

Riesling Report

The voice of Riesling

MARCH/APRIL 2001

Germany's 1999 Vintage

*Surprisingly agile wines show
that acidity isn't everything*

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE:

Estate Reviews:

Fritz Haag
Robert Weil

Eiswein 2000?

**VDP & Vineyard
Classification**

www.rieslingreport.com

An old barrel cellar at
Weingut Robert Weil.

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Keeping the faith

RIESLING, LIKE MOST WORTHWHILE things in life, requires a fair degree of devotion. What you get out of a wine has a great deal to do with the attitude you bring to the wine. To be sure, the fickle marriage of climate and grape can cause astounding variation from year to year. But as my Riesling comrade Peter Liem is fond of saying, "It's all about faith."

You have to believe in the talent, skill and ingenuity of the many great winemakers in this world to bring the best, most interesting characteristics out of whatever harvest hand they are dealt. Vintage variation is an intrinsic and inescapable aspect of fine wine – something we should embrace, not bemoan. Still, it is easy to backslide and let your faith falter.

The 1999 vintage in Germany is a good example. When we first tasted it a year ago, we thought, "Hmm, some pretty wines, but where's that acid crunch, like '96 or '98?" Well, the '99s do not have that acid crunch, and they never will. It's a different vintage!

But a year later, the skill of the wine-makers and the inherent beauty of the vintage are shining through in the best wines. They're not vivacious, explosive beauties like '98s, but are more discreet, and utterly charming. Thankfully, they are also quite forgiving – always ready to welcome a believer back into the fold.

—Kirk Wille, editor & publisher

Riesling Report navigation

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Two new German wine designations

AFTER YEARS OF DISCUSSION (and much political wrangling, you can be sure) the German government has approved two new designations for “international style” dry wines: “Classic” and “Selection.” These new classifications take effect with the 2000 vintage. Clearly the goal of these new names – and their Anglicized spellings – is to create wines that will be easy for the world wine market to recognize and understand. Whether it will achieve that goal or not will be interesting to see over the next few years.

It’s easy enough to understand why Germany’s winemakers would want something like this, especially those who have a significant export market. With a raft of confusing and seemingly contradictory terms such as Spätlese trocken, Auslese trocken, halbtrocken and Auslese feinherb, it’s difficult enough for wine lovers in Germany to keep it all straight, much less the budding vinophile in Atlanta or Adelaide. Complex terminology and inconsistent usage among producers often make the German wine scene all the more intriguing for dedicated Riesling fanatics (like Riesling Report subscribers!), but the average wine drinker, bless his poor soul, hasn’t the time nor the inclination for vinous minutiae. He is the target, it would seem, of these two new designations.

Defining Classic and Selection

To be called “Classic,” a wine must be from one of Germany’s 13 specified wine regions and must be made from a “traditional” grape variety. Each region gets to define what is traditional. Most of the experimental hybrids (Kerner, Ortega, Siegerrebe and all of their inbred brethren) are verboten, although you can bet we’ll be seeing “Müller-Thurgau Classic” from Rheinhessen in the not too distant future. There’s simply too much of that high-production, lower-quality variety planted there for it not to become part of this global marketing effort. The streamlined label would show only the variety, vintage and region, along with the word “Classic.”

At harvest, fruit destined for a “Classic” bottling must have one percent higher potential alcohol than the minimum allowed for the variety in that region. Total alcohol of the finished wine must be 12 percent. An exception is made for the Mosel, where the minimum is 11.5 percent. This would still be disastrous for Mosel Riesling in the opinion of Wilhelm Haag. “Mosel Rieslings are very well known for lightness, for elegance and for richness from minerals and concentration, not for alcohol,” he says. “Nobody else in the world can produce wines like these.” He is quick to add that he and the VDP Mosel-Saar-Ruwer, of which he is president, do not oppose the new names, but they probably won’t use them. They prefer to stick with the Prädikat system, which, despite its faults, works well for the region.

The requirements for “Selection” are more stringent. Minimum alcohol is 12.2 percent and the grapes must come from a single vineyard site. No attempt has been made to classify any vineyards, but since no chaptalization is allowed and hand harvesting is required, it is assumed that the fruit will come from a good vineyard or it would never get ripe enough. This, of course, opens up a whole debate about early-ripening varieties in flat, warm sites that ripen fruit but have no character. But let’s save that argument for another time.

“Classic” Criteria

Origin of the grapes

One specified region

Varieties allowed

Traditional varieties typical of the region, to be determined by the individual states.

Varietal blends are not allowed, except for a traditional Trollinger/Lemberger blend in Württemberg.

Potential alcohol

One percent higher than the minimum for region and variety

Total alcohol

Minimum of 12%

Exception: Minimum 11.5% in the Mosel-Saar-Ruwer

Style of wine

“Harmoniously dry”

Maximum residual sugar is 2 x total acidity, up to 15 g/l

On the label

Region, vintage, grape variety and the word “Classic”

Example:

Rheingau Riesling Classic 2000
Other descriptive terms, such as ‘trocken’ and ‘halbtrocken,’ are not permitted.

I'd like to commend the framers of this new wine law for at least one bit of good sense: They have indexed the allowable residual sugar in these wines to their total acidity. This means that a wine can have more than the currently allowed nine grams per liter of sweetness (up to 15 g/l for Classic) and still be called dry, although the word "trocken" will not appear on the label. This is a great move in the right direction. Too often we taste dry German Rieslings that are brutally acidic and out of balance. A little extra sweetness can make a huge difference in texture, flavor and drinkability. A great Riesling producer like Bernhard Breuer, however, would say that if it's so far out of balance, maybe you shouldn't be making dry wine – yet another Riesling debate!

Ever the optimist, I want to believe that these new designations will ultimately be a good thing for the worldwide image of German wine. In a lengthy and much-appreciated press release from Selbach-Oster, the ever-in-the-know Johannes Selbach says, "The whole new concept can work if the majority of the German wine industry, including the top estates, takes it seriously and fills it with life." Unfortunately, as we have seen, there is already disagreement about it on the Mosel.

Warmer regions, such as the Pfalz, Baden and even Rheingau, are much better suited to dry Riesling, and there the idea has a chance to do some good. It's easy to disparage the neophyte wine lover for not being hip to all the complicated intricacies of German wine production and labeling, but being a slow learner myself, I think it's important to give people an accessible entry point. The road to Riesling fanaticism starts with that first wondrous sip of a wine that is pure, sensual pleasure. The intellectual pursuits will follow. If this new, simplified labeling system can help the uninitiated discover the joys of German Riesling, while at the same time helping to dispel, at long last, Germany's sweet and cheap image, what's there to complain about?

Another new category: Verarbeitungswein

"Don't worry," says Johannes Selbach, "this is not going to show up on a wine label anywhere!" This is a new segment in the wine commodities market. Verarbeitungswein means "processing wine" and is fermented base wine that's used in making flavored drinks and other food-like products. It's not finished wine for drinking.

The idea here is to create a market for low-quality or excess production so that winegrowers can use only the best grapes for making fine wine and still get some return on their significant investments in vineyards and labor. You can imagine how difficult it must be to throw away perfectly good fruit, even if it is diluted and underripe. This won't change how the top estates do things, but it could go a long way toward getting truly insipid low-end German wines off the fine-wine market and into wine coolers, where they belong.

First ever "Riesling worldwide" Internet tasting

Wednesday, March 21, 2001, at 14:00 European time. The tasting takes place at the wine institute in Geisenheim, and will be carried live on the Web so wine lovers around the world can participate in the discussion.

We will be tasting the 12-bottle line-up and adding our comments to those of the tasting panel in Geisenheim. Tune in and share your thoughts:

www.wine-event.com

"Selection" Criteria

Origin of the grapes

An individual vineyard in a specified region

Varieties allowed

Traditional varieties typical of the region, to be determined by the individual states.

Varietal blends are not allowed

Total alcohol

Minimum of 12.2% natural alcohol (no chaptalization)

Harvest restrictions

Maximum yield of 60 hl/ha
Hand harvesting required

Style of wine

Dry (< 9 g/l residual sugar)

Exception: Riesling can have a maximum residual sugar of 1.5 x total acidity (up to 12 g/l)

Quality controls

Standard analytical testing as well as tastings to assure regional and varietal typicity and overall quality

On the label

Region, vintage, grape variety, vineyard name and the word "Selection"

Example:

Pfalz Riesling Selection

Forster Kirchenstück 2000

Other descriptive terms, such as 'trocken' and 'halbtrocken,' are not permitted

Eiswein 2000 – An Endangered Species?

AS THE TRANSATLANTIC 747 was dropping down for a landing at Schiphol Airport, Amsterdam, on the first day of December, the captain spoke a refrain that I heard repeatedly during more than three weeks in Germany: “It’s quite warm, and also rainy. It’s been very warm, and very rainy, lately.” Great Eiswein weather, I thought, with a touch of irony.

Not that I’m one who thinks that Eisweins are the epitome of German wine-making. An Eiswein is something of a freak, and is almost as expressive of a single night’s frost as they are of their vineyard. An Eiswein (ICE-vine) is produced when normally ripe grapes are not harvested in the fall, but are left on the vines in the chance that they will be frozen hard as marbles there by an early deep frost. The vintner then rushes out to pick them early in the morning before they can melt, and then slowly presses them in that state, leaving the ice crystals behind with the rest of the pomace, effectively subtracting water from the must and concentrating it. For instance, out of a hundred liters, 20 to 40 liters of water may come out as ice. However, a great wine is not just an ordinary wine from which water is removed!

The extra time on the vine is not always beneficial to the grapes, because there they are susceptible to all sorts of diseases and perils, from Botrytis rot to rain to marauding deer. It’s possible that a better wine might have been produced from these grapes had they been picked at the time that the plant stopped making sugar, back in late October. There is a signature taste to Eiswein, not only the concentration of sugars, acids and other flavors brought about by the removal of ice, but a sort of earthiness from the prolonged exposure of the grapes to the elements; not every drinker enjoys this.

But what of the Eiswein from this harvest?

At this writing, the whole answer is still not in. However, every one of the producers I visited had that hopeful patch of vines. The hillsides were streaked with bundles in blue netting or white microporous plastic, or plots completely exposed to the elements, still awaiting the chill of the first Siberian high. Few of the plots had grapes that were in perfect condition, but the amount of rot was highly variable. A bit of sorting could take care of that, if only the North Wind cooperated and brought the deep frost. And little or none of the shallow frost/thaw cycle that makes mush out of both grapes and Eiswein hopes was seen.

But the weather seems to have a sense of humor: some fine Eiswein weather struck Germany within 48 hours of my return to the United States. Deep frosts were experienced on the nights preceding December 22, 23 and 24. Early returns from producers in the Saar and the Nahe reported record must weights up to an astounding 180 degrees, over 60 percent higher than the legal minimums.

Thomas Loosen, of the Dr. Loosen estate in Bernkastel, reports that an Eiswein was produced in the family vineyard Bernkasteler Lay around the Johannishof on December 22, and that the must weight was well up into the high Beerenauslese range. As is usual here, this wine will not complete its fermentation until about May 2001.

Annegret Reh-Gartner reports that her much larger estate, Reichsgraf von Kesselstatt, harvested two different batches that will make marketable Eiswein if



George Heretier (Gangofour.com)

John Trombley is another devout Riesling lover who is very active on the Internet. You’ll find John’s articles on Robin Garr’s Web site (www.wineloverspage.com), among other places. John lives in Detroit, Michigan, and travels to Germany as often as he can.

all goes well. Both were picked on December 22. The Kaseler Nies'chen [picked at -10°C , weighed in at 155° Oechsle] produced 100 liters from 0.5 ha of vines (a stingy 20 hl/ha)]. The Scharzhofberg must was picked a tad warmer at -8°C , resulting in a touch less harvest sugar, 145° Oechsle. One hundred fifty liters were made from 1.0 ha (only 15 hl/ha).

Of course, high degrees of ripeness are not all that is needed. In certain regions in the Rhine basin, the grapes were actually too ripe to make the very best Eisweins. Great Eiswein also must be of very firm acidity. If the grapes are too ripe going into the harvest, the wines will be out of balance, too sweet with not enough zing. Because this is a warm, moist vintage, some of the wines will have too-evident botrytis. To my taste, these are not the best. Better producers will use many of this year's 'Eisweins' for other purposes, such as making Auslesen or Beerenauslesen. (By the way, I like to avoid calling these products 'declassified Eiswein'. If the producer did not label them so, we should not do so.)

Buying vintage 2000 Eiswein

If you buy a vintage 2000 Eiswein, look first on the label for the name of a scrupulous producer. With the prices for Eiswein being what they are, it's only the most dedicated winemakers who will resist the pressure to market wines that are too soft and too honeyed with noble rot.

How will this year's Eisweins stack up against recent vintages? The 1999s were very chancy, due to widespread botrytis and uncooperative temperatures late in fall, with very scattered deep frosts. The 1998 Eisweins were mostly picked in mid-November and the condition of the grapes was perfect. The '98s are potentially the best recent Eisweins. The '97s were made from grapes probably too ripe for the best results, due to excessive heat.

Producers have been faced with the news that increased competition from foreign ice wine is here, and that more use is also being made in certain regions of inexpensive refrigeration-based cryoprecipitation methods. Producing Eiswein can be extremely expensive, whether or not a usable result is obtained. Labor is desperately short in the German vineyards, and pickers make professional-level wages. In North America, in Canada and the northern United States, ice wine production often can be taken to an almost bulk-factory level. The public, not often recognizing the difference in quality, pays prices similar to that of the German product. Often lesser grape varieties are even used.

In Ontario and my native state of Michigan, conditions for ice wine production in this vintage seem to have been very good. A warm, dry autumn resulted in clean, ripe Riesling ice wine musts, and the frosts were earlier and even deeper than in Germany.

However, I don't think that competition will cause the elimination of authentic German Eiswein. German winemakers will persist, as they always have, in the face of troubles, whether economic or climatic. They know that when the weather chooses, the best Eisweins from Germany are a special, extra gift of these superb vineyards, and there's nothing like them in the world.



Eiswein grapes in the blue light of morning. Harvesting of these treasures takes place very early on the day of the first good freeze. They have to be picked and pressed while still solidly frozen.

Germany's Resilient 1999 Vintage

OUR FIRST EXPERIENCE WITH THE 1999 wines was in April of 2000, at the Mainzer Weinbörse. Many of the wines there did not show well, appearing soft and overly sweet, and we came away a little disappointed. However, upon re-tasting these wines five to eight months later, we have noticed some remarkable transformations in the 1999s. As these wines continue to develop, it becomes apparent that there is much that is appealing about this vintage.

The growing season in 1999 was unseasonably warm, with a very mild spring followed by hot, dry weather that lasted well into late summer. Although there was a great deal of rainfall in September, the weather cleared in October to reward the patient with a ripe, prolific harvest. But despite the favorable conditions, it was still a challenge to make quality wine in 1999. The yields were very high, requiring careful vineyard management. Botrytis could be a problem in many areas, and those who did not perform a strict selection were punished with muddied, unclean wines. And with the high degree of ripeness, there was the temptation to create top-heavy, "monster" wines that do not have the acidity levels to support their mass.

Overall, the character of the vintage is one of round, juicy fruitiness, and the wines are very accessible and precocious. In this they resemble the 1997s, although perhaps 1999 is a bit less consistent in quality. There is a lot of lush, generous flesh about these wines that makes them extremely pleasurable to drink, but that also makes them less intellectually rewarding than vintages such as 1996 or 1998. Whether this is positive or not is purely a question of preferences in style. The acidity levels are relatively low in 1999, and combined with the extremely high ripeness can result in wines that taste very sweet. However, as I indicated before, the wines are undergoing dramatic changes in a relatively short period of time, and many wines that appeared clumsy and spineless nine months ago have shed enough puppy fat to reveal an increased level of balance and completeness. They will never be the razor-like, crystalline 1998s, nor should they be, as 1999, like any new vintage, has a quality and character all its own.

Many people are skeptical of the ageability of the '99s, because of the low acidity levels and the upfront, easygoing appeal. Personally, I am of the opinion that good Riesling always lasts longer than you think it will, and I believe that there is plenty of good Riesling in 1999 that will reward time in the bottle. In discussing this topic with producers, many have drawn comparisons to warm, low-acid vintages such as 1959 or 1969, and these are vintages that have lasted very well. On the other hand, the wines are delicious now, and with the current string of remarkably high-quality vintages, there is no shortage of wines for the cellar. But for those who are truly interested in German wine, I think that 1999 is a very intriguing vintage, and only time will reveal its true nature.



Riesling Report's tasting director Peter Liem found plenty to smile about at Weingut Robert Weil.

1999 Tasting Notes

All of these tasting notes are by tasting director Peter Liem, except those followed by the initials [kw], which are Kirk's.

Mosel

Joh. Jos. Christoffel-Erben, Ürzig

Riesling 1999

AP 9. Terrifically juicy flavors of tangerine peel, lilac and fresh apple. Fresh and lively, this just makes you want to drink more. **87**

Ürziger Würzgarten Riesling Kabinett 1999

AP 14. Pretty aromas of green pear, guava and lime, but although this has plenty of juicy acidity, the flavors seem muted and a bit dulled, lacking a bit of freshness. **85?**

Ürziger Würzgarten Riesling Spätlese 1999

AP 10. Pungent red berry and nectarine aromas, held tautly in place by wonderful, lime-like acidity. This conceals a lot of power underneath a delicately flowery exterior. Terrifically complete for 1999, with its impeccable balance carrying the flavors on the long, aromatic finish. **93**

Erdener Treppchen Riesling Spätlese 1999

AP 17. Fine in texture, and higher in tone than the Würzgarten, as befits the terroir, delicately crystalline versus the resonant power of the previous wine. Very mineral-driven and long, carrying an underlying raciness. **91**

Ürziger Würzgarten Riesling Auslese 1999

AP 13. A nearly anise-like component underneath penetratingly clean berry aromas. Really incisive palate presence, lingering in subtle, aromatic presence. Quietly wonderful. **91**

Ürziger Würzgarten Riesling Auslese* 1999

AP 16. Repeats the profile of the former wine at a more intense level – more citrus-focused, but with even greater resonance and clarity, and greater length on the back end. **92**

Ürziger Würzgarten Riesling Auslese** 1999

AP 12. Poached pear, lime and a hint of maraschino cherry. Explosive impact on the palate, not possessing quite the incisive clarity of the one-star, but offering a whole different facet of Christoffel, with greater dimension and resonance as it expands in the mouth. This balances all of its components with remarkable harmony, very complete and very compelling. **94**

Ürziger Würzgarten Riesling Auslese*** 1999

AP 11. Botrytis is a little more prominent here, but everything is still held together with hallmark balance and refinement. Rich and intense yet clean, pure and superbly defined, showing a glittering array of apricot, mandarin orange and fresh cream aromas backed by racy acidity. **92**

Reinhold Haart

Piesporter Goldtröpfchen Riesling Kabinett 1999

AP 15. Aromas of smoked meat, dried herbs and red berry, with a powerful presence on the palate and pungent, mouthfilling length. This should develop well after a few years in the bottle. **90(+?)**

Piesporter Goldtröpfchen Riesling Spätlese 1999

AP 20. Intense, gripping mineral aroma. A little gangly at the moment, but I really like its weight and spicy acidity. An exuberant wine. **91** [kw]

Piesporter Goldtröpfchen Riesling Auslese 1999

AP 12. Quite a lot of youthful funk in the aroma, but the sheer power and girth on the palate win you over. Focused, earthy and very rich. This is a '99 that really needs a few years in the cellar. **92** [kw]



The Middle Mosel's superb Domprobst vineyard, on the hills behind the village of Graach.

Immich-Batterieberg

Enkircher Batterieberg Riesling Spätlese** trocken 1999

AP 4. Creamy pear and apple flavors, with ripe depth and reasonable balance. **85**

Enkircher Steffensberg Riesling Spätlese halbtrocken 1999

AP 6. Ripe, juicy peach and tangerine flavors, held together by racy acidity. Well-balanced and refreshing. **85**

Riesling Kabinett 1999

AP 7. Ripe in profile, very lush and almost candied. Just a bit overly sweet, but this is quite drinkable. **85**

Enkircher Batterieberg Riesling Spätlese 1999

AP 8. Smooth and softly juicy, balancing a concentrated sweetness with near-spicy minerality. **87**

Enkircher Batterieberg Riesling Auslese*** 1999

AP 9. Very rich but a little soft, flattening the aromas a bit. Still, this has appeal, with creamy tangerine fruitiness and roundly billowing length. **88**

Also tasted: Riesling QbA trocken 1999, Enkircher Batterieberg Riesling Spätlese trocken 1999

Heribert Kerpen

Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Spätlese* 1999

AP 12. Ripe peach and orange flavors, backed by a touch of herbalness. Just missing a bit of concentration on the back end, but this is reasonably well-made. **86**

Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Auslese** 1999

AP 18. Creamy lime and tangerine flavors, nicely ripe but with a good balance of acidity. **88**

Also tasted: Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Kabinett 1999

Reichsgraf von Kesselstatt

Josephshöfer Riesling Spätlese 1999

AP 14. Much cleaner than the Kabinett, with firm, cleansing acidity and a sweetly ripe profile. The aromas remain fairly high-toned and compact, but this is quite good. **87**

Piesporter Goldtröpfchen Riesling Spätlese 1999

AP 20. Good depth on the palate, with low-toned berry flavors and firm structure. **88**

Josephshöfer Riesling Auslese 1999

AP 39. Very ripe, nearly pineapple behind rich pear and nectarine aromas. Pungent depth in the mouth, backed by a firmly mineral presence. **87**

Also tasted: Josephshöfer Riesling Kabinett 1999, Piesporter Goldtröpfchen Riesling Kabinett 1999, Brauneberger Juffer-Sonnenuhr Riesling Auslese 1999, Piesporter Goldtröpfchen Riesling Auslese 1999

Schloss Lieser

Lieser Niederberg Helden Riesling Spätlese 1999

Much more depth than the slightly disappointing Kabinett. Complex array of lime, orange peel and lemon curd aromas, backed by a nicely spicy perfume. This has a lot of seemingly soft, fleshy puppy fat, but there is a good presence of acidity hiding underneath that reveals itself on the juicy, lingering finish, and it should develop well. **89**

Lieser Niederberg Helden Riesling Auslese 1999

AP 10. Terrific clarity and harmony, with mouthfilling perfumes of orange, lime, citrus rind and soft red berries. Very harmoniously built, continuing on the finish with fine, filigree length. **90**

Lieser Niederberg Helden Riesling Auslese** 1999

Harvested at 180 degrees Oechsle, but without botrytis. Quite concentrated, yet maintains a lovely sense of purity and finesse. This is definitely a step up in quality and refinement over the previous wines, building in a cassis- and blackberry-driven intensity with graceful texture and depth. **93(+?)**



Also tasted: *Lieser Niederberg Helden Riesling Kabinett 1999*

Dr. Loosen

Dr. L Riesling QbA 1999

AP 8. This is made with a percentage of purchased grapes, and bottled under the 'Dr. L.' label. Fragrant lime flavors, really juicy and bright. The acidity is prominent but very harmonious, and overall this represents impressive value for the price (about US\$10 average retail). **87**

Bernkasteler Lay Riesling Kabinett 1999

AP 17. Ripe and harmonious layers of pear and mandarin orange fruitiness, underlined by beautifully flowery slate aromas. Well-poised and compelling, making up for a somewhat short finish by sheer grace and breed. **88**

Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Kabinett 1999

AP 8. Richer and fuller-bodied than the Lay, showing classic tangerine and white peach notes. This balances considerable ripeness with a fine delicacy, really expressing the character of the site. **90**

Graacher Himmelreich Riesling Spätlese 1999

AP 11. Smoky slate aromas above grapefruit and apple flavors, turning quite creamy in texture on the palate. This seems to be a little softer and more fruit-dominant than the other Loosen wines, without quite the incisive balance of acidity, but it's refreshingly tasty and certainly bears the Loosen signature. **87(+?)**

Ürziger Würzgarten Riesling Spätlese 1999

AP 19. Wonderful clarity and poise, showing very expressive aromas of red berry, nectarine and apple. This shows the lush ripeness of the vintage, but remains so well-focused and taut, with an inner tension and depth that is all too uncommon in 1999. **91**

Erdener Prälat Riesling Auslese 1999

AP 23. Opulent and fairly large, with flavors of raisin, apricot and pastry cream. On the palate this remains strangely high-toned and lacking in middle-palate depth, without the intensity or completeness that I expect from Loosen's Prälat. **87**

Ürziger Würzgarten Riesling Auslese Gold Capsule 1999

AP 29. Very elegant, with dark and subtle peach, wild strawberry and passion fruit aromas on the nose. In the mouth this is unctuously textured and cleanly expressive, with the botrytis beautifully integrated into a seamless whole, underlining a boldly pungent core of richness with a sultry, spicy complexity. Terrific wine, continuing on the finish with long, subtle aroma and great length. **94**

Markus Molitor

Bernkasteler Lay Riesling Spätlese trocken 1999

AP 50. Good weight and depth, with a pronounced minerality and expressive aromas on the back end. **85**

Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Spätlese halbtrocken 1999

AP 37. Quite expressive and well-balanced, with nice floral, lime-leaf undertones. **85**

Graacher Domprobst Riesling Auslese** halbtrocken 1999

Harvested at 107 degrees Oechsle, and picked at night to keep the grapes cool. Powerful and mineral-driven, very low-toned and broad. Great intensity on the back end, driving the aromas onto your palate in a manner reminiscent of top Smaragd from the Wachau. Intriguing wine. **89(+?)**

Bernkasteler Graben Riesling Kabinett 1999

Light-bodied and delicately fragrant, underlined by a nicely smoky slatiness. **86**

Zeltinger Sonnenuhr Riesling Kabinett 1999

Pronounced red-berry tones, very slatey, with racy acidity and lively freshness. **86**

Zeltinger Schlossberg Riesling Kabinett 1999

An interesting comparison with the previous wine – creamier in tone than the Sonnenuhr and more expressively fragrant on the finish, but not quite as racy or fine. **86**



Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Spätlese 1999

AP 25. Soft and fruity, with pleasantly candied orange and pear flavors. Finishes with floral perfume and good length. **88**

Zeltinger Sonnenuhr Riesling Spätlese 1999

AP 22. Bracing acidity, perhaps a little too much for its fruit. Not as balanced or as complex as the Sonnenuhr from Wehlen, but could develop well if the other components harmonize with the acid levels. **85?**

Ürziger Würzgarten Riesling Auslese 1999**

AP 30. Softly perfumed and gently fruity, concealing a hidden buttress of acidity, with lime-like citrus tones driving the finish. **88**

Bernkasteler Badstube Riesling Auslese 1999**

Sleek and filigree concentration, held in a delicate frame with good length and graceful green apple, pear and lime-like aromas. Very classic Bernkasteler in profile. **87**

Wehlener Klosterberg Riesling Auslese 1999**

A bit simple, but appealing in its forward, easy-going tangerine fruitiness. **85**

Zeltinger Sonnenuhr Riesling Auslese 1999**

AP 27. A 100% botrytis selection, harvested at 112 degrees Oechsle. Pronounced botrytis aromas not unlike turnip or vegetable broth on the nose, leading to more straightforward stone-fruit profile on the palate. Still, it retains a savory aspect throughout, a bit clunky, but reasonably nice, and could improve as the fruit develops in the bottle. **86(+?)**

*Also tasted: Zeltinger Schlossberg Riesling Kabinett trocken 1999, Wehlener Klosterberg Kabinett trocken 1999, Zeltinger Sonnenuhr Riesling Spätlese trocken 1999, Zeltinger Sonnenuhr Riesling Auslese*** trocken 1999, Bernkasteler Badstube Riesling Kabinett halbtrocken 1999, Wehlener Abtei Riesling Kabinett 1999*

Peter Nicolay**Erdener Treppchen Riesling Spätlese halbtrocken 1999**

AP 49. Very ripe citrus and berry notes, underlined by expressively slatey aromas characteristic of this site. Reasonably well-built, juicy and sweet. **85**

Ürziger Würzgarten Riesling Auslese 1999

AP 50. Ripe and tropical, a bit too much so, but this has a firm core of fruit and a juicy, direct appeal. **87**

Ürziger Goldwingert Riesling Auslese 1999

AP 32. Deeply-toned and very ripe, with a slightly bitter element that becomes more prominent the further back it moves. A lot of impact, but the bitterness is a little troubling. **85**

Erdener Prälat Riesling Auslese 1999

AP 46. Lush, velvety texture, a bit soft and overripe, but this will have its fans. These three Auslesen don't seem to carry much expression of site, focusing more on an opulent sameness. **86**

Also tasted: Ürziger Goldwingert Riesling Auslese feinherb 1999, Ürziger Würzgarten Riesling Spätlese 1999

Dr. Pauly-Bergweiler**Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Spätlese 1999**

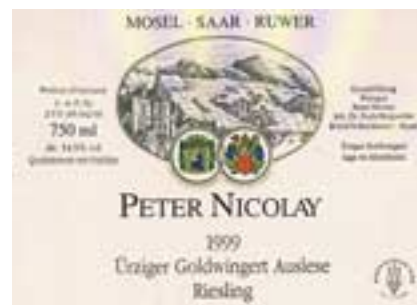
AP 10. Flowery tangerine and peach, delicately ripe and juicy, backed by slatey, fragrant perfume. Well-made wine, and a real sense of site. **90**

Bernkasteler Badstube Riesling Spätlese 1999

AP 7. Lemony and bright, with a slightly bitter component detracting from its clarity. But it's friendly and juicy, and good to drink. **86**

Bernkasteler alte Badstube am Doctorberg Riesling Spätlese 1999

AP 22. Clear and precise, showing a delicately citrusy fruit and clean, slatey minerality. This has real harmony and poise, carrying itself with a fragrantly aristocratic breeding. Finishes with subtle aroma and long, quiet length. **92(+?)**



Bernkasteler alte Badstube am Doctorberg Riesling Auslese 1999

AP 48. Very rich, but this has a dimension and fineness above the previous three wines. Apricot, white peach and baked pear, concealing a hidden complexity under voluptuous flesh. The finish is powerful and penetrating, with an inner core of fruit that lingers for a long time in firmly aromatic presence. **93**

Graacher Himmelreich Riesling Eiswein 1999

AP 60. Very concentrated, with opulent and tropical flavors of papaya, passionfruit, mango and Meyer lemon. High-toned and delicately fragrant aromas linger with incisive presence and bold impact. **93**

Bernkasteler alte Badstube am Doctorberg Riesling Trockenbeerenauslese 1999

AP 57. Expansive aromas on the nose, complex layers of fig, red berry, cream, dried apricot and candied pear. Very elegant and complex on the palate, unfolding in layers of aroma and really stitching itself into your palate, continuing in long, aristocratic length. This is superb. **94(+?)**

Joh. Jos. Prüm**Riesling Kabinett 1999**

Quite forward and pretty, with good depth and surprisingly forward, easygoing fruit. **88**

Graacher Himmelreich Riesling Kabinett 1999

Cleanly focused pear, apple and grapefruit flavors, very sleek and high-toned but with an underlying bite of acidity and round, harmonious balance. **88**

Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Kabinett 1999

A noticeable step up in depth, presence and breed from the Himmelreich. This has a very pretty tone to the fruit and really elegant aromatics on the finish. Like the other Prüm wines, this is surprisingly forward and accessible, but it should develop superbly. **91(+?)**

Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Spätlese 1999

Plenty of structure here to match the forward, delicately citrusy fruitiness. Very fragrant on the palate, with long length and a floral delicacy. **92(+?)**

Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Auslese 1999

Lovely concentration and finesse, resonating in orange-floral aromatics but impeccably held together in sleekly focused and detailed intensity. A hint of botrytis sticks out at this stage, but this should be terrific after some time in the bottle. **93(+?)**

S.A. Prüm**Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Kabinett trocken 1999**

AP 6. Citrusy, concentrated depth, with good acidity to balance. **86**

Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Kabinett 1999

Big-boned yet balanced, showing creamy tones of vanilla and orange-cream backed by an underlying slatiness and a firm thrust of acidity. **89(+?)**

Graacher Himmelreich Riesling Spätlese 1999

AP 12. More weight than the Sonnenuhr but less refinement. A bit earthy in its minerality, but this has good depth and a lime-like acidity to back it up. **87**

Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Spätlese 1999

AP 8. Repeats the tones of the Kabinett, concentrating the bright, orange-cream flavors in a tightly structured frame. Finishes long and aromatic. **91**

Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Auslese 1999

AP 19. Creamy in tone, but the botrytis is slightly bitter here. This has plenty of richness and power, but I don't find the detail or length of the Spätlese. **86**

Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Auslese Fass 12 1999

AP 13. Ripe flavors of golden raisin, poached pear and litchi, very big but with a sweet, dessert-like intensity. **88**

Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Beerenauslese 1999

AP 15. Richly syrupy, velvety concentration, with its great mass supported by delicately fresh, even buoyant acidity. **92**

Also tasted: Riesling QbA trocken 1999, S.A. Prüm Riesling QbA halbtrocken 1999, Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Spätlese trocken 1999



Willi Schaefer**Graacher Domprobst Riesling Spätlese trocken 1999**

AP 12. Richly biscuity appeal, with good texture and length. Plenty of fruit here to balance the dryness. **85**

Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Kabinett 1999

AP 18. Still tight and a little yeasty, but this has a fine, delicately floral profile, superbly expressing the grace and character of this site. Not a lot of length, but it's very pretty, with lots of finesse. **88**

Graacher Himmelreich Riesling Kabinett 1999

AP 15. Rich, baritone depth, a wonderful contrast to the Sonnenuhr. This holds a sleek core of ripe, juicy lime, orange blossom and poached pear fruitiness, with more length and resonance on the back end than the Sonnenuhr. **89**

Graacher Domprobst Riesling Kabinett 1999

AP 10. A step up in breed here, showing floral and cleanly rich, orange-tinged fruitiness that sparkles in filigree intensity. Very classic, and very beautiful. **91**

Graacher Domprobst Riesling Spätlese 1999

AP 14. Very, very pure in profile, gently exerting a powerful array of grapefruit, fresh pear and flower blossoms, with a very expressive undertone of minerality. Excellent acid structure for the vintage, and requires several years to really develop. **90(+?)**

Graacher Himmelreich Riesling Spätlese 1999

AP 5. More overt power here, more friendly and upfront. This is missing some of the underlying depth and completeness of the previous wine, but this is all about charm, finishing with graceful, high-toned length. **89**

Graacher Domprobst Riesling Spätlese 1999

AP 13. Deep, resonant and darkly brooding, pregnant with potential. Superb depth and a nearly tropical ripeness is encased in a firmly taut structure, expanding in finely wound aromatics across the palate. **92(+?)**

Graacher Himmelreich Riesling Auslese 1999

AP 8. This contains only the small, golden berries from the oldest vines, with no botrytis. Terrific balance of powerful intensity and subtle elegance, unfolding in an explosive array of white peach, fresh pear, lime and Meyer lemon aromas. Wonderful acidity keeps this clean and racy as it continues in long, floral-citrus nuance. **93**

Graacher Domprobst Riesling Auslese 1999

AP 6. More restrained and more overtly stony than the Himmelreich, but with terrifically energetic white peach, mandarin orange and ripe apple flavors, held in tense purity through a long, grand cru finish. The fragrances really expand in the mouth in forceful fashion. **93(+?)**

Selbach-Oster**Riesling Kabinett 1999**

AP 35. Fresh, fruity and rounded aroma. On the palate, its youthful flesh gives way to a deep mineral core. Good fullness backed by truly scintillating acidity. A real pleasure to drink. **87** [kw]

Zeltinger Schlossberg Riesling Kabinett 1999

AP 8. Pungent aroma of mineral soil and dried herbs, with a citrus top-note that really captivates. Good, layered complexity to the fruit. The acidity takes your breath away, but is somehow still delicate. Very fine and elegant. **90** [kw]

Graacher Himmelreich Riesling Spätlese 1999

AP 3. The herb and citrus aroma has a pungency very similar to the Schlossberg Kabinett, with a delicate creaminess that comes through both on the nose and palate. There is a good, full texture with prickly acidity, but the palate is a bit diffuse. **89** [kw]



Zeltinger Sonnenuhr Riesling Spätlese 1999

AP 14. A very engaging aroma. Again, very minerally with a citrus top note even though the nose is a little dusty and holding back right now. Another delicate Selbach-Oster gem with lovely fruit on the palate. **90** [kw]

Zeltinger Sonnenuhr Riesling Spätlese 1999

AP 15. Bigger and more forward than the AP 14 Spätlese from the same vineyard. This is pure, minerally Riesling, with fruit flavors walking a tightrope between ripe red berries and barely ripe stone fruits. There is terrific balance to this wine and it finishes nearly dry. **92** [kw]

Graacher Domprobst Riesling Spätlese

AP 9. A deeper, stonier aroma than the previous wines. Not so obviously fruity, but the fruit is there, buried deep. Round and full with a good upper end. A wine of power and depth. **90** [kw]

Zeltinger Sonnenuhr Riesling Spätlese* 1999

AP 20. Complex, creamy lemon aroma. The acidity here is actually a bit rough. It starts full and lush on the palate, but quickly turns hard with a little bitterness on the finish. **86** [kw]

Zeltinger Schlossberg Riesling Auslese

AP 5. A clean, delicate aroma, with lively acidity that tickles the back of your nose. Juicy, ripe fruits hit your palate and is followed quickly by a surprisingly dry finish. No lack of acid balance here. In fact, it could use some cellar time to meld together better. **89** [kw]

Zeltinger Schlossberg Riesling Auslese 1999

AP 5. A lot of depth here, silky and pure with insistent slatiness underneath. Lots of finesse and a perfect balance. **91**

Zeltinger Sonnenuhr Riesling Auslese* 1999

Rich and a little creamy, with pure, persistent fruitiness resonating through a long finish. **91**

Zeltinger Sonnenuhr Riesling Auslese 1999**

Noticeably larger and richer in texture, but with no loss of balance or finesse. Very focused and taut. **90**

Zeltinger Sonnenuhr Riesling Auslese**

AP 4. Very clean and pure, with delicious full-on Riesling fruit and a good balance of juiciness to pricklyness. In that sophisticated Selbach-Oster style, it is powerful and full-bodied, yet still quite delicate. A definite keeper. **92** [kw]

Zeltinger Sonnenuhr Riesling Beerenauslese 1999

Creamy and confectionary, with incisive presence and a razor-like edge that is all too uncommon in this vintage. Very expressive and aristocratic, unfolding in toffee and stone-fruit complexity, superbly defined. **93(+?)**

Wwe. Dr. H. Thanisch-Erben Thanisch**Berncasteler Badstube Riesling Kabinett 1999**

Fragrant lime and slate aromas, light in body but very pretty and aromatic. **86**

Berncasteler Doctor Riesling Kabinett 1999

Silky orange-citrus aromas backed by a firm and very pure minerality. Carries itself with delicacy and grace. **88**

Berncasteler Badstube Riesling Spätlese 1999

Good depth of ripe fruit, with a distinct pear tone. Well-built and pleasant, if a bit monotonous. **87**

Berncasteler Doctor Riesling Spätlese 1999

Good concentration, packing ripe, fruity depth in a very discreet manner. Pear and tangerine notes are underlined by an intense stoniness, really showing off the breed of the site. Finishes very aromatic, with good length. **90**

Berncasteler Doctor Riesling Auslese 1999

Creamy, elegant and pure, with graceful, silky length and superb breed. Very promising. **91(+?)**

Berncasteler Doctor Riesling Auslese Long Gold Capsule 1999

An increase in concentration over the 'regular' Auslese but not really in weight. Smooth botrytis, harmoniously integrated, with delicately penetrating depth on a long and incisive finish. Beautiful wine. **92(+?)**

Finding German wines

The key to finding the great German Rieslings you want every year is to develop a good relationship with a wine retailer, either locally, by mail or on the Web.

Your favorite local wineshop is always a good place to start. We are big believers in the "support your local Riesling supporter" philosophy. If your wine retailer isn't dialed in to the Riesling pipeline, tell him to get busy and start talking to his suppliers. A five-minute Web search will probably turn up most of the important importers and distributors in your area.

There are also numerous Web and mail-order retailers around the world. This can be a bit more difficult because you have to find one who has the wines you want and can ship them to you legally. Plus, of course, you then have to pay the shipping charges. Still, this is sometimes the only way to find the tasty Riesling treasures you're after.

Being a Riesling lover isn't easy. It takes not only a fair measure of devotion, but also diligence and tenacity. You must always endeavor to persevere!

Saar

von Hövel

Oberemmeler Hütte Riesling Kabinett 1999

AP 14. Pear, fig and lime notes, backed by bracing acidity. Fresh and lively, with a lemony-citrus finish. **87**

von Hövel Scharzhofberger Riesling Auslese 1999

AP 6. Cured meat and dark raisin, with a sleek ripeness and firm, nearly crunchy acidity to carry the flavors through a long, aromatic finish. **92**

Also tasted: 'Balduin von Hövel' Riesling QbA 1999, Oberemmeler Hütte Riesling Spätlese 1999

Reichsgraf von Kesselstatt

Kaseler Nies'chen Riesling Kabinett 1999

AP 36. Very ripe red berry, cassis and nectarine, backed by a hint of savory perfume. Good balance of acidity, not a lot of complexity but has a fruity appeal. **86**

Scharzhofberger Riesling Spätlese 1999

AP 18. Good balance and cut, held together by racy acidity and a strongly minerally undertone. Finishes with fragrant, flowery length. **89**

Also tasted: Kaseler Nies'chen Riesling Spätlese 1999

von Othegraven

Riesling 'Maximus' QbA 1999

AP 14. Quite rich, with dusty apple flavors and intense aromatic presence. **86**

Kanzemer Altenberg Riesling Auslese 1999

AP 8. Big-boned and nearly tropical, with broad, pineapple ripeness and firm acidity. Cleanly built and well-balanced, this should develop well. **89(+?)**

Kanzemer Altenberg Riesling Auslese 'Ungrafted Vines' 1999

AP 12. Noticeably richer on the mid-palate than the 'regular' Auslese, showing a riper profile and an intensely spicy minerality. Very penetrating on the back end, expanding with powerful yet graceful perfume. **91**

Also tasted: Kanzemer Altenberg Riesling Spätlese halbtrocken 1999, Kanzemer Altenberg Riesling QbA 1999, Kanzemer Altenberg Riesling Spätlese 1999, Kanzemer Altenberg Riesling Auslese Gold Capsule 1999

Schloss Saarstein

Serriger Schloss Saarsteiner Riesling Kabinett 1999

Round and appley, with good mid-palate depth. Could use a bit more length, but this is appealing. **85**

Serriger Schloss Saarsteiner Riesling Spätlese 1999

A big step up in richness and concentration from the Kabinett. Aromas of orange and peach race along in vibrant, finely-toned balance. **89(+?)**

Serriger Schloss Saarsteiner Riesling Auslese 1999

Ripe and concentrated, packing rich and intense depth, but this hasn't quite got the definition of the Spätlese. **87?**

Serriger Schloss Saarsteiner Riesling Auslese Gold Capsule 1999

Cleanly rich and penetrating aromas of tangerine, pineapple and mango, subtle and silky but with a wonderful intensity and presence on a long finish. **93**

Bert Simon/Weingut Herrenberg

Serrig Würtzberg Riesling Auslese* 1999

AP 12. Mandarin orange and baked peach, with a clarity that is missing in the other Simon wines we tasted. Nicely textured, with good length and grace. **88**



Serrig Herrenberg Riesling Beerenauslese 1999

AP 14. A bit confectionary, but this has tasty flavors and good acidity, if not a lot of complexity. **87**

Also tasted: Serrig Würtzberg Riesling Kabinett halbtrocken 1999, Serrig Herrenberg Riesling Kabinett 1999, Serriger Herrenberg Riesling Spätlese 1999, Serrig Herrenberg Riesling Auslese 1999*

Dr. Wagner**Ockfener Bockstein Riesling QbA 1999**

AP 1. Apple, lime and maraschino cherry. Creamy and quite full in texture with a good balance of acidity. **86**

Ockfener Bockstein Riesling Spätlese 1999

AP 20. Perfumed pear, apricot and licorice flavors backed by spicy minerality and a surprisingly crisp level of acidity. Deliciously refreshing and vibrant. **89**

Zilliken**Saarburger Rausch Riesling Kabinett 1999**

AP 14. A high, tightly focused aroma that goes directly to the back of your brain. Concentrated, with good lemony fruit and a smoky minerality. Superb balance and a lovely, silky texture. **90** [kw]

Saarburger Rausch Riesling Spätlese 1999

AP 10. The ripe, rich aroma is clean, pure and delicate. There's a depth and roundness that keep your interest, but the finish has a touch of bitterness. **89** [kw]

Saarburger Rausch Riesling Auslese

AP 7. Really lovely red berry fruit, with extreme purity and excellent focus. There is a gentle yielding on the palate followed by a surge of acid-driven intensity. It gives your palate an afternoon at the beach in a quietly swelling surf. **91** [kw]

Saarburger Rausch Riesling Auslese

AP 6. The biggest and fullest of Zilliken's seven Auslese from 1999. Seems a little soft compared to the others, but it has a delicious juiciness and a surprising fruity twist on the finish. Massive, but with Zilliken's characteristic raciness. Usually I prefer the more delicate style (see AP 5 below), but this is irresistible. **94** [kw]

Saarburger Rausch Riesling Auslese 1999

AP 5. Not as big and lovable as AP 6, but it is a finer, more focused wine. The botrytis character is pronounced, but very clean and balanced. Ripe, concentrated and delicious. **93** [kw]

Note: Three other Zilliken Auslese from 1999 were sold at the VDP auction in September. For tasting notes, see our November/December 2000 issue.

Ruwer**Karthäuserhof****Eitelsbacher Karthäuserhofberg Riesling Auslese 1999**

AP 13. Tangerine rind, Bartlett pear and fresh chive. Very perfumed and softly voluptuous. Right now this seems to be missing a touch of internal depth, but it's very pretty and distractingly fleshy. **88**

von Schubert/Maximin Grünhaus**Maximin Grünhäuser Riesling QbA 1999**

AP 19. This is all from the Bruderberg vineyard. Fruity and clean, with supple apricot notes and a slightly earthy minerality. **86**

Maximin Grünhäuser Herrenberg Riesling Kabinett 1999

AP 1. A slight red-berry element, nicely taut and slatey, with delicately aromatic fruitiness and sneaky length on the finish. **88**



Maximin Grünhäuser Abtsberg Riesling Spätlese 1999

AP 4. Bright and focused, with a lot of fleshy fruitiness dominating right now but tethered by a firmly slatey interior. High-toned and delicate, with ripely appealing presence. **89(+?)**

Maximin Grünhäuser Herrenberg Riesling Auslese 1999

AP 5. Intensely perfumed aromas of white peach, strawberry candy, ginger and poached pear. Very refined, carrying very intense depth yet feeling effortless and not at all weighty. Lots of puppy fat keeps this lush and sexy, but there is a hidden current of acidity holding this all together. **91(+?)**

Maximin Grünhäuser Abtsberg Riesling Auslese 1999

AP 7. Creamy, fragrant depth, with nearly tropical perfumes of kiwi, mango, red plum and white peach. Concentrated depth on the back end, long and penetrating. This will be impressive. **93**

Maximin Grünhäuser Abtsberg Riesling Eiswein 1999

AP 15. Opposite in style to the '98, focusing on a supple, floral elegance vs. the '98's power and intense pyrotechnics. Velvety in texture, with an intense core of tropical ripeness building to a seamlessly refined, ultra-harmonious finish. **94**

Maximin Grünhäuser Abtsberg Riesling Beerenauslese 1999

AP 11. Smoothly flowery and elegant, again emphasizing a purity and finesse rather than overt power. Yet there is a subtle concentration here, very penetrating and detailed, finishing with sneaky length and great finesse. **94**

Rheingau**Prinz von Hessen****Winkeler Hasensprung Riesling Kabinett 1999**

Very nice minerally fruit on the palate and a spritely texture. **86** [kw]

Winkeler Hasensprung Riesling Spätlese 1999

Fruity and delicious with medium body and a cool, spicy finish. **88** [kw]

Prinz von Hessen Riesling Auslese 1999

A blend of neighboring vineyards from Winkel and Johannisberg. Good richness, with lovely citrus and stone fruit aromas. Also a little honey and melon indicating botrytis. Rich but elegant and not too sweet. **90** [kw]

Winkeler Hasensprung Riesling Auslese 1999

Big and rich with a smoky character to the aroma. Good viscosity on the palate, followed by a crisp acid finish. **89** [kw]

Johannisberger Klaus Riesling Beerenauslese 1999

Deliciously fruity wine with just a bit of bitterness on the end. Texturally it maintains its elegance through a medium-long finish. **89** [kw]

Johannishof**Johannisberger Vogelsang Riesling Kabinett 1999**

AP 9. Dusty pear and citrus aromas, showing a ripe, easygoing fruitiness and fragrant aroma. **87**

Johannisberger Goldatzel Riesling Kabinett 1999

AP 11. Minerally, peachy depth, rounded and forward but with good underlying presence and aromatic length. **88**

Johannisberger Klaus Riesling Spätlese 1999

AP 15. Heavier weight, with ripely playful orange and nectarine notes. Nearly exuberant in its perfume. **87(+?)**

Rüdesheimer Berg Rottland Riesling Spätlese 1999

AP 17. Melon, poached pear and citrus coulis, richly creamy in texture and very pretty in tone. **89**



The Ehrenfels castle overlooks the Rhine Valley from the Rüdesheimer Berg in Rheingau.

Johannisberger Vogelsang Riesling Auslese 1999

AP 20. Brightly peachy, with glossily mouth-coating flavors that stay pleasantly ripe without becoming at all imbalanced. **89**

Johannisberger Hölle Riesling Beerenauslese 1999

AP 22. Tropical notes of mandarin orange and mango, a bit too easygoing, but it's delicious to drink, with high-toned, fragrant aroma and bright acidity to balance the stickiness. **88**

Peter Jakob Kühn**Oestricher Lenchen Riesling Spätlese 1999**

AP 12. Pastry-like tones over aromas of fresh pear and lime, fairly sweet but with firm acidity to back it up. Well-made wine, pleasantly balanced and refreshing. **88**

Also tasted: Oestricher Doosberg Riesling Kabinett trocken 1999, Oestricher Lenchen Riesling Kabinett feinherb 1999, Oestricher Lenchen Riesling Kabinett 1999

Josef Leitz**Rüdesheimer Bischofsberg Riesling Kabinett 1999**

AP 12. Slightly earthy nose, round and full with a nice minerality. Flavors of citrus peel, apple and guava in the mouth, carrying a nearly smoky stoniness and finishing with a lot of fragrance. **88**

Fred Prinz**Hallgartener Jungfer Riesling Kabinett 1999**

AP 5. Soft and playfully sweet, with an elegantly confectionary tone and bright, lemony acidity that holds it all together. **89**

Hallgartener Jungfer Riesling Spätlese 1999

AP 4. Grapefruit, kiwi and nectarine, a bit soft, but this is well-made, with long, fragrant length. **88**

Hallgartener Jungfer Riesling Spätlese Gold Capsule 1999

AP 3. Rich and lush, with a touch of botrytis adding complexity to the peachy, orange-like fruitiness. Deliciously voluptuous, in a relatively high-powered style. **90**

Hallgartener Jungfer Riesling Auslese Gold Capsule 1999

AP 1. Decadent and heady, with very alluring aromas of baked peach, cream, mandarin orange and crème brûlée. Powerful presence in the mouth is backed up by impeccable acidity, finishing with wonderful expansion and complexity. **93(+?)**

Also tasted: Hallgartener Jungfer Riesling Auslese 1999

Schloss Schönborn**Erbacher Marcobrunn Riesling Erstes Gewächs 1999**

Rich, heady nose, powerfully and harmoniously concentrated, with a tightly-wound, expressive complexity. This will benefit from a few years of bottle age, and should develop into a terrific wine. **93(+?)**

Hattenheimer Pfaffenberg Riesling Kabinett 1999

AP 13. Rich presence of dried orange and stone fruit flavors, good weight and depth, if slightly monolithic. **87**

Erbacher Marcobrunn Riesling Kabinett 1999

AP 8. Detailed, stony intensity, excellent expression of this great site, combining boldly aristocratic presence with a fine balance and long, mineral length. **91**

Hattenheimer Pfaffenberg Riesling Spätlese 1999

AP 14. Deep-toned intensity. Very mineral and really penetrating on the mid-palate, lingering on a long, heady finish. **90**

Erbacher Marcobrunn Riesling Spätlese 1999

AP 17. Lime, orange peel, nectarine and papaya. This is a bit fruit-dominant, without the site-expressiveness of the Kabinett, but there is good structure and deep-toned ripeness. **89**



'Pfaffenberger' Riesling Spätlese 1999

AP 36. This is from Hattenheimer Pfaffenberg. It has a rich peachiness and is ripely concentrated, with glossy fruitiness detracting a bit from the complexity. Good acidity on a deeply-wound finish. **88**

Rüdesheimer Berg Schlossberg Riesling Auslese 1999

AP 12. Large and BA-like, with impressive concentration but perhaps missing some detail and finesse. **87**

Also tasted: Rüdesheimer Berg Rottland Riesling Spätlese trocken 1999, Schloss Schönborn Riesling halbtrocken 1999

Domdechant Werner**Hochheimer Kirchenstück Riesling Spätlese trocken 1999**

AP 8. Tart, bracing acidity underneath aromas of tangerine, lime and pink grapefruit. Could use some food to tone down the acid, but there is good, clean ripeness and reasonable depth. **85?**

Hochheimer Stein Riesling Kabinett halbtrocken 1999

AP 13. Ripe and fruity, with pleasant citrus notes and juicy sweetness. **86**

Hochheimer Hölle Riesling Kabinett 1999

AP 9. Bright and lively, with tangerine-like fruitiness and taut acidity that carries the flavors through a juicy finish. **88**

Hochheimer Domdechaney Riesling Spätlese 1999

AP 10. Juicy flavors of red berry and lime, with playful presence on the palate and good length on the finish. **87**

Hochheimer Kirchenstück Riesling Spätlese 1999

AP 11. Peachy and bright, packing a rich ripeness but with a firmer acid presence in the middle than the Domdechaney. The finish is a bit short, but this is pleasantly appealing. **86**

Hochheimer Domdechaney Riesling Auslese 1999

AP 1. Intriguing complexity in aroma, dried citrus, poached pear, spicy tree bark. Rich body on the palate, yet with a very pleasing balance, expanding on a long, aromatic finish. Well-made wine, and one that should develop well in the cellar. **92(+?)**

Mittelrhein**Toni Jost****Wallufer Walkenberg Riesling Kabinett 1999**

AP 8. Ripe and peachy, with juicy presence on the palate that lingers fragrantly on a taut, balanced finish. **88**

Bacharacher Hahn Riesling Kabinett 1999

AP 8. Dark and earthy, with flavors of rhubarb, pear and fresh figs. This hides a subtle complexity under rich, powerful fruitiness, really penetrating on the finish. **90**

Bacharacher Hahn Riesling Spätlese 1999

AP 10. Dark berry and plum-like flavors, swarthy presence wrapped in a constricted structural frame. This will take some time to unwind, but it should develop very well. **91?**

Bacharacher Hahn Riesling Auslese 1999

AP 6. A nearly minty component underneath lush, sticky fruit. Very high-powered yet with excellent structure and definition. The finish is long and intriguing, continuing to develop nuance and aroma for a long time. A year ago I tasted this wine in Mainz and it seemed overly soft and top-heavy, but like a lot of other '99s, this is now coming together really nicely, and developing a balance that was previously concealed. **93(+?)**

Matthias Müller**Bopparder Hamm Engelstein Riesling Spätlese trocken 1999**

AP 15. Soft guava and lime aromas, backed by a meaty, savory perfume. Big and bold presence in the mouth, finishing a bit short, but overall it's likeable, and there is a lot of flavor interest. **86**



Bopparder Hamm Mandelstein Riesling Spätlese 1999

AP 9. Intense aromas of orange peel, cured meat and chicken broth, really fine in texture and tautly wound. A lot of complexity on the palate, concealed behind richly girthy presence and finely-tuned power. **91**

Bopparder Hamm Feuerlay Riesling Auslese 1999

AP 8. Powerful aromas on the nose, really sauvage, with a musky, meaty complexity. A lot of upfront impact in the mouth, but the finish is a bit short and simple. Still, this has a lot of interest, and it's very well made. **88**

Ratzenberger**Bacharacher Posten Riesling Spätlese halbtrocken 1999**

AP 8. Sulfur is a little prominent, but this has a nicely broad ripeness and clean, pear-like fruitiness. Well-balanced sweetness and firm acidity make this pleasantly quaffable. **86**

Also tasted: 'Caspar R' Bacharacher Riesling 1999

Nahe**Schlossgut Diel****Diel de Diel 1999**

AP 8. Flowery apple aromas, with a good depth of fruit and a nice balance of acidity. A blend of Riesling, Pinot Gris and Pinot Blanc. **85**

Dorsheimer Pittermännchen Riesling Kabinett 1999

AP 14. A very stony, almost herbal minerality gives way on the palate to a burst of citrus and pear-like fruit, very well-defined in a sleek and compact package. A refreshing level of acidity provides focus and structure. **90**

Dorsheimer Burgberg Riesling Spätlese 1999

AP 15. Juicy flavors of lime, pink grapefruit, litchi and peach, nicely focused on the palate and acquiring a nearly creamy texture on the back end. Really harmonious and delicious to drink. **89**

Dorsheimer Goldloch Riesling Spätlese 1999

AP 16. Broad, earthy tones underline a sweetly ripe core of pineapple and peach fruitiness. Very textural on the back end. **88**

Dorsheimer Pittermännchen Riesling Spätlese 1999

AP 17. Quiet and low-toned, but packing a lot of hidden power and intensity. Creamy mango, pear and guava notes intertwine with an insistent minerality, supported by a wonderful level of bright, cleansing acidity. Very well-made wine, really shows breeding and poise. **92(+?)**

Dönnhoff**Riesling QbA trocken 1999**

AP 2. This is from a sandstone-slate vineyard called Oberhäuser Kieselberg, and the wine is always made dry. Crisp and earthy, with a pronounced stoniness and juicy, balanced appeal. **86**

Schlossböckelheimer Felsenberg Riesling Kabinett trocken 1999

AP 8. Felsenberg contains mostly volcanic soils, and it really shows in this wine. Pungently spicy and stony, this seems to be purely about terroir, as if one were drinking the very essence of the soil. Delightfully expressive and remarkable wine. **88**

Schlossböckelheimer Felsenberg Riesling Spätlese trocken 1999

AP 4. Rich but finely sleek, almost creamy in texture yet totally stony. Well balanced and quite long, finishing with a hint of lemon. **90**

Niederhäuser Hermannshöhle Riesling Spätlese trocken 1999

AP 3. Sleek and powerful, packing a lot of depth. Superb balance and harmony, with firm acidity gently supporting and developing the flavors of pear, melon and kumquat. Softly perfumed slatiness on the finish, continuing in quietly aromatic length. **92**

Weissburgunder Spätlese trocken 1999

AP 23. This was all fermented in barrique, 80% of which was new wood. Brightly fruity green apple and Bartlett pear, with very harmonious integration of the wood and a finely firm acidity that seems to brighten the fragrance on the finish. **88**



Grauburgunder Spätlese trocken 1999

AP 21. This, along with the Weissburgunder, comes from the loamy parts of Felsenberg where Riesling doesn't grow well. Twenty percent is fermented in new barriques, and the rest in old 1200-liter barrels. Apricotty and floral, retaining the signature Dönnhoff delicacy and poise, with the wood adding a nice richness and texture. Bright acidity lingers on the finish, where the wood sticks out a bit right now, but this seems to have all it needs to develop well in the bottle. **87(+?)**

Riesling QbA 1999

AP 24. Apple and a little citrus, with well-balanced sweetness. Retains a crisp and fresh appeal on the finish. **86**

Norheimer Dellchen Riesling Kabinett 1999

AP 10. Deep underlying power, concealing a lot of energy underneath playful grapefruit and nectarine fruitiness. Like the other Dönnhoff wines, this feels very firmly driven by soil. Great acidity keeps this lively throughout. **89**

Oberhäuser Leistenberg Riesling Kabinett 1999

AP 11. Tight core of dark, nearly berry-like fruit, really pure and expressive aromas of cassis, orange and blackberry. Very lively and taut thanks to a superb balance of acidity. **91**

Norheimer Kirschheck Riesling Spätlese 1999

AP 19. Delicately fine in tone, with a supple, silky texture supporting the fresh apple and lemon fruitiness. Maintains a racy, high-toned profile through a bright finish. **89**

Schlossbockelheimer Kupfergrube Riesling Spätlese 1999

AP 6. Sleek and racy, unfolding in flowery pear and citrus perfumes. The aromas really pick up on the finish, expanding with wonderful dimension and length. **91**

Oberhäuser Brücke Riesling Spätlese 1999

AP 7. Very resonant depth, showing taut aromas of lemon rind, red berry and pear. Supple and silky on the palate, racing to a deep, tightly-wound and very lively finish. **92**

Niederhäuser Hermannshöhle Riesling Spätlese 1999

AP 12. Poached pear, fresh guava and lime, bursting with ripe fruitiness but staying very, very sleek and fine as it expands with powerful, kinetic dimension. Resonates with long, subtle perfume on the finish. Truly grand cru. **94**

Niederhäuser Hermannshöhle Riesling Auslese 1999

AP 14. About 40% of this was from botrytised grapes. Quite sweet, with firm depth and an emphasis on a delicate finesse. Very aromatic as it moves on the palate, integrating its botrytis superbly in a harmonious whole. **91(+?)**

Oberhäuser Brücke Riesling Auslese 1999

AP 16. Terrific raciness combined with rich, botrytised depth. Aromatic fig, poached pear and peach tones, very defined and insistent, with vertical dimension. Dönnhoff suggests that accompanied by a dessert, the softer, flowery Hermannshöhle might be better, however "if you drink it alone, perhaps the Brücke has more expression." **93**

Oberhäuser Brücke Riesling Beerenauslese 1999

This will probably be offered at the VDP auction later this fall. Wonderfully clear and precise nose, carrying its mass so sleekly and superbly. A slightly smoky minerality peeks out from under honeyed, tangerine-like fruit, nearly crystalline in its purity and harmony. The finish is delicate, flowery and subtle, almost weightless as it expands with finesse and complexity, holding a long, deeply resonant bass note that lingers seemingly forever. **96**

Oberhäuser Brücke Riesling Eiswein 1999

AP 17. Amazing nose filled with aromas of orange perfume, white peach, fresh apple and white raisin. There is a touch of an intriguing aroma not unlike very fresh, very high-quality beef. Superbly elegant and harmonious as it unfolds in silky-smooth complexity, revealing an intense concentration of pineapple, poached pear, violet and fresh ginger flavors. Glorious wine, lingering with floral persistence and penetrating intensity as it shifts subtly through a kaleidoscopic finish. **98**

What about prices?

Because there is so much variation in wine prices around the world, we have decided to stop listing them. It was always just a rough figure anyway, based on current market conditions here on the West Coast of the United States.

In general, though, you can use the following price ranges as a guide for what you can expect to pay for the normal line of wines from good to godly producers. High-end dessert wines and auction wines are, of course, a different matter, and vary according to the reputation, fame or celebrity of the estate.

These prices are in US dollars, so you can do your own conversion. Right now the dollar remains fairly strong, but if the recent dot.com crash drags the rest of the economy down with it, that could change quickly.

Average price ranges

Riesling QbA	\$10 – \$14
Riesling Kabinett	\$12 – \$18
Riesling Spätlese	\$16 – \$25
Riesling Auslese	\$25 – \$50

Kruger-Rumpf

Münsterer Dautenpflänzer Riesling Spätlese trocken 1999

AP 10. Perfumes of apple skins, fresh litchi and crushed flowers. Not quite as clean in the mouth, with big-boned ripeness and rather low acidity. **85**

Münsterer Pittersberg Riesling Kabinett halbtrocken 1999

AP 22. Aromas of prune, dried currant, ripe pear and minerally stoniness. Nicely balanced, fresh and inviting. **87**

Münsterer Kapellenberg Riesling Kabinett 1999

AP 30. Minty herbalness, currant, dried apricot and tangerine, slightly candied in flavor and quite full in body. Like the rest of the Kruger-Rumpf wines, this seems very round and rather low in acidity, but it's well-made and the flavors are delicious. **87**

Münsterer Rheinberg Riesling Spätlese 1999

AP 36. Quite sweet and a bit soft, but there are pleasant flavors of red berry and melon backed by a near-licorice note. **86**

Münsterer Dautenpflänzer Riesling Spätlese 1999

AP 12. Perfumed apple, Asian pear and plum notes, with more prominent acidity than the previous Kruger-Rumpf wines. **86**

Münsterer Dautenpflänzer Riesling Auslese 1999

AP 30. Spicy, confectionary sweetness, with fruit cocktail and pastry aromas. A bit top-heavy, but likeable in a rich dessert style. **88**

Rheinhessen

Gunderloch

Nackenheimer Rothenberg Riesling QbA trocken 1999

AP 22. Lovely fig and apple aromas backed by a spicy, minerally intensity. Relatively delicate in body, but this has a penetrating insistence and real depth on the back end. Fine acidity keeps this taut, and should provide a firm backbone for development. **90(+?)**

'Jean-Baptiste' Riesling Kabinett 1999

AP 20. Bursting with radiant fruitiness, though this is in a more delicate profile than the last few vintages of this consistently excellent wine. Pear, fresh fig and red berry aromas, racy and compact, with a deliciously aromatic, brightly-toned finish. **88**

Nackenheimer Rothenberg Riesling Auslese*** 1999

AP 28. Tightly wound, quietly powerful, with great internal richness and kinetic tension. Fresh apple, nectarine and lime aromas, very sleek and cleanly defined – like the other Gunderloch wines, this is lighter in body than its '98 counterpart, but it's really well-balanced and harmonious, carrying a spicy minerality on a long, penetrating finish that superbly expresses the grand cru quality of this site. **92(+?)**

Nackenheimer Rothenberg Riesling Spätlese 1999

AP 9. Red berry, lime and mandarin orange aromas, roundly mouthfilling and fairly forward but very pretty, packing a lot of depth and exuberance. Very charming now. **91**

Nackenheimer Rothenberg Riesling Auslese 1999

AP 12. Richly ripe white peach and tangerine flavors, quite round and forward with youthful sweetness dominant right now. Rich texture on the palate creates a lot of impact. **89(+?)**

Nackenheimer Rothenberg Riesling Auslese Gold Capsule 1999

AP 18. Harvested at 148 degrees Oechsle. Powerfully-wound, nearly syrupy peach and confectionary orange notes, very intense as the aromas echo through a bass-driven, resonating finish. This is superb, really long and complete in the mouth. **94**

Nackenheimer Rothenberg Riesling Beerenauslese 1999

AP 19. Great depth, but also great balance, staying sleek and not at all ponderous as it opens in honeyed, dried-fruit intensity. Very fruit-dominant right now, with good length and excellent structure. **91**



Nackenheimer Rothenberg Riesling Beerenauslese Gold Capsule

1999

AP 23. Candied ginger, quince, baked apple and mango aromas, with superbly velvety texture. Intense but not at all cloying as it moves unctuously across the palate, thanks to a firm underlying acidity. **92(+?)**

Nackenheimer Rothenberg Riesling Trockenbeerenauslese 1999

AP 25. Very clear and brightly radiant despite its great mass, with a subtle interplay of flavors – white raisin, dried dates, prunes, dried pear, candied lemon peel. Thickly blanketing on the palate, but this has such beautiful definition and carries its flavors with such length and harmony, brightly introducing new components and nuances as it continues back in the mouth. **93(+?)**

Nackenheimer Rothenberg Riesling Trockenbeerenauslese Gold Capsule 1999

AP 24. Fewer than 200 half-bottles of this were produced. Cocoa, white raisin, apple candy, with a hint of coconut. A bit more internal punch than the 'regular' TBA, with more middle weight, but this is still very sleek, maintaining the overall delicacy of the '99 collection. Deliciously sticky and raisiny back end, with expressive, unctuous aromas and textures that refuse to leave the palate. **94**

**Freiherr Heyl zu Herrnsheim****'Red Slate' Riesling 1999 (Spätlese trocken)**

Intensely dry and gripping wine from the red slate soil of the Rhein Terrace vineyards in Nierstein. Just a bit severe right now, but should mellow nicely. **85** [kw]

Nierstein Riesling Kabinett 1999

Pretty good stuffing for a basic estate Kabinett. Good length and fine acidity. **87** [kw]

Pettenthal Riesling Spätlese 1999

More of those interesting and spicy red soil minerals and fruit. Nice concentration and a clean, zippy finish. **88** [kw]

Nierstein Riesling Auslese 1999

Obvious botrytis character in the aroma. Good depth and ripeness, but rather monotone. The finish has some nice, crisp acidity, but leaves you with a touch of bitterness. **86** [kw]

Keller**Dalsheimer Hubacker Riesling Spätlese 1999**

AP 26. Candied orange, strawberry and canned peach. Very sweet, with a fleshy, easy-going voluptuousness, but on the back end there is just enough acidity to hold it together. The heavy concentration persists through a dense finish, picking up more complexity the further back it goes. **89(+?)**

Dalsheimer Hubacker Riesling Trockenbeerenauslese 1999

AP 42. Complex and darkly alluring aromas of peach-pit, tangerine rind and meat broth. Terrific clarity on the palate, with penetrating and perfectly balanced intensity, unfolding in scintillating and multi-faceted glory on the back end. Great wine. **97**

Also tasted: Dalsheimer Hubacker Riesling QbA trocken 'G' 1999

J.u.H.A. Strub**Niersteiner Riesling Kabinett 1999**

AP 1. Fresh, lively and appley, well-made wine, and a great value. **85**

Niersteiner Hipping Riesling Spätlese 1999

AP 3. Fresh, tangerine-like citrus notes, lively and juicy, with a rich texture and an upfront, friendly profile. **88**

Niersteiner Paterberg Riesling Spätlese 1999

AP 7. Perfumed red berry and orange, nicely ripe, kept lively and fresh by a strong current of appley-lime acidity. **88**

Also tasted: Niersteiner Oelberg Riesling Kabinett 1999, Niersteiner Orbel Riesling Kabinett 1999

Pfalz

Bassermann-Jordan

Forster Riesling Kabinett 1999

A decent drinker with a fresh, fruity aroma and a clean texture. **85** [kw]

Forster Jesuitengarten Riesling Spätlese 1999

The nose is fairly closed, but there's good richness with tasty peach and apricot fruit on the palate. Just needs some time to open up. **86** [kw]

Forster Kirchenstück Riesling Auslese 1999

A very interesting citrus and mineral aroma. Plus, there's good concentration and satisfying juiciness on the palate. **89** [kw]

Deidesheimer Kalkofen Riesling Eiswein 999

Excellent concentration with intriguing lemon-cream and lime aromas. It's warm and round on the palate, but no hint of botrytis and enough acidity to keep it aloft. **89** [kw]

Josef Biffar

Deidesheimer Kieselberg Riesling Kabinett trocken 1999

AP 12. Dusty aromas of lime and fresh meat. Large presence on the palate, with intense, refreshing acidity and a lingering fragrance on the back end. **87**

Deidesheimer Herrgottsacker Riesling Spätlese trocken 1999

AP 34. Fragrantly perfumed aromas of citrus and nectarine. Round and big-bodied, showing a supple mouthfeel – a bit overly large if anything, but there is enough acidity here to compensate. **86**

Deidesheimer Grainhübel Riesling Spätlese trocken 1999

AP 13. Fruity and fresh, with delicately peachy flavors. Not a great deal of depth, but this is nice. **85**

Wachenheimer Gerümpel Riesling Spätlese trocken 1999

AP 23. Apple, nectarine and a hint of nuttiness. Full-bodied and richly textured, picking up a little spiciness on the long, aromatic finish. **89(+?)**

Deidesheimer Herrgottsacker Riesling Kabinett halbtrocken 1999

AP 17. A slight earthiness under ripe apricot and grapefruit flavors. Well-balanced acidity keeps this sharp and focused. **87**

Deidesheimer Kieselberg Riesling Kabinett 1999

AP 26. Fragrant aromas of cured meat, almond, fig and fresh pear. Fruity and freshly appealing in the mouth, with good aroma and length. **88**

Deidesheimer Herrgottsacker Riesling Spätlese 1999

Spicy meatiness on the nose, with dark aromas of raisin and plum. Bursts with grapey exuberance on the palate, ripely alluring and easy to drink. **88**

Also tasted: Deidesheimer Mäushöhle Riesling Spätlese trocken 1999, Deidesheimer Riesling Kabinett halbtrocken 1999

Christmann

Königsbacher Idig Riesling Spätlese trocken 1999

AP 12. Exotic, subtly complex aromas of sandalwood, passionfruit and guava. Viscous and richly textured in the mouth, with a lot of interest and a superb balance of acidity. **90**

Deidesheimer Hohenmorgen Riesling Spätlese trocken 1999

AP 14. Less complexity than the Idig, but there is nice ripeness and richness, with clean fig, pear and guava flavors. Quite long on the back end, nicely balanced. **88**

Gimmeldingen Mandelgarten Riesling Spätlese trocken 1999

AP 11. Golden raisin, cured meat and lentil aromas. Ripe and rich with a meaty, earthy complexity. Very nicely balanced, picking up citrus peel and peach nuances on the back end. **90**



Ruppersberger Reiterpfad Riesling Auslese 1999

AP 22. Tropical aromas of papaya, tangerine and fresh ginger. Well-balanced ripeness, lushly fruity and creamy in texture yet backed by a strong orange-citrus acidity that cleanses the palate and keeps this firmly taut. Long and fragrant aromas on the back end. **91(+?)**

Ruppersberger Reiterpfad Riesling Beerenauslese 1999

Very compelling aromas of canned peach, spiced apple and pastry cream. Intense concentration in the mouth, with crackling acidity that really brightens the flavors and creates a smooth racy feel despite the viscous and considerably large mass. Very well-made wine. **94(+?)**

Ruppersberger Reiterpfad Riesling Trockenbeerenauslese 1999

AP 26. Confectionary and lush, but without quite the tension of the Beerenauslese. Still, this is very promising, with a tropical and cleanly decadent intensity. This should develop very well. **92**

Pfeffingen-Eymael**Ungsteiner Herrenberg Riesling Spätlese trocken 1999**

AP 17. Round and rich, with apple, apricot fruit and an oily viscosity. Quite nice once it settles down in the glass, revealing some tropical notes and expanding in deep, muscular presence. **88**

Ungsteiner Herrenberg Riesling Spätlese 1999

AP 7. Nicely plush, with a minerally spiciness underneath creamy orange fruit. Not a lot of complexity or length, but this has impact, and it's pleasantly drinkable. **86**

Also tasted: Ungsteiner Weilberg Riesling Spätlese trocken 1999

J.L. Wolf**Wachenheimer Riesling QbA 1999**

AP 15. Fresh, apple aromas. Simple and direct but a pleasant quaffer, with fresh acidity and nicely ripe fruitiness. **85**

Forster Ungeheuer Riesling Spätlese trocken 1999

AP 21. Strong underlying stoniness and a hint of mint, quite big in body but with razor-like acidity that keeps this cleanly taut and linear. **89(+?)**

Forster Pechstein Riesling Spätlese trocken 1999

AP 17. Odd aromas of raisin, clove and cinnamon. Slightly candied fruitiness in the mouth, more accessible at this stage than the Ungeheuer but with reasonably good balance and early appeal. **86**

Also tasted: Wachenheimer Goldbächel Riesling Spätlese trocken 1999, Wachenheimer Belz Riesling Spätlese trocken 1999

Franken**Juliuspital****Würzburger Stein Silvaner Spätlese trocken 1999**

AP 16. A lot of finesse here, with ripe, pear skin flavors and an intense stoniness. **88**

Würzburger Stein Riesling Spätlese trocken 1999

AP 28. Wonderful balance, showing a rich depth of ripe, mineral-driven fruit. Discreet without being lean, as it opens with aromas of citrus peel, nectarine and green apple. **89**

Würzberger Stein Riesling Auslese 1999

AP 44. Rich, honeyed and slightly confectionary, with velvety flavors of tangerine and passionfruit coulis. Excellent balance. **89**

Würzburger Pfaffenberg Riesling Eiswein 1999

AP 45. Concentrated and supple, more BA-like than Eiswein-like, though it's quite compelling and approachable. A nice bass note holds down the fragrant citrus and tropical fruit aromas, lingering in long, harmonious length. **89(+?)**



Mosel man, Mosel mountain

WILHELM HAAG, THE FIRST OF TWO WILHELMS being reviewed in this issue (see page 30 for the other one), is one of the most genuine human beings I have ever met. He is among the most celebrated winemakers in all the world – and rightly so – but deep down you can see that he is really just a farmer. Without a whit of pretension, he lays aside his work gloves and welcomes you into his home to share with great gusto the fruits of his labor.

At most wine estates, the proprietor will daintily pour you a sip or two for thoughtful, reflective tasting. Not so at the Dusemonder Hof. Here Wilhelm verily upends the bottle into your glass for a rollicking round of unbridled conviviality. Definitely a work hard, play hard kind of guy. Still, it's not like guzzling cheap beer or Jack Daniels (sometimes both) with the Wild West farmers I grew up with in rural Oregon. In Brauneberg, you are slurping down greedy mouthfuls of ultra-refined, full-flavored, refreshingly racy, low-alcohol Mosel Riesling.

Fritz Haag Rieslings are renowned for their sleek, muscular texture and their powerfully expressive fruit, all delivered in a nearly colorless liquid package of astonishing clarity. Wilhelm Haag and his top-flight vineyards in Brauneberg are a wonderful example of cosmic synergy – both man and mountain are exuberant, robust and eternally youthful.

The Brown Mountain

About a hundred years ago, Brauneberg (BROW-neh-bearg) wines were considered the best on the Mosel. More recently, tastes shifted to the delicate style of Wehlen. But now, thanks mostly to Wilhelm's hard work and tenacious quest for absolute perfection, the "brown mountain" is again among the unquestioned elite of Mosel vineyards.

The Brauneberg was formerly known as Dusemond, from the Latin for "sweet mountain" (dulcis mons), which tells us that even back in Roman times it was recognized as a good spot for growing ripe grapes. It is divided into two main vineyards. The largest, Juffer (YEW-fur), covers some 30 hectares (72 acres) and is considered the lesser of the two. Juffer-Sonnenuhr (11ha/26.5ac) is the choicest center cut of the southwest facing slope, from the river up to the sundial. Here the berg's heavier, drier (and thus warmer) soil brings exceptional ripeness to the grapes, even in wet years.

Like other Mosel Rieslings, these wines have a pronounced minerality. But it's not the delicate, filigreed mineral quality that you get from the blue slate in Wehlen; it's deeper and more rugged. Yet, for all their brawniness, the wines of Fritz Haag are magnificent in their definition, purity and sophistication.

The warmth of the site seems always to give the wines a very ripe acidity so that they are never hard or harsh. This quality is one of the main reasons that Fritz Haag wines can



Wilhelm Haag, owner of the Fritz Haag estate and president of the VDP growers association in the Mosel-Saar-Ruwer.



Looking upstream from the center of the 'brown mountain' and the Brauneberger Juffer-Sonnenuhr vineyard.

age almost indefinitely. Wilhelm likes nothing more than to startle you with a wine, tasted blind, that seems only a few years old, when really it is 15 or 20.

We experienced this amazing aging capacity again most recently in September, when we were lucky enough to get invited to a tasting Wilhelm and his son, Thomas (of Schloss Lieser), were hosting for a group of European customers. Take a look at Peter's tasting notes (on page 28) and you'll see how well these wines have developed. Of the 1975 Fritz Haag Brauneberger Juffer-Sonnenuhr Auslese, Wilhelm said, "This is a wine to drink after 40 years." As you can imagine, neither Peter nor I was willing to abstain for another 15 years. These occasions are rare and we cherish them, all the while lamenting the fact that our forebears didn't have the resources to lay down an adequate cellar for us.

On the other hand, Wilhelm is also a winemaker who enjoys drinking the wines young. He heartily extols Riesling's virtue as a wine that gives you two windows of opportunity – the fresh, fruity charms of youth for the first year or two, then the long, slowly evolving onset of maturity. In the same way that a man develops detail and distinctiveness in his features as he ages, a great wine will become more characterful, more interesting, more "itself" as it matures.

The future of Fritz Haag

Wilhelm is tireless in his efforts to produce pure, expressive Rieslings from the Brauneberg, but he is not afraid to admit that he's looking forward to retiring. Between his daily chores as a winegrower and his endless duties as president of the VDP Mosel (see our story about the VDP on page 33), Wilhelm has definitely earned a rest. His trophy shelf is full. Among many other honors and awards, he was named Germany's Winemaker of the Year by Gault Millau's *Weinguide Deutschland* in 1994, and his top dessert wines go for unbelievably high prices at the annual VDP auction in Trier.

In addition to making exceptional wines, Wilhelm and his wife, Ilse, have brought two gifted new winemakers into the world. Their oldest son, Thomas, has been running Schloss Lieser since 1993 and recently bought the estate outright. Their other son, Oliver, now runs the sizable winemaking operation at Deinhard-Wegeler in Rheingau.

It's still undecided, but Wilhelm hopes to retire in another two years or so, and he expects that Thomas will take over the Haag estate, keeping alive a family wine-making tradition that goes back to 1605. If you've had the pleasure to drink any of Thomas's precisely focused Schloss Lieser Rieslings, I think you'll agree that the Fritz Haag estate will be in very good hands. And you can bet that the next generation of Haags will have a properly stocked cellar to keep them focused on Wilhelm's legacy of consistency, craft and character.



In 1989, parts of the Juffer-Sonnenuhr vineyard were reworked and replanted. In the process, an old slate wall was broken up and returned to the soil. Some feel that explains the extraordinary minerality of the 1990 vintage!

Weingut Fritz Haag

Total vineyard area
7.5 hectares/18 acres

Average production
65,000 bottles

Varieties
Riesling 100%

Top vineyards
Brauneberger Juffer-Sonnenuhr
Brauneberger Juffer

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If you want to visit the Fritz Haag estate, an appointment is absolutely necessary. Wilhelm and Ilse are very welcoming, but please remember that they are a small, family estate and are often quite busy.

Fritz Haag's fountain of youth

ON THE DAY FOLLOWING THE VDP Mosel-Saar-Ruwer auction in Trier last September, we attended a joint tasting of Fritz Haag and Schloss Lieser. We tasted through the '99s, a vintage that Wilhelm compares to the excellent 1969 vintage. To prove his point about the ageability of these wines, he then opened several older bottles, including the 1969 Auslese.

Riesling QbA 1999

Fragrant and slatey, with just enough perfumed peach and plum fruitiness to balance the dryness. **85**

Brauneberger Juffer-Sonnenuhr Riesling Kabinett 1999

Pungent slatiness underneath delicately floral-orange perfume, very sleek and clean. This retains a classic delicacy that keeps it refreshing, and makes it stand out in this warm vintage. **88**

Brauneberger Juffer-Sonnenuhr Riesling Spätlese 1999

The sweetness is a little dominant right now, but this is very pretty, with a delicately filigree profile. Remains a bit high-toned and easygoing through the back end, but there is a lot of appeal here. **88**

Brauneberger Juffer-Sonnenuhr Riesling Auslese 1999

AP 6. Delicate and very pure, showing high-toned aromas of lime, mandarin orange and fresh pear. Terrific balance for the vintage, held together in finely elegant and very refined fragrance. **91**

Brauneberger Juffer-Sonnenuhr Riesling Auslese Gold Capsule 1999

AP 9. Harvested without any botrytis. Incredible sense of breed on the nose, deep and slate-driven, but with a full, taut profile. Perfect harmony in the mouth, shifting through a panoply of citrus and tropical nuances as it moves unhurriedly back on the palate in subtle, aromatic tension, allowing the aromas to slowly expand in a refined harmony. Great length and finesse, aristocratic wine. **95**

Brauneberger Juffer-Sonnenuhr Riesling Spätlese 1988 (auction)

Richly vibrant core of fruit is encased in a sleek package, showing a complex interplay of citrus and mineral components that dance across the palate. There is a lot of nuance and energy concealed under a deceptively quiet build, expanding on the finish with subtle dimension and complexity. **94**

Brauneberger Juffer-Sonnenuhr Riesling Spätlese 1976

AP 4. Medium-deep color, still retaining a yellowish-green tint. Aromas of toffee, praline, and cream, very subtle and harmonious, with marvelous freshness and an impeccable balance. Builds on the palate to a citrus-peel intensity that continues in long, deeply-toned presence. Very compelling wine, and still very youthful. **93**



The sundial of Brauneberg from which the great Juffer-Sonnenuhr vineyard takes its name.

Brauneberger Juffer-Sonnenuhr Riesling Auslese 1975

AP 27. Surprisingly pale color. Delicate and very quietly smoky aromas, focusing on elegance more than anything. Supple and silky, balanced in a beautiful tension between primary and secondary elements, and finishing in airy, billowy length. This still has room to develop, but it's showing superbly right now. **92**

Brauneberger Juffer-Sonnenuhr Riesling Auslese 1969

This was also harvested without any botrytis. More prominent depth on the nose than the 1975, but carries the same delicately harmonious profile, along with a smoky, slatey intensity. There is an intense sense of place underlining the whole thing as it hangs in subtle, refined balance. This finishes with just a hint of bitterness, but it's extremely beautiful, and very, very fresh. **93**

Brauneberger Juffer-Sonnenuhr Auslese Gold Capsule 1990 (auction)

AP 11. Deeply resonant and dark-toned on the nose, wound in brooding intensity. The power continues on the mouth, but it's power without a trace of excess weight, delicately and effortlessly assaulting. Hints of dried orange and a nearly papaya-like tropical component build in quiet, subtle concentration that expands on an incredibly harmonious and gripping finish. Superb wine. **95**

Brauneberger Juffer-Sonnenuhr Auslese Long Gold Capsule 1983

AP 15. Richly creamy, smoky profile, somehow combining power with a deft raciness. Very complete wine, cut like a jewel despite obvious concentration. Terrifically elegant and defined. The finish lingers in complex and multi-faceted intensity for a long, long time. **97**

Brauneberger Juffer-Sonnenuhr Riesling Beerenauslese 1971

Medium-pale and greenish-golden in color. Very intense, yet retains Haag's signature purity and *gout de terroir*, repeating the style of the previous two wines at a richer level. Really penetrating and palate-staining in its depth, with powerful concentration that unfolds in subtle, refined layers. The only blemish on this incredible experience is a slight hint of overly bitter botrytis that remains pervasive throughout the palate, but this is glorious wine. **93**



The Schloss Lieser estate, where this tasting was held, is owned by Thomas Haag, likely heir to the Haag family estate. Lieser is a village just downstream from the Brauneberg vineyards and across the river from the village of Brauneberg.

Robert Weil – King of the Rheingau

THE OTHER WILHELM FEATURED IN THIS ISSUE is Wilhelm Weil, the current director of Weingut Robert Weil in Kiedrich. In the few years since he took charge of the estate in 1987, Wilhelm has restored and expanded the grand reputation that Robert Weil wines enjoyed at the turn of the 20th century. Now the estate sits at the absolute pinnacle of Rheingau quality and world renown with its impeccably made and hugely impressive range of Rieslings.

The explosive development of the estate's reputation was propelled by Wilhelm's intense focus on quality and perfection at the upper Prädikat levels. The goal has always been to make the finest, most expressive wines possible throughout the range, but it is the record-price dessert wines that get people's attention. This prestige-building strategy has worked well – with prices for the Beere-nauslese and Trockenbeereauslese completely out of sight, non-wealthy wine lovers can turn to the QbA, Kabinett and Spätlese in order to get a piece of the Robert Weil action.

Some may dismiss the Weil approach as a grand-standing contrivance, but there is no denying the supreme greatness and audacity of their high-end wines. So, while we certainly lament the fact that Weil's Goldkapsel TBAs are far beyond our economic means (the 1999 TBA/GK sold for DM5,000/\$2,500 *per bottle* at the VDP Rheingau auction in September), we can't fault them for using the pursuit of perfection as a marketing and image-building technique. These wines are not made simply to impress the press. They are the result of Wilhelm's innate drive to push Riesling to the ultimate and create Rheingau wines that you will never forget.

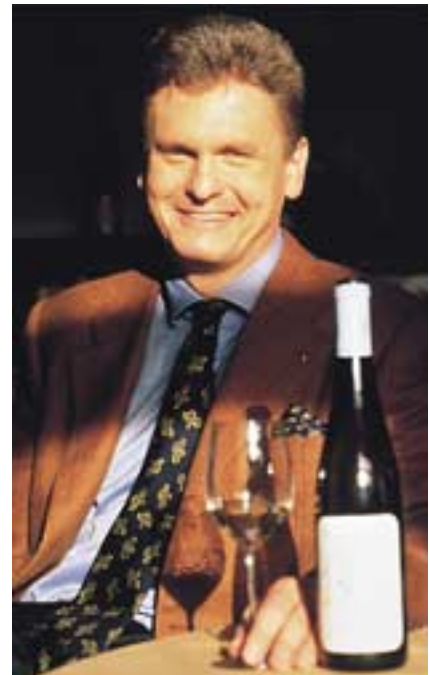
The old meets the new

By Rheingau standards, the Robert Weil estate is not really that old. It was founded in 1875 by Wilhelm's great-grandfather, Robert, who bought his first Kiedrich vineyards in 1868. By the end of the 19th century, the Weil estate was well-established with the European aristocracy and already setting price records. Weil's Kiedricher Berg Auslese was a special favorite of Kaiser Wilhelm II.

The historical meets the modern when we move to the late 20th century. In 1988, Wilhelm formed a partnership with Suntory, the huge beverage conglomerate based in Japan. With Suntory's solid financial backing, Wilhelm was able to modernize the cellar and adopt more labor-intensive vineyard practices. Freedom from cash-flow restraints gave him the breathing room he needed to bring the estate up to the highest quality standards. It wasn't long before the bet paid off.

Wilhelm instituted all of the now-familiar winemaking techniques that are necessary for maximum purity in the wines. These include a more ecological approach to vineyard care, heavy pruning to reduce yields, strict selection at harvest time, whole-berry pressing, slow fermentations and a sparkling clean cellar where vinification is reductive (meaning there is minimal oxygen contact so that freshness and purity are maintained).

Today the estate is a graceful melding of old and new. The neo-gothic estate house stands next to a new glass-and-steel tasting room. In the cellar you'll find century-old arched stone chambers lined with sleek and shiny stainless steel



Wilhelm Weil, great-grandson of Robert and current director of the Rheingau estate.

tanks, which are all connected to a high-tech, computerized temperature control system. During the frenzy of harvest, freshly pressed must can be held at a stable temperature in these tanks to delay fermentation. This gives the winemaking team a chance to catch its breath and consider their vinification options carefully. The system also gives them very precise control over fermentation speed and vigor.

The Hill of the Counts

As is usual, it is the raw materials – the grapes – that enable Wilhelm to make such flavor-packed, yet elegant, wines. Any great winemaker will tell you that without the finest-quality fruit from an exceptional vineyard site, it is not possible to make truly great wines.

The Gräfenberg (GRAY-fen-bearg) vineyard in Kiedrich is among the finest sites in all of Rheingau. The name means “hill of the counts” because of the site’s popularity with the nobility over the centuries. There is also a stone tower atop the berg, still standing among the ruins of Scharfenstein castle, the Middle Ages home of the Archbishops of Mainz.

“Kiedrich Gräfenberg” is the only vineyard designation you will find on a Robert Weil wine (to declutter the label for the global market, they have dropped the German possessive ‘er’ from the village name, as well as the vintage). The estate also owns vines in the excellent Wasserros vineyard, but wines from there and other, lesser, vineyards are bottled only as estate wines. Thus has Wilhelm established a de facto vineyard classification for his estate: the Gräfenberg is “grand cru” and everything else is village wine.

Raising all boats in the tide

Wilhelm Weil has an uncommon determination to reach the pinnacle of Riesling quality and expression – and then to keep improving from there. His dedication has paid off remarkably for both the estate and for him personally. In addition to numerous awards and accolades in the press, he, like Wilhelm Haag, has also been named a Winemaker of the Year (1997) in Gault Millau’s *Weinguide Deutschland*.

But, looking beyond the personal praise and singular success of his estate, Wilhelm is working hard to revitalize the overall image of the Rheingau region. He is president of the VDP Rheingau and has been tireless in his work to establish an official vineyard classification and develop the Erstes Gewächs program – both things that he doesn’t really need for his own estate (see VDP story on page 33).

With the resurgence of the Weil estate as inspiration, other Rheingau estates are working to recapture their glorious past. Slowly, quality is improving region-wide, but for the foreseeable future, Robert Weil will no doubt remain Rheingau’s crown jewel.



The top-class Gräfenberg vineyard with the medieval tower of Scharfenstein castle in the distance.

Weingut Robert Weil

Total vineyard area
65 hectares/160 acres

Average production
360,000 bottles

Varieties
Riesling 98%
Pinot Noir 2%

Top vineyards
Kiedrich Gräfenberg
Kiedrich Wasserros

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Estate visits
A stylish and modern tasting room has been built next to the estate house. Open hours vary with the seasons, so you’ll want to check by phone or e-mail. For cellar tours, you will need to make an appointment well in advance.

A sampling of Robert Weil 1999

These wines were tasted at the Weil estate in Kiedrich on the 26th of September, 2000.

Kiedrich Gräfenberg Riesling Kabinett trocken 1999

AP 40. Light, flowery and slatey, with very pretty aromas of white peach and lime. Delicately elegant, with a fine sense of breed. **90**

Kiedrich Gräfenberg Riesling trocken Erstes Gewächs 1999

AP 39. Pungently mineral, very forceful and wound-up in tightly constricted power. Pear skin and nectarine fragrances build with concentrated intensity to a long, aromatically expansive finish. Really dense and authoritative. **91**

Rheingau Riesling Kabinett 1999

AP 28. Creamy in tone, softer and rounder than the previous wines thanks to 35 g/l of residual sugar. Juicy flavors of lemon curd, melon and poached pear are a bit overly exuberant right now, but this seems to have the stuffing and build to develop well, and will be very compelling once it settles down.

89

Kiedrich Gräfenberg Riesling Spätlese 1999

AP 30. Tremendous concentration of peachy-orange fruitiness here that initially conceals the penetrating level of depth on the palate, really drilling a hole into your mouth. There is a little botrytis, superbly integrated and very harmonious. The expansive, grand cru finish shows the masterly touch of this great estate. **93**

Kiedrich Gräfenberg Riesling Eiswein 1999

AP 33. Picked as absolutely healthy grapes, without any botrytis at all. Delicately perfumed aromas of pineapple, mandarin orange and papaya, showing thunderous depth and intensity yet somehow maintaining the delicate, elegant subtlety of the site. Impossibly textured on the palate, nearly crystalline in tone, lingering with tremendous impact on a long and glorious finish. Tremendous wine for any vintage, but especially profound for 1999. **96(+?)**

Weil's Kiedrich Gräfenberg Riesling Auslese Goldkapsel auction wine was reviewed in our November/December 2000 issue.



The Robert Weil estate house in the village of Kiedrich.



A bottle of the 1893 Kiedricher Berg Auslese on display at Weingut Robert Weil. An exceptionally high price was paid for this wine by the Austrian court – back in the days when Rheingau Riesling was the most expensive wine in the world.

Germany's VDP and vineyard classification

GERMANS LOVE TO ORGANIZE CLUBS. They even have an old joke about it: If more than three Germans come together on the street, what are they doing? They're forming a club! It seems to be true. Every little village has its singing clubs, its hiking clubs, bird-watching clubs, sewing clubs and, naturally, wine-tasting clubs. So it's not surprising that Germany is overflowing with winegrowing associations, some of which have been around for a century or more.

The most prominent association, certainly in terms of the global market, is the Verband Deutscher Prädikatsweingüter, known simply, and quite mercifully, as the VDP. This group was formed in 1910 and, for the most part, represents the very elite of German wine. VDP estates can be identified by the familiar, ultra-Germanic eagle-with-cluster-of-grapes emblem that is their logo.

As with any quality-control association, the VDP was founded by a small group of visionary and strong-willed winemakers who recognized that the overall respectability of German wines was just as important as the reputations of their individual estates. When a group of like-minded individualists is small, a unity of purpose can be achieved. But as the group grows and competing interests join the fray, it can become very difficult to maintain the highest standards of quality.

The VDP has done a remarkable job of keeping its membership low and its quality standards high. There are currently 202 members of the VDP, who together own only three percent of the vineyard area and account for less than one percent of all the wineries in Germany. Still, not every VDP estate is performing up to the level you would expect from the nation's most prestigious winegrowers' association. The most common cause of this problem is the shift in fundamental philosophy that occurs when an estate changes owners or is handed down to the next generation. It's like the great, benevolent king who must turn his powerful empire over to a less than deserving heir, only to see it crumble and fall.

To be, or not to be, VDP

Admission into the VDP is difficult to achieve and usually comes when an estate is being run by someone whose primary goal is to make the finest wines possible from great vineyards. When that artistic vision is replaced by indifference or a purely commercial point of view, quality suffers. But it's even more difficult for an estate to lose its VDP status than to get it— though it has happened — so the VDP leadership does its best to bring the strays back into the herd.

Some superior estates, such as von Schubert (Maximin Grünhaus) and Müller-Catoir, have felt no need to join the necessarily politicized lists in which the VDP tilts its lance. They are content to go it alone, secure in the knowledge that if they make exceptional wine, the customers will come. This, of course, raises an essential question: Is the VDP necessary? For a few stalwart, utterly self-directed winemakers, the answer is a self-assured no. But it is clear that VDP estates do benefit from the image of quality and prestige that the organization has crafted over the past 90 years. It is only when an estate has surpassed the quality standards of the group that it actually finds itself being held back by the restrictive rules and regulations designed to keep the less conscientious producers in line.



"It is politically inconvenient that excellence lies with a small minority. But it is in the nature of quality to be 'elitist,' whether convenient or not."

— Hugh Johnson,
writing in the forward to the
VDP's promotional brochure

I believe that the VDP is still a valuable institution and, in most cases, the VDP logo is the mark of exceptional German wine. It also serves as a worthy role model for other estates, in terms of wine quality, ecological viticultural practices and commercial integrity. The most unfortunate consequence of an organization having rules that must be weighted to the low end in order to accommodate the interests of all its members, outstanding and mediocre alike, is that membership is usually the most beneficial for the least deserving estates.

Ultimately, however, it is the marketplace that decides. VDP logo or no, if the wine is consistently great, it will find an audience. If the wines are poorly made or uninteresting, it will be difficult to find a sustainable market. What the VDP brings to the German wine world is an overriding vision of quality first, commerce second. Wine is a commodity, a product, yes – but at the pinnacle of quality, it is also an artistic expression of the land and people that produce it. The VDP seeks to uphold the highest standards possible for building and maintaining the image and prestige of Germany's finest vinous creations.

Grand Cru, by any other name



The VDP's latest battle is over the age-old question of vineyard classification. The VDP Rheingau has led the most recent charge and the smoke is just now beginning to clear over the famous slopes between the Taunus mountains and the Rhine. The new rule of law is a classification system called Erstes Gewächs (AIR-stess ge-VEX), which is a hopeful translation of the exalted French designation “grand cru.”

The Erstes Gewächs idea grew out of the Charta association, founded in 1983 by another small group of quality conscious estates. The principal forces behind this movement were the late Erwein Graf Matuschka-Greiffenclau of Schloss Vollrads, a great promoter, and Bernhard Breuer of Weingut Georg Breuer, a gifted and historically informed winemaker. The idea was to recapture the winemaking style of Rheingau's illustrious past. That meant a return to naturally fermented dry wines, from top sites, that were meant to accompany food.

The Charta association adopted the romanesque arch as its logo and even developed its own classification map, based on historical records and new soil and climate research. The map closely resembled the official government tax assessment map of 1885, and was substantiated by further research done by the Geisenheim wine school in 1967.

In 1992, the Charta group decided to adopt a set of unofficial, yet very strict, standards for the production of “first growth” dry wines from the great sites of Rheingau that they had classified. The only indication on the label was the use of three of the romanesque arches instead of just one. It was kind of a secret society. Only people in the know had any clue they were drinking an Erstes Gewächs wine.

Once more, into the breach

In an effort to consolidate their classification efforts, Charta and the VDP merged a couple of years ago. Also joining the classification fight at this time was the Rheingauer Weinbauverband, the association of all Rheingau wine estates. It was agreed that if Erstes Gewächs were ever to become law, it would have to extend beyond the VDP and to all producers in the region. They also turned to the German Meteorological Service in Geisenheim to create yet another classification map.

In May, 1999, the new classification was announced. Of Rheingau's 3,227 hectares, 1,132 ha (35 percent) were approved for Erstes Gewächs classification. This

Erstes Gewächs

Region

Only legal in the Rheingau at this time, but the goal is to make Erstes Gewächs classifications in all of Germany's wine regions.

Vineyard classification

Only wines from classified vineyards can be considered for Erstes Gewächs approval. However, it is possible for a vineyard to be added to the classification if it can be shown to produce high-quality wines consistently from year to year.

Grape varieties

Riesling
Spätburgunder (Pinot Noir)

Harvest requirements

Min. 83° Oechsle for Riesling
90° Oechsle for Spätburgunder
Hand harvesting only
Maximum yield 50 hl/ha

Styles of wine

Dry, with no more than 13 g/l of residual sugar for Riesling. Sweet wines designated as Spätlese or higher are also allowed in the classification.

On the label

Identified by the three romanesque arches and the words “Erstes Gewächs.” The vineyard name is also required as these wines are, by definition, single-vineyard wines.

For more information

To see a list of all the wines from 1999 that have been approved as Erstes Gewächs, visit this Web site and follow the wine links:

www.rheingau.de

set off and instant retaliatory furor from the press and officials from other regions, who claimed that the percentage was far too high. Others, most notably Bernhard Breuer, took issue with the methodology employed. The classification was based on must weights at a specified date in late September, a method that favored the flat, warm-soil sites near the river and ignored some historically great, later-ripening sites (Breuer's Rauenthal Nonnenberg included) on the steep hillsides.

It is possible that they reacted too quickly (although for Breuer, there are other issues involved in his split with the VDP). Jochen Becker-Köhn, export director at Weingut Robert Weil explains: "We needed the scientific, weather-based classification if we were to get it made law. It was always the intention of the VDP that the map must be very flexible to allow for further classifications in the future." So the map was a political expediency, a necessary tool to convince the German government of the classification's impartiality. Once established as law, it could then be modified as the truly great sites and producers revealed themselves.

In any case, classification of the site is only the first step toward producing an Erstes Gewächs wine. The law also delineates very strict vinification standards and all wines must pass a very critical blind tasting. This three-step process eliminates a large percentage of the wines submitted from classified sites.

Owning vines in a classified vineyard does not guarantee an Erstes Gewächs wine, only the *possibility* of producing one. For 1999, the first official Erstes Gewächs vintage, 55 wines were submitted and only 29 were approved – less than one percent of the wine produced in Rheingau that year. It is expected that Erstes Gewächs wines will grow to three or four percent, but will never exceed five percent of Rheingau production. Now that sounds more like a grand cru standard.

As Becker-Köhn points out, the classification map is not perfect. "It was made by human beings," he said, "and we do make mistakes." The Rheingau classification as it stands now is not in its final form – it is a framework for the future as Germany struggles to bring its top wines into the same hallowed light as the grands crus of France. It may be some time before they realize this goal. Wilhelm Haag put it very succinctly when he said, "We are 200 years too late!"

Classification efforts in other regions

Every region is working on its own classification system. Some share the goal of making Erstes Gewächs a legal designation for all of Germany; others aren't really interested in adding even more confusing German words to their labels.

The VDP Nahe has completed a vineyard classification, backed by strict wine-making rules. With only eight members, they had an easier time coming to an agreement. Now, any vineyard-designated wine from a VDP Nahe estate is from a classified vineyard, and only Riesling is allowed.

In the Mosel-Saar-Ruwer region, a similar classification is in the works for VDP estates. There is only one level of classification, and the usual strict vinification standards apply.

A special situation has developed in Rheinhessen, where a small band of Riesling estates in the steep-sloped Rheinfront, between Nierstein and Nackenheim, is creating its own classification. They want to distinguish themselves from the low-quality Liebfraumilch producers in Rheinhessen's vast rolling hills. As usual, there is dissatisfaction and dissension in the ranks.

In spite of much hard work, Germany's wine industry still has a long way to go to prove that an Erstes Gewächs type of classification is workable for the producers and will be of any real benefit to consumers.



Jochen Becker-Köhn has been working very closely with his boss, VDP Rheingau President Wilhelm Weil, on the Erstes Gewächs classification.

"We needed the scientific, weather-based classification if we were to get it made law. It was always the intention of the VDP that the map must be very flexible to allow for further classifications in the future."

– Jochen Becker-Köhn,
Export director at Robert Weil

Rating the wines

WINES ARE ASSESSED BASED ON THEIR perceived total potential lifespan. In an ideal world, prose would be the only language required, but of course we humans have a penchant for categorization and qualitative organization. Therefore, despite its flaws, we have chosen to include a numerical score in our notes, based on a hundred-point scale. We stress that the text of the tasting notes is the matter of importance, and that the score apart from the text is divested of meaning. A (+?) indicates the potential for an increased score.

Tasting notes are by individual tasters, and not composites of a panel. We document who is tasting the wine, where, and when the wine is being tasted, as all three of these elements are crucial to the contextual understanding of the notes. In addition, lot numbers are provided whenever possible, and especially AP numbers for German wines. In general, unless otherwise noted, all tasting notes are Peter's.

Because of extreme variability around the world, we have decided not to include prices, except for the auction wines.

THE RIESLING REPORT RATING SCALE

- 95–100 Classic.** A perfect example of its type. The holy grail of all wine lovers, these are wines that stop time and transport you to a higher plane of existence.
- 90–94 Exceptional.** A superbly crafted wine with extraordinary attributes.
- 85–89 Above average.** Wines showing character, distinction and interest.
- 80–84 Average.** A drinkable wine, but without any special distinction.
- 75–79 Below average.** An underachiever.
- 75 or less Poor or flawed.**

Only wines rated 85 or better will appear in this magazine. These are our personal recommendations. More tasting notes can be found in Library within the **Members Only** area of the Riesling Report Web site: www.rieslingreport.com

Next Issue

The 1999 vintage in Alsace

WE WILL BE MAKING OUR ANNUAL PILGRIMAGE to our favorite spots in the foothills of the Vosges Mountains in April. While there, we will visit as many producers as possible so we can give you an accurate assessment of the 1999 vintage. In the May/June 2001 issue of Riesling Report you will find all of our tasting notes, as well as estate reviews, travel ideas and, most Alsatian of all, food and wine pairing suggestions. Please join us. And please tell all of your friends to get in on the Riesling action, too!

Special thanks

We'd like to extend our special thanks to all of the wine industry people who were so kind in helping us out with this issue. They include: Carol Sullivan, German Wine Information Bureau USA; Eva Raps and Hilke Nagel, VDP; Wilhelm Haag; Wilhelm Weil; Jochen Becker-Köhn; Dr. Alexander Michalsky and the Society for Rheingau Wine Culture.



The delightful little village of Niedermorschwihr in Alsace.