

T H E W I N E R Y R I E S L I N G !

The Winery Wine Course - German Riesling Module *at Kandoo* 14.07.15

Germany is the spiritual home of Riesling. Tonight we will be exploring variations and nuances of different regions such as the Mosel, the Rheingau and the Nahe, looking at hot new growers in Rheinhessen and Baden.

We will revel in Riesling's transparent expression of terroir – the steep, slate slopes of the Mosel, the volcanic soils of the Nahe, and the perfumed depth of historic Rheingau.

We are throwing caution to the wind with a top shelf line-up, peppered with Grand Cru or Grand Cru equivalents. Rieslings youthful and mature, almost entirely dry but for one – a rare opportunity to taste some of the historic last bottles of the Niederhauser Hermannshohle Auslese 1989 from the former Prussian State Domain in the Nahe.

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 tonight's 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 **Mosel**, the **Rheingau** and the **Nahe**. A Grosses Gewächs (Grand Cru) from **Baden** - and three from **Rheinhessen**, a region energetically building a new reputation for exciting vibrant Rieslings, largely driven by a younger generation taking over from their parents.

T H E
W I N E R Y

SPARKLING

1) Rheingauer Riesling Sekt 2011, Schloss Vaux (Stadt Eltville/Rheingau)

It was Claudia von der Papen, one of our talented interns from Geisenheim who brought us our first bottle of Schloss Vaux. We were very impressed. It turns out that Schloss Vaux is one of the top sparkling wine producers in Germany. Schloss Vaux originally started in Berlin in 1868 and in the 1880s had the opportunity to buy a winery in Metz, which became Chateau Vaux. Fifty years later it was time to move from Metz to Eltville where they focused on making Sekt from top Rheingau sites. From the beginning it was based on the French Champagne House model. Until very recently they owned no vines, and always had longstanding grape contracts with top growers such as Kloster Eberbach and Langwerth von Simmern from which they produce startling sparkling versions of the legendary Steinberg and Erbacher Marcobrunn Rieslings and the red Assmannshäuser Höllenberg from Spätburgunder. Last year they bought a cellar in Geisenheim, and going forward will be making some of their base wine themselves. Cuvée Vaux, their calling card, has become a Winery staple. Tonight we are opening with their Rheingau Riesling Sekt. Made with grapes around Eltville produced by Langwerth von Simmern, and almost two years on the yeasts. One more thing – the Chairman of the Board is a real live Count, Nikolaus Graf von Plettenberg. Classy!

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.

2) vom grauen schiefer Riesling trocken 2011, Clemens Busch (Pünderich)

Until 2009 this wine was called Pündericher Marienburg Riesling Spätlese trocken two star. "From the grey slate" seems a bit less wordy.

Clemens Busch, the man who looks like Jesus, is something of a guru to his disciples, the New Wave German winemakers. He was the first to show that, with meticulous work in the vineyards, 100% organic viticulture - biodynamic even, and if you pick late enough, you can make amazing dry Riesling on a river best known for its sweeter styles. His elevation to the VDP (Verband Deutscher Prädikats – und Qualitätsweingüter/the official Premier League of German growers) seven years ago brought with it added recognition and status from the Old Guard, but it also means Clemens now has to play the politics game. Tinkering with labels and classification - fiddling with skis, in our opinion.

Based in the village of Pünderich, between Traben-Trarbach and Zell, it's easy to forget the bureaucracy as you stand outside Clemens and Rita's 17th Century picturebook house on the riverside, looking up at the overwhelming wall of vines on the opposite bank. Truly one of the most stunning views in a beautiful river valley.

Clemens and Rita picked the grapes for this wine late (as usual) from grey slate parcels dotted around the Marienburg and allowed them to ferment out dry. Bursting with tightly-packed flavours, the late-picked ripeness of the fruit surges with electricity and savoury minerals.

3) Molun Riesling trocken 2011, Melsheimer (Reil)

"I'm the only one stupid enough to work the crazily steep vines in Reil" says Thorsten Melsheimer, the perfect picture of a Saxon in rude health. "It's not as if the vines are actually facing in an ideal direction either. It forces you to work hard. It helps to be biodynamic. You have to slash the yield and pick insanely late. I bought some vines in a perfect south facing vineyard on the other side of the river and the wines are not as interesting - the vines are just lazy!"

Thorsten is certainly not lazy - certified Ecovin (Organic) since 1997, he has been nursing old vines back to life, rebuilding walls in the remotest, steepest, least accessible parts of the Mullay-Hofberg vineyard.

"When I get really hot working in the vines, I jump into the Mosel for a quick swim to cool off."

Thorsten has several bottlings based on old vineyard parcel names. Langeberg, Schaf, Pfefferberg and Molun, a wine that he describes as "liquid history". Molun was first mentioned in 1143, in a document witnessed by King Conrad III, when it was bequeathed by a Palatinate Graf. Molun was a farm in a slightly sheltered corner, a break in the long uninterrupted slate slope just south of Reil. Molun would morph into Moley, then Mullay, and become the name of the pre-eminent vineyard of Reil – the Mullay-Hofberg. Thorsten has revived the vineyard and the name.

His wines have all the nervy definition and slatey minerality we have come to expect of the Mosel's finest.



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.

4) Schönhell Riesling Spätlese trocken 2012, Fred Prinz (Hallgarten)

In contrast to wine made in historic castles and convents, for 20 years Fred Prinz made his wine in the garage of the flats where he and his family live in the small village of Hallgarten. Demand for his wine was so great that he gave up his day job at the State Domain at Kloster Eberbach to turn what was a hobby into a full time job.

Uneconomic with just 1.5 hectares, he needed to find another hectare or two. Or three. He always keeps his ears open while he's out working in the vines. Gossip and rumour are rife among the vines - who has been approached by who, who's thinking of selling to whom? Over the last 10 years, he and his wife Sabine have snaffled up old parcels in the Jungfer, Schönhell and Hendelberg vineyards and grown from 1.5 to 7 hectares which is still just about manageable on their own with some family members press-ganged in for harvest.

He also had to rent a slightly bigger cellar in a neighbouring village. The space in the original garage has recently been filled by a brand new Harley.



5) Rudesheimer Berg Rottland Riesling EG 2004, Schloss Schönborn (Hattenheim)

From one extreme to the other, from a garage in a block of flats to a castle. Schloss Schönborn is one of the grand old estates of the Rheingau, tracing its vineyard ownership back to 1349. Today it is owned and managed by the current Earl, Paul Graf von Schönborn. He and his family have another wine estate, a castle and agricultural land in Franken and wine and horse interests in Portugal.

They own top-notch vineyards at either end of the Rheingau (Rudesheim and Hochheim) and in the middle (in Winkel, Hattenheim and Erbach).

The town of Rudesheim is a tourist magnet, sitting on the corner of the Rhine as it turns north. Whether it is tourist heaven or hell may be debatable but the quality of its vineyards is without question. Berg Rottland is a Grand Cru site. Rheingauers were the first to implement a new Grand Cru system for dry wines, calling it Erstes Gewächs (First Growth). Started in 1992 by four leading estates, it became a recognised Rheingau classification in 2000. Since 2012 they have fallen into line with the rest of Germany and now call this level Grosses Gewächs (Great Growth/Grand Cru).

We frequently drop in at Schloss Schönborn on our trips to the Rheingau, to see what else they have tucked away in their cellar.

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.

6) Nierstein Riesling trocken 2012, Kühling-Gillot (Bodenheim)

The Winery's David Motion was involved in a Dragon's Den type German Wine event in 2013 and there were two clear winners, Kühling-Gillot and Bischel. Both are now on our shelves.

Before marrying Oliver Spanier of Battenfeld-Spanier, another Rheinhessen star, Carolin was a Kühling-Gillot. Her family has wonderful vineyards overlooking the Rhine on Rheinhessen's eastern flank in the legendary villages of Oppenheim, Nackenheim and Nierstein. Many of their vineyards are on the Roter Hang (the red cliffs), thick with iron oxide which imparts their wines with an almost tropical spice and intensity. Oliver now makes the wines for both Kühling-Gillot and Battenfeld-Spanier. Their dry Rieslings are benchmarks for the region. Bold, opulent and powerful.

We also managed to scoop up a handful of bottles of the Burgweg Spätburgunder GG. Yum.

Carolin and Oliver live in Hohen-Sulzen, south Rheinhessen, with their boys, Louis and Leopold.

7) Rabenturm Riesling trocken 2013, Fritz Ekkehard-Huff (Nierstein-Schwabsburg)

We had been on the lookout for a great Nierstein ever since our beloved St Antony winery changed hands in 2005. A dinner at the excellent Schloss Sörgenloch restaurant deep in the Rheinhessen countryside ended in intense conversation with the owner, Thomas. Nierstein? Try this Fritz Ekkehard-Huff. Yum. When we phoned shortly afterwards, the daughter Christine said, "that's amazing, I only dropped a single sample bottle off at Sörgenloch!" Fate. Christine was fresh out of Geisenheim, the top German wine college and making bright, minerally dry Riesling from the iron-rich red cliffs overlooking the Rhine at Nierstein.

There have been developments since we first visited. Jeremy Bird, a New Zealander, came to the Huffs to do a harvest in 2009. One thing led to another and he never left - Christine and Jeremy got married summer 2013 and their baby girl was born in January.

Christine is particularly proud of her 2013 Rabenturm, a fillet piece of the Schloss Schwabsburg vineyard with 50 year-old vines at the base of the Ravens' Tower.



8) Scharlachberg Riesling trocken 2013, Bischel (Appenheim)

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 may explain why the wines have an almost Rheingau-like opulence.

Back at the Dragon's Den type German Wine event in 2013, Bischel was one of the clear winners. Their prize? An order from us.

Based in Appenheim, not far from Bingen where the Riffels are based (and where they share some vineyards in the Scharlachberg), the young Runkel brothers, Christian and Matthias, 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 bone dry. As it turns out, it wasn't just one order - Bischel are now a fixture on our shelves.

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.

9) Goldenes Loch Riesling GG 2012, Schloss Neuweier (Baden-Baden-Neuweier)

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!”

NAHE

Spicy and plump.

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

10) Schlossböckelheimer KG Riesling trocken 2013, Gut Hermannsberg (Niederhausen-Schlossböckelheim)

11) Niederhäuser Hermannshöhle Riesling Auslese 1989, State Domain Nahe (Niederhausen-Schlossböckelheim)

We recently unearthed a small stash (diminishing by the day) from the legendary Prussian State Domain in the Nahe which ran for almost a century. Full name: Staatliche Weinbaudomänen Niederhausen-Schlossböckelheim.

“Legend” is a much, possibly over-used word in the wine world, but sometimes no other word will do. The former Prussian State Domain, the vines it overlooks – the Schlossböckelheimer Kupfergrube – and its monopole vineyard, the Niederhäuser Hermannsberg, are the stuff of legend.

The Domain was started in 1902 using convict labour and plenty of earth-moving, rock-shaping dynamite by Forester Hoeppe who persuaded the reluctant Prussian State to build a new wine domain in the Nahe. The region’s vital fruit and oak sales had collapsed and Hoeppe, who was a strong supporter of “Naturwein” (the new concept of wine as a natural product), believed that winemaking should be encouraged. He proposed that the new domain should be operated as a “model vineyard”; improving the quality of winemaking in the area and raising the reputation of German wine generally. He was convinced that the location and geology were perfect for vines. Subsequent decades proved him to be correct.

After a long golden era the estate’s fortunes went south in the 1980s and 90s until it was bought in 1998 by the Maurer family, who had made their fortune selling potatoes to German supermarkets. The talented Christian Vogt was brought in to make the wine. We visited and bought a few times in the mid 2000s. The estate was on the up again but Erich and Tilly Maurer decided to retire and sold in 2009. Their daughter Gudrun continues to work at the estate. Christian Vogt moved to Karthäuserhof in the Ruwer.

The new owners, Dr Christine Dinsel and Jens Riedel, a wealthy wine-loving couple from Hamburg with a background in banking, have invested generously in every area of the estate. Dr Christine has written a very thorough and readable history of the Domain and the striking new label is a reworking of the original design from the early 1900s.

They have an excellent young winemaker plucked from the Pfalz, called Karsten Peter. And the wines? In our opinion; striking, bold, full-throttle. Exploding with deep, layered minerals and surging with freshness.



T H E
W I N E R Y

TONIGHT'S WINES

1	Rheingauer Riesling Sekt 2011, Schloss Vaux	20.99
2	vom grauen schiefer Riesling trocken 2011, Clemens Busch	20.99
3	Molun Riesling trocken 2011, Melsheimer	21.99
4	Schönhell Riesling Spätlese trocken 2012, Prinz	22.99
5	Rüdesheimer Berg Rottland Riesling EG 2004, Schloss Schönborn	33.99
6	Nierstein Riesling trocken 2012, Kühling-Gillot	21.99
7	Rabenturm Riesling trocken 2013, Fritz Ekkehard-Huff	28.99
8	Scharlachberg Riesling trocken 2013, Bischel	26.99
9	Goldenes Loch Riesling GG 2012, Schloss Neuweier	36.99
10	Schlossböckelheimer KG Riesling trocken 2013, Gut Hermannsberg	21.99
11	Niederhäuser Hermannshöhle Riesling Auslese 1989, State Domain	51.99

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 **Flower Day**.

Our next Winery event will be a ticketed event on **Tuesday 11th August** at **Postcard Teas** in Dering Street W1, just off New Bond Street. Postcard Teas are to tea what The Winery is to wine. Timothy d'Offay travels to China, Taiwan, Japan, India, Vietnam and Korea to find tea masters making small batches of very fine tea.

The event is a **Benefit** for **Shuktara**, a charity which provides a loving home for life for children and young people with disabilities who have no family of their own in **Kolkata, India**.

In addition to a line-up of some of our fancier selections, there will be two of Tim's teas to taste. Tickets are £30. All proceeds will go to Shuktara.

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