate*);
Niederhäuser Felsensteyer
(*melaphyr*);
Niederhäuser Klamm
(*porphyry*);
Norheimer Dellchen
(*grey slate*);
Niederhäuser Kertz
(*slate and porphyry*);
Norheimer Kirschheck
(*grey slate and sandstone*)

GRAPE VARIETIES

90% Riesling
10% other varieties

FARMING PRACTICES

Practicing sustainable viticulture

I have now worked with three generations of this family. And yet it doesn't make me feel old; it makes me feel good.

Schneider is a little like Eugen Müller, in that the lion's share of their business is direct to their private customers. It's rare in this day and age, to sell so much of your wine to people you know personally. It's a stay against preening and pretentiousness.

This morning the *Globe* ran a story on Premier Cru, and all the people who lost money with them. I've given up being pissed at the whole "collector mentality," but right now while I think of Jakob Schneider I find my blood simmering. All those world-class great wines are out of the purview of people who *deserve* to drink them—by which I mean you and me—because their prices have been bidden through the roof by rich fucks and asshole speculators, and I'm *happy* these people took such a bath. It serves them right.

Meanwhile I'm about to offer you Rieslings from some of the world's most elite and precious vineyards, from a family so intimately connected to their land they aren't consciously *aware* of being "connected" because it's like oxygen to them. These wines cost less than they're worth. They will never be "commodities."

They're very good in 2015, in their typically lusty way. You never get a sense of Schneiders having "formed" a wine.



2015 Riesling “Melaphyr” Trocken

12/750ml | GJS-118 | SOS : 0

There are two definitions for Melaphyre (the English spelling): “a porphyritic rock consisting of phenocrysts of feldspar in a dark groundmass; broadly: a porphyritic igneous rock with dark-colored aphanitic groundmass and phenocrysts of various kinds.” Or, a Mesozoic basalt. I myself have been called a “Mesozoic basalt,” though never to my face. It’s one of the several volcanic soils the central Nahe contains, and it usually gives wines scented and flavored of soursop, lemon-balm, violets and ginger.

This year the wine is mostly from Rosenberg (there’s a Felsensteyr Halbtrocken I didn’t select.), and even with just six days in bottle it has a wonderful rich fragrance, violets and guava; a nearly creamy mouthfeel leads to a warm jab of acidity, which is certainly exaggerated by bottling. Sternly dry, to be sure, but it’s far less taut and snippy than the ‘14.

2015 Niederhäuser Hermannshöhle Riesling Trocken

12/750ml | GJS-140 | SOS : 0

Sponti (for “spontangärung,” or ambient-yeast ferments) aromas combine with classic site fragrances into a complex soulful mélange of dark masculine expressiveness; fabulously smoky and quite *baritone* for this usually crystalline bottling; oyster mushrooms, cherry tobacco, dusty and markedly long.

2015 Niederhäuser Hermannshöhle Riesling Trocken “Magnus”

6/750ml | GJS-141 | SOS : 0

This would be the “GG” if Schneider were VDP which IMO would be FUBAR.

A 60-40 blend of two lots gives a wine with a lot of low notes from the cask and zingy top notes from a *sponti* in steel; it begins to knit itself into a statement; adamant, big feet and a strong tread, along with a gravelly exotic note (reminded me of Alsace’s Grand Cru *Schoenenberg*) plus notes of iris and hyacinth with air. Potentially a complete, even profound Grand Cru Riesling.

2015 Niederhäuser Kertz Riesling Feinherb

12/750ml | GJS-143 | SOS : 1 | **SOMMELIER ALERT!**

For me this is the great wine among Schneider’s ’15s. From a tiny vineyard on a mix of slate and porphyry, it’s one of those utterly unaccountable wines you can’t believe came from grapes and dirt, the flavors are so complex and bewitching. This is a truly exquisite aroma! I mean, sheesh—what on earth smells like this?? A masterly, gorgeous wine, crazily complex, orchids and wild-strawberries and gold raspberries in an angular mosaic that’s nothing but miraculous. Best vintage ever of this beauty.



2015 Riesling Kabinett

12/1000ml | GJS-139L | SOS : 1

A STUNNING VALUE in this (and every) vintage. Schneiders have no mundane vineyards planted with Riesling, and so each year this “everyday” wine combines various Grand and Premier Crus and we get to pay next to nothing for it. In 2015 it is Kirschheck, Klamm and Kertz, drier than recent years (which I encouraged and applauded); delicate, complex, flowery, with exceptional refinement, class and perfume.

2015 Niederhäuser Klamm Riesling Kabinett

12/750ml | GJS-144 | SOS : 2 (barely) | SOMMELIER ALERT!

Next door to Hermannshöhle, but here there’s less slate and more porphyry and red-sandstone, so the wines are more savory and succulent. This is a *sponti* salty mouthful of chewy Riesling joy; more exotic than smoky; hardly discernible sweetness, like the juice you squeezed from a Smithfield ham.

2015 Niederhäuser Hermannshöhle Riesling Spätlese

12/750ml | GJS-145 | SOS : 2

Polished and relatively “modern,” showing all the classic flavors of this greatest-of-great vineyards. From their oldest vines (planted 1939) blended with a parcel that’s *merely* 40. A wine to study in its mint-smoke potion hookah juju; it should be served by a *Vizier* instead of a somm, unless the somm comes to the table with falcons on both shoulders...

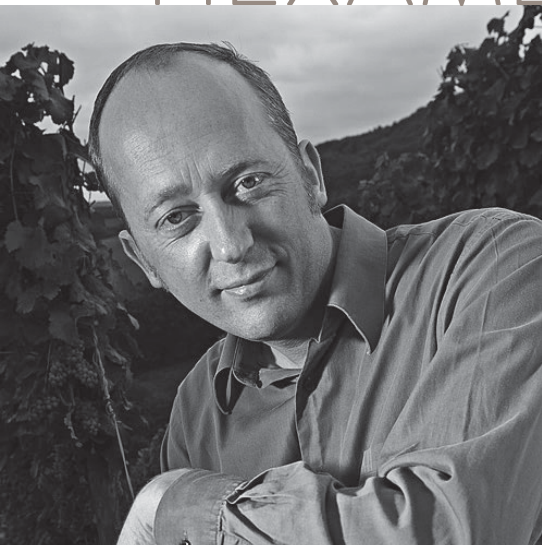
ONE FINAL SURPRISE, AND WAS IT EVER A SURPRISE....

2015 Spätburgunder Rosé Feinherb

12/750ml | GJS-142 | SOS : 1 | SOMMELIER ALERT!

Sure I’d taste it. I’m a broad-minded guy. But wait....shit, this is *delicious*. It’s from (Roxheimer) Höllenpfad—the site Dönnhoff’s making famous—and there is a fruit I literally could not identify. I mean, rose hips? *Groseille*? Literally incomparable! It’s decidedly on the floral delicate side but with positive strong vinosity, not at all fragile, and can be drunk year-round.

HEXAMER



REGION / SUB REGION

Nahe / Meddersheim

VINEYARD AREA

18.5 hectares

ANNUAL PRODUCTION

10,800 cases

TOP SITES AND SOIL TYPES

Meddersheimer Rheingrafenberg
(red slate with a high content of quartzite);
Schloßböckelheimer In den Felsen
(volcanic, porphyry);
Soberner Marbach
(volcanic, porphyry);
Meddersheimer Altenberg
(slate and quartzite);
Schloßböckelheimer Königsfels
(volcanic, porphyry);
Schloßböckelheimer Felsenberg
(volcanic, porphyry)

GRAPE VARIETIES

Riesling
Weissburgunder
Grauburgunder
Spätburgunder
Frühburgunder
Sauvignon Blanc

It's an estate that won't hold still. It keeps adding vineyards because great land is available at irresistible prices. If you probe you discover there are old stocks of back-vintages you never heard about, including one that never was sold. Even the wine style is adapting to the new terroirs, and while Harald's wines will always be on the ultraviolet side, the middle-Nahe wines are less high-strung than the (often) scintillating wines from his home-village of Meddersheim. What is salient about Harald Hexamer's winery is first, his identity as the keeper of the Rheingrafenberg vineyard, an outstanding site of which he is by far the biggest owner; second, his rare ability to make consistently gorgeous dessert-wines—few if any have the gift of keeping them sleek and racy even when they're massively concentrated. And finally, the diamond like cut and clarity of his wines overall, as if he refined them beyond refinement. A balance of two extremes is still a balance, but I find Harald's wines are getting deeper and moderating their extremes into something more drinkable, and even, dare I say, more wholesome.

He's a vineyardist first, only thereafter a cellar master. "I can only attempt to optimize in the cellar what I pull from the vineyard; the quality of the grapes is decisive." He handles as little as possible. The grapes are picked exclusively by hand and fermented very cold (below 12 degrees celsius) with cooling when necessary ("but we often pick so late we bring naturally cold fruit—below 10 degrees—back to the winery.") Yields are controlled by pruning ("We often end up with only

six to eight bunches per vine").

Most of the wines are whole-cluster pressed; "The most filigree wines come from this method." 95% of all Rieslings are made in stainless steel, and only racked three to six weeks after fermentation is complete. The wines are bottled early to preserve their vigor. Acidity has been a theme here, less for its actual extent and more for the way it behaves; Hexamer's wines are (if you like them) "brilliant" and (if you don't like them) "tart." Mind you, I don't actually know if the wines are high in acidity; they just taste that way. Hexamer continues his ongoing bifurcation into two wineries. Not deliberately or by design, but de-facto, because as he adds more land in the central Nahe (with its volcanic soils) it becomes an important facet of his total production. It also stands apart from the upper-Nahe sites he's always worked, and which are so well suited to his zingy ultraviolet style. Harald and I talked about whether that cellar regime was really perfectly suited to the more exotic, smoky wines of Schloßböckelheim, and he agreed that he'd been thinking along similar lines. Meanwhile, the Meddersheimers maintain that winter-sun-on-icicles brilliance they've always shown.

2015 is not just a good vintage for Harald, it's a good kind of vintage. His style is already digital and pixilated, so his wines have more animus in vintages with body and strength. But as always, these are wines of such clarity and gleam, you'll feel certain you must be tasting them on a "fruit day," but naw—it's how the wines are all the time.



2015 Meddesheimer Rheingrafenberg Riesling Trocken “#1”



12/750ml | GHX-121 | SOS:0

I think “#1” is kind of a cute name. It should be a diuretic, right? *Acme Diuretics: We’re Number One!* Actually it’s what Harald calls his top dry Riesling, what would be his “GG” if he was VDP—which thankfully he is not. It’s a cuvee of two cadaster-named parcels, Eisendell (from barrel) and Birkenfelder (from steel tank), both of which belong to the Rheingrafenberg. The wine is completely, almost overwhelmingly convincing. *Rampant* mirabelle aromas, explosively spicy, minty palate but with so much juiciness it isn’t shrill. Green tea and nettle and verbena round out the portrait. This is purely and entirely a dry GERMAN Riesling; it would be unfathomable from Austria or Alsace.

2015 Riesling Feinherb “Porphy”



12/750ml | GHX-122 | SOS:1 | SOMMELIER ALERT!

This wine is so important and I love it so much we’re adding it to the CORE-LIST, which means you can buy it year-round. For me it is nothing less than a glimpse into the perfect future for German Riesling, neither dry nor sweet, simply delicious and amazingly versatile.

And truly, this is a perfection of terroir-driven German Riesling, and in this case “terroir” denotes not some gnarly scratch of pebbles and scree, but smoke, cherries, violets and cloves. Dry Riesling is a recitation, but feinherb Riesling is a melody. *Anyone* who loves and cares about wine should cherish this.

AN INTERMEZZO OF TWO LITTLE WEIRDOS....

2015 Sauvignon Blanc

12/750ml | GHX-123 | SOS:0 | **SOMMELIER ALERT!**

Hexamer has the touch with SB; the wines are never gaudy, vulgar or wretches of pyrazine. This one's a little more silex than usual, so the wet-forest flinty thing is stronger than the bell-peppers; it's a crunchy fine SB, not merely a novelty—though for somms of a certain ilk it has novelty value, so, like, pour?

2015 Spätburgunder Weissherbst Halbtrocken

12/750ml | GHX-119 | SOS:1 | **SOMMELIER ALERT!**

More vinous and Pinot-y now, especially in the delayed-action finish. Smells like fresh Sockeye, spearmint and laurel. Richer than the '14 and more solid than the '13—what a friend this is turning out to be!

WE NOW RESUME OUR REGULARLY SCHEDULED RIESLING ORGY....

2015 Riesling "Quartzit"

12/750ml | GHX-120 | SOS:1

This has become perfect over the past few years—much less sweet than it once was; now it is deep, multi-layered, crackery (rye and seeds), grape-hyacinth aromas alongside cherry and plum-blossom; actually *exciting* wine, serious and diligent.

2015 Meddersheimer Altenberg Riesling Kabinett

12/750ml | GHX-124 | SOS:1

This wine also keeps shedding needless RS, and becomes more racy and drinkable. Again crunchy and spicy, wild plum and spice cake and marjoram—an *edible* wine. So solid, deft, almost nubby texture. What a vintage here!

2015 Meddersheimer Rheingrafenberg Riesling Spätlese

12/750ml | GHX-125 | SOS:2

Again less a sip than a *bite* of wine. From the cadaster parcel Eisendell, it's an emblem of 2015, big juicy body surrounds a cement block of structure; we have sweetness but it expresses as a *brulée* of terroir, black cherry and an improbably dry and long finish.

2015 Meddersheimer Rheingrafenberg Riesling Auslese

12/750ml | GHX-129 | SOS:2

+

2015 Schlossböckelheimer In Den Felsen Riesling Auslese

12/375ml | GHX-126H | SOS:3

++

A vivid (and delicious) examination of terroir. How on earth do you leave such wines behind? The Rheingrafenberg is peyote expressive; it tastes like it would single-handedly wipe out autoimmune disease; insanely spicy and minty, superbly clean botrytis; the substantial RS is absorbed or rather sizzled away. But the Schlossböckelheimer... this is an apex predator of Riesling bliss. Porphyry baby! Smoked peaches, candied violets, total intensity, just a crazy-ass wine.

KRUGER-RUMPF



REGION / SUB REGION

Nahe / Münster-Sarmsheim

VINEYARD AREA

22 hectares

ANNUAL PRODUCTION

13,750 cases

TOP SITES AND SOIL TYPES

Münsterer Dautenpflänzer
(*slate with sandy loam*);
Münsterer Pittersberg
(*slate*);
Münsterer Rheinberg
(*weathered quartzite and sandy loam*);
Binger Scharlachberg Rheinhessen
(*Rotliegend and porphyry*)

GRAPE VARIETIES

Riesling
Pinot Blanc
Pinot Gris
Pinot Noir
Scheurebe

FARMING PRACTICES

Practicing sustainable viticulture

A PROFILE OF THE SITES

Dautenpflänzer is one the leading Grand Crus of the lower Nahe, with a typical mélange of soil types within its borders. Rumpf claims some of it is slatey and some of it is “sandy loam,” which agrees more with the standard references. It is in any case singular and immediately significant, giving a sometimes damnably complex set of aromas and flavors including coconut, violet, soursop, leaf-smoke—it is a very long list even if you’re sober. In any case it belongs with the vamping exotics of the Nahe.

Pittersberg is the other of the top Crus, and this site is more classic and less mischievous than its neighbor. Stefan refers only to “slate” and very often the wine smells just like Mosel wine – in fact just like Graacher Himmelreich. “In parts dusty loam over slate,” according to the textbook. Pittersberg is related to the Rüdesheimer Berg Schlossberg, which is just over the Rhine less than two miles north, though without the Taunus-quartzite of the Rheingau site. Diel’s great Pittermännchen is also on slate; I’m sure the similar names are not coincidence. Pittersberg gives firm, nutty Rieslings.

Rheinberg is the steepest of the three, on weathered quartzite and dusty loam—“similar to Rüdesheimer Berg Roseneck,” according to Stefan. It’s flavors are indeed virtually identical, though the Nahe wine has a grace and curvaciousness the more

stoic Rheingauer lacks. Sweet apples and yellow fruits are paramount here, though the minerally terroir notes give a firm foundation. These are wines of true charm, not merely winning ways. I’d categorize it as a 1er Cru.

Scharlachberg is a Grand Cru, but in fact a Rheinhessen Grand Cru, as it sits across the (mighty!) Nahe from Münster-Sarmsheim; it’s a serious prow of hillside acting as a kind of warm-up to the Rüdesheimer Berg just to its north over the Rhine – though on a radically different soil; a mélange of rotliegend and various volcanic derivatives (e.g., porphyry). The wines are, or can be, superb, seeming to mingle the succulence of Hipping or Pentalthal with the exotics of Felsenberg or Dautenpflänzer.

This on-the-move winery has a steadily excellent vintage in 2015. Stefan compares it with ’96, but I think ’15 is better, riper, more harmonious and likely to age more kindly. Scion Georg is dynamic and busy with a host of projects, but what impressed me most about their ’15s was the clear presence of steady hands.

It’s a large winery by my piddly standards, which can make for an unruly offering if I’m not disciplined. Indeed the prevailing standard was so high I had to leave some good ‘uns behind.

2015 Spätburgunder Rosé

12/750ml | GKF-223 | SOS:0

All Pinot Noir, 80% assemblage and 20% saignée, dry, charming, along lines of rose-hips.

2015 Sauvignon Blanc Trocken

12/750ml | GKF-224 | SOS:0

Everyone seems to be making a little, and notwithstanding my skepticism as to whether the variety actually belongs in Germany (where it is very trendy) I allow myself to be won over by the yummy ones. This is barrel-fermented in (1,000-liter) Stück, without temperature control, and it's a seriously pretty slinky sorta SB, neither paprika nor gooseberry but instead smoky and current-leafy; the palate is racy and juicy and the finish really snappy. I like it a lot, but watch out if you require a "smooth" finish.

2015 Estate Riesling Trocken

12/750ml | GKF-225 | SOS:0 | **SOMMELIER ALERT!**

The '14 was one of the pleasantest surprises of the vintage, and hats off to Georg for working so collegially with me on the assemblage. The parameters are essentially slate and quartzite, and again I love them for not doing it on auto-pilot but instead adjusting the blend to account for each vintage's nature.

This '15 is all slate, and it's juicy, curranty, with the texture of "soft" stones, shade herbs, osmanthus; the profile is dry, bracing but not lean; woodruff and currant over a surmise of stone. Most important it's *tasty*, not seductive but cooperative and easy-going. A little sideways angularity in the aroma makes me wonder whether a teeny homeopathic amount of *Scheu* might have been involved. Not that I'd mind....

2015 Dorsheim Riesling Trocken

12/750ml | GKF-226 | SOS:0 | **SOMMELIER ALERT!**

This is the king among the village wines, probably because it's actually all *Burgberg*, the "GG." At once tall and deep, with superb aromas of nettles and pistachios; palate is earnest and judicious but neither dour nor severe. A "wine of ideas," you could say; it considers your dissertation and writes gentle notes of measured praise. All it's lacking viz. the "GG" is the Affect Of Mighty Significance, which guess what—I don't miss.

2015 Bingen Riesling Trocken

12/750ml | GKF-227 | SOS:0

Fruit and more fruit; peach-apricot-passionfruit and meyer lemon, all on a bed of warm stones. All *sponti* and all cask. This will please the crowd; the wine has a buzz on, it twerks and jiggles, it's fruit in its most powerful form.

THE "GGS"

(tasted in a very embryonic state, so consider these notes preliminary, educated guesses.)

2015 Pittersberg Riesling "GG"

6/750ml | GKF-228

(+ +)

2015 Dautenpflänzer Riesling "GG"

6/750ml | GKF-229

(+ +)

Potentially the most outstanding GGs Rumpfs have made. *Pittersberg* is masculine, slate and salt; incipiently explosive aroma; deep and solid, nutty and mineral and something fibrous and husk-y. *Dautenpflänzer* is wildly exotic, obscure and turbulent, with complex spiciness standing at the threshold about to knock.



2015 Estate Riesling Feinherb

12/750ml | GKF-230 | SOS : 1 | **SOMMELIER ALERT!**

Sugar is to wine what salt is to food, a secret yet ordinary weapon to enhance flavor. Like salt, sugar is vulgar when it's excessive, but also like salt, sugar is *perfect* when you can't taste it but it's doing its magic. It is literally amazing, the layers and graces it adds to this wine, and trust me—you *can't taste it*. It creates serpentine angles and corners of flavor, counterpoints and conversations, and the floral note (violet, wisteria) is piquant astride the mineral base. Simply—this is class. And perfect for the table.

2015 Münsterer Rheinberg Riesling Kabinett

12/750ml | GKF-231 | SOS : 2

An orgy of apples along with their skins, animated and contrapuntal, cox-orange flesh against granny smith skins; solid acid driven finish, and beautifully balanced; soulful texture from cask aging. A leap not forward but *down*, into truth and foundation. This isn't a "little" Kabinett anymore.

2015 Münsterer Dautenplänzer Riesling Spätlese

12/750ml | GKF-233 | SOS : 2

Shows the loam and lemony face of this spicy exotic vineyard; picked ginger, earthy clove and duck skin; freesia and mint—what a glorious Grand Cru this is. Earthy yet tastes like it was visited by extraterrestrials, who threw down seeds for a phosphorescent moss.

2015 Binger Scharlachberg Riesling Spätlese

12/750ml | GKF-232 | SOS : 3

An entirely typical, which is to say riotously super ripe fruity wine from this vineyard, an old-school "sweet" Spätlese anchored to a big earthy richness.

2015 Scheurebe Spätlese

12/750ml | GKF-234 | SOS : 2

Another beauty in a long string of outstanding Scheurebes; this one's all redcurrant, bergamot, allspice, smoke and soursop; not kinky but decidedly off-center; all brown-butter, sage and currant leaf.

SCHLOSSGUT DIEL



REGION / SUB REGION

Nahe / Burg Layen

VINEYARD AREA

22 hectares

ANNUAL PRODUCTION

12,500 cases

TOP SITES AND SOIL TYPES

Pittermännchen

(*slate*);

Goldloch

(*gravel*);

Burgberg

(*quartzite*);

Dorsheimer Pittermännchen

(*slate*);

Dorsheimer Goldloch

(*gravel*);

Dorsheimer Burgberg

(*quartzite*)

GRAPE VARIETIES

70% Riesling

25% Pinot Noir,

Pinot Gris and

Pinot Blanc

FARMING PRACTICES

Practicing sustainable viticulture

A bit of context for anyone recently arrived....

Until not very long ago, Armin Diel was what my New York friends would call a Macher, influential, a personage, a man of consequence. He was the author of several books and the editor of the leading German wine guide, the Gault-Millau. He is also the peer of many leading European wine estate proprietors, and is also connected to people we'd call "movers and shakers." You'd not be surprised, when tasting one of his wines at the estate, to learn it had been served at the wedding of the daughter of the CEO of Mercedes-Benz—that sort of thing.

Armin has eased back into a more private life, and his daughter Caroline has assumed control of the estate. She is a great hero of mine, because with her connections (not to mention looks and charm and smarts) she could have done any number of Dolly-girl jobs, but she chose instead to get her hands dirty working as a vintner. When you see her in my film, you'll know right away why she inspires me so.

Slowly it's easier to approach and discern the wines qua wines, without the "omigod-DIEL" star-struck-ness one may have felt before. These wines indeed have quite a lot of aristocratic polish, but so do other wines, and these are also delicious and not the least bit haughty. Ten years from now Caroline will be sailing along on a reputation for which she is primarily responsible, and so I encourage you to look ahead.

There are a few murmurs that Caroline Diel is changing the style of the wines,

and there's a little truth behind it, but not a lot. People look for these things and find them when they expect to, even if they're actually just figments of their expectations. But Caroline has her own taste, of course, and the wines will slowly shape-shift to align with her preferences—but not a lot of shifting is called for. The wines were already fine, classy and articulate.

Caroline has a markedly outstanding vintage in 2015, even by this estate's already high standards. Indeed this was one of the few collections (among Selbach, Catoir and Dönnhoff) where it almost felt as another vintage entirely had been made. Diel's '15s are marked by astounding precision, grace and class. And you know, it's one thing to prevail over a "difficult" vintage (such as '13 and '14) but it's perhaps even more remarkable to take a good, easy vintage like '15 and improve upon it. Can I say these wines are sophisticated? Because I fear you'll hear "pretentious" if I use that word, whereas what I mean is they are smart, craftsmanlike and delicious.

2014 Pinot Noir “Cuvée Caroline”

+

6/750ml | GSD-172

The most polished PN in this portfolio, and one of the few really toothsome wines from the otherwise stewy and tannic '14s. Rich, marrowy aromas here, rose-hips and really good consommé; a tic of tannin works dusty and gauzy; the palate is delicate, sleek yet also purring a baritone sweetness, with spice-box and soy. More Ahr than Baden; rich, smart, gracious and pretty.

2015 Rosé de Diel

++

12/750ml | GSD-170 | SOS:1 | **SOMMELIER ALERT!**

Best! Vintage! *Ever!* Right in the sweet-spot between weight and buoyancy, fruit and splashy transparency; it's solid yet weightless, with *fantastic* fruit; don't dare miss this high-water-mark of stylishness and pure YUM-factor.

2015 Riesling Trocken

+

12/750ml | GSD-173 | SOS:0

This is how it's done folks. Light, silky, really truly *dry* but not a bite or a scratch on its elegant surface; salty and mineral, all silver and gray; a detailed articulate delicate Riesling of length and sheer class.

2015 Dorsheim Riesling Trocken

12/750ml | GSD-174 | SOS:0

The sweet lime and freesia aromas announce a more “feminine” wine, but the palate is powdery and sternly dry. It has some astringency that filtration will remove. It leaves a *fond* of roasted bones and black salt.

2015 Riesling “Eierfels” Trocken

+

6/750ml | GSD-175 | SOS:0

This is a cuvée of (basically) the 2nd-wine of the “GGs,” in this case two-thirds Goldloch and one-third Burgberg, and is thus an ideal value for a wine with every virtue except profundity. Cool euphoric perfume, white flowers, chalk, lemon blossom; actually smells like hillside *Mesnil*; plays in a fluting register, and yields to a minty talc-y lemon-powdery finish.

2015 Goldloch Riesling “GG”

++

6/750ml | GSD-176 | SOS:0 | **SOMMELIER ALERT!**

Markedly accessible at this stage, showing the talc, white flowers and key lime profile of Goldloch, not the sometimes baroque pitted fruit facets. The palate is aerial yet stern, delicate yet intense, kelpy, a *dashi* of Riesling—ginger, tapioca, coconut... and the alcohol?? What Federspiel is in the same *universe* as something like this?

2015 Pittermännchen Riesling “GG”

+

6/750ml | GSD-177 | SOS:0

Pungently slatey; ostensibly lighter but curiously lingering and stubborn; a wine of twigs and shoots and small bones, Riesling with no concessions; intricate trigonometry of gravelly mineral, lacy hoar-frost tracings of delicate little threads of Riesling love.

2015 Riesling Feinherb “Von der Nahe”

+

12/750ml | GSD-178 | SOS:1 | **SOMMELIER ALERT!**

Perfect! Zingy, minerally, perfectly balanced, piquant and zippy, real Nahe, as balanced and spicy as the “MC” we get from Catoir but sleeker and “greener,” more stone and shade-herbs, less exotic and tropical. The entire Riesling *genre* soars on such wines!

2014 Riesling Kabinett

+

12/750ml | GSD-165

A delicious and (again) perfectly balanced Riesling; glorious fragrance, talc and golden-delicious apples; I don't remember a better edition of this wine; it's the perfect classic not-hardly-sweet Kabinett. “Great drinkyness,” as Caroline says. Stretched taut but neither austere nor lean. A Riesling Ideal.



2015 Dorsheimer Goldloch Riesling Kabinett

12/750ml | GSD-179 | SOS : 2

A cool, delicate rendering of the Great Lady that is Goldloch; a lovely being of a certain fleshy amplitude but also fresh, vertical, and *snappy*—there's almost 10g of acidity with 45g of RS; a classic paradigm of high-acid German Riesling.

2015 Dorsheimer Pittermännchen Riesling Spätlese

6/750ml | GSD-180 | SOS : 2

Shimmering and brilliant to an almost ludicrous degree; reminds me of the 1-star Auslese from Christoffel, the buzzing slate, *para*-slate, the lashing gorgeousness of naked slate; a parfait of green apple.

2015 Dorsheim Riesling Auslese

12/750ml | GSD-181 | SOS : 3 (barely)

Fruit from all three "GGs," this is the perfect argument for "Auslese" as not only a genre, but as a certain type and nature of beauty I don't think we can just walk away from. A paradigm, if you will. As savory as aged Comté, not a botrytis liqueur but a salty-savory wine with "a certain sweetness," showing here as grain and straw more than peaches and nectarines. It seems to urge toward sweetness but finally yields to its crisp quince-y acidity.

2015 Dorsheimer Pittermännchen Riesling Auslese

12/375ml | GSD-182H | SOS : 3

I couldn't help it, the wine was too lovely. Throw my ass out to pasture when I ever become indifferent to a wine like this. Salty, sassafrass, any sweetness it has seems to wash away to stones and zinginess; like fruit that spent six months in zero-gravity.

THE RHEINGAU

It's always dispiriting to consider all the good land in the Rheingau and all the complacent growers who seem to have resisted the healthy competitiveness of growers in other regions. I wonder if this will ever change. Of course it makes me grateful for the few really superb growers who swim against the current of mediocrity, because I've always revered the great Rheingau wines. Always and still. But every time you hear that one of the old Great Names is reviving its old reputation, you either don't see it when you taste, or it turns out they've been doing illegal and unsavory things, as was the case with one conspicuous Great Name who was so corrupt there hardly seemed to be an illegal practice they omitted.

We have a new grower to offer you whom I think is truly exciting. What I don't know is whether he is a herald of better things to come, or just an exception that proves the rule. Still, I was struck by the keenness of the thrill, to discover an under-the-radar family estate making *typical* firm RG-Riesling showing the sort of abiding dignity that makes those wines unique.

SPREITZER



REGION / SUB REGION

Rheingau / Oestrich

VINEYARD AREA

17 hectares

ANNUAL PRODUCTION

8,500 cases

TOP SITES

Oestricher Lenchen
(*gravel, clay*);
Oestricher Doosberg;
(*gravel, clay, marl, loess*);
Oestricher Rosengarten
(*tertiary marl, loess*);
Winkeler Jesuitengarten
(*sand, loess, gravel*);
Hattenheimer Wisselbrunnen
(*marl, loam*);
Hattenheimer Engelmansberg
(*loess, loam*);
Hallgartener Hendelberg
(*clay, marl*)

SOIL TYPES

deep tertiary loam and loess

GRAPE VARIETIES

96% Riesling
4% Spätburgunder

FARMING PRACTICES

Practicing sustainable viticulture

Because they're in Oestrich, where the wines tend to run fruity, one can forget this is a Rheingau estate. But one taste of the astonishing Jesuitengarten Spätlese brought home reminded me why this region attained its reputation for aristocracy. It is, however, a bastard to put into words.

Let's try anyway. Rheingau Rieslings are alpha. They assume the right to be in command. They have the natural bearing of the born leader, including the geniality that makes the best leaders. Yet behind it is an essential indifference to the impression they make on you. This isn't haughty, but they aren't going to preen for you. They have no desire nor need to ingratiate themselves. You'd seldom use a word like gushing or seductive to describe a classic Rheingau wine, but you'd use words like splendid or impeccable. And all of this is entirely compatible with deliciousness, just as all leaders display an irresistible magnetism.

Only good things to report here. 2015 is exceedingly fine, with a whole bevy of delicious, successful wines across the RS range. And there is also a slight change of style, in terms of winemaking, in terms of how the wines show when young, that is, when we're tasting and judging them. Spreitzers heard our comments that the wines had a lot of sponti aromas out of the gate, and while we all claim to want "natural" yeast ferments, we're less likely to cuddle up to the sometimes inconvenient aromas that result—unless of course the wine is in the "natural wine" matrix, in which case anything goes. Our heroes are still doing ambient ferments but the

wines are better behaved, and it's now possible to see what we used to have to wait 2-3 years to see: just how outstanding these wines are. Outstanding enough for me to offer eleven of them, seductive beasts that they are.

2015 Estate Riesling Trocken

12/750ml | GSP-117 | SOS : 1 (though in fact it is dry)

(Lot 90) This is a huge step up from the '14; lavishly juicy! Lovely fragrances, gently sponti, apple compote, lilacs; a wonderful fruit-driven RG-Riesling; dry but relaxed and genial.

2015 Oestricher Muschelkalk Riesling Trocken

12/750ml | GSP-118 | SOS : 0

This used to be the Doosberg, and I'm sure it was changed to accommodate some arcane VDP diktat. In any case the wine is excellent; beautifully mineral and gently dry; white hyacinth; slim, demure and complex dialogue of flowers and rock dust.

2015 Hallgartener Hendelberg Riesling Trocken Alte Reben

12/750ml | GSP-120 | SOS : 0

A new-ish cask, and thus an outlier in the family; nutty and savory, crusty and addictive. I hedge the plus to see how it gets through bottling, but it's at least equal to the excellent '14.

2015 Rosengarten Riesling "GG"

6/750ml | GSP-122 | SOS: 1 (though, again, dry) | **SOMMELIER ALERT!**

This is the most charming "GG" I think I know. Others can sometimes feel like monuments of their own Solemn Stature, but this is just volley after volley of concentrated fruit. That said, this '15 is unusually mineral, like a basket of apples with flint sparks flashing; wonderfully expressive, it's the best vintage I've tasted, with endlessly juicy tangy fruit threading off in a fine white line of spice, delicious phsio-sweetness—it's *hard* to resist!

2015 Wisselbrunnen Riesling "GG"

6/750ml | GSP-121 | SOS : 0

Wow, what a vintage here..... Raw pretzel dough and nut husk typical of the Cru; torque, thrust and spiciness, quite the Prussian officer next to the Rosengarten, but the sheer intensity is convincing (if not overwhelming); overall feeling drier and crunchier.

2016 Hattenheimer Englemannsberg Riesling Feinherb

12/750ml | GSP-123 | SOS : 1 | **SOMMELIER ALERT!**

Soils are loess, loess-loam and tertiary marls, somewhat similar to its neighbor, the great Nussbrunnen. Lot #18 was the more elegant of two options, with its typical oatmeal-y sweet-grain; a lick of savory *jus* off a duck breast; pink pepper; the mid-palate exhales into a lovely tertiary finish of dried apricot.

2015 Winkeler Jesuitengarten Riesling Feinherb Alte Reben

12/750ml | GSP-125 | SOS : 1 | **SOMMELIER ALERT!**

A true masterpiece. Plays on every register; earthy, irises, capacious and vivid; a solid spicy mass, primordial depth, implacable length; the 1st finish is monumental, the tertiary finish is all lamb and mint jelly. Use this wine to understand the renown the Rheingau once had, and could have again if more wines like this were made. And **if you only buy one Spreitzer wine, make it this one.**

2015 Riesling "101"

12/750ml | GSP-119 | SOS : 1

Essentially the estate-riesling in a feinherb idiom. It's appley and pithy, less of the stony spine of the hill vineyards; more pure fruit yet still firm, fibrous, wintergreeny, with all the fruit and vigor we love in this wonderfully flexible wine.



2015 Oestricher Lenchen Riesling Kabinett

12/750ml | GSP-127 | SOS : 2

This wine has about *half* the sweetness it did only five years ago. It combines cox orange pippins and wintergreen, and it's worth inhaling deeply to reach the apple-y depth; a zingy wine with a nuance of sweet chiles and roasted parsnip; Riesling in the "classic" rendering, sweetness mitigated by a bracing freshness; charming and refreshing.

2015 Winkeler Jesuitengarten Riesling Spätlese

12/750ml | GSP-127 | SOS : 3

Solid and with a jot of botrytis; its sweet in the foreground but a high gingery and flowery note lifts the aromas and front-palate, albeit the middle and end are old-school sweet.

2015 Oestricher Lenchen Riesling Spätlese "303"

6/750ml | GSP-126 | SOS : 3

From the cadaster parcel *Eisenberg* (iron hill) from which a TBA was picked in 1921 which had the then-record must weight of 303°. This '15 is quite piquant and acid-driven; the iron is pronounced, the botrytis is (let's call it) "expressive," and this minty guy doesn't say his speech all at once. Be patient as it billows and deepens. This will be *hard* to suss in a quick swirl 'n' hurl.

KÜNSTLER



REGION / SUB REGION

Rheingau / Hochheim

VINEYARD AREA

42 hectares

ANNUAL PRODUCTION

Between 250,000 and 320,000 bottles total

TOP SITES AND SOIL TYPES

Hochheimer Domdechaney (*calcareous clay marl with pebbles from the river Main*); Hochheimer Kirchenstück (*heavy limestone with loamy loess*); Hochheimer Hölle (*heavy clay with limestone sediment*); Hochheimer Herrnberg (*limestone debris with layers of sand*); Rüdesheimer Berg Rottland (*Tanus quartzite and loess*); Rüdesheimer Bischofsberg (*loess, loam*); Rüdesheimer Drachenstein (*Tanus quartzite and loess*)

GRAPE VARIETIES

80% Riesling
12% Spätburgunder
8% Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc, Grüner Veltliner and Silvaner

FARMING PRACTICES

Practicing sustainable viticulture

There aren't many more sure-things in the wine business than a new vintage at Künstler. And as good as 2015 is here, the chief revelation from this visit was the amazing quality of the late-released 2014s. Gunter's is a guiding hand overseen by a calm intelligence that reminds me of Johannes Selbach. And man, he was born to make dry Riesling...

Künstler is now essentially bracketing the Rheingau, with land in Hochheim and Rüdesheim. (Yes I know there's other villages "technically" part of the Rheingau but actually and properly part of the Mittelrhein.) The Rüdesheim thing is fairly new, and gives this vintner a chance to speak a radically different language than that of his native Hochheim. The latter is also "attached" to the Rheingau because the wines kind-of resemble Rheingau wines, plus where else could they put it? The river Main, which defines the wines of Franken, empties into the Rhine at Mainz, and the very last vineyards on its north bank are those of Hochheim. The great site is Domdechaney, followed closely by Kirchenstück—both Grand Crus—followed by Hölle and Stielweg which I think are 1er Crus, though I suspect Gunter would disagree. Soils run to loams, marls and clay, and the microclimate in Hochheim is rather more humid than its environs. This can complicate Gunter's urge to move in an organic direction, though he says "Generally we are working without any herbicides since 1992 and we grow on 11 hectares (TT: of 42 in total) organically. Here we have three blocks of about 3.5 hectares. In the future we will move step by step to 100 % organic, but this,

in our warm and humid microclimate, is not easy. Finally I have to make ends meet and to pay my employees. In order to produce dry Rieslings we have to protect against botrytis in every production step." Cellar work is generally in line with the norms among elite producers. Musts settle by gravity and are pressed clear. He ferments with cultured yeast, because it's often still warm when grapes are being picked ("Which means flies and bees...") and to work sponti would mean a greater risk of volatile acidity. The cellar orients toward cask as opposed to steel, though each is used. Wood gives the ideal low tech micro-oxygenation. The overriding goal is to produce wines with "heart and soul," and here I think is where these new Rüdesheimers are especially interesting. Of course it will take several more years for these vineyards to improve to Gunter's prevailing standard, but it's already apparent how much more unruly the Rüdesheimers are compared to the rather more *comme il faut* Hochheimers.

In the ADVOCATE reviews, Stefan Reinhardt used the German term "Vollprofi" to describe Gunter, and he's exactly right; the term means (sort of like) "the pro's pro." There's a palpable intelligence across the range, and the craftsmanship that results from that intelligence, plus vision, perspective and know-how. In the next life when I'm king, I'll give this guy a bunch of vineyards from across the Rheingau—most of which are in under-performing hands—and let him show what this region can do. Just looking at the great land he does have—Domdechaney and Kirchenstück in Hochheim, and Berg

Rottland in Rüdesheim, gives a teasing glimpse of supernal possibility. The first year's offer was unruly, I admit, because there was so much wine available. This

time I tried to rein myself in, with fitful success as you'll see. I know these aren't inexpensive wines, but you do say you want great dry Riesling, and you won't

find anything more expressive, solid and delicious than these.

2014 Spätburgunder "Tradition"

12/750ml | **GKU-037**

This is less charming than the '13—as is typical for the two vintages. Gravelly tannins, but spicy and assertive. I'd say to decant a couple hours out, and let the marrowy rose-hip flavors emerge.

2013 Spätburgunder Hochheimer Stein "GG" +

6/750ml | **GKU-038** | **SOMMELIER ALERT!**

This is spendy but it's also *really* classy and tasty, representing German red at its most adult and poised. Smells like Morey Mont Luissants; gorgeous spice-box and soy; silky texture but spicy high notes add a twist to the richness. Sensual and smart.

The Cru is on sandy-gravelly soil but also shows loess and loess-loam over tertiary marl.

2015 Riesling Trocken +

12/750ml | **GKU-030** | **SOS : 0** | **SOMMELIER ALERT!**

We're talkin' steady-Eddy, because this is consistently the smartest dry estate Riesling I know. Delicious and dignified; savory, cornbread and brown-butter with firm structure and frothy fruit. It's in fact somewhat too good, but I won't tell if you don't.

2015 Hochheimer Kirchenstück Riesling Kabinett Trocken (+)

12/750ml | **GKU-031** | **SOS : 0**

One of the best two sites in Hochheim—the other being Domdechaneu—this is in fact a "GG," and it's not supposed to be offered as a "Kabinett." Why then is it? The answer is so logical it calls the entire wisdom of the VDP into question. Gunter picks when the grapes are *ripe and clean*, because if he waits he runs the risk of having overripe and/or botrytisey material, neither of which he desires. The result of his eminently sensible decision is a wine with alcohol around 12.5% that *tastes like the site*. Such thinking is anything but radical, yet it runs afoul of the "system" and thus our hero is a calm and reasonable outlaw.

The wines always have (what I call) an erogenous minerality, the thing that says immediately—this is special land. This '15 has every gorgeous gnarl of terroir, constricted by very recent bottling, so I'll spare you the details. Suffice to say, this is an exceptional *value*, and lest we forget.... ROCK-HEADS: line up!

2015 Hochheimer Domdechaneu Riesling Trocken + +

6/750ml | **GKU-033** | **SOS : minus -1**

Truly stunning Grand Cru aromas. The whole periodic table of elements seems to live in it. There is also the complexity of the unseeable—though what *can* be seen is bilberry, heirloom apple, puff pastry and a profound, powerful symphony of rocks; an alpha, an apex-predator of terroir! Not only "masculine" but *manly*. As far as this vein of character will reach, but please understand that the wine is stern.

2013 Rüdeshheimer Berg Rottland Riesling "GG" +

6/750ml | **GKU-027**

All the rye-dough and barley of the site in a spritzy brilliant form (yet 100% made in cask); really absurd relief and length; every imaginable intensity though without "power," only precision and expressiveness. No fruit really, nothing floral, just pheasant stock and Triscuits. Riesling's genius—and who doesn't like Triscuits?

2014 Kostheimer Weiß Erd Riesling "GG" +

6/750ml | **GKU-035** | **SOS : 0**

First offering. The white marl soil creates Champagne-like aromas; the wine is actually chalky, cool and refined; the powdery mineral has a salty vein and also a mustard-green snap, all into a savory mineral-drenched finish. Lovely stylish Riesling.



2015 Hochheimer Kirchenstück Riesling Beerenauslese

(+) +

12/375ml | GKU-036H | SOS:4

I don't write notes about young sweet wines because it is often ridiculous. But this wine is clear and sleek, and you *recognize the site*; it's very sweet but that's excusable, the syrup is lissome not heavy. It excels in finesse, which is all I ask.

AND, BECAUSE I COULDN'T HELP MYSELF.....

2015 Sauvignon Blanc Trocken

12/750ml | GKU-034 | SOS:0

I tried to leave it aside, really! But it's so bright, such a chalk-dusty wine, with its mid-palate of sweated fennel; overall it's compact, mineral and strong. Not a lot of bell-pepper or gooseberry, but instead it's gleaming and minty.

WEINGUT GOLDATZEL



REGION/SUB REGION

Rheingau/ Johannisberg,
Winkel and Geisenheim

VINEYARD AREA

12 hectares

ANNUAL PRODUCTION

Between 60,000-75,000
bottles in total

TOP SITES AND SOIL TYPES

Johannisberger Goldatzel
(loam, loess, quartzite) ;
Johannisberger Vogelsang
(gravel, sandy loam) ;
Johannisberger Hölle
(loam, quartz and
some iron rich earth) ;
Winkeler Hasensprung
(deep loess, loam with chalk,
quartz and slate) ;
Geisenheimer Kläuserweg
(loam, marl, chalky clay)

GRAPE VARIETIES

80% Riesling
15% Pinot Noir
5% other varieties

A newbie!

This is a 12-hectare estate that's recently gotten an infusion of energy from young Johannes Gross, who is in his third year post-university (Geisenheim), and who is working seamlessly alongside his parents. I emphasize that; he isn't taking a moribund estate and "rescuing" it, but he is guaranteeing its healthy future and making any number of small impacts.

I was tipped off. I went to visit, and met Gross Seniors, and tasted a lot of wines and really liked what I was tasting. So I bought a mixed case and shipped them to myself and *drank* them over a period of months, just like you guys do, just to see if the wines were truly attractive and interesting as opposed to merely "showing" well. The truth of *any* wine is not how the first sip tastes, but rather the last. And these were '14s and '13s, two difficult vintages, and every single bottle was delightful, fascinating or both, and all of them kept tasting lovely after days open in the fridge.

To the facts at hand. These are what I'd call *CLASSIC* Rheingau Rieslings, which is to say they are spicy, stoic and firm. The true RG-Riesling is almost never in-gratiating, though they are delicious in their cordial ways. They possess another kind of charm; the kind that doesn't care what you think of them. Traditionally this kind of Riesling has always skewed dry, or dry-ish, and these wines are no exception. Nothing here is what any normal taster would call "sweet," even the wines with residual sugar. But they are *saturated* with personality and with the easy command that makes such wines aristocratic.

There's a bevy of great vineyards: in Geisenheim the supernal *Kläuserweg*, probably that commune's best site: in Johannisberg the great *Hölle*, giving rampantly powerful wines from its steep slope, as well as the *Goldatzel* and its crystalline wines with such fastidious chiseled clarity: finally the (Winkeler) Hasensprung shows as it *truly* should show and all too rarely does, as its boundaries were absurdly extended by the numbnuts '71 wine law.

The family operates an informal restaurant up the hill from Schloss Johannisberg, with a commanding view over the vineyards to the Rhine, and it would have sufficed for the wines to be decently competent, to be consumed by weekenders and gawkers. All the more impressive, therefore, just how serious and impeccable these wines are.

The facts of the matter are, they ferment with both neutral cultures and with ambient yeasts. In principle the wines are whole-cluster pressed, which accounts for their polish and transparency. Wines are made and developed in tanks or casks according to their characters. Fermentation temperatures can be controlled but very seldom are. The family has no "formula" regarding lees-contact, preferring to judge it wine by wine. They bottle on the young side, to preserve primary fruit. Ecologically the estate is classic "sustainable," which means (among other things) that spraying is usually done between 2:00-3:00 *in the morning*, so as to inhibit unwanted dispersal. "We do not use copper, insecticides, botyticides. If Herbicide is used, it is only underneath the vines

and [no more than] once a year; the use is more and more declining.”

As someone who has long lamented the dearth of new talent in the Rheingau, this was a momentous discovery for me.

It is all the more heartening to see them respecting and fulfilling the paradigm for these unique Rieslings, and not seeking to “reinvent” the recipe. I can’t wait to taste them with you.

It’s a lot of wine(s) but I’m a lot of excited. In time we’ll cull away into a steady and sensible assortment. For now, nothing is wasted, everything belongs, and everything is *rockin*.’

2014 Johannisberger Vogelsang Riesling Trocken

12/750ml | GDZ-001 | SOS:0

This was one of the wines I took home, and I’m thrilled he still had any—we bought all he could spare, as well as the next two wines. *Vogelsang* is in my opinion a 1er-Cru, a flat-ish site on deep gravelly loess and loess-loam. The wines tend to run direct and (relatively) fruity, and this superb ‘14 is savory and brothy, winsome and surprisingly long.

2014 Winkeler Hasensprung Riesling Kabinett Trocken

12/750ml | GDZ-002 | SOS:0

You really see the tarragon and verbena aromas of this vineyard, a taut and textured spiciness and a vein of salt and fennel; this ‘14 is wonderfully juicy and savory.

2014 Geisenheimer Kläuserweg Riesling Spätlese Trocken

12/750ml | GDZ-003

Kläuserweg always smells like vetiver to me, almost referring to GrüVe as much as to Riesling; it excels by force of expressiveness and its no-quarter-given power; eggplant and rosemary with a beautifully assertive profile. Limestone, loess, loess-loam and tertiary marl on the due-south hillside.

2015 Johannisberger Goldatzel Riesling Spätlese Trocken “Bestes Fass”

+

12/750ml | GDZ-004 | SOS:0 | **SOMMELIER ALERT!**

This “best cask” would easily take its place alongside any “GG” throughout the entire region; refined, crystalline, flowery; green and sapid, balsam; precise and spicy, like you squeezed some rare nectar from flowers and tea leaves. The site lies upslope, and Taunus quartzite makes an appearance.

2015 Winkeler Hasensprung Erste Gewächs Riesling Trocken

+

12/750ml | GDZ-005 | SOS:0

Vinified in 800-liter acacia casks, which are both more neutral and more porous than oak. This has exemplary poise and balance; a *ne plus ultra* of the vineyard; shady and herbal, iris and ore, spicy and wild-lavender and a savory finish like puff-pastry.

2015 Johannisberger Goldatzel Riesling Kabinett Feinherb

+

12/750ml | GDZ-006 | SOS:1

“Feinherb” at this address means a wine on the *dry* side of Halbtrocken, i.e., dry enough to be “Brut” if it were sparkling. This is really pretty, delicate and winsome, flowery along violet lines. It’s *keen*, almost urgent in its tender way, like a Nahe wine, with superb balance on the dry side. Hard to resist!

2015 Johannisberger Hölle Riesling Spätlese Feinherb

12/750ml | GDZ-007 | SOS:1 | **SOMMELIER ALERT!**

Wines from this vineyard can be monumental. This one’s rich and juicy, more roasty and robust than the Goldatzel; a salty lip-smacker, buttery puff-pastry, complex and grand. *Rheingau!*

2015 Geisenheimer Kläuserweg Riesling Spätlese Feinherb

(+) +

12/750ml | GDZ-008 | SOS: 1

A Trocken rendition seemed a bit ungainly, but this pittance of RS justifies all that power. It's like a library of Riesling, old thick books, ladders and shelves and scholars and quiet and concentration. But also, spice and power, roasted veggie savor and a firm no-nonsense profile.

2015 Johannisberger Hölle Riesling Kabinett

12/750ml | GDZ-009 | SOS: 2

Just bottled but promising in its strong roasty way. Bright and almost buttery with a fine herbal edge. Great promise for a dignified yet yielding and savory wine.

2015 Winkeler Hasensprung Riesling Spätlese

+

12/750ml | GDZ-010 | SOS: 2

Also just bottled yet a strikingly refined aroma—the kind that makes you ask why they'd ever make them dry. Apex-lacy, lime blossom, articulate herbs and flowers, not at all very sweet; verbena and wintergreen; a spicy minty and savory wine.

2015 Johannisberger Hölle Riesling Auslese

+ +

12/500ml | GDZ-011H | SOS: 3

A *magnificent* old-school perfect Auslese! Not a pimped-up score whore but a solid and splendid being that's absorbed a *perfect* botrytis; malty, sweet but strong, not a fragile little parfait. A Rheingau paradigm here, like a wine from the 50s.

GEORG BREUER



REGION/SUB REGION

Rheingau/Rüdesheim and Rauenthal

VINEYARD AREA

33 hectares

ANNUAL PRODUCTION

Between 150,000 and 175,000 bottles in total

TOP SITES AND SOIL TYPES

Rüdesheimer Berg Schlossberg (predominantly slate and quartzite);
Rüdesheimer Berg Rottland (rich loess, loam with some slate and quartz);
Rüdesheimer Berg Roseneck (Tanus quartz and loess soil);
Rauenthaler Nonnenberg (Monopole—phyllite soils—slate with white mica and gravel deposits)

GRAPE VARIETIES

Riesling
Pinot Noir
Pinot Gris

Cornelius Dönnhoff and Theresa Breuer are both members of a sustainability certifying organization called Fair And Green, which by the way I find to be the *very* best of its kind. Cornelius mentioned that he thought we should get acquainted with Theresa, if for no other reason than that she was “*sympathisch*”, which in German means “a good sort” or words to that effect.

I knew her father, Bernhard Breuer, though not very well. Our paths crossed once and again, and we shared a pleasure in theorizing how German Riesling “ought” to be, about which we shared many common views. Somehow I had never met Theresa, and now, having met her, I admonish myself. Life is truly too short not to know people like her.

And most saliently, wines like hers. This will be a shorter text than the estate deserves, simply because when I visited it was not with the idea of representing them, but only to pay respects. I tasted carefully but only took sketchy notes. Still, I came away with an interesting image of the wines. I knew they’d be refined and pure, and I knew they were among the elite in the Rheingau, but I didn’t know how much they’d make me *feel*.

This made me curious, and I asked Theresa if she could identify a way her wines were different from those of her peers. She answered, “*I don’t want to divert with wine making techniques, I don’t want to produce overloaded fruit bombs... I don’t want everybody’s darlings; we try to produce wines with a character and a life line...*” and this answer went part of the way. I asked her a bunch of other ques-

tions about basic cellar practices, and her answers were as I hoped—basically, it depends. That’s always the best answer.

I found the wines to be uniformly soulful, whether I liked them a little or a lot. I felt I was in the presence of wines with beating hearts, not merely wines with “superb” flavors. And I also found a seamless unity of person and wine that reassured me.

And so I’ve rather hastily assembled an offering along lines of an opening salvo, to be focused and made logical over time. Right now I feel these wines belong in my world, and therefore in yours, and with that in place the rest will follow.

Three families of wine emerge from the estate: Pinot Noirs from in and around Rüdesheim, Rieslings from Rüdesheim, and most compelling for me, Rieslings from Rauenthal, from a *monopole* holding called Nonnenberg. This commune can give the most heart-rending Rheingau wines of all, and has suffered more than anywhere else in the region from underachieving among its landowners. A single taste of Breuer’s wines—any of them—from this village and you’ll know immediately; these are wines not only to respect, admire or appreciate – these are wines to love.

I found a pervasive character of persimmon and melon over the range, along with great class but even more important, great *poise*. It’s hard to define, but it’s what makes you feel friendly toward a wine.

So here they are, with a few short words.

2013 Rouge Rheingau Spätburgunder

12/750ml | GGB-001

I found this to be excellent, marrowy and classy.

2015 Georg Breuer Sauvage Rheingau Riesling Trocken

12/750ml | GGB-002

This basic dry estate Riesling is beautiful, classic, firm and mineral.

2014 Rudesheim Estate Riesling Trocken

12/750ml | GGB-003

Though Breuer is not VDP, having left in 2000—they use the estate-village-Cru system, and this wine is salty, fruity, full of a soulful woody balsam note; classy and delicious.

2014 Rauenthal Estate Riesling Trocken

12/750ml | GGB-004

Oh man, what perfume. It's a little more phenolic than the Rudesheim, a little tighter, but that fruit is just miraculous.

+

2014 Terra Montosa Rheingau Riesling Trocken

12/750ml | GGB-005

I understand this to be a cuvée from the Rudesheimer Berg, and found it to be salty and yummy.

2014 Nonnenberg Rheingau Riesling Trocken

6/750ml | GGB-007

2013 Nonnenberg Rheingau Riesling Trocken

6/750ml | GGB-006

These are almost luscious, fine classic Rauenthalers, the smells of nostalgia, wistfulness and longing.

+ +

+ +

MITTEL RheIN



The Rhine valley between Bingen and Koblenz is a UNESCO World Heritage Zone, and if you're a tourist "doing" Germany you're bound to see it. Yet for all the visitors it receives, it's become rather sleepy as a wine region.

That's actually due to the tourism, because the taverns and steamship lines drove the prices down to the point the grower couldn't make a living in such steep land. Marginal vineyards were abandoned—and not only marginal vineyards. But there's signs it may have bottomed out, as Weingart told me the vineyard acreage had actually increased of late.

It's a wide sort of gorge the river cuts between the Taunus hills on its right bank and the Hunsrück hills on its left. There are riverfront vineyards and others snaking off into lateral valleys heading for the hills. Soils run to slate and quartzite in general, and the wines taste like fuller-bodied Mosels. There are very few "names" here, and the ones that do exist need to charge prices commensurate with their costs, which are quite high in the perpendicular land. But I'm glad I went, because otherwise I'd never have met my hero—about whom you're about to read...

WEINGART



REGION / SUB REGION

Mittelrhein / Spay

VINEYARD AREA

4.3 hectares

ANNUAL PRODUCTION

3,300 cases

TOP SITES AND SOIL TYPES

Bopparder Hamm Feuerlay
(*devonian slate*);
Bopparder Hamm Ohlenberg
(*devonian slate with
small amounts of loess*);
Bopparder Hamm Engelstein
(*loess with variable contents of
lime, slate and volcanic ashes*)

GRAPE VARIETIES

93% Riesling
5% Spätburgunder
2% Grauburgunder

We're a couple of salmons, him and me; we never met a stream we wouldn't try to swim up, against every sensible current. Florian's little revolution takes two forms. One, he's resisting the urge to grow the estate, and wants in fact to shrink it down to about 4 hectares (10 acres) because then he can do much of the vineyard work himself. Not for him, the task of being "winery sales manager," schlepping hither and yon to this fair and that, hawking his wares. Nor is he eager to be an "estate administrator" giving people orders to do things he'd prefer to do himself. He is, in his unassuming way, enacting an example of the world he wants to live in. I love this.

He continues to wish to reduce the estate's size to something he can do himself, as he wants his hands in the work. Construction on a new winery and cellar has been expensive and frustrating, but I think he's far enough in to persevere. He's planted fruit trees in some old terraces in Spay. The guy even has llamas. He's also a fan of the cadaster names and will start using them next year. This will probably give him the longest wine-names in the world, which I just know you're looking forward to.

Though Florian is markedly successful with dry wines, he didn't make very many in 2015, because that's just how those fermentations proceeded. This blessed man wants only to be truthful to his wines, which can create inconveniences for him and me, but which I am happy to support regardless. Here's Florian on the subject of long names:

"I received a sub-site "appellation"

(sort of) for the Bopparder Hamm Engelstein which is called "Am Weissen Wacke" because of the large Quartz boulders found there. I plan to use it together with the site name. Bopparder Hamm Engelstein Am Weissen Wacke. I know it is something like *Polterdorfer Rüberberger Domherrenberg* but still—it has a Story. Since both Katasterlagen (that is actually the thing that was eliminated by the wine law of 1970) contain slate and loess soils (and mixtures of both partly combined with varying amounts of volcanic ashes) we should plan for further sub-sub-appellations and sub-sub-sub-appellations..."

Look, I get it: the names are long, the wines aren't cheap, they're off-the-track, and they slip-slide around. The problem is, for me, they are superb, and I'm blown away by Florian's integrity, idealism and by the example he's setting on how to live a good life. Finally, please bear in mind, some of these steep slopes have a layer of loess atop the slate, and the wines can seem to mimic the rich tropicality of *Pfalz* wine. They actually are seductive, like *Pfalz* wines with a firm "northern" spine.

These were the most confounding wines I tasted from 2015, because while their acids were analytically low-ish they *tasted* high, which was inexplicable.

2015 Bopparder Hamm Feuerlay Riesling Spätlese Trocken

+

12/750ml | GAW-128 | SOS: 1 (though dry, the fruit is so lavish...)

Lavishly fruity, salty and crunchy; the palate whipsaws between a sizzling acidity and the most charming loessy fruit; wet cereal and sweet straw; recalls (Austrian) wines like Alzinger's Hollerin or Nigl's Kremsleiten in its pêche-de-vigne richness. Strap in—this one is a ride...

2015 Spay Riesling Kabinett Feinherb

+

12/750ml | GAW-129 | SOS: 1 | SOMMELIER ALERT!

What can one say? *Perfect Riesling*. Papaya, malt, wet cereal; firm and entirely dry enough; complex, racy, with a spicy finish and with that jab of acidity.

2015 Bopparder Hamm Ohlenberg Riesling Spätlese Halbtrocken

(+)

12/750ml | GAW-130 | SOS: 1 | SOMMELIER ALERT!

This was intended as a Trocken wine but the yeasts had other plans. Bless him, Florian didn't force it. It has its typical *quetsch* (wild plum) aroma; a rounder more murmury palate; still has acidity to spare but rides lower in register; the fruit is almost chocolatey; the finish tastes like an Oreo...

2015 Bopparder Hamm Engelstein Riesling Spätlese Feinherb

+

12/750ml | GAW-131 | SOS: 1

Engelstein always smells and tastes like mirabelles; this is as gingery and zingy as some Pfalz wines; a wasabi-snap here; the flavor-stream is colder. You need to relish a vigorous wine with some chile-thread heat and a phenolic snap in the finish. High toned fruit and crunch.

2015 Bopparder Hamm Engelstein "Am Weissen Wacke" Riesling Spätlese Feinherb *Anarchie*

12/750ml | GAW-132 | SOS: 1

Tank #9 was the radical in '15, and Florian has used the *Anarchie* name for wines that won't fit into the usual German conceptual boxes, like this one. It has 30g of RS, drier than one would expect, and it really shrinks the palate-pupils. Though higher in RS than the other Engelstein, it tastes drier; it writhes and bites and says "Now you listen!" The liquid of a wild idea.

2015 Bopparder Hamm Engelstein Riesling Spätlese

12/750ml | GAW-133 | SOS: 2

The briskness of Engelstein really melts away the considerable RS, and the wine is taut and flirting. A first-crop from young wines, it managed the '15 drought via irrigation. Has an almost Nahe-like lift and brightness.

MOSEL

Back before they built the tunnel under Bernkastel, the old road brought you to an abrupt and jaw-dropping view of the steep slopes. You descended down through the slatey woods, streams and trees and the curvy road, and then wham, it hit you: perpendicular goddamn vineyards, rows of vertical stakes in a straight line up unbelievably to the sky.

One year I drove a few colleagues to the Mosel, on a low spitty sort of gloomy November evening, and a guy who'd never indicated an emotional bone in his body couldn't stop exclaiming. It's like a religious experience.

This love, though, is not unclouded. The Mosel is a narrow valley with a highly cohesive culture, which sometimes isn't pretty. In a couple days we heard about a vintner who'd had a break-in in his cellar, in which a cask of precious wine was vandalized. Narrow, spiteful, vindictive, all the things that grow when the air isn't as fresh as it might be; the shadow-side of the admirable cohesion.

Back in the mid-eighties a guy like me had his pick among literally dozens of interesting growers, who quietly and inconspicuously made honorable Mosel wines—which is to say fine Mosel wines. In the case of an estate such as Merkelbach, most of the wine was sold in bulk. Hans Leo Christoffel and Willi Schaefer were simply below the radar. If one searched diligently enough, eventually one found the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow.

But this generation is aging. In many cases their children have moved away to easier and more lucrative careers in the cities. But what's really shaking things up isn't the ones who left, but the ones who remained.

This isn't easy work! You have to love it in your bones, and so the young generation of Mosel vintners has self-selected its most enterprising and conscientious members; if you're a young guy making wine at all along the Mosel, you're probably making excellent wine. You wouldn't have chosen the life if you didn't love wine and didn't plan to excel.

But two critical things have changed. First, the young person does not wish to work in obscurity. His only chance to prosper lies in spreading the word quickly and widely. So he sends his samples to all the necessary publications. In theory, his wines are noteworthy, he makes his name, he places himself on the scene, and customers ensue. This means a guy like

me just isn't going to make the kinds of "discoveries" which were so easy fifteen years ago. If a producer is good, he's not waiting around hoping to be discovered; he's aggressively marketing himself.

The second major change, the more important one, is economical. Until around the late 60s, there was equilibrium between costs of production and prices paid. Few vintners were cash-rich but most did well enough. Their expectations were modest. They defined "affluence" differently than we do.

Then in the 70s costs began to rise, driven by labor, driven by the disinclination of the young to break their balls on the steep-slopes. For a while the growers lived on whatever fat they'd been able to accumulate. By the late 80s—early 90s, they were scraping bone. The young man or woman emotionally committed to assuming the reins was only going to do so if he could make a decent living. These young people were far more cosmopolitan than their parents; they traveled widely, drank other wines, knew other markets, and saw the prices vintners were getting in other parts of the world.

Everyone along the Mosel plays the same lament; **labor**. It's hard to get, and because it's hard to get it commands a high price. The slopes are forbiddingly steep—it's physically dangerous to work such land—and there's very little feasible machine work. Handlabor on steep slopes in this satellite-TV world is not consistent with Kabinett wine costing \$10.

Here's something I'll bet only a few of you knew. There are very likely some *half-million* ungrafted vines on the Mosel, about 10% of the total. The proportion is shrinking, as the law stipulates you must plant grafted vines whenever you re-plant. Meanwhile, I know you're into ungrafted vines and willing to pay a premium for their wines, if the wines are French or Spanish or Italian. Right? Yet a few pages hence I will offer you a wine from vines planted in **1896** which costs the consumer some \$25, and sorry but y'all aren't clamoring the way you might be.

It's just another example of un-told stories emerging from Germany, because no one examines the place as carefully as they do other places they actually care about. In the interim this is a good thing for the few and proud partisans of Mosel Riesling, because we can own it for a pittance. But is it sustainable?

SELBACH-OSTER



REGION / SUB REGION

Mosel / Zeltingen

VINEYARD AREA

21 hectares

ANNUAL PRODUCTION

13,300 cases

TOP SITES AND SOIL TYPES

Zeltinger Himmelreich,
Schlossberg and Sonnenuhr
(*blue devonian slate*);
Wehlener Sonnenuhr
(*blue devonian slate*);
Graacher Himmelreich
and Domprobst
(*blue devonian slate with loam*);
Bernkasteler Badstube
(*blue devonian slate*)

GRAPE VARIETIES

98.5% Riesling
1.5% Pinot Blanc

FARMING PRACTICES

Practicing sustainable viticulture

What Johannes Selbach understood about 2015 was that the wines would need *middle*. In many instances you can increase the fullness-factor by how you ferment (with what yeast, with what temperature and in what vessel) and by lees management. Selbach's wines have the same (high) acidity as everyone else's, but with very few exceptions the wines register as scintillating and rich rather than sharp or pointed.

His wines are certainly in a class by themselves in this portfolio—Merkelbach was perhaps equally profound but they have fewer than two hectares, whereas Selbach has 21—and I wonder whether anyone else on the Mosel is quite in this league. This isn't just partisanship. There are obviously a great many stellar Mosel wines from producers I don't represent (that goes without saying) but when I taste most of them I find them to excel in brilliance and explicit complexity, which of course are wonderful! Selbach's wines, though, seem more inferential, in some ways quieter; they seem to be looking for truths deeper than the sensual and visible. This doesn't mean they are more "honest" than other wines. It means they are perhaps *truer*, more anchored in depth of foundation, and less eager to show us their curlicues and gables and gargoyles.

They are certainly drier and richer than many of their peers' wines. This includes growers whom I *do* work with. This can make them seem sedate, but that is a superficial reading. It takes more than a cursory glance to appreciate the fullness, depth, balance and usefulness of

Johannes' wines, but when you glean it you'll be tied into Mosel Riesling in a rare and numinous bond.

The amount of guidance needed to steer some fifty wines in a common direction, and the finesse of understanding needed to confer a consistent character on them, these are the attributes of a virtuoso. I shouldn't be amazed anymore; after all, Johannes had great vintages in '05, '07, '12 and '14, but each time I am somehow erased and when the wines compound into a shining sequence of warmly satisfying loveliness, I find a great chord is sounding, and in 35 years of drinking wine this has very seldom happened.

The offering only *seems* large. In fact I culled relentlessly. What remained were the wines I had the hugest crush on. Slobbering, useless, doomed like all the crushes I ever had, but these wines actually do love you back.

BEFORE WE GET TO THE MAIN EVENT....

2015 Pinot Blanc Dry

12/750ml | GSO-514 | SOS:0 | **SOMMELIER ALERT!**

Perhaps the biggest surprise of any wine I've ever shipped, because it's uncanny and delicious. This vintage is done in a new 2,000-liter cask, with a tiny dose of Riesling to give it some *yin*; it's a friend-making wine, yummy and varietal; a bit woodsier than the last couple vintages, and perhaps a little less overtly slatey, but it's also chummier. Hard to imagine a fish *chowdah* without this bad boy to wash it down....

2013 Sekt, Riesling Brut

12/750ml | GSO-518

+ +

Johannes likes Champagne, and I know this because I'm his Champagne-Sherpa, as I drive directly *from* there to the Mosel, my trunk laden with Jo's stash-o-fizz for the year. Yet his own bubbly is quite an amazing accomplishment in its own right. *Tirage* between 18-24 months; really classy Riesling aromas—his dosage is old Auslese!—and in truth this is lovely stylish fizz, what one would hope for (though not expect) from sparkling Riesling: class, clarity, finesse, the opposite of coarseness or brashness; this is really demure and graceful and pretty. (*Nor is it a fluke, as there's also a 2008 from Pinot material that's similarly silky and deelish.*)

2015 Zeltinger Riesling Kabinett Trocken

12/750ml | GSO-511 | SOS:0 | **SOMMELIER ALERT!**

+

In fact this is Himmelreich, and it shows virtually perfect balance; spicy and wild-herbal but with a leesy fluffiness and yet a spazzy brilliance amounting to quite a vivid euphoria. As fabulous as an everyday dry Mosel can be; saturated with a powdery wash of mineral.

2015 Zeltinger Schlossberg "Bömer" Riesling Trocken

12/750ml | GSO-512 | SOS:0

+

This is the parcel directly behind the village, a steep SE slope that gets warmth from the sun reflecting off the rooftops. It has much of the twiggy-silvery mineral of Schmitt, its neighbor, and it's a delicious yet cerebral examination of slate and ore, but a round mid-palate balances it perfectly. How does he do it, time after time? THE FRONT LABEL WILL SAY SIMPLY "Bömer" while the Schlossberg name will appear on the back.

2015 Zeltinger Sonnenuhr Riesling Spätlese Trocken

12/750ml | GSO-513 | SOS:0 | **SOMMELIER ALERT!**

(+) +

Profound, capacious vineyard aroma; a rich minerally palate with a final wash of salt; richness justifies dryness in this case. This could be the best dry Mosel I've ever tasted.

2014 Graacher Domprobst Riesling Feinherb Alte Reben

12/750ml | GSO-510 | SOS:1 | **SOMMELIER ALERT!**

+

(The back-label will say "Spätlese.") Again a really long fermenter that went until May 2015 and which stopped at almost the same RS-point as the previous two vintages. It was bottled promptly and hails from two parcels, one with 80-90 year vines and the other 30 years, both *ungrafted*. This is a **FIRST OFFERING**, and I think it's the nuttiest Domprobst I've ever tasted. It's also pure ornery gorgeous Domprobst; quince, exotic fruit and pistachio. The finish echoes the fruit, beautifully.

2015 Graacher Domprobst Riesling Spätlese Feinherb Alte Reben

12/750ml | GSO-533 | SOS:1 | **SOMMELIER ALERT!**

+ +

More capacious and grand than the more finicky (and perhaps more fascinating) '14—more sensual, in short. Spicy (allspice, ginger, clove) with the fleshy middle of Selbach's '15s, it mitigates the Domprobst crunch a kind of toasted slate here; toast in general, actually. Whole-wheat! Sexy and firm.

2015 Riesling Feinherb

12/750ml | GSO-515

(Each of two lots were still fermenting, so no note except to say the balance appeared perfect.)

2015 Zeltinger Himmelreich Riesling Kabinett Halbtrocken

+

12/750ml | GSO-516 | SOS:1 | **SOMMELIER ALERT!**

Our old perennial favorite! The '15 shows the most fetching aroma; the palate is spicy as always and yet creamier than usual—2015 is kind to this wine. Almost rasping with mintiness but also a wet cereal inner sweetness.

2015 Zeltinger Sonnenuhr Riesling Spätlese Feinherb Uralte Reben

12/750ml | GSO-517

“Ur-alt” means extremely old; in this case most vines over 80 and many over 100. Ungrafted goes without saying.

You know, when I hear people say that dry Rieslings were “traditional” or even that they prevailed most of the time back in the day, I think the young listener has no way of knowing that it’s wines like this being talked about. Those halcyon days of mostly dry Riesling had zero to do with the modern cellar style: stainless steel, ice-cold fermentation, whole-cluster pressing, early bottling. Those old wines were wines like this, fermented in cask after settling by gravity as best they could (before the days of separators, centrifuges and micropore filters), all of them spontis, bottled after multiple rackings and often 2-3 years after the vintage. They were naturally softer than today’s wines, and even THEN it was widely known the best casks were those that weren’t entirely dry.

This '15 was too early to judge, as it was just finished fermentation. But one dare not dawdle...

2015 Selbach-Oster Riesling Kabinett

+

12/750ml | GSO-508 | SOS:1 | **SOMMELIER ALERT!**

A little bit of new-Fuder here. I’ll share the numbers.... acid about 9.2g/l and RS 35-ish (many Mosel grower’s Kabs are twice that sweet.) '15 is the *best vintage EVER* of this utter Mosel paradigm.

2015 Zeltinger Schlossberg Riesling Kabinett

+

12/750ml | GSO-506 | SOS:2

Acidity, for the first time, shows. Aromas are sharply spicy and wildly herbal, an id-attack of Schlossberg, but you will need to tolerate a brazen acidity.

2015 Zeltinger Sonnenuhr Riesling Kabinett

+

12/750ml | GSO-520 | SOS:2 | **SOMMELIER ALERT!**

Fantastic! Each great thing about this magnificent site, rendered strong and true, and emphasizing the inherent key-lime profile.

2015 Selbach-Oster Riesling Spätlese

12/750ml | GSO-521 | SOS:2

Acid over 10g/l now. RS is relatively high for Selbach also, but you won’t fixate on either of these. This is twiggy, apple-skin, wet forest, marjoram and iodine; the palate is certainly electric but brazenly balanced.

NOW THE FUR BEGINS TO FLY...

... with a sequence of Spätlese, Auslese and the two en-blocs, that sent me into ecstatic reverie....

2015 Bernkasteler Badstube Riesling Spätlese

+ +

12/750ml | GSO-522 | SOS : 2

Classic kirsch and flint, and the knee-buckling wash of salty sweetness characteristic of the best '15s; crescendos through its mid-palate and finishes as a sonnet of sparks and blossoms.

2015 Zeltinger Schlossberg Riesling Spätlese

(+) + +

12/750ml | GSO-523 | SOS : 2

Certainly this is the best damn CORE-LIST wine I've ever offered. How does wine actually get better than this? An apotheosis of the great site.

2015 Zeltinger Sonnenuhr Riesling Spätlese *

(+) + +

12/750ml | GSO-524 | SOS : 2

It has some of that para-slate ethereality of the high terraces in Uerziger Würzgarten; it's in fact the heart of the steep sections to the left of Rotlay, which shows in a severe structural backbone beneath an avalanche of silvery fruit, and all in gloriously high relief, resolving into a calm slatey finish that feels immortal. The taste of Time and Truth—nothing less.

2015 Bernkasteler Badstube Riesling Auslese

+ +

12/750ml | GSO-505 | SOS : 3

This is like the Spätlese having birthday sex. It isn't very sweet until the finish but it is incredibly erotic. Set up the mirrors, pluck any restive body hairs inelegantly positioned; open, pour, repeat.

2015 Graacher Domprobst Riesling Auslese

+ +

12/750ml | GSO-525 | SOS : 3

The *vineyard shows through*. What more needs to be said? So many painted-ladies, so many wines posing as "rich and concentrated," but very few that say the simple truth of who they are, what citizens they are, what they love, and whom they pray to when they turn out the lights....

2015 Zeltinger Schlossberg Riesling Auslese

+ + +

12/750ml | GSO-526 | SOS : 3

I'm selecting the least "sweet" and the most vinous and fundamental ones. This is a *ne plus ultra* of Schlossberg. I don't know how you "use" it, and I'm not sure how I myself would use it; I only know I want a life – or the remaining part of a life—where there is a room, where there is a chair, a ticking clock, a bird not far away, a little sunlight through the window, some music playing, and a glass of this liquid beauty that I can empty and fill again, until evening comes on.... and I call out for Chinese.

THE 3 EN-BLOC MASTERPIECES (introduced by Johannes)

“The soil in all three is obviously blue Devonian slate though **Rotlay** has the rockiest, shallowest and therefore driest soil as can be seen by the massive cliffs that hang over the vineyard and partially to its side. Rotlay also benefits the most from the wide water surface of the Mosel, especially since the river is dammed some 500 meters downstream from Rotlay and provides a mirror effect for the sunshine back into the slope, plus some humidity from morning dew, which helps induce botrytis during autumn.

Schmitt is almost as steep as Rotlay, and also has a perfect southern exposure, but a deeper subsoil of crumbly, broken slate mixed with organic matter and loam. The vineyard is farther back from the Mosel and gets less of the river’s cooling effect. Instead the warmth radiated from the village houses and church beneath warm the vineyard (a privileged situation akin to that of Bernkasteler Doctor.)

Anrecht, while equally steep and also on a perfect southern angle, has the deepest subsoil of broken slate mixed with organic matter (humus) and loam. It is further away from river and village compared to Rotlay and Schmitt, hence a tad cooler but nonetheless excellent.

What I mean to translate with a mix of organic matter and loam is the German word “Feinerde” which literally translates into “fine earth” and that is a very valuable finely crumbled soil that combines the ability to warm up quickly, lets roots penetrate quickly and has good water storage capacity. In other words, “Feinerde” is a highly desirable component of the soil structure, especially if you have rocky soils.”

Terry here again. These wines harken back to an earlier sensibility of waiting until the last possible moment and then picking the entire vineyard. You discarded the dubious fruit at picking, or you’d already done so in a “negative” harvest, if you had the means and the people. Later it was in vogue to make multiple passes through the vineyard, selecting the bunches or grapes you wanted for a wine you wished to make. It gave you certain bragging rights. But you’d pivoted away from pure terroir; you’d picked out the parts of terroir you wanted, but the old ones assumed that terroir resided in the *entire vineyard* and not in the chocolate chips you plucked from the cookie. Picking *en-bloc* you get a mix of green berries, just-ripe berries, ripe and overripe berries and even a few botrytis berries. You get the WHOLE THING. And then you learn to know what that thing is.

Selbachs identified their best parcels for what was at first an experiment – in 2003 with the Schmitt (in Schlossberg)—and which has continued and grown to the three wines you see below. I find this all very moving, because what I see in it is a search for authenticity—to actually do what so many others only pay lip service to doing.

(As an aside, this mentality can also be seen at Merkelbach, all of whose wines are picked en-bloc, because they’re old school and that’s just how it’s done. There are others also.)

2015 Riesling **Anrecht**

6/750ml | GSO-527 | SOS : 3

A wild-child this year. Adamantly green and minty; doesn’t quite know how to act, is a genius but not afraid of biting sarcasm; it’s a wild ride, it scares you, but when it stops you want to go again.

2015 Riesling **Schmitt**

6/750ml | GSO-528 | SOS : 3

+ + +

Yes. A gorgeous, pure, lavishly generous but diligently focused masterpiece; molten silver, possibly even deeper than “terroir;” it seems to encompass the gray March hills, the vines on their posts, the limpid green-gray river, the candid northern light; is it even wine any more? It is for all I know some kind of tear of the world, sliding slowly down its face...the open-hearted, shy, inscrutable world. Our home.

2015 Riesling **Rotlay**

6/750ml | GSO-529 | SOS : 3

+ +

This one’s the Granddaddy, the silent soul of the rocks, the keeper of the heavy boulders. On a hot day, eons ago, a tree’s worth of cherries and apples fell off their branches onto the sun-boiled rocks, they nearly sizzled when their skins split, and while much of the juice evaporated in the pitiless heat, some of it soaked into the stone, and became part of the stone, and then later, who even knows how much later, the rocks themselves dissolved, and the fruit was still embedded inside, and at some point a wine was made from vines planted in the warm rocks, and at long last, this wine tells the story, to you and to me. I plan to listen.

2015 Zeltinger Sonnenuhr Riesling Trockenbeerenauslese

12/375ml | GSO-530H

(+) + +

J&H SELBACH REGIONALS

Tasting these, I witnessed the most stirring gesture of integrity I'd seen in many years.

These are commodity wines. For coastal hipsters they mean almost nothing, but vestiges of this market persist and are important. I can prove it in two words: *Schmitt Söhne*. This firm ships more wine to the States than any other, and nearly everything they ship is bulk commodity plonk. In earlier times they'd have borne labels like "Piesporter (this) and Bernkasteler (that)" whereas now they've got some German person's idea of a colorful "contemporary" name like Koala Nipple-Clamps or Skid Mark Pink, but it's the same bulk juice just prettied up for the hep young wine purchaser.

The small negociant firm of J&H Selbach are minor players in this market. Because they're small, they're more sensitive to blips in the cost of grapes or juice, but they're also able (and willing) to pay a hands-on attention that's otherwise unheard of. For example, nearly 100% of their grape supply is under contract with growers they know and trust, and they're making the wines with more lees contact

and with spontaneous fermentation. And so I wanted to taste the wines this year with the same attention I give to the wines I take "seriously," just to be sure they wouldn't tarnish my own hipitude.

Friend, they do honor to me, to you, and to Johannes, because taking this kind of care over these kinds of wines does not win you medals. It's just the things you do that no one sees, the manifold choices you decide to make with care and integrity because it's who you are. Every single one of these wines is sophisticated and has vinosity and most important, moderate residual sugar for the genre.

Good as they all are, the firsts-among-equals are the Piesporter Michelsberg, the "Fish-Label" Trocken and the "Incline." Which warrants a small explication.

Just know but don't be concerned with those old "generic" names that looked like actual vineyards but weren't. Thank the wise elders who wrote the 1971 wine law for this abomination. Thus a wine called "Zeller Schwarze Katz" is in effect bulk wine grown vaguely in the area of Zell. Same with "Bernkasteler" or

"Piesporter." The big companies often use Müller-Thurgau for this category—Selbach uses only Riesling.

Because no one has a monopoly over these names, it ends up being a race to the bottom who flogs the stuff at the lowest price. (We are not, by the way, those guys.) This is why people want to create their own "Brands" and why these have proliferated. In fact when Selbach introduced their "Fish-Label" I felt a certain dismay; the whole critter label thing was getting wearisome, and I thought it was beneath their dignity. Alas, the wines are very good, and if you buy them you'll receive a wine that's better than even decent-to-good estate wine.

A wine like the "Incline" is a perfect wedding reception wine if most of the guests aren't "wine people." It's tasty, doesn't cost a lot, it's easy-drinking, and someone somewhere will probably have cause to think This wine is unusually good; I wonder what it is. Why should those people drink crummy plonk? Show me what you give to your least pretentious customer, and I'll show you your integrity.

2015 J&H Selbach Saar Riesling Kabinett

+

12/750ml | GSR-746 | SOS: 1 | **SOMMELIER ALERT!**

Crunch and citrics abound; the wine is actually close to *Vo/s* in style (though less fibrous than those wines); stylish and green apple lime; essentially *Feinherb*, an almost suave finish. Punches way-y-y above its weight in 2015.

2015 J&H Selbach Saar Riesling Spätlese

+

12/750ml | GSR-749 | SOS: 1 | **SOMMELIER ALERT!**

A lot of brilliance here and a superb vintage again; tautly floral-funky (hyacinth, fading peony, white iris) and almost peppery; a wonderful wash of balsam-soaked mineral; also very much *dry-ish*. AN INSANE VALUE!

MEULENHOF/ERBEN JUSTEN EHLEN



REGION / SUB REGION

Mosel / Erden

VINEYARD AREA

7 hectares

ANNUAL PRODUCTION

4,200 cases

TOP SITES AND SOIL TYPES

Erdener Treppchen and Prälat
(*devonian slate with Rotliegend*) ;
Wehlener Sonnenuhr
(*devonian slate*)

GRAPE VARIETIES

85% Riesling
10% Rivaner
5% Kerner

2015 is, at last, the vintage this honorable decent vintner has waited for. In fact he compares it with 2010, and one sees why, though it's not as bombastic as '10, and it was more backward on the day I tasted.

Young customers haven't seen what this laudable grower can do at his best. The wines are analogue, with an inferential richness, and they age forever. Old-timers will have learned to treasure Meulenhof as a source of excellent values for true-blue Mosel that really fills the mouth.

Stefan Justen is also the curator of the Roman press house that was discovered during a reorganization of the Treppchen slope, as well as the creator and keeper of a rugged and spectacular hiking trail that goes from the Treppchen down to Uerzig, and is *the* walk to take (if you're sure-footed) to get immersed in Mosel-ness.

2014 Erdener Treppchen Riesling Trocken “GG”

6/750ml | GJU-153 | SOS : 0

Yes, '14. Yes, dry. All the healthy grapes seem to have gone into the Trocken wines, and this is a stylish, complex and balanced Riesling. There wasn't much to be had, and we bought all of it. Classic aromas of slate, shoot-smoke and satsumas lead into a balanced palate full of woodruff and balsam, nodding in the phenolic direction of many '14s. A finely textured mosaic, lots of quince, a deliberate careful Riesling that left me entirely surprised and impressed.

2015 Erdener Treppchen Riesling Kabinett

12/750ml | GJU-154 | SOS : 2

This is rich for a Kabinett, quite ripe and dense, but otherwise hard to note as fermentation aromas dominated it in late March. What could be glimpsed was a sleek ultra-violet artery of slate and a quince-tangerine fruit.

2015 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Spätlese

12/750ml | GJU-155 | SOS : 2

Further along now; full of Wehlen “blue”, though the slate is more incipient than overt, lying beneath opulent fruit; you can feel it coming on and you will really taste it on the stern finish, which shows RS and acidity watching each other warily from across a chasm. I coaxed it, and let it sit in the glass for an hour, when it became seriously mineral and drier-tasting than it first seemed.

2015 Erdener Treppchen Riesling Spätlese Alte Reben

(+)

12/750ml | GJU-156 | SOS : 2

When Erden did its *Flurbereinigung* the parcels among and below the cliffs couldn't be altered as the land was too rugged and chaotic. It's now the last remaining stand of old ungrafted vines in Erden, and there's also a distinction between the power and citrics from these parcels versus the apple and walnut from the downstream hillside.

So, might as well jump. The wine is *mega* in all ways. It took its time hatching, so I kept going back to it. It's solid and rocky, really redolent of the cliffs; dignified and brooding for all its power. The aromas are complex and enticing; the palate chewy and savory; sweetness and acidity are in accord, and this might become the best wine of his vintage.

2015 Erdener Treppchen Riesling Auslese Alte Reben

+

6/750ml | GJU-157 | SOS : 4

This isn't far from a BA, and can be used as a “sweet” wine as it isn't at all savory. It's grand, resplendent, a real persimmon marmalade, yet there's clarity of fruit despite the clamorous power, and just maybe someone wants a *big* Auslese.

ALFRED MERKELBACH



REGION / SUB REGION

Mosel / Ürzig

VINEYARD AREA

1.9 hectares

ANNUAL PRODUCTION

1,700 cases

TOP SITES AND SOIL TYPES

Ürziger Würzgarten
(*blue devonian slate*);
Erdener Treppchen
(*blue devonian slate*);
Kinheimer Rosenberg
(*blue devonian slate*)

GRAPE VARIETIES

100% Riesling

This is the estate, and these are the people, by whom I am most moved, who touch me most deeply, and whom I am proudest to represent. They live deep inside my heart.

Alfred is the older brother. He's 82. Rolf had just had his 79th birthday this year. The brothers would sell their estate, rather than let it go to probate, or whatever the German equivalent is for probate. But there are two problems. One, they want to keep working, and the new owner would understandably want to install his "team." Two, they can't establish a price, because they don't need money. This isn't because they're so honking wealthy, but because they live simple lives. Until I started buying wines in-bottle, they sold most of their production in cask. These days they make more, but don't appear to spend it.

Merkelbachs have become conspicuous of late, as various media have been able to package them as "The Last of a Bygone Age." This is superficially true. The nostalgia we're made to feel is also superficial. But I don't despise these things; they just stop where they ought to keep going.

In fact I seem to have played a small role in making them "famous," as they're now being sought-after by merchants who knew nothing about them for the last thirty years. When I arrived I learned of an inquiry from a retailer in Köln, who wrote for an appointment to come and taste the new vintage in cask. "You can taste," he was told when he arrived, "But we can't offer you anything until Terry's made his selections." I am touched by their old-school loyalty. Yet every time they thank

me for the many years of doing business and the comfort it has brought them, I feel—truly—that I've received more than I gave, or could ever give. And not only the wines.

Are they slowing down? Yes and no. They reduced the size of the estate, by releasing their Erden vineyards, which had been leased, so now it's just Ürzig and Kinheim. They still do the vineyard work themselves, and wish to continue.

I cannot account for the miracle of the 2015 vintage here. I didn't expect it. Neither '13 nor (especially) '14 was kind to them, because their *en-bloc* style of harvesting really requires almost entirely clean fruit. I was also tasting 2015 wines bottled four days beforehand. I'd have been happy to find clean and typical Merkelbach wines. It also occurred to me that I might find another wacked-out year like the derangedly monumental 2010s. In fact what I did find was a kind of Platonic perfection not only of Merkelbach, but of Mosel Riesling in its most ur form. These wines have always been pared-away, every frill and ornamentation not so much "removed" as never to have been present in the first place. But these 15s seem to have pared away even the pared-away-ness, so that what remains is a kind of divinity. Think of it: a whole family of wines, offering in their unfussy way an immersion in pure Truth and pure essence. Where else in the world is such a thing to be found?

The crop isn't large, and though I wanted (desperately!) to buy every bottle of my selections, I had to leave a little of for the Brothers themselves, and for the

other Merkelbach lovers whom of course don't deserve the wines nearly as much as I do, but who must, evidently, be accounted for. I suppose it's only proper, in

the presence of such divinity, to become saintly oneself. What you see below represents 810 cases of wine, with no single wine exceeding 110 cases. Care for them

like the treasures they are, and please join me in my gratefulness that our world can still give us such gifts.

2015 Kinheimer Rosenberg Riesling Kabinett #4

12/750ml | GME-226 | SOS : 1

The numbers are the *Fuder* numbers, to distinguish multiple bottlings, though in this case there's just one Kin-Ros-Kab. Yet it is known as *Fuder number 4* because that's how intimately these things are known. The wine is perfect; angular, salty, solid yet lissome, piquant and not very sweet, but large-scaled with an impact of slate that doesn't yield an inch. Wonderful and pure.

2015 Kinheimer Rosenberg Riesling Spätlese #2

12/750ml | GME-227 | SOS : 2

Aroma!! Though this is an Auslese in most years, this Spät is entirely euphoric on entry; a parfait of slate and fruit, and then the acidity sizzles along into the finish, in a galvanic salt-wracked spray of slatey fire-and-ice.

2015 Uerziger Würzgarten Riesling Spätlese #1

12/750ml | GME-228 | SOS : 1 | **SOMMELIER ALERT!**

I have to point out: this wine has been a core-list item for us, and we usually blend *Fuders* in order to give us (relatively speaking) "volume" under one s.k.u. But this year there are just three contributing lots, and they're so distinct from one another that I'm shipping each separately, though all as core-list. This will be random, as it would be utter chaos for y'all to "pick" the *Fuder* you preferred.

I will note them separately. And this one is pure, pure licorice, classic kiwi and sassafrass; a look into the very bones and capillaries of Uerz-Würz, like an MRI of terroir. A completely amazing Mosel wonder of a very fundamental nature.

2015 Uerziger Würzgarten Riesling Spätlese #6

12/750ml | GME-229 | SOS : 1 | **SOMMELIER ALERT!**

A little bottle-sick but all elements in place, especially saltiness and minerality. Has some reduction to shed, but often these turn out to be the best wines, and this one's potentially superb.

2015 Uerziger Würzgarten Riesling Spätlese #7

12/750ml | GME-230 | SOS : 1 | **SOMMELIER ALERT!**

This is complete and entirely striking, for its purism and lack of (nor need for) makeup; it's the opposite of spiffy, a genius but an autodidact, with savant-like expressiveness; force, dignity and length, it squares the circle and culminates the culture.

2015 Uerziger Würzgarten Riesling Spätlese #10

12/750ml | GME-231 | SOS : 2 (barely) | **SOMMELIER ALERT!**

This is a stand-alone offering, not included under the core-list program. In part this is because it is very different from the others, now showing perfume and strawberries; almost brashly expressive to a hypnagogic degree; my dear—these are wines! The outer limit of the complexity of *slate*, its possibilities, you might say, its threads and eyelashes and the tiny etches in the skin.

2015 Kinheimer Rosenberg Riesling Auslese #5

12/750ml | GME-234 | SOS : 2 | **SOMMELIER ALERT!**

The most masculine Auslese I think I've ever tasted. Power, saltiness, force, *iron*; the thing is almost domineering, absurd and amazing. You cannot miss it.



2015 Uerziger Würzgarten Riesling Auslese #9 Urglück

(+) + +

12/750ml | GME-233 | SOS : 2 | SOMMELIER ALERT!

This is a single parcel under its cadaster name. One wonders how Mosel wine ever improves on this. Ore, ginger, quince, garrigue, with the para-slate force that feels almost druidic; it's adamant, spicy, it's *Bach* really, mystic. It's a taser of slate.

2015 Uerziger Würzgarten Riesling Auslese #8 Lang Pichter

+ + +

12/750ml | GME-232 | SOS : 2

The greatest wine I've tasted from Rolf and Alfred. Incomprehensibly articulate, rich, taut and gorgeous; lysergically vivid and expressive; has more *fruit* than Urglück, kiwi-lime-strawberry-salt, leading to an ecstatically beautiful implosion of beauty and complexity. Just sit still, pour, inhale, taste and worship joyfully. Soon it will be gone.

JOH . JOS . CHRISTOFFEL



REGION / SUB REGION

Mosel / Urzig

VINEYARD AREA

4 hectares

ANNUAL PRODUCTION

3,200 cases

TOP SITES AND SOIL TYPES

Ürziger Würzgarten
(red slate) ;
Erdener Treppchen
(blue slate)

GRAPE VARIETIES

100% Riesling

It's hardly surprising to taste another finely etched, crystalline and transparent vintage at Christoffel. The wines are super-fine, glossy and full of class. I confess I find it a little unnerving how every vintage seems to be like this, but when I hear myself thus observe I feel a little churlish, and certainly ungrateful. I suspect it takes a decade or longer for the wines to emerge from this youthful uniformity, and the 2002s and 2004s I'm drinking at home are definitely distinct from each other and both are stellar.

The wines were in bottle three weeks when I visited; the worst possible time to taste, and some were seen through a veil. But first, a repeat of a little masterpiece from 2014....

2014 Uerziger Würzgarten Riesling Kabinett

12/750ml | GJC-222 | SOS : 2

This is one of those finely herbal '14s that shows the vintage's phenolics but is also curiously lingering on the palate. I really like this kind of wine; it doesn't tend to "show" well at tastings, but it rewards the peaceful hours it asks the attentive drinker to share with it.

2015 Erdener Treppchen Riesling Kabinett

+

12/750ml | GJC-224 | SOS : 2

A real salt bomb; long, licorice-y, caraway seeds, seemed drier than it used to be, and shows a serpentine structure. Fibrous and light on its feet.

2015 Uerziger Würzgarten Riesling Kabinett

+

12/750ml | GJC-227 | SOS : 2

Licorice again but the Würzgarten garrigue is now present; the wine's more open and available than the Erdener; transparent and exotic, almost as if it were Zierfandler and not Riesling, all that radish-y spring-onion juju; the wine's a real tongue-dancer, and leaves a slinky herbal finish.

2015 Erdener Treppchen Riesling Spätlese

+

12/750ml | GJC-228 | SOS : 2

Wonderful fragrance, again quite open and again rampant caraway; it feels stretched, like pulling taffy; crackling acidity, black walnut, a savory and herbal critter, like one of those not-sweet desserts.

2015 Uerziger Würzgarten Riesling Spätlese

(+) +

12/750ml | GJC-229 | SOS : 2

More backward, but also distinctly finer, with more acidity showing through its leaner body; it follows their vintage line in being slithery and savory, and like all of these it has the *perfect* RS.

2015 Erdener Treppchen Riesling Auslese "Herzlay"**

(+)

12/750ml | GJC-230 | SOS : 2

The *mise-en-scene* was my colleagues and me around a long rectangular table, and at this point they were all talking and laughing, Johannes (Selbach), his mother Sigrid, his son Sebastian, Hans-Leo (Christoffel) and Robert (Eymael), and it became a warm background hum, reassuring somehow, the purring engine of a community.

It let me detach and just taste the wine, which was wicky and fibrous and reminded me of what granny smith apples used to be like before the modern breeders destroyed them. A little botrytis appears now; the wine, again, is threading the sweetness needle, and is as much food as wine.

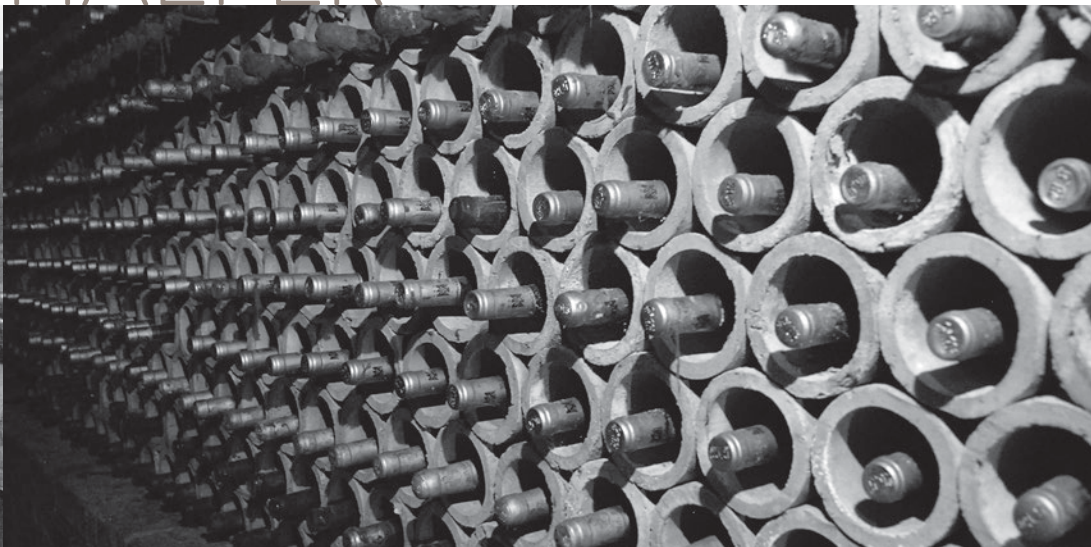
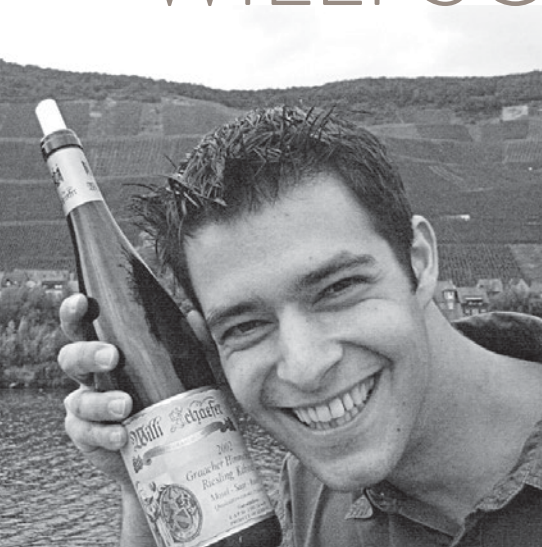
2015 Uerziger Würzgarten Riesling Auslese* "Kranklay"**

+

12/750ml | GJC-231 | SOS : 2

Hails from the cadaster parcel from which the "3-star" came. It fits the "system" in being spicy, angular and savory. Glossy and sophisticated.

WILLI SCHAEFFER



REGION / SUB REGION

Mosel / Graach

VINEYARD AREA

4 hectares

ANNUAL PRODUCTION

2,900 cases

TOP SITES AND SOIL TYPES

Graacher Himmelreich
(*devonian slate*);
Graacher Domprobst
(*devonian slate*);
Wehlener Sonnenuhr
(*devonian slate*)

GRAPE VARIETIES

100% Riesling

2015 is a glorious and demanding vintage here. It reminded me of 2001, another year that was defined (at Schaefer) by a brisk acidity. This is an estate where the vintage is *profoundly* expressed, seen through the membrane of the estate's customary ways of working. Vintages like 2003, 2007, 2011, which I find to be gloriously meditative and eerily transparent, will strike other tasters as sedate. Vintages like 2001, 2008, 2010 and now 2015 are more electrifying, and in many ways more astounding.

I wanted everything they showed me. As I write I don't know what our allocation will be, except that it won't be as much as we need, but we'll do our best for you. Schaefer is always among my most beloved agencies, both because of the candor and brilliance of the wines, but also because of the kindness and warmth they embody. They are wines of bedrock happiness.

2015 Graacher Himmelreich Riesling Kabinett

12/750ml | GWS-241 | SOS: 2

In '15 the Himmelreich is less pliant and waxy than usual, more like Domprobst, though I was properly admonished to "Taste the Domprobst before you say that..." This is one spicy little dickens! Lots of *qui*, lots of energy from its acidity, which also absorbs the RS and creates a high-strung tangy wine, glass-clear and really good.

2015 Graacher Domprobst Riesling Kabinett

12/750ml | GWS-242 | SOS: 2

This is like a slate *pit* into which fresh-pressed quinces are poured, finished off with a whole basket of Altoids. "Tensile" barely describes its manic energy. Vigorous, but it somehow finishes almost calmly, a deliberate farewell of slate. The empty glass could be Dönnhoff's Kirschheck, it's so cherry-blossomy.

2015 Graacher Himmelreich Riesling Spätlese

12/750ml | GWS-245 | SOS: 2

Cox orange apples lead into a leaping euphoric yawp of fruit but again all stretched and tensile, slate sprinkled like powdered sugar over the almost nervy fruit; a zippy complex Mosel Riesling.

2015 Graacher Domprobst Riesling Spätlese #10

12/750ml | GWS-243 | SOS: 2

Schaefer *amateurs* will know "#10" as the firm, stony one. It often but not necessarily comes from the same parcel(s), but the guiding decision is based on character in this case, not origin. This wine is like slate under a microscope, each fleck and sleeve and crease is visible. A subtle nuttiness emerges, but this wine is twitching with jittery intensity, and carries a high note of ginger.

2015 Graacher Domprobst Riesling Spätlese #5

12/750ml | GWS-247 | SOS: 2

Now begins the melting... but not the yielding; the acids are still bracing and sparkling, yet the Mosel soul of *ur*-fruit begins to show. The empty glass smells like a young 1975 BA—you'll have to take my word for this. This young masterpiece is still completing itself, but I wonder whether my poor self could bear to drink it when it finally culminates.

2015 Graacher Himmelreich Riesling Auslese #4

12/750ml | GWS-249 | SOS: 3

Aroma! Complicated and turbulent for now, but a galvanic being is coiled, waiting, tiger-eyed and hungry...

2015 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Auslese

12/750ml | GWS-251

For me this is the summit among Schaefer's '15s, unusually as they're not really associated with Wehlen, as their parcels are quite small. If I ever said "OMG," this is when I would say it. What a fragrance here! Unreal, almost ethereal blue slate and vanilla and shady herbs. It's a spirit-kin to Ockfener Bockstein. Plum-blossom enters this shimmering stunning young masterpiece from Schaefer; an equipoise of divinity and urgency, a lapsed Buddhist monk who left the monastery because he was too fond of *éclair*s. We don't use the word "noble" all that much, it's kind of vague and twee—but this is what it means.

2015 Graacher Domprobst Riesling Auslese #11

12/750ml | GWS-252 | SOS: 2

First wine with fermentation aromas, but this will be a solid adamant powerhouse, Domprobst at its forceful best, all pistachio and soursop, seeming none too sweet; a bullet-train of torque. Nothing delicate about this!



2015 Graacher Domprobst Riesling Auslese #14

++

12/375ml | GWS-253H | SOS : 3

Clean botrytis and what the Germans call *Beerenton*, which connotes the beginnings of BA character and also denotes the taste of overripe berries. And yet, there's nothing dainty nor confected about this, and it isn't "dessert wine." What is it then? A parfait of exquisite fruit riding an F-16 of slate and acidity. Riding on it, not inside it.

2015 Graacher Domprobst Riesling Beerenauslese

(++)

12/375ml | GWS-254H | SOS : 4 (barely)

All you can say, now, is that it's clear and sleek. The rest is either self-evident (that it's concentrated) or premature (specific cognates). Seems like it may become wonderfully piquant and "green," and geezers like me will maybe remember the great 1990, which was similar in its infancy.

A · J · ADAM



REGION / SUB REGION

Mosel / Dhron

VINEYARD AREA

3.7 hectares

ANNUAL PRODUCTION

1,250 cases

TOP SITES AND SOIL TYPES

Dhroner Hofberg
(*weathered devonian
slate with quartzite*);
Piesporter Goldtröpfchen
(*blue slate*)

GRAPE VARIETIES

100% Riesling

It's great to see Andreas settled in, and especially great to see him holding one of his almost-newborn twins in his arms. I'm a softie for young Daddies with their bonny wee ones. But the new/old house in the heart of the village, right along the shushing *Dhronbach*, and Barbara Adam working with her brother as (of course) an equal, and Annika being (among other things) a fine young mother...it's quite the idyll. And it wasn't won easily.

The '15s, also, are idyllic. The vintage was healthy, so all the wines are *sponti*, as Andreas prefers. It's a year that plays to his strengths, and what I find to be his strengths is something that might surprise him, as it surprises me.

The man is a master of dry and almost-dry Mosel Riesling. That is to say, a master at a genre that was barely tolerable until not very long ago. To do this, you have to have an excellent palate, plus the know-how to enact your vision. Mosel Trockens will never have the generous bodies and amenable acids of, say, Pfalz wines, and they have to locate a fullness and a mid-palate buoyancy that's not so often found. Johannes Selbach is the only other vintner I know who seems to have The Touch with dry Mosels.

Indeed Adam's touch is so sure with those wines, it is striking how much sweetness he permits in his "sweet" wines, which can seem quite baroque alongside their dry siblings. Such wines certainly have their partisans, among whom would be a younger version of myself, but these days I have less relish for a lot of sweetness.

It's a big ol' offering, but there was basically no dross. I swear I try to be selective, really I do.

2015 Spätburgunder Rosé Trocken

+

12/750ml | GAD-094 | SOS : 0 | **SOMMELIER ALERT!**

Sure we'd taste it. And then, presumably, forget it. But no; the first impression was, "This is *really* good." Really EFFING good, I'll have you know. It grows on a group of steep slate vineyards next-door to the Rieslings, and shows literally fantastic fruit and twangy slate; elegant and limpid. I can't remember a more interesting Rosé from Germany, and in my portfolio you have to go to Prieler to taste anything as complex as this. Calm, caressing, yet smoky and buzzingly slatey. I was literally amazed. My gob is only just recovering from the smacking it received.

2015 Riesling Trocken

+

12/750ml | GAD-095 | SOS : 1 | **SOMMELIER ALERT!**

(still shaking head...) oh, yeah, he makes Riesling here also...

And this is *excellent* Riesling; limpid, minerally, balanced, slatey and transparent; the structural motion is rippling and angular but the fruit has the peace of a sleeping baby. So salty, such expressive fruit that it "reads" sweet, though of course it's not.

2015 Dhroner Riesling Trocken

+

12/750ml | GAD-098 | SOS : 0 | **SOMMELIER ALERT!**

Now at the village level, we see more roundness and also the influence of *Fuder*; wonderful focused length, again perfect balance, showing more ore from the Zalto and more fruit, structure and harmony from the tulip—this is a place where I taste parallels from two different stems, in my unending quest to demonstrate the appalling unsuitability of the Zalto for most wines I taste from it. The wine is superb in its echelon

2015 Hofberg Riesling Trocken

+

6/750ml | GAD-096 | SOS : 0

This would be the "GG." It has the self-importance of such wines, and that is not a negative; they ought to convey a certain visible stature. This has an almost Champagne-like aroma; spice, lemon blossom, talc, balsam; the palate is fantastically salty with an Avize-like graphite; the complex iron-salt finish doesn't really cling as it rises in smoky curls through your soft palate.

2015 Goldtröpfchen Riesling Trocken

6/750ml | GAD-100 | SOS : 0

A collaboration between Adam and Julian Haart, a friend from Piesport.

You know, it strikes me that wine people up to age-35 really never experienced the *commodity* that was Piesport, and for those folks it isn't an automatic sale, it's just another vineyard. A hard one to really grok, because there's way too much dross going out under its name, and its borders were scandalously expanded in the miserable 1971 German Wine Law. Finding real Goldtröpfchen remains a challenge.

This hails from small terraces upstream from the (impressive) amphitheater. It's old-school Piesport. Ungrafted 70-year vines. The flavors are "blue" and wild-plummy and extremely salty; a powerhouse of spices especially ginger, and it's an expressive *yang* wine, less eloquent than Hofberg but more assertive.

2015 Riesling Im Pfarrgarten Feinherb

+

12/750ml | GAD-101 | SOS : 0

The second vintage from a new (for Andreas) vineyard, 51-year vines planted in a flat-ish site by the stream. It means "The garden of the rectory," and conveys its own meditative profile.

But here I need to point out, this is where Andreas is *MOST IN THE ZONE*, where he best expresses his signal Riesling genius, exactly at this level of not-sweet not-dry, and this is virtually perfect Riesling with a licorice note the '14 showed also. All steel here, it's juicy and twiggy, piquant and angular; has a tap-on-the-shoulder of late-palate acidity together with a certain mustard-green pungency. Not an "easy" wine but def freaky.

2015 Riesling Feinherb *In Der Sängerei*

+ +

12/750ml | GAD-102 | SOS : 0 | **SOMMELIER ALERT!**

A cadaster parcel within the Hofberg, this is becoming one of the greatest Rieslings I offer from the Mosel. This 15 is definitely fabulous; the most lavish fruit-basket face of Hofberg—spirit-kin of Oberhäuser Brücke, as I see it—it's lavish in all ways yet also electrically spicy like mint and tarragon, yet with this wild explosion of esoteric fruit and smoky slate and chocolate-y *sponti* notes. For me it's a Mosel monument.

2015 *Has'chen* Riesling Kabinett

(+)

12/750ml | GAD-104 | SOS : 2 (barely)

A new vineyard for Adam, a steep parcel across the Mosel from Dhron itself, a cadaster name for what I *think* was a part of Dhroner Roterd. Andreas is way stoked about it, and I like this Kabinett a lot, in part because it's on the dry side. It recalls a Saar wine, actually, in its pink-grapefruit twang. There's vivid acidity, and the wine is serpentine, edgy and quince-y. Potentially outstanding.

2015 Hofberg Riesling Kabinett

+

12/750ml | GAD-105 | SOS : 2

The vintage I'm sloppin' down at home these days is the lovely "cool" 2008, and this smells just like it. That is, classic Mosel, and this really soars up to super glamorous fruit, warmer than the '08 but cooler than '11 or '12. Mid-palate gets wintergreeny with smoky slate; it's taut yet ripe and generous.

It's also an item of deep belief for Andreas, who loves this idiom of Mosel wine and wants to do his part to preserve it. To that end he has offered a new price, which I think will make you smile.

2015 Hofberg Riesling Spätlese

12/750ml | GAD-107 | SOS : 3

A high-wire balance between pronounced RS and vigorous acidity is tactile (at this point) for drinkers who like to observe a blatant dialogue of components. A kind of scorched spiciness, a chile-thread heat. In a sense this is more a "study-in-wine" than a wholesome beverage. Taste and decide. RS is 90g/l and acidity is 10!

2015 Hofberg Riesling Auslese

(+)

6/750ml | GAD-108 | SOS : 3

On entry it seems drier than the Spät, and only in the middle and end does sweetness really register. Steel-fermented. A solid *drinking* Auslese and not a baby-BA; highly salty and lush.

REUSCHER-HAART



REGION / SUB REGION

Mosel / Piesport

VINEYARD AREA

6 hectares

ANNUAL PRODUCTION

4,200 cases

TOP SITES AND SOIL TYPES

Piesporter Goldtröpfchen
(blue devonian slate);
Piesporter Domherr
(blue devonian slate);
Piesporter Falkenberg
(blue devonian slate);
Piesporter Günterslay
(blue devonian slate);
Piesporter Treppchen
(blue devonian slate)

GRAPE VARIETIES

90% Riesling
5% Regent
5% Rivaner

They can be forgiven for stumbling in 2014, as they suffered a death in the family, not to mention almost everyone on the Mosel had “issues” in 2014. So it was lovely to see them roaring back with their ‘15s, a typical solid muscular vintage for this estate.

I’ll honestly cop to underrating these wines. It’s because their cellar regime (*sponti* in tank) can make for some heavy reduction aromas when I’m there in March, which entails my peering through the periscope, which entails me hedging my notes so I don’t hype.

The estate is decidedly on-the-move now, the generational transfer now complete. I wonder to what degree (if any) the wines will change. They were quite rococo and sturdy when I first encountered them—in the early 90s, before you were born—and they still seem basically immortal, which is somewhat unaccountable for wines that “read” so horizontal and gentle when young.

2015 Piesporter Domherr Riesling Spätlese Trocken “Hugo”

12/750ml | GRH-087 | SOS : minus-1

Named for Mario's father; it was his favorite wine. It is thoroughly *apart* from Pies-Gold, far more taut and mineral. It doesn't yield an inch, but it's ore-like and snappy greens (mizuna, the other mustards) and shows a dark mineral that recalls Nigl. A huge surprise, but don't approach it looking for charm.

2015 Piesporter Goldtröpfchen Riesling Spätlese Feinherb “Überschwang”

12/750ml | GRH-088 | SOS : 1 | **SOMMELIER ALERT!**

This is highly successful in 2015; savory, attractive, balanced fruit that seems at first to attenuate until minerality rushes in to fill the palate, salty and satisfying. One wonders whether any Pies-Gold needs to be sweeter than this....

2015 Piesporter Riesling

12/1000ml | GRH-089L | SOS : 2

It does its typical happy-puppy-playful-charm thing. Good density and texture; over-delivers in this vintage.

2015 Piesporter Goldtröpfchen Riesling Kabinett

(+)

12/750ml | GRH-090 | SOS : 2

The best vintage—by far—since 2012. This has a many-layered density, true richness and not just voodoo fruit, and the pebbly phenolics are helpful. Markedly long, like passion fruit, chestnut, and in this vintage, a big swell of mineral.

2015 Piesporter Goldtröpfchen Riesling Spätlese

+

12/750ml | GRH-091 | SOS : 2

Oh good: I was hoping for this. It's bigger than the Kab but not apparently sweeter, just more powerful, with a larger musculature. The usual banana-flambé vanishes quickly into verbena and stone. It's a strong boy, like one of those Ukrainian athletes who can pull a 737 on a shoulder harness.

CARL LOEWEN



REGION / SUB REGION

Mosel / Leiwen

VINEYARD AREA

12 hectares

ANNUAL PRODUCTION

8,300 cases

TOP SITES AND SOIL TYPES

Leiwener Laurentiuslay
and Klostergarten
(grey slate);
Thörnicher Ritsch
(grey slate);
Longuicher Maximin Herrenberg
(red slate)

GRAPE VARIETIES

100% Riesling

FARMING PRACTICES

Practicing organic viticulture

This is one of the FIVE MOST INTERESTING ESTATES IN MY OFFERING, and among them it's the one you know the least about. And that is gonna change.

A couple decades ago an idealistic young couple realized there were great vineyards—not “good” or “interesting” vineyards, but truly great ones—along this stretch of the Mosel, and that no one knew of them because of the lack of a flagship estate. If J.J. Prüm had been a citizen of Leiwen and not of Wehlen, we'd be giving all that Sonnenuhr luv to Laurentiuslay and Ritsch. This is clear, and obvious.

Karl was also convinced of the old Mosel verities; spontis in cask with no fussings or tweakings.

When the estate Schmitt-Wagner had to fold its tent, as there were no children willing to carry it on, we were all very fortunate that Loewens could buy it. Carl now has every great site on this section of the Mosel. These are:

Longuicher Maximiner Herrenberg Thörnicher Ritsch Leiwener Laurentiuslay

They are every bit as important as Graacher Domprobst, Wehlener Sonnenuhr and Zeltinger Schlossberg, only you don't know them, and therefore they **COST LESS.**

Karl-Josef's son Christopher is now fully installed and brings his own vision and infusion of vim. They are discontinuing the name *Schmitt-Wagner* for wines from the vineyards they bought from Bruno Schmitt when that venera-

ble estate had to sell, for want of heirs. This consisted of some 9,000 ungrafted Riesling wines, planted in 1896 and 1903, which constitutes as great a legacy as one could hope for, and cemented Loewen's position as the great holder of every noble Riesling vineyard on the Mosel upstream from Leiwen. This won't matter to you if you're too young to remember Schmitt-Wagner. Older Riesling lovers may join me in a moment of gratefulness and sadness, first that Bruno Schmitt existed—he was the only reason to attend to Longuich at all—and second that the gentle tactful style of wine he made is a quickly vanishing species.

2015 is unsurprisingly an excellent vintage here, yet I was somewhat perplexed at my coolness toward many of the Trocken wines, which I thought might benefit from the vintage's power and ripeness. I have no fundamental quarrel with dry Mosel Riesling, when it's made by people like Adam or Selbach, and when it doesn't supplant the “traditional” style. I only need them balanced. However, Loewen's do not make the corresponding mistake of making their “sweet” wines too sweet—far from it. Those wines are perfectly balanced and vigorous, and represent the estate's greatest strength.

2015 Riesling Trocken Alte Reben

12/750ml | GCL-091 | SOS : minus-1

This is a cuvée from old ungrafted parcels hither and yon, and offers an entrée into the top range of Trockens. Bearing in mind how early I tasted, I do think you need to love really dry wine for this to be feasible. It's ore-like, juicy, taut and tensile. I find it to be quite strict, but there are drinkers who relish a little asperity.

2015 Riesling Trocken 1896

6/750ml | GCL-092 | SOS : 0

The wine makes me think more than anything of Michi's "Tradition" bottlings at Schloss Gobelsburg; it's atmospheric and inferential; analog, soulful, more pealing, bell-like overtones, more poetic and secretive. Even in its animation it shows repose, and a complexity you don't subdue, but simply and calmly allow it to guide you to the mystery.

Here's what Christopher had to say about this amazing wine:

"Our Maximin Herrenberg, which was planted in 1896, is the oldest Riesling vineyard in the world of this dimension (more than 6,000 vines).

Planted 1896. This is an incentive to us. I have asked myself over weeks: How did they produce wine in that period, in a time when Mosel Riesling was one of the most important wines of the world?

In the Maximin Herrenberg we still have the single post training system with 10.000 vines per hectare, which was common in those days. No chemical fertilizer is used, everything, even the hardest work is done by hand. Never has the Maximin Herrenberg seen a machine! The adventure started in the harvest. The handpicked grapes were being transported to the trailer with the help of a hotte (a hotte is something like a rucksack, with which you can transport about 60kg of grapes in it; it was used before tractors made the vineyard work easier). The grapes, which were collected in a basket, were being stamped by foot, which had been common then. Through that procedure the maceration starts directly in the vineyard.

On the evening of the picking day, the press process started. For the 1896 we used a very old wooden basket press, which we found in a small dusty corner at the lower section of the Mosel valley and which we restored with a lot of love. Pressing was done by brawniness, the juice is guided without any sedimentation or pumping directly into the Fuder. The fermentation, of course, is spontaneous, without any added yeast.

The result is a wine, which shows perfectly the strength of Riesling. It is a unique statement of consistency in a fast moving world. Due to the small scaled 1896 vineyard, we are just able to do one Fuder of the 1896 Riesling."

This wine is remarkable, much more than just a curio, and I think more than an homage or a fascinating story. It's bone dry but has such mineral density it avoids any shrillness or sourness. It's an exegesis of crushed rocks, an entire quarry of flavor and energy with barely a fruit or a flower in sight—though if a hyacinth married a slate-pit they might produce this. A *ne plus ultra* of its type—if it even has a "type"—and with a commanding gorgeous ferocity that doesn't flash the tiniest of smiles, but you're overcome anyway.

2015 Riesling Feinherb 1896

6/750ml | GCL-094 | SOS : 0 | **SOMMELIER ALERT!**

With just 13g/l of RS—the Trocken has 8—so they'd seem to be ostensibly close together. You want to see the impact of *five grams-per-liter* of sugar? It's a lesson to last a lifetime, my friend. This wine has substantially more dialogue, more yin-yang, more animation; a curious note of tobacco enters; the mineral sings but doesn't howl; salt and mint are thrust forward, along with lavender and licorice, and a lot of garrigue. This is a DRY wine, while the other is a very dry wine; they are both marvelous but one of them is superb.

2015 Ritsch Riesling Trocken "GG"

6/750ml | GCL-093 | SOS : 0 | **SOMMELIER ALERT!**

The 2nd steepest vineyard in Europe—the Bremmer Calmont is the very steepest, also on the Mosel. This is also THE greatest unknown Cru in Germany. The wine is a riot of every iridescent green thing in creation; it's leaning tart, but the sheer force of this wildly herbal Chartreuse-y extract carries a lizard-balance, blinking its glassy eyes. No other wine like it.

2014 Leiwener Klostergarten Riesling Kabinett

+

12/750ml | GCL-083 | SOS:1 | **SOMMELIER ALERT!**

We're moving off this wine as a core-list offering because the ancient-vines Herrenberg is simply more interesting, but I'll be sorry to see this go. And "go" it probably will, as it was basically made for me – the Germans, excuse me, *The "Germans"*—will not buy such a thing. The wine is essentially perfect in a delicate way; it tastes Feinherb, and has some of the white-flower and (even) chalkiness that makes me think of Margaine's Champagne. So, this is the final melody, and a very sweet lyric melody it is.

2015 Longuicher Herrenberg Riesling Kabinett

+

12/750ml | GCL-095 | SOS:1 | **SOMMELIER ALERT!**

Ungrafted, planted 1903—terribly young, I know—and it sits upslope from the *Maximiner* Herrenberg, whence the 1896 bottlings arise. It reminds me of a Merkelbach wine only richer, or like Christoffel but not so glossy, not so formed. Ginger and quince, an endless call-and-response among Spring flowers, wild herbs, licorice and key lime.

I know you won't mind my pointing out that if you were offered a wine from a great vineyard from ungrafted 113-year old vines, and that wine came from France, Italy or Spain, you would pay a **fuckload** more money for it. You don't mind if I say that, do you?

2015 Leiwener Laurentiuslay Riesling Spätlese

(+) +

12/750ml | GCL-096 | SOS:2

This is the best German wine on our core-list, and one of the great classic Mittelmosel Spätlesen. You pronounce it lore-rentyuse-lie, and this very old vineyard (at least 80 and some over 100) has never undergone flurbereinigung because the citizens of Leiwen voted it down as too expensive. So the vineyard shows its original little terraces and walls.

This '15 was surprisingly backward, though the potential exists for a masterpiece, with its vanilla pear opulence over a firm earthy structure and an almost imposing length.

2015 Thörnicher Ritsch Riesling Auslese

+

6/750ml | GCL-097 | SOS:2

It's the inverse of the "GG," which means it has more botrytis, but in '15 the botrytis was rare and healthy, so this wine feels almost delicate, it's so interior. But then the acidity pokes its head out. Still, it's a demure green beauty but one with a sharp wit. It's also a *useful* Auslese—in many wineries it would be a Spätlese—and I may be underrating it.

SAAR

The Saar valley is singular in many ways. Close as it is to Trier, it seems entirely removed. Unlike the fjord of the Mittelmosel, the Saar is more open country, and vineyards mix with forests and pasture. It is deliciously relaxing, quiet and verdent and birdy.

In massage they talk about the cleansing breath, the exhale that sends the tension away. Coming to the Saar is like taking cleansing breaths, one after another.

And so when I taste the wines, something in them speaks of this place where they grow, both its serenity and its drama. It can't be helped, or at least I can't help it. At the same time, though, I am evaluating each of them as wine qua wine. However much I may love it because it speaks to my soul, the wine has to work by itself, has to have something convincing to say to you in your shop or restaurant, and to me when I taste it months later in the throb and crash of a trade tasting.

It's the only way I know how to respond—how to be alive—by combining a strict professional appraisal with whatever arises spontaneously from within, impulses or impressions or dreams or just emotion. I can't transfer that to you, but we're both human beings and I want you to know it is there. Something is there. These wines offer an opportunity to pass

through a curtain.

I also think there are gregarious wines and also introspective wines, and I love those autonomous little beings who don't look up when you enter the room. I have an amazingly clear rapport with wines like that.

Saar wine seems to take an essence of Mosel wine and concentrate it, but this isn't something one can isolate as a flavor or flavors per se. Saar soils are a little different from Mosel soils, but only a little; there's more so called Grauwacke here intermixed with the slate. Almost every Mosel wine has an herbal profile and a citric profile, and it is these two things that are seemingly intensified in Saar wines. They are also rather more earthy than Mosel wines. They convey an even more palpable solidity. When they show the expected apple-y fruit they prompt you to imagine the apples were smaller and more dense, or had been picked later, when the fruit-sugars were concentrated by a light frost. Indeed one could say Saar wines taste like Mosel wines from grapes that slightly froze, not deep enough for Eiswein, but just enough for a tangy little jab of concentration. They are also shadier than Mosel wines, with more silvery flavors. Not bad for a guy who basically has no idea what he's talking about!

VOLS



REGION / SUB REGION

Saar / Ayl

VINEYARD AREA

6 hectares

ANNUAL PRODUCTION

4,000 cases

TOP SITES AND SOIL TYPES

Ayler Kupp
(*weathered slate*);
Ayler Schonfels
(*weathered slate*);
Wiltinger Kupp
(*weathered slate*);
Wiltinger Braunfels
(*weathered slate*);
Wiltinger Schlangengraben
(*weathered slate*)

GRAPE VARIETIES

Riesling

FARMING PRACTICES

Practicing organic viticulture

In the sense that Merkelbach makes the *ur*-Mosel wines, Helmut Plunien at Vols makes the *ur*-Saar wines. They are entirely unornamented, and primordially pure.

I wasn't surprised his '15s were outstanding, but I was surprised they weren't a lot more outstanding than either '13 or '14 had been. Plunien is establishing a splendid track record for consistency, even in difficult vintages, and any thoughts I might have harbored that his '15s would be more "massive" or "heavy" were quickly laid to rest by the crunchy scintillating wines.

We're also going to move back a few vintages and offer some wines with bottle-age, and which are showing magnificently.

2013 Wiltinger Kupp Riesling Kabinett

+

12/750ml | GVL-015

Really old-school Kab, with just 30 blissful grams of RS—like in the olden days—and this lovely shady green-apple-and walnut Saar character with no perceptible sweetness but with lovely fennely penetration, fine salty length, and mineral ground to a fine powder.

2013 Ayler Kupp Riesling Kabinett

+

12/750ml | GVL-016

Some day, in a museum of paradigms-of-wine-flavors, someone will approach a wine like this, that has a sign saying Icon Of Saar Riesling,” and it will taste just like this. Just. Like. This!

2012 Ayler Kupp Riesling Spätlese

+

12/750ml | GVL-014

Smoky-slate and undeflected Saar-ness, and all I can do is yell and cheer. When the world seems to weigh you down with difficulty, obscurity and ambivalence, you take a mouthful of this and it's all clear, radiant and wonderful again. This at least isn't inscrutable! This is chipper, hale and glorious. Thank you thank you thank you.

2015 Riesling “United Slates”

12/750ml | GVL-024 | SOS : 1 | **SOMMELIER ALERT!**

Racy, *sponti*, vivid, crunchy; absolutely steady perfect prototype Saar Riesling. Tastes Feinherb.

2015 Ayler Kupp Kabinett

+

12/750ml | GVL-025 | SOS : 1 | **SOMMELIER ALERT!**

Kr-RUNCH! Not quite ripe cox-orange pippin, quince and grapefruit. Again, classic Saar, weight plus tension, and the acidity is harmonious albeit happily frisky.

2015 Wiltinger Kupp Riesling Kabinett

(+) +

12/750ml | GVL-026 | SOS : 2

The pick of the vintage here; talc, white flowers, osmanthus; a wine of depth, strength and length, as strong and lithe as a woman tennis player. More pure fruit than the Ayler; very appealing yet serious stuff. Seckel pears, moonlight, and a 100-mph serve.

2015 Ayler Kupp Riesling Spätlese

12/750ml | GVL-027 | SOS : 1

Decidedly on the *dry* side, drier-feeling than either Kabinett; it has the strong earthiness of (parts of) Kupp; in any case a fine crunchy Riesling with excellent balance though not charming balance; it's for purists and rock-heads and people who love radicchio and frisée in their salads.

2015 Wiltinger Braunfels Riesling Spätlese “Vols I”

+

12/750ml | GVL-028 | SOS : 2

Maybe the first time I've grok-ed this wine, its carbon smokiness and burning-leaf earthiness. Old vines length and cling. A primordial no-quarter-given Saar wine.

2016 TERRY THEISE
• GERMANY •
ESTATE SELECTIONS



48 W 25th St, 9th Floor, New York, NY 10010

212 273 9463 • skurnik.com