



2014 TERRY THEISE  
• GERMANY •  
SNOW  
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

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<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	1	<b>RHEINGAU</b>	68
<i>The Shit You Gotta Understand...</i>	3	<b>Spreitzer</b>	69
<i>Dry or Sweet Wine Culture?</i>	4	<b>Künstler</b>	71
<i>How This Catalogue Will Proceed</i>	4		
<i>The 2013 Vintage</i>	5	<b>MITTEL RheIN</b>	74
<i>Highlights and Superlatives</i>	7	<b>Florian Weingart</b>	75
<i>Two New Things I'm Doing</i>	9		
<i>...Wrap Your Arms Around Feinherb!</i>	9	<b>MOSEL</b>	77
<i>Core List Wines</i>	11	<b>Selbach-Oster</b>	78
<i>Hard-Core List Wines</i>	11	<i>J&amp;H Selbach Regionals</i>	85
<i>How I Select</i>	11	<b>Meulenhof/Erben Justen Ehlen</b>	86
<i>Daddy's Fucked Up Tasting Notes</i>	11	<i>The Question of Tartrates</i>	87
<i>Plusses and the Quest for Perfection</i>	13	<b>Alfred Merkelbach</b>	88
<i>Invasion of the Young'Uns</i>	13	<i>Dry German Wine</i>	92
<i>Sommelier Alert!</i>	14	<b>Joh. Jos. Christoffel</b>	94
		<b>Heribert Kerpen</b>	96
<b>PFALZ</b>	15	<b>Willi Schaefer</b>	97
<i>What is a Palate?</i>	16	<b>A.J. Adam</b>	99
<b>Müller-Catoir</b>	17	<b>Reuscher-Haart</b>	102
<i>Scheurebe: What Gives?</i>	21	<b>Carl Loewen/Schmitt-Wagner</b>	104
<b>von Winning/Dr. Deinhard</b>	22		
<b>Eugen Müller</b>	26	<b>SAAR</b>	107
<b>Herbert Meßmer</b>	29	<b>von Othegraven</b>	108
<b>Theo Minges</b>	32	<b>VOLS</b>	111
<b>Kurt Darting</b>	35		
		<b>REFERENCE</b>	113
<b>RHEINHESSEN</b>	38	<i>How German Wines Age</i>	113
<b>Strub</b>	39	<i>Glossary</i>	114
<b>Weingut Geil</b>	42	<i>Hard-Core/Core List Wines</i>	116
<b>Gysler</b>	44		
<i>"Natural Wines"—Where I Stand</i>	46		
<b>NAHE</b>	48		
<b>Dönnhoff</b>	49		
<b>Jakob Schneider</b>	54		
<i>Can You Taste The Minerals?</i>	57		
<b>Weingut Hexamer</b>	58		
<b>Kruger-Rumpf</b>	61		
<b>Schlossgut Diel</b>	65		

# Introduction

*OK, got my umlauts lined up....wearing my “Jesus Drank Riesling” t-shirt, all full of righteous indignation and lyrical appreciation....not too many jokes or puns, but those’ll come... so, let’s begin.*



YOU: Just for right now, I’m going to assume you’re tabula rasa, and so I’ll confront the basic question, Why Germany?

Because Germany is the cradle of Riesling, and Riesling is the *best* grape, the best grape, either color, no exceptions, the essential effing best grape that wine can be made from. And Germany has the largest number and the greatest variety of superb Rieslings of anywhere on earth.

They can work in every style. Many of the dry wines tingle with fruit and minerality, most of the fruit-driven wines (almost but not quite clinically dry) are amazingly charming, complex and versatile, and a large number of the honestly-sweet wines—sweet like apples, not like bon-bons—are unique in all the world, superb with food,

low in alcohol, brimming with freshness, incomparably complex, and able to age for decades.

So—be interested!

You’re about to form a question, one I’ve heard many times, and I will anticipate you. If these wines are so amazing why aren’t they better known and easier to sell? Here’s the short answer. The long answer follows, but I’ll even keep that answer brief.

In my gnarly silverback coot stage of life, I see no reason to pull punches. The true reason the wines are not more popular, the reason beneath all the other reasons and justifications and theories and metaphysics, is that they are too good for a mass audience. Really, it is just that simple. And I don’t care if I sound snobby, because I know



I'm not a snob, just a realist, reporting what anyone can see with his own eyes.

Consider the giant queue waiting to get into the theater for the latest Hollywood car-chase-explosion-heaving-bodice-CGI-laden blockbuster, and then contrast that with the mingy little scrum of nerds in line at the funky cobwebby place where the quirky Indie movies show. Need I continue? Riesling is beloved of the smartest people with the best taste because Riesling *gives* us more of what we need; grace, intricacy, food-friendliness, tact, beauty, and ultimately, comfort. It's the way we want to taste the world. It's how we want life to be. We're tired of wines that act like carnival barkers or talk-radio bloviators. We like a wine we can take a walk with, talk to, a wine that keeps us company and understands us.

But doesn't everyone want a wine like that? Of course not. Look around you.

Am I saying you somehow have to prove yourself worthy of Riesling? No no no. I'm saying you will find your way to Riesling when it scratches an itch that not many people have. This doesn't make you a "better" person; it makes you a person with finer taste.

And now comes the hard part. In the actual world, the Germans have made it awkward to scope the basic info you need to comprehend, not the wines (which speak entirely well for themselves) but the conceptual frameworks within which they operate. So, let me help.

I have a set-piece I do with audiences in which I ask someone to time me with a stopwatch while I explain in fewer than five minutes every *salient* thing a person needs to know about German Riesling. This isn't hard at all. And I emphasize this point because there's a lot of shit going down, and someone who wants your attention had better get to the point.

Today there's hardly a corner of Italy or Spain or Greece or Slovenia where some wine grower in a hidden dell with twelve rows of vines, three irritable sheep and a ratty scrofulous dog isn't making wine that some intrepid (or merely lost) American importer hasn't unearthed. And you want to have them. It's fun, all this crazy new stuff, and you love to be part of the spirit of discovery.

It's not only wine, it's all of life that's banging up against your windows. Your basic consciousness was formed by another syntax of input than I knew. It's a battle royal in there, a mosh of material you can only pay glancing attention to, and so "glancing attention" becomes a defining feature of how you see the world.

(I pause here to clarify: obviously you're not all the same, and obviously generalities such as these are only *generally* true, and obviously there are infinite shades of temperament among you and I know that someone's reading this and thinking "That doesn't describe me at all." But for all that, your world and therefore you are different.)

One thing modern German wine does not do is make its point quickly. In fact it makes a fucked up mishmash of points all at once, many of them at odds with one

another, and before long you're confused and impatient, and maybe you think "I'll revisit this thing when they have their shit together. Some of the wines are sure good."

Here's what I mean. One, a lot of what you're being offered are Rieslings, and many of those have residual sugar. Yet the official "marketing" of the German Wine Institute seems to want to shove the dry Rieslings in your face, plus Pinot Blanc and Pinot Gris and various red wines. Just what *is* this wine culture's identity?

Two, you receive frequent sales calls from (or on behalf of) so-called "VDP" estates, because this grower organization is active in the marketplace. And one of its innovations has been to re-cast German wine categories and nomenclature along Burgundian lines. So they explain what they're doing and it makes sense and you get it. So far so good.

But three, then you look at some random other label and all this stuff isn't there. Instead there's all these terms from an antique wine law written in your grandparents' time, and now you're completely confused. Is *this* how the German thing works or is *that* how the German thing works?!

And so, Germany is in a period of transition (if you're spinning it positively) or else in an identity crisis (if you're telling the truth), and having failed in either case to decide what it wants to be, it throws the whole damn mess at you and cluelessly expects your busy self to just suss it.

If the wines weren't as good as they are, you'd throw their ass into the street. But there's the rub—these amazing, one-of-a-kind wines.

Many of you have them conflated among the "classics" of the wine world, and thus they appear either stodgy or else unaffordable, as nearly all of the great classics have (sadly) become. If I were in my twenties or thirties I'd be seriously pissed off at these so-called classics, because I'd want to drink them and couldn't, since the only people who can finagle the scratch are Hong-Kong investment bankers or Swiss plutonium magnates. So screw it if I can't afford Barolo; I'll drink Gattinara or Boca or some Nebbiolo from Uruguay or even a native grape from Urquarhtistan called "Phrzzic" that's said to be the same as Nebbiolo.

I seriously empathize because I can't afford those wines either. Oh sure, you may think I'm a "successful importer" but no one gets rich selling German Riesling and most of the supernals of the wine world are out of my reach. Hang out with me and I'm sure to geeze your ass straight to sleep; "Well young'un, in my time a fella could score a bottle of 20-year old Rioja for under twenty samolians, and hell, I could drink one of the top Côte Roties once a week...." I mean, I just saw a bottle of 1975 Clos de Goisses on the wine list of a restaurant in Alsace for **188 Euro**, which I'm sure reflects the price they paid for it back in 1985. Top wine is now a mere commodity whose costs are hyperinflated by the breathless bloviating of, let's say, certain reviewers. I can't possibly blame you for wanting no part of it. Neither would I.



But German wine is still not only affordable, it's actually a bargain, because it's still a buyer's market even for the top ones. That's the silver lining for all the incoherence. The wines are ungodly gorgeous *and* you can afford them.

There's maybe another aspect to the question. For a lot of us, the image of "classic" is like one of those banks in the shape of the Parthenon; fusty, self-solemn, Terribly Earnest. Who needs this? It's all Masterpiece Theater in a glass. However, this arises from a conceptual error we ourselves make, by leaping to the conclusion that "classic" only denotes one limited thing. In fact the true classics of the wine world are those wines that have proven over time to be most delicious, most expressive, most powerful, most resonant and most transcendent. Classic wines are the tantric sex between grape and ground, full-body orgasms of flavor, toe-curling and scalp-tingling and the whole melting-into-the-universe thing, and when you have one of them in your glass you know, immediately: wine isn't just a diversion, a plaything or even an adventure. Wine is a bringer of profound and beautiful experience, the kind that invades us and makes us more alive, so that we think "I didn't know I could *be* so alive."

That's what a classic is.

And Germany is perhaps the last place on earth where this experience is within reach of people who ride the subway to work.

That's why I want you to surmount the dismay and irritation you have *every right* to feel, because the payoff is unbelievable.

I want to help. So I'm going to tell you, in shorthand form, the few things you really need to know. These will get you 85-90% of the way there. The rest is fine-points, bureaucracy and spit-shine. If I haven't imparted this to you in less than ten minutes of your reading and considering it, one of us has failed.

## 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 **FEINHERB**.

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 either 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 *Dorhsheimer 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.



## IS IT A DRY-WINE CULTURE OR A SWEET-WINE CULTURE OR BOTH?

It depends on whom you ask. If you ask, say, author Stuart Pigott or blogger/merchant Lars Carlberg, they will say it's both. They are meeting a young generation of hip wine drinkers whose tastes are flexible and ecumenical, I am told, and I would like to believe them. I fear they may be judging an entire wine culture based on their hip friends, which is OK but runs the same risk as judging all of America from a sampling of Brooklyn hipsters. What I myself see, from the growers I visit and the restaurants I go to and the stories I'm told, Germany is not only a dry-wine culture, it is militantly and obsessively so. Maybe all of us are right.

And yet, how many letters have I gotten from travelers to Germany who were promptly dismayed to find the utter hegemony of the Trocken style? I didn't set these people up. They saw what I see. And what we see gives cause for grave concern. The wines we love are threatened. The omnipresence of dry wines within Germany is a dubious example of this country's temptation to implacable blocs of taste. This is a little unnerving, because everyone's taste is (or should be) particular, and yet every German likes just one type of wine: dry. Likes, or supposes he does. Or thinks he must. Either way, if you were dropped from the sky and landed in Germany you'd conclude it's a dry wine culture.

Outside of Germany it is a not-dry wine culture, because we in other countries can perhaps see with greater perspective that the not-dry German Rieslings are a singular and precious gift to the world and to the cause of beauty. So we cherish and nurture those wines, to try and ensure they don't vanish. This isn't because we're stubborn, conservative or digging in our heels to refuse to move with the times. It's because the times are fucking wrong. *Both styles can and ought to exist together.* This isn't a last-man-standing fight to the death. So the answer to the question, in truth is: It is *both* a sweet and a dry wine culture, but not if the Germans themselves have anything to say about it. Other than a few token dessert-wines they'd just as soon see the sweet wines go extinct.

## HOW THIS CATALOGUE WILL PROCEED

I'll do what I've done up to now, try to isolate and explain the *salient* aspects of a grower's work. Where greater depth is called for—and it often is—I'll cordon off those writings in discrete essays you can read if you have the time or desire. That said, I will not address you in tweet form. That would insult your intelligence. I will, though, respect the demands on your attention and seek to give you what you most need to know in the smallest possible space.

Some of this will be very chop-chop, matter of fact. But not all. Because one of those salient things about German wine growers is that some of their stories can't be

told in short-form just-the-facts prose. To do so would be unfair to both them and to you.

For readers closer to my age who may be dismayed that my normally discursive ruminations are curtailed, I'm sorry. But there are twenty seven years worth of back-catalogues, plus a book, and I'll find plenty of time to write more of those antic foamy passages that are so much fun for us both. But these folks need to get through this material and still have time to do their laundry, and I can't have their dirty socks on my conscience.

Here's how my portfolio fits into the general mix of German wine importers.

I have never sought the "elite," though I do assert that right *within* wineries, where I choose my favorites and leave the others. I want of course to have *some*, maybe even lots of "elite" growers, but I also want to have really good, lusty, vital, honest examples of wines in every "echelon" of quality. Not because I'm strutting my egalitarian cred (rather the reverse, since I'm an unabashed elitist) but because *I enjoy the variety*. No one would claim a Schneider is "as good" as a Dönnhoff, but what can I offer you for those times when an *exalted* experience is simply not called for?

That's when it helps to be ecumenical. That's where I think (hope?) my strength lies, because *I know* there are times, lots of times, more times than you may realize, where an honest, grounded, entirely GOOD wine is called for. You don't always want to go to the opera dude; sometimes you want to go to the ballgame. If the "good" wine is honorable and true, it's like having the best seat in the house at the ballgame.

We are at risk of squandering this capacity to enjoy that which is simple, because we seem to need to insist it is *merely* simple, or that simple isn't good enough for us. And so I wonder whether assembling a portfolio that's all about the "best" wines isn't really about the guy and not the wines. Because life's various pleasures apportion themselves in diverse ways, and wine's pleasures are no different. The "Schneider-pleasure" is not identical to the "Dönnhoff-pleasure." In one case we cultivate an appreciation of the highest refinement of beauty, in the other we cultivate an appreciation of the joys of honesty, integrity, goodness, companionability. We don't have to choose. We get to have them both. As long as we're not cowering inside our dread and insecurity insisting "only the best is good enough for me, or rather, for *me*."

I am constantly tasting new estates. A portfolio is never fully settled. You have to be very careful not to coast, and I often ask myself "If I were coming to this grower for the first time, would I want the wines?" That doesn't mean I go all lord-of-the-flies on my suppliers; even the most talented and caring grower will have a dud vintage once in a while. When that happens you steer customers elsewhere and wait for the next fine year.

But there's an assumption this portfolio is somehow valedictory whereas the small new importers have the real "cutting-edge" hotties. Would it were true. I'm seriously





encouraged by any new importer for fine German estate wines: I want them to succeed. But the notion they are sleuthing cool new things out from under my settled old gaze just doesn't wash. In nearly every case, I know of the new estates coming over, I tasted them and they were either redundant for this portfolio, or they weren't good enough to handle the internal competition.

I find what works best for me is when I can catch the chicken just as it hatches, and follow it as it grows. I am proud of the many "unknown" growers in this portfolio who have since become stars. These days it's hard to do. Anyone with any ambition at all is thrusting himself out there, and unless you stumble over someone, his name's bound to already appear in one of the many guides. Still, one keeps alert.

## \* THE 2013 VINTAGE \*

The good news is there are plenty of good wines, a decent number of outstanding wines and a small but significant number of superb wines. My job is to find them for you, and I did my job. But another part of my job is to build and maintain trust with you, and here I run afoul of a collateral worry; I can annoy my growers if I am too blunt when they have a dud year. So I am going to tell you as much of the truth as I think you need to hear and they can bear to hear. Of course part of my job is to *sell*

wine, and that entails being able to spin and be relentlessly positive. A grower has every right to believe I'm working on his/her behalf. I have an equal right to suggest that I am most effective for them if my customers *believe* me. So, watch me pick my delicate way through the thickets.

When 2013 works it gives wines of great relief and contrast; these are vivid wines. They're almost never creamy, but they are sometimes quite silky. They can seem deliciously savage at times, like a raspy-voiced singer; it isn't a "pretty" voice but still you love it. 2013s are high in acidity and stunningly high in extract; this is tactile and discernible, not a metaphor. That said, bottling will often subdue this component, not insofar as it exists but insofar as it can be tasted. At that point extract behaves as a buffer to acidity (and to sweetness if it is there) and confers a richness to the mid-palate. 2013s are often high in botrytis, and the degree to which botrytis was managed is a leitmotif of the vintage.

As such '13 invites comparison to two previous vintages, 2010 and 2000. But it is both less ripe and not as monstrously high in acidity as '10 was. It has in common with '10 its tendency to an almost monumental solidity along with always-prominent (and sometimes unbalanced) acids. Regarding 2000, nearly every grower told me the conditions in '13 were less challenging, there was less overall mildew, plus they'd learned from the earlier vintage and were better prepared this time. All of this may



very well be true. The best 2000s have aged surprisingly well, but that “best” is a slim tip of a large iceberg.

In crude meteorological terms, '13 was marked by a late beginning and uneven flowering. It was the year “climate change deserted us” in Johannes Selbach’s words. The summer was uneven, with cool damp periods prevailing, interrupted by one or two heat-spikes, and by September the grapes were still underripe or barely ripe.

Then came an occluded front in early October. On its south side the weather was sultry, on the north side merely damp, but it wasn’t what growers on either side needed.

In the Pfalz they reversed the old military expression “hurry-up-and-wait,” because having waited and waited, botrytis arrived rampantly and now they had to hurry up. A couple growers spoke of a 6-day picking, “harvest[ing] day and night and mostly by machine,” as one of them said. Grapes went from green on Tuesday to brown on Wednesday, in effect from under to overripe in the course of 36 hours. And yet, two outstanding collections from PFALZ growers (Catoir and Von Winning) joined excellent lineups from Eugen Müller and Theo Minges, and it began to seem that meticulous vineyard and canopy work, combined with ruthless sorting at harvest, could give truly exciting wines. All my Pfälzers were at least very good. The wines can be said to resemble 2011s, with a little less ripeness and a little more acidity.

Moving north and west, everything I saw in

RHEINHESSEN was clean and quite-good to good. Maybe not wines of legend, but you and I will enjoy drinking them. The three RHEINGAU estates I visited all had very good vintages in the rather jittery '13 manner; the wines are like a teenager jiggling his leg constantly, such is their nervous energy. You’d seldom call them sedate. But they can exhibit something of the poise of the classic, for all that.

The NAHE seems to have drawn the winning number in 2013; everyone made excellent wines and one estate made perhaps their best wines ever—Kruger-Rumpf. Here one didn’t taste a vintage in which “challenges were surmounted,” one didn’t say *These are good for '13s*—they were just kick-ass wines through and through, though of course they show the torn-silk textures and prominent acids of the vintage.

Similarly my lone MITTEL Rheine estate Florian Weingart had a fine vintage, and one of these days I’ll figure out how to get you to love these interesting and adorable wines as much as I do.

The MOSEL and SAAR are where things get... interesting. Upending the pattern of the past decade or so in which vintages tended to improve as one moved north/west, the Mosel in general got a little roughed up in 2013. But how will you take this? If you’re reading “He says not to buy Mosels” you’re reading it wrong. There’s loads of lovely wines. But where the vintage failed, it was most likely to fail here. Yet it fails in a curious way.



The basic harvesting choice appears to have been, either pick now and get clean grapes that aren't ripe enough, or wait and get grapes with a lot of botrytis. Oddly enough, the wines that show a *little* botrytis are more likely to be awkward and unbalanced than those that show a *lot* of botrytis, which are at least balanced in their particular context. The Mosel also had the most fruit still hanging during a decent week of weather in the second half of October, and generalities are hard to defend. Indeed throughout this collection there are estates who made delicious squeaky-clean wines (Christoffel, von Othegraven, Vols) while others made wines that didn't defy the vintage but took its virtues and expressed them (Selbach-Oster, Merkelbach, Schaefer, Loewen).

Yet it was a week in which one's poor teeth and gums were subject to a fusillade of astringency and acidity. A week to remember how to cull and triage remorselessly. Why am I telling you this? Must we discuss the wines that didn't make the cut? Yes, I think we must, because they also define the parameters of the vintage. I think you should know there were times I asked myself *Why is he showing me this wine?* But after a while the answer became evident.

The vintage is *very* small. Many growers made one-third of an average year. At best it was 40-50% below average, coming on the heels of the short crops of 2012 and 2010, and so every possible wine was on the table.

Nor am I by any means certain that I got the whole picture of these '13s. In 28 years of tasting young German wines I have never seen a more reticent backward vintage. I lost count of the number of times a freshly-poured wine was irksome, and then returning to the glass after five minutes (or more) the wine had changed, thrown off the yuckies and started showing fruit. Snap judgments will not do these wines any justice. Especially *these* wines, because they are obstreperous and gaudy and wont to trip over their own feet, and often it's just these kinds of wines that gain grace and restraint through bottling. I'll be deeply curious to taste them again.

Let's talk about acidity, and let's repeat something I said two years ago when I introduced the 2010s to you. There are two kinds of vintners in 2013; those who deacidified (henceforth "d-assed") and are glad to admit it, and those who d-assed and won't admit it. I'm not saying every grower d-assed every wine; I'm saying every grower d-assed *some* wines, and if he didn't and you drink them, baby, do two things right now—find the Pepto-Bismol and call your dentist.

I just know that some competing importer, at some sad point, will try to score some macho cred by decrying "Theise's zombie wines" and insisting that his growers were fearless in the face of caustically high acids. If he's been told the truth—which I doubt—then he and his customers are welcome to those wines. They are for a certain extreme taste that relishes spiky wines and if your palate runs to S&M then by all means enjoy. My palate likes vigorous acidity but doesn't appreciate being tasered by it.

And what are we talking about here? I'm not remotely arguing that a wine with 13% natural acidity should be strip-mined down to 8.0. I'll show you dozens of wines with acids north of 10 which at least can be drunk without gastric pain, whereas the original 12-13 could have perforated an ulcer. Mega-musts, of course: If you have dessert-wine with 140° or more (Oechsle —see glossary) then you can easily manage acids around 13-16. But for ordinary table wines? Puh-leeze.

Now, how do you feel about botrytis? Many aficionados of German Riesling align with the conventional wisdom, "welcome in sweet wines but not in dry," and yet in 2013 they sometimes had little choice. You could sort for hours but the thing was rampant in the vineyards and even scrupulously sorted grapes often carried an echo of botrytis. You can remove most of it by fining with carbon or charcoal, but this is an intervention most growers are wary of making. You can whole-cluster press, but can you afford to lose even more volume in an already tiny vintage?

Here 2013 offers some good news. Most of the botrytis was "good" botrytis, in contrast to 2000 when most of it was ordinary grunge and mildew. Good botrytis expresses as smokiness or malt. Sometimes it is inherently bitter, but this isn't always objectionable. All of Merkelbach's wines showed botrytis, yet it was encased in splendidly ripe fruit and truly epic extracts, and this is a regal vintage for them, standing easily alongside the monumental 2010s. There's just too little of it.

ANOTHER LOOK AT 2012: In part because '13 was so scant, and in part because the two adjacent vintages are so different, I scooped up all the remaining 2012 I could find. I am also closer to thinking '12 is a near-great vintage which may yet become *great* in certain regions and certain estates. A year in-bottle has unfurled a lovely mélange of creamy texture with vivid mineral brightness, along with a maltiness that made me think of the truly great 2005. At its best, I think '12 makes a case for being the best vintage *since* '05 and so yes I was greedy and don't feel a single bit of shame. Plus, I suspect '13 needs every bit of time we can give it, and '12 is sure a tasty thing to drink while we're waiting for '13 to turn the treble down.

OTHER KINKY GRAPES: Muscat seemed to be good in '13, and this surprised me. Usually the growers race to pick Riesling in a difficult harvest, letting Muscat and Scheurebe fend for themselves. But Muscat seemed to better resist botrytis, and gave some scintillating wines. Scheu was either somewhat mute or else it was in full hissing glory.

## HIGHLIGHTS AND SUPERLATIVES

(For any new readers, we have in effect retired Mr. Dönnhoff's number, because otherwise he'd have all the best wines. Cornelius might well wish to see some actual kudos—not that he needs to be affirmed by the likes of me—but I hope he and you will appreciate that his hors

classe estate occupies the highest of summits, and it would be boring to see his name infinitely repeated.)

#### THE WINERY OF THE VINTAGE IS:

I hate giving this to the same estate twice in a row, but truth is truth, and **VON WINNING** is showing that their glorious collection in 2012 was no fluke, but instead the settled arrival at a lofty elevation. Believe me, I wondered. Because those astonishing '12s might have been lavished with pixie-dust from the weightless weight of the creamy vintage style. Would the '13s be arch and angular again? Not a bit of it. These guys are here to stay. It is conceivable that Von Winning '13s will be a little tiny bit less grand than their '12s, but it's definite that their '13s are dramatically better than almost everything around them.

I spent a couple days of R&R in Burgundy, and I took a bottle of '12 Pechstein GG as a gift to each grower I visited. "What is it like?" they asked. I looked for an easy shorthand way to say it. *Imagine François Raveneau made Riesling in the Pfalz instead of Chardonnay in Chablis: That's what it's like.* Any doubt I ever harbored about the impact of Stefan Attmann's somewhat atavistic style of "winemaking" is now quelled. These wines are miracles.

#### OTHER MARKED SUCCESSSES:

It is a markedly fine vintage at **Müller-Catoir**, perhaps even better than '12, hard as that is to believe. I was also struck by the sure hand and steadily increasing polish at **Kruger-Rumpf**. I've already told you about **Merkelbach**. My personal darling **Carl Loewen** keeps having outstanding vintages.

There's a paradox in which estates who always show an intelligent hand of craftsmanship can get overlooked, just because they did it yet again. We come to expect it of them, so when they keep performing it isn't news. But attention must be paid to the passionate diligence of **Selbach-Oster** and **Schlossgut Diel**.

2013 was especially kind to a few estates who flourished by dint of its acid-structure. These include **Eugen Müller**, **Theo Minges**, **Jakob Schneider** (who's on a steady upward climb in any case) and **Reuscher-Haart**.

#### THE WINE OF THE VINTAGE IS:

**Von Othegraven** Kanzem Altenberg Riesling Spätlese Alte Reben. This is just an improbable miracle from this vintage, and though it won't "create sales" as much as a less expensive nominee would, an achievement such as this must be recognized.

#### THE WINE OF THE ENTIRE OFFERING IS:

A late-released (because long-fermented) 2012 **Selbach-Oster** Graacher Domprobst Riesling Spätlese Feinherb, an utter Mosel masterpiece, showing a thrilling and soulful pathway to a new/old dialect of slate-grown Riesling that you simply shouldn't miss.

#### RUNNERS-UP INCLUDE:

**Müller-Catoir** Mandelgarten Riesling Spätlese

**Kruger-Rumpf** Münsterer Dautenpflänzer Riesling Spätlese

**Merkelbach** Ürziger Würzgarten Riesling Spätlese #9

#### THE AUSLESE OF THE VINTAGE IS:

(bearing in mind I selected very few Auslesen this year)

**Müller-Catoir** Herzog Rieslaner Auslese, along with **Selbach-Oster** Schmitt, two utterly different wines, neither of them at all "dessert" like, each powerfully savory, each a thrall of masterly beauty.

#### THE KABINETTS OF THE VINTAGE ARE:

**Selbach-Oster** Zeltinger Sonnenuhr Riesling Kabinett

**Schlossgut Diel** Dorsheimer Goldloch Riesling Kabinett

#### THE BIGGEST SURPRISES OF THE VINTAGE ARE:

**Schneider** Norheimer Dellchen Riesling Trocken, (a markedly expressive wine from this normally opaque terroir, I can barely recall a superior young Dellchen. Dönnhoff's was also unusually expressive at this early stage.)

**Von Winning** Sauvignon Blanc, because pyrene-averse little me was quite overcome by how good this was!

#### THE GREATEST DRY WINES ARE:

The entire Von Winning collection of GGs, especially... no, actually: ALL of them.

**Schlossgut Diel** Pittermännchen Riesling GG

**Kruger-Rumpf** Pittersberg Riesling GG

**Müller-Catoir** Haardt Muskateller (just *show* me a better Muscat, go on, just do it)

#### THE GREATEST INEXPENSIVE DRY WINES ARE:

**Eugen Müller** Forster Pechstein Riesling Spätlese Trocken

**Schneider** Niederhäuser Hermannshöhle Riesling Spätlese Trocken

#### THE GREATEST OF THE GREATEST RESTAURANT CATEGORY, THE FOOD-FRIENDLIEST MOSTEST PERFECTEST RIESLING WINE, THE DAMN-NEAR-DRY WINE:

**Kruger-Rumpf** Dautenpflänzer Riesling Feinherb

#### THE ABSOLUTE TOP VALUE:

**Merkelbach** Ürziger Würzgarten Riesling Auslese #7 (though its sister wine the "Urglück" is also an amazing bargain).

#### THE ABSOLUTE MOST FUN:

**Weingart** Spay Riesling Kabinett Feinherb

**Darting** St Laurent (2011, first being offered)



## TWO NEW THINGS I'M DOING

Ever-alert to each seismic shudder in the marketplace, it has crossed my mind that most Champagne is getting too pricey to pour by-the-glass. We seek alternatives, among them the very attractive Jura sparkling wines, and also the previously ignored but now-becoming-attractive German sparkling wines.

So anyone who made one, I tasted. And among the ones I tasted, I liked these best of all. They will fizz obediently and make your guests super-happy.

**Darting** Pinot Blanc Brut

**Meßmer** 2009/2010 Pinot Noir Brut Rosé—will console you if you don't get all the Vilmar *Cuvée Rubis* you'd hoped for. F'real.

**Minges** 2011 Riesling Extra Brut

**Von Winning** Riesling Extra Brut

The other new thing is to renew my focus on RED WINES. There are some "names" on the German red wine scene, but many of them entail a substantial detour (and thus expenditure of time) that may not be justified by either the amount of wine I could get and/or the amount I could sell at the going price. And there are estates in already trodden regions (Pfalz among others) specializing in reds, but the supply-demand equation makes them fearfully pricey especially now in our weak-Dollar era, exacerbated by several small vintages of late. So, again, I tasted what I already had access to, and will present you the best among those wines, which I am very sure are entirely as sexy as can be found – and apart from Diel's, won't break the bank.

**Gysler** 2011 Spätburgunder

**Darting** 2011 St Laurent / 2012 Pinot Noir / 2013 Pinot Meunier

**Meßmer** 2011 Pinot Noir LITER / 2010 Pinot Noir GG

**Minges** 2011 St. Laurent / 2011 Spätburgunder "Tradition" / 2011 Spätburgunder Spätlese Trocken

**Müller-Catoir** 2012 Spätburgunder

**Schlossgut Diel** 2012 "Cuvée Caroline" Pinot Noir

**Von Winning** 2012 Pinot Noir "II"

**Weingart** 2012 Spätburgunder Spätlese Trocken, Spay

## TIME TO WRAP YOUR ARMS AROUND FEINHERB!

**SOMMS!** Are you feeling fried? Sixteen days without a day off. Too many doubles lately? Craving some, any little sliver of down time?

I'm here to help. Here's what you do.

You take any of the wines on this list, and you go in to work before evening service, and you take bottles of these wines, the same one or various ones, whatever you prefer,

## A New Way to Measure Sweetness

There's entirely too much yammering in Germany about sweetness, dryness, sugar; it's a kind of fetish. For our part, we're making progress but we still haven't quite outgrown a preoccupation with residual sugar as a measure of "correctness." I do feel we have reached the point of knowing the difference between actual sweetness and the sense of sweetness a wine conveys. Many of us know a Mosel Kabinett with 30 grams of residual sugar and 9 grams of acidity tastes drier than a new world Chard-oak-nay with 9 grams of sugar, no acid, and 14% alcohol. I don't think the standard sugar-pyramid of German wines is Serviceable any more. Thus I started noting each wine I planned to list according to an intuitive scale I tried to apply consistently. I call it the SENSE-OF-SWEETNESS scale—SOS for short—and you'll see it following every tasting note. It should be a more reliable guide to the actual taste of a wine than any word on any label. Here's how it goes:

- **IT STARTS FROM ZERO.**  
Zero is the point of no discernable sweetness.
- **MINUS ONE (-1)**  
Indicates sugar is discernibly absent but the wine is in balance.
- **MINUS TWO (-2)**  
For lovers of austere wines.
- **ONE (1)**  
Signifies barely discernable sweetness.
- **TWO (2)**  
Signifies sweetness which is discernable but not obtrusive..
- **THREE (3)**  
Signifies sweetness important of itself. Remember, I reject any wine of grotesque or vulgar sugariness.
- **FOUR (4)**  
is bona-fide dessert wine.

Put "SOS" into your lexicon today!

## PLEASE BUY MY MOVIE!

Nearly every time I have ever been to Germany I've found myself feeling "Nobody knows how beautiful it is here, and nobody guesses how lovely the Riesling culture actually is, now how inspiring the people are."

We've brought customers over in small groups for 21 years now, but what I really want is to bring everyone over, because I'm convinced that not only would you find this place deeply inspiring, it would also cast a pitiless light on many of the bogus things around you that masquerade as real.

Of course that's impossible. So I made a film to try and capture the flavor for people who haven't been there, or to remind people who *have* why they were so stirred. Plus I'm at a time in my life where I want to give testimony, to honor the taproots that have nourished me.

It's 53 minutes long, and I kept my gormless self out of it as much as I could. The film's about *them*, those people, those places, those lives and that beauty.

Here's how you get a copy: [TerryTheiseMovie.com](http://TerryTheiseMovie.com)

Six reviews to date—all 5-stars.  
You'll laugh, you'll cry, you'll order a pizza.

and you put a bottle on each table in the dining room. One on each. Then you scan the room, exchange a few words with staff, and clock out. Take the night off. Watch the ball game, do your laundry, have dinner at home with your sweetheart. *Your work is done.* The perfect white wine is on every table already. The troops can handle the reds.

If I or you or anyone were given godlike powers, and we could design the *ideal* white wine for the table, a wine that would manage to harmonize with nearly anything (and with many things perfectly), a wine that was so delicious the bottle would empty in a flash and another one be ordered, a wine without tiringly high alcohol, a wine with freshness and substance—this is exactly precisely totally truly-madly-deeply the wine we'd create. But we don't have to: it already exists.

I'll define *Feinherb* in the glossary at the end of the catalogue, but for now what you need to know is: 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 ghoulish 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 sommelier 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.

**Meßmer** Riesling Feinherb

**Meßmer** Scheurebe Feinherb

**Meßmer** Gelber Muskateller Feinherb +

**Meßmer** Riesling Kabinett Feinherb "Muschelkalk"

**Minges** Riesling Halbtrocken

**Gysler** Silvaner Halbtrocken

**Gysler** Scheurebe Halbtrocken

**Spreitzer** Winkeler Jesuitengarten Riesling Kabinett Halbtrocken +

**Strub** Niersteiner Oelberg Riesling Feinherb "Roter Schiefer" + +

**Strub** Niersteiner Hipping Riesling Feinherb "Thal" + (+)

**Schnieder** Niederhäuser Kertz Riesling Feinherb +

**Hexamer** Riesling "Porphyr" Feinherb

**Hexamer** Spätburgunder Weissherbst Halbtrocken

**Kruger-Rumpf** Riesling Feinherb "Schiefer"

**Kruger-Rumpf** Dautenpflänzer Riesling Feinherb + +

**Weingart** Spay Riesling Kabinett Feinherb +

**Weingart** Bopparder Hamm Engelstein Riesling Spätlese Feinherb +



**Selbach-Oster** Graacher Domprobst Riesling Spätlese Feinherb  
“Alte Reben” ++ (+)

**Selbach-Oster** Zeltinger Sonnenuhr Riesling Spätlese Feinherb  
“Uralte Reben” ++

**Selbach-Oster** Zeltinger Himmelreich Riesling Kabinett Halbtrocken +

**AJ Adam** Dhroner “In der Sängerei” Riesling Feinherb (+)

**Reuscher-Haart** Riesling Spätlese Feinherb “Überschwang”

**Schmitt Wagner** Longuicher Herrenberg Riesling Kabinett Feinherb +

**Carl Loewen** Longuicher Maximiner Herrenberg Riesling Spätlese  
Feinherb + (+)

## CORE-LIST WINES

The core-list, with which we have been very successful, was created to ensure greater continuity and help you build brands. It began as an empirical record of having consistently selected a certain wine over many years. The wine needed to be in “good” supply (by small-batch standards). Yet for all that it’s been fabulously received, it’s created many “candid exchanges of views” (in the parlance of diplomacy) among my staff and me. I want you to know this: *no wine will be offered merely because it’s on the core-list. Every wine will continue to earn its way into this offering. In the (extremely unlikely!) event a core-list wine is yucky in the new vintage, off it goes. If we’ve done our jobs properly, that will almost never happen. Core-list wines will be clearly indicated in the text (with notes in **bold print**) and I’ll explain why each wine is on the core-list.*

## HARD-CORE-LIST WINES

Here’s the basics for the hard-core program. I usually offer around 300 German wines per year, and of those we keep some 44 wines on the core-list. That leaves a lot of wine subject to the caprices of the DI system, where even my fulsome swollen tasting notes will often fail to entice buyers. Last Winter I drank a bunch of wine I’d bought from my growers, which I like to do because it’s *drinking* like y’all do as opposed to “tasting” which is only a fraction of any wine’s truth. While I drank the wines I got pissed off at how little of them we sold. I decided we had to have a way to draw attention to the most *seriously wacked out wines* that would otherwise disappear into the maw of the pre-arrival offerings.

Thus the HARD-CORE list. It comprises a group of wines, not too many, which are so good they deserve special attention, but which may not be this good again next year (the core-list is about reliability) and which are in short supply (the core-list is about availability). We are going to *buy and stock* these wines, and when they’re gone they’re gone. They are the gnarliest of the gnarly, the apex of latex, the supplanting monkeys of lackey imperialistic capitalism, the *best group of wines to which under normal circumstances you wouldn’t pay attention*. Here they are:

**von Winning** 2012 Riesling Extra Brut Sekt

**von Winning** 2012 Sauvignon Blanc Trocken “I”

**Eugen Müller** 2013 Forster Pechstein Riesling Spätlese Trocken

**Darting** 2011 St. Laurent

**Geil** 2013 Muskateller Trocken

**Jakob Schneider** 2012 Niederhäuser Hermannshöhle Riesling Spätlese

**Hexamer** 2013 Spätburgunder Weissherbst Halbtrocken

**Weingart** 2013 Spay Riesling Kabinett Feinherb

**Selbach-Oster** 2012 Graacher Domprobst Riesling Spätlese  
Feinherb “Alte Reben”

**Selbach-Oster** 2013 Pinot Blanc Trocken

**Reuscher-Haart** 2012 Piesporter Falkenberg Riesling Kabinett Trocken

**von Othegraven** 2012 Kanzemer Riesling Trocken

## 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 27 years now, and it could be squandered in six months if I started dissembling or broke faith with my core values.

Otherwise, I try to build a sensible assortment, which entails leaving very good wines behind sometimes. I can live with that. Now and again a grower will convince me to offer a wine that has obtained iconic status, and I’ve been known to do that even when I didn’t like the wine. In those cases I’ll write a truthful tasting note. You’ll make up your own mind.

## DADDY’S FUCKED UP TASTING NOTES

I write as the spirit moves me. Some notes are free-flow and others are more detailed. I don’t calculate, and I never write with sales in mind, unless I’m convinced a certain wine isn’t getting enough attention.

I use cognates and associations, but I’m not convinced how useful they are. I tend to use them more on days I’m tired. When I’m alert and engaged I more often write in images and tones.

I almost never give analytical values, nor do I detail cellar or vineyard practices unless these are salient for any reason. After thirty five years tasting, I know the parameters in play. But some of you seek that information, which I appreciate—sometimes. It’s good to be curious and

eager to learn, but I sniff at times an unseemly desire to accumulate dubiously relevant information so as to sound knowledgeable to one's peers. I also think that obsessing over such details can obscure one's view of the big picture.

Here's an **ESSAY** I published on this subject in a recent Zester Daily. Skip over it if you don't have time for essays.

*Lately I've been frustrating my customers, which is never a wise thing to do. We get asked all the time for analytical stats on the wines we offer and details about our winemaking practices. My catalogues tend to pass over such things, because I've reached a place in my drinking career where I find them otiose. This might seem snooty. So let me explain.*

*First, a wise quote from Peter Jost (of the estate Toni Jost), who said: "Judging a wine by its analysis is like judging a beautiful woman by her X-ray films." Second, and further support for my theory, a remark I received from esteemed German winemaker Helmut Dönnhoff many years ago, when I asked him for the figures of a wine in my glass. "You don't need these anymore, Terry," he said. "Analyses are for beginners."*

*But there **are** beginners, I must remember, and they're curious, and it's peevish for me to deny them the understanding they seek. If a drinker is interested in knowing how a wine was made, or in knowing what its acidity or residual-sugar or extract might be, this is entirely valid if she is trying to collate her palate's impressions with the facts of the matter. That is a useful way of thinking—until it isn't anymore.*

### THE ECSTASY OF DEFEAT

*I well remember traveling with an earnest young colleague who sought to guess how a wine was made strictly from its taste. He was especially eager to identify cask versus stainless steel aging. I loved the guy, but I knew the perplexing denouement that quivered a few days down the road. For indeed, at one winery where all the wines were done in cask, my pal was sure they used steel, and yielded to his dismay; however hard he tried, he just wasn't getting it. When I told him he'd crossed the Rubicon into a place of far greater wisdom, he thought I had a screw loose. I tried to reassure him that being right was reassuring, but being wrong invited epiphany; you ascended to greater understanding through your mistakes.*

*I remember, though, the urge to understand, to find explanations, to learn the causes and effects of flavor. We mustn't frustrate that urge — it's*

*human to be curious and I think we should respect curiosity. But we also have to help drinkers understand the limits of this vein of knowledge. It is a closed system that gives the simulacrum of expertise while actually leaving us in an airless chamber of our minds. We feel terribly knowledgeable discussing the details of a wine, but there's a big-picture glaring at us that this approach won't let us see.*

*If you're hungry for knowledge of how a grower trains his vines, prunes his vines, binds his vines; if you seek to know the density of plantings per hectare and the space between the rows; if you're curious about which clones were used, how the canopies were worked, if and when the winemaker did a green harvest, if the grapes were picked by hand, with what-size teams and with one big bucket or several smaller ones, then these are things you ought to know. Shame on me for finding them ancillary and ultimately trivial.*

### MORE THAN THE SUM OF ITS YEASTS

*If you want to know the wines' total acids, the amount of its sweetness, the must-weights of the grapes at picking, whether it fermented with ambient or with cultured yeasts, how it was clarified, what vessel it fermented in and at what temperature (and if the temperature was technologically controlled), whether it sat on its gross or fine lees and for how long, and whether it was developed in steel or in wood—I don't mind telling you. But it worries me some. Because I fear that for each one of you who sincerely wants to compare what his palate receives with what's actually inside the wine, there are many of you who want to enact value-judgments prior to tasting, because you've decided what's permissible and what's despicable. (This nonsensical approach is rampant in Germany.)*

*I am decidedly not in favor of excluding tasters from any wine because they disapprove of the effing yeast that was deployed, or because they won't go near a wine with more than X-grams of sweetness. Who wants to enable something so repugnant?*

*Nor am I willing to abet the sad phenomenon of people talking about wine with what seems like authority, because of the "information" they've accumulated, whereas they're actually blocked from attaining true authority by the rigid limits of their approach. If you're stuck in the "how," you'll have a rough time finding your way to the "what." And that is where true wisdom lies. The*



*wonky isn't a bad place to be, for a while, but it's a dangerous place to stop, because like all objects of beauty, wine is more than the sum of its parts. If you're busily probing into technical minutiae, will you remember to consider not only the application of technique but the expression of a vintner's spirit? Will you remember to pause for just a second and consider how a wine makes you feel?*

## PLUSSES AND THE QUEST FOR PERFECTION

You'll see one, two or three plusses next to certain wines in the following text. They are how I formalize the answer to your oft-asked question "What must I not miss under any circumstances?" That is, they are my short-list of "musts."

Every wine in this offering gets in because I like it a lot. Certain ones are especially striking; firsts among equals, if you will. To these I give a plus.

Less frequently, a wine really stops me in my tracks. It announces its greatness; it is aristocracy. It gets two plusses.

And on very rare occasions a wine is utterly transporting. It stops conversation, it seems to slow time down, it conveys a nearly divine spirit of beauty. To these one or two wines per vintage, I write three plusses.

This "scoring" scale is deliberately vague because I think any attempt at greater definition is misled, misleading and even pernicious. I barely *think* about it at all; it registers immediately, and if I find myself thinking about it I grow very irritated.

Any evaluative scale presumes upon some notion of perfection. For years Gault-Millau refused to award any restaurant more than 19.5 on its 20-point scale, saying, correctly, that perfection was unattainable. Then they relented and gave the full 20 to Marc Veyrat, causing him plenty of indigestion I'm sure, and compelling the question of what they'll do when, inevitably, they find some restaurant they think is *even* better.

But I understand the feeling, the sense of sublimity and the ache it creates, and the desire to convey such an exaltation of emotion in a way equal to its intensity. It is very natural and human, but it doesn't always do good. David Schildknecht has found a way out; he defines perfection as "better than which cannot, at that moment, be imagined." Because in the essence of the Moment Of Beauty one is quite certain that all such moments are fundamentally *equal*, and one sees how fatuous it is to catalogue or quantify them.

## INVASION OF THE YOUNG'UNS

A lot of them I knew when they were kids, an unsettling feeling. The more I myself age, the less I understand "age" abstractly. I feel no loss of vigor or juice, though my needs and priorities have altered and continue to alter. When I began this improbable little crusade on behalf of German wines, most of the growers I bought from were older than

I. Often I played with their kids, or dandled them if they were especially bonny. Now these little beings are brusque 20-somethings with all kinds of 'tude. In fairness, they're not all brusque and a lot of them are really very sweet. But there's a breach in social syntax, a sort of crevasse with our respective sets of assumptions eyeing each other from the two sides. Though again, not always.

Most important, I think, is that the young person came of age in his/her particular world, and doesn't (or can't) know whence that world derived. His world is just the world. What led into it, how its reality developed from the things that came before, these are abstract, like "history." This is markedly true with the sweet-dry divide, as the young German vintner sees (what he calls) the sweet-wine era as aberrant, and he can't perceive how or why *dosage* could ever have been countenanced.

That's the zeitgeist of this particular moment, but it's the nature of zeitgeists to be mutable and for trends to come and go in phases. Usually it skips a generation, and you often hear a grower say "I'm going past my father, back to my grandfather's practices."

Here are the estates in which a generational change has taken place, or is somewhere in the process:

- Stephan Müller (at Eugen Müller)
  - Sebastian Strub
  - Johannes Geil
  - Alex Gysler
- Cornelius Dönnhoff
  - Jakob Schneider
  - Georg Rumpf
  - Caroline Diel
- Christoph Schaefer
- Mario Schwang (of Reuscher-Haart)

I appreciate all the frisky energy, and while I don't mind if they see me as some sort of Elder, I'm no one's loveable Uncle Farty. When it goes well, they bring *esprit* and I bring perspective, and the dialogue is open and respectful. In nearly every case the new blood either maintains or improves the quality of the estate's wines. Sometimes they just change, and if I don't like the change as much as they're sure I ought to, we part ways. And the reason I bring any of this up at all is, someone selling German wines will try to tell you—already has, if I'm to believe what I'm told—that they're the cutting edge of modern German wine and I have the old guys. It isn't true.

## AN ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I worked with Kevin Pike for thirteen years, and in that time he became a friend, along with working wonders to grow our business. I will always be grateful to him. And I wish him health, love and fulfillment for all the rest of his life.

# Sommelier Alert!

*I never set about to sell wines that “go well with food.” It just happened that way, because the kinds of wines I liked spontaneously were precisely those most flexible and useful at the table.*



Flex and a comradely wish to be helpful are what matter most to me in the wine-food 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 been 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 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 Pfalz has completed a transformation. It is now a region for weighty, high-alcohol dry white wines (some Riesling, some Pinots, and far too much Sauvignon Blanc), a token few “dessert” wines (or the occasional oversweet Spätlese), and a lot of reds, a few of them quite good, but all of them overpriced by the domestic demand.*



I would like to explore the region. I like it, always have, and the portfolio would be enlivened by some eager young blood. But every estate with any pretension to “quality” has to twist itself into the prevailing formula. That is, a bunch of self-consciously “serious” dry whites (often named for the soil they come from), a similar queue of (often over-oaked) reds, and a token handful of sweeties.

*THIS IS NOT A SCREED AGAINST DRY WINES. I LIKE DRY WINES!* This is a screed against sheep-think and dogmatic uniformity. I want there to be excellent dry Riesling from the Pfalz, and I want it alongside Rieslings with sweetness (and I don't mean “noble-sweet” Auslesen) and I want growers and their customers to be flexible and ecumenical and *honest* in their tastes.

It's of course a bromide to observe that we all have different tastes. But we do. We have different tastes in cars, in food, in clothing, in every single thing on which we act based upon our taste. Yet somehow, in Germany, and especially in this region, *everyone has the same taste in wine*. Don't you find this odd, even ominous? If taste were really the issue, wouldn't you suppose there'd be at least a visible minority of people who didn't like dry wines? Or who liked both styles??? It's as if suddenly every single person in Germany wore the same color shirt.

I'm a guy who sniffs for nuance. I was raised to mistrust the categorical. But the categorical insistence that all white wine must be dry creates a categorical response in me. And so, however at-odds it may be to my temperament to issue such a *pronunciamento*, it can't be helped and has to be said. My friends in Germany, among whom I lived for many years, many of whom are among my most beloved friends, wake the fark up. *You do not* have an absolute monolithic taste for dry wine and only dry wine. You do not. You may think you do, but you don't. Instead you do what you think is expected of you in order to be fashionable and acceptable. In so doing, you're at risk of losing your connection to your true sensual preferences. Literally, you quite possibly don't *know* what you like any more. You wear yellow because everyone wears yellow, and you get used to seeing yourself in yellow and you're reassured you're wearing the proper color. Five years from now when everyone's wearing cobalt, you'll realize you looked like shit in yellow.

But what if you look lousy in cobalt too? Maybe then you say “You know what, the hell with this; I'm gonna wear red because I like red and red's my color. I look like the cat's ass in red. And I don't care what anyone thinks or how many people stare at me on the street. I believe in red!”

# What is a Palate?

*A chapter of my book is devoted to this very question, in general terms, but the salient issue here is to describe what my palate is, since you ought to know what I like and why.*



In fact I think there should be some sort of law that anyone who writes about wine should be able and willing to describe his/her palate, what it likes, what it recoils from, what it's sensitive or insensitive to. I don't believe the reader should need to infer these things. That's unreasonable and even discourteous.

Perhaps we don't perceive this need because we're still chasing the romantic fallacy of "objectivity." This capacity is not present in any human being I know, when confronted by an aesthetic object. Yes, there are certain facets of wine objectively present – degree of fragrance, for instance. We'd all agree, objectively, that Muscat's a big ol' shitload of scent. But I might love it while the next guy loathes it. He either recuses himself from writing about Muscat because it makes his stomach heave, or he tries feebly to be "objective" and produces flaccid useless prose, or he says what he feels and you conclude that Muscat is a yucky sort of thing. Because you're stuck chasing the chimera of objectivity.

It's fine to ask our writers to be as *impartial* as they can. It is fine to demand they surmount their natural preferences when appropriate. I think it's imperative to

want writers to be mature enough (and keen enough in their judgment) to know where their subjective palates take over. The line exists in every taster, but not every taster knows where it is. And this is because too few of us ask the question *what is the nature of my particular palate*.

Thus I advocate, not objectivity, but a consistent, visible and informed subjectivity. It is all you can ask of a person.

I do believe there are larger truths—or Truths—about wine, and we can make value judgments about them and argue all night—civilly I hope. But when it comes to scents and flavors of individual wines, I am much less sure. Here's a blatant example. One thing I know about my own palate is that it grows over-sensitive to tannin if I have tasted a bunch of young astringent whites. If colleagues are present I'll always ask them "Does this wine strike you as extremely tannic?" and when they answer no, I'll know it's just me. Alone, I'll suspect it's just me. I've started to taste the red wines first for just this reason. So this "palate," this part of ourselves that we use to apprehend wine, shouldn't we begin by knowing it, and shouldn't we share what we know with our readers? I mean, just to be minimally *useful* to them?

I like detail more than I like size. In fact I instinctively recoil from wines I feel to be bigger than I have room for. When I detect skeins of flavor I am happy. When a wine enters my palate and then breaks down into many colored rivulets of flavor,

I am *very* happy. I like wines which show *persistent soft-sell*. The persistence is how I know the wine is serious, and if it has the *real* goods it doesn't need to hard-sell.

I am highly partial to stone and mineral flavors. I like fruit-flower flavors but not as much. Ideally I like to see a strong binding of mineral inside which discreet fruit is set.

I love kinetic flavors, the sense that a wine is in constant motion on my palate. I don't like a wine that just whumps there in a big lump of flavor. I adore a sense of *urgent movement*, of activity.

I like balance but I will tolerate a fascinating "flaw." Ideally a wine is both balanced and fascinating. In a balanced wine the flavors seem *preordained* to exist in precisely that configuration. No knees or elbows poke out.

I like clarity and firm discernable lines of flavor. I also hate driving with a dirty windshield. These things are related!

I'm tolerant of high acidity but I don't relish it. Acid has to be in balance with all other flavor and structural components.



# Müller-Catoir

Pfalz // Haard

vineyard area // 21 hectares  
annual production // 12,500 cases  
top sites & soil types // Haardter Bürgergarten and Herzog (sandstone);  
Haardter Herrenletten (loam, limestone); Gimmeldinger Mandelgarten (loess);  
Mußbacher Eselshaut (gravel)  
grape varieties // 60% Riesling, 10% Weissburgunder, 5% Grauburgunder,  
5% Muskateller, 5% Rieslaner, 5% Scheurebe, 5% Spätburgunder



Müller-Catoir

Pfalz

*If you're young, please bear with me while I give you some history and context.*



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 stand. 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 *sang froid* 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

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**Müller-Catoir at a glance** // Maybe the greatest estate in the Pfalz and one of the top few in all of Germany. Brilliant primary fruit driven wines of supernatural steely clarity and multi-layered depth. The overused word aristocratic perhaps best describes them.

in overtone, nuance and penumbra, and he chooses not to make the fleshpots that would get him “high scores.”

Apart from which, as an introvert myself, I respect introversion in all things. The introvert’s self-sufficiency can be mistaken for aloofness, but it isn’t; it’s just contentment and peace within one’s skin. It takes courage for Catoir and Franzen to make these searching, even ethereal wines, and let the critical chips land where they may.

I am wary of quoting wine press in this catalogue—and you may have noticed I won’t ever refer to whatever “score” a wine has received. But I share a minority opinion about Catoir with David Schildknecht, and I just read the following, which David published today.

*“Franzen quickly brought quality back to that level which had for three decades made Muller-Catoir a Pfalz beacon, and his wines have reflected both continuity and subtle innovation, displaying refinement and clarity of expression equaled by few of their region. (To be sure, you’ll read other very different accounts of Franzen’s tenure – which is one reason I am reiterating mine.) The complexity and balance of residually sweet wines rendered at this estate remain unsurpassed anywhere.”*

Now, I am personally very happy to see this, not only because it’s a flattering comment about an agency of mine, but because I think David’s on to a truth the German

critical establishment appears not to see, or may not be able to see.

I propose two things. One, inside of Germany there’s almost no attention paid to the quality or consistency of any residually sweet wines a Pfalz estate produces. They are thought to be ancillary and trivial. Two, there’s a tacit assumption that Pfalz wines *should* be lusty and generous, in keeping with the physical and social ambience of the region. Pfalz is hearty, but Franzen’s wines are ethereal and spectral, and so his “serious” Rieslings are assumed to lack the torque of the region’s standard-bearers. I often find some of those critically lauded wines slipping across the line between heartiness and burliness, and I don’t like burly wines. I do like forthright wines, candid wines, even sometimes obvious wines, but Franzen’s wines are exceptionally diligent and articulate, as though they want you to see into their terroirs with no interference at all and through a clear magnifying lens.

Nor is Martin “fashioning” the wines to show all their attributes in year-1. Isn’t that quaint! The notion that Riesling has elements in reserve, that we don’t know everything about it except in the fullness of time. Considering all the lip-service we pay to that principle, I find it stirring when someone actually does it, and risks having wines that seem demure at first.

This was the first estate I visited where I felt *This is a superb collection of wines in any vintage*. That evening I was excited.

### 2013 “MC” Riesling

GMC-192

**SOS : 1 | SOMMELIER ALERT!**

The wine they usually make is, of course, Trocken. And it’s very good. But I asked whether a feinherb rendition was thinkable, something along lines of Dönnhoff’s estate Riesling, effectively limning all those delicious complexities on the dry-sweet divide.

They offered to make me a prototype, and I adored it. It’s more charming and versatile than the super-dry version, with more malt and talc and apple. I’m committing to 100 cases, and *this* year it’s the only version I’m offering. (Next year I anticipate offering both.)

### 2013 Haardt Riesling Trocken

GMC-191

**SOS : 0**

The village-wine in the VDP 4-part scheme. This showed more terroir, plum jam, soursop and maizy grain, meringue and malty peach; a seriously charming dry Riesling, with digital focus, loads of fruit and just a tiny phenolic kick on the finish.

### 2013 Bürgergarten Riesling Trocken 1er Lage +

GMC-193

**SOS : 0 | SOMMELIER ALERT!**

In effect the Premier Cru. This is the paradigm of Franzen’s dry-Riesling style, pixilated and “blue,” fresh and cool but not light and not aloof; fetching aromas of mandarin and Satsuma; it lands on the palate like a spreading down-comforter of mineral; it covers the palate entirely yet seems to hover and float—this is where the idea of “ethereal” comes from; completion without weight. Like an orange essence strained through chalk powder.



**2013 Breumel in den Mauern Riesling Grosses Gewächs, 6/750ml ( + )**

GMC-194

**2013 Breumel in den Mauern Riesling Grosses Gewächs, 1/3L**

GMC-194J

**SOS : 0**

In the range of Pfalz GGs this is maybe the least flamboyant or showy. It's focused on stone and bark-y textures; it's a dialectic of Riesling, markedly full of material but not falling easily into herbs or stones or flowers, and thus likely to be misunderstood. The finish is crusty and boxwood with a caraway note.

The site is a "clos" in the middle of Bürgerarten, on pure mottled sandstone gravel with a high ratio of decomposed stone, and within its walls, a favorable microclimate. I can imagine growers who'd try to "force" a blockbuster wine from it. I can only marvel at Franzen's integrity in trying to hear, not what the vineyard shouts, but what it whispers.

**2013 Haardt Scheurebe Trocken +**

GMC-196

**SOS : 0**

A detailed, scrupulously refined and pixilated Scheu. It's all-in but there's nothing remotely vulgar, just this beautiful angular wry clarity. Fennely, crackery finish.

**2013 Mandelring Scheurebe Trocken +**

GMC-197

**SOS : 0**

*This* on the other hand is entirely pungent and kinky; blatant grapefruit and sage, emphatic and willful. It helps to like Scheu, but seeing as how I have a hopeless crush on the grape, a wine like this makes my palate horny! I don't know how else to put it.

**2013 Haardt Muskateller Trocken + +**

GMC-198

**SOS : 0**

So last year I'm sitting with Martin Nigl tasting his Muskateller, and he asks me if I know the one from Müller-Catoir, and I say I know and love and *import* it. Why? "Oh, I tasted it recently and I was really impressed by this wine. I think it's the best I've ever tasted."

Ah yup. Me too. With just the exception of the Goldert from ZH, which isn't even "better" but is a peer of another type. And this '13 doesn't miss a step, taking its place among the best vintages of the best German Muscat. It break-dances over the palate and sizzles away with this crazy incipient salivating sense of *sweetness* but of course it isn't sweet. It's like drinking wine while you're *stoned*, it's derangedly vivid and you can't stop laughing. It's also very long—a masterpiece!

**2012 Haardt Spätburgunder Trocken**

GMC-199

**SOS : 0**

**First offering.** It's a month from bottling, all done in used barrique, and it's Pinot Noir in calligraphy, not at all Burgundy but if it were, its great-Uncle would be Bonnes Mares. The palate is fine-boned and wire-rimmed but also juicy and with a gentle dusty sandalwood conclusion.

**2013 Gimmeldinger Riesling Kabinett +**

GMC-200

**SOS : 2**

From the vineyard *Schlüssel* in fact. One of the few "Riesling Kabinetts" left in all the Pfalz, bless these guys. Caraway, Timut pepper (a Nepalese black pepper with a shocking citric fragrance) and Meyer lemon, a tangy angular sweetness (42g/l rs with 8.2g/l acidity, not d-assed), and more herbal-balsam than cox-orange apple or peach. I like this rendering and hope they keep using this vineyard to make this wine.

**2013 Mandelgarten Riesling Spätlese** + +  
**SOS : 2**

GMC-201

The better of two very fine Spätlesen, this one excels through sheer capaciousness—how many various nuances it crams into a little mere wine. Laurel, chartreuse, Asian pear, osmanthus, even rye bread, and all in a juicy lively interplay leading into a savory consommé-like finish.

**2013 Herzog Rieslaner Spätlese** + +  
**SOS : 1 | SOMMELIER ALERT!**

GMC-202

Come to my house, and if I want to completely warp your mind and destroy anything you ever assumed about what white wine could be, I'll serve you a wine like this. A stunning fragrance leads into a searing masterpiece of Rieslaner; brass-knuckled vinosity breaks the very bones of your defenseless palate; shoot-smoke, plank-roasted scallops with a slightly bitter sear, as penetrating as eucalyptus, sharply herbal. I promise you will not find a more complex or compelling white wine in the year 2014.

**2013 Herzog Rieslaner Auslese, 12/375ml** + + (+)  
**SOS : 2 | SOMMELIER ALERT!**

GMC-203H

Does wine actually get better than this? Balsam and laurel aromas lead to something with the strength of titanium and a black-hole vinous density. Utter power, incomprehensible intricacy and detail, and by no earthly means “sweet,” let alone a “dessert” wine.

**2013 Herzog Rieslaner BA, 12/375ml** + +  
**SOS : 4**

GMC-204H

This is like a double-concentrated version of the above Auslese, and showing (at this infantile stage) a kind of jalapeño heat, as though it'd been fined with chili-powder. A big BA with 160° Oechsle.

## Rieslaner, The Riesling Viagra

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...



# Scheurebe: What Gives?

*Um, I happen to like it, that's what gives.*



It was crossed about 80 years ago by a Mr. Georg Scheu (hence its name). I imagine Scheu was looking for a wine with Silvaner's advantages (big berries and early ripening) paired with Riesling's structure and class. His introduction also claimed the Scheurebe would be a Riesling-like wine suited for sandy soils (which Riesling doesn't especially like, or rather Riesling *grows* don't like, as the yields are mingy).

Scheurebe ripens 7-10 days ahead of Riesling, and has a little less acidity, but it's essentially a Riesling structure, i.e. firm and citrusy. It does indeed like sand but doesn't give its very best results; the wines tend to be 1-dimensionally tangerine-y.

Great Scheurebe unfolds a truly kinky panoply of flavors and aromas. Indeed, Scheu is to Riesling what "creative" sex is to missionary-with-the-lights-out. Start with pink grapefruit. Add cassis; I mean pure cassis. Then add sage leaves you just crushed between your fingertips. Then lemon grass. If it's extremely ripe you can talk about passion-fruit and papaya. If it's underripe you will certainly talk about cat piss.

Scheurebe is capable of great finesse and stature. Yet it's becoming an endangered species. Why? Theo Minges told me, "A lot of bad Scheurebe was made from too-high yields. You got cat-piss and sometimes botrytis on top of cat-piss." But times changed, and after a general retreat in

acreage, the variety is being rediscovered by good growers sensitive to its manic potential. But you have to respect it. Scheurebe likes vineyard conditions which Riesling likes as well. Scheu will hiss at you if you plant it in the wrong place. This you don't want. But by planting it in good Riesling sites, you have a wine which fetches less money than Riesling. Not good.

Growers who maintain their Scheurebe recognize its beauty and uniqueness. If anything it's almost *more* attractive at table than Riesling, working with boldly flavored dishes (especially Pac Rim) for which Riesling is sometimes too demure.

Scheurebe keeps very well but doesn't age as dramatically as Riesling. Ten-year-old Scheu is only a little different than 1-year-old Scheu.

Tastes differ, of course, and what's sizzling and emphatic to me might be blatant and vulgar to you, but we who love Scheurebe are truly in a kind of thrall to it. It has little of Riesling's spiritual depth, but neither does Riesling have Scheurebe's erotic power. We need both for a balanced diet! Riesling may indeed represent All That Is Fine And Good, but Scheu offers All That Is Dirty And Fun. Scheurebe is bad for you; it's fattening and wicked and hair will start growing on your palms as soon as you pull the cork. In other words, there's no down-side...



vineyard area // 40 hectares    annual production // 23,000 cases  
 top sites & soil types // Deidesheim Mäushöhle and 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)  
 grape varieties // Riesling, Sauvignon Blanc, Weisses Burgunder, Chardonnay, Grauer Burgunder, Pinot Noir, Muskateller, Scheurebe, Gewürztraminer

## WINERY OF THE VINTAGE!

Is there any hipper an estate in Germany right now? Not that I can see.

They zoomed out of almost nowhere. The wines are unanimously superb, every one of them, and your humble servant has the rare chance to pick the sweetest cherries from a group of very sweet cherries. And the wines are superb in a way I have never seen from any other German Riesling estate.

It didn't take very long, but it didn't happen overnight. I unearthed a bottle of 2009 Reiterpfad a few months ago, a stray that happened to end up in my cellar, and I opened it with great curiosity. I'd already tasted the astonishing collection of '12s and was properly blown away, and certain early doubts I'd harbored were quickly being effaced. Drinking this '09 reminded me that the way toward this new stellar era was not without its complications. The '09 was certainly aromatic and fetching, but on the palate it gave the sense that the oak had been plastered on, and the wine was sharp. That was then. Having since drunk all the '12s again, and tasted the even more remarkable '13s, there are no doubts any more. Von Winning has not only arrived, they've set up house.

The '12 vintage was, let's say, favorable to the making of outstanding wine. '13 is not. This makes Von Winning's achievement in '13 even greater than it was in the much easier '12. I arrived deeply curious; would they pull it off? *Could* they? It was the final estate I visited. I arrived happily expectant but by no means certain. And then they blew my mind.

When magnate Achim Niederberger bought this estate several years ago, and installed the genially manic Stefan Attmann to run it, I was already representing the little legacy winery of Dr. Deinhard, and I wondered what would happen.

Fast forward to now, and von Winning commands a prime position at a curve in the road in Deidesheim,

itself the prime tourist magnet of the Pfalz, home to two Michelin starred restaurants and to many of the elite estates of the region. Winning opened its own place to eat, the lusty-refined *Leopold*, and have opened a hotel across from the winery. It is investment on a grand scale, ambitious and conspicuous, and it might easily have been another rich guy's vanity project.

But for Mr. Attmann. For below his passionately hectic exterior, he set himself one single goal. "There's no point in working this hard if you're not going all out to make *great* wine. Good wine isn't enough."

As the estate improved with each year, rising steadily through the German critical firmament, it grew clear that Attmann took a kind of pan-European view of what greatness in wine signified. He didn't look to the likes of Egon Müller or to Dönnhoff. His heroes were the Burgundians. He wanted his wines to be *mighty*.

This involved raising Rieslings in oak casks, not in barriques but rather in the traditional "Stückfass," that holds around 1,000 Liters. As these were new, they imparted a degree of flavor to the wines, but Attmann was sure of two things: one, the influence of oak would fade—and yes, that's what they all say—and two, that his Rieslings would have so much of their own power they would subsume the wood in which they were made.

For several years I harbored mixed feelings. (Note: when I say "mixed feelings" I don't mean uniform lukewarm feelings; I mean various measures of different *strong* feelings.) Some of the wines showed thrilling teases of future profundity. Others were (to my palate) excessively woody. Some wines were incisively detailed and direct; others were just sharp.

There's a moment when you're watching something being built, an actual building or the interior design of a restaurant, when the thing first starts to show its finished form. It's a keen and lovely moment, all those plans and ideas, taking 3-dimensional reality at last.

**Dr. Deinhard at a glance** // Big doings at this fine old name, an estate on-the-move, so grab on tight and catch a rising star.



Attmann is clear that this is his life's work. He wants every possible *substance* in his wine, to taste as if it were alive. He doesn't fine and won't filter if he doesn't have to. If you're cultured-yeast phobic, all these wines are ambient-yeast fermented (which the Germans call *sponti*, for "spontangärung") and he'd rather never have to rack them off their gross lees until bottling. It's a kind of atavism of the cellar that makes for inspiring contemplation, and for stunning wines.

Let me emphasize this. All vineyard work is organic in transition to bio-dynamic. The cellar work is to leave the wines be; ferment them in cask and leave them on their gross lees, never fined, and rarely filtered. They are basically Raveneau Chablis made from Riesling in the Pfalz. Attmann may have set about making Bâtard Montrachet, but he ended up with Valmur or Les Clos. I doubt if this bothers him!

They are stunning through and through and in all price ranges. But they are supernally stunning at the top of the range, in the Grand Crus, and the best I can say is, these cost what they're worth. Placed alongside any of

Europe's great white wines, they have their place, they warrant their prices, and many of them are relative *values* vis-à-vis much of Burgundy.

*How much do you really care* about great dry Rieslings? Or does it begin and end with Clos Ste. Hune for you? Sales of the great magnificent Austrian examples are mingy compared to their true stature and value. Or are we really stuck in the mire of wanting wines that aren't *sweet*, oh no god forbid, but also not really *dry*, or if they're dry they also have to be *smooth* and juicy? Of course if you're reading this in the first place, you're in the vanguard of taste and these aren't issues for you. And yet I wonder.

A small note about labeling. The wines are divided into parallel series, with the "traditional" Pfalz styles going out under the Dr. Deinhard label as before, and the ambitious profound styles sold as *von Winning*. I myself will divide the offering roughly by price and then by variety. It's a large offering, because I couldn't help myself. And I advise you to hold on *extremely* tight, because you have never tasted Rieslings like these.

## 2012 Pinot Noir "II" +

GDD-082

SOS : 0

This is the "basic" among a group of three PNs, and it's the one I most wanted you to see because its price is amenable and its style is honest. I don't think you *need* to see an expensive German PN with tons of new oak, even if it's impressive. I want you to see the floor on which the more ambitious wines stand.

This was done in *Stückfass* (typically 1200 liters) and it's all from the Hergottsacker vineyard. A stylish suave PN, a plummy fragrance along Corton lines; nubby tannin below sweet fruit; a charming push-pull between warm and cool elements; good length and graciously seductive.

## 2012 Riesling Extra Brut Sekt

GDD-083

SOS : 0

**HARD-CORE LIST WINE.** It shows a *wonderful* Pfalz Riesling fragrance. Made from 2012 with about a year *en tirage* (though this cuvée will have multiple disgorgements over the next year), and it's a classy and explosively flavorful bubbly, nothing like Champagne but an entirely valid fizz with a fanfare of flavor—a kind of YAY ME! wine.

## Estate, Village and *Lieu Dit* Rieslings

### 2013 Von Winning Riesling +

GDD-086

SOS : 1 | **SOMMELIER ALERT!**

**CORE-LIST WINE.** Lilac, melon, wisteria, markedly flowery; a tasty wry balance on the palate, wherein a tiny sweetness delivers a huge payoff. Slim and lissome but long and classy. Completely amazing quality in the "basic" echelon, and a classic example of one of the Great Truths of German wine: A perfect dry Riesling is often not perfectly dry.

### 2013 Hergottsacker Riesling Trocken "K" +

GDD-099

SOS : 0 | **SOMMELIER ALERT!**

Grainy, toasty, delicious; allspice and pink peppercorn; a "plus" for sheer craftsmanship and the YUM-factor. Lip-smacking and truly-dry Riesling, which I enjoyed more than a big-sister Spätlese next to it.

**2013 Deidesheimer Paradiesgarten Riesling Trocken**

GDD-087

**SOS : 0**

Tasty, barley and cask-y notes behind a grainy delineated Riesling; less creamy than the '12 and showing some of '13's more pointed edge, but it delivers length, clarity and some ineffable Pfalz-ness, and they tell me it will be smoother by the time its bottled.

**2013 Ruppertsberger Reiterpfad Riesling Trocken 1er Lage +**

GDD-088

**SOS : 1 | SOMMELIER ALERT!**

The level just below the GGs—though it could have stood among them easily enough. There's a lovely and remarkable conciliation of heartiness and focused spicy fruit, ginger and soursop; generous and ample but not husky; classy old/new school Pfalz.

## The Grand Crus

Quite a collection of world-class Riesling vineyards, so much so that the superb Grainhübel is in effect “downgraded” to a 1er Cru, and I didn't even see the probably still-fermenting Jesuitengarten. I urge you to check out the helpful information on these great sites, at this address: [von-winning.de/en/weingut/weingut/weinberge.html](http://von-winning.de/en/weingut/weingut/weinberge.html)

**2013 Kalkofen Riesling Grosses Gewächs, 6/750ml + +**

GDD-089

**SOS : 0**

The *Les Clos* of the estate, the most power and concentration and in a sense the easiest wine to “get” as it's big-and-bold, but far from simple. Brothy and explosive, tortilla chips and remoulade and dried apricot.

**2013 Langenmorgen Riesling Grosses Gewächs, 6/750ml + +**

GDD-090

**SOS : 0**

It's just on a slim edge between brothy and woody, but the sheer complexity of spices and toasts—the tastes of many different breads, toasted, plus dried berries, rusks, biscotti, cloves; fabulously complex and even oyster-shell-y. It's more cerebral than Kalkofen but equally penetrating and expressive.

**2013 Ungeheuer Riesling Grosses Gewächs, 6/750ml + +**

GDD-091

**SOS : 1 | SOMMELIER ALERT!**

And yet another entirely different way for Riesling to be great; this is like a liquefied sea-salt caramel, voluminous and muscular and stocky, yet still classy and even glossy, and so ripe and juicy as to suggest sweetness that's actually not there, but this is overwhelmingly seductive and convincing.

**2013 Pechstein Riesling Grosses Gewächs, 6/750ml + +**

GDD-092

**SOS : 0**

The Pfalz-lovers favorite vineyard, and the wines give no quarter; this is absolutely salty and flowery, and if they'd told me Martin Nigl was guest-cellarmaster when it was pressed I'd have believed them. Wisteria and powdered chalk, ginger and talc, mint and even a hint of wasabi. Don't mind the slightly pointed finish; it's early days for this savage beauty.

**2013 Kirchenstück Riesling Grosses Gewächs, 6/750ml + + (+)**

GDD-093

**SOS : 0**

I had a bottle of the '12 I couldn't wait to drink. In fact I hadn't tasted it *since* it was bottled. So I poured some for my wife and me, and immediately the aroma was so haunting I needed to study it. We were cooking and the house smelled good, but I took the wine outside to taste it in the fresh air. It was actually a lousy winter night, some sort of sleet and all kinds of wind, and anyone would have to be a fool to stand outside with a glass in his stupid hand on a night like this. But I took a sip, and there came the silence, the one that always comes at such a time, the one that makes you weightless and slowly sends



the world away. For those few seconds you live in pure beauty, meaning and reality, and then you go back to the dream.

So I came to the '13 expectantly and ruthlessly; I didn't want to be seduced in advance. I'd show that damn wine I could be objective.

The wine didn't care a single bit what I had to prove. It didn't care about anything. Nor will it care about you. It will only be there, numinous, an apex of complexity not only for Riesling but for all of wine, and all of life. A *deep* vinous intricacy, an un-noisy brilliance. Something wise and serene embedded in the twigs and threads of mineral, some pollen, some marrow, some memory of cherry-blossom you sniffed with the girl you'd eventually marry. Please, please: Participate in this. Forget the price. You owe this to your soul.

## What's a circus without some clowns?

### 2013 Gelber Muskateller Trocken

GDD-098

**SOS : 0**

A delicious and freaky Muscat, as the final notes of raw dough and cask take the basic fruit and twirl it in the direction of sheep's cheese like Pecorino or Caciotta or Manchego. It's a compelling variant of Muscat, so get your grapy freak on and put *this* next to what you *thought* was the weirdest wine you ever had.

### 2013 Sauvignon Blanc Trocken "II" +

GDD-094

**SOMMELIER ALERT!**

It's not enough for Attmann to want to make Grand Cru white Burgundy, he has to make Dagueneau Pouilly Fume also? This is the basic level, done in stainless steel, and I defy anyone to show me a better SB at this price.

### 2011 Sauvignon Blanc "500", 6/750ml + +

GDD-0670

**SOS : 0**

You have to go to the best-of-the-best of Dagueneau to get better Sauv-B than this. A selection of the best 500 Liter barrels, from a vine density of 9,500 plants per hectare, as in the Europe of 100 years ago, from the Paradiesgarten, and what it reminds me most of is Haut Brion Blanc or the best years of Polz's "Therese." So don't quake at the price. Perhaps the most ambitious Sauv-B ever made in Germany, smoky and incense-y with loads of roasted red pepper, and a strikingly complex finish.

### 2012 Sauvignon Blanc Trocken "I," 6/750ml + +

GDD-096

**HARD-CORE LIST WINE.** Was there ever a greater SB made outside of France? I can't even recall anything from Styria in this league; the opposite of garish or blatant, with almost no discrete pyrene to speak of; it's very White Bordeaux, texture and dough and "sweetness."

## Outliers containing actual sweetness

### 2013 Deidesheimer Mäuschöhle Riesling Spätlese

GDD-085

**SOS : 2**

Corn bisque, basil, lime oil, doughy and minty, not at all that sweet (and maybe not quite sweet enough) but full of zing and a gingery sharpness.

### 2012 Deidesheimer Hergottsacker Riesling Eiswein, 12/375ml + (+)

GDD-097H

**SOS : 4**

I confess my vocabulary for young sweet wine is kaput. But I know this is as fine as the genre can be, and such a thing is rare in 2014; it isn't spiky and it isn't radishy (as young poorly balanced Eisweins often are) and the acidity isn't sharp, but the whole wine is warm and delicious and tastes like ideal Eiswein.

# Eugen Müller

Pfalz // Forst



vineyard area // 17 hectares    annual production // 14,000 cases  
top sites & 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

*The estate will never be “trendy” because they sell nearly all their wine to a loyal private customer base, and so they have no need to “make the scene” or “get high scores” or go to parties with the popular kids.*



But Stefan Müller has nonetheless raised the quality of the wines since taking over from his father several years ago. They're now straddling the line between analog and digital, and they've become more polished.

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.

Got a second? Let me give you a primer on the best communes of the Pfalz. If you're serious, you should know them, so let's begin.

In sketch form, the Ruppertsbergers are strong Premier Crus, but not quite entirely Grand. Wachenheim they say is “feminine,” and these are indeed queenly and sometimes swooningly perfumed. Partisans of Forst/Deidesheim will argue which is “best.” Forst is more Cajun is the way I'd put

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**Eugen Müller at a glance** // This is a winery on the move, and the next few years will tell a new tale. There's a sensational collection of vineyards and new energy in the cellar. This is what the Germans call an *Aufsteiger*, i.e. one who is climbing.



it. Forst is full-throttle, overtly expressive, yet with breed and finesse – it isn't sloppy. Deidesheim's more grown-up; it's there at the party but it goes home by midnight, after having had a roaring good time. Forst goes on roaring. Wachenheim declined the invitation because it had theater tickets. Ruppertsberg was invited but felt a little out of place. Forst stumbled into bed in the wee hours, but was up promptly the next morning to work against deadline on an article on Latvian interpretive dance.

Weingut Eugen Müller is an owner of considerable consequence, with more than 25% of the Kirchenstück, plus significant holdings in the Jesuitengarten (a site many think equal to Kirchenstück and some radicals think is even better), plus holdings in Pechstein and Ungeheuer and Musenhang (every great Forster!), and two of the top sites in Ruppertsberg, Hoheburg and Nussbien.

It bears mentioning that *these* dry Rieslings are among the juiciest and easiest to drink of any German examples I've encountered. And yet they're far from easy. Loads of salty-savory-mineral complexity abound, but they're simply less huffy and a ton more fun. And while Stephan Müller's wines continue to grow more polished and less hearty than his father's wines were, they remain companionable and chipper and unaffected by any need to be Very Serious Indeed.

This was the first winery I visited in Germany where I came away impressed. There'd be more later on, but it was heartening to feel like "There could be some fun to be had the next few weeks." Each year I think Stefan's estate inches forward, and the wines now have a clarity and sheen they didn't have before, yet they're still genial and unfussy. I find it recreational to drink them at home, and we open lots of them.

**2013 Forster Pechstein Riesling Spätlese Trocken** +  
**SOS : 0 | SOMMELIER ALERT!**

GEM-138

**HARD-CORE LIST WINE.** Yes, it's the same vineyard that makes GG for estates in the VDP, and it may just be that eventually they'll have to address this curious problem. Stefan could force the issue in various ways, such as using "Erste Lage" on his label, but this wholly decent guy doesn't have an axe to grind about anything I can see. And so we get a "GG" caliber wine for a very modest tariff indeed.

It's Pechstein, after all, so it's fervently salty and mineral, with wildflower and allspice; angular and wicked, arch and articulate; it's completely smooth but cracks every possible pun and is full of witty observations. Utter crushed stones and yet not remotely austere—my kind of wine.

**2013 Forster Ungeheuer Riesling Spätlese Trocken "Ziegler"** +  
**SOS : 0**

GEM-139

"Ziegler" is the old name for the particular sirloin parcel this wine is made from. Pre-1971 wine law, the wine would have been labeled "Forster Ziegler," but many of these small names were collapsed into the single-site names now in use, because they wanted fewer names, to make everything simpler. But many of today's growers are using those names again, which is technically illegal and exposes them to prosecution. However, the EU appears to be ready to *grant* the use of these old site names again, so we're in abeyance. Meanwhile, Müller has a big –Z– on the label.

This means you can buy a quasi-outlaw wine and strike a blow for individuality while you're at it. Pungent duck-stock aromas in a markedly mineral call from the voice of this usually spicy-brothy Riesling baritone. With air it leans even more rock-powdery. You'd do Pechstein for lunch and this one for dinner. Or Pechstein for frickin' breakfast if you were a degenerate like me.

**2013 Forster Kirchenstück Riesling Spätlese Trocken "Cyriakus"** +  
**SOS : 0**

GEM-140

It takes a moment (as many '13s do) but <whew>... what mineral sings out from this cherry-licorice-almond-blossom potion; there's power here, but it's the cut of the scythe rather than the blow of the hammer. The length is compelling, and it's just the beginning for this beauty.

**2013 Forster Mariengarten Riesling Kabinett**

GEM-141

**SOS : 2**

**CORE-LIST WINE.** It's also Pechstein, always a super-aromatic lot he ferments with a less vigorous yeast culture that guarantees an incomplete result, i.e., residual sugar, which he prefers to "abruptly" stopping fermentation by sudden chilling or sulfuring. Thus the use of cultured yeast is far less invasive than any other means of arriving at this result.

The new vintage is likely the best since we put this wine on the core-list. 2013 is brilliant here; the wine is floral and angular and has an almost peppery polleny finish. Big character, small price.

**2012 Forster Ungeheuer Riesling Spätlese**

GEM-134

**SOS : 2**

Sea-salt caramel and Ceylon tea and dried apricot and porcinis; a Pfalz archetype and a forgotten dialect of Riesling almost no one speaks any more. Yes sweet wines still exist, but most of them are "modern" and compared to this, they seem almost clinical. This is *vinosity*, it warms and soothes you and makes you feel glad.

**2013 Gewürztraminer Spätlese "Reiterpfad"**

GEM-142

**SOS : 2**

The vineyard is a GG that is only approved for Riesling. It seems to add an elegance and refinement even to this Gewürz, which has subtle and wonderfully balanced RS and whose finish suggests an incipient complexity in a couple years.

**2013 Forster Kirchenstück Riesling Auslese, 12/500ml + ( + )**

GEM-143H

**SOS : 2**

So when I sat with Jay MacInerney for the Wall St. Journal article, I said I'd bring along something to drink. I could have chosen anything, blown him away with a great Dönnhoff or with a Selbach Eiswein. What I *actually* chose to bring was the 2001 Kirchenstück Auslese from Müller.

Every year for the last fifteen or more, this wine has been a masterpiece, and I can think of few if any parallels in the wine world—or in *my* wine world—of such sustained stellar performance year after year.

This '13 is embryonic but not hermetic, as he did it in cask and helped open its pores; there's some of 13's steely grip, but also '13's brilliant mintiness; white flowers abound, and if you know the beautiful osmanthus, you'll sniff it here. (If you don't know it, check out my pals at Red Blossom Tea Company and ask for some.)



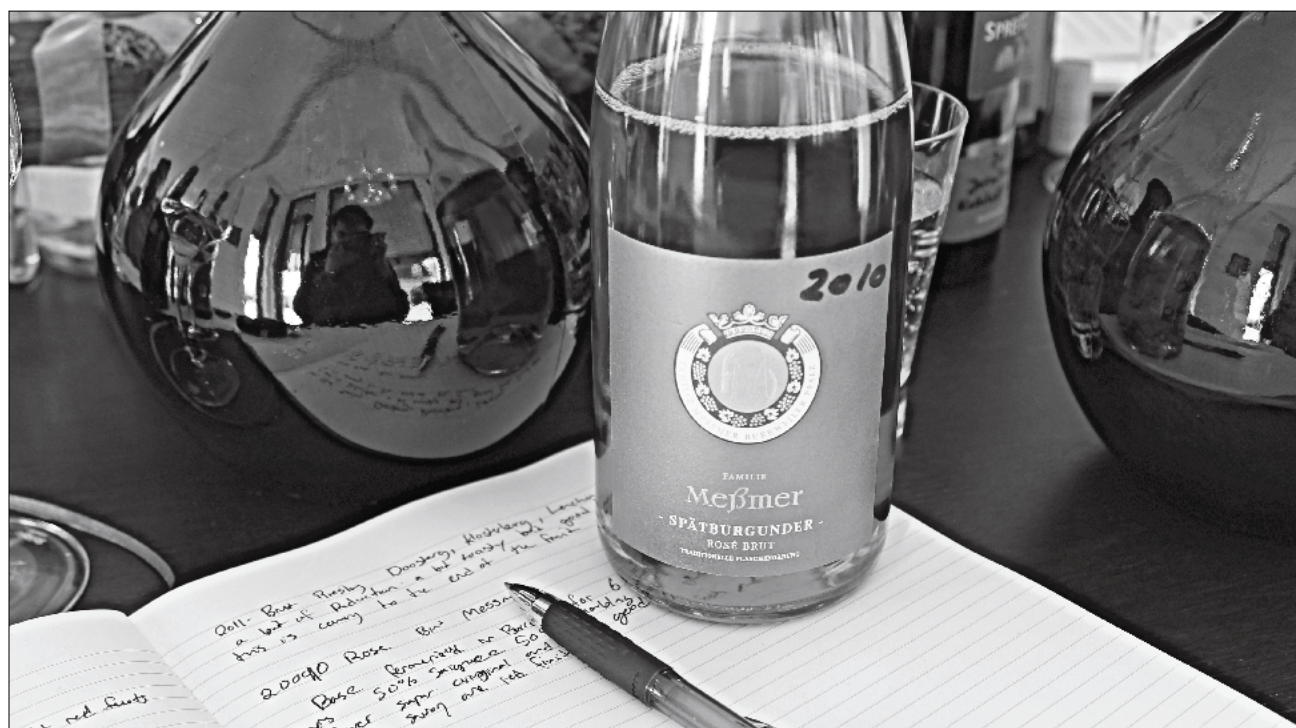
Pfalz // Burrweiler

vineyard area // 25 hectares  
annual production // 26,700 cases  
top sites & 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**



Herbert Meßner

*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."

**Herbert Meßmer at a glance** // Superbly made wines, exceptional clarity and polish in a keenly etched and chiseled style. Has soared ahead to take its place among the best estates in the Pfalz the last few years. Sure-handed with a multitude of grape varieties.

# Pfalz

While we are all very glad to have found such a happy success with the Meßmer Pinot Noir in Liters, I won't deny it gives us mixed emotions. Gregor's is a rich, complex domain, full of interesting and superb wines from a number of grapes in a number of idioms, and it's a shame when 75% of one's business comes from a single (relatively) everyday wine.

"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 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 reductivist 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."

## 2012 Pinot Noir, 1.0 Liter

GMS-189L

**SOS : 0 | SOMMELIER ALERT!**

We're just shipping the last of the yummy 2011—*wasn't* that delicious? And the '12 on its heels has both a "sweeter" fruit and is also more herbal. You won't be at all disappointed.

## 2010 Schlossgarten Spätburgunder Grosses Gewächs, 6/750ml

GMS-169

**SOS : 0**

Here I show my preference for cool concentration over a more effusive (but tannic) generosity. The 2011 of this will make more friends, at least among folks who appreciate loose-knit wines. The '10 won't make so many friends but the friends it makes are serious and loyal. The wine is a kind of blue implosion, blueberry and cobalt and shoot-smoke—a "dark" wine, almost brooding, dusty and gravelly, yet it's as concentrated as a demi-glacé.

I've offered this before, and not sold very much, but I'll bet every soul who bought it was deeply satisfied when they tasted it.

## 2009 Pinot Noir Rosé SEKT +

GMS-190

## 2010 Pinot Noir Rosé SEKT +

GMS-196

**SOS : 0**

The '09 is drawing to a close though I may yet score a little if I order it very soon. The '10 seems every bit as good. And both of these are hugely amazing, original and virtually mind-bending.

It's as if someone had staged at Vilmart and gone home thinking "I want to make sparkling wine that tastes like the Cuvée Rubis."

Yes, you read correctly. I don't have the data for the '10, but the '09 has 13.5% alc and the base wine was fermented in 3rd-use barriques and aged for six months before tirage. It spent about 3 years on the lees, and it is a serious sparkling WINE. Hibiscus and rhubarb jelly, an echo of wood, a finishing kiss of rosewater. We have nothing like it – there may be nothing like it.

## 2013 Riesling Feinherb, 1.0 Liter

GMS-188L

**SOS : 1**

This had just been bottled and was therefore somewhat brash and bolshie, but beneath the fangs lays a delicate, light, studious Riesling, a party wine if all your friends are PhDs in quantum physics.

**2013 Scheurebe Feinherb, 1.0 Liter**

GMS-191L

**SOS : 1 | SOMMELIER ALERT!**

This was the 4th Scheu producer I visited, and the first wine that really *reeked* of Scheurebe. And as you have to know, if it doesn't reek it doesn't speak. So, definite grapefruit and sage, and the lovely subtle tang of RS takes it into woodruff and balsam, and while the palate is less effusive, it's long, silky and wry.

**2013 Gelber Muskateller Feinherb +**

GMS-192

**SOS : 1 | SOMMELIER ALERT!**

I have never *not* bought this wine for my own cellar. This '13 is rich and clamorous for the vintage, and basically I can't resist it. Nor should you.

**2013 Riesling Trocken "Granit" (+)**

GMS-193

**SOS : 0**

Perfect *dry* Riesling, a juicy explosion of crushed stones, and not a bit of fruit; but what a salivating drooling guffaw of totally dry mineral white wine! I only hedge the "plus" because it's still to be filtered and bottled, but great potential here.

**2013 Riesling Kabinett Feinherb "Muschelkalk"**

GMS-194

**SOS : 1**

**CORE-LIST WINE.** It means "fossil-bearing-limestone." And I can only give you the limited view from the periscope, as he's still working on a final blend. Of the two prototypes we liked the drier one; it's sinewy and tensile, salty and energetic. A spicy Riesling awaits, but we are very early to this party.

**2011 Burrweiler Schäwer Riesling Spätlese +**

GMS-176

**SOS : 2**

Not creamy exactly, more like liquid silk, and showing all the wild plums, saltiness and smoke of the great site; a tangy length, really a clinging rock-dust length, as impressive as this wine has ever been. I'm currently drinking the still-youthful 2001 vintage, and Gregor says (and I agree) this '11 is fundamentally better. It's also fundamentally *drier*, by about half, and this is both a very good thing and an endangered species. Most growers, if they bottle "sweet" Spätlese at all, bottle it *much TOO sweet*, but this one's right in the zone-of-ideal-balance.

**2012 Burrweiler Altenforst Gewüztraminer Spätlese +**

GMS-195

**SOS : 1**

Different from the lot we offered last year, and different from his usual streamlined style; this is rich and lavish, a big cloud of vinosity, more lychee than roses; esoteric salt on the suddenly firm finish. Masterly wine, brilliant.



# Theo Minges

Pfalz // Flemlingen



vineyard area // 25 hectares  
annual production // 15,000 cases  
top sites & soil types // Flemlinger Zechpeter and Burrweiler Schlossgarten (loess-loam); Gleisweiler Hölle (sandstone, limestone)  
grape varieties // Riesling, Scheurebe, Muskateller, Gewürztraminer, Grauburgunder, Spätburgunder

*In a few years you'll be clamoring for these. That's because there's a new face at the domain, Regine, and the girl is whip-smart and passionate and imaginative, and when you meet her you'll love her immediately.*



These are also the kinds of wines you say you like. In one more year they'll be certified organic (through EcoVin), and papa 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.

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**Theo Minges at a glance** // Pfalz-meets-Mosel in these high-flying mineral- leesy wines. Extraordinary value across the board. The best, best, best quality large-format wines I have ever tasted ANYWHERE.

## 2011 St. Laurent

GTM-162

SOS : 0

I went and spooked poor Theo, who never expected I'd be clamoring for his red wines. In fact when I tasted them many years earlier I found them too tannic, but had they changed over the years? "Yes, we're making them to be richer and with more fruit." I figured I'd find one, but they were all good and I ended up with three.

So, what of this? Done in old neutral wood, it shows a suave richness and plummy fruit, a hint of leather and the finish is a total sweetheart of savor, like a liquid duck confit with cherries and milk chocolate. Tasted from two bottles, one open two days and another opened fresh.

## 2011 Spätburgunder "Tradition" +

GTM-163

SOS : 0

The entry-level PN is completely convincing; pure fruit aroma, classy texture and scrupulously correct, no pepper, marmalade or overripeness, but instead silky, vinous and as rich as veal stock.

## 2011 Spätburgunder Spätlese Trocken +

GTM-164

SOS : 0

Older vines, more selection, different soils; more the rock-star PN, fleshier sexier scents, still no "oak" as such but more *protein*, like the jus from a duck breast with clove and *groseille*; the wine has a lot of love in its heart even with its more extravagant personality.

## 2011 Riesling Extra Brut SEKT +

GTM-165

SOS : 0

This was considerably better than a Brut we tasted first; doughier, wet cereal and barley, more elemental—it didn't need all that fruit; it shows ground-cherry, lime and jasmine, and seems to be the spirit-kin of Varnier-Fanniere. This is all done in-house, by the "classical method" or whatever it is we're allowed to say instead of *Méthode Champenoise*.

## 2013 Gleisweiler Riesling Trocken +

GTM-166

SOS : 0

Wow, this is really high-toned but really balanced and juicy; white tea, osmanthus and pineapple and lemon-zest; reminded me of a Herrenletten from Catoir in fact, and how do you get this fluffy deft mouthfeel with so much zing and tang?

## 2012 Pfalz Kalkstein Riesling Spätlese Trocken (+)

GTM-167

SOS : -1

A bit of nomenclature history, as starting with 2013 a VDP member can no longer use a "Prädikat" term (Kabinett, Spätlese, etc.) for a Trocken wine. So they'll have to find some new other way that'll *also* need to be explained.

It's like getting a bad haircut. The hapless fuck with the scissors cuts too much off the left and so he cuts more from the right to balance it, but now there's too much off the right so he hits the left again and then finally your poor head looks like shit. Every time these wine people climb into their "marketing" clothes they try to "simplify" and each step they take creates new additional complexities and metaphysics that still need to be explicated.

Anyway, the wine at least is good. But in a curious way. It was bottled off its gross lees in October 2013, which is something Minges likes to do, and the wine was like the best sex you ever had, but then your partner up-and-leaves, let's say, abruptly. Some palates will perceive it differently. It's *very* Blanc-de-Blancs Champagne-ish, almost ludicrously so, and part of you can't fathom how delicious it is—until it ups and bounces.

**2013 Gleisweiler Scheurebe Trocken**

GTM-168

**SOS : 0**

He has really inherited Hans-Günter Schwarz's genius with Scheurebe. This is fully expressive and uncompromising, fiercely sage-y and basil-y, incipient cassis, and something like the vapors from a Moldovian opium den. Like I should know.

**2013 Riesling Halbtrocken, 1.0 Liter**

GTM-169L

**SOS : 1**

Delicate and herbal-limey. A little slight in '13, but showing its customary class and lift.

**2013 Pfalz Riesling Kabinett**

GTM-170

**SOS : 2**

White flowers, buerre-blanc with orange-zest; the aromas are pungent but the palate is demure, until a crazily delicious finish as though you'd chewed plum blossoms and chased them with a mint leaf.

**2013 Gleisweiler Hölle Scheurebe Spätlese**

GTM-171

**SOS : 2 | SOMMELIER ALERT!**

Schwarz had a hand in this, and it shows, in length, electricity, absurd hissing beauty, angularity with polish, and the echo of a hundred smokes. If you're doing Pan-Asian *anything*, you need this wine.



# Kurt Darting

Pfalz // Bad-Dürkheim

vineyard area // 25 hectares

annual production // 20,800 cases

top sites & soil types // Spielberg and Herrenberg (limestone-marl);

Hochbenn (sandy loam)

grape varieties // Riesling, Gewürztraminer, Muskateller, Scheurebe, Burgundersorten, Rieslaner, Pinot Noir, Pinot Menuier, St. Laurent, Dornfelder



Kurt Darting

*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.*



Pfalz

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. The paradigm of a responsibly commercial winery. 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!

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**Darting at a glance** // Extraordinary VALUE FOR MONEY for superbly made reductively brilliant wines.

**2011 St. Laurent** +  
**SOS : 0**

GDR-234

**HARD-CORE LIST WINE.** This year I liked all of Helmut's reds and couldn't omit any of them. This was maybe my fave of the bunch; juicy, gorgeous animal fruit and carob-y "dark" tones; stewed tomatoes and cloves and a fetching Corvina-like bitter nuttiness leading to a chocolatey finish.

**2012 Pinot Noir**  
**SOS : 0**

GDR-236

Very pretty with loads of cherry; like a Côte Chalonnaise at its friendliest, a winning smiling PN with lift and joyfulness.

**2013 Pinot Meunier**  
**SOS : 0**

GDR-235

A sprightly little wine, this. Less creamy and chocolatey than the '12 but the zippy surge actually disguises how rich this is; the sense of stiffness recalls a Lagrein, the tannin's a little dusty, and the wine, like all Darting's reds, is fundamentally *fun*.

**NV Weissburgunder SEKT Brut** +  
**SOS : 0**

GDR-237

This is actually all 2012, but a new disgorgement will occur in April, so about 17 months on the lees. This is a <whew!> *yummy* wine, a fragrant tasty wet cereal corn soup diver-scallop dollop of semolina happiness. Could legally have been "Extra Brut" with 6 g/l RS. I earnestly doubt this money will buy you a more attractive sparkling wine—anywhere.

**2013 Dürkheimer Fronhof Riesling Kabinett Trocken, 1.0 Liter**  
**SOS : 0 | SOMMELIER ALERT!**

GDR-238L

I'm starting to think this belongs on the CORE-LIST, so consistent has it been for these many years—and so absolutely delicious. In '13 there's a torn-silky texture to a wine that's less plump or exotic than usual, but more lively, sleek and grassy—*really* fresh-cut lawn here. Know what? It tastes like fresh air in the country.

**2012 Ungsteiner Herrenberg Riesling Spätlese Trocken** +  
**SOS : 0**

GDR-226

Much more complex and refined, and a *steal* for the money. This is brilliant cellar work, as it has robust acidity (8.1g/l) and not a lot of RS (6.3g/l). "The last few grams of sugar are hard to ferment," says Helmut Darting. "It stresses the wine and creates bitter substances." This has infinitely more charm and joy than most dry Riesling with far greater pretensions, and its finish is seriously long. A year in-bottle has given this an allusive complexity and the flavor of lemon pudding. Smooth, not angular, but with marked detail and polish on the deliberate soft-palate farewell.

**2013 Dürkheimer Hochbenn Muskateller Trocken (Kabinett)**  
**SOS : 0**

GDR-231

As always, *the* classic "dark" Muscat, no elderflower or balsam here, but it's neither underripe nor catty, and has all the Darting juiciness. What kind of sourpuss can resist such a wine?

**2013 Dürkheimer Nonnengarten Riesling Kabinett, 1.0 Liter**  
**SOS : 2**

GDR-232L

**CORE-LIST WINE.** They tell me it's all clean fruit but I taste at least an echo or a facsimile of botrytis, but the wine is tangy with a lavender earthiness, angular and herbal and expressive.

**2012 Dürkheimer Hochbenn Riesling Kabinett**

GDR-221

**2013 Dürkheimer Hochbenn Riesling Kabinett**

GDR-242

**SOS : 2**

**CORE-LIST WINE.** We'll stay with this '12 until the beginning of 2015, when the guava-scented vetiver-herbal '13 makes its delicious albeit atypical way.

**2013 Dürkheimer Michelsberg Riesling Kabinett**

GDR-233

**SOS : 2**

Right now the best Riesling site in the Darting stable, and it shows; the wine is brighter and classier, and the only reason it isn't on the CORE-LIST is the production is too small.

**2013 Dürkheimer Nonnengarten Gewürztraminer Kabinett**

GDR-240

**SOS : 2**

I sometimes think it's *good* when a wine is so reliable; I mean, if I had the sniffles and couldn't taste at Darting I think I could offer you this sight-unseen. This is, yet again, refined and rosy and typical.

**2013 Dürkheimer Fronhof Scheurebe Beerenauslese, 12/500ml**

GDR-241H

**SOS : 3**

A concentrate of the feral, grapefruit-and-sage profile of Scheu, with botrytis and with strong but not blatant acidity; salty and gnarly, but we don't go to Scheu for the sake of divinity; we go for the grumble and the snarl.



# Rheinhessen

*Today's Rheinhessen is a profile of the right generation in the wrong place at the wrong time.*



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 wines 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.

vineyard area // 15 hectares  
annual production // 7,500 cases  
top sites & 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



*These are very old friends, and I'm proud that I may have done even a tiny bit to help them survive the pitiless triage among what used to be a good dozen "name" estates in Nierstein, back when its vineyards were appreciated as they deserve to be.*

Sebastian is a few months younger than my son, and now he's *staging* in New Zealand, nearly finished his studies, and will take the helm of the winery some time this summer. There is a dignity in the passage of time, it begins to seem.

Sebastian may have already had an influence over the family's wines, or it may have derived from the vintages, or it may have been both, but Strub's wines have gotten juicier the last three years. 2013 is lighter than either '12 or '11, but it's full of substance and continues the trending toward charm.

When I was younger I liked a wine to thrill me with its brilliance. I liked the excitement of high-tension and glaring relief. I thirsted for a sort of supernatural clarity, and I still like these things, the avatars and appetites of my younger self. But lately it seems I am "appreciating" such attributes more, admiring and respecting them, but not *liking* them all that much. I look at a widening crevasse between the things I "evaluate" in a wine versus the things I'm sensually drawn to. A wine that offers a strictly cerebral pleasure doesn't suffice any more. I like a little fun. And Strub's wines have been moving toward a kind of sensuality that lets me feel affection for them.

So the shorthand for you is, expect aromatic and refined wines with plenty of fun-factor but also with Riesling's polish and breed, superbly delineated and reflective of Nierstein's great and unique terroirs, still at reasonable prices, and from an estate about to get an infusion of youthful vim.

If you'd like to know more, keep reading.

My annual tasting trip always begins and ends in Nierstein, with the Strubs. Both experiences have imprinted upon me, as tangible feeling and intangible yet affecting spirit.

Arriving in early March after a year away, things are usually closed, but breathing and urging – Winter is softening, nature is opening her eyes again. Then four weeks later when I return, all that tasting and all those people under my belt (not to mention all them *schnitzels*) it's often full-on Spring, greener and milder.

And yet... a walk around the town tells a melancholy tale. One producer has a display of barrel-facings on which are written the names of important Riesling vineyards, yet in his display window are bottles of Pinot Blanc, Sauvignon Blanc and Chardonnay. But give this hack some credit; it's not easy to diss and pander at the same time.

I stood outside my hotel one morning looking at an elegant placard for another wine estate that's no longer there. In the 60s and 70s Nierstein was full of venerable (and mostly good) growers. But few have survived. In those days, the Heyl estates's proprietor Peter Von Weymarn waged a quixotic campaign to declare the "Rheinterrasse" a region *separate* from the rest of Rheinhessen. He correctly surmised these great vineyards, steep and thus expensive to work, couldn't compete against flat sites growing new crossings selling for pennies on the D-Mark in the supermarkets. I look at all the shuttered estates, and realize he was right.

Walter is a generous father. He's fundamentally a generous man, but there's another aspect in play; Walter himself had to assume control of the winery somewhat abruptly when his own father took ill, and he wants to give Sebastian all the time and companionship he possibly can. To launch the child with love, into a decent and beautiful world... there's a thing to strive for.

Walter humanely steps out of your gaze if you ask him about the wines. "They're Sebastian's wines now," he

**Strub at a glance** // Always reliable wines are rapidly becoming stellar—with no increase in price! Availability is always good, so sell like hell! Pleasure-giving wines that are easy to "read" and understand.





might say, and it is loving and respectful and not quite true. Both men's hands, father's and son's, are holding the reins. Soon the son's grip will tighten, soon the father's grip will slip slowly away, soon the routine yet poignant passage will enact itself again, and it is my unearned privilege to witness such love.

It was also my privilege to play a rousing card game called "Asshole" with Strubs and their daughter Juliane—

wine queen of Nierstein—and with her friend Jana who was also wine queen of Nierstein, and so there was lots of royalty at the table yet still I won a couple times and let someone else be the "asshole" for a hand or two. I found it kind of sweet that a 21-year old woman would enjoy an evening playing cards with her parents, not to mention some wine-schlep from Boston who shows up once a year. Thanks your highness(es).

### 2013 Niersteiner Grüner Veltliner Trocken

GST-183

**SOS : 0**

Not much GrüVe in Germany, but Walter visited Austria and came back wanting to go-for-it. In '13 he did more battonage than usual, and the getting-older vines helped mitigate the vintage's grassiness. Fennel aromas lead to a cool dried-marjoram note on the palate; almost a Provençal profile, but it wasn't especially expressive of GV. There's talk of a teensy dollop of Riesling, just a couple percent, to focus the fruit.

### 2013 Niersteiner Rosenberg Riesling Trocken

GST-184

**SOS : 0**

This is turning into the most accommodating and aromatic of the very-dry wines, and I've bought it for myself the last three vintages. The '13 is another mineral-blueberry juice bomb, focused and classy and as light as gauze; white hyacinth and even a hint of new-car smell. Final alc around 11.5% and unchaptalized, as no wine from this family has been since 1987.

### 2012 Niersteiner Oelberg Riesling Trocken "Taubennest" +

GST-178

**SOS : 0**

This mirco-parcel bottling will likely say "Spätlese" on the back label. The wine is marvelous, full of substance, with less alcohol-ripeness than the '11 (a good thing) and on its gross lees until mid-February *with* battonage, so a creamy texture yet somehow it doesn't taste leesy. Carob-y aromas are typical for this Grand Cru (it is indeed a Rheinhessen GG), a delicate autolysis is there as a nuance; true GC authority, solidity and complexity; Riesling for lovers of CHABLIS at its gnarliest most stubbornly ornery self.



**2013 Niersteiner Oelberg Riesling Feinherb “Roter Schiefer” (+)**  
**SOS : 1 | SOMMELIER ALERT!**

GST-186

It means *red slate*. Lemon and balsam aromas—or now—but also shows the classic Oelberg *salumeria* aromas; a seductively juicy and lively interplay among peach, prosciutto and lime. The '12 may have been more irresistible but this one has more articulation and diction.

**2012 Niersteiner Oelberg Riesling Feinherb “Roter Schiefer” ++**  
**SOS : 1 | SOMMELIER ALERT!**

GST-179

Spätlese again. And this is the single best wine from here for a dozen years – not to be missed. Approaches a point of sensual perfection where it not only tastes but *feels* good. And it's complex enough to ponder. I mean, really; chocolate and boxwood? It recalls Dönhoff's Krötenpfuhls but with more body. Serious terroir-drenched dry finish.

**2013 Niersteiner Hipping Riesling Feinherb “Thal” ++**  
**SOS : 1 | SOMMELIER ALERT!**

GST-185

Classy this year. From the flat section of Hipping (favored in cool vintages), it shows apple, lime and woodruff in a bright and juicy palate. This is the perquisite of the Cru, and not just this Cru but the entire notion of “Cru;” the focus and precision and yet the long quince-like fruit. Think Chenin from Saumur plus Riesling from the Saar.

**2012 Riesling “Soil To Soul”**  
**SOS : 2**

GST-172

*(To be sold while supplies last; then 2013.)*

**CORE-LIST WINE.** Ha! I find I did not for some reason write a tasting note. Maybe I went to pee and when I got back there was a new wine in my glass. Maybe I'm just a nimrod. In any case, I recall the wine was markedly excellent, even better than the superb '11, and you'll be glad to own it.

**2013 Riesling “Soil To Soul”**  
**SOS : 2**

GST-187

**CORE-LIST WINE.** The first vintage in some time to include wine from the red-slope Grand Crus; it's 30% Brückchen, 30% Paterberg and 30% Hipping & Oelberg. A wonderful aroma; rye, lemon and prosciutto; solid, chewy vinosity, like sandalwood and Phô in a steel tube, or turkey thighs in a sauce with fennel fronds and honey mushrooms. A “brand” Riesling with grip and length.

**2013 Niersteiner Brückchen Riesling Kabinett**  
**SOS : 2**

GST-188

**CORE-LIST WINE.** The vineyard is a paradox, a warm microclimate yet a cool soil (clay and limestone, slow to warm) gives ripe grapes with high acidity and low pH. The '13 has three component parts, blended for depth, length and no great sweetness; it's a little phenolic (in early March; bottling will tame this), shows some scents and flavors of corn chips (who doesn't *love* corn chips??) and golden delicious apples, and a jab of acidity.

**2013 Niersteiner Paterberg Riesling Spätlese**  
**SOS : 2**

GST-182

**CORE-LIST WINE.** From a high windy plateau on almost pure limestone, this single-lot (#1324 in fact) bottling was the best stand-alone Spät on the table; sweet but none too sweet; limestone and tarragon fragrance and a palate like a lime candy-cane with a minty shimmer.

# Weingut Geil

Rheinhessen // Bechtheim



vineyard area // 30 hectares  
annual production // 20,800 cases  
top sites & soil types // Bechtheimer Geyersberg Rosengarten (chalky loam, carbonate-rich loess)  
grape varieties // 35% Riesling, 15% Weissburgunder, 15% Spätburgunder, 4% Rieslaner, 4% Scheurebe, 27% other

*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, 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 winemaking-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

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**Weingut Geil at a glance** // Honorable traditional Rheinhessen estate energized with the arrival of a young lion. Outstanding modern white wines (Riesling, Scheurebe, Rieslaner) at wonderfully reasonable prices. An emblem of the quixotic new generation in Rheinhessen.

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 Süssreserve 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 CO<sub>2</sub>.”

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.

### 2013 Grüner Silvaner Trocken

GGE-076

**SOS : 0**

Silvaner likes cooler vintages, which give it focus and freshness, and this one’s a bit like a Weinviertel GrüVe; it’s discreet at first but then an attractive sort of declension into streams of mineral; herbaceous but not brash, and sneakily long.

### 2013 Riesling Trocken

GGE-077

**SOS : 0 | SOMMELIER ALERT!**

30% malo but no diacetyl, just juicy and delicious, with wet cereal, mutsu apples and good finishing grip. Perfect by-the-glass Riesling.

### 2013 Geyersberg Riesling Trocken +

GGE-078

**SOS : 0**

This would be the “GG” if Geil did GGs, and of the three different sites I’m finding Geyersberg to be the most detailed and mineral; this one’s playful and silky, almost ferrous (the “ore” thing I sometimes find in Austria) and certainly smoky; the finish is like a meringue with herbs.

### 2013 Muskateller Trocken

GGE-079

**SOS : 0**

**HARD-CORE LIST WINE.** Correct but tactful, and insanely tasty and juicy, almost like a Santorini white in its white-glare sun-herbal bite, or like Verdelho with acidity. Surprisingly rich mid-palate; low yields added concentration where there wasn’t a ton of ripeness.

### 2013 Bechtheimer Scheurebe Kabinett

GGE-073

**SOS : 2**

**CORE-LIST WINE.** A tic of botrytis (92° Oechsle), this blends four sites including the first crop from new plantings. It’s Scheu as “Vetiver-Extreme,” acacia blossoms and peony, angular and with a dry herbal finish; less papaya and elderflower, more lime and woodruff.

### 2013 Bechtheimer Rosengarten Riesling Kabinett

GGE-080

**SOS : 2 | SOMMELIER ALERT!**

Aced it! A solid anchor of acidity keeps the sweetness from floating away and maintains its firm clarity; great play of salts and a delicate tangy RS with a meyer-lemon lift.

### 2013 Bechtheimer Rieslaner Beerenauslese, 12/500ml +

GGE-081

**SOS : 3**

A nearly perfect “sweet” wine; highly refined honey (lemon blossom, linden, rhododendron... I’m quite the honey-maven), white chocolate, meringue, not huge acidity but also not a huge sweetness, like white corn with tapioca pudding. Not a monster at 135° Oechsle.



# Gysler

Rheinhessen // Weinheim



vineyard area // 12 hectares  
annual production // 8,000 cases  
certification // Demeter Certified Biodynamic  
top sites & soil types // Weinheimer Hölle and Mandelberg (red sandstone)  
grape varieties // Riesling, Silvaner, Scheurebe, Pinot Gris, Pinot Blanc, Pinot Noir, Huxelrebe

*Gysler is now fully biodynamic, Demeter-certified and all.*



He's 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 carby 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 tastings? I can, and did, but I *bad* the time.

A vintner can eliminate H<sub>2</sub>S 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.”

We talked together about all this. Alex is a decent, smart and humane guy, and I wanted him to know how the wines presented themselves out in our world, because I believe in them and in him, and I want them to be loved. He registered what I said, and when I tasted the wines again four weeks later – which I did – they were showing fine. I'd rather worry less about how they “show,” since y'all seem so forgiving of other wines that show pretty dubious, but those wines come from hipper places and are marketed with a lot of romance, some of it spurious. And here's a RANDOM TOURETTE'S YELP: You guys are *way* too smart to be intimidated by the German

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**Gernot Gysler at a glance** // The new wines are slimmed down, streamlined and modernized, jazzy and full of crispy, primary fruit. Prices, though, remain un-real for the time being!

language, and I won't accept that hoary shopworn excuse any more. You sussed "Savignin" and you got your mouth around "Txackolina" and so I am sure you're intrepid enough to handle "Scheurebe" or even "Hermannshöhle." Be honest: the first time you looked at *Cinsault* or

*Carignan* were you certain how they'd be pronounced? Of course not. Yet I hear all kinds of sniveling from otherwise capable people about "the German language," and sorry, but that's bullshit. Or else you're not as smart as I think you are. And *I'm* too smart to be wrong about that.

### 2013 Scheurebe Trocken

GGY-108

**SOS : 0 | SOMMELIER ALERT!**

Chaptalized in part, this is a Scheu on its best behavior, like he's meeting his girlfriend's father. *When* the wine emerges there's sage and grape hyacinth, Verdelho-like herbs and pliancy.

### 2013 Weinheimer Hölle Riesling Trocken

GGY-109

**SOS : 0**

Again this would be the "GG" if Gysler were a VDP estate. It's the oldest vines, best site (on sandstone); these were the first grapes Alex picked in '13, healthy at 85°, yielding 28 hl/ha (*very* little!), and the point was to get *these* grapes picked healthy and without botrytis, even if he might have wanted another 10° of ripeness.

There's kiwi, wisteria and cherry blossom aromas; the palate is juicy and wintergreen-y; the wine seems a little slight (though charming) but it will stay on its gross lees until August, which will plump that fella up.

### 2013 Silvaner Halbtrocken, 1.0 Liter

GGY-110L

**SOS : 1**

**CORE-LIST WINE.** Now 100% estate-bottled (Demeter!), and this is a crisp, fine and charming vintage of this perennial value, showing a curious length. Among the best vintages of a wine I've known for nearly thirty years(!).

### 2013 Scheurebe Halbtrocken, 1.0 Liter

GGY-107L

**SOS : 1**

The 2012 of this was like wine in the form of giggling helplessly. This '13, while both creamier and tangier than its sibling Silvaner, hasn't quite the angular wit of that amazing '12, though it redeems itself with redcurrant and cherry blossom aromas. It may just need a lot of oxygen. Scheu can be elusive...

### 2013 Weinheimer Riesling Kabinett

GGY-111

**SOS : 2**

OK, tough guy, let's see how much you really like high acidity. This wine was picked at 89° Oechsle and acids were left alone. We now have 11.7 g/l acidity and 60 g/l of RS that tastes like 40. Yet the acids are far less spiky than the figures indicate. The wine shimmers like some amalgam of white nectarine and candied lime. '12 was serene but this is a hyper little dervish.

### 2013 Huxelrebe Beerenauslese, 12/375ml

GGY-112H

**SOS : 4**

It's relatively delicate and not as thickly honeyed as these can sometimes be. It has '13's transparency and breeziness; more white raisins and seckel pears than overt honey. A nice pour or tasting-menu farewell.

### 2011 Spätburgunder Trocken

GGY-113

**SOS : 4**

Alex has a good hand with PN. This is velvety, with a peppery fragrance (green and wild-Madagascar black); the palate is dry, charred, caressing and burnt-shoot smoky; an original old-world PN that's a long way from Burgundy, but is distinct, original and welcoming.

# “Natural Wines”—Where I Stand

*I encourage every producer with whom I work to go as far in an organic direction as they feel they can.*



I do not and never will guilt-trip them for the steps they don't take. That is both counter-productive, and adds to the coarsening of civility in the world.

If someone tells me they are organic (or bio-dynamic) but aren't certified, I reply that I will not inform my customers as such. It is unfair to attach to the organic “brand” to help sell wine unless you're willing to fill out the forms. Those who do undergo the inconveniences associated with certification are the only ones entitled to the use of the term. For the others, virtue must be its own reward.

My fundamental value is to reject all fundamentalism. The only good dogma is no dogma. This explicitly includes dogmas I may find personally appealing. These are the most dangerous ones.

That said, it is clear that an intimate relationship to one's land is a prerequisite for meaningful and located wines. Vintners who nurture such close accord with their vineyards will feel a kind of humility and love, and this conduces naturally to an environmental conscience. But these many and varied human beings have many and varied consciences, and none of them must live up to my

ideas of environmental purity. The perfect is the enemy of the good. And it is only by encouraging and accumulating good that the perfect can be reached—if ever it can.

As regards bio-dynamics, I am in sympathy. Whatever my skepticisms may be, I can't possibly feel that any aspect of bio-dynamics is harmful. I'm personally not convinced by the preparations buried in the cow horn, but so what? It is harmless. I am concerned by the risk of bio-dynamics being turned into a quasi-religion, and am dismayed by the zealotry I sometimes glean from its supporters— or True-Believers.

Beyond the questions of organic/bio-dynamic there's the entire sensibility that's been (unfortunately) given the name “Natural Wine.” Unfortunate because it suggests an either/or formula whereby anything not sufficiently “natural” is thus unnatural. My mind spits those things out, because they're crude and obtuse. I would rather examine value weighted questions by analyzing the continuums they operate along.

I will defend the natural wine community from attacks from outside, especially when they hail from the wine establishment that supports the overblown



overextracted over-manipulated bruisers that get so much attention and such “high scores.” Compared to the evil those wines do, a few stinkers from some misguided hippies are hardly worth fussing over.

But within the natural-wine community I see far too many naked emperors and far too much credulity. A certain dewy-eyed blurred vision is fine, even charming. But when it gets militant, holier-than-thou and ideological, then I taste a bitter thing. There are too many people far too eager to polish their haloes at the expense of honest vintners and clearer thinkers. We want to feel good about our values, of course, but the prevailing values should be humility and a respect for the complexities in play.

I’m very fond of many of the wines in the Natural sensibility. Others I find repulsive. Yet all of them are defended as though they offer the keys to the palace of Perfect Goodness.

I’m eager to find an amphora wine I can like, because I like the stories and the impulse behind the quests. Sadly for me, the wines I’ve tasted have only demonstrated that there were very good reasons for human intervention in the process of making wine. I do, though, respect the vintner who has invested time, money and soul in such a project; it can’t be easy for him to admit “Well that didn’t work, did it! Recess over; back to school.”

I suppose, <sigh>, we shall have to talk about sulfur. Last year I quoted a lengthy and sensible piece by Stuart Pigott in which he offers a detailed rebuttal to most of Alice Feiring’s writings on the subject. Having done that, I think I’ll simply say that it’s simply comical to reduce this question to a sulfur=BAD equation, or even to insist that less is always preferable. In fact sulfur levels (in Germany at least) are far lower than ever before, and the overall zeitgeist is to use as little as possible and as much as necessary.

To be sure, reasonable people can debate how much is necessary, but I don’t often see that debate conducted reasonably, and at times it doesn’t look like a debate at all, but rather a chance for people to polish their own haloes by taking a righteous stand regarding an issue they know just enough to be ignorant about.

I had a very good friend over one evening. This person is a dear soul. I opened an old Merkelbach Spätlese for us. The age of that wine was surmised to be somewhere between 20-30 years—but in fact it was exactly 50 years old, a Spätlese from 1962, as pale as a 5 year old wine, in stunning perfect condition. Silence descended, and tears were duly shed. But I couldn’t help myself, and felt I had something I needed to say. I told my friend, “You know, we sit here drinking this soul-stirring Riesling with 8% alc and 50 years old, and a lot of people would have objected on principle to its sulfur level when it was bottled. So I will only beg you, as someone who loves you, to remember this wine and ask yourself What is really more important, that principle or THIS flavor?”

The other truly fatuous issue over which the

Naturalistas are inclined to unnecessary value judgments concerns natural versus cultured yeast fermentations. Mind you, I do agree there’s a line to be drawn, but it’s not the place they draw it.

I think the crux of the distinction isn’t between ambient and cultured yeast, but among different types of cultured yeasts. Briefly, there are highly neutral yeast cultures whose only purpose and function is to give a predictable fermentation, which is helpful if you want perfectly dry wine. No reasonable objection can be made to these.

The next level might be the families of yeasts cultured to ferment very cold, tempting to growers who use stainless steel and who want wines with expressive primary fruit. Very cold fermentations (in white wines) can produce amylic acid aromas (bananas), which one might argue are not inherent in the wine. This is one of those questions over which reasonable people might differ.

There are, though, a great many yeasts deliberately cultured to create spurious and short-lived aromas, and these to me are unacceptable falsifications.

As regards so-called “natural” yeast fermentations, I’m very fond of those wines, at least in the regions where I taste frequently and deeply. The Germans shorthand them as “sponti” (short for “Spontangärung,” or spontaneous fermentation) and when I encounter such wines I’m subjectively pleased. This does not mean I am displeased by other types of wines, and it EMPHATICALLY does not mean that natural-yeast fermented wines represent all that is Holy And Good. It’s merely an accent, one among many ways for good wines to be.

Nor do I make the common mistake of seeing yeast as a crucial aspect of terroir. This just isn’t true, and even if it were true it’s only true if one’s definition of “terroir” is fungible and slovenly, and so dispersed and holistic it really means almost nothing any more.

The sad ferocity with which the natural-yeast argument is thrust forward seems to indicate two things, and only one of them is good. I’m glad wine drinkers are rejecting tweakings and diddlings because way too many wines are tweaked and diddled (and “spoofofulated”), and I also know we often have to go too far in order to learn just how far we should have gone. The problem arises when I see people claiming rigid categorical positions because it makes them feel moral and righteous, but such tea-party evangelism is never helpful even among people one sympathizes with.

All of this may be unsatisfying if you’re in a point in your life where you want to take positions and claim your values. All I can say is, the deeper the values, the less fiercely they need to be claimed. And the longer we live, the less categorical and more complex we find things to be. Then we start to consider deep values, which often appear less militant and passionate than the positions we held earlier, but which are in fact tenderer and more respectful of the true difficulties of living and trying to be good.

# 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 semi-precious 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 Schötleber) 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 flood-plain 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 Rudesheim 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...

vineyard area // 25 hectares

annual production // 17,000 cases

top sites & 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 (pebbles, loam)

grape varieties // 80% Riesling, 20% Weissburgunder and Grauburgunder



*I probably write too much about how I respond to Dönnhoff's wines. Maybe it's too I-focused. Yet I'm drawn to do it, to continue doing it, and I think it's because this interaction is at the very core of my engagement with beauty, with meaning, and with life.*

I suspect I will never know why. And it probably doesn't matter. Each of us seems to hold a kind of receiver that's tuned to one slender band of frequency, and when the signal invades us we can't help but respond. Maybe it's unsettling, especially if we envision ourselves as matter-of-fact. Maybe if so we ignore it. And yet it is there.

These wines convey to me an extraordinary beauty. It's not only the *what* of the flavor, the arrangements of nouns by which it might be understood and described; it's also the verb, the how, the mode of expression, and perhaps it is this most of all. I'm at a loss to understand how a wine can be at once so numinous and also so tender. It's the most poignant mystery I'm aware of. And because it is inexplicable, I keep fussing at it, urged into the mist, where I try to find some paths or trails, and only get more and more lost.

I question whether this thing I experience is actually irreducible, that is, in short; is it actually really there? Or do I bring it with me by the force of my own expectations? Here I can offer a clue. Because we had Cornelius Dönnhoff at our New York trade tasting last January, and he (like many others) brought cask-samples of his baby-2011s for us all to taste. It was my first encounter with the new vintage, and I hastened to taste them all, ideally before the room got too crowded and distracting. So I skimmed my palate over a bunch of the '11s, briefly touching down on this-and-that, and when I got to the Dönnhoff table I was in power-taster mode. *I'll show these wines who's in charge.* We've all been there.

The first Dönnhoff wine was the simple dry estate Riesling. The first thing that went through my mind was "This is different from the others." It was stiller, somehow, like the unperturbed surface of a moonlit pond. Compared to the other wines I'd tasted, nothing

here seemed to be on *display*, and I was struck right away with this seemingly affectless coolness, poise, clarity. Yet it never felt like a clarity any person had had to focus, it never seemed as if human effort was engaged in making it as calmly precise as it was. And of course it was keenly dissonant with the crashing *drang* of the rest of the room. But there it definitely was. And it compels me, in a way I cannot resist, to stop the noise and let this strange thing in. Or is it really so strange? Maybe these are just introverted wines, and they appeal to the introvert in me. Maybe. Or maybe they let me feel *seen*, as if the very wines understand and approve of me. That really feels true.

The wines find me in a place I myself am almost unaware of. It's the place I am most human, most tender, most sad, most forgiving, and most deeply sure that something matters in all this, that we are here for some purpose. You might think it was pleasurable to be roused so deeply, but it is also unnerving. It reminds me how much of my life is unreal. How I tolerate the superficial. How heedless I am of the gifts, of living at all, of the people who are with me, and the love we feel for one another. It's a kind of admonition, and I know I deserve it. But is it really fair? How in the world could one live like this all the time? The ecstasy would kill you.

I hope it's enough to know that such places are there. That each of us walks in an envelope of divinity. The world is a beauty we need to be happy in and grateful for. Each sip of a wine like this is a drawn breath of beauty, an invitation to remember, a voice from the deep leaves, it is safe to be lost, the forest will hold you, the world will hold you.

It occurs to me we are all very lucky in Helmut Dönnhoff. Me of course 'cause I represent him, but more than that. First of all we have an unusually intelligent and articulate guy. Good so far. Next we

**Dönnhoff at a glance** // In this humble taster's opinion, these are the greatest Rieslings on earth. No other wine, anywhere, exceeds the clarity, polish, complexity and sheer beauty of flavor of this grower's finest wines.





have a guy who's uncommonly happy in his work. Then it happens that this smart, happy guy has some of the greatest vineyards in the world. And that for years the region in which he worked was so sufficiently obscure that he got to do his work in almost monastic purity. He was never in danger of becoming that most queasy and dreadful of creatures: a "wine celebrity." More correctly, when that danger first began to manifest, our hero was old enough to assimilate it and not allow it to disturb the basic integrity of his relationship to the work.

Great wines also arise from people who are at home – or at one – with their landscape. Helmut's been hinting that new vineyards were going to enter the picture, and when he showed me two new wines from sites in Bad Kreuznach called Kahlenberg and Krötenpfuhl (two of the top-3 in this town), I asked if he was at all curious about any upstream sites. "Not at all," came his typically unambiguous answer. I asked why not. "I want the wines I make to contain a story, and the story I can offer them is that of me at home in my landscape. I feel myself a man of the middle-Nahe, that is, the area between Oberhausen and Kreuznach. You have to be at home not only in the vineyard but also in the landscape in which it's contained. Of course, I could make a perfectly nice wine from a "foreign" vineyard, but it would only be a product; it wouldn't contain a story."

A story I have told insufficiently is that of Cornelius Dönnhoff, who has in fact been responsible for the wines since the 2007 vintage. When I've been there he has stood in the background, perhaps in deference to my long friendship with his father. And so I don't really know him enough to have spoken of him enough. I do know that he wishes to reduce the production of the several estate-Rieslings—not to discontinue them, but to have more energy available for the top Crus. I once asked him if he had changed or was planning to change anything about how the grapes were grown and the wine was made. He's

not afraid to quarrel with his dad, and he's very much his own man. His answer surprised me. "No, nothing." He did not elaborate, nor needed to.

Helmut will tell you Cornelius is quicker, more resolute, and in certain ways more technically competent. In my film he says the estate's current quality level would be "unthinkable" without Cornelius. Other elements also come into play, such as the trade Helmut made with Gut Hermannsberg, whereby he gave them the Kupfergrube (which their forbears had actually created from a scrubby bare hillside around eighty years ago) in exchange for Hermannshöhle. This gave Dönnhoffs a bigger holding in this stellar vineyard, which gives them more flexibility to harvest selectively, without worrying about filling a cask. Cornelius isn't voluble, at least not with me, but I am seriously stirred by his commitment to travel here in the U.S.—he hardly *needs* to come over in order to sell the wines—and also his collegial ease with other growers. There are places where the "top" grower might put on airs, but not the Nahe, and not the Dönnhoffs. It makes sense the folks are down to earth, because the wines themselves *come down to EARTH*.

They were picking the final '13 the day I visited in March. Having produced one of only four Eisweins in the entire state of Rheinland-Pfalz, a second parcel was left hanging hopefully in the Brücke. But it never froze. And so on March 6th 2014 a Beerenauslese was picked at 150° Oechsle from shriveled but otherwise healthy fruit. The consolation prize.

I also learned that Dönnhoff produces a sparkling wine, which I am very eager to taste, but which is between-cuvées and we'll all have to wait till 2015.

Persons interested in Dönnhoff's PINOTS, which I have never offered *only* to keep the portfolio as tidy as humanly possible, will be happy to know you can buy them now. There are two types of two wines, Pinots Blanc and Gris, in basic and reserve qualities.

## Some Notes on the Vineyards

In essence the BRÜCKE is a minerally wine; it shows a more masculine profile, it's more fibrous and nutty than many other Nahe wines, but just at the moment you think you're tasting everything in it, it comes at you with even more nuance, yet another facet of flavor. If new-world-oaky-creamslut wines are like basic addition and subtraction, these wines are like integral calculus—except that any ragamuffin palate (even mine!) can grok them.

NIEDERHÄUSER HERMANNSHÖHLE is one of those vineyards that gives utterly miraculous wine. You shake your head in delighted perplexity that fermented grape juice can attain such flavors. It is a steep hillside, not very large (8.5 hectares), with ideal exposition and a soil whose complexity is mirrored in its wines. Walk fifty yards through the vineyard and you see a mish-mash of soils, as though this were a geological junction, an Arc de Triomphe of slate, porphyry, melaphyre and conglomerates—sometimes all jumbled together. The only possible drawback is drought in the drier years. Its favorable exposure makes Eiswein almost impossible.

Dönnhoff is currently producing the very best wines from HERMANNSHÖHLE, and you need look no further to see one of the wine-world's great confluences of a great vineyard and a great proprietor. I don't care what a hot-shot palate you have, the complexities of these wines will tax it to its outermost limits. The fundamental aromas and flavors are a mingling of sharply sweet cherry, sometimes black cherry, and currant-cassis, but there is a hint of anise too, something spriggy, and an undertow of stoniness from the slate. Botrytis brings tropical fruit notes. I would go so far as to claim that **NO SINGLE WINE IN THE ENTIRE WORLD IS AS COMPLEX AS DÖNNHOFF'S BEST FROM HERMANNSHÖHLE.**

### 2013 Estate Riesling Trocken

GDH-320

**SOS : 0 | SOMMELIER ALERT!**

This is the one from (mostly) porphyry soils, so we get that particular jazz in an affordable format. This '13 is delicious! A kind of embedded "sweetness" and a stony finish, between which are notes of balsam, fresh verbena leaves and empire apples, and the whole thing is intricately herbal and grassy. We're hoping for a second *tranche* later this year—the first one is gone-baby-gone.

### 2013 Tonschiefer Riesling Trocken

GDH-323

**SOS : 0**

The estate wine from (mostly) Leistenberg which grows on a sandy slate called *Tholeyer Schiefer*. This is as limpid as spring-water, until it rears up with radicchio and with a slatey char. It's for connoisseurs of the art of bitterness, in a jacket of cool freshness and the gleam of sunlight on the surface of the water.

### 2013 Roxheimer Höllenspfad Riesling Trocken

GDH-325

**SOS : 0**

A mostly steep site on sandy loam. The wines have tended toward steeliness, and this is like liquefied cobalt and as smoky as burning leaves, yet also as flowery as plum blossoms and as tart as wild plums themselves, but it builds to a juicy crescendo, as if yielding at last to a certain kindliness.

### 2013 Felsenberg Riesling Grosses Gewächs "Felsenturmchen," 6/750ml + +

GDH-326

**SOS : 0**

Distracted while tasting, so my note is sketchy. The wine is markedly sleek and delineated, and "greener" (in terms of tea and herbs, not lack of ripeness) than '12.

### 2013 Dellchen Riesling Grosses Gewächs, 6/750ml + +

GDH-327

**SOS : 0**

Remarkably approachable young Dellchen! It's not that the wine is usually forbidding; it's just closed until about 3-4 years old. But this is as pixilated and herbal-stony as I've ever tasted, so full of grasses and herbs and rock-dust. Ethereal finish, exceedingly delicate.

**2013 Hermannshöhle Riesling Grosses Gewächs, 6/750ml + (+)**

GDH-328

**SOS : 0**

Surprisingly forceful and masculine, and showing a certain Calvinist rectitude, as if the Trimbachs had visited and vinified it. This view is likely distorted, as this among all the wines was the least forthcoming.

**2013 Estate Riesling +**

GDH-321

**SOS : 1 | SOMMELIER ALERT!**

I recently took delivery of the 2001 Dönnhoffs I'd bought and laid away in a cellar a friend in Germany let me borrow space in. Among them were six bottles of the gutsriesling, and at first I winced; I should have brought them over sooner.

I needn't have worried. In fact, the '01 and '02 gutsrieslings are drinking like dreams right now. Remember some of the internet silliness about Dönnhoff's wines don't age? Don't make me laugh. Or rather, don't make me puke, since laughing is pleasurable.

I think these wines show a paradox analogous to the thread-count in linens: the more there are, the smoother it feels. Each of these wines has so much sheer material the result is they feel not soft but caressing. That said though, this '13 has greener flavors than usual, in keeping with the vintage character. It remains the world's greatest wine value, and it seems that some of you have also made this discovery, as we have very few cases unspoken for as I write.

**2013 Oberhäuser Leistenberg Riesling Kabinett (+)**

GDH-331

**SOS : 2**

A trebly wine in general meets a trebly vintage in particular, and the result is like a St. Elmo's fire of flavor; high-toned lemony aromas, talc, spearmint, with a scythe-like cut and relief; almost shockingly taut in this very young stage.

**2013 Kreuznacher Krötenpfuhl Riesling Kabinett +**

GDH-330

**SOS : 2**

Whew! That's a fragrance—whew! This is gonna make some friends; chocolate and balsam and hugely expressive, more enveloping than the Leistenberg, if a little less racy.

**2013 Norheimer Kirschheck Riesling Spätlese ++**

GDH-322

**SOS : 2**

Maybe the most simply beloved wine in the Dönnhoff stable, this is one of the great vintages, recalling the '04 and '02, or like the '08 but better; blazing clear and deliciously articulated, with its signature flavors of lady-apples and cherry blossom.

**2013 Oberhäuser Brücke Riesling Spätlese + (+)**

GDH-332

**SOS : 2**

An aside—there's no Felsenberg Spät in the small crop of 2013, as all of it went into the dry wine. Thus we head straight into Brücke, and into its quiet monastic stirring and yearning. That's the essence of Brücke, this kind of ur-Riesling that seems to find our own primordial souls. In '13 its acids feel more prominent, and it's brooding just now, but serenely—Brücke can be obscure but is never austere. I opened the 2001 over the winter and it needs 4-5 more years, though you can drink Hermannshöhle now if you insist.

**2013 Niederhäuser Hermannshöhle Riesling Spätlese +++ (+)**

GDH-333

**SOS : 2**

After the Brücke this was vividly lively again. Qualities of sublimity and qualities of almost hyperactive acidity. A decades-keeper, or if you drink it young, then food please. You need to carpet over an end-palate snappiness. The trebly skeins-of-herbs-and-flowers style of '13 is well expressed here! But again—take this all with some grains of salt. I was early to this particular party.



**2013 Norheimer Dellchen Riesling Auslese Goldkapsel, 6/750ml + + ( + )**

GDH-334

**SOS : 3**

The first since 2006. Clarity goes without saying. Berries, mint and wintergreen and aloe vera; the transparency, reserve and intricacy are divine, and the Gyokoru and balsam finish is heart-rending. The best Auslese I tasted from 2013—so far.

**2013 Oberhäuser Brücke Riesling Auslese Goldkapsel, 12/375ml + +**

GDH-335H

**SOS : 3**

Very early days for this incipient masterpiece. Silly to describe associations. Sweeter than Dellchen. We'll know its truth in 30 years.

**2013 Niederhäuser Hermannshöhle Riesling Auslese Goldkapsel, 12/375ml + + ( + )**

GDH-336H

**SOS : 4**

Now we see the cherry and verbena elements of this greatest of all Riesling vineyards in the elevated form of a parfait. It's sweet and overt yet also mysterious, as intense and as light as the best macaroons.

**2013 Oberhäuser Brücke Riesling Eiswein, 6/375ml + + ( + )**

GDH-350H

**SOS : 4**

November 27th was as cold as it got—minus-7° Celsius as I recall, and this is one of only 4 Eisweins made in all the Nahe, Pfalz, Rheinhessen, Mosel, Saar and Ruwer. There's a wonderfully strange aroma of veal chops sautéing, along with spearmint and aloe vera; the palate is resonant and humming, without a scintilla of imbalance or blatant acidity; ridiculous length, a deeply beautiful and curiously earthy Eiswein.

# Jakob Schneider

Nahe // Niederhausen



vineyard area // 19 hectares  
annual production // 10,000 cases  
top sites & soil types // **Niederhäuser Hermannshöhle** (volcanic soil, gray slate); **Niederhäuser Felsensteyer** (melaphyr); **Niederhäuser Klamm** (porphyry); **Norheimer Dellchen** (grey slate)  
grape varieties // 90% Riesling, 10% other varieties

*We really can't talk about Jakob in the process of arriving any more. He done got here. Yes, the wines continue to improve steadily, but Jakob Schneider is a settled force now, 30 years old, about to get married, and very much a peer, not a "young vintner" to keep an eye on.*



Sometimes my colleagues have wondered at what they interpret as my stately tempo on tasting trips. Why would I allow three and a half hour for a visit to Schneider? Well now! He had about 14-15 wines to show us, and in most cases he had *three or four variants/possibilities* of each wine. This involved not only tasting the different options alone, but tasting manifold potential blends of each, until when we left (after almost five hours) we'd probably had 100 wines in our mouths.

I'm not complaining! This is incredibly touching and collegial. We're sort of guest-palates who can taste and talk and debate and eventually we all agree on what each wine can be at its best, Jakob from his intimate view, and we from our outsider's remove.

It's been thirty five years since I first visited this estate. But that needn't concern you, the three generations I've seen, and the gradual and now accelerating modernization. What's important here is that this outstanding collection

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**Jakob Schneider at a glance** // "Colorful" stories aside, these can be the most hauntingly, intricately perfumed wines I have ever tasted. They are modernizing but still a fair way from modern; great depth in the best of them.

of Grand Cru vineyards finally has a Niederhausen vintner to do full justice to them.

A recent improvement is a new bottling line—which Jacob shares with Georg Rumpf (at Kruger-Rumpf) and which both fellows tell me is much gentler on the wines as they are bottled. It's just those small finesse points that make the critical difference in *texture* whereby a wine becomes polished and refined and more pleasurable to drink.

You might wonder why I represent two growers less than three miles apart who own parcels in many of the same vineyards. Is it redundant? Well, no. Not any more redundant than having two sources for Musigny or Chambertin, which no one would question.

For me to do this leads me toward a kind of truth I do well to remember. What's most important is to deal honestly with honest people who are ineluctably connected to their vines and their land. Someone like

Dönnhoff expresses this connection in the form of the sublime, and someone like Schneider does it in the form of the compelling and generous, with warmer, more analog tones. If one must evaluate and contrast the two for purposes of “ranking” or “scoring” one certainly may, and that's part of my job. But the deeper principle is that each person is caring and *faithful* in his own way to his own vines. When you think that way, the values become not identical, but equivalent. And as a wine lover (and wine drinker) I see no reason to grope toward the “best” and ignore the mountain of pleasurable and delicious wines on which the “best” is standing. If it always has to be the “best,” then you want wine to be a kind of arm candy that validates your own stunning incredibleness. I'm sad for you; you're wasting wine and wasting a life among other human beings. And I doubt you feel good about yourself.

### 2013 Riesling “Melaphyr” Trocken

GJS-118

**SOS : 0**

The soil is a variant of porphyry, with feldspar and even basalt; it looks almost black at the surface. And the wines are always deranged with exotic terroir. This one's an elegant and balanced dry wine; spicy, smoky, angular but not sharp; a cobalt-like minerality, refined, classy and full of character.

### 2013 Niederhauuser Hermannshöhle Riesling Trocken +

GJS-119

**SOS : 0 | SOMMELIER ALERT!**

A super dry Hermannshöhle, with all the clarity and lavish spice it can give; the best vintage yet; like *charcuterie* and edible flowers, with a wonderful embrace of vinosity. It was bulked up with 5% of the reserve “Magnus” cuvée—and this wine is a steal.

### 2013 Norheimer Dellchen Riesling Trocken + (+)

GJS-120

**SOS : 0 | SOMMELIER ALERT!**

Quite open, transparent and full of saltiness and minerality—which by the way are not the same thing. Tastes like it had been passed through a powder of sel gris; Serrano and roasted beets and a shimmering herbal brightness. I don't recall a better Dellchen from here, nor many from anywhere.

### 2013 Niederhäuser Kertz Riesling Feinherb +

GJS-121

**SOS : 1 | SOMMELIER ALERT!**

Among the greatest Nahe vineyards, and one of the smallest; soils combine slate and porphyry, but there's no accounting for the intricate and exotic spiciness of the top Rieslings from this magical ground. This wine shows a lavish aroma of raspberries; the palate is slinky and salty, angular in a lively way, not arch or sarcastic, just charming and food-loving.

### 2013 Riesling Kabinett, 1.0 Liter

GJS-122L

**SOS : 2**

Along with Dönnhoff's estate Riesling, this is the best value in my offering, year after year.

Why? Because Schneider has no mundane vineyards containing Riesling, and so this “jug” wine has fruit from the Grand and Premier Crus, in this case Rosenberg (melaphyr), Kirschheck (slate) and Rosenheck (sandy slate). It's almost incredibly appley and minty, showing hyacinth and verbena; you need to accept an acid-pronounced farewell but the alternative entailed an unacceptable manipulation; in any case if you know this wine, expect a less effusively fruity and more serpentine version in '13.



**2013 Niederhäuser Klamm Riesling Kabinett +**  
**SOS : 2**

GJS-124

**CORE-LIST WINE.** Next-door to Hermannshöhle, it's the steepest Nahe vineyard and as usual the soils are a mélange, in this case of porphyry and *Rotliegend*. Jakob had two lots, one a *sponti* and this was less peachy than usual, drier and earthier. I was liking it and ready to pounce on that bad boy, but then came a brother-cask that was more crystalline, higher-acid, sweeter and more floral. We combined them. The earthy porphyry still determines the aroma, and the brilliance of the 2nd lot just sizzles on the palate; the wine is animated, serpentine, intricate and whirling with salts and spices. A true (modern) Kab, 87° Oechsle, RS below 50 g/l, and brisk acidity.

**2013 Norheimer Kirschheck Riesling Spätlese +**  
**SOS : 2**

GJS-123

Streamlined, flowery, slatey, charming and long. No wonder everyone loves this vineyard!

**2013 Niederhäuser Hermannshöhle Riesling Spätlese + +**  
**SOS : 2**

GJS-125

A lot of cuvée-combining here; three very different lots, and quite high-acidity. Tobacco, marjoram and ginger. The palate is maybe even more herbal, though with echoes of bacon, hyssop and chartreuse and even Gyokoru, but the finish is nutmeg-y and cherries. Too complex for one brain—mine anyway.

**2013 Niederhäuser Hermannshöhle Riesling Auslese, 6/750ml**  
**SOS : 2**

GJS-126

I always seem to like the “lighter” one; it's more *Hermannshöhle* and less “Auslese.” This is a potion of woodruff and chartreuse; a richer but not inherently sweeter version of the Spätlese, just more intense and saltier, yet still essentially herbal.

**2013 Niederhäuser Hermannshöhle Riesling Beerenauslese, 6/375ml**  
**SOS : 4**

GJS-127H

No note—I can't write them for infantile (very) sweet wines, but this is impressively clean, lively and very rich.

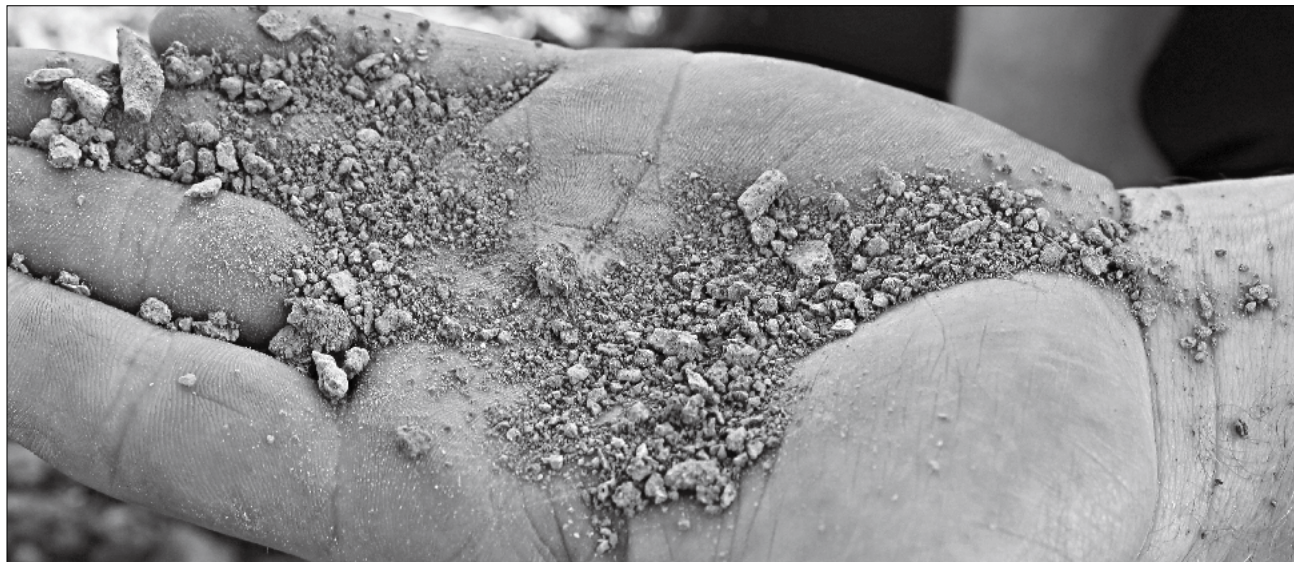
**2012 Niederhäuser Hermannshöhle Riesling Eiswein, 6/375ml + +**  
**SOS : 4**

GJS-128H

**First offering.** This is the “bigger” one I alluded to last year—180° Oechsle now, and the wine is stupendous, a virtually perfect Eiswein, that awakened even my jaded sweet-wine palate and reminded me how sublime such things could be.

# Can You Taste The Minerals?

*My friend Lisa Airey wrote to me because she knows just how to press my buttons.*



"I'm working with a group of students that have read the latest Guild of Sommeliers paper on terroir," she began. Evidently in the course of an online thread, a professor of geology wrote a skeptical post that was paraphrased thus: "Maltman is not a terroir denier. He does not posit that terroir has no effect on wine flavor or structure—quite the contrary. His primary objection is to the claim that specific minerals or rocks can be tasted in wine. He objects to the claim that the rocks in the vineyard, such as slate, flint, and chalk end up as detectable flavors in the wine. Proving that the presence or absence of certain trace elements in the soil affects the taste of wine is one thing. Proving that one can actually taste the slate from the vineyard is another."

So I replied to her, saying this:

I have mixed feelings about Mattman's claim. On one hand, the whole business of "minerality" can be overstated to the point it becomes metaphysical, and I myself am not willing to insist that we can literally "taste the minerals." However, that isn't because I assume this is impossible, but rather because we don't (yet?) know how it could indeed be possible.

Yet I also wonder whether the Professor is himself being too literal. One can put too fine a point on these things. First, we have the observable phenomenon of countless numbers of people tasting and discerning *something* in these wines that isn't "fruit" or "flowers" or "spices" and which they spontaneously describe in terms of stones, rocks or minerals. When they learn that the soils these wines grew in contain certain stone-rock-mineral components, it is not de-facto unreasonable to

infer a cause and affect. Just because we haven't discerned the mechanism by which such nuances appear in wine is no reason to insist they are figments of fantasy.

As for the literal claim of tasting slate as-such, all you need to do is go to a classic Mosel vineyard, pick up a little wafer of slate and *lick* it. Or soak it in water overnight and drink it the next morning. Then you'll be in a better position to insist that it can't be what you're tasting in the wine. While you're at it, feel free to postulate an alternate explanation! "If not slate, then *what?*" I strongly suspect by the time you're finished, your theory will be far more abstruse and improbable than the common-sense one that's evident to your simple wits and senses.

To be fair, though, I do not know and would not insist that such a phenomenon is universally true. That is, if one tastes "slate" in Mosel Riesling then one must also be tasting *caillou* in Châteauneuf, limestone in Mâcon or belemnite chalk in Champagne. We taste the effects these components create in wine flavors, we intuit a causal chain, and that's as far as we can go, and stay reasonable. We can take this thing too far. But that doesn't mean we shouldn't boldly take it as far as it can plausibly travel! For example, please posit a theory as to why Champagne tasters have spontaneously arrived at tasting terms that include marine images of iodine, oysters, and seafood shells that is more persuasive than the one that says it's because the vines grow in soil *made up* of agglomerated sea fossils.

The supporters of the terroir argument have infinitely repeating empirical experience on their side. What do the deniers have?



# Weingut Hexamer

Nahe // Meddersheim



vineyard area // 18.5 hectares  
annual production // 10,800 cases  
top sites & soil types // Meddersheimer Rheingrafenberg (red slate with a high content of quartzite); Schloßböckelheimer In den Felsen (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.

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**Weingut Hexamer at a glance** // Sensational discovery on the upper Nahe, a young vintner doing everything right; handcrafted fruit-driven wines of terroir.



He's a vineyardist first, only thereafter a cellarmaster. "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.

This vivid acid profile may be the reason I struggled with Harald's dry Rieslings in 2013. I'm not inflexibly opposed to them, but I just don't like shrill wines, so I'm going where the pleasure is.

### 2013 Sauvignon Blanc Trocken SOS : 0

GHX-102

Remember how much you liked this wine a couple years ago? This is the best one since. I like them when they're mineral and grassy but not bell-peppery and vegetal, and this one's very sleek and charming.

### 2013 Spätburgunder Weissherbst Halbtrocken SOS : 0 | **SOMMELIER ALERT!**

GHX-103

**HARD-CORE LIST WINE.** It's not pink, but rather the color of beeswax, yet it tastes like a rosé and a super-good one at that. Fantastic berried freshness and charming length of fruit; delicate but not gauzy—this has vinosity.

### 2013 Riesling "Porphyry" Feinherb SOS : 1

GHX-104

This may use the site name (Schlossböckelheimer In Den Felsen) but may not; the small crop might have caused Harald to blend two porphyry sites, or he may wish to reserve the right to do it in future vintages.

The wine is still an infant but a salty and smoky one—all its core-flavors are intact, and only a couple structural issues remain to be resolved, as I'm certain they will.

### 2013 Meddersheimer Rheingrafenberg Riesling "Quartzit" SOS : 2

GHX-108

**CORE-LIST WINE.** Also a work-in-progress, with RS corrections pending (downwards). Picked early with 84° Oechsle and about 5% botrytis, and slightly chaptalized.

### 2013 Meddersheimer Altenberg Riesling Kabinett + SOS : 2

GHX-105

A *sponti* and a yummy wine; mirabelle, cox-orange pippins, malt, and all the intricate texture of real Riesling; a tactile delicacy, like when your beloved runs fingers through your hair.

### 2013 Meddersheimer Rheingrafenberg Riesling Spätlese + SOS : 2

GHX-106

Acidity over 10g/l subsumes the 80 grams of RS, and the wine works slim and snappy; mirabelle, wintergreen, meyer-lemon and ginger; nearly unbearably vivid with a finish like a gelée of the yellow plums.

**2013 Schlossböckelheimer Felsenberg Riesling Spätlese + (+)**  
**SOS : 2**

GHX-107

A new vineyard for Hexamer, but not a new parcel (25 yrs old); picked over 100° Oechsle, it's a classic Felsenberg (which is to say, a supernally great Riesling vineyard); exotic, esoteric, mesmeric but also seeming to quiver with energy. The parcel is right above the hotel *Niederthäler Hof*, with a SW exposure. A sizzling acidity sticks out a little on the finish, but this baby has a ways to go.

Isn't it great we now have *four* excellent producers (Dönnhoff, Schäfer-Fröhlich, Crusius and Hexamer) with land in this great site?

**2012 Sobernheimer Marbach Riesling BA “-6.9°C,” 12/375ml + +**  
**SOS : 4**

GHX-091H

I well know how unfashionable such wines are these days, but I also know what a genius he is at making them. Few can follow Harald when he reaches this zone; the wine was picked in late October at 120°, and though the grapes were frozen near-solid he opted for an incandescent Auslese. Because why? Because read on...

**2012 Meddersheimer Altenberg Riesling Eiswein, 12/375ml + +**  
**SOS : 4**

GHX-092H

Perilously close to sublime. It's beatific and loving, all apples and cloves and ginger; almost a Saar quality. The acidity's in proportion, and the wine exhales a blessing of serene intensity. The guy has The Gift.

## A Couple Old Geezers

**2003 Sobernheimer Marbach Riesling Spätlese +**  
**SOS : 2 | SOMMELIER ALERT!**

GHX-109

Drank this over dinner, and I don't write tasting notes at the table, but I can tell you it's not the same wine we shipped last year, but like the best '03s it's amazingly delicious. Plus this one's smoky and none too sweet.

**2004 Meddersheimer Rheingrafenberg Riesling Kabinett**  
**SOS : 1 | SOMMELIER ALERT!**

GHX-023

I shipped this in 2005, and it almost hasn't budged since then, barely into its tertiary stage, but starting to show the spicy grassy edge of 2004, and thus for lovers of zippy racy Rieslings..

# Kruger-Rumpf

Nahe // Münster Sarnsheim

vineyard area // 22 hectares

annual production // 13,750 cases

top sites & 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



*It's best when a generational transfer takes place with both generations active, at least for a while. You get the best of all worlds; institutional memory plus fresh eyes, an up and running infrastructure plus an innovative spirit. Plus the competitive energy of parent and child each with something to "prove" to the other.*



This is happening now at Rumpf, and the wines have surged forward for each of the past several years.

They have primo holdings in many of the Grand Crus of the lower Nahe, and economies of scale have kept prices sensible, though that's a relative term for an estate of just 55 acres.

I do think a small tribute is in order for Rumpf's geniality. Many producers, especially young studs in their twenties, can be quite the divas. "I make the wines I like and he takes them or leaves them" is a typical sentiment. And it's reasonable enough on its face; it only locks a door whereby collegial interaction might benefit grower and buyer alike. But hey, I understand, having been an insufferable twit in my twenties, and I didn't have to deal

with boffo reviews before I was old enough to handle them gracefully. All of which is to say that Rumpf's collegiality is becoming rare, which makes its underlying gesture of respect and friendliness even more precious.

They're as sturdy as before but there's more flesh on the bones. There's more mineral density, more complexity of texture, and they are invariably site-specific: The PITTERSBERGS are still nutty and slatey, the DAUTENPFLÄNZERS are still complex and multifaceted, with all the intricacies of real Grand Cru style, but the fabric is finer now. You know the hoary old truism about Nahe wines being a cross between Mosel and Rheingau? When you taste these you'll see the truth behind the cliché.

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**Kruger-Rumpf at a glance** // Up-and-comer the past few years, making more glamorous wines than ever before. Deft, appley and minerally wines from the greatest sites of the lower Nahe. Priced quite reasonably for blue-chip quality.



## 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. Its 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 Pettenthal with the exotics of Felsenberg or Dautenpflänzer.

### 2013 Estate Riesling (Trocken)

GKF-195

SOS : 0

The first of several exciting (and logical) things happening at this dynamic estate in 2013. The wine hovers around the periphery of legal-Trocken, maybe a gram below, maybe a gram above, so it will be a *dry-tasting* wine and the fine-print can, um, fuck itself. The blend of sites may change each year, according to what will give the best results in this style—so the “formula” is to remain flexible—my god, to actually TASTE! Ignoring the law, creating the cuvée by tasting and not by recipe??? What will they think of next.

This year it’s 50% Dautenpflänzer, 30% Kapellenberg and 20% Rheinberg, and if this quality persists we will have a 3rd wine to occupy the medal-podium for stunning value along with Dönnhoff’s estate Riesling and Schneider’s Liter. This maiden-voyage is crisp, both exotic and slatey, with hyacinth and shoot-smoke; balance, juiciness and charm. Bravo!

### 2013 Dorsheim Riesling Trocken

GKF-194

SOS : -1

The village-level wine according to the new VDP schemata. In fact it’s all Burgberg (A “GG”) and it was all done in cask. It tickles the boundaries of austerity, even with acid and pH suggesting the opposite. You need to like dry, dark flavors, black magma, charred things, licorice without sugar. Sounds yummy, right? Yet the wine’s oddly compelling for all that, suggesting some embedded dark stream of sweetness.

### 2013 Rheinberg Riesling Trocken +

GKF-196

SOS : 0

This one’s *like* a GG in its swollen minerality; indeed it’s shockingly mineral for this usually fruity vineyard—though a vein of slate was discovered during a replanting project last year, which no one knew was there. Ginger and empire-apple, taut and crisp but mouth-filling; talc-y minty; animated zippy interplay and splashy freshness.

**2013 Pittersberg Riesling Grosses Gewächs, 6/750ml** + +  
**SOS : 0 | SOMMELIER ALERT!**

GKF-197

This establishes a new high-water mark for Rumpf's dry Rieslings. It's like a liqueur of the site but with no sugar, but only the essence of its fruit.. Not nutty, not dusty; pure voluptuous energy following on a burnt-slatey fragrance; amazingly creamy for a '13. It was the best-by-a-hair of a trio of excellent GGs (Dautenpflänzer and Scharlachberg) and I'll offer them when this one sells out—which it will—you can't keep such mastery a secret for long.

**2013 Riesling Feinherb "Schiefer"**  
**SOS : 1 | SOMMELIER ALERT!**

GKF-198

An angular successful dry Riesling; pungent slate aromas lead to a nutty and mutsu-apple palate; still shows a sternly dry finale but only after a salty, lemon-blossomy middle.

**2013 Dautenpflänzer Riesling Feinherb** + +  
**SOS : 1 | SOMMELIER ALERT!**

GKF-199

The same grapes that went into the GG, the best of which accidentally stopped fermentation and might have been used as a blending partner—until this wine was tasted.

The Grand Cru fragrance is all-in; the palate is brilliant, snappy, ginger and soursop and the crust of a crème-brulée. Again a seriously *perfect* dry Riesling—or what that thing should be.

**2013 Münsterer Rheinberg Riesling Kabinett** +  
**SOS : 2**

GKF-193

**CORE-LIST WINE.** 30% cask and about ten grams drier than earlier vintages; streamlined and less apple-fleshy in '13; racy and shimmering and springy, a subtle change of approach toward greater gloss and polish and less overt sweetness. Clap-clap-clap.

**2013 Binger Scharlachberg Riesling Spätlese** +  
**SOS : 2**

GKF-200

**CORE-LIST WINE.** Exotic, baroque, lavish and complete, a very ornamented building with snow on its roof. All freesia and mango and white chocolate; sweet yes but not grotesquely so.

**2013 Münsterer Dautenpflänzer Riesling Spätlese** + +  
**SOS : 2**

GKF-201

Everything a great lower-Nahe Riesling ought to be. Stature, exotic flavors, noble richness and layering of nuances, and an animate yin-yang between citric tang and gingery quince-like spice.

**2013 Scheurebe Spätlese** (+)  
**SOS : 2**

GKF-202

So discreet as to be almost hidden, and more a lovely tangy Riesling-variant than a full-throttle Scheu. Hints of grapefruit and sage augur perhaps a kinkier future. Or so one hopes.

**2013 Münsterer Dautenpflänzer Riesling Auslese Goldkapsel, 12/375ml** + +  
**SOS : 2**

GKF-203H

Hugely ripe with almost no botrytis, so an essence of tropical and incenses and potpourri, and so smoky it doesn't present as "sweet," but instead embodies the solemn greatness of the Auslese culture.

You don't buy such a wine by determining how you will "use" it. You buy it because it tastes astonishing, and because otherwise wines like this will die. You'll find a way to "use" it. Maybe, who knows, one fine day you'll just be in the mood for a miracle.

## Some Old Geezers

### **1994 Münsterer Dautenpflänzer Riesling Spätlese, 6/750ml**

GKF-121

**SOS : 2**

(about 30 cases of 6 can be had; a penetrating Jura-like gnarliness; laurel and balsam, verbenas; more like a tea than a wine, and still nowhere close to decadence.)

### **2004 Münsterer Dautenpflänzer Riesling Spätlese, 6/750ml**

GKF-095

**SOS : 2**

(40 cases of 6 now, of this ++ beauty; fresh, herbal, dry-ish, penetrating quality and not a ladybug pyrene in sight. Stiff as a cool green wind.)

### **2003 Münsterer Dautenpflänzer Riesling Spätlese, 6/750ml**

GKF-083

**SOS : 2**

(40 cases of 6. The best '03 started out resplendent and have only grown more majestic. This ++(+) wine is entirely euphoric, all the greatness of the vintage at its noblest. See what a true classic tastes like—and one that's barely sweet at all.)



# Schlossgut Diel

Nahe // Burg Layen

vineyard area // 22 hectares  
annual production // 12,500 cases  
top sites & soil types // Pittermännchen (slate); Goldloch (gravel);  
Burgberg (quartzite)  
grape varieties // 70% Riesling, 25% Pinot Noir, Pinot Gris and Pinot Blanc



*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 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.

**Schlossgut Diel at a glance** // Elite blue-chip estate on the lower Nahe, producing scintillating terroir-driven rieslings ranging from tingly slatey to baroque. Attentive viticulture and intelligent craftsmanship in the cellar make this one of Germany's leading estates.

The Rieslings hail most importantly from a trio of contiguous Grand Crus: **Goldloch** on thin loam and gravel over a rocky subsoil, **Burgberg** on quartzite, and **Pittermännchen** on Hunsrück slate. “The age of the vines are similar in the three sites, the microclimates are similar in the three sites, only a few meters separate them from one another, yet they are entirely different based on terroir,” says Armin.

I found it endearing that Caroline was a little camera-shy when we filmed her. It was a sweet glimpse below the family’s customary aplomb. This was reinforced by having dinner at Caroline and Sylvain’s home, because you can’t really *do* aplomb with three little kids in the house. (Then you do something infinitely sweeter than aplomb, especially with children as bonny as these.) That sense of being put-together extends to the wines, which are sophisticated and aristocratic and engineered with exquisite craft and intelligence. They’re also consistently

delicious, the way a BMW is consistently marvelous to drive. They take the aesthetics of tastiness about as far as such things can go, and the grateful drinker is duly admiring. And if this sounds like I’m damning with faint praise, I’m not. It’s fun to be with such wines, where the trouser-crease is impeccable and the pocket-hankie is folded just so, and the shoes are gleaming. They make it all look easy, they taste so good—and of course it’s anything but easy, and we don’t see the sweat and toil behind the bottles. We only drink the wine.

As a general rule I wouldn’t mind seeing the whole collection of Rieslings melt a bit toward some aesthetic center, whereby the sweet wines were somewhat less sweet and a few of the dry wines weren’t quite so fastidiously *dry*. This would make them more fun, in my view. And you can do it without compromising a scintilla of intelligence or craftsmanship, but just by inviting sensuality to the gathering.

## 2013 Rosé de Diel

GSD-149

**SOS : 1**

I saw this a day after it was filtered, so it was a little stripped, but showed some rose-hips and rhubarb and clean dewy fruit. Vinosity will return, and class is present in spades.

## 2012 Pinot Noir “Cuvée Caroline,” 6/750ml

GSD-150

**SOS : 0**

“We make sure to pick no riper than 95° Oechsle, because otherwise you get these marmalade flavors,” says Caroline. Normally their PNs are “elegant” and restrained, but this one’s as dark as a Jacques Prieur Burgundy, and the attack is markedly tannic; the wine’s more concentrated (if also less suave) than usual. However, a power-pack of “sweet” fruit is also evident, and it may just need time.

## 2013 Riesling Trocken “Nahestein,” 6/750ml

GSD-151

**SOS : 0**

Fervid aromas of hay, brassicas, celery, Sencha and herbs; the palate is brisk and super-clear; oxygen plumps it out and a rich spiciness emerges. This wine I think will surprise me.

## 2013 Dorsheim Riesling Trocken, 6/750ml (+)

GSD-152

**SOS : 0**

This “village-wine” shows remarkably minerality, more than it’s ever displayed, and there’s a dark-plum-like fruit, esoteric orchid-y florals; sheer but not light; lime juice strained through an entire quarry of crushed rocks; serious but not solemn, and markedly long; a wire-rimmed high-cheekboned Riesling but neither sinewy nor stringy.

## 2013 Pittermännchen Riesling Grosses Gewächs, 6/750ml ++

GSD-153

**SOS : 0**

Armin always fusses that I’m there too early to taste these top Rieslings, but for some unlikely reason the normally-reticent ’13s were more precocious. This is superbly pretty—Diel at their best; the wonderful fruit and the crisp diction and the sense of constant motion from fragrance to finish and the thread-the-needle precision; a doctoral these of terroir without floating into ethereal abstraction, this is a long winding river of shimmering beauty.

**2013 Goldloch Riesling Grosses Gewächs, 6/750ml + (+)**

GSD-154

**SOS : 0**

This is a mountain of mineral, a study in mineral, a TV mini-series of mineral; it's like sipping apricot schnapps during a rockslide that buries you up to the tonsils. Serious Business here.

**2013 Burgberg Riesling Grosses Gewächs, 6/750ml +**

GSD-155

**SOS : 0**

This is as mineral as Goldloch but not as massive and more delineated and filigree; smoky char, arugula and mizuna; it's the least dry of the trio but tastes driest. The opposite of seductive; this is professorial, pedagogical.

**2013 Riesling Kabinett +**

GSD-156

**SOS : 1**

Racy and vibrating with vigor; it works almost Feinherb and is true (modern) Kabinett, with high-80s must-weight. It's *green* (herbs, tea, forest) and the acids are prominent, but if you like taut snappy wines, here's your boy.

**2013 Dorsheimer Goldloch Riesling Kabinett, 6/750ml + +**

GSD-157

**SOS : 1**

We are nearing profundity now, and yes with just a "mere" Kabinett; malt, orange oil, nutmeg, dried apricot and ston-n-es; stunning density, so much that it seems nearly dry; stubborn length; one of the few greatest wines of the vintage.

**2013 Dorsheimer Goldloch Riesling Spätlese, 6/750ml +**

GSD-158

**SOS : 2**

Here it's pure fruit that's front and center. Rare for 2013!

**2013 Dorsheimer Goldloch Riesling Auslese, 6/750ml**

GSD-159

**SOS : 2**

Further into dried apricot, but solid, malty and salty; I'm betting on its powerful "lower-body strength," that is, its center of gravity is low to the ground. But the truth of this wine will be written not in years, but decades.



# Rheingau

*Eventually, in the business and marketing curriculum at some wine university or other, we'll see a course called "How To Squander An Impeccable Reputation," and the subject of study will be the Rheingau.*



30 years ago the Rheingau and Mosel were considered the two great classic Riesling regions. Pfalz and Rheinhessen were outliers, and no one knew from Nahe. But the Rheingau rested on its laurels, and quality began to slip. This was obscured by its ready local clientele, as the region sits astride a little megalopolis of three cities (Frankfurt, Mainz and Wiesbaden) and everyone can get there within thirty minutes – can and did. Alas, most of those customers seem to have been content with any-old wine as long as it came with an imprimatur—the Germans love those.

These days one hears an equal number of tales of great “name” estates still making mediocre wine from supernal land as well as lordly estates who seem to be fitfully improving. One also hears of former names going under, which is sad. What one doesn’t hear is any stories of an ambitious young generation determined to make the most from the great vineyards they were endowed with. This is even sadder. And when I taste the splendid wines of my two suppliers I have profoundly mixed emotions, grateful for them and despondent at how few of them there are.

But when men like Spreitzer and Künstler show a vintage, it offers an itchy tantalizing glimpse of the Rheingau’s real potential. And then you remember what a uniquely blessed piece of earth this is.

In a space one can traverse by car in fifteen minutes, the Riesling grape gives ten or fifteen distinct and different expressions of its best, noblest self. Obviously I love the Nahe and the Mosel, but the truth is there’s no equivalent-sized area in either region whose wines

are as fascinatingly different from one another’s as Rauenthal’s are from Winkel’s, as Erbach’s are from Hallgarten’s—all of them. Taste any of these as they should be, and you’ll see Riesling at its most—it must be said—aristocratic; its most refined and impeccable. The “classic” wine of the Rheingau can possibly best be defined by what it is not: not as lavish or exotic as Pfalz wine, not as easy and fruity as Rheinhessen wine, not as delicate and tangy as Nahe wine. It is firm, contained, dignified; it is amiable, certainly, but it’s not eager to please.

As such I begin to suspect that the old preeminence of Rheingau Riesling was a product of a very different time than the present. The virtues of its wines are such as to be admired by educated ladies and gentlemen in an age of leisure. They are wines for “experts” who taste attentively. No dripping wet rock & roll hyper-erotic sybarites need apply. Ah but I overstate. Still, do words like polished, impeccable, aristocratic sell any wines these days? Now that so many Bordeaux have abandoned such virtues in favor of inky sweet fruit-blasts that get them big scores? I wonder. Hugh Johnson writes that he’s less interested in wines that MAKE STATEMENTS than in wines which ask questions. But I fear the problem is even more pernicious. So many wines shriek at us like Discount-Louie the cheapest guy in town!—that a wine content to merely make a “statement” seems almost bashful.

I do have faith that a small market will endure for mystically intricate wines. And I’m quite sure there will always be a clamor for big-ass bruisers. But what of the ones in the middle?

vineyard area // 17 hectares  
annual production // 8,500 cases  
top sites // Oestricher Lenchen and Doosberg, Winkeler Jesuitengarten, Hattenheimer Wisselbrunnen  
soil types // deep tertiary loam and loess  
grape varieties // 96% Riesling, 4% Spätburgunder



*I wrote myself a note in my tasting book. “It’s getting to the point the wines are the wines – why grope for associations year after year?” The blank page glowers at you, and you feel compelled to write “apples, violets, crawdads moldering on a humid pier...” And then you see you wrote the same thing a year ago. I guess you could do the tasted twice, consistent notes trope, but that always seemed pompous to me.*

I mean, this is a good thing; it shows how consistent the wines are, and in the Rheingau this is no small matter. The list of estates one can rely on is not exactly huge.

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 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.

Spreitzer’s wines certainly speak in the prevailing “syntax” of the times: crystalline, refined, perfumey and polished. These are Rheingau wines as Diel might make them. Andreas and Bernd’s wines are, in the best sense, fashionable, spiffy, well turned-out. Thankfully the two of *them* are plenty unpretentious.

The wines do require a certain understanding, because they are never fined and they often show reduced aromas. As always these vanish with swirling, if you remember to swirl, and have the time to wait.

And speaking of waiting, there’s a point I need to

emphasize. The moment of the point-of-sale when I’m showing and you’re tasting these wines is the least favorable moment to be tasting them—in terms of the wines’ own development. It doesn’t take long to see this – a year in bottle, maybe two. Then the wines are gleaming and radiant, beautifully balanced and splendidly pretty—or handsome in some cases. But in their very early stage they can show either pungently reduced or else unknit, a sense that fruit and acidity are in separate rooms with a wall between them.

Any grower can form or fashion his wines to be immediately presentable. Nor is this morally wrong. Pragmatically speaking, wine needs to be sold, and it’s entirely justifiable to have it be presentable as its being sold. And that being said, I reserve my utmost admiration for those producers who execute a vision whereby their wines are perhaps ornery at first, but splendid later. After all, if you accept the youthful turbulence of J.J. Prüm’s wines, or Nik Weis’ wines, or Erni Loosen’s wines, you can easily manage the same phenomenon in Andy Spreitzer’s wines. *Because the rewards are equivalent.*

There are very good reasons for the consensus among Germany’s critical community that Spreitzer is near the very top of his region.

**Spreitzer at a glance** // Finely fruity wines in the modern idiom, with polish and class, at reasonable prices, from a young vintner with many years of greatness in store.

**2013 Oestricher Doosberg Riesling Kabinett Trocken**

GSP-093

**SOS : 0**

A *sponti* done in large cask; fragrances of lilac and iris; dry but gentle and complex; still cerebral but lots of pleasant musings in its flowery lime oil and green-tea articulations. I'm drinking a pot of *Wen-shang Bao-Jhong* as I write, and the limpid deliberate crawl of exquisite flavor is analogous to this wine.

**2013 Rosengarten Riesling Grosses Gewächs, 6/750ml**

GSP-094

**2013 Wisselbrunnen Riesling Grosses Gewächs, 6/750ml**

GSP-095

**SOS : 0**

Two bits of news: one, the Rosengarten is now officially a GG—up till now the designation was approved pending the final decision. And two, it's now "GG" everywhere (instead of "Erstes Gewächs" in the Rheingau alone).

It would be hard to imagine two more opposite wines. Rosengarten is all about fruit and yumminess. Even in '13, though it's angular out of the gate, the finish is suave and juicy, and the whole thing's like a herb-and-fruit smoothie. Wisselbrunnen is almost anti-fruit, more about nut-husk and toasted grains and quinoa; it's firm, in control and sure of itself, and shows the greater complexity. But Rosengarten is more adorable.

**2013 Winkeler Jesuitengarten Riesling Kabinett Halbtrocken +**

GSP-096

**SOS : 0 | SOMMELIER ALERT!**

OK, yes, that's a long name. I know. But every word *tells*. It's the Garden-of-the-Jesuits, in the commune of Winkel, a Riesling, unchaptalized, picked at a certain must-weight, RS between 10 and 18 g/l.

Another classic example of my little bromide: the perfect dry Riesling is often not perfectly dry. Classic site aromas (lavender and violets and something earthy yet firm); again studious but it sneaks up on you with a walnutty balsam shady savor.

**2013 Riesling "101" +**

GSP-097

**SOS : 1 | SOMMELIER ALERT!**

**CORE-LIST WINE.** And oh yeah! Utterly limey and spearminty and addictively drinkable; not sweet, just fun, like the first moment when the buzz hits you. Open, pour, taste—you'll see.

**2013 Oestricher Lenchen Riesling Kabinett**

GSP-098

**SOS : 2**

**CORE-LIST WINE.** And now the drier regime is firmly established; more mirabelle and tart-apple and herbal snap; even (in '13) green tea and sweet peas.

**2013 Winkeler Jesuitengarten Riesling Spätlese (+)**

GSP-099

**SOS : 2**

This was so infantile I couldn't really note it. But it's marked by its customary dense solidity, and its acids are mitigated by the bright green leafiness of '13.

**2013 Oestricher Lenchen Riesling Spätlese "303," 6/750ml**

GSP-100

**SOS : 2**

From a sub-parcel called Eisenberg (iron-hill) from which a TBA was picked in 1921 which had the then-record must-weight of 303 Oechsle. Though botrytis often shows in the wine's youth, it dissolves over time to take its place as part of a Rheingau classic. And this is classical, as anyone would concur tasting through the vintages. A curator of Great Spätlese could easily run a vertical of a wine like this, yet I suspect we don't give it its due.

I can't give a note for the new vintage as it still showed fermentation aromas when I visited. A pity!



vineyard area // 37 hectares

top sites & soil types // Domdechane (calcareous clay marl with pebbles from the river Main); Kirchenstück (heavy limestone with loamy loess); Hölle (heavy clay with limestone sediment); Herrnberg (limestone debris with layers of sand);

Rüdesheimer Berg Rottland (Tanus quartzite and loess)

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



*We spent a lot of last winter drinking Künstler's wines. There were two cases of samples. I hadn't had them regularly for a long time, maybe even since I first worked with him from '86-'90. Sporadic encounters don't count.*

Even "tasting" doesn't really count, as I've often said. I want to drink the wines the way *you'll* drink them; I want to see if the last sip tastes as good as the first—or better—and I want to think those tertiary thoughts, the ones that go below the surface.

I also wanted to see if I was compelled. I had two other Rheingau suppliers at the time, and if I added another it couldn't be redundant or create awkward internal competition. When I was younger I'd just grab what was there to be grabbed, for reasons of ego. No more.

We loved the wines, honestly. I challenged myself; maybe I was loving them too much. Maybe they were too easy to love. Or maybe I was just being silly. Yeah, probably that.

Gunter Künstler's wines are amazingly tasty. He's a smart vintner. Those of you who've been working with his wines for years now probably know more about them than I do. Plus I had to scramble a bit to get this decision made in time for the new catalogue, so Gunter and I have yet to have a walk in the woods or a long airplane ride to really tuck in. My notes are also sketchy, which you probably won't mind...

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 Domdechane, 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.

The feeling-tone for me as a drinker was one of kindness and affection. I felt that the wines meant to keep

**Künstler at a glance** // Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipisicing elit, sed do eiusmod tempor incididunt ut labore et dolore magna aliqua. Ut enim ad minim veniam, quis nostrud exercitation ullamco laboris nisi ut aliquip ex ea commodo consequat.

me warm company. They were considerate. Easy to be with. As a “professional taster” they convey an aristocratic sheen, and are highly expressive of their vineyards. They age superbly—which happily, I can demonstrate to you.

Apropos “unruly,” this offering is somewhat sprawling, largely because I had several vintages to work with and also because there were *so many* good wines.

Gunter may also be surprised by my emphasis on his dry wines; too many people have me pegged as the sweet-wine guy even now. But what I actually am is an empiricist, and at this address it was clear that the dry wines simply had more *lebenskraft*, *elan-vital*, *mojo*.

I’ll try to give some shape to this happy mess!

## Basic Core Wines

(Some will likely become actual Core-list wines, but call this the platform category.)

### 2013 Estate Riesling Trocken

GKU-001

**SOS : 0 | SOMMELIER ALERT!**

**CORE-LIST WINE.** A superbly conceived and crafted wine, which is a fancy-pants way of saying it’s farking delicious. Very bright, insanely tasty, full of perfume, gently earthy, gentlemanly and reassuring.

### 2012 Rudesheimer Riesling Trocken +

GKU-007

**SOS : 0 | SOMMELIER ALERT!**

This was flinty and exciting. I need to learn more about it. What was the blend of sites? It was stony, fennely, a classic “Taunus” style Riesling.

### 2012 Hochheimer Kirchenstück Riesling Kabinett Trocken +

GKU-002

**SOS : 0**

A value-wine from a great terroir; classic Hochheim fragrance, smoke and roasted root-veggies; tangy minerality; pleasing corners but no sharp angles.

### 2013 Rudesheimer Drachenstein Riesling Kabinett Trocken

GKU-008

**SOS : 0**

Normally done in steel but the more *strict* ’13 was done in cask; it’s delicious, minty and juicy; fun, glinting with diamond-shine.

### 2011 Hochheimer Reichesthal Riesling Kabinett

GKU-006

**SOS : 2**

Sand and gravel, loess and loess-loam over a bed of tertiary marl. I picked the 2011 because it was the most attractive available vintage to *drink* now; it’s grainy as ’11s are proving to be; apples and sweet hay, Ceylon tea, and while it’s not as complex as the dry wines, it fulfills its destiny with elegance and grace.

## Important Terroir Wines, Dry

### 2013 Hochheimer Hölle Riesling Kabinett Trocken

GKU-003

**SOS : 0**

Even more marl gives a fuller-bodied wine without quite the mineral twang of Kirchenstück but more enveloping and fuller-bodied. This ’13 is salty and tastes like a vapor of dried apricot. For me it’s a more cold-weather Riesling, but I couldn’t say why.

**2012 Rudesheimer Bischofsberg Riesling Trocken "Alte Reben" +**  
**SOS : 0 | SOMMELIER ALERT!**

GKU-009

It was when I opened this wine that I first started to think "I may not be able to say no to these..." It's a charcuterie cloud-party, just an amazingly interesting and tasty wine, a little funky iris. *I'd buy this one if I were only buying one.*

**2013 Hochheimer Domdechaney Riesling Trocken +**  
**SOS : 0**

GKU-010

Intricate aromas, almost Pfalz-like. The palate is shimmering with an almost manic interplay among smoke, mint and stones; it isn't severe but it is strict. Still, '13s are jittery at this point in their lives, and this Grand Cru usually has the gravitas to carry the day.

## Grosses Gewächs

**2011 Hochheimer Kirchenstück Riesling Trocken Grosses Gewächs + +**  
**SOS : 0**

GKU-004

Again I opted for the best vintage to drink today, and this is near to a masterpiece, an amazingly expressive Riesling showing allspice, mineral and salts. Proud and spicy.

**2012 Rudesheimer Berg Rottland Riesling Trocken "Grosses Gewächs," 6/750ml + +**  
**SOS : 0**

GKU-012

Stunning, massive, powerful and brooding; huge minerality made me think of *Klaus* or *Achleiten* (and I'd love drinking it next to a Prager wine); the wine is truly profound, and having it cheek-by-jowl with the Hochheimer is a alpha-omega journey across the Rheingau.

## Two Wonderful Mature Vintages

**2002 Hochheimer Hölle Riesling Spätlese Trocken + +**  
**SOS : 1 | SOMMELIER ALERT!**

GKU-005

There's no doubt any more than '02 was better than '01 in the Rheingau, and this is an absolutely *perfect* medium-mature dry Riesling you can drink day and night and day.

**1997 Hölle Riesling Spätlese Charta (Feinherb) + +**  
**SOS : 0**

GKU-011

Notes getting sketchy by this point. "Grilled veggie, quince, grain, porcini powder" is the extent of my scribble.

## Other Wines We May Eventually Also See

There's old-vine bottlings from a site called Stielweg, a curious wine from a limestony vineyard in Kostheim called Weiß Erd, another couple of Rudesheimers (Roseneck, Klosterlay) plus **reds** of some renown (with prices to match), a rosé that was ravishing in 2012, and even a well-behaved Sauvignon Blanc. There are other sweet or sweet-ish Rieslings, but the offering is so resplendent with gorgeous dry wines that I'd like the sweet Rieslings to overcome my resistance!

I *try* to be tidy, I pwomise.



# Mittelrhein

*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...



# Florian Weingart

Mittelrhein // Spay

vineyard area // 6.5 hectares

annual production // 3,300 cases

top sites & 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



*He really was the hero in the film. Or so I thought. Beard a wagging, he had the most trenchant insightful things to say, and in the last couple vintages he's been backing it up with some of the loveliest wines in this offering.*



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.

"I'll be 40 this year," he says. "Time to become what you're going to be."

Second, he's been bucking the dry-wine trend lately, and making wines he feels to be better balanced. There's still a few Trockens in the offering—as there should be—and they take their place with wines of other styles. Not for him the "totalitarianism of taste" he wrote to me about.

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**Florian Weingart at a glance** // A risen star on the Mittelrhein with the advent of young Florian Weingart at the helm. Still-good value for in-your-face fruity-minerally steep-slope wine.

His assortment of wines is perfect, unconstrained by the prevailing asswad ideology, instead spreading itself neatly over an ecumenical range of styles—just what Riesling was destined to do before the Trocken Stasi put it in a choke-hold.

The Bopparder Hamm is one of the few due-south exposures in the Mittelrhein, and one of the few hillsides with almost no abandoned vineyards. Boppard and its neighbor Spay are an isolated warren of activity in a region that's grown ominously sleepy. The sites are slatey of course, but there's also a residue from the volcanic activity of the Eifel hills to the north, which imparts a certain ripe tropical note.

And there's an overlay of loess in certain vineyards, giving its usual sweet-grainy charm.

If you don't know about this soil, you should; it's extremely important in northern Europe, as a soil for

Riesling and in Austria saliently for Grüner Veltliner. Quoting from the helpful website *terroir-hessen*, loess is “[an] ice age dust found in vineyard soils. Storm winds winnowed the fine dust particles from gravel beds deposited by wide rivers. The dust dropped out of the wind in shielded locations accumulating to thick loess beds. Loess mostly consists of silt particles (diameter 0.02 to 0.0063 mm) and contains quartz, feldspar, mica, various clay minerals and a lot of calcium carbonate. Iron oxides give the loess its yellow brown colour.”

So while Weingart's wines are steep-slope wines, from vineyards that *look* as though they should give Mosel-like bottlings, in fact they are more like a hybrid of Mosel and the northern Pfalz, as if the Pfalz wine had been hitting the gym.

And there are *no wines* in this offering that are more useful and tasty at the table. NONE!

## 2012 Spay Spätburgunder Spätlese Trocken

GAW-117

**SOS : 0**

What strange thing am I doing now? Pinot Noir from the Mittelrhein? Well yes, if it tastes this good! Just a wonderfully pretty northern European PN; strawberry—every berry really. It made me think of Margaine's PN *vin Claire* that was so delicious I wanted to make off with the bottle under my jacket. With air it starts to recall Pernand or even Volnay. This may seem expensive, but it delivers the goods.

## 2013 Bopparder Hamm Ohlenberg Riesling Spätlese Trocken +

GAW-118

**SOS : 1 | SOMMELIER ALERT!**

The most impressive among a generally successful range of Trockens. Ohlenberg is destined to make good dry Riesling, it's full bodied and has “darker” flavors, and this one has the typical aromas of plum, pink peppercorns and allspice; the palate is lively even at room temperature (the way we tasted the whole range), with just *delicious* fruit and a sort of fennel-frond and balsam nuance, carrying a delicate minerality.

## 2013 Spay Riesling Kabinett Feinherb +

GAW-119

**SOS : 1 | SOMMELIER ALERT!**

**HARD-CORE LIST WINE.** Had a bit of *sponti* reduction to lose, but behind it are lovely loess-y aromas of wet cereal, sweet hay and hedge-flowers; animated push-pull between green crispness and ripe yellow fruit, and charm like a giddy madness.

## 2013 Bopparder Hamm Engelstein Riesling Spätlese Feinherb +

GAW-120

**SOS : 1 | SOMMELIER ALERT!**

Yup, that's a lot of words. My mnemonic might be “Engelstein? He spat fine.” But that's just me.

The wine shows that loess-y sweetness again. In the olden days, the best wines from Lingenfelder were a bit like this, though this is zippier and more mirabelle-y, and acidity certainly does show, but basically this is a genius of Riesling, bouncing manically off walls of stone-fruit, berries, stone and mineral, green tea, orchids... and we have the privilege of taking such things for granted! Like “Oh yeah, that's a Riesling,” without pausing to consider the miracle that something like it exists at all.

## 2013 Bopparder Hamm Engelstein Riesling Kabinett (+)

GAW-121

**SOS : 2**

Ultra *sponti*! Could pass for a Loewen Spätlese, with all the chocolate-y soulfulness that implies. It has some acidity to reconcile, as many '13s do. I often drink these wines years later and think “Why was I so cool??”



# 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 slaty 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. Hand-labor 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

Mosel // Zeltingen



vineyard area // 21 hectares  
annual production // 13,300 cases  
top sites & soil types // Zeltinger Himmelreich, Schlossberg and Sonnenuhr;  
Wehlener Sonnenuhr; Graacher Himmelreich and Domprobst; Bernkasteler  
Badstube (All blue devonian slate. In Graach with a layer of loam underneath)  
grape varieties // 98.5% Riesling, 1.5% Pinot Blanc

*Johannes asked me, for the first time I think I can ever remember, “How were they?” when we finished tasting his 2013s.*

It had been a struggle at harvest, and the wines were surprisingly reticent everywhere, and the Mosel took it on the chin this year, and I was touched to think that he and his fellow growers drove themselves half-mad with all the issues and risks of the picking, and many of the wines were still grinding their teeth, and here I was, having tasted around and finally arriving at Selbach, and the question wasn't really “How were they?” but rather—“Was it worth it?”.

Of that there is no doubt. The vintage at Selbach-Oster is at least very good, often exceptionally good, and sometimes excellent. And they taste like '13s, for which I thank them and him. I wonder whether it's wise to resist a vintage, to try and wrestle it into a shape you've decided upon *a priori*. Willi Bründlmayer taught me that, saying “If its name is on the bottle then its taste should be in the bottle.” Let me amplify this point. Selbach didn't make one of the *en-bloc* wines in 2013, as the Rotlay just wasn't suitable to be picked that way. This wine has become an “item” for them, and many other producers would have made it no matter what, and “cleaned it up in the winery”. You're naïve if you think otherwise. But to have done so would have obviated the very principle Johannes is expressing: that such block-picking is perhaps the truest way to *express terroir*. And so it wasn't made, and I send him all the melancholy rueful kudos I can send. I'll miss the wine but the integrity is stirring and irreplaceable.

Johannes Selbach is exceptionally intelligent, which gives him perspective and cool nerves, and exceptionally intuitive, which points him, always, in the direction of expressiveness and honesty. The *segment* of 2013 I was shown—many wines were still fermenting or otherwise unready—was impressive, but even more impressive was the development of the 2012s. This vintage, for this

producer, is great. “Great”—a word I almost never use because it's so easy to squander, is the only possible word to use here.

If you're new to this estate, or even this entire idiom, I will emphasize what makes Selbach-Oster unique. For they are. It can sound facile to say they make Mosel “classics,” yet they do, and it isn't facile, because not many people do it. Oh sure, lots of estates make *their* types of Mosel classics, but Selbach makes the kinds of wines you'd send out into space to show folks on other planets what this kind of wine tasted like, un-impinged upon by someone's need to write their *signature* in bold script.

The wines aren't neutral; they are respectful and intelligent. They are flexible and pragmatic, they aren't burdened with any ideology but are willing to adopt whatever works in the particular circumstances of particular wines. They are often keenly expressive yet they are always actual beverages for human beings to drink and to use in our lives, not specimens of adorableness by which “high scores” are obtained.

Three things have to be present: Intelligence, memory and desire. Intelligence to steer a sensible way through all the noise about how-wines-are-made, the incoherent dialectic in which the strongest opinions are held by the dumbest people. Memory, to hold in your soul the vision of Mosel-Riesling as a being of a special nature, a beacon of meaning toward which you steer. And desire, to get there, because even if you are already there, even if all you have to do is *get out of the way*, it never feels like you've arrived, it always feels like you're traveling.

“We don't do all casks or all stainless steel; we don't do all cultured yeasts or all *spontis*,” he says. “We do some of each, so that we can respond to the fruit during the crush, and also blend afterwards if it seems to suit the wines.”

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**Selbach-Oster at a glance** // A large estate by Mosel standards means many wines to choose from. The ambitiousness of Johannes Selbach has made this estate the region's most prominent rising star. Since 1989, always among the very best wines in this collection.

This may seem like heresy to certain kinds of people who like to make religions out of cellar practices. Can't the feckless man *take a stand*?? But you see, he has. He's taken the wisest stand, the only sustainable stand. Take the best from all methods and approaches. Listen to what the fruit asks for. Tilt as needed. Flexibility and pragmatism are not excuses for lack of principle; they are principles.

We were a group in the little parlor Selbachs still use as a tasting room. We had gotten up to the *en-bloc* trio of Anrecht, Rotlay and Schmitt. Johannes was asked where the idea had come from.

This is the spirit of what he said.

*When I arrived at the estate I was convinced all this talk about terroir was mumbo-jumbo. What mattered most was how you made the wines. Well after about two years I had no choice but to change my mind, just by tasting the juice. We were doing the same things in all the vineyards but the wines were simply different, and there was no other way to explain it.*

*Then I wanted to push the wines forward a little. Everyone was pushing more and more ripeness, lowering yields and harvesting selectively, and we started doing that too. We still were making relatively moderate wines for the table, not the fruit bombs that some of our colleagues offered, but I certainly got seduced by the idea of micro-picking for 2-star and 3-star lots. My father went along.*

*After a while I remember he said to me, it's a little silly to talk about "terroir" when you're going out into the vineyard three times to select what aspect of terroir you're going to push forward. It's like picking two or three voices out of the chorus and saying "Now you three shout." What you want is for the entire chorus to sing. He went on to say that in his day a grower waited as long as he possibly could, taking all the risks that this entailed, and then picked the whole vineyard in one pass. The botrytis grapes, the shriveled dry ones, the golden ones and also the green ones. And then you really saw what that vineyard gave in that vintage, the whole picture, the real terroir.*

*So I thought yes, we could try that. And Papa and I discussed it and we thought we'd try it with one of our best parcels, a part of the Schlossberg originally called Schmitt. The first vintage we did it was 2003. The wine was an Auslese, though now we don't use the Prädikat names any more. As soon as we tasted it we knew we had something. It was alive, multifaceted.*

*So we added the Rotlay to the program with the*

*2004 vintage, and a couple years ago we started with Anrecht. And I came to see that Papa had been right; you can't respect the vineyard if you're trying to manipulate the vineyard. He brought me around to seeing what terroir really could mean. I owe this all to him...*

*... And you know, the last wine he ever drank, the day before he passed, was that 2003 Schmitt... I'm sorry, men aren't supposed to cry...*

What Johannes is doing here is closest to the very soul of what I hope to do with my working life among these people and their wines. It seems simple. It's an ongoing search for authenticity. And in these beautiful wines there's an existential and spiritual reality that can't be reduced away. The truth of a vintage is in them. The truth of a vineyard is in them. The courage and love of a vintner is in them. They are all of the things that true wine can be.

I spend the best part of a whole day tasting Johannes' vintage. Not only because there are a lot of wines – and variations of many – but because I find it important to taste these with nowhere else I have to go. There is something in them that builds, which you don't find if you're in a hurry. They take you inexorably toward wordlessness. The more you know, the less there is to say, or that needs to be said.

Often I go through the membrane into a mystic zone when tasting at Selbach. The wines consolidate into a great chord of beauty, and they do so in an especially allusive way; they crawl in your windows while you're running to get the door. Selbach's wines aren't like books of poems, where you can dip in here and there or dog-ear your favorites; they're more like novels, where you can certainly indicate passages you like especially, but where you can't just start reading any old where. Any given vintage is a whole story of which individual wines are scenes or sometimes chapters.

Giving shape to an offering this large is a challenge. But this time at least it was made easier by a happy discovery. **2012 is a great vintage at this estate**, the best since 2005, which may be the single best-ever vintage I've tasted at any winery, ever. 2007 came close, but '12 is astonishing, and so I will highlight it by repeating *every* wine I still could get, and adding a couple I either didn't taste a year ago, or tasted with my stupid-palate and underrated.

If you remember 2005, '12 is perhaps its fraternal twin. The vintages share a weight, or rather a weightlessness within which resides an astonishing concentration. '12 might be a little creamier, '05 might have more (noble) botrytis, but both vintages convey the numinous force that stops you, that says something crucial is taking place. One thing is different though: 2012 is certainly the better vintage for *dry* and *Feinherb* wines. So, one last chance and then they're gone. We've sold a bunch already. This is Mosel at an ecstatic pitch of expression but never seeming *contrived*, only soulful and honest and vinous and haunting.





## A Look at the Vineyards

**BERNKASTELER BADSTUBE** is a small Grosslage; the component single-sites are distinct from one another, but one can organize them thus: LAY stands alone. DOKTOR-GRABEN (at least the good parts of Graben!) stand together, and MATHEISBILDCHEN-BRATENHÖFCHEN stand together, and give us what we see now; heavier understructure, not quite as tensile, due to richer soil, and signature flavors of kirsch and almost Pouilly-Fumé flint; the piquant exotics of the Mosel. Typically, they are medium in body.

**ZELTINGER SCHLOSSBERG** is mineral to the MAX! I think it's time to give this vineyard its due: it's a great Grand Cru site, fully deserving the status of a Wehlener Sonnenuhr or Erdener Prälat. The pity is most of it is worked by the small growers of Zeltingen, among whom standards aren't particularly high. Flavors are a *borealis* of slate, buttressed by lime and grassy aspects. Mosel-apple is present but discreet. Medium bodied. If you love Mosels for their cussed Moselness, grab these wines and hang on for dear life!

**WEHLENER SONNENUHR** is like Zeltinger Sonnenuhr feminized, slimmed down, and refined. If Zeltinger Sonnenuhr is oaken, Wehlener Sonnenuhr is willowy. It can show a ravishing elegance. Butter-vanilla, very delicate slate and equally delicate apple, now with a slightly herbal tertiary flavor. I would say light-to-medium body, but the beauty in these wines resides in class and actual flavor, and not in size or fullness.

**GRAACHER DOMPROBST:** I doubt there's a better site on the "great ramp" (as Hugh Johnson terms it) between Bernkastel and Zeltingen. Domprobst is invariably starched and magnificent; its flavors are always standing at attention. It has a particularly emphatic slate statement, with nuances of pistachio or pecan, cassis and quince. Medium-bodied, high-bred and snappy, coltish and itchy to take off full-gallop.

**ZELTINGER SONNENUHR** is the Premier Grand Cru. Basically All Of The Above; slate, lime, apple, butter-vanilla, rich, almost chewy earthiness, great depth. Some parcels are prized by locals as the best sites in the entire Bernkastel-Zeltingen ramp—DOKTOR notwithstanding! These wines are fullbodied. Selbachs are now the primo owners in this great site and have inaugurated an era of selective harvesting and a quality potential such as we have never before seen.

## The Great Selbach-Oster 2012 Vintage

**2012 Zeltinger Schlossberg Riesling Spätlese Trocken +**  
**SOS : 1 | SOMMELIER ALERT!**

GSO-421

A fetching, polished aroma leads to a wonderfully herbal-fruity palate and a clear long incisive finish. A beautifully balanced charming wine that happens to be dry, and an object-lesson to others: this is how to do it right.

**2012 Zeltinger Schlossberg Riesling Spätlese\* Trocken +**  
**SOS : 0**

GSO-422

The wine is now more solid, with broader shoulders, more grounded in mineral and *sous-bois*, but every bit as impressive; even more herbal (balsam, woodruff) and less apple-y; more intensity, power and sternness. While I'm not convinced that every "GG" has to be Serious Business, *this* wine delivers.

**2012 Zeltinger Sonnenuhr Riesling Spätlese Trocken +**  
**SOS : 0**

GSO-423

What? THREE dry wines? Well chua, when they're *this* good. All barrel this time, including one new one. As Sonnenuhr does, it's more warm and buttery, more vetiver and less balsam; a bit of ginger and a really seductive glow of fruit without pandering and gushing. A drier snap on the finish here. I personally think these three wines would make a *killer* flight to pour by-the-glass, if you think you got the *cojones*.

**2012 Zeltinger Himmelreich Riesling Kabinett Halbtrocken +**  
**SOS : 1 | SOMMELIER ALERT!**

GSO-411

Much of this site isn't killing steep, and Selbachs have been farming it organically for a number of years, not to gain "cred" but because they wanted to see whether it *could* be done, and now that it can, they'll keep doing it.

This wine is also unfined, as are all the 2012s, and Johannes plans to discontinue fining for good. "If the wines don't need it, why do it?"

This wine has started to constitute a Franchise; it's been so stellar for so many years, and this is a superb vintage of this steady classic, as minty and pointed as always, peppermint and tarragon, but a thicker, denser body and greater mid-palate length. It seems drier than the Trockens. Likely the best vintage ever for this.

**2012 Graacher Domprobst Riesling Spätlese Feinherb "Alte Reben" + + (+)**  
**SOS : 1 | SOMMELIER ALERT!**

GSO-420

**HARD-CORE LIST WINE** and **first offering**. This wine fermented through the summer and is only recently in-bottle. It's a single Fuder and I bought about half, so do not hesitate to lay claim to some of this amazing masterpiece. Fuder-sponti dialect here but in the context of the crackery-nutty stiffness of the slate-cauldron that is Domprobst.

I wonder if this kind of wine points the way to a golden future for Mosel Riesling, splitting the difference between the gossamer-flowery style and the often-dour dry style. For I find a wine like this to be *perfect*. Riotously aromatic, classic site-expression, pistachio crispness but sponti-fuder creamy, deranged length and a salt-mineral mid-palate and finish; fantastically intricate texture, a great old/new school Riesling.

**2012 Zeltinger Sonnenuhr Riesling Spätlese Feinherb “Uralte Reben” + +**  
**SOS : 1 | SOMMELIER ALERT!**

GSO-424

“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.

At some point I realized I had a little family of wines like this. Loewen’s 1896, Adam’s *Feinherb*, Kerpen’s old-vines *Feinherb*, and this wine from Selbach. They constitute a fantastically beautiful brotherhood of Riesling, and a really smart buyer would have them all and highlight them as a group.

This one’s maybe the most atavistic of them all. I completely adore it, *because* it’s not especially polite. There’s something erotic and raunchy about it. There’s only a small amount left.

**2012 Selbach-Oster Riesling Spätlese**  
**SOS : 1 | SOMMELIER ALERT!**

GSO-408

The “basic” Spät is always on the dry side and mostly from Himmelreich plus sundry small parcels and bits. Often it’s quite classy, and it’s always easy-going and food-friendly. *We’ll ship 2013 when this one sells out.*

**2012 Zeltinger Schlossberg Riesling Spätlese + + (+)**  
**SOS : 2 | SOMMELIER ALERT!**

GSO-403

**CORE-LIST WINE.** That Schlossberg Kabinett was so astonishing in ’12 that the riper wine almost stood in its shadow. It only needed time. A lavish showing of all the complex herbal-slatey genius of this outstanding vineyard, a wonder of key-lime and toasted brioche.

**2012 Zeltinger Sonnenuhr Riesling Spätlese + + (+)**  
**SOS : 2**

GSO-454

*How* on earth did I miss this last year? I mean, I know how; I opted to offer the 1-star instead, and will offer it again below, but this wine is literally astonishing, amazingly herbal atop toasted brioche and wet cereal; a structural wonder, tugging and pulling between buttery and stony elements; we’re deep, deep into the land of the supernal here. There isn’t much and I reserved it all.

**2012 Graacher Domprobst Riesling Spätlese + +**  
**SOS : 1 | SOMMELIER ALERT!**

GSO-405

OK, another mea-culpa: I did intend to offer this and just dumbly forgot to put it in the catalogue text. Germans and their zillion different wines...

Anyway—*<sorry!>*—this is all steel, 50-50 sponti and cultured yeast, the RS just quivers at the edge of visibility; pine-wood and wintergreen and pistachio and fantastic salty relief, plus tart apple leading into a bewitching finish.

**2012 Zeltinger Sonnenuhr Riesling Spätlese\* + +**  
**SOS : 2**

GSO-414

With a slinky vein of botrytis now, yet it works deeper and with richer fruit—not exotic, only a whiff of malt or cinnamon, but infinite dreamy depth, a wine of deliberate ecstatic flow, endorphin fruit, liquid love.



**2012 Zeltinger Schlossberg Riesling Auslese\* + +**  
**SOS : 3**

GSO-427

Given that “Auslese” is (wrongly) considered useless, there’s ridiculous torque and force on this, and it’s one pointed undeflected jab of site-intensity; psychedelic green, long tall 7-foot high flavors; not at all a “sweet” wine, just assertive and strong, not voluptuous.

## The 2013 Vintage

**2013 Pinot Blanc Trocken**  
**SOS : 0**

GSO-441

**HARD-CORE LIST WINE.** I confess this wine amazed me. It comes from Wehlener Klosterberg, Zeltinger Himmelreich and (amazingly) Zeltinger Schlossberg. Some new *Fuder* are seasoned with this, including one double-Fuder, so that the Rieslings don’t taste woody. This was done with cultured yeast, one-third in tank. I can barely recall a “woody” Pinot Blanc with anything like this winsomeness and class. Just 12.5% alc; wet cereal, fresh langoustine, fruit, salt, delicate cask notes. Utterly delicious, and there’s only a teensy bit to be had.

**2013 Selbach-Oster Riesling Kabinett**  
**SOS : 1 | SOMMELIER ALERT!**

GSO-445

It could have said “Feinherb” or almost, with only 33g/l RS, and it’s all *sponti* with all that cashmere-textured soul; a whisper of botrytis and a snappiness below the fuder pliancy; salty finish.

**2013 Zeltinger Schlossberg Riesling Kabinett +**  
**SOS : 1 | SOMMELIER ALERT!**

GSO-446

Lift and melody here; still as always on the dry side, and beautiful herbal and lime-y.

**2013 Zeltinger Sonnenuhr Riesling Kabinett + +**  
**SOS : 2**

GSO-447

**CORE-LIST WINE.** There is also a 2012 vintage available, but this may be an instance where the ’13 more than holds its own, and is likely the great Selbach ’13 below the level of the *en-blocs*. A round, complex, thorough Mosel Riesling that touches all bases; herbs, wintergreen, pitted-fruits, slate, succulent mineral shimmer; just delicious, long and classy.

**2013 Zeltinger Schlossberg Riesling Auslese**  
**SOS : 2**

GSO-451

9.6 g/l acidity, 90 grams RS, picked at 108° Oechsle and yet it feels muscular and adamant rather than “sweet” or even a “cheese wine.” Fantastically herbal, and propelled rather than obscured by its botrytis.

*The bloc-harvested micro-parcels, with a text from Johannes telling you a bit about them:*

“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? KM?] 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, has also perfect southern exposure, but it has a deeper subsoil of crumbly, broken slate, mixed with organic matter and loam. The vineyard is more distant from the Mosel and gets less of the effect from the wide water surface but sits smack behind the church and the warm bodies of the village houses beneath which radiate warmth back into the vineyard (a privileged situation akin to that of the 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.”

#### 2013 Zeltinger Himmelreich Riesling “Anrecht,” 6/750ml + +

GSO-452

**SOS : 3**

It’s as though you’d taken the Halbtrocken Kabinett and put it into a cyclotron. Spearminty and spectacular, and *very* young even by ’13 standards. Outsized in every way especially extract and acidity; it buzzes and twitches as though the grapes were zapped by a stun-gun.

#### 2013 Zeltinger Schlossberg Riesling “Schmitt,” 6/750ml + + (+)

GSO-453

**SOS : 3**

A superb wine of the 2013 vintage, and a triumph for Selbach; a shattering wine that’s potentially great. It’s a *sponti* in steel; botrytis shows but plays nicely; extraordinarily high-toned florals, white iris, hyacinth, wisteria; such sensory overload here I started to think of Hans-Günter Schwarz’s wines. Fathomless, what he might have done with such minerality to conjure...

## 2013 wines to be shipped when the ’12s sell out

**Zeltinger Himmelreich Riesling Kabinett Halbtrocken**

**Selbach-Oster Riesling Spätlese**

**Zeltinger Schlossberg Riesling Spätlese**

**Zeltinger Sonnenuhr Riesling Spätlese**

# 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 négociant 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 hippitude.

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.

## 2013 Saar Riesling Kabinett

GSR-414

**SOS : 0**

These two Saar wines don't really belong among the commodity negoç wines, but I don't know where else to put them! They're bought cask by cask from a "name" VDP estate in the Saar who needs to preserve his incognito. Perhaps it's a matter of cash-flow, but whatever it is it's a *gift* to us, for these wines are both seriously good and serious *bargains*.

In 2013 we get a kid-brother to go with the usual Spätlese. With just 26g/l RS it's a Feinherb, and many of you will relish its 10.2 grams of acidity; the wine has such a delicate pink grapefruit flavor it could almost be a well-behaved Scheurebe.

## 2013 Saar Riesling Spätlese

GSR-413

**SOS : 1 | SOMMELIER ALERT!**

Still with moderate RS (48 grams, which you don't taste) and a lusty 9.5 g/l acidity, this is Saar of the old-school, with kirsch and cassis aromas, a crisply brilliant palate that's euphoric enough to curl your toes.



# Meulenhof/Erben Justen Ehlen

Mosel // Erden

Mosel

Meulenhof



vineyard area // 7 hectares  
annual production // 4,200 cases  
top sites & soil types // **Erdener Treppchen** and **Prälat** (devonian slate with *Rotliegend*); **Wehlener Sonnenuhr** (devonian slate)  
grape varieties // 85% Riesling, 10% Rivaner, 5% Kerner

*Stefan Justen is most of the things you want in a supplier; he's modest, reasonably priced, scrupulously honest, loyal, and the furthest thing from a diva.*



He's the last person who deserves to be unlucky, but the sad fact is he has been. In 2011 he had hail, and the damage extended also to his 2012 crop. In 2013 he had... 2013. I didn't select much, but it's important to emphasize that what I do offer are excellent wines, not just the "least difficult among a difficult lot."

There's more, and I ask you to bear with me. I saw these wines on the cusp of the point they could be tasted, and most of them were unfinished. That is, there are things a grower can do to mitigate or remove dubious botrytis flavors, but most growers would rather not intervene prophylactically; they'd rather wait to see whether it's necessary. This makes sense, provided your nerves can stand it.

Still, as unassuming as this estate can seem to be, when you drink a mature vintage (by which I mean something 25 years old or older) you see what perfect Mosel wines they are. And you have to ask, why would anyone want to re-invent this? It's already sublime. It may not align with

our modern sensibilities, as if some new Mosel-Riesling-*app* was launched every three days, but sooner or later we return to the verities.

These wines are analogue, and they have big fruit and a lot of warmth. They're a little like Hiedler's wines in that respect. Not "fat" but ample. If you're looking for neurosurgical detail and lacy intricacy, try Christoffel (among others), but ideally you're not looking for just one single thing.

Stefan is still acting mayor of Erden, so y'all let him know if you need a parking ticket fixed. He's also the curator of the Roman press house that was unearthed when Treppchen had *flurbereinigung*. And he was instrumental in creating the amazing hiking path that goes from Ürzig to Erden far above the cliffs. His phone rings a lot. (I still forgot to ask him if he could pass a law making dry Mosel wines illegal.) He remains a model of what a loyal, nice man should be. Which is why we have done business together for twenty five years, first with Stefan's dad, and now with him.

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**Meulenhof at a glance** // Full-throttle fruit and serious stature characterize these ripe Mosel wines. Prices have remained moderate for impeccable quality.

**2013 Devon Schiefer Riesling Trocken (#1)**  
**SOS : 0**

GJU-142

All Stefan's dry wines were curiously good in '13, probably because the cleanest grapes had gone into them. This is his slate-grown estate Riesling, it was not deacidified, and it's very good. A real snap of slate; the acids are lively but not pointed; aromas of Treppchen walnut lead to a bright vein of ginger and aloe on the palate. After bottling (and at fridge temp) it'll be really crunchy and green-apple-y.

**2013 Erdener Treppchen Riesling Kabinett (#8)**  
**SOS : 2**

GJU-143

**CORE-LIST WINE.** And as you see, just one lot. When it's gone it's gone, so we may have an interruption in supply later in the year. It recalls a 2000 in its exotic botrytis notes; fruit runs to peaches rather than apples, with notes of lemon-candy and ginger.

**2013 Erdener Treppchen Riesling Spätlese (#14)**  
**SOS : 2**

GJU-144

Seemingly the least botrytis, and showing energy and crunch. Tangelo-satsuma citrus, a rather sweet finish (at room temp) but it's a clean tasty Mosel wine.

**2012 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Spätlese +**  
**SOS : 1**

GJU-138

**CORE-LIST WINE.** I reserved every drop left of this. Last year it was fresh from the filter and I couldn't assess it, and the only chance I had to retaste it was at one of the big tastings, which is a challenge in itself. But now it can be seen; this is a cool lovely slaty classic Wehlener, a real beauty!

**2012 Erdener Treppchen Riesling Spätlese (#5)**  
**SOS : 1**

GJU-145

Classic '12 aromas, bakey and buttery, charming and orange-y; a brightly fruity wine that's not markedly slaty but more in the exotic Prälät direction, a wine that will charm and refresh as long as it's good and cold.

## The Question of Tartrates

Now and again we get a pick-up request due to tartrates in the bottle. When I was starting out some 30 years ago, every grower's pricelist had a disclaimer to the effect that tartrates are a naturally occurring substance and no cause for refund or return. I wish we all could do the same.

After all, haven't we been taught to prize *Vin non filtré*? Don't we feel great looking at all that muddy goop in the base of a red-wine bottle? Yet two threads of potassium bitartrate in a bottle of white wine and people start returning bottles. It defies reason.

A retailer I know had a case of wine, seven bottles of which were throwing tartrates. He put these alongside the "clean" ones and charged a Dollar more for them! "Special unfiltered cuvee!" I believe

he wrote. All seven of those bottles sold before the first clean one was bought.

At worst tartrates are entirely benign. At best they're an active sign of superior quality, because potassium bitartrate won't precipitate without a lot of *ripe* tartaric acid in the wine, the acid from *mature* fruit. Yes, you can eliminate tartrates before bottling by cold-stabilizing, but some growers dislike what they feel (with justification) is an unnecessary handling that can sap a wine's vitality.

Don't get me wrong; we're not urging growers to encourage tartrate formation in bottle. In fact we're not discussing it AT ALL. Nor should we! Nor should you. If you buy a wine with tartrates from me (or anyone else) you have my blessing to hang a sign **WINE DIAMONDS: A SIGN OF SUPERIOR QUALITY!**

# Alfred Merkelbach

Mosel // Ürziger



vineyard area // 1.9 hectares  
annual production // 1,700 cases  
top sites // Ürziger Würzgarten; Erdener Treppchen; Kinheimer Rosenberg  
(blue devonian slate)  
grape varieties // 100% Riesling

*Alfred is the older brother. He's 80. Rolf had just had his 77th birthday the day before I visited, so all of us sang him Happy Birthday in English, while he sang along.*



It is somehow quite touching to consider that Rolf knows the English words for “Happy Birthday.” He doesn’t say a lot in his own language, but he can sing the birthday song in English.

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.

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**Alfred Merkelbach at a glance** // The clearest imaginable look into pure Mosel. Vivid, toe-curling clarity of fruit and terroir make this my most beloved Mosel agency.



If you don't know, the gentlemen never married. They work a barely-2-hectare estate all on steep slopes, divided into about 35 different parcels. They do it all themselves, with part-time help for harvest and for exceptionally busy times in the vineyard cycle. They don't green-harvest—believing it's a sin against providence—and they don't pick selectively in multiple passes. If you know the “en-bloc” series of wines at Selbach-Oster, in which three parcels are left to the last possible moment and then picked in their entirety, you'll be interested to hear that *all* of Merkelbach's vineyards are picked that way. It's always been done like that.

Thirty years ago when I first visited these villages, they were full of tiny estates like this one, every little street festooned with signs to taste and buy direct from the grower. Today there are fewer growers, and they've gotten bigger as vineyards came onto the market from luckless neighbors who were closing their doors. Merkelbach was typical of the artisan production structure of an earlier time, and they haven't changed. But the times have.

Now these bigger estates have to compete for a slice of a smaller pie, as wine is no longer a routine everyday beverage, but instead a drink for specialists and aficionados. An active press has arisen to lead such drinkers to the best hooch. And as you know, as soon as you've established rankings and hierarchies you induce growers to examine your criteria and adapt their wines to them. It's human, it can hardly be helped. So everyone's wines are pimped up to get the scores they need and to land on top-10 lists. Everything's richer, more concentrated, sweeter (if sweet at all) and more alcoholic and imposing (if dry), and so the entire grammar of wine has changed entirely – except for a small few holdouts like Merkelbach, who aren't even aware they are holding out, or what they're holding out against. They're just making the wines they've always made, honest, true, fresh and light-bodied Mosel wines.

It sounds silly to say they make me feel “young” again, but they have a way of collapsing time, so that the first whiff of the first glass takes me back immediately to my formative virginal experience of these wines back in the late 70s. That smell is why I loved them. That smell is like no other smell. The purity and modesty of that smell and those flavors are a return to an Eden of bliss. As modest as the wines may seem, they possess something that makes them impervious to corruption, from the enticements of ego or the temptations of falsity. I raise the glass, and the decades dissolve like the foam on a glass of Champagne. There it is again; there it always is. The fragrance isn't huge, but it contains the sum of love and gratefulness for a lifetime in wine.

Of course this is important at this time in my life. One is paring down. The fundamental things apply – but where does one find them, and what do they apply to? Yet I'd argue these things are even more important to you, because you almost never experience them, they are too seldom found. Or when they are found, one senses the enactment of a pastiche of authenticity. Even when the

wines are truly authentic, when are they ever *this* beautiful?

And when are they ever *this* accessible??? Please look at the prices Rolf and Alfred want us to pay for the work of their entire lives. For truly small-batch, hand-crafted wines done on such steep land that no machines can be used. Did you know that Merkelbach's wines are produced *cask-by-cask*, and that each cask represents about 112 cases of wine? Did you know that even if they wanted to create a wine with more volume, their biggest holding tank only holds two fuders? Did you know that nearly all their vineyards are old, ungrafted plants, some between eighty and a hundred years old? Can't you imagine that if such wines came from some more fashionable place, they'd cost exponentially more?

I hope I am wrong, but I suspect that for people of your generation, there are so few authentic things left in the world that you hardly learned how to recognize them. Anyone could lead you to some young hottie making sexy-pants wines and who's active on Twitter, or to some crusty old coot in an austere and forsaken corner of Spain or Italy who's making wines whose obscurity is, let's say, understandable. We get seduced by the story, but the wines are iffy. Come on, admit it. So if you think I'm just flying my silverback flag by loving two guys whose wines haven't changed a lot in thirty years, I think there may be aspects of the world you don't yet understand.

I felt again how unadorned these wines are. They are faces that need no makeup. They're articulate but never chattery. They are completely beguiling but never seductive. They are full of substance and yet weightless. They taste eternal and yet also eternally fresh, as though the gravitas of slate were dancing with a gurgling cooing innocence. Even other wines I *like* have more affect than these do. Merkelbach's wines are pure life-force.

Rolf and Alfred have also seemed to condense a million pages of Buddhist study into two divine and simple lives. They need very little, and are thoroughly happy. They love their lives. Think about it: do you know anyone who is leading the exact life he was meant to lead? Someone who is unreservedly happy, whole, integrated?

I can name two people. Bless you both, thank you both, Rolf and Alfred.

The 2013s are a happy shock. Somehow they are full citizens of 2013 while having sidestepped every negative facet of the vintage. I don't quite know how. You don't discuss minutiae of vineyard or cellar work with Rolf or Alfred. I do wonder whether they are nonplussed by how close '13 comes to the monumental wines they grew in 2010. Such a vintage is a once-in-a-lifetime proposition, until its uncanny sibling-vintage comes along three years later. Not that the wines are identical; '10 had more acidity and cleaner fruit, while '13 has its botrytis to reckon with. But the vintages share a solidity you almost can't fathom in such a slender frame, as though someone had pounded a half-ton concentrate of terroir into a single small syringe.

It is a small vintage, as it is everywhere, and I selected



seven wines and trusted I could buy them out. Well, not quite. I seem not to be the only person who loves these wines, and will need to yield to other buyers also, it seems, I guess, though who *are* these others, really? But don't you hesitate, because what we're getting is roughly half what we usually get. Four restaurants pouring the Würzgarten Spät by the glass could buy the entire production.

I keep trying to find new ways to say how all this is for me, because the Merkelbachs and their little domain are the most beautiful thing in my wine world. But not

because we're intimate, and not because it is at all grand. Rather, it seems to concentrate a universe of meaning into something not only unspoiled, but something that cannot be spoiled. When my baby son was born, there were times I'd look at his face when he was awake and calm, and I had the feeling "He knows everything. It's already there, all of it," and that's a little how these wines make me feel. I'm pursuing a divinity I can't quite catch. Maybe it will stop, if I do, and then I can just gaze upon it, across the dust and the distance.

## About the Vineyards

**KINHEIMER ROSENBERG:** this vineyard gives Merkelbachs their lightest wine, the one they always show you first. It's the appetizer to prepare you for the weightier Erdeners and Ürzigers. Rosenberg's wines often seem to actually smell of roses, so that one wonders which came first, the aroma or the name. The slate is brilliant here, the appley fruit ranges from tart-green in the cool vintages to fresh golden-delicious apples in the hot years. The wines are small-scale Mosel classics, and in great years they can show surprising authority and balance while their bigger siblings stumble.

**ERDENER TREPPCHEN:** this is a completely different expression of Treppchen from Justen's or Christoffel's. The site is broad; the upstream sections lean in the Prälat-Würzgarten direction: bergamot, spice, peach. The downstream section is more classically slatey, with nuances of hyssop, walnut and green apple. Now that Flurbereinigung is complete and everyone's vines are young one sees the importance of parcel. I was delighted by the absolute Treppchen fingerprint I saw in even these brash new wines.

Finally the great site **ÜRZIGER WÜRZGARTEN**, which gives Merkelbach's most memorable wines. A vein of red clay running through the soil gives them their eponymous spice—the name means "spice garden"—but it isn't just the extra zingy cut of spice that marks these wines; such a strong flavor could pall if not for their redeeming class. Their feel is feminine and lithe; their aspect is springtime blossomy, and their underlying flavors of slate and mineral attain an apex of refinement. Wines of baroque opulence can be made from here, but Merkelbach's are the most primary and fundamental of all Ürz Würz., as though you are tasting ur-Würzgarten.

**2013 Ürziger Würzgarten Riesling Kabinett #6** +  
**SOS : 1**

GME-204

The one and only Kabinett of their vintage! The first wine I tasted, not knowing what was to come, I wrote that it overcomes the vintage's botrytis by sheer density of spicy material, and an almost incredibly fervent expressiveness, so absurdly spicy it's almost a caricature of Würzgarten.

**2013 Kinheimer Rosenberg Riesling Spätlese #1**  
**SOS : 1**

GME-205

Again density like some madness. I had to see the numbers, to know what I was tasting. Dry extract 31 g/l! Acid 9.8g/l, picked at 90° Oechsle; here's where I first thought of 2010, that galvanic solid buzzing, the tremendous fruit and a finish as solid as a stone fist.

**2013 Erdener Treppchen Riesling Spätlese #4**  
**SOS : 2 | SOMMELIER ALERT!**

GME-206

This might almost have been a Christoffel wine, it's so polished and vibrating and dense. The vintage shows as char or smokiness and salt, but the sheer impact and ur-slate are imposing, and the length seemingly endless, a tantrum of obduracy—"I *won't* leave!"

**2013 Ürziger Würzgarten Riesling Spätlese #9** + +  
**SOS : 2 | SOMMELIER ALERT!**

GME-207

**CORE-LIST WINE.** This is a masterpiece, the best Mosel I'd tasted up to that moment, and a great wine in this family's legacy. A magnificence of slate and garrigue, fruit and solidity. Young '71s might have been like this, but less concentrated!

**2013 Ürziger Würzgarten Riesling Spätlese #10** + (+)  
**SOS : 1**

GME-208

This one's saltier and gnarlier, a crazed potion of herbs, woodruff, Thai basil; the palate is exotic and even a bit beyond-the-pale—but compelling! Maybe bottling will "civilize" it.

**2013 Ürziger Würzgarten Riesling Auslese #8 "Urglück"** + +  
**SOS : 1 | SOMMELIER ALERT!**

GME-209

I wonder whether the obscure name of an old Riesling parcel will have gained some specious commodity value by dint of being given a "high score." Regardless, this is a steep site on pure red slate, right behind the village, planted in the 1930s and of course ungrafted. The wine shows utter naked slate and is another masterpiece of primordial minerality; tectonically slatey! It made me think of Jacquesson's single-site Dizy wine, all that power expressed as nothing but mineral. I wrote "salt and pepper and flowing quivering silver." I was quite overcome.

**2013 Ürziger Würzgarten Riesling Auslese #7** + +  
**SOS : 2**

GME-210

107° Oechsle. Extract 37.5! How does it even pour? This shows pungent slate but isn't purely rocky; there's more resonance of exotic fruit and spice, as if it combined Greek, Provençal and Mosel wine; I mean this wine is rowdy, a loud party of spice and pepper and raspberries; lighter than air and denser than iron.

**2002 Erdener Treppchen Riesling Spätlese** + +  
**SOS : 1 | SOMMELIER ALERT!**

GME-114

I tasted this in Selbach's kitchen at breakfast one morning, so I didn't write an analytical note, but I remember it very well, because it was perfect! Perfect, no-longer-infantile Mosel wine. I can't believe they still have it.



# Dry German Wines

*Some people have sought to make a cartoon of me as the “sweet-wine guy,” because it’s easier to do that than to engage in an actual discussion of a nuanced issue.*



I surprised one of my colleagues when I told him that most of the Rieslings I drink are dry. We drink more Rieslings with RS in the summer, because the low alcohol is welcome, and also because we cook with more in-season fruits and just lighter food in general, and “sweet” Riesling is called for. In cold seasons the way we cook calls for fuller-bodied wines. And crucially, in restaurants, I think the odds are vastly increased that the match will work if the Riesling has at least *some* RS. At home one controls one’s food, but dining out there’s often sweetness one doesn’t anticipate, and menu language often won’t help.

I have never had an agenda. I’m an empiricist; I form mutable conclusions based on my experience. 10-15 years ago I was experiencing dry German Rieslings that were really appallingly bad: shrill, bitter, sharp and perverse. But oh, the quasi-religious fervor with which these wines were justified! It was enough to make me cynical. When the wines began to improve, as they did in the new climate era, I responded by offering more of them. The surrounding polemics didn’t change, and I found it rather pathetic that “Germany” was reduced to a posture of “Well certainly we over-played our hand back when the wines were yucky, but they’re not yucky any more!” This struck me as undignified, and still does.

Riesling is one of the *very* few wine grapes able to be wonderful across the whole range of dry-to-sweet. Why wouldn’t we celebrate that? Some of my German colleagues would insist they do celebrate that, by allowing

that Mosel wines, those Eskimo Rieslings, ought perhaps to be permitted their little sweetness, but outside of that ghetto there’s little or no reason for any Riesling to be anything but *dry*.

I know people who feel I’m painting in absolute strokes. They live in big cities such as Berlin or Trier, and their friends are flexible in their tastes, or so they tell me. I don’t suppose they’d have any cause to lie to me, so I “believe” them, the way I’d believe an otherwise sober person who swore he had a unicorn in his back yard. For all I know it’s true! But in my own actual experience I just don’t see it. And it makes me wonder. My encounters with the Germans—or “the Germans”—doesn’t lead me to suppose they’re excessively conformist. I don’t see it in their general behaviors or demeanors. Yet there’s a dogged inflexible insistence that white wine must be dry, that it’s the correct and approved way for white wine to be, and one had better adapt to the “Prevailing Taste” or... or what, I wonder?

There’s something ominous about this. It is not a question of taste. To believe that, you’d have to believe that *every single German person* likes the same style of wine. This cannot be. They don’t all like the same food, they don’t all wear the same color shirt, they don’t all have the same hairstyle; they don’t have the same fucking dogs fa cryin’ out loud. But: amazingly, there’s only one kind of wine they like. Trocken.

Item: a grower told me of a neighbor winery who, like many German vintners, puts analytical values on his private-customer pricelist. This is so that no cowering timorous unwary wine drinker will ever have to taste something that has more sweetness or acidity than he’s *decided* he will accept. Now it so happened this vintner had two dry Rieslings, one with *0.5grams/liter* of residual sugar, and the other with *0.2g/l*. These wines had less than A SINGLE GRAM of RS. It cannot be tasted. It’s as dry as dust; it’s a miracle the damn wine would *pour*. So guess what happened? The wine with 0.2g/l sold out immediately, and the one with 0.5 was DOA—no one would taste it! And EVERY TIME I repeated this story to another vintner they all nodded knowingly—yes, that’s the way it is.

Item: Florian Weingart’s father sometimes helps out their private customers when Florian’s in the vineyards or the cellar. Folks show up, want some wine. What do they want to taste? TROCKEN of course! So they’re taken through the dry wines, they write their orders, and Weingart senior goes off to pack the boxes. But not

before leaving an unlabeled bottle in the tasting room, saying “I need ten minutes or so to pack your orders; help yourselves to this while I’m gone.”

He returns to clamors of enthusiasm. “What was that wine?” “Is it for sale?”

It was, *of course*, a wine with sweetness, not a “dessert” wine but just a garden-variety Feinherb or maybe even a Kabinett. And all these tasters, categorically certain they could only taste TROCKEN wine, discovered that they *spontaneously* enjoyed the not-dry wine as long as they didn’t know what it was!

And again, *every single time* I repeated this story to another vintner, they all nodded. “Yes, that’s how it is. You have to trick them.”

So I will argue that this isn’t a taste, it’s a form of self-hypnosis. It isn’t a clientele; it’s a cult. Its effect is to do evil.

Item: while one hears a kind of grudging acceptance of the sweetness of Mosel wines, because they have such dreadful acidity up there in the frozen north they *have* to have some sweetness or your ears would bleed, in fact even the Moselans report increasing trouble selling anything but dry wines.

Item: there’s an increasing and distressing tendency for a vintner to create a token sweet-wine for those extraterrestrials who inexplicably still have to have them. The younger and hipper the domaine, the more you’ll see this. You’ll look on a pricelist with seven searingly dry Rieslings and *one* Spatlese—with **100 grams** of residual sugar! Doesn’t anyone realize how contemptuous this is? “Well, cupcake, if it’s sweet wine you want then *try this*, it’ll be nice and sugary, just the way you like it...” It’s also a loathsome piece of propaganda, to make the sweet wine so grotesquely over-sweet that any sensible person would conclude “sweet” wines weren’t for her.

Welcome to German wine in the 21st Century: dry wines too dry, sweet wines way too sweet, and a whole perfect zone of harmony, beauty and balance in the middle that everyone ignores, because it won’t fit into the conceptual boxes whereby “Dry should be dry and sweet should be sweet.”

I propose a NEW conceptual box. *Wine should taste good, and be kept out of conceptual boxes at all times!*

Item: look again at an estate like Donnhoff. There you’ll see a pure Ideal brought to life. Some of the wines are dry, and they are juicy and balanced and delicious. Some of the wines are not-dry; they contain sweetness but are not DOMINATED by it, and these wines are also balanced and delicious. They all coexist; they play-well-with-others. Many of us love both styles, and are glad to have them, each as it’s warranted by the food or the ambience or just what you want to drink right then. Sounds perfect, right?

The dry Rieslings themselves are still a mixed bag. That bag contains an ever-increasing number of excellent and even stunningly good dry Rieslings, many of which are cooler and snappier than their cousins from Austria.

I buy them, I sell them, they’re in my cellar and I drink them. That said, however, it has to be admitted that too many of dry German Rieslings are still prone to shrillness, sourness, bitterness and shrieking disharmony. To build a wine culture predicated on a single prevailing style, it has to work from the *ground UP*, not from a topmost layer of extravagantly good examples. I repeat; it’s getting better overall, my dry Riesling offerings are steadily increasing, and the quality of the best ones is steadily growing.

But what’s the endgame here? If Germany joins the ranks of good dry-Riesling producers, all it’s doing is delivering something to us that we already have, another entry into an already occupied field.

Whereas the not-dry wines are singular, unique and cannot be imitated. They are also low in alcohol and more flexible at the table.

So let’s let the styles coexist, and let’s be more sensually flexible, and let’s quit making sugary caricatures of the sweet wines, and let’s stop marching in step like the North Korean Army toward a *single* style of wine, and let’s be civilized persons again.

Apropos coexistence, I was taken to task for using the metaphor of an “invasive species” to describe the Trocken Riesling wave. I admit the image was misleading; I’d rather have called Trocken Riesling an “evil weed” or some such thing, because in most cases it refuses to let other plants exist. And yet, the people who challenged me were intellectually disingenuous, because they seized upon my metaphorical imprecision to throw up a smoke-screen. Dry Rieslings always existed, they protested. It was the sweet wines of the post-War period that were aberrant. Well, sigh, OK. I see this as an ancillary issue, one that is raised to confer a patina of “tradition” by which the Trocken slave is reassured he is drinking the “proper” wine. Because there are many ways to tell this story.

Here’s one. It was long understood that the best Rieslings were those with residual sugar, whether these were the spawn of great vintages or else the one-offs from ordinary vintages that happened to ferment incompletely. Regardless, they were prized. And when technological advances permitted residually sweet Rieslings to be made routinely, they were. Because they were desirable! Now of course most of these wines were mundane, and most of them did no credit to the tradition of sweet Riesling from the “noble” vintages. But what does this signify? Hack growers make mundane wines in the prevailing idiom of the day, and the oceans of banal sweet wines were by no means more egregious than the subsequent oceans of banal – not to mention evil and objectionable – dry wines that came along 25 years later. At least those sweet wines were unencumbered by theology, dogma and metaphysics. So we find ourselves in a curious place; today’s dry Rieslings are more often desirable, as no reasonable person would deny, and yet the dogma is as venal as ever. And, it must be said without blinking; there is something at least unsavory in the uniformity with which this belief-system is insisted upon.

# Joh. Jos. Christoffel

Mosel // Ürzig



vineyard area // 4 hectares  
annual production // 3,200 cases  
top sites & soil types // Ürziger Würzgarten (red slate); Erdener Treppchen (blue slate)  
grape varieties // 100% Riesling

*Will you understand me if I say the wines from here have been unnervingly consistent for the past ten years? One wonders by which remarkable device they have avoided the vintage-variations that swing in wider arcs at other wineries.*

I don't know, won't surmise, and certainly won't remotely accuse; after all, the same thing can be said of J.J. Prüm, and it's patently absurd to criticize consistency. But I'd be perversely reassured to taste something ornery or clunky here once in a while. This is markedly dramatic with the 2013s, which don't taste like anyone else's 2013s along the Mosel—at least what I tasted. They taste like another marvelous Christoffel vintage, and who but a churl would take them to task for that? The point seems to be, you open the bottle and the wine does the job. It tastes like it should when it's healthy and true. The question of whether it tastes like a '13 is something for geeks to fuss over.

Hans-Leo Christoffel's wines are vinified separately from Mönchhof's, as has been the case from the beginning of the two estates' association. They're whole-cluster pressed (hence their filigree crystalline textures), with some *sponti*, some steel and *some* fuder, fermented cold, quickly drawn off the lees, and bottled early. It's the approach you'd take if you wanted digitally clear wines, fruit/terroir driven, as un-funky as possible. And this is what we get, and have gotten without fail for many years now. It wouldn't surprise me if the '13s had received a carbon-fining, and maybe more than one. Let me be careful here, because this is an issue that asks for parsed language. If a grower makes a choice not to intervene, or to intervene minimally, he gets the result of his *laissez-faire* approach for *better or worse*. If on the other hand he lays the greatest emphasis on making clean healthy pleasurable wine, he may take actions to which the purist could object. The purist, though, has the luxury of objecting from the sidelines, unless (s)he is a wine merchant willing to offer unpleasant (or even flawed) wine, excused and justified by

the "greater" value of purism.

I stand toward the purists, but my own line of demarcation is the wine has to taste good and not be spoiled or flawed. If I can satisfy both values, I'm happy, and I can do this 99% of the time. The last 10-12 years of Christoffel vintages have swung in such a narrow arc that I suspect they are being "formed" in some way. But I do not find this objectionable, because the wines taste good. I find it perhaps uninteresting, because I like a certain ornery surprise in my wines. It's how I know they came from nature, and that is what I like. So, you can count on Christoffel's '13s to be radiantly and lyrically delicious, just as they always are. You won't have to "excuse" this-or-that having to do with 2013's sometimes peculiar nature.

In general the wines continue to present with polish and brilliance and digital focus. (Eymael's own Mönchhof wines are rather more baroque.) They are certainly more masterly than Merkelbach, and at many points in each vintage they are wines that raise your eyebrows and send a flush of pleasure through your senses. They're high-bred and racy, and at their best they touch upon mystical qualities.

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**Christoffel at a glance** // With Schaefer and Selbach-Oster, the "big three" among the Mosels I offer. Everything one can wish from great wine is lavished on these: depth, clarity, complexity, buoyancy, purity and ineffable beauty.



**2013 Erdener Treppchen Riesling Kabinett**

GJC-213

**SOS : 2**

**CORE-LIST WINE.** Steady as she goes; a teensy tic of '13 saltiness but otherwise polished and silky, very ripe and salty-sweet. It has some of the '13 cling, but check *this* out—over 110° Oechsle with acids over 9g/l and RS 62g/l/. It makes me wonder, what do we mean by “Kabinett” any more?

**2013 Ürziger Würzgarten Riesling Kabinett +**

GJC-214

**SOS : 2**

Also north of 100°. Oy. The wine is wonderfully stylish and silky, filigree and lacy; quite the kiwi and lime in this gracious and beautiful Riesling, that simply is nothing resembling a “Kabinett.”

**2013 Erdener Treppchen Riesling Spätlese +**

GJC-217

**SOS : 3**

Curiously, though this is sweeter now, it also seems cooler and shadier than the two Kabinetts. (This sometimes happens at Diel too.) Another salty wine but not a beast; it's ultra-refined and crystalline.

**2013 Ürziger Würzgarten Riesling Spätlese + (+)**

GJC-215

**SOS : 3**

**CORE-LIST WINE.** Now we really do taste botrytis, which is curiously reassuring. It has the semi-solid construction of '13, and all sorts of lime zest and lime blossom and if you could concentrate lime juice and strain it through pulverized slate, it would also taste like that. The complexity unfolds tart and salty but in a basic matrix of sweetness. It unfolds deliberately, like an opening rose. A wine with secrets, and plenty of time to tell them.

**2013 Erdener Treppchen Riesling Auslese \* \* “Herzlay,” 6/750ml + +**

GJC-216

**SOS : 3**

“Lay” is old dialect for slate. This is from an old ungrafted parcel among the cliffs, and as it often is, it's masterly. Divine apple and walnutty slate; stunning salty length, like having an old Comté with those crunchy crystals and putting that and an apple in your mouth together. Somehow with “only” 115° it tastes markedly riper than the (110°) Kabinett. This is the spectacular wine; next up is the compelling riddle.

**2013 Ürziger Würzgarten Riesling Auslese \* \* \* “Kranklay,” 6/750ml + (+)**

GJC-211

**SOS : 3**

This parcel is below the sundial, spreading to either side, down where the slate is more crumbled and the wines have more finesse. This transparent delicacy is prized, bless them, above all other things such as ripeness or power. But this '13 is atypically dark and brooding, at least today. It tastes like it's encased in a crust of salt, fruit in a tiny dense kernel, waiting to pop.

**2012 Ürziger Würzgarten Riesling Auslese \* “Kauen,” 6/750ml + (+)**

GJC-205

**SOS : 2**

If you walk the steep vineyard road up from Ürzig, past the big “Würzgarten” sign and all the way up past the red-slate defile and on to where the road ends and the path begins, you'll see an especially forbidding set of small terraces (and you'll think “How in *God's* name does anyone work in that place?”)—and this parcel is the Kauen.

It gives wines with a para-sensual buzzing taste of slate, as though a subterranean stream of electricity ran below the vines. This '12 is stern and gorgeous and demanding. It doesn't charm, doesn't say “There, there Schnooky, everything will be all right.” It says *Now you stop and LISTEN*. If you want to hear the naked whisper of pure terroir, you will.

# Heribert Kerpen

Mosel // Wehlen



vineyard area // 7.5 hectares  
annual production // 6,250 cases  
top sites & soil types // Wehlener Sonnenuhr (blue devonian slate);  
Graacher Himmelreich and Domprobst (blue devonian slate with loam)  
grape varieties // 100% Riesling

*My old friend Martin Kerpen's wines fall into two groups. Up to and including most Auslesen, they are what I'd call "shady" wines. They refresh the way sudden shade does on a warm day, and they have a cool kind of glow, they are woodsy and leafy and dapply. Once botrytis enters the picture they seem to about-face, and become much more overt.*

All the wines are done the old-school way, in Fuders, as I like them best. But that is as far as I think one can go in describing them. It's as much as you can be certain of getting in every vintage. But compared to, say, Christoffel or Schaefer, whose wines are to some extent predictable—delightfully so—with Martin you'll sometimes be surprised. You can taste everywhere else, you can reach

any conclusions you like about the nature of a vintage, but you can't quite guess what Kerpen did until you're in his winery tasting.

2013 was at its most inscrutable here, and I suspect these are the wines with the most to gain from additional time.

## **2013 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Kabinett (+)** **SOS : 2**

GKE-149

**CORE-LIST WINE.** Bottled, and thus bottle-sick and schtinky. The aromas peeking through are brash and salty, not limpid or apple-y. The palate strongly suggests a purer flavor will emerge, and the wine has great potential. How long must we wait?

## **2013 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Spätlese** **SOS : 2**

GKE-150

Bottled, and even more stubborn, and when it finally does emerge it has more salty twang than the Kabinett. Redcurrant jelly, tart and sweet, concentrated stoniness that isn't precisely "slate" plus a fruit like apples sautéed in brown-butter, with scattered burn marks, sprinkled with sel gris.

## **2013 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Auslese \*** **SOS : 3**

GKE-151

The second time today the 1st Auslese is better than the best Spätlese—it seemed to happen also at Adam—as if the botrytis somehow belongs here, and the underlying fruit is more pure and ripe; it's the right thing being concentrated.

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**Kerpen at a glance** // Sleek, feminine, elegant and soulful wines with silky fruit of exceptional beauty. Prices reflect the "Wehlen premium" but are still below the levels of many of the richer and more famous!

# Willi Schaefer

Mosel // Graach

vineyard area // 4 hectares  
annual production // 2,900 cases  
top sites & soil types // Graacher Himmelreich and Domprobst (devonian slate)  
grape varieties // 100% Riesling



Willi Schaefer

Mosel

*If you're new to all this, there's a reason these wines are so beloved.*



Part of it is they're so scarce; the estate is all of 4 hectares with no desire to grow. Part of it is the wines themselves; they're *silly* with deliciousness. And as crystalline as they are, as ethereally complex and limpidly clear, they have a quality of calm; they don't fuss at you how *amazing* they are. They are, dare I say, affectionate; they just sit in the glass and love you. And so we love them back. We banish all the unruly beasts of our ragged natures, and slip into the warm pool, and let ourselves, for once, be happy.

One thing that makes me happy at this address is you never know just what kind of vintage you're going to see. I couldn't have predicted the limpid serenity of their divine 2011s, nor the focused "masculinity" of the '12s. The

2013 Mosels had been so perplexing, and Schaefer's were the 2nd-to-last Mosel estate I visited, that I had nothing but fogs and clouds to see through. What I received, in fact, was a collection of typical '13s and typical Schaefer's. It was the most backward vintage I'd ever tasted there. It sent me back to 2001 looking for a cognate, and '13 does resemble the 2001s only far more opaque and strenuous. Yet the wines have the classic polish of Schaefer, and they won't always be as inscrutable as they were on that mild March day.

Nor are they plentiful. The entire United States will receive some 265 cases of wine, so I'm sorry because no one will get enough.

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**Willi Schaefer at a glance** // For many tasters, these are the **Ne Plus Ultra** of Mosel wine, and they have attracted an almost religious following. Thus my most frustrating agency, as there is never enough wine.



**2013 Graacher Himmelreich Riesling Kabinett ( + )**

GWS-225

**SOS : 1**

It's limpid though some botrytis is present through the gently polished texture; as is often the case with '13s the fruit emerges with air, as does the salty concentration; the delicate (and moderate) sweetness is welcome. Which wine is it, the salty botrytisey one or the semi-solid fruity one? We shall see.

**2013 Graacher Domprobst Riesling Kabinett**

GWS-226

**SOS : ?**

Very spicy and salty and the acids are quite prominent; ginger and tropical fruit are emphatic, but this is still pre-filtration and it has many more tartrates to precipitate—so hard to judge right now.

**2013 Graacher Himmelreich Riesling Spätlese ( + )**

GWS-227

**SOS : 1**

Again quite backward, a concatenation of stubbornness! At first only botrytis shows, and the sweetness seems too low. Patience... and after about five honest minutes it starts to smell like itself, and really good; lots of lime, wintergreen and empire apples, and now with fruit showing the sweetness seems correct, but the acidity gives the wine a Feinherb profile.

**2013 Graacher Domprobst Riesling Spätlese #5 + +**

GWS-228

**SOS : 1**

Highly complex aromas in a strong-willed rendition of this perennially great wine. Pure force of self and no desire (or need) to charm. Swollen acidity engulfed in turn by massively dense fruit and perfectly balanced RS; the wine seems creamy, clotted, you could ladle it as much as pour it.

**2013 Graacher Himmelreich Riesling Auslese #4 ( + )**

GWS-230

**SOS : 3**

Sleek, tangy, streamlined version of Himmelreich, angular and quince-y. Acids are pointed and botrytis is high-toned and gingery. At the moment depth is obscured by the glaring brilliance; there's little apparent middle, yet there must be, so judgment of necessity deferred.

**2013 Graacher Domprobst Riesling Auslese #11, 6/375ml ( + + )**

GWS-231H

**SOS : 3**

Solar flares of Domprobst, almost shrieking intensity as it shakes away its external mintyness. There's a great Domprobst in there somewhere.

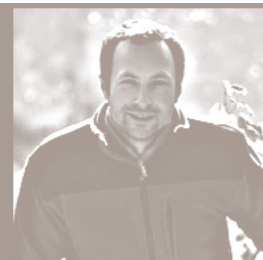
**2013 Graacher Domprobst Riesling Auslese #14 +**

GWS-232

**SOS : 4**

Candied ginger. Rather into BA-territory now. The first of these to taste discretely "sweet." Already balanced, albeit turbulent, but this is glaringly brassy and brilliant. The customary Schaefer serenity is elsewhere. Impressive finish here, and fathomless miles to go.

vineyard area // 4.5 hectares  
annual production // 1,250 cases  
top sites & soil types // **Dhroner Hofberg** (weathered devonian slate with quartzite);  
**Piesporter Goldtröpfchen** (blue slate)  
grape varieties // 100% Riesling:



*Lots of news from here. Andreas's sister Barbara is now installed at the estate, and brother and sister are collaborating happily. Andreas is also a proud hubby now, since last September.*



His new winery will be finished by this time next year. He's also obtained a new parcel in a fine but forgotten vineyard called **Dhroner Häschen** which was planted in 1930, and occupies small terraces on the other side of the Mosel, facing east—and which means “little hare,” which is, of course, adorable. They're up to 4.5 hectares now and may keep growing, but not a lot.

The estate has done every possible thing smartly and correctly, and all you can do is view and admire. And wait to see what sort of vintage 2013 will turn out to be. I don't

think it will be the petulant vintage it seemed at the fussy moment I tasted it, but it has no precedent in the estate's history, so one waits and expects to be surprised. Adam's view is so clear, his perspective so bright and capacious—he reminds me at times of Johannes Selbach—that I'm confident these '13s will laugh last, especially over my *dim* clueless self.

Pure blind luck. The samples were sitting on the tasting table at Selbach back in 2002. “I have no idea who this is; the samples just showed up,” said Johannes. I was

**A.J. Adam at a glance** // Tiny, grower making some of the longest, most exotic, most old-school Mosel wines in existence. Stellar across the board, and for the quality, far from expensive.

intrigued because I love Dhron; the first “WTF is this?!” wine I ever tasted was a ’71 Dhroner Roter Riesling Kabinett, and I think the Grand Cru Hofberg is among the top-10 greatest Mosel vineyards.

But Dhron was always a rather provincial village—most of the best land was owned by the big Trier estates—and though I tried I never found a reliable source. With the first sip of Adam’s first sample, I knew. Just knew.

Andreas Adam was still in wine-school (Geisenheim) then, and was making wine in his weekends home, from 0.9 hectares of land his father owned. As best I recall the grapes or juice were sold off in bulk. Andreas’ wines and he himself were quickly on the radar, as the wines were excellent and the young man was serious.

Then came the moment of decision. Should he get a job somewhere as a cellar master or vineyard manager, and continue to make a teeny bit of wine in his spare time? Or should he throw caution to the winds and try to make a living from his own estate? He’d have to grow it, have to get more land, have to improve the land he did manage to get, have to *invest* in the cellar. Have to invest period.

He decided to go for it. He regretted the decision many times, and gave thought to shutting it down. But slowly, deliberately, it started to gain critical mass. 2007

was a turning point. It would work.

You’ll see the prices are on the high side. They need to be, just to manage cash-flow in this period of heavy spending. They also deserve to be, as the wines are in the top rank. And most remarkable, they are equally successful across the stylistic spectrum; the dry wines, the barely off-dry wines, the “sweet” wines, all of them work, and the styles coexist just as they ought to.

Lately there’s been a modest expansion into Piesporter, where Andreas is cooperating with his friend Julian Haart. He’s peering around his environs, considering where (and if) to obtain vineyards, but over the past couple years he seems more committed to being the shaman of Dhron, the champion of this marvelous terroir.

The wines are highly expressive, whether they’re old-fashioned leesy *sponti* or more stainless-steel primary fruit driven. They’re muscular for Mosel wines, mouthfilling and complex and loaded.

For me Adam is the ultimate example of applying long-held and grounded principles into the making of *excitingly* conservative Mosel wines. He isn’t reinventing an already perfect paradigm. He is reaching into the heart of its gravitas and expressing it in Rieslings that embody what great classics should be.

### 2013 Riesling Trocken

GAD-067

SOS : 0

A little purchased fruit this year, the crop was so small. All Dhron. Half & half *sponti* and cultured yeast, all done in steel. The ’13 aroma is there but the wine is more limpid and pebbly than most, balanced-dry, with cool quince-y fruit; ’13 expresses as burnt-candle now, and this smells as much like (good!) Chenin as like Riesling.

### 2013 Dhroner Riesling

GAD-068

SOS : 0

The village-wine. More extravagant and smoky. Has 14g/l RS and acids in the high-9s. A blend of steel and Fuder; acidity shows as a redcurranty spine, and a wide glass is helpful to disperse the sharpness across the palate, and highlight the dramatic minerality.

### 2013 Piesporter “Terrassen” Riesling

GAD-069

SOS : 0

This contains what would have been the Grosses Gewächs, as the quantity was too small to bottle alone. It’s a cuvée of several terraced vineyards, all in steel and all *sponti*; typical slate and blueberry (Adam’s Goldtröpfchen never seems sultry or passion-fruity, but is always cool and fascinating) with a lot of salty power; the 18 g/l of RS doesn’t even begin to show, and the finish is pleasingly tart.

### 2013 Dhroner “In der Sängerei” Riesling Feinherb (+)

GAD-071

SOS : 0

This micro-parcel, part of Hofberg, gives Andreas his *ne plus ultra* calling-card Riesling, the one that best expresses the pure spirit of the domain. It is always refined and pure yet exotic and classy, and that’s how this ’13 will turn out—eventually. What I saw hadn’t received its first filtration let alone been bottled, and its knees-and-elbows and botrytis-riven saltiness were over-emphatic. The 25 grams of RS are perfect and only register as a surmise of sweetness.



**2013 Hofberg Riesling Trocken +**  
**SOS : 0**

GAD-070

This is the quasi-GG and of all these obstreperous '13s it was the best behaved. In fact a lovely dry Riesling, herbal, juicy, malic and salty; long and clinging finish; amazing equipoise of ethereal delicacy and heavy density and grip. 94° Oechsle, rather *little* botrytis, cask-fermented and aged on the fine lees, and finely smoky; only 8.5g/l RS but extract concentration confers a kind of facsimile of "sweetness."

**2011 Dhron Hofberg Riesling Kabinett + +**  
**SOS : 2 | SOMMELIER ALERT!**

GAD-048

This in fact was a cask-sample, and is entirely rapturous! Just splendid gorgeous Mosel Riesling. Will be the last lot of '11 Kab to be bottled, and <whew> you'll be the happiest person you know as soon as you drink this.

**2013 Dhron Hofberg Riesling Kabinett + (+)**  
**SOS : 2**

GAD-072

Half-half cask and steel, this was typical and completely delicious; everybody's favorite among the '13s that day. Euphoric site fragrance, like a Nahe wine; mirabelle, quince and lemon pudding, not to mention Alishan Oolong. The considerable RS is obliterated by natural acidity that looks scary on paper but which cracks and pops in the glass.

**2013 Dhron Hofberg Riesling Spätlese**  
**SOS : 3**

GAD-073

A voodoo-exotic Auslese-styled Spät that's left the corporeal world behind. It's all steel, and tasted like melted candy, a sort of pure experience of untamed flavor, a study in superripeness and lavish, almost kinky fruit.

**2013 Dhron Hofberg Riesling Auslese**  
**SOS : 3**

GAD-074

Curiously, this rings more pure than the Spätlese, cooler. And even though it's crazy-ripe it's also somehow more demure. Honestly if you seek *this* experience you'd find it better here than in the more ostentatious Spät. This is like a super-hero of slate, intrepid, confident and righteous.

# Reuscher-Haart

Mosel // Piesport



vineyard area // 6 hectares  
annual production // 4,200 cases  
top sites & soil types // Piesporter Goldtröpfchen, Domherr, Falkenberg, Günterslay and Treppchen (blue devonian slate)  
grape varieties // 90% Riesling, 5% Regent, 5% Riavner

*Nothing but good news from here—at least for us. They have a second consecutive tiny vintage and 2013 was very good for them, as high-acid structure-driven years so often are.*



The estate is old-school: all *spontis* done largely in tanks. No fining, and long fine-lees contact. In certain vintages the wines can seem rococo to the point they're hardly Mosel wines any more. When that happens the Piesport fruit shows its *raison d'être*; an almost lurid court bouillon of bewitching fragrances and flavors; patchouli, passion fruit, bergamot, mango. And all in a

voodoo voluptuousness that's the wine equivalent of an erotic trance. Yet they age astoundingly and end *up* tasting like very GOOD Mosel wines. Still, they're Piesporters the way Justen might make them: analogue, corpulent, luscious. And in concentrated high-acid years they wriggle out from their fleshy bounds and make quite a firm case for themselves. As witness...

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**Reuscher-Haart at a glance** // Leesy, old-fashioned Piesporters that need time. Great resonance and depth in the best examples.

**2012 Piesporter Falkenberg Riesling Kabinett Trocken**

GRH-078

**SOS : 0**

**HARD-CORE LIST WINE.** From the hills below the woods above the Goldtröpfchen, in a warm vintage the wines will have freshness and structure. And this is simply delicious dry Riesling, smelling like ripe apricots, leading to a complex grainy palate, sweet corn and sweet hay with a note of shady balsam and wet cereal; really mouth-coating with a creamy finish, yet still with the mineral snap of Riesling.

**2013 Riesling Spätlese Feinherb “Überschwang”**

GRH-079

**SOS : 1 | SOMMELIER ALERT!**

It's a pun on the family surname (Schwang) which means both “pregnant” and also stoked, jazzed, over-the-moon. They're onto something with this wine; it's peachy yet not at all sweet; pleasantly angular and with good grip; a green edge gives yin and freshness. Charming and useful.

**2013 Piesporter Riesling, 1.0 Liter (+)**

GRH-080L

**SOS : 2**

A markedly good vintage for this, as the '13 extract-density makes it more than the normal flattering slug-it-downer; indeed there's more pear and prosciutto than the customary undefined “nice fruit.” A pleasant surprise!

**2013 Piesporter Goldtröpfchen Riesling Kabinett +**

GRH-081

**SOS : 2**

Wonderfully talc-y crushed-pebble texture; these extract-loony high-acid years are *very* kind to estates like this; more than just toasted brioche and passion fruit, there's something searching and salty going on.

**2013 Piesporter Goldtröpfchen Riesling Spätlese**

GRH-082

**SOS : 2**

Even better than the somewhat sultry '12. I love its almost-grassiness and mineral nuance and salty finish. Positive botrytis here, like a slightly less ripe version of 1995.



# Carl Loewen/Schmitt-Wagner

Mosel // Leiwen



vineyard area // 12 hectares  
annual production // 8,300 cases  
top sites & soil types // Leiwener Laurentiuslay and Klostergarten;  
Thörnicher Ritsch (grey slate); Longuicher Maximin Herrenberg (red slate)  
grape varieties // 100% Riesling

*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**.

In another year or two Carl’s son Christopher will have finished in Geisenheim and will join his dad full-time at the estate. He’s already making his mark. He’s perfect, by the way: he Gets It, he isn’t hell-bent on “innovation” for its own sake, and yet his first project—offered below—is absolutely *perfect*, a re-casting of something already there, but seen with lovely new eyes.

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**Carl Loewen/Schmitt-Wagner at a glance** // Energetic, idealistic young couple on a quixotic quest to gain renown for the great unknown sites of this part of the Mosel. Astoundingly reasonable prices for very high-quality juice! “Cool” chalky-minerally style, as if the wines were blended with 15% Blanc de Blancs Champagne.

When Carl obtained Bruno Schmitt's legendary estate, he knew full well the legacy he was carrying on. Not just in human terms, but in the monumental value of the 6,000 vines Schmitt possesses which were planted in 1896. This is possibly the largest-oldest stand of ancient ungrafted vines in Germany, perhaps in Europe. The vineyard – Longuicher Maximiner Herrenberg – has various sub-sections and exposures, but it's all steep and there's a lot of red slate that gives the wines the sassafrassy garrigue we also find in Ürzig.

I don't at all mind that Carl's wines are bigger than Bruno's were—I miss that nearly extinct light style, but

times change and everyone's wines are bigger now. But you can't just pick them riper and have done with it. If the raw material is markedly more intense then every other aspect of the wines must change along. Where Bruno's wines had a delicate licorice note, Carl's have a peppery intensity.

So, please take note: these are very likely the **single best values** for classic old-school Mosel Rieslings from great vineyards in ALL OF THE MOSEL. Not just in this offering: anywhere. And the estate is seriously on the move with its new acquisitions and the influx of passionate youthful energy from Christopher.

That energy seems to be spurring his father on. These two wines, the quantities of which are alas homeopathically small, are perhaps the two most interesting wines in this *entire offering*. Buy a tiny bit of each, and learn something amazing. They are an exact parallel, two wines from the same vineyard, Dad's picked in the morning and Junior's picked in the afternoon, and vinified in different ways. The wines are beautiful and the *story* is moving and fascinating. The ungrafted vineyard, containing "6000 vines plus a few," was planted in 1896. Here goes:

**2013 Maximin Herrenberg Riesling Alte Reben Trocken, 6/750ml +**  
**SOS: -1 | SOMMELIER ALERT!**

GCL-082

Dad's wine comes from a vineyard with 5,000 vines per hectare, wire-trained; the wine is explicit and digital, hi-def and fervent; has a point and comes to it. Enormous minerality; very dry but crammed with every conceivable aspect of this great terroir; psychedelic garrigue, magma-deep smolder of ur-terroir, this goes a universe beyond hedonism, on its journey to a splendid and complicated truth.

**2013 Maximin Herrenberg Riesling "1896," 6/750ml + (+)**  
**SOS: 0 | SOMMELIER ALERT!**

GCL-079

The wine makes me think more than anything of Michi's "Tradition" bottlings at Schloss Gobelsburg; it's atmospheric and inferential; analog, soulful, more peeling, 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."*

**2013 Longuicher Herrenberg Riesling Kabinett Feinherb +**

GSW-080

**SOS : 1 | SOMMELIER ALERT!**

This is the baby, planted in 1903. It is a different vineyard, we didn't forget to write "Maximiner." But it's on the same hillside and managed, I suppose, to evade the monks.

Last year I wrote that somms were crazy if they didn't pour this. I still think that, and think it again. We're exploring the feasibility of putting this on the CORE-LIST, which will depend on the available amount, but meanwhile we're gonna buy some because this is about as hip as Riesling gets. It was in fact picked *after* the Spätlese, and shows just total ridiculous sassafrass, it's up the ass in sassafrass; zing and spice and wicked cunning balanced zip that leads you, drooling and salivating, to a salty finish.

**2013 Leiwener Kloostergarten Riesling Kabinett +**

GCL-080

**SOS : 2 | SOMMELIER ALERT!**

**CORE-LIST WINE**, though we may wean ourselves off it by 2015 if we can secure enough of the Herrenberg. But I'll never stop offering this charming, modest old-school Mosel, a steady personal favorite, and a wine we'd sell more of if people tolerated or understood the way *ambient-yeast fermented wines ACTUALLY SMELL*. The '13 is especially winsome, mineral and salty.

**2013 Longuicher Maximiner Herrenberg Riesling Spätlese Feinherb + (+)**

GSW-081

**SOS : 1 | SOMMELIER ALERT!**

More ripeness, more redcurrant and plum and *Quetsch* and even a little more butter and vanilla-bean, but otherwise it's a fleshier and riper version of the Kabinett, equally exciting, just getting faster from zero to sixty.

**2013 Leiwener Laurentiuslay Riesling Spätlese + + (+)**

GCL-081

**SOS : 2**

**CORE-LIST WINE**. This is quixotic of me. You haven't heard of the vineyard, nor can you easily pronounce it (lore-rent-ee-use-lie), and it has the *sponti* aroma when it's young, but. But! In the past 5-7 years there has been no other Mosel wine in this (or any) offering that is more consistently profound.

The '13 shows brioche and apricot and earth, walks across the palate with crampons. "And it was a stroke of luck the flurbereinigung was voted down here because it was too expensive. So the old vineyard shows its original little terraces and walls." Did I mention the vines are 80-plus years old and some are over 100?

We basically have massive fruit anchored to deep almost meaty structure. That fruit runs in the cox-orange direction; in some years it topples over into peach and malt, but it is *always* profoundly solid and grounded. This '13 has almost incomprehensible solidity and salty grip, and the finish flirts with the infinite.



# 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.

Hugh Johnson says that great wine demands to be talked about. I used to agree, but now I'm not so sure. Something of the miracle of great wine is amplified in the echo-chamber of conversation, among people who share this love and are fond of one another. But I am really beginning to wonder about the experience of drinking wine by oneself, alone and calm, answering to no one, no need

to produce affect or to “contribute” to a conversation. This I think is valid too. Not always, and maybe not even very often, but just as a way to sound the inner voice from time to time.

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!

# von Othegraven

Saar // Kanzem



vineyard area // 16 hectares  
annual production // 5,500 cases  
top sites // **Kanzemer Altenberg** (devonian slate); **Ockfener Bockstein** (grey slate);  
**Wiltinger Kupp** (slate)  
grape varieties // 100% Riesling

*This was as stirring and impressive a group of wines as I have ever tasted, radiant with beauty, polish and aristocracy.*

Othegraven was a *very* close second in my “Winery Of The Vintage” hierarchy, and I am convinced this is a Great And Noble agency, and watched over by the world’s nicest guy, Andreas Barth.

Then I look at what we sell. The previous importer didn’t sell a lot either. And of course there’s a profound disconnect, a chasm really, between the quality of the wines and the relative indifference of the marketplace. I have to wonder why. And I think I know the answer, and the answer makes me sad.

These wines are, let’s say, not inexpensive. For the beauty they offer I feel they are very good *value*, but not only are there fewer buyers for wines over a certain price-point, there are fewer still for Rieslings over that price point. What can one do but lament? People are buying lots of expensive wine, especially when those wines have “collector” value or offer the vinous equivalent of the “porn-star experience.” I am absolutely certain that Dollar for Dollar Othegraven’s wines deliver *better* quality than nearly any other wine. So why? Maybe it’s because it’s been a buyer’s market for Riesling for so long, and we’ve all gotten spoiled. Maybe it’s because there’s only so much money or energy allocated to “expensive” German wine, and that money clusters around a few established names. Maybe it’s because of a tacit assumption that no Riesling could ever be worth a high price because Riesling is essentially trivial. Maybe it’s because Oprah hasn’t done a show demonstrating that regular Riesling consumption gives more frequent and powerful orgasms.

I know there are Riesling pilgrims out there, I see you, and I’d never negate your work. I love your work! But let’s assume that *Summer Of Riesling* is basically established. I allow that the wine landscape includes Riesling, in some small way. I am touched beyond measure by each of you who places Riesling near (or at) the center of your life’s

work. Maybe, just maybe, the next step, after we celebrate the many cool Rieslings we can pour by the glass or sell by the bottle for under \$50, is to make the world safe for the *honestly expensive* Riesling, because this offers a truly profound and gorgeous experience that *few if any* other wines can offer for that expenditure.

I’ll make it personal. How can I watch a man do the work Andreas Barth is doing and not feel with every cell of my being that he ought to be famous? But fine, OK; a man needs something to grind his teeth over, or life gets too soft. So I’ll try to be grateful and mature.

Egon Müller is, obviously, the standard-bearer for the Saar. He is, if not the very “best” grower there, indisputably the first among equals. In the same class are a few excellent growers making classically fruit-driven wines, and every German wine lover cherishes them, as do I although I do not sell them. Then our friend Mr. Niewodnicianski came on the scene at Van Volxem and really shook things up, opting to make extremely dense, concentrated old-school wines mostly chewy and dry (or dry-ish) which are consistently compelling.

Somewhere between these two poles is von Othegraven, neither as *outré* as Volxem nor as keenly fruity as Müller, et al., but instead hewing to a classical line, making scrupulously honest terroir-drenched Saar wines of admirable depth and form. If you like Josmeyer best of all Alsace producers you’ll probably like Othegraven best of all Saar producers.

The estate is 16 hectares, with 7.5 in the great Kanzemer Altenberg which looms spectacularly above the manor. It’s almost comical to open the front door and have this immense mountain of vines occupy your entire field of vision. It beats the view out my front door, in any case.

The wines are *spontis*, done in tank since the 2005 vintage, with very long aging on the fine lees, and only racked once *during* fermentation, and not

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**von Othegraven at a glance** // Venerable estate on the Saar, making intense soil-imprinted wines which are true Saar-archetypes.

again. Musts clarify by settling. There are three great sites: WILTINGER KUPP on highly weathered gray slate with lots of crumbled earth, making compact brilliant wines with a whole basket of heirloom apples. These are what you'd call *keen* or *penetrating* wines. OCKFENER BOCKSTEIN is famous of course, blue-ish silvery slate, a real Saar archetype. Finally the KANZEMER ALTENBERG on pure Devonian slate with rusty flecks from weathered iron oxide, making the most primordially concentrated wines, almost meaty, with such depth as to be almost inscrutable when young, as if they have so much to say they can only stutter.

One lovely development is the acquisition of a new site, the *Wawerner Herrenberg*, a true Grand Cru you may not have heard of, but bought from a fellow whose name you know *quite* well. The wines are (potentially) wonderful, and stylistically different from the existing vineyards in the estate's portfolio.

Between these wines and those of Weingut Vols, I had the impression that the Saar was able to avoid the worst of the issues that affected the Mosel. In any case, these wines were certainly '13s in their saltiness and high acidity, but I neither smelled nor tasted anything dubious, and these seemed to be the best-behaved '13s in the vicinity.

**2012 Kanzemer Riesling Trocken +**  
**SOS : 0**

GOG-038

**HARD-CORE LIST WINE** and **first offering.** This is all Altenberg, and it is exceptionally beautiful in its studious thoughtful way; a fascinating fragrance leads to a palate with filigree diction of red apple, plum blossom and prosciutto; it's HD-articulate and you see every crease and pore of intricate flavor; the finish is irresistible; what dry German Riesling can do at its particular best.

**2012 Altenberg Riesling Grosses Gewächs, 6/750ml + +**  
**SOS : 0 | SOMMELIER ALERT!**

GOG-040

**First offering.** The gentle alpha, like a leader so sure of herself she can rule with a soft hand—but rule indeed. The wine shows a gentle but entirely pure authority. Quietly magnificent, serene yet *intense* minerality; shows the quintessential “urgent whisper” of great Riesling, taut and forceful and echoey; apple-skin and shoot smoke and pure, pure terroir.

**2012 Bockstein Riesling Grosses Gewächs, 6/750ml + +**  
**SOS : 0 | SOMMELIER ALERT!**

GOG-039

**First offering.** All white flower, mirabelle and plum blossom; creamy, enveloping mineral-drenched fruit, juicier and tangier than the Altenberg, more stone-fruit and good cheer; succulent finish. Like twin brothers, both gorgeous, both graduated with 4.0s, but this one wants to party and the Altenberg wants to go home, call a friend, drink some wine and talk.

**2013 Wiltinger Kupp Riesling Kabinett**  
**SOS : 2**

GOG-041

Salty and with classic Saar fruit; entirely charming, slaty golden-delicious apple, and not a scintilla of the '13 funk.

**2013 Kanzem Altenberg Riesling Kabinett Erste Lage**  
**SOS : 2**

GOG-042

Ten days in-bottle when I visited, so I'm sure I saw only a surmise of what this wine will be; firm, tangy and salty, but its essential flavor was closed.

**2013 Kanzem Altenberg Riesling Spätlese Erste Lage +**  
**SOS : 2 | SOMMELIER ALERT!**

GOG-043

Hugely mineral and very juicy. You guys won't remember 1982, but it was a gigantic crop that was diminished by rain during picking, and yet when the wines revealed themselves, they had a botrytis-seasoned fruit that resembled the great 1975s; without the concentration or structure of the Great One, but with some echo of the great flavor. I'm telling you because I saw that here also, writing that this wine was “like '82 mixed with '10; the inherent flavors are there but the timbre is different, and the extract-riven length of '13 suggests an incipient profundity.”



**2013 Kanzem Altenberg Riesling Spätlese Alte Reben, Erste Lage, 6/750ml** + + (+)  
**SOS : 2**

GOG-044

**WINE OF THE VINTAGE.**

Pungently mineral, musk-melon; palate is pure power but focused to a point of quantum; a slide of scree seems to overcome ones poor palate; high citrus and esoteric salts; a smoky tropical note resolves to a long peal of smoke wafting as though from a great distance. Very serious beauty.

**2012 Kanzem Altenberg Riesling Spätlese Alte Reben, Erste Lage** + + (+)  
**SOS : 2**

GOG-036

The parcel is 59 (60 in 2013), and with a year in bottle, and in contrast to the whippy young '13 this is creamier and more exotic. '13 is an arrow shot in a whirring line, while '12 pauses in the woods to dip his feet and a stream of running cream. Both of them are High Nobility of the Riesling culture.

vineyard area // 6 hectares  
 annual production // 4,000 cases  
 top sites // Ayler Kupp, Schonfels, Wiltinger Kupp, Wiltinger Braunfels,  
 Wiltinger Schlangengraben  
 soil types // weathered grey slate, red slate, quartzite  
 grape varieties // Riesling



*These outstanding Saar wines came to Johannes Selbach's attention, who quickly wrote me about them. "You'll like them; they're not cookie-cutter wines."*



Not only is he correct, he's also zeroed in on a guiding beacon for this portfolio; to the extent anyone is added, the wines can't merely be clear, modern, effective or *viable*. They need to be original in some essential way, to offer something we don't already have, and ideally, something *no-one* already has.

Enter and welcome Helmut Plunien, and his beautiful new/old estate on the Saar.

He comes from a recent background as the administrator of big "noble" estates, first in Würzburg, and more recently closer to his native Saar – in Trier, at the Bischöflichen Weingüter, which us old-timers will remember as one of the venerable Great Names in the Mosel-Saar-Ruwer. Though Plunien didn't go into detail, I surmise his stint in Trier was frustrating, and I further surmise his efforts to innovate and improve quality at the now-moribund property were resisted. At the same time (and maybe to blow off steam) he founded a tiny estate in Wiltingen, and called it "Vols" after a micro-parcel name in the great Wiltinger Braunfels, better-known before the 1971 wine law wiped it (and far too many other names) off the map.

But the real breakthrough came in 2009, when he was able to buy the estate Altenhofen in Ayl. Though barely known to Americans, this was a "name" among Saar *amateurs*, both for its superb holdings in the (Ayler) Kupp but also its holdings in the partly abandoned but still fascinating Schonfels.

Plunien, a genial and unpretentious guy you like immediately, calls his cellar philosophy "concentrated doing-nothing." He'd rather not fine or filter and will avoid doing so if at all possible. The wines are *spontis*, done partly in fuder and partly in steel. In the vineyards he's close to organic, precluded both by the steepness of the terrain and the helicopter spraying. The estate

**VOLS at a glance** // Up and coming star-estate on the Saar; begun as a "hobby" project but growing to ambitious proportions.

is “6-something” hectares, with plans to grow “but not beyond ten.”

The wines intrigued me. They were indeed unique, they showed personality, they were fingerprinted with it; not as atavistic as Von Volxem, not as polished as (say) Zilliken, but something that was specifically theirs, including a remarkably deft sense of balance, as though they’d spontaneously found their ways to the perfect non-sweetness-sweetness – you don’t see it and you also don’t miss it.

A year has passed and I’ve gotten to see how the wines “behave;” that is, how they show. To me they show wonderfully, but I’m tolerant of the *sponti* tones that some tasters write off as “sulfur” (incorrectly, as it happens). Plunien himself observes “It’s the zone between 15-25g/l residual sugar where the *sponti* notes come out most,” which is a new theory to me. Again I find I must observe; y’all accept all manner of dubious aromas in wines you approve of because of where they come from or what

“natural” imprimatur they carry. But the first whiff of funk in a German Riesling and you assume they’re trying to poison you with sulfur.

When these wines clear up in the glass—which entails maybe a minute of swirling—they are gripping, snappy and stunningly mineral Saar wines.

2013 was successful here, and we got into a chat about canopy work, which was a motif of the ’13 discussion. Helmut said a curious and surprising thing. “In principle we do not trim canopy. When sun strikes the grapes directly there’s a flavor we don’t want, and the wines taste too powerful and age too quickly.” This may not be a terribly original opinion, but it’s one I hadn’t heard, and it linked up with the “shady” nature of these wines, which are growing ever-more beloved among Saar *amateurs* for their wonderfully determined Saar-ness.

That said, ’13 was at its best (here at least) at RS levels higher than Feinherb, which is something of a misnomer because even Vols’ “sweet” wines taste Feinherb.

### 2013 Wiltinger Kupp Riesling Kabinett +

GVL-015

**SOS : 1 | SOMMELIER ALERT!**

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 fennelly penetration, fine salty length, and mineral ground to a fine powder.

### 2013 Ayler Kupp Riesling Kabinett +

GVL-016

**SOS : 1 | SOMMELIER ALERT!**

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 +

GVL-014

**SOS : 2**

**First Offering.** Last year we were still selling ’11, but now it’s time for this fine snappy beast. 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.

### 2013 Wiltinger Braunfels Riesling Spätlese “Vols II” +

GVL-018

**SOS : 1**

Braunfels is next to Scharzhofberger, and Vols is the name of the primo micro-parcel, first used by Van Volxem. It makes a *very* different kind of wines than the Aylers, more herbal and smoky, and this is an *expressive* ’13, salty, very long, with densely packed extract. Balsam and pine needle, almost lovage or tansy, with botrytis showing not gnarly but finely smoky and agreeably bitter, like radicchio.

### 2013 Wiltinger Braunfels Riesling Spätlese, “Vols I” +

GVL-017

**SOS : 2**

This was why I liked this etate to begin with. Semolina, wet cereal, basmati; in other words a highly original Riesling, not markedly appley or flowery but savory, pudding, a cold corn bisque, almost a GrüVe vetiver, and if it weren’t so adamantly mineral you could well ask if it’s even Riesling at all. Except for that vein of lime and quicksilver...



# Reference



## HOW GERMAN WINES AGE

The whole “petrol” matter stirs some controversy. Some growers accept the adjective sanguinely, but others detest it. All I can say is I wish I knew where some guys go to tank up, ‘cause *I’ve* never smelled refined oil products that smelled like Riesling.

But, I know what y’all mean by it, and I want to correct a misconception. That “petrol” flavor is not a signal of maturity, but rather of adolescence. It will vanish when the wine is truly mature. By which time we’ll all be driving electrical cars anyway.

The author Tom Stevenson of whose scholarship I stand in near-awe, summed up the petrol thing neatly. “The so-called petrol aroma is a well-known varietal characteristic of a classic... Riesling wine of some maturity. The active chemical compound has been identified as trimethyldihydronaphthalene, or TDN for short. TDN develops during the bottle aging process through the degradation of beta-carotene, an antioxidant that is itself derived from lutein, another antioxidant. The ratio of beta

carotene to lutein is higher in Riesling than in any other white grape variety. Studies show that the lower the pH of a wine, the higher its potential for developing TDN. The longer it takes for the petrol aromas to emerge, the more finesse they have. Interestingly, cork absorbs 40 percent of TDN, thus screwcaps preserve more petrol aromas.”

In next month’s edition, Tom will demonstrate how you can use this information to get all the girls you want, so don’t miss that issue!

Here are my rules-of-thumb, with all the usual provisos; your mileage may vary, etc. It presumes on good Riesling from a good grower and a good site in a good vintage.

**Kabinett:** peaks from 4-6 years (if it’s *true* Kabinett and not declassified Auslese) and shouldn’t fade till about age 15. It’s not an abrupt demise, but rather a deliberate twilight slide. That said, I have in mind a 1961 Kabinett I drank at Schmitt-Wagner; 42 years old and going strong.

**Spätlese:** peaks from 7-10 years and shouldn’t fade till about age 25.

**Auslese:** peaks from 12-15 years and shouldn't fade till about age 35.

**Beerenauslese:** peaks from 25 years or so, and shouldn't fade till about age 50.

**TBA:** I know you'll hate to hear this, but these wines aren't designed to fit into a human lifetime. Unless you started buying TBA when you were, like, seventeen, every bottle you have will outlive you. I drank a bunch of 1953 TBAs in 2003 (in honor of my ghastly birthday) and several of them had more improvement ahead of them. So, peaks anywhere between 35 and 55 years, and shouldn't fade till the Red Sox play the Cubs in the series—and the Cubbies win.

**Eiswein:** No one knew how these would age, but some theories are starting to gel. It depends on the wine, on its essential balance. If the acidity is too high, and if it's too dominated by malic "green" acid, this will oxidize into vegetal flavors not to everyone's taste, though the wine is strictly still "intact." Such wines compel a theory to drink Eiswein young. This makes little sense to me. The correct theory would be to ignore such wines entirely. They are unbalanced and will give little joy. Eiswein with balanced, ripe acidity will age splendidly, if unpredictably. Dönnhoff served me an '83 Brücke Eiswein last year, whose caramel color took us aback. "Actually, Terry, the wine took on that color at three years old, and has held it since," he said.

My own instincts are to pay heed to the weight of the wine—Eiswein at 135° Oechsle is a different critter than one at 200° Oechsle—and drink it as you would any other hyper-concentrated dessert wine: either very young or very old.

## GLOSSARY

**Oechsle:** A scale by which grape ripeness is measured. Mr. Oechsle was a chemist and his scale is ludicrously simple. It takes the specific gravity of must and shoves the decimal point around to get a reading. Thus a must with a specific gravity of 1.085 has an Oechsle reading of 85 degrees. One degree Brix equals roughly four degrees Oechsle.

You'll hear me mention Oechsle if a wine displays remarkable ripeness for its quality level. Most of my growers are contemptuous of the lenient standards for minimum ripeness. And you need to know if, for example, I'm offering you a Kabinett with near-Auslese ripeness because you might be looking for a light wine and you won't get it. Each grower sets up his own schemata, and if the baseline level is, say, equivalent to Spätlese, then the lightest wine could be called "Kabinett," even with Spätlese-level ripeness. Better to be remembered for a superb Kabinett than to be forgotten for a run-of-the-mill Spätlese. German wine in general is riper than it was fifteen years ago (it's a globalwarming thing), even though

I have stopped using aerosol deodorants personally.

**GL:** GL means grams-per-liter, and is the method by which most wine things are measured in Germany. We prefer to think in percents, so here's how to transpose. A thing measuring 8.5 g.l. has .85% of whatever thing it is.

**Extract:** Extract really is simple and tangible. It is everything in wine except sugar, acid, water, and alcohol. You can measure it in the lab, and all German wine carrying an A.P. number has had its extract measured. The average reading would be somewhere in the low 20s—speaking in g.l. now. I'd expect to see a Riesling QbA or Kabinett with 22 to 24 g.l. extract, or 2.2 to 2.4 percent. I'd look for Spätlese to be a little higher, Auslese still higher, and the stickies quite high, up to 40 or even 50 g.l.

I'll bring extract to your attention if it's noteworthy. High extract corresponds with low yields, old vines, moist soils, and generally with high acidity. Can you taste extract? Not as a specific flavor, but as a largeness of flavor, especially mid-palate flavor—the second wave of taste that comes on after the initial burst of fruit. Extract is also a buffer, ameliorating both acidity and sweetness.

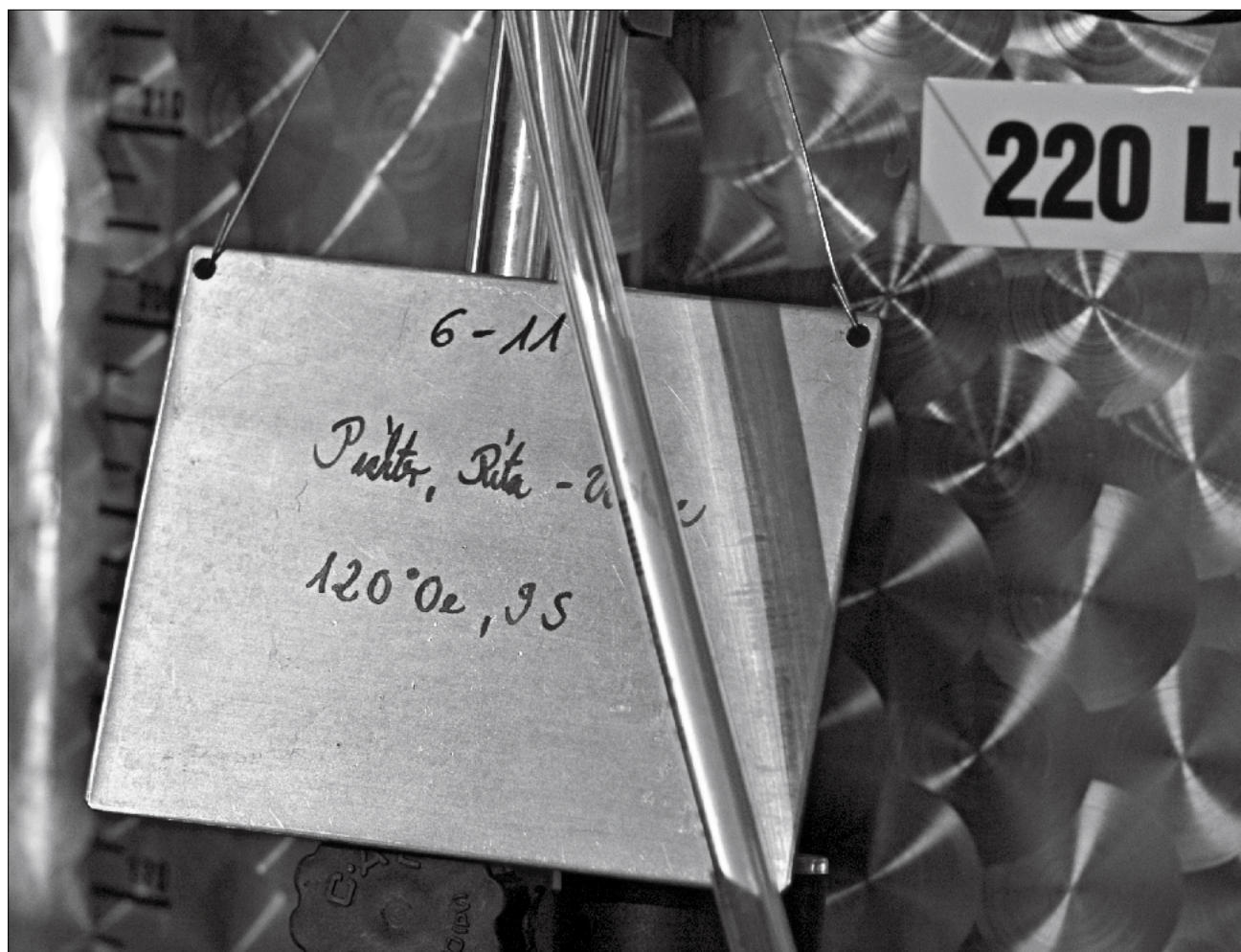
**Acidity:** I need you to understand just how high in acidity German wines are. Most Champagne has an acidity of around 5.5 to 6 g.l., but this would be considered dangerously low for a typical German Riesling. Most Alsace wine, except Riesling, has acidity in the 4-6 g.l. range, and even the Rieslings rarely exceed 8. For the German Riesling grower anything below 8 looks deficient, except for the dry wines.

**Types of Soil:** Soil plays a decisive role in determining specific flavors in German Riesling. I will often make mention of soil if a wine has expressed it with special brilliance. Examples of the more striking soil/flavor rapports include the mineral, wet-stone flavor from slate soil, the curranty, spectral complexities from porphyry soil, and the fiery savor from potassium-rich basalt soils. Oh, and let's not forget the unique smokiness from the red slate-sandstone mélange the Germans call Rotliegend.

**Feinherb:** There must have been a hole in the ozone layer when they permitted this term to be used. Because they didn't *control* it, and this is most scandalously fungible, sensible and un-Teutonic. In fact *feinherb* means whatever a grower wants it to mean. It always denotes a wine on-the-dry-side, and in practice, as one grower told me, the local wine-inspector tolerates anything up to 30g.l. residual sugar especially if the wine tastes as if it should have 70. For some growers *feinherb* are their dryish wines above the limit for Halbtrocken. Others use it in place of Halbtrocken because (correctly) they despise "Halbtrocken".

When I first started seriously with wine, *herb* was the word growers used to indicate their dry (or dry-er) wines. "Trocken" was unknown. So "feinherb" is an attempt to





rub a little spit on it and make it sound nice. The word is neither here nor there, but the idea of regulating it *sensorily* is so manifestly sensible I wonder why they don't apply it to all the dry wines instead of obsessing over lab figures. Enjoy this wee glimmer of sanity while it lasts, as I'm sure some constipated twit at E.U. Brussels HQ will wrestle it into his airless little box.

**Flurbereinigung:** Literally this means the “rectification of the fields.” It's actually a process whereby costs of production are diminished by rationalizing land holdings and building roads, paths, and walkways. Formerly the growers' holdings were split into myriad tiny parcels and scattered hither and yon over the hillside. Often there was no easy access. It could take a longer time to get to one's vines than to actually work them.

In Flurbereinigung, the entire expanse of a vineyard is pulled up. After the new roads are built and the work is completed (sometimes old walls and terraces are rebuilt also), the growers get the same amount of land back, or nearly, but in fewer, larger sections. After replanting, the first commercial crop follows in three to four years. Everyone who's had vineyards through the process reports that it is much easier to work the land afterwards. It also levels the playing field, since everybody's vines are now the

same age. It does create short-term shortages of wine, and it does diminish the quality of wine from a vineyard until the vines mature again, but it's a small price to pay to help ensure the future of viticulture in Germany.

But here's a curious twist. Every parcel of vineyards in Germany is categorized by quality—categories A, B, or C—so that when the vineyards are reapportioned the grower gets back nearly the same proportions of A, B and C land he gave up. Makes sense. But also raises a very sneaky question: Why does anyone still quarrel with the idea of a vineyard classification *when it has already been done??* And is already being used! Show me a grower who fumes that vineyard classifications are undemocratic and I'll show you a grower who'll fuss to **high hell** if he gives up A-land and gets B-land back.

**Gutsabfülllung:** This is a recently permitted term for estate bottling, and much preferable to the old Erzeugerabfüllung which is now restricted for use by coops. This is good for at least two reasons. First the word is shorter. Second, it creates a logical connection between Weingut and Gutsabfüllung. And third, we'uns can remember it because, after all, it means to fill your gut! 'Bout time the Germans did something good with their Twilight-Zone wine law.



# Core List Wines

## Hard Core List

2012 von Winning Riesling Extra Brut Sekt   GDD-083	23
2012 von Winning Sauvignon Blanc Trocken "I," 6/750ml   GDD-096	25
2013 Eugen Müller Forster Pechstein Riesling Spätlese Trocken   GEM-138	27
2011 Darting St. Laurent   GDR-234	36
2013 Geil Muskateller Trocken   GGE-079	43
2013 Hexamer Spätburgunder Weissherbst Halbtrocken   GHX-103	59
2013 Weingart Spay Riesling Kabinett Feinherb   GAW-119	76
2012 Selbach-Oster Graacher Domprobst Riesling Spätlese Feinherb "Alte Reben"   GSO-420	81
2013 Selbach-Oster Pinot Blanc Trocken   GSO-441	83
2012 Reuscher-Haart Piesporter Falkenberg Riesling Kabinett Trocken   GRH-078	103
2012 von Othegraven Kanzemer Riesling Trocken   GOG-038	109

## Core List

2013 Von Winning Riesling   GDD-086	23
2013 Eugen Müller Forster Mariengarten Riesling Kabinett   GEM-141	28
2013 Meßmer Riesling Kabinett Feinherb "Muschelkalk"   GMS-194	31
2013 Darting Dürkheimer Nonnengarten Riesling Kabinett, 1.0 Liter   GDR-232L	36
2012 Darting Dürkheimer Hochbenn Riesling Kabinett   GDR-221	37
2013 Darting Dürkheimer Hochbenn Riesling Kabinett   GDR-242	37
2012 Strub Riesling "Soil To Soul"   GST-172	41
2013 Strub Riesling "Soil To Soul"   GST-187	41
2013 Strub Niersteiner Brückchen Riesling Kabinett   GST-188	41
2013 Strub Niersteiner Paterberg Riesling Spätlese   GST-182	41
2013 Geil Bechtheimer Scheurebe Kabinett   GGE-073	43
2013 Jakob Schneider Niederhäuser Klamm Riesling Kabinett   GJS-124	56
2013 Hexamer Meddersheimer Rheingrafenberg Riesling "Quartzit"   GHX-108	59
2013 Kruger-Rumpf Münsterer Rheinberg Riesling Kabinett   GKF-193	63
2013 Spreitzer Riesling "101"   GSP-097	70
2013 Spreitzer Oestricher Lenchen Riesling Kabinett   GSP-098	70
2012 Selbach-Oster Zeltinger Schlossberg Riesling Spätlese   GSO-403	82
2013 Selbach-Oster Zeltinger Sonnenuhr Riesling Kabinett   GSO-447	83
2013 Meulenhof Erdener Treppchen Riesling Kabinett (nr. 8)   GJU-143	87
2012 Meulenhof Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Spätlese   GJU-138	87
2013 Merkelbach Ürziger Würzgarten Riesling Spätlese #9   GME-207	91
2013 Joh. Jos. Christoffel Erdener Treppchen Riesling Kabinett   GJC-213	95
2013 Joh. Jos. Christoffel Ürziger Würzgarten Riesling Spätlese   GJC-215	95
2013 Kerpen Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Kabinett   GKE-149	96
2013 Carl Loewen Leiwener Klostergarten Riesling Kabinett   GCL-080	106
2013 Carl Loewen Leiwener Laurentiuslay Riesling Spätlese   GCL-081	106



*If it's true that the road to excess leads to the palace of wisdom, Terry Theise has been there and back. A brief perusal of his writing makes it quickly apparent that the man has no reservations about conveying his thoughts and feelings on wine, life, sex, philosophy and general cosmology. In Terry's world, it's all interrelated. We encourage you to jump headlong into the wonderful world of Terry Theise Estate Selections. Prepare yourself for a psychotropic experience.*



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