

T H E
W I N E R Y

German Riesling Module

The Winery Wine Course *at* Kandoo

30.07.14

Riesling is cool (or, if you prefer, hot). Again.

SPIRITUAL HOME

Whilst there are good (some great) Rieslings grown in (among others) Austria and Australia, Alsace and Lombardy, Central Otago and the Finger Lakes (in the US it is currently the most-planted variety), Germany remains its spiritual home.

FASHION

In Queen Victoria's time, wines from the Mosel and the Rheingau (known as *Hock* because the British found Hochheim difficult to pronounce) fetched more than top Bordeaux.

German white wines were extremely popular in the UK in the 1960s and 70s. Wine was suddenly accessible to all, not just the upper classes. The fashion was for off-dry and sweet wines and Germany found it easy to produce enormous volumes very cheaply. This proved to be a double-edged sword in the UK and, while their top Rieslings have always been exquisite, those wines were tarred with the same brush and fell from favour.



DRY (*trocken = dry*)

Wind forward to the new millennium and onwards to the present day. The domestic German market is almost entirely for dry wine. German growers have been making dry Riesling for decades. It has taken the rest of the world a while to notice just how good these wines are.

TERROIR - TRANSPARENCY

Most of these wines are made fairly close to each other geographically and we hope to demonstrate the enormous variation of styles between different regions and also variations within those regions.

Above all, German Riesling is the purest sensory demonstration of the **concept of terroir** – the idea of a wine from a specific vineyard tasting unique and different to one from next door or further afield.

Riesling has a sense of transparency – you can taste the geology, taste the earth that it is grown on, whether that is volcanic rock, fossil-rich limestone, sandy clay or quartz-infused slate. It is almost as if you are licking the slate itself.

ELECTRIC

Great Riesling, dry or sweet, is something of a helter-skelter ride in your mouth. The play of ripeness with the exhilarating lift of fresh acidity is something that can't be found in other wines. Be careful - once converted, it is highly addictive!

WHERE ARE TONIGHT'S WINES FROM?

Tonight, in addition to the sparkling dry Riesling, we will look at a spread of Rieslings from a spread of regions, all but one of which is dry. Classic, historic regions - the **Rheingau**, the **Mosel** and the **Nahe**. Further-flung **Franken** and **Baden** - and one, the upstart, **Rheinhessen**, energetically building a new reputation for exciting vibrant Rieslings, largely driven by a younger generation taking over from their parents. You could draw a parallel with what's happening in Shoreditch and East London generally – a previously run-down area with a poor reputation, now a magnet for a younger demographic and undergoing enormous change and innovation.

W I N E R Y

SPARKLING

1) Zum Krug Riesling Sekt Brut 2012, Josef Laufer (Hattenheim/Rheingau)

Hotel Zum Krug, in Hattenheim, is a magical place. The sort of place that may have existed in mediaeval Germany, atmospheric twists and turns in a wooden interior straight out of a fantasy grotto from ancient legend. Josef Laufer, owner and font of Rheingau knowledge, always gives us a warm welcome and we start with a glass of his brilliant dry Sekt made from top class Rheingau fruit just outside the village - a wake-up call to the senses in all its petroly splendour.

FRANKEN

Volcanic playground

Minerals and Bocksbeutel.

2) Riesling Kabinett trocken 2011, Graf von Schönborn (Hallburg/Franken)

Full name; Hallburger Schlossberg Riesling Kabinett trocken 2011

Franken -1, 2 or 3 hours drive east of Frankfurt (depending on how fast you drive) - is all about the Bocksbeutel and Minerals. "Bocksbeutel" is the name of the funny squat bottles most Franken wines come in, said to be derived from a "goat's sack" and dangerously reminiscent of a Mateus Rosé bottle – but there the similarity ends; the contents could not be more different.

The difference (as everyone in Franken keeps saying) is all to do with minerals. 250 million years ago, the bright sandstone rock Franken now sits on was on the equator and 100 million years later, as the continental plates shifted northwards and outwards, became the predecessor of the Mediterranean, accumulating fossil-heavy chalk. These layers fan outwards, exposing their seven different geologies to widely scattered pockets of the Franken vineyards.

The thrilling liquid within tonight's Bocksbeutel is racy, dry Riesling fizzing with volcanic mineral goodness.



BADEN

The sunny south – protected by the Black Forest. Influenced by volcanoes and, on the Kaiserstuhl in the far south, by 1970s man with earth-moving machinery.

Warmer and sunnier than most German wine-growing regions, Riesling from Baden tends to be ripe and heavy - other than in small, specific pockets such as tonight's case; a rare example of Riesling grown on granite.

Alte Reben Riesling trocken 2012, Schloss Neuweier (Baden/Germany)

The sun was beginning to set as we arrived at Schloss Neuweier in the outskirts of the spa town of Baden-Baden on the edge of the Black Forest. The vineyard was deep orange – there's a reason why one of Neuweier's top vineyards is called Goldenes Loch (*Golden Hole*).

Robert Schätzle, complete with curly, almost Afro-style hair and a regional southern Baden accent, had only recently persuaded his family to move from the southern end of Baden, close to the Swiss border, up to the other. Schloss Neuweier has centuries of history. Its Mauerwein (*Wall wine* - from a terraced vineyard on the hill behind the castle) was one of Queen Victoria's favourites. It had won awards in Philadelphia in the 1800s and was on the airship Graf Zeppelin's maiden flight. After consulting soil guru Claude Bourguignon, Robert went for it and 2012 was his first full vintage.

Robert hasn't appeared out of nowhere. He has put in the time at serious wineries over the years - in Baden, Alsace and Bordeaux. Robert clearly knows what he's doing. The first vintage was a success – the dry Rieslings are open, expressive with plenty of fresh acidity. "The acidity is interesting. The Riesling here is grown on granite soil. That's very unusual. Other than one or two vineyards of Zind-Humbrecht's, you rarely come across Riesling on granite."

Robert has a couple of other secrets. Deep in the old cellar (and you have to squeeze behind the tanks to see it) is a seriously old rock. He had been told that it was a billion years old until a geological expert came down and put him right: it was only 700 million years old.

The other secret is a magic box. "You know sometimes the wine in one tank is troubled, jumbled-up and doesn't taste right? Well, Tobias (my colleague) or I take a beaker from that tank and put it for 45 minutes in this 8-sided box. Then we pour it back into the difficult tank. Don't ask me how it works but it tastes much better!"

T H E
W I N E R Y

NAHE

Spicy and plump.

Considered to be plump, rich and firm, some people say earthy. Classic, fine, age-worthy wines from historic vineyards.

4) Schieferboden Riesling trocken 2012, von Racknitz (Odernheim/Nahe)

5) Schieferboden Riesling trocken 2011, von Racknitz (Odernheim/Nahe)

6) Schieferboden Riesling trocken 2008, von Racknitz (Odernheim/Nahe)

Top Mosel growers Clemens and Rita Busch had asked two times running “have you tasted at von Racknitz recently?” No, not recently. “You have to go there, the wines are getting really good!” So we looped through the Nahe to check them out. Formerly belonging to a historic cloister, the estate has a long history traceable back to Hildegard of Bingen (the Saint, Composer and Mystic) back in the 1100s. There have been ups and downs through the centuries to the point where the winery was on the brink of collapse in 2002. Enter Matthias Adams, former CFO of tech company Infineon Germany. Then in his late 30s he decided he wanted a career change, jacked-in his high-powered job and spent a year walking around the Black Forest. A friend at a large consultancy firm phoned him up and said, “there’s a job come in, it’s too small for us. Can you take a look at this winery, see if there’s anything you can salvage?” What no-one could have foreseen was that Matthias and Luise von Racknitz would fall in love and that together they would turn the estate’s fortunes around.



Matthias and Luise make three “Stone Wines” from different soils. Schieferboden (Slate), Vulkangestein (volcanic rock) and Kieselstein (pebbles over slate). Schieferboden is from Odernheimer Kloster Disibodenberg (the vineyard on the ridge by their home) and three vineyards in nearby Niederhausen – Hermannshöhle, Kertz and Rosenheck. We thought it might be interesting to compare the same wine in three different vintages.

RHEINHESSEN

A region with new direction

Rheinhessen, fertile and mostly flat, was the source of oceans of watery, sugary Liebfraumilch in the 60s, 70s and 80s. Today there is real energy, a real movement taking hold as the new generation of growers have taken over. Sons and daughters coming out of wine college determined to make great wine in this previously unfashionable region.

7) Binger Quarzit Riesling trocken 2013, Bischel (Appenheim/Rheinhessen)

Bingen is on a massive corner on the Rhine, opposite Rudesheim in the Rheingau. It is at the north-western edge of the region where four wine-growing regions meet - Rheinhessen, Mittelrhein, Nahe and the Rheingau. Millions of years ago the Rhine looped below it, which explains why the wines have an almost Rheingau-like opulence.

The Winery’s David Motion was recently involved in a Dragon’s Den type German Wine event and Bischel was one of the clear winners. Their prize? An order from us. Then another.

Based in Appenheim, not far from Bingen, the young Runkel brothers, Christian and Mathias, took over the family winery and have been turning heads in Germany. No expense is spared and everything is done by hand. Wild yeasts and long lees contact give the wine added texture. Although the richness and minerality would seem to contradict the lab stats, the wine is dry.

RHEINGAU

Classical and perfumed.

Long-lived, fragrant Riesling. Often floral or evocative of perfume on the nose (some writers talk of blackcurrant leaf), with wonderful body, structure and precision.

The Rhine takes a sharp turn west at Mainz before turning north again at Rudesheim. The south-facing slope on the north bank between the two is the Rheingau, thick with castles, convents and vineyards. This is the classical home of Riesling. Evocative names like Steinberg, Marcobrunn, Johannisberg, Hochheim - the home of Queen Victoria's "Hock", back when German wines were the most expensive in the world.

8) Quarzit Riesling trocken 2012, Peter-Jakob Kühn (Oestrich-Winkel/Rheingau)

Despite seeming (at first) quite shy, Peter-Jakob Kühn is a high-visibility figure on the German biodynamic wine scene. Peter-Jakob, his wife Angela and their burgeoning family are from Oestrich in the heart of the Rheingau.

Peter-Jakob had a complete change of direction in 1999, was certified organic in 2004 and then went the whole way to biodynamism.

What is Biodynamism? Organic viticulture taken to the extreme, ruled by the lunar calendar - man, moon and earth in perfect harmony. Based on a series of lectures given by the Austrian Philosopher Rudolf Steiner to a group of German farmers in 1924 in which he proposed a holistic, spiritual approach to farming, emphasising the interconnectedness of the universe with soil, plants and animals. It's a self-sustaining, self-nourishing system, in which decisions are synchronised with the Lunar Calendar. Gnarly German guru, Maria Thun (who died in 2012) and her son Matthias have been publishing the annual calendar in which, depending on the position of the moon and planets, the lunar month is divided into four types of days. Fruit, Flower, Leaf and Root. Biodynamics captures the imagination with its strange-sounding rituals, such as dynamising rainwater or burying a cow horn filled with cow manure through the winter, and its widespread use of Yarrow, Nettle, Dandelion and parts of animals.



So, how are the Kühns' wines? Their style is utterly distinctive - standing quite apart from other Rheingau. They can challenge our idea of how Riesling should taste. The aromas can invoke incense, orange peel and hedgerows. There's an oiliness without ever being cloying. There's sometimes a sense of tannin that you expect in red wine but not in white. We often recommend putting their top Rieslings in a decanter several hours before serving. 10 hours isn't too much!

9) Riesling Spätlese trocken 2013, Asbach-Kretschmar (Oestrich-Winkel/Rheingau)

Full name: *Rüdesheimer Berg Roseneck Riesling Spätlese trocken 2013*

Rüdesheim is on the western edge of the south-facing Rheingau, where the Rhine then makes a sharp turn north. There's a statue of Germania (not unlike Britannia) at the top of the hill, the car ferry from Bingen below. A cable car crosses the vines. We had long been searching for a great Rüdesheim Riesling and it was a BIO-vintner on another river, Rudi Trossen from the Mosel, who gave us the tip.

Anglophiles Peter and Tania Kreuzberger lovingly tend their small organic parcels of vines in picturesque Rüdesheim, Hattenheim, Hallgarten and Winkel. This wine is benchmark Rheingau; opulent, oily, almost unctuous Baroque perfume emerges as the wine warms up. Classical structure with weight and power.

MOSEL

Minerality and piercing purity.

The Mosel is a stunningly beautiful, steep-sided valley that loops from Luxembourg through Trier up to Koblenz where it joins the Rhine. The vineyards are punishingly steep and dangerous to work. The entire valley, and its wine, is all about the slate – blue, grey or red. Mosel Riesling is known for its refinement, ethereal delicacy, raciness and terroir definition.

10) Escheburg Riesling trocken 2012, Immich–Batterieberg (Enkirch/Mosel)

We have been circling Immich-Batterieberg for some years and have swooped. Strictly speaking it has been re-circling and re-swooping. We bought a couple of times almost a decade ago from the previous owner, lawyer Gerd Bastgen, and have just started again with the new incumbent Gernot Kollmann.

Immich-Batterieberg is a historic estate and has some of the best vineyards in Enkirch, including the monopole Batterieberg. It can trace its history as a winery back to 1425. One of its buildings has a longer history, dating back to 908 AD. The East Frankish (Carolingian) King Ludwig IV had a throne room here and bequeathed the building to the Church.

The estate was in the hands of the Immich family from 1425 until 1989. The intriguing Jugendstil/Belle Epoque style label with the two cherubs firing a cannon at the vineyard tells the story from 1841 of the incumbent Immich wanting to modify the exposition of his vineyard and tilt it more in favour of the sun. He achieved this by pounding the steep slope with cannons (some say it was dynamite) – the deafening sound ricocheted along the valley.

Winding forward to recent times, Gerd Bastgen went bankrupt in 2007. Star winemaker, Gernot Kollmann, had made several earlier approaches but finally bought it from the bank in 2009.

Gernot Kollmann is widely known and respected. Now 46, he comes from the Ruhr, southeast of Dortmund – an area that has nothing to do with wine. Although he studied at Heilbronn, he says he learnt everything he knows while working. He did two years at Dr Loosen, three years at the Bischöfliche Weingüter in Trier, then worked for four years at van Volxem when the Bitburger heir Roman Niewodniczanski bought the estate. From 2004 until 2009, Gernot worked as consultant at Knebel in Winningen/Mosel, and at estates on the Ahr and in Bulgaria.

Gernot is running a lean operation at Immich-Batterieberg. With 5.5 hectares on the very steep slate slopes around Enkirch, he does all the work himself with one full-time co-worker and the occasional apprentice. He had a fascinating statistic for us when we visited recently. A top winery in Rheinhessen reckons it takes 450 hours each year to work each hectare. An average Mosel winery with a balance of steep and flatter vineyards (where a tractor can be used) needs 700-800 hours per hectare. Gernot worked out recently that for them, with nothing but steep-sloped vineyards, they need 1,007 hours per hectare. That's a ton of work. But the results are worth it. Definitely.



11) Gäns Riesling trocken 2011, Lubentiushof (Niederfell/Mosel)

We now find ourselves in the suburbs of Koblenz, where the Mosel tips into the Rhine and the vineyards are dizzyingly steep - terraced to squeeze out every last bit of late autumn sunshine. This section of the river is known as the Terrassen-Mosel (*Mosel terraces*). Here you will find one of the New Wave winemakers on the Mosel creating a stir with his very late harvested, dry wines of considerable texture.

Andreas Barth studied Law and Music but decided, with the support of his interior designer wife, Susanne, to turn to wine-making. He is almost entirely self-taught. In 1994 they bought an estate on the outskirts of Koblenz on the not very well-known Lower Mosel called Lubentiushof. Sounds grander than it was, but it did come with a run-down cellar and an old vineyard in Gondorf.

Andreas' career trajectory has been impressive. Following rave reviews in the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung by Daniel Deckers and Stuart Pigott, since 2005 he has also been winemaker at the historic von Othegraven estate on the Saar.

With tiny yields and very late harvesting you can really taste the old vines. He only uses natural yeasts, and is virtually organic. Bold, yeasty and spicy. Taste that minerally slate!

12) Gäns Riesling Spätlese 2005, Lubentiushof (Niederfell/Mosel)

When we visited in May to taste the 2012s, which they always release later than everyone else, we asked if they had anything sweet with a bit of age. We were rather taken with this succulent, classical Spätlese, picked late, with the fermentation stopped early before all the grapey sweetness has turned to alcohol. Wines like this can age gracefully for at least half a century.

T H E
W I N E R Y

TONIGHT'S LINE-UP

1) Zum Krug Riesling Sekt Brut 2012, Josef Laufer	12.99
2) Riesling Kabinett trocken 2011, Graf von Schönborn	15.99
3) Riesling Alte Reben trocken, Schloss Neuweier	21.99
4) Schieferboden Riesling trocken 2012, von Racknitz	18.99
5) Schieferboden Riesling trocken 2011, von Racknitz	18.99
6) Schieferboden Riesling trocken 2008, von Racknitz	17.99
7) Binger Quarzit Riesling trocken 2013, Bischel	19.99
8) Quarzit Riesling trocken 2012, Peter-Jakob Kühn	19.99
9) Berg Roseneck Riesling Spätlese trocken 2013, Asbach-Kretschmar	14.99
10) Escheburg Riesling trocken 2012, Immich-Batterieberg	22.99
11) Gäns Riesling trocken 2011, Lubentiusshof	24.99
12) Gäns Riesling Spätlese 2005, Lubentiusshof	25.99

Wine labelling

A classic German label will usually show the grower, the vintage and the bit that some find intimidating: Name of the village, name of the vineyard, the grape, the Prädikat level (Kabinett/Spätlese etc) and whether it is vinified dry (**trocken**) or fruity.

Key thing to look out for - trocken = dry.

Many find the German classification system (the Prädikat system) difficult to comprehend. Unless you are drinking sweet wines, or want to go deeper, it is not worth getting too bogged down with it.



The Prädikat system – the ladder of quality

Determined entirely by the ripeness of the grapes at picking, measured in Oechsle.

QbA (Qualitätswein bestimmter Anbaugebiete) –
can be dry (trocken) or sweet or between (halb-trocken/feinherb)

QmP (Qualitätswein mit Prädikat):

Kabinett - can be dry (trocken) or sweet or between (halb-trocken/feinherb)

Spätlese - can be dry (trocken) or sweet or between (halb-trocken/feinherb)

Auslese – almost always sweet but can be dry (trocken) or half-dry (halb-trocken/feinherb)

Beerenauslese – always sweet

Trockenbeerenauslese – always sweet

Eiswein – always sweet

Term for top dry wines:

Grosses Gewächs (until 2012 labelled as Erstes Gewächs in the Rheingau).

This is the highest level in dry wines, equivalent to Grand Cru.

Always bears the name of the vineyard .

LUNAR CALENDAR OBSERVERS – today is a **Fruit Day**.

Our next tasting will be on **Wednesday 20th August** at our shop in Clifton Road from 17.00-21.00h.

Join us for our Monthly Tastings
The Winery, 4 Clifton Road, London W9

mailinglist@thewineryuk.com
020 7286 6475

www.thewineryuk.com

info@thewineryuk.com