

Jane MacQuitty



Every so often a vintage like the extraordinary German 2012 comes along that defies logic. Its wines do not match the intense racy 2011s or the outstanding 2005s, yet the curious and rather delicious 2012 Mosels and Rhines are on the next step down. What separates this from other years is the extra ripe, intense, exotic fruit flavours with white peach, lychees and white pineapple to the fore, yet with a pure, precise, transparent quality. It is this unique “fruit basket” combination that singles out the wines. The 2012 vintage is odd, too, in that it produced almost no grapes affected by noble rot, so there are very few luscious, late-harvest beerenauslese and trockenbeerenauslese wines, the sign of a truly great German vintage for some.

To create the quirky 2012 vintage, the weather had to be pretty darned strange. What gave the grapes a tremendous boost was a long, sunny autumn and late harvest, which finished on about November 10 and meant that the low-yielding, slow-ripening crop had a much longer hang-time, concentrating fruit flavour and acidity. The latter was not the tart malic, green-apple acidity you get from lean German years but tartaric, which explains why these 2012s have the perfect balance between delicate fruit and acidity, plus lower alcohol levels.

So relaxing was the long, drawn-out 2012 German harvest that Reiner Flick, from the eastern Rheingau's leading winery of the same name, reckoned that, despite yields being down by almost a



third, “If I had to choose a vintage every year like 2012, I would take it.”

What will confuse everyone are the latest twists in terminology. Germany's long, slow, and thankfully unanimous return to producing elegant, drier wines has seen the Rheingau's Verband Die Prädikatsweingüter, or VDP group, labelling its finest dry wines from a specific top vineyard site as *grosses gewächs* from the 2012 vintage on. The VDP's finest off-dry wines, from specific top vineyards, will be labelled *grosse lage* and in second place will come the *erste lage* wines. Alas, the old *grosslage* term, a group of indifferent vineyards thrown together, can still be seen on evil sugar-water wines.

Ignore the tedious terminology and instead tuck into the mouthwatering, tongue-tingling, crisp apple and stone fruit-layered 2012 Dr L Loosen Riesling (Sainsbury's, £7.49, and Majestic, £8.49). Just off dry is von Kesselstatt's delicious, zesty, white peach-perfumed 2012 Niedermenniger Riesling Kabinett (Wine Society, 01438 741177, £9.50). Ditto Dr Loosen's smashing, waxy, lemon and lychee-licked 2012 Urziger Würzgarten Riesling Kabinett (Waitrose, £15.99). Finally, don't miss Flick's gorgeous, spritzy, elegant, pink grapefruit and white nectarine-scented 2012 Wickerer Nonnberg Riesling Trocken (The Winery, 020-7286 6475, £15.99).

A vineyard in Rheingau, Germany