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Flick, Hochheimer Hölle Riesling Spätlese trocken 2009 Rheingau

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4 Mar 2011 by Jancis Robinson

From €12.80, £17.99

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Here's an interesting story, or at least interesting to anyone who has been following the fortunes of German wine over the past few decades. Hochheim is the far eastern district of the Rheingau, separated from the rest of the region by the sprawling city of Wiesbaden. It used to be famous as the derivation of the old word 'hock' for Rhine wine and is perhaps more famous nowadays for being where the talented Gunter Küntler is.

One of the most florid labels of all is that illustrated here for the wines of a sandy enclave in Hochheim in the far eastern Rheingau, a vineyard called Victoria Berg ever since Queen Victoria visited it in the mid 19th century (when fine German wines were the height of fashion and cost at least as much as first growth red bordeaux). For 80 years it belonged to the Hupfeld estate and the wines were not desperately exciting, but last year it was taken over by Reiner Flick, a Hochheim grower who took over from his father Joachim in 1992 and has grown the estate from three to 19 hectares. He also bought an old mill that belonged to the Prince of Hesse for 500 years in which, to judge from the photographs he was showing at this week's Rheingau Riesling tasting, much jollification as well as vinification takes place. Because of the Hesse connection, he has appropriated the Hessian lion on his dramatic new labels.

Now that he owns the Königin Victoria Berg vineyard, for which he is determined to retain the old label design, substituting silver for gold and inserting his name at the bottom, he has two monopoles. The other vineyard of which he is sole owner is Wicker Nonnberg, a more limestone-dominated site that is designated one of the chosen sites for the top Erstes Gewächs dry Rieslings. I enjoyed his wines, even if the two 2010s from the Victoria Berg were much less expressive than the 2009s. I imagine it will take some time to get the vineyard into ideal shape.

Best value by far, I thought, was **Flick, Hochheimer Hölle Riesling Spätlese trocken 2009 Rheingau** which was well up to the quality of many an Erstes Gewächs but can be found at The Winery, London's German wine specialist, for just £17.99. It has wonderfully bright precise fruit (Hochheimers can be a bit heavy) and the density of the fruit is well counterbalanced by the confident way the flavour seems to have been carved out of the raw materials. This would make a great bottle to convince doubters of the sheer quality of Germany's new generation of assertive dry Rieslings. Flick's **Wicker Nonnberg Riesling Erstes Gewächs 2009 Rheingau** is also very good, is similarly styled and a little more youthful but I'm not sure I'd pay the extra £9 a bottle asked for it.

I was also impressed by the quality of his fruity **Wicker Nonnberg Riesling Auslese 2009 Rheingau** (£28.99 at The Winery, also in halves). In my experience, some German wine producers seem rather half hearted when it comes to making sweeter wines nowadays but that certainly isn't the case here.

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