

Wine

Germany's not all sweetness and light, says Fiona Beckett



Of all the misconceptions about wine, none is perhaps harder to shift than that all German wines are sweet (or off-dry, at least). Yet some of Germany's best whites and all of its reds - yes, it makes red wine, too - are completely dry. You won't find them in the cooler Mosel, obviously, but in more southerly regions such as the Rheinhessen, Pfalz, Rheingau and Baden; those first two were once stigmatised for making low-quality wines, but they now produce some excellent, often organic ones.

So how do you tell how sweet a German white is likely to be? The word trocken on the label, especially "Qualitätswein trocken", is more informative than "kabinett" and "spätlese", which can also be off-dry or sweet. Wines from members of the VDP (Verband Deutscher Prädikatsweingüter) may also carry the words "Grosses Gewächs" on dry Grosse Lage (grand cru) wines.

Confused? I don't blame you. The best plan, quite honestly, is to go to a specialist who can talk you through the styles. One that's well worth visiting is The Winery in Maida Vale, London W9, which imports direct from Germany, including the wines of Peter Jakob Kühn, an exciting biodynamic producer in the Rheingau whose wines made a huge impression on me on a recent visit. If you're a riesling

fan, try his seductively peachy **Sankt Nikolaus Riesling Trocken 2011** (13%; note the higher abv of these dry wines) at £29.99, a wine I fancy drinking a few years down the line with rich fish or roast guinea fowl. (Tanners has Kühn's more affordable **2011 Jacobus Riesling** at £11.90, or £29.70 for three; 11.5% abv.)

Another specialist is Hampshire's Wine Barn, which will put together tailor-made cases of dry German whites or reds according to your taste and budget. And it stocks another producer whose wines really appealed to me, Weingut Wittmann in the Rheinhessen. Wine Barn's 100 Hills range, which includes a pinot blanc, a riesling and a silvaner, starts at £11.80; the pinot blanc is also available from Oddbins at £11.50.

A good German red to get started on is Marks & Spencer's dark, plummy **Palataia Pinot Noir 2012** (£8.99; 13.5% abv), made by M&S's former winemaker Gerd Stepp (pinot nuts should also explore Rudolf Fürst from Franken, whose stellar wines bear comparison with much better-known burgundies).

The sad truth is, many German producers don't even bother with the UK, because their wines find a much more enthusiastic and knowledgeable response in the Netherlands, US and Scandinavia. That's our loss. matchingfoodandwine.com

