

VIEW FROM THE CELLAR

By John Gilman

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THE 2017 GERMAN VINTAGE VERY CAREFUL SELECTION LEADS TO GREATNESS



Looking down on the center of the town of Lieser from the superb Niederberg Helden vineyard above.

Through the ups and downs of a rather challenging growing season in German wine country in the spring and summer of 2017, few winegrowers were overly optimistic that a great vintage was in the making. Mother Nature was not in a most generous of moods through much of 2017, with the first gauntlet thrown down by the weather being quite heavy frost damage on April 20th of this year. While the frost varied in its severity from parcel to parcel and region to region, the timing could not have been worse for winegrowers, as the spring had been unseasonably warm and budbreak had been very early in 2017, with the vines getting out and running in their early vegetative growth in the last week of March and the shoots on the vines were well advanced by the time the frost hit on the 20th of April. The results were a significant loss of crop for many wine producers, as badly affected vineyards would end up losing anywhere from twenty to fully fifty percent of the cropload of 2016. But, how bad the frost hit one's vineyards really was a matter of luck, for Tim Fröhlich of Weingut Shafer-Fröhlich in the Nahe town of Bockenau commented that "in the vineyards where I and Helmut Dönnhoff both have vines, like Felsenberg in Schlossböckelheim, my frost damage was really fairly moderate, but right next door in the Dönnhoff parcels, there was substantially more damage, so I count myself

quite lucky.” Frost was not the only difficulty posed by Mother Nature in 2017, as the summer was hot and wet, so there was always plenty of mildew pressure in the vineyards and one had to be very vigilant to not let mildew damage compound the problems caused by the frost. This challenge was most difficult on those estates that are in the transition to organic and biodynamic farming methods for some of their parcels, as there are less treatment options available and some of these estates ended up with crops that were fully fifty percent off a “normal” harvest in 2017.

As if severe frost damage and then extensive mildew pressure were not enough for winegrowers in 2017, there was also a strong hailstorm that hit the middle Mosel on the evening of August 1st that caught the grape bunches just as they were starting to really ripen and soften up their skins, so that the damage was quite extensive for those vineyards which received the full brunt of the hail on the first of the month. Christophe Schaefer in the heart of the middle Mosel in the village of Graach commented that “when I first went out in the vines the morning immediately after the hail on the evening of the first, I thought, okay, we may have been lucky, as the grapes did not look too bad and I hoped they had not been too badly damaged, but by mid-afternoon, the berries were starting to change color where they were hit from the hail and I knew we had lost a lot of grapes.” In the end, between the frost and the hail in Graach, Weingut Schaefer would end up at least fifty percent off a normal crop in 2017. Klaus-Peter Keller in the Rheinhessen also was hit by hail in 2017, with the storm in the Hügelland arriving on the evening of August 27th and principally affecting the two fine grand cru vineyards of the Abtserde and the Morstein, where he estimated that he lost between seventy and eighty percent of the production to the storm and the earlier frosts in the spring. Happily, at least the hail in both regions happened soon enough ahead of the start of picking that most berries affected just shriveled up and fell off of the bunches, but for a crop that was already going to be short from the frost in the spring, the further crop thinning by August hail damage was hardly welcome! Happily, at least the Nahe and the Saar valley missed the hail that passed through vineyards in the middle Mosel and Rheinhessen in August, so their losses were primarily due to the frosts.

After the August rounds of hail, the weather turned very nice, with warm, sunny days and cool nights, so that the remaining bunches out on the vines were able to bask in a fine *fin de saison* leading into the picking. A great many of the producers whom I visited with during my eleven days in the region at the end of May commented that due to the very early budbreak back in March, the harvest of 2017 was one of the earliest, if not the earliest of their careers, with everyone getting started picking in the second half of September. A September start to harvest in German wine country is extremely rare (except outside of the warmest regions, such as the Rheinpfalz), but there was absolutely no one who I spoke with who started picking in October in 2017. Helmut Dönnhoff commented that “I recall very well when we started, for it was on my birthday on September 21st, and this was the very first time in my career that we had started picking as early as my birthday!” Similarly, Johannes Haart of Weingut Reinhold Haart in Piesport started on the 21st of September. Most estates collected their grapes very quickly by German standards during the harvest of 2017, as a heavy rainstorm one week into picking was followed by warm and humid conditions over the next couple of days, which got the botrytis started very quickly in the vineyards in its aftermath, and several winegrowers reported that the botrytis quickly turned from a nice clean glaze to less desirable rot, and one had to be very, very careful during picking to avoid unclean botrytis and grey rot in the bunches.

As Christophe Schaefer commented, “in 2017, after the rain storm, the botrytis spread very quickly, and we decided to pick as quickly as possible after this to ensure that we might only have good, clean botrytis to work with.” He continued, “however, even working fast, we started sorting very carefully in the vineyards to take away anything that looked subpar, and it soon became quite apparent that we really did not want to use any of the botrytis this year, as it just was not clean enough to make great sweet wines.” Christophe’s wife, Andrea Schaefer was in charge of the picking teams in the vineyards in 2017, and she was very draconian in having grapes that had any touch of less than perfect botrytis left on the ground in the vineyards, and she noted that “I told Christophe that I had never seen such a bad harvest as 2017, as we had to just keep rejecting bunches because even if the botrytis looked good on one side of the berry, the other side was already getting grey rot elements and had to be rejected, so I was very downhearted about the harvest.” However, Christophe, who was receiving the baskets of grapes in the winery and starting the pressing, was very happy about the selection that was being made and he started to be very optimistic for the potential of the wines from this year! As he noted, “everything we did in the vineyards was negative selection- leaving behind any grapes that were not absolutely perfect, so in the end, we have almost zero botrytis even in our Auslesen, which were made with desiccated golden berries, rather than with botrytized grapes.” Hanno Zilliken noted much the same, saying that “there is some botrytis in the grapes for the sweeter wines, but the vintage is more defined by its shriveled berries and this is particularly true of the Spätlesen and light Auslesen of 2017.” Julian Haart in Piesport commented about the botrytis of 2017, “much of it that truly looked good on the outside (and there was not all that much of this) still showed tinges of grey rot when you crushed a berry, so we had to select out the vast, vast majority of the botrytized grapes on a berry by berry basis to ensure that we only used perfectly clean botrytis for the sweet wines.” Julian noted that he hates doing this grape by grape selection to make botrytized Auslesen and his wife, Nadine, actually went down in the cellars and did the Auslesen berry selections herself, as their daughter Ellie was born in 2017 and she wanted to make sure that they had some special Auslese in the cellar from her birth year! As Julian tells the story, “Nadine came up from the cellars about 3:00 AM and nudged me awake and said, ‘it’s all finished, now don’t screw up the wines, as they are for Ellie!’”

The resulting 2017 wines that I had a chance to taste from Julian Haart and virtually every other estate that I visited on this trip were truly stunning, with only a small handful of bottlings offering less than thrilling quality. 2017 is another high acid vintage, somewhat similar to 2010 in this regard, though as Klaus-Peter Keller noted, “the acids were mostly tartaric this year, with little malic acidity, and the acidity levels dropped quite a bit during the wines *elevage* in 2017.” He continued, “some estates decided to de-acidify in 2017 and I think that this would have been a mistake, as the acidity is a gift from nature in this vintage and really make the wines’ quality.” As mentioned above, one of the reasons the acids stayed so nice and high in 2017 was the evening temperatures leading into the backend of September stayed quite cool, and it was this diurnal swing between warm days and cool nights that allowed the grapes to push sugars nicely across the finish line without acids dropping and making flabby wines. Tim Fröhlich commented that “I was a little worried at the start of September, as the weather was warm both day and night, but then the evening temperatures started to cool off quite a bit and I thought, okay, now we are in good shape to really make something special in 2017.” So the winegrowers had grapes with excellent sugar levels to work with, coupled to high acids that keep the wines racy and very, very precise, and the levels of extract were also very high in this vintage, due to the reduced crop

yields from the earlier depredations of the growing season. One of the signature elements of the very best 2017ers is an almost salty, saline nature to the backend minerality in the wines, from the very high extract found in this vintage. It is quite an exciting element in many of the sweeter wines that deliver such beautiful and concentrated fruit tones, as the wines invariably finish with a distinct sensation of salty minerality which provides great lift and vibrancy on the finish.

But, one of the interesting hallmarks of the 2017 vintage is just how good the wines are from the dry bottlings across the board to Auslesen, with seemingly perfect grapes available to make absolutely classic bottles of Feinherb, Kabinett or Spätlese as well as Grosses Gewächs dry wines. Even, the basic dry “Estate Riesling” bottlings can be exceptional in 2017- provided that the winegrower had enough grapes to make these cuvées, as those who were very careful about selection had absolutely pristine raw materials to work with in this vintage. There are very small quantities of Beerenauslese and Trockenbeerenauslese in some cellars as well, with very nice sugar levels and really excellent, ripe and snappy acidity. So, producers were generally free to make wines along the lines of sweetness that they felt their clientele would most desire in 2017, with some producers, such as Johannes Haart, producing almost seventy percent dry wines in this vintage, whereas Christophe Schaefer decided to make only classic off dry and noble sweet Prädikat wines, with fifty percent of his production truly beautiful Kabinetten bottlings, and almost all the rest made up of Spätlesen, with the exception of one Auslese from the Domprobst that will go to auction in Trier. In contrast, Egon Müller, who loves his sweeter bottlings, made plenty of Auslesen and Goldkapsel Auslesen in 2017. The one Achilles’ Heel of the vintage was that producers did have to be very strict with selection of only pristine berries in 2017, and if the selection process was a bit too relaxed, the potential quality of the wines did fall off noticeably and one missed out on a golden opportunity to make truly profound wines in this vintage.

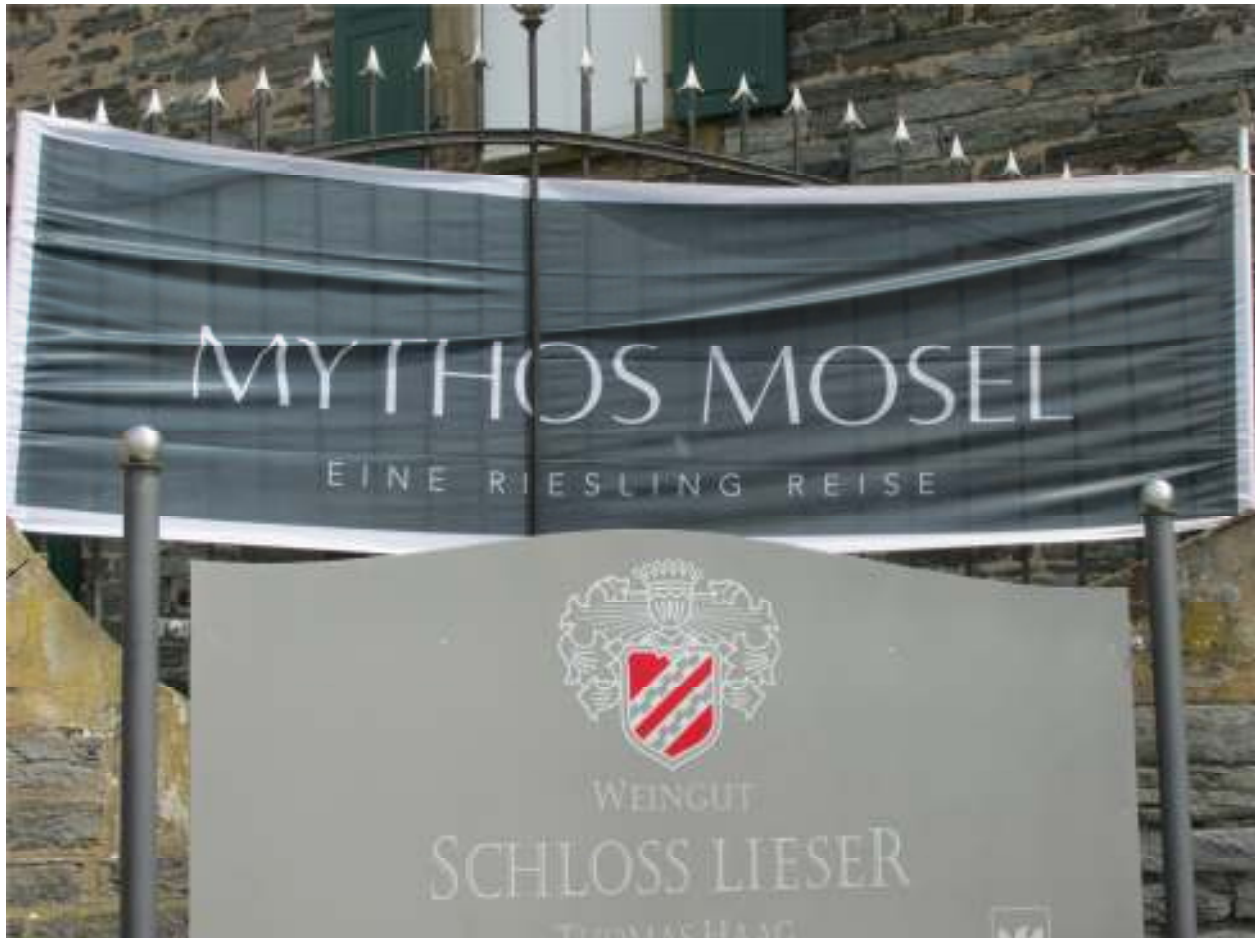
While the potential quality for each style and level of wine in 2017 was outstanding, as long as winegrowers were strict and did not allow anything less than perfect grapes into their presses and fermenters in this vintage, I have to make mention of just how beautiful so many of the 2017 Kabinetten are this year, as this is one Prädikat level that has truly stood out in my tastings at the most successful estates. This is a unique style of wine- light, ethereal and pure as well water- that seemed to be in serious eclipse a decade ago, as the conventional wisdom was that in our era of climate heating, one simply could not make these “light as a feather” wines anymore with the sugar levels that grapes in Germany now routinely attain. For several years, a great many Kabinetten were simply less successful Spätlesen declassified down to the next Prädikat level. However, producers have been adapting techniques very well in the last several years for crafting true Kabinetten and it looks like we are going to see a real renaissance of this style of Riesling in the coming years. Certainly, the market in Germany has re-discovered these wines with passion in the last handful of years and there is far more demand within the country for true Kabinetten than was the case only a half dozen years ago, and the rise in demand has allowed more top producers to craft these lovely wines. It is as if many newer fans of German wines, who were drawn to them in the last decade because of the growing excellence of the Trocken bottlings, have discovered that Kabinett is also essentially a dry wine and can be far more flexible at the table with certain dishes, or is the best wine to serve as an aperitif when one is trying to wash away the taste of the workday with something pure and completely beautiful in the glass. There is now talk amongst many winegrowers to start to look for old vines in some of

the side valleys along the Mosel, which were once considered too cool to properly ripen Riesling a generation or two ago, as these side valley vineyards may well offer perfect growing conditions today to craft classic Kabinetten.

I made my annual trip to Germany this year a bit later in the spring than has been my practice in the past, as I was invited to attend several press events planned around the middle Mosel's relatively new wine festival, called Mythos Mosel, which was held this year on the weekend of May 25th to the 27th. It is a terrific event, with four wineries getting together to show samples at a "host winery" owned by one of their friends, so one can visit five or six wineries in a day and taste wines all told from twenty to twenty-four producers and really cover some ground with the wide range of outstanding Mosel estates pooling resources to show their wines to a very appreciative crowd of Riesling lovers. The main events are the tastings hosted on Saturday and Sunday from 11:00 AM to 6:00 PM, with a marvelous opening wine dinner held Friday evening (at the hotel at Schloss Lieser this year) that had several Michelin-starred chefs in attendance and turning out truly excellent food. The organizers of the event set up shuttle buses to run up and down on both sides of the Mosel River for the winery tastings on both Saturday and Sunday, so that it is possible to visit a great many of these wineries without ever having to drive, which makes for quite the festive atmosphere on the buses later in the afternoons! The crowds for the tastings were quite large this year (I understand that the event has been growing each of its first three years), but with so many different wineries hosting tastings, it was not too crowded at the vast majority of the wineries I had a chance to visit and I strongly recommend the event to Riesling lovers who might like to be in the middle Mosel at the end of May next year! Just to give an idea of what a visitor might find at Mythos, at Weingut Willi Schaefer in Graach, which was one of the hosting wineries, the other producers showing their wines included Katharina Prüm of Weingut Johann Joseph Prüm, Alexandra Künstler and Konstantin Weiser of Weingut Weiser-Künstler and representatives from Weingut von Kesselstaat as well. And these kind of lineups were present up and down the Mosel for both days, so if one winery was a bit packed with tasters when one arrived, it was easy to make a note to visit it again tomorrow and hop back on the bus in search of a less crowded location to taste. Several of the wineries were also working with local chefs, so there was plenty of good tasting food available as well at certain stops. It really is a great event.

I am normally in wine country in March, customarily right before Prowein in Düsseldorf is held, as this earlier timing usually gives me a very good look at the quality of the new vintage in Germany, but there are certainly some major advantages to visiting a bit later in the spring, as almost all of the final cuvées have been decided upon by winegrowers and the roster of wines to taste is certainly far more complete at the end of May than it is in mid-March. The addition of all the wineries on display at the Mythos Mosel events allowed me to taste a far wider number of wineries this year than I have typically had time to visit in my busy March trip to Europe, which always includes a second pass through Burgundy and usually an extended stay in Champagne as well. So, it was extremely pleasant this year to be in German wine country a bit later in the year, when all of the vines are flush in an ocean of green leaves and the first flowering had already started and the sun is out bright and warm, as it made for quite the dramatic contrast from those March visits, which are typically still defined by towering hills of barren grey, blue and red slate vineyards that define the winter landscape in the region. The flip side is that many wineries had only done their bottling two to four weeks before my visit, so a few estates' rosters were still a

bit shaken from their recent bottling and it took a bit more work to uncover the quality of the wines. But, given the trade-offs between completely finished wines for the most part in May (even if a few had only recently been bottled) versus still some yeasty qualities in the very young wines in March, it was hard not to be really content to be here in a very sunny and warm second half of May this year and to have a few more days to make proper winery visits in a less compacted and stressful tasting schedule.



I should take a moment to mention that one of the great side benefits of attending the Mythos Mosel events this year was being introduced to the marvelous Zeltinger Hof Hotel and Restaurant in the village of Zeltingen-Rachtig. The hotel was quite comfortable, but it was the restaurant and stunningly deep wine list here that really merits mention. The restaurant and hotel are set up in the center of Zeltingen, a block or so up the hill from the riverfront, with the hotel now having grown to occupy several of the lovely old guest houses that sprinkle this part of the village. Zeltingen is the second most important tourist destination in the middle Mosel, with only nearby Bernkastel attracting more visitors each year. Despite its popularity as a base of operations for visitors to this section of the Mosel, the town is very pretty and comfortable to stay in and can boast in the Zeltinger Hof the finest wine list of German wines that I have ever had the pleasure to delve into- with no other restaurant in my experience even remotely close in terms of depth or breadth of selection! The cuisine at the Zeltinger Hof is very well done, focusing on German classic dishes, very fresh ingredients and generous portions. The gentleman

behind the hotel and restaurant is Markus Reis, who is the chef here, as well as the proprietor of the hotel and one of the most passionate advocates of Mosel Riesling as one will find anywhere. The wine list is just amazing, with great depth of bottles in both the dry and noble sweet style to be found from almost all of the top estates on the Mosel, and with a truly astonishing wealth of options for bottles at eight to ten years of age at bargain prices, as well as superb depth of old wines back to the 1930s. As I was leaving, Markus told me to come back soon, as he had just bought a cellar and was about to add another two hundred and fifty selections of old wines to the list! Markus Reis is a great guide for the older bottles in the cellar from estates who one may not be familiar with today, and he also offers a wide array of options of wine flights of three or four wines to go along with each course. In short, this is a Riesling treasure on the middle Mosel and a must visit when tasting in the region.

The following notes are arranged by region, starting with the Saar and Ruwer, and then moving to the middle Mosel, Nahe and finally, the Rheinhessen. The wineries that I visited during my ten days of visits to the tasting rooms here to work on the 2017 vintage are listed first, and after this, I have included notes on wines that I had a chance to taste during the weekend of Mythos Mosel events and where I was able to take proper notes. As these were very well-attended, stand up tastings, it was not always convenient to taste and write notes at the tables set up at the different hosting wineries. Given the size of the Mythos events, it was obviously not possible for participating wineries to show their entire range of 2017ers (and some chose to show a range that included other vintages as well), but where the wines were really good (such as those from Peter Lauer or Max Ferdinand Richter), I hunkered down and tried to make a full report on the wines that they were showing. However, as the tasting conditions were obviously not as ideal as sitting down one on one with the winegrower in their tasting room at the estate, I have kept the Mythos reports separate and they appear at the end of this article. As I had the chance to spend considerably more days here in May than I have available in March, this report is far more complete than usual and I am very happy to have several more estates to write up in the truly stellar vintage of 2017. That said, even with ten days of tastings, there were still several of my favorite estates that I could not squeeze into the calendar this year! I was very sorry not to have the opportunity to visit top estates I have been to in the past such as Hofgut Falkenstein, Daniel Vollenweider or Peter Lauer and taste their full rosters of 2017ers, but with only one good knee to limp around on during this trip, I like to think that I covered as many bases as possible during my time this May in German wine country.

Estates Visited

Saar and Ruwer

Maximin Grünhäus (Mertesdorf)

My visit to Maximin Grünhäus and tasting with Dr. Carl von Schubert was my very first stop on my twelve day trip to Germany at the end of May of this year. Consequently, as I did not have a real sense of the style or shape of the vintage of 2017, nor of the vagaries of the growing season, I did not think to ask important questions about things such as de-acidification and the like. I was also still plenty foggy from jet lag and consequently did not write down AP numbers for each wine I tasted. My apologies in advance for this bit of sloppiness. As I had not been to the estate to taste in a couple of years, missing last year with surgery on my right knee and the year previous because of scheduling difficulties, Dr. von Schubert was very kind to show me

quite a few 2016ers in addition to the lineup of 2017ers during my visit, so that I could play a bit of catch up after not visiting for a couple of years. A lot has changed here since my last visit to Maximin Grünhäus, as the estate has now joined the VDP (after long remaining aloof from this top growers' association) and Dr. von Schubert is now the president of the VDP. I think this is a wonderful turn of events for both the estate and the VDP and from what I heard around the Mosel during my time in the region, members of the VDP are delighted to have Dr. von Schubert and the great historic estate of Maximin Grünhäus now part of their association. The participation of the estate in the VDP now also makes it possible for Dr. von Schubert to produce Grosses Gewächs bottlings from the Herrenberg and Abtsberg and I had the chance to try these new additions to the lineup from the 2017 vintage and was quite impressed with these cuvées.



Late spring in full bloom at the beautiful Maximin Grünhäus estate.

The wider changes in the vineyards at Maximin Grünhäus in the last decade have now taken root and are starting to build a bit of tradition of their own, so the relatively new bottlings of pinot noir and pinot blanc here do not seem quite so alien as they did a half dozen years ago. Dr. von Schubert kindly opened a couple of vintages of the pinot noir for me to try that had a few years of bottle age on them and I was impressed with how the wines are evolving with cellaring. As far as the 2017 vintage goes here, the spring frosts on the evening of April 19-20 cut back potential yields substantially, but the estate was able to avoid hail damage later in the summer that hit some middle Mosel properties quite hard. The harvest got started at Maximin Grünhäus

on September the 16th and the last grapes were brought in on October the 10th. In the Ruwer, there was some rain during picking and Dr. von Schubert observed that they had to be very strict with selection for this reason. The 2017ers had been bottled four weeks prior to my visit and most were showing nicely. I quite enjoyed the examples from the 2016 vintage that I had a chance to taste here as well, and at least where head to head comparisons could be made, I generally had a slight preference for the 2016 version. In general, the 2016ers here seemed to be a bit more precise, racy and structurally sophisticated than their 2017 counterparts, though one does have to keep in mind that most of the 2017ers here had only been in bottle for four weeks and perhaps more snap and backend cut and grip will emerge when they have a chance to get a bit more distance out from their bottling. But, at the time of my visit, one had to tip one's hat to Dr. von Schubert and his team for producing such outstanding 2016ers, which seemed destined to be a classic, top flight vintage at Maximin Grünhäus, whereas the 2017ers seemed very good, but perhaps not in the top division of recent vintages here. That said, if they were showing a bit easy going simply from their recent mise, then my scores will probably move up in the future. I spent much of the remainder of my trip trying to decide if the 2017ers here were a bit facile due to their recent bottling, or the damp weather at harvest, or de-acidification. They were very tasty wines across the board (with a few truly excellent high water marks), but as my trip unfolded with a great many more winery visits and so many truly stunning 2017ers at other estates, the facility of some of these 2017ers at Maximin Grünhäus became more and more of an enigma. I hope to get a chance to revisit some of them next year and get a better sense of the wines.

2016 Maximin Grünhäus Pinot Noir

Dr. von Schubert has certainly fine-tuned the pinot noir here in the last few vintages. Today, the wine is completely de-stemmed and raised in a mix of Stockinger and François Frères *barriques* for eighteen to twenty months prior to bottling. The 2016 Maximin Grünhäus pinot noir is a pretty ripe example, coming in at a full fourteen percent alcohol. The wine is quite red fruity, despite its ripeness level, offering up scents of strawberries, cherries, woodsmoke, slate and a touch of spicy new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely transparent in personality, with moderate tannins and a long, well-balanced finish. This is quite good. 2020-2040+. **89+**.

2015 Maximin Grünhäus Pinot Noir

The 2015 pinot noir from Maximin Grünhäus is a tad less ripe than the 2016 version, coming in listed at 13.5 percent octane and is a bit more black fruity in personality as well. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a mix of black cherries, woodsmoke, a touch of gamebird, bitter chocolate and a deft framing of spicy new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and impressively light on its feet, with a solid core, fine length and grip and just a bit of backend tannin adding structure on the focused finish. Good juice. 2021-2040+. **90**.

2017 Maximin Grünhäus Pinot Blanc (screwcap)

These days the Pinot Blanc bottling at Maximin Grünhäus is raised entirely in old *fuders*. The 2017 version comes in at twelve percent alcohol and offers up a very pretty and expressive nose of peach, apple, a touch of almond, lovely soil tones and plenty of spring flowers in the upper register. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and juicy, with good length and grip on the bouncy finish. This is not particularly complex, but offers up good depth and personality. 2018-2025+. **88**.

2017 Maximin Grünhäus Pinot Blanc Reserve

The Pinot Blanc Reserve bottling from Maximin Grünhäus sees one new oak *fuder* out of the three that it is raised in. Dr. von Schubert estimates that this is about the equivalent of fifteen percent new oak if the wine were raised in regular *barriques*, as the *fuders* are two thousand liters in size. The 2017 Reserve is a tad riper than the regular bottling, tipping the scales at a cool 12.5 percent alcohol and offering up a bouquet of peach, apple, a touch of vanillin oak, soil and a topnote of fruit blossoms. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, well-balanced and still a bit reserved after its *mise*, with a good core of fruit, bright acids and fine length and grip on the currently quite closed finish. This is certainly good and probably should merit a score at the top of the range when it fully bounces back from its recent bottling. 2018-2028. **88-90.**

2016 Maximin Grünhäus Riesling “Monopol” (screwcap)

The Monopol bottling is a new name for the QbA level Estate wines here, with most of the fruit for this bottling hailing from the Herrenberg. 2016 was the first vintage for this wine, which comes in at 11.5 percent octane. It is essentially a dry wine in personality, but not labeled as Trocken so that the residual sugar levels have a bit more flexibility. The nose is nicely floral and esthery in style, wafting from the glass in a mix of green apple, lime, slate, wild yeasts and a note of lilac blossoms in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and succulent, with good acids and fine length and grip on the zesty finish. A good entry level bottling. 2018-2030. **89.**

2017 Maximin Grünhäus Riesling “Monopol” (screwcap)

The 2017 Monopol is a good wine with its residual sugars a touch over the Trocken level, coming in around twelve grams per liter. The wine offers up a nose of apple, wild yeasts, slate and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is bright, medium-full and really pretty dry, with respectable depth and solid length and grip on the well-balanced finish. This does not have the cut and grip of the most impressive 2017 Estate Riesling bottlings found around the Mosel, but it is not bad. 2018-2030. **88.**

2017 Maximin Grünhäus Riesling Trocken “Alte Reben”

In contrast to the Monopol bottling, the Alte Reben is all from Abtsberg fruit. The 2017 version is quite tasty, delivering a fine nose of apple, pear, a touch of wild yeasts, gentle smokiness, slate, delicate floral tones and a touch of bee pollen in the upper register. On the palate the wine is crisp, fullish and quite complex, with lovely balance and focus, a bright, bouncy finish and good length on the backend. Good juice. 2018-2040. **90+.**

2016 Maximin Grünhäus Riesling Trocken “Alte Reben”

The 2016 Alte Reben bottling is also very good indeed. The bouquet is refined and quite complex, wafting from the glass in a mix of lime, pear, wild yeasts, smoky overtones, a touch of iris blossoms and a fine base of slate minerality. On the palate the wine is crisp, medium-full and nicely reserved in profile, with a good core, fine cut and grip and a long, nascently complex and energetic finish. I quite like this, but it will need a few years in the cellar to start to really blossom. 2021-2045. **91.**

2017 Maximin Grünhäus Herrenberg Riesling Grosses Gewächs

Having loved the noble sweet wines from the Herrenberg and Abtsberg for so long, I never really imagined what these two vineyards could deliver if done in a Grosses Gewächs style, but I have to admit that I was quite impressed by both wines in 2017. The 2017 Herrenberg GG comes in at an even twelve percent alcohol and offers up a lovely bouquet of lime, apple, petrol, wild yeasts, salty slate minerality and a topnote of bee pollen. On the palate the wine is

crisp, fullish, complex and very nicely balanced, with a good core fine focus and grip, solid acids and a long, classy and vibrant finish. Impressive. 2021-2055+. **93.**

2017 Maximin Grünhäus Abtsberg Riesling Grosses Gewächs

The 2017 Abtsberg Grosses Gewächs is even a tad deeper than the very good Herrenberg version. The bouquet delivers a classy constellation of pear, lime peel, wild yeasts, slate, petrol, a nice touch of lemongrass and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is crisp, fullish, pure and complex, with lovely structure, a good core and impressive length and grip on the nicely precise and very promising finish. 2023-2060. **94.**

2017 “Maximin” Riesling- Maximin Grünhäus (screwcap)

The Maximin Riesling bottling is a new cuvée introduced here in the 2016 vintage, made from purchased fruit. I have to confess that I do not really understand the need for this bottling in the lineup. The wine carries sixteen or so grams per liter of residual sugar, so it is essentially a Feinherb bottling, though this does not appear on the label. The bouquet is wide open and nicely fruity, offering up scents of apple, a touch of spring flowers, a good base of slate and a bit of violet in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied and fairly dry in personality, with good bounce and length on the finish. There is not the customary complexity of a Maximin Grünhäus wine here, but it is not bad. 2018-2026. **87.**

2016 “Maximin” Riesling- Maximin Grünhäus (screwcap)

The 2016 version of this bottling seemed a bit deeper and more serious than the 2017, but it was already showing overt signs of reduction from its closure, so I did not rate the wine, as we did not have time to decant it and see if it would open up.

2017 Maximin Grünhäuser Herrenberg Superior

The 2017 Herrenberg Superior carries between sixteen and seventeen grams per liter of residual sugar and comes in at 10.5 percent alcohol. The wine offers up a beautiful and already quite expressive bouquet of pear, apple, wild yeasts, slate, a touch of violet, gentle mossiness and an esthery topnote of bee pollen. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and complex, with good mid-palate depth, sound acids and good length and grip on the well-balanced finish. This is a bit deeper-pitched on the palate than the nose suggests, and I expected to see a bit more raciness in 2017, but it is quite tasty. 2018-2040. **90.**

2016 Maximin Grünhäuser Herrenberg Superior

To my palate, the 2016 Herrenberg Superior is a step up from the 2017. The bouquet is bright and nicely precise, wafting from the glass in a mix of lime, pear, citrus peel, wild yeasts, lilacs and an excellent base of slate minerality. On the palate the wine is crisp, fullish and nascently complex, with bright acids, fine focus and grip and a long, youthful and promising finish. This is very good, but will need a few years in the cellar. 2021-2050. **92.**

2017 Maximin Grünhäuser Abtsberg Superior

The 2017 Abtsberg Superior is a very good wine in the making, but it does not show quite the precision and cut of the 2016 version. The quite complex bouquet offers up an elegant blend of lime, apple, slate, a hint of petrol, wild yeasts, citrus peel and a touch of lilacs in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, focused and nicely balanced, with good mineral drive, a respectable core and a long, vibrant and quite wide open finish. This is quite tasty, but it does not seem to have quite the same depth and structural integrity of the 2016 Superior. 2018-2040. **92.**

2016 Maximin Grünhäuser Abtsberg Superior

The bouquet of the 2016 Abtsberg Superior is outstanding, jumping from the glass in a vibrant mix of lime, lemon, pear, a touch of Abtsberg mossiness, wild yeasts, a fine base of slate minerality and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is fullish, long and nicely reserved in profile, with a fine core of fruit, laser-like focus and excellent cut and grip on the long, youthfully complex and very promising finish. This still needs a few years in the cellar to blossom, but it will be an excellent wine when it is ready to drink. 2021-2050. **93+**.

2017 Maximin Grünhäuser Bruderberg Riesling Kabinett

The 2017 Bruderberg Kabinett is a very pretty and stylish wine, but shares the same wide open personality of several of these other 2017ers and will not demand a lot of cellaring before drinking. The lovely nose wafts from the glass in a mix of pear, apple, nice mossy overtones, a fine base of slate, petrol and a topnote of bee pollen. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, complex and nicely succulent at the core, with good filigree, zesty acids and a long, complex and already quite generous finish. Perhaps this will firm up a bit more once it settles in from its bottling a month ago? If so, my score may prove a tad conservative. 2018-2040. **92**.

2017 Maximin Grünhäuser Herrenberg Riesling Kabinett

The 2017 Herrenberg Kabinett is again, a very refined and accessible wine out of the blocks, but with lovely complexity and soil signature on both the nose and palate. The bouquet offers up scents of pear, fresh lime, a touch of petrol, wild yeasts, a fine base of slate, bee pollen and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, complex and filigreed, with a sound core, lovely focus and grip, bright, well-integrated acids and good length and grip on the well-balanced finish. This is very lovely, but lacks a bit of the cut and sizzle on the backend of the best examples of Kabinetten in 2017. 2018-2040. **92+**.

2016 Maximin Grünhäuser Herrenberg Riesling Kabinett

The 2016 Herrenberg Kabinett from Maximin Grünhäuser is not quite as pleasingly plump as the 2017 version, but seems to have a bit more sophistication to its structural chassis and promises to land a touch higher on the quality scale when it is ready to drink. The bouquet is fresh and vibrant, jumping from the glass in a fine blend of green apple, lime, violets, wild yeasts, a fine base of slate and incipient notes of petrol in the upper register. On the palate the wine is racy, medium-bodied and utterly classical in proportion, with excellent backend mineral drive, a nice sense of reserve, snappy acids and superb cut and focus on the long and promising finish. This needs at least a couple of years in the cellar to blossom, and should prove to have a long and rewarding life. 2020-2050+. **93+**.

2017 Maximin Grünhäuser Abtsberg Riesling Kabinett

As is often the case, the 2017 Abtsberg Kabinett was showing a bit more reserve than its counterpart from the Herrenberg. This is one of two 2017 Kabinetten from the Abtsberg vineyard this year, with a second cuvée being targeted for the auction in Trier in September. The bouquet on the “regular” bottling offers up a classic constellation of pear, a hint of white cherry, wild yeasts, bee pollen, a fine base of slate and a topnote of iris blossoms. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, nascently complex and nicely mineral in profile, with lovely focus and grip, bright acids and a long, well-balanced and classy finish. This will need a couple of years in the cellar, but should still drink fairly early for a top vintage of Abtsberg Kabinett. 2020-2050. **92+**.

2017 Maximin Grünhäuser Abtsberg Riesling Kabinett AP #45 (Auction Bottling)

This is a single *fuder* of Abtsberg Kabinett that has been reserved for Trier and it has more of the cut and backend salty minerality from high extract than the top Kabinetten of the

vintage exude. The bouquet is pure and beautifully detailed, offering up scents of apple, pear, violets, bee pollen, a nice touch of Abtsberg mossiness, wild yeasts and an outstanding base of slate. On the palate the wine is pure, medium-bodied and laser-like in its focus, with excellent cut and grip, fine filigree and impressive backend tension on the long and complex finish. This is a great bottle of Kabinett in the making. 2022-2055. **94+**.

2017 Maximin Grünhäuser Herrenberg Riesling Spätlese AP #18

The 2017 Herrenberg Spätlese AP #18 is a nicely understated example of the vintage, but it too seems just a bit easy-going structurally at the present time. The bouquet is youthful and still nicely reductive, eventually blossoming to show notes of pear, white cherry, bee pollen, a bit of mossiness, salty slate and a nice touch of wild yeasts in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, complex and transparent, with impeccable focus and length, gentle framing acids and a long, suave finish. If more cut and grip emerge here with further distance from the bottling, then this will be terrific. If not, then it will still be a very good bottle, but without the same exhilaration as is found in the Auction Kabinett from the Abtsberg. 2020-2050. **91-93?**

2017 Maximin Grünhäuser Abtsberg Riesling Spätlese AP #17

There is only this single bottling of Spätlese from the Abtsberg this year, as perhaps some of the grapes that might have been earmarked for a second example of this Prädikat level ended up going into the very good Grosses Gewächs cuvée? In any case this is a lovely wine and is particularly charming on the nose, where scents of lime, mint, pear, a fine base of slate, lilacs and gentle mossiness waft from the glass. On the palate the wine is medium-full, pure and more overtly mineral in profile than the Herrenberg Spätlese, with fine complex, solid acids and a long, focused and elegant finish. Again, with more cut and backend lift, this will be outstanding, but I am not sure if this will come further out from the bottling, or is just not part of the equation with this wine in 2017. 2022-2055. **92-93+?**

2016 Maximin Grünhäuser Abtsberg Riesling Spätlese AP #16

The 2016 Abtsberg Spätlese AP #16 is an absolute classic example of the marriage of this great *terroir* and my favorite Prädikat level. The bouquet offers up a superb and youthful constellation of green apple, lime, a complex base of slate, bee pollen, gentle smokiness and a topnote of citrus blossoms. On the palate the wine is crisp, racy and medium-full, with excellent filigree and focus, excellent cut and grip and a long, nervy and nascently complex finish. Fine, fine juice. 2024-2065. **93+**.

2017 Maximin Grünhäuser Abtsberg Riesling Auslese

The “regular” 2017 Auslese from the Abtsberg is a wine made with virtually no botrytis, so this is another of those lovely Auslesen made principally from golden berries in this vintage. The lovely nose wafts from the glass in a mix of white cherries, pear, bee pollen, a nice touch of slate undertow, wild yeasts and a floral topnote redolent of iris blossoms. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish, complex and nicely filigreed for a young Auslese, with bright acids and a long, pure and precise finish. Again, this does not show razor sharpness on the backend, but it is beautifully balanced and very tasty. 2021-2065. **92-93+?**

2017 Maximin Grünhäuser Abtsberg Riesling Auslese Goldkapsel Fuder 56

The 2017 Goldkapsel Auslese has more botrytis to it than the straight Abtsberg Auslese, and perhaps from the concentrating effect of the noble rot, the acids here seem a bit more present. The bouquet is really stylish, delivering scents of pear, a hint of the honeycomb to come, lilacs, violets, bee pollen and just a hint of the vineyard’s botanicals. On the palate the wine is medium-full, complex and refined in personality, with a good core, sound acids and fine length and grip on the well-balanced finish. Good juice. 2022-2065. **93.**

Weingut Egon Müller (Scharzhof)

Egon Müller and his fine team began harvesting the 2017ers on September 25th and finished bringing everything in by the 15th of October in this year. Given the wide range of stylistic possibilities presented by the vintage, it is not surprising that the estate has produced a bevy of classically sweeter-styled wines in 2017, as of course, there had not been any real interest in dry wines here since Egon Müller was a young student and experimenting a bit while his father was still directing this iconic winery in Wiltingen. I sometimes wonder if there are odd bottles of those early dry Riesling experiments still aging down in the cellars here, as I am sure that there has been little interest in drinking them from Egon Müller as the years have gone by, and it would certainly be intriguing just to see how they have evolved over the decades! In any case, one will find no dry wines here in 2017, but a fine range of classically sweet wines in the style one expects from this great estate. The spring frosts cut back yields in the Müller parcels on the Scharzhofberg by fully thirty percent, but their sections in the Braune Kupp vineyard in Wiltingen were a bit less affected, as this is a warmer vineyard close to the river and this provided a bit of protection when the frosts hit. I had the pleasure to taste this year with Egon Müller's Commercial Director, Veronika Lintner, who joined the estate's team last year. The 2017ers had all been bottled at the time of my visit on the 23rd of May this year, with the QbA and two Kabinetten having been bottled in mid-March and the rest of the range at the outset of April. The team here at this iconic Saar estate likens the style of the 2017ers to the fine range of 1983s that were produced here back in the day and this is very good news for those who have an opportunity to latch onto some of the newest vintage. The 2017 vintage will be noteworthy for another reason at Weingut Egon Müller, as this will be the first year in a long, long time, that Herr Müller will release a bit of Trockenbeerenauslese as part of the regular release of 2017ers, as for many years now, the TBAs that have been produced here have been held back in the cellars to eventually be offered up at auction in Trier in September, with the wines understandably earning a king's ransom during the bidding, as they have long been considered the very finest expression of this level of dessert wine produced in Germany and well to do attendees in Trier have always been willing to spend what it takes to secure a few bottles of Egon Müller TBA.

2017 Scharzhof Riesling QbA- Weingut Egon Müller

The Scharzhof QbA bottling is again a lovely example in 2017. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a very pretty blend of white cherries, pear, slate, a touch of petrol and a delicate touch of citrus peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is fullish, crisp and nicely transparent, with zesty acids, fine focus and very good length and grip on the promising finish. This is one of the most ageworthy "estate Rieslings" produced in all of Germany and the 2017 will once again be a nice, long distance runner. 2018-2040. **89.**

2017 Scharzhofberger Riesling Kabinett- Weingut Egon Müller

The "regular" 2017 Kabinett from the Scharzhofberg is a classic example of the fuller, lower yield style from Egon Müller. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a nascently complex blend of pear, green apple, a fine base of slate, a touch of fresh lime and a lovely floral topnote redolent of iris blossoms. On the palate the wine is crisp, fullish and very nicely balanced, with ripe, zesty acids, fine focus and grip, very good balance and plenty of complexity to come with a bit of bottle age. Very tasty. 2022-2050. **92.**

2017 Scharzhofberger Riesling Kabinett “Alte Reben”- Weingut Egon Müller

The 2017 Alte Reben Kabinett from Egon Müller will be sold at auction in Trier in September and it is a superb bottle in the making. The stunning nose delivers a vibrant blend of lime, pear, wild yeasts, a complex signature of slate, citrus zest, candied violets and a bit of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is pure, medium-full and more filigreed than the regular Kabinett, with excellent focus and grip and outstanding backend lift and energy on the long, salty and perfectly balanced finish. 2024-2055+. **94+**.

2017 Braune Kupp Riesling Spätlese- Weingut le Gallais

There are two Spätlesen from the Braune Kupp vineyard this year, with one being earmarked for sale at the auctions in Trier. This is the regular bottling that will be available through the trade and it is really lovely, with just a blush of botrytis adding a nice glaze to its aromatic and flavor elements. The complex nose offers up scents of white cherries, lime blossoms, bee pollen, a touch of fresh mint, lovely slate undertow and a topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish and quite suave on the attack, with excellent focus and balance, vibrant acids and very good length and grip on the zesty and complex finish. This will be delicious to drink from the outset, but will age very nicely as well. 2018-2045+. **93**.



Veronika Lintner, Egon Müller's relatively recent addition to the team at the Scharzhof.

2017 Braune Kupp Riesling Spätlese (Auction Bottling)- Weingut le Gallais

There is a bit more botrytis in evidence in the Auction Spätlese from the Braune Kupp in 2017, but the overall quality differential between the two wines is not dramatic, as both are excellent. The bouquet offers up a fine constellation of white cherries, violets, a hint of honeycomb, a nice base of slate minerality and plenty of spring flowers, including lilac blossoms, in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full and complex, with an impressive lightness of step for what is a pretty broad-shouldered Spätlese, lovely acids and a long, focused and very well-balanced finish. Though this has a bit more botrytis to it than most examples of Spätlese, there is a filigree here that is quite impressive and the wine retains a true sense of Spätlese, rather than just being a light Auslese. 2022-2055. **94.**

2017 Scharzhofberger Riesling Spätlese- Weingut Egon Müller

The 2017 Scharzhofberger Spätlese is a bit more reserved out of the blocks than the two lovely Spätlesen from the Braune Kupp. With a bit of coaxing, the nose starts to offer up a classic and nascently complex blend of lime, pear, petrol, wild yeasts, salty slate minerality and a nice touch of citrus zest in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and rock solid at the core, with ripe, snappy acids, fine focus and grip and a very long, very youthful finish. This will be excellent, but it will need time in the cellar to start to fully blossom. I would not be surprised to see my score move up once the wine starts to stir a bit! 2025-2065. **93+.**

2017 Scharzhofberger Riesling Auslese- Weingut Egon Müller

There is only a single “regular” Auslese bottling from the Scharzhofberg and it is just lovely. The bouquet is pure and nicely glazed, wafting from the glass in a mix of pear, white cherries, a hint of fresh pineapple, very clean botrytis and a floral topnote redolent of orange blossoms. On the palate the wine is deep, full and crisp, with a superb core of fruit, excellent focus and grip and a long, complex and zesty finish. Fine juice. 2027-2085. **94.**

2017 Braune Kupp Riesling Auslese - Weingut le Gallais

The 2017 Braune Kupp Auslese from Egon Müller is another beautiful wine in the making, with great purity and salty mineral drive coupled to its nice glaze of botrytis. The aromatic constellation delivers a mix of pear, white cherries, a hint of mint, bee pollen, salty soil tones, hints of the honeycomb to come with bottle age and a topnote of violets. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and beautifully glazed, with an elegant profile, a fine core, bright, zesty acids and excellent length and grip on the complex and vibrant finish. This wine deserves at least five years in the cellar to start to show some of its secondary layers, but it is so delicious right now that I am sure that many bottles will be drunk with great pleasure right out of the blocks. 2023-2075+. **94.**

2017 Scharzhofberger Riesling Auslese Goldkapsel (Auction)- Weingut Egon Müller

This is the only Gold Kap in the cellar in 2017 and it will be auctioned off in Trier in September. It is a beautiful wine in the making and will be one of the stars in Trier. The nose is heavily botrytized and hauntingly beautiful, wafting from the glass in a mix of pineapple, white cherries, honey, orange zest, a touch of salty soil tones and a topnote of lemon blossoms. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and dancing, with a great core, stunning complexity, bright, zesty acids and magical length and grip on the vibrant and sizzling finish. A great botrytis wine and my absolute favorite in the cellars this year. 2027-2085. **97+.**

2017 Scharzhofberger Riesling Trockenbeerenauslese- Weingut Egon Müller

The 2017 TBA from the Scharzhofberg will be the first wine of this level to be released through normal trade channels by Egon Müller in many, many years, as most have been held in

the cellar for eventual auctioning in Trier when they start to close in on maturity. This is going to be a great wine, as the nose offers up a beautifully glazed mix of candied pear, *mirabelle*, mango, honey, a touch of salty soil tones, violets, lemon blossoms and a very exotic touch of spiced meats in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and beautifully balanced, with zesty acids, great focus and grip and a very, very long, very complex finish. Egon Müller has made so many great TBAs over the years that it is hard to get a sense where this young titan will land in his personal pantheon, but it is going to make a few lucky clients very happy when it is released. 2018-2075+. **96.**

Weingut Forstmeister Geltz-Zilliken (Saarburg)

Hanno and Dorothee Zilliken reported losing about fifteen percent of their 2017 crop to the spring frosts and counted themselves lucky to have not lost more. The Zillikens allowed the style of the vintage to dictate their range of wines in 2017, so there is a bit less dry Riesling in the cellars this year (no Rausch Alte Reben Trocken for instance) and the beautiful 2017 Saarburger Rausch Kabinett is the largest cuvée in the cellars this year. As Hanno Zilliken noted, “though we have a bit of botrytis in some of the sweet wines, this is not a vintage defined by botrytis, as even the Auslesen are really wines made almost entirely from shriveled, golden berries, rather than from botrytis.” The Zillikens did not begin harvesting until October 2nd, which was quite a bit later than many of their neighbors, so this was not one of those “earliest harvest on record” at Weingut Zilliken. There was a tiny, tiny amount of TBA quality grapes collected during the harvest, but the quantity was so small that Hanno decided to use it to add a bit “more dimension” to the stunning Auction bottling of Long Goldkapsel Auslese from the Rausch this year. As I mentioned above, the largest single cuvée on its own is the Rausch Kabinett, which is a filigreed beauty defined by great purity and its salty minerality. Because of the short crop from the frosts, the Zillikens purchased a bit of fruit from neighbors to make their estate Riesling bottling this year, and I believe that it is the first time that they have done so. I take this as a good sign that the Estate bottlings are starting to garner a strong following in the marketplace, as well they should, as they have been some of the most stunning values to be found in Germany for many years now. As this was again a visit at the very outset of my trip, I did not think to ask Hanno and Dorothee if they had de-acidified any wines in 2017, but my gut feeling is that a few of the entry level bottlings were de-acidified to make them a bit more accessible out of the blocks. As Hanno Zilliken is one of the most experienced winemakers in all of Germany today, I would think he is a most seasoned hand at seamless de-acidification, as this technique was necessary quite often in the Saar Valley back in the early years of his career, where the kind of ripeness we routinely see today was something that winegrowers only witnessed a couple times a decade. In any case, as has been the case for many years now, the range of 2017ers from Hanno and Dorothee Zilliken are absolutely stellar and this was one of the finest collections I had the pleasure to taste during my May trip to German wine country.

Dry Wines

2017 Zilliken Riesling Trocken- Weingut Geltz-Zilliken AP #15 (screwcap)

The 2017 Estate Riesling Trocken is an excellent wine and shows off the precision and salty minerality of the vintage very nicely for an “entry level” wine. The fine bouquet offers up scents of pink grapefruit, slate, petrol, a touch of wild yeasts and a topnote of lemon peel. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish, crisp and already quite complex, with ripe acids and impressive length and grip on the well-balanced finish. Fine juice. 2018-2035+. **90.**

2017 Saarburger Riesling Trocken- Weingut Geltz-Zilliken AP #14

The 2017 Saarburger Riesling Trocken comes in this year at a cool and vibrant 10.5 percent alcohol. The wine is very elegant in profile on both the nose and palate this year, with the bouquet offering up scents of lemon, sweet grapefruit, spring flowers, a complex base of slate, orange peel and a nice touch of wild yeasts. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and nicely filigreed, with beautiful seamless structure, fine focus and grip, a good core and a long, complex and vibrant finish. This is lovely wine. 2020-2045+. **91.**



Hanno and Dorothee Zilliken in the estate's beautiful tasting room in Saarburg.

2017 Rausch Grosses Gewächs- Weingut Geltz-Zilliken AP #13

The 2017 Grosses Gewächs from the Rausch vineyard is one of the top wines in the Zillikens' cellar this year and this is going to be a superb, long-distance runner. The wine comes in at twelve percent octane and offers up a great young nose of lemon, white flowers, gentle wild yeast tones, grapefruit, salty minerality, lime peel and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and rock solid at the core, with a fullish profile, ripe, seamless acids and outstanding focus and grip on the nascently complex and supremely elegant, long finish. A great GG in the making. 2022-2060. **94+.**

Off-Dry Wines

2017 Zilliken Riesling Butterfly- Weingut Geltz-Zilliken AP #12 (screwcap)

There are two versions of the Butterfly this year, as one of the Zillikens' clients requested one with just a touch more residual sugar. The AP #12 has just a touch more sweetness to it, but

is still essentially a dry wine, as it wafts from the glass in a lovely and quite floral bouquet of lemon, tangerine, slate, plenty of spring flowers and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and complex, with a juicy core, fine focus and grip and a long, zesty and well-balanced finish. Very tasty. 2018-2030. **89.**

2017 Zilliken Riesling Butterfly- Weingut Geltz-Zilliken AP #11 (screwcap)

The AP #11 is the ever so slightly drier version of Butterfly this year. Qualitatively, these two versions are identical, but they have slightly different personalities, with the AP #11 a bit more mineral in profile. The bouquet offers up scents of lemon, grapefruit, slate minerality and plenty of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and quite long on the backend, with nice mineral drive, crisp acids and fine focus and grip on the vibrant finish. Good juice. 2018-2030. **89.**

2017 Saarburger Riesling Feinherb- Weingut Geltz-Zilliken AP #10

The 2017 Saarburger Feinherb is excellent this year and supremely elegant in profile. The wine tips the scales at a cool ten percent alcohol and offers up a beautiful bouquet of lemon, tart orange, sea salts, a fine base of slate, a touch of petrol and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is fullish, pure and filigreed, with lovely intensity of flavor, ripe, juicy acids and excellent focus and grip on the nascently complex and quite long finish. A lovely wine and a fine value. 2020-2045. **90+.**

Traditional, Prädikat Wines

2017 Estate Riesling- Weingut Geltz-Zilliken AP #9

As I noted in the introduction, the Estate Riesling this year is all made from purchased fruit, though I could not detect any real difference between it and similar level bottlings made from estate-grown grapes in 2017. It is a pretty and wide open wine, offering up a fine nose of green apple, lime, white flowers, a good base of minerality and a nice touch of Saar smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is crisp, medium-full and juicy at the core, with fine length and backend bounce, good focus and grip and a stylish finish. This carries thirty-eight grams per liter of residual sugar this year, but with the good acids, it seems drier than that. 2018-2030+. **89.**

2017 Bockstein Riesling Kabinett- Weingut Geltz-Zilliken AP #8

The two Kabinetten in the Zilliken cellars in 2017 are both really, really lovely. The 2017 Bockstein Kabinett offers up a brilliant bouquet of lemon, pink grapefruit, salty minerality, wild yeasts and a nice touch of citrus peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, pure and classic in profile, with great palate presence, ripe, zesty acids, superb focus and grip and a very long, complex and filigreed finish. I love this wine. 2022-2055+. **94.**

2017 Rausch Riesling Kabinett- Weingut Geltz-Zilliken AP #7

The 2017 Rausch Kabinett is also stellar. The nose delivers beautiful precision in its classic mélange of lemon, pineapple, smoky overtones, a hint of Rausch botanicals, a great base of slate minerality and a gentle topnote of wild yeasts. On the palate the wine is pure, medium-bodied and electric, with superb complexity and lift, laser-like focus and a very, very long, filigreed and dancing finish. Another absolutely beautiful Kabinett. 2022-2055+. **94+.**

2017 Rausch Riesling Spätlese- Weingut Geltz-Zilliken AP #6

I have more Rausch Spätlese in my own cellar than any other bottling from the Zillikens, as this is one of my favorite Prädikat levels from the family and the wines always age gorgeously. The 2017 is another I will be adding to my cellar, as it is a classic in the making, offering up a fine aromatic constellation of pineapple, pear, a fine base of slate, plenty of

smokiness, wild yeasts, white flowers and a gentle topnote of citrus zest. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and very suave on the attack, with a fine core, bright, bouncy acids and excellent focus and grip on the long, complex and vibrant finish. 2018-2055+. **93.**

2017 Rausch Riesling Auslese- Weingut Geltz-Zilliken AP #5

The “regular” Auslese from the Rausch in 2017 is a beautiful wine and clearly one made from golden, shriveled berries, rather than botrytis. Hanno Zilliken noted that “this only carries two grams per liter more residual sugar than the Spätlese- eighty versus eighty-two grams- but, with the higher extract of the Auslese, we have a completely different structure.” This is a beautiful wine in the making, offering up a youthful nose of white cherry, pineapple, a hint of petrol, a fine base of slate, wild yeasts and a gentle floral topnote redolent of violets. On the palate the wine is fullish, pure and very refined in personality, with a superb core, excellent cut and grip and a very, very long, nascently complex and promising finish. This will want at least another seven or eight years in the cellar to start to really stir and should be a long-distance runner. A lovely wine. 2025-2075+. **94.**

2017 Rausch Riesling Spätlese (Auction Bottling)- Weingut Geltz-Zilliken AP #4

The 2017 Auction Spätlese from the Zilliken family is a legend in the making and I hope it does not close down before auction goes in Trier have a chance to taste it in September! Hanno Zilliken observed that there are more shriveled berries used in this bottling than in the regular Spätlese, though no botrytis. The wine soars from the glass in a gorgeous blend of pear, white cherries, bee pollen, a complex base of salty slate, spring flowers, lime zest and a touch of wild yeasts. On the palate the wine is pure, medium-full and laser-like in its focus, with the cut and precision found only in the very best wines of the vintage. The finish is very, very long, snappy and filigreed. This is pure magic in a bottle. 2023-2055+. **97.**

2017 Rausch Riesling Auslese (Auction Bottling)- Weingut Geltz-Zilliken AP #3

The 2017 Auction bottling of Auslese from the Rausch is another stellar example of this great vintage. The bouquet is pure, refined and nascently complex, offering up scents of fresh pineapple, pear, spring flowers, bee pollen and a delicate touch of honey. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and gently glazed, with a lovely core, excellent focus and grip, vibrant acids and a very, very long, elegant and perfectly balanced finish. Great juice. 2023-2075. **95+.**

2017 Rausch Riesling Auslese Goldkapsel- Weingut Geltz-Zilliken AP #2

The 2017 Auslese Goldkapsel from Weingut Zilliken is a lovely wine in the making. The wine carries one hundred and forty-five grams per liter of residual sugar, coupled to 11.4 grams per liter of acidity and plenty of extract. The beautiful and still quite youthful nose wafts from the glass in a mix of yellow plum, white cherry, honey, salty soil tones, gentle smokiness and a topnote of violets. On the palate the wine is fullish, focused and nicely succulent on the attack, with a lovely core, vibrant acids and great focus and grip on the very long and nascently complex finish. This wine is very light on its feet and will age beautifully. 2023-2075+. **95.**

2017 Rausch Riesling Auslese Lange Goldkapsel Verst.- Weingut Geltz-Zilliken AP #1

I am not sure if the 2017 Lange Goldkapsel Auslese from the Rausch will be auctioned off this September in Trier or held a few years, but make a note to look for it when it is unleashed from the cellar, as it is a great, great wine! As I mentioned in the introduction, there was a tiny amount of TBA in the cellars this year which Dorothee and Hanno Zilliken decided to blend into this wine and the results are stunning. The beautiful bouquet delivers a fine constellation of *mirabelle*, honey, mango, salty soil bass notes, a touch of new leather and a gentle smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish, racy and already

very, very complex, with snappy acids, great focus and grip and a very, very long, zesty and perfectly balanced finish. Great juice. 2023-2085. **98.**

Middle Mosel

Weingut Fritz Haag (Brauneberg)

Oliver Haag and his team at Weingut Fritz Haag took advantage of the characteristics of the 2017 vintage to produce both superb dry or fruity Rieslings and decided to tilt their selection towards the dry side of the ledger in this year. Consequently, sixty percent of the production here in 2017 was in dry wines, while the other forty percent were noble sweet wines. The harvest started here on September 20th, which was once again the earliest on record at this iconic estate, and finished up one month later on the 20th of October. There was hail in Brauneberg in July of 2017, which coupled with the crop loss from the April frosts led to overall production numbers that were thirty to thirty-five percent down in this vintage. The wines had been bottled five weeks prior to my visit on May 25th and were showing very nicely, with superb depth of fruit, lovely mineral drive and bright, tensile acidity giving the wines cut, grip and excellent precision. As the winery was one of the hosting estates for the weekend Mythos Mosel events, Oliver Haag was busy with last minute preparations for the weekend when I scheduled my visit on the Friday morning ahead of the Mythos events, so I had the pleasure to taste with Maik Hilderbrand, who is one of the talented cellar team here at Weingut Fritz Haag. I very much enjoyed meeting and tasting with Maik, as he was a wealth of knowledge about the 2017 vintage here and about the German domestic market for the wines from the estate. One of the things that I found very interesting in his comments concerned the relative lack of interest in wines with any bottle age from the estate's German clientele, as the winery had just made available a beautiful 2011 Brauneberger Juffer-Sonnenuhr Spätlese on their list at the estate, but Maik commented that "most of our German clients will not have any interest in this wine, as they feel it is already too old!" I noted that the price on the list was an absolute bargain (maybe one euro higher than the new 2017 version?) and I highly recommend trying to secure a few bottles if you happen to be in the neighborhood of Brauneberg! As is true at many estates these days, there are more screwcaps in use at Weingut Fritz Haag for the entry level bottlings that I would like, but such is the way of the world these days. I should note that we tasted a few 2016ers in addition to the lineup from the 2017 vintage, and one of the 2016 wines under screwcap was already permanently reduced and I consequently did not take a note on it. However, all the other wines sealed under this closure were showing well and seemed to not have been deleteriously affected by the screw, at least for the short-term. As Maik Hilderbrand so honestly commented, using screwcaps "is an economic decision, as certain wines need to hit certain prices in the market, and top quality corks are just too expensive to be used for these bottlings." I fully understand his reasoning, but did point out that agglomerated corks are in the same general price range of screwcaps and another possible option down the road for a cost-effective closure option. In any case, all the wines I tasted here, be they from the 2017 or 2016 vintage, were excellent and everything one might expect from this great VDP estate.

2017 Estate Riesling Trocken- Weingut Fritz Haag (screwcap)

The 2017 Estate Riesling Trocken from Weingut Fritz Haag comes in at 11.5 percent alcohol, with ten percent of the blend raised in large cask and the rest in stainless steel. The wine is a lovely entry level bottling, offering up a bright bouquet of green apple, lime, slate, lovely

smokiness and a touch of Brauneberg's upper register mossiness. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and very nicely balanced, with fine focus and grip, good acids and a long, zesty finish. A fine example. 2018-2030+. **89.**

2017 Brauneberger "J" Riesling Trocken- Weingut Fritz Haag (screwcap)

The Brauneberger "J" Trocken hails from a blend of fruit from the Juffer vineyard and the Juffer-Sonnenuhr and the wine is excellent out of the blocks in 2017. The nose wafts from the glass in a sophisticated blend of grapefruit, lime peel, salty slate minerality, wild yeasts, a touch of herbs and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is fullish, crisp and complex, with excellent backend mineral drive, a good core, bright acids and impressive cut and grip on the long and classy finish. I really like this a lot, and the only caveat is that the 2016 version tasted right before it was already showing a bit of permanent reduction from its screwcap. With that in mind, I might be inclined to drink the 2017 version very early on, which is a pity, as this has the depth and structure to age gracefully if under natural cork. But, it will not disappoint in its youth! 2018-2030+? **91+.**



The great base of grey slate in the Juffer-Sonnenuhr vineyard in Brauneberg was still quite evident in late May.

2016 Juffer-Sonnenuhr Riesling Grosses Gewächs- Weingut Fritz Haag

The 2016 Grosses Gewächs from the Juffer-Sonnenuhr vineyard is outstanding. The superb nose offers up impressive nascent complexity in its constellation of lime, pear, sea salts, gentle notes of wild yeasts, a fine base of slate and a nice touch of fresh mint in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and seamlessly balanced, with a lovely core, ripe, well-integrated acids and outstanding focus and grip on the long, youthful and

zesty finish. This needs five years in the cellar to properly blossom, but it will be outstanding once it is truly ready to drink. 20123-2055+. **93.**

2017 Estate Riesling- Weingut Fritz Haag (screwcap)

The 2017 Estate Riesling is another very tasty entry level bottling. The wine carries seventeen grams per liter of residual sugar in this vintage, so this is still essentially a dry wine. The nose wafts from the glass in a wide open blend of pear, apple, slate, a dollop of wild yeasts and a nice floral topnote. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and nicely succulent on the attack, with bright acids and very good grip on the long and focused finish. Good juice that is very easy to drink right out of the blocks. 2018-2030. **88.**

2017 Brauneberger Riesling Feinherb- Weingut Fritz Haag (screwcap)

The 2017 Brauneberger Feinherb is a tad drier than the Estate Riesling, with its fifteen grams per liter of residual sugar nicely gobbled up by fine extract and good acids, so this too is a pretty dry example. The bouquet is superb, offering up scents of pear, fresh lime, salty minerality, a touch of petrol, wild yeasts and plenty of Brauneberger smokiness up high. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish, focused and rock solid at the core, with outstanding focus and grip, bright acids and a very long, complex and classy finish. This is a significant step up in seriousness from the tasty Estate Riesling. 2018-2035+. **90+.**

2017 Brauneberger Juffer Riesling- Weingut Fritz Haag

The 2017 Juffer Riesling is also a pretty dry wine, finding its perfect balance at just a hair under seventeen grams per liter of residual sugar, so again, this is not particularly sweet. The nose is deep and refined, delivering a fine mélange of lime, pear, a touch of mossiness, a complex base of the vintage's salty minerality, a hint of anise and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish and beautifully balanced, with excellent complexity out of the blocks, bright, snappy acids and excellent focus and bounce on the long and very classy finish. This is approachable already, but I would try to keep my hands off of it for at least a couple more years and let some of the secondary layers emerge. Fine, fine juice. 2020-2045+. **92+.**

2017 Brauneberger Riesling Kabinett- Weingut Fritz Haag

The 2017 Brauneberger Kabinett is a notable step up in residual sweetness from these drier bottlings, but with excellent high acidity to balance its forty-five grams per liter of residual sugar. The bouquet is very pretty and wide open, offering up scents of apple, pear, spring flowers, slate, wild yeasts and a touch of upper register mossiness. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and succulent, with nice backend mineral drive, zesty acids and fine cut and grip on the long and juicy finish. 2018-2035+. **89+.**

2017 Brauneberger Juffer Riesling Spätlese- Weingut Fritz Haag

The 2017 Juffer Spätlese from Weingut Fritz Haag is a lovely and juicy young wine that is going to make friends right out of the blocks. The bouquet is bright and classic, delivering scents of pear, a touch of white cherry, lime zest, a good base of slate and a bit of cress in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bouncy and nicely balanced, with a good core, fine backend minerality and good length and grip on the zesty finish. A very easy to drink Spätlese. 2018-2040. **91+.**

2017 Brauneberger Juffer-Sonnenuhr Riesling Spätlese- Weingut Fritz Haag

As is often the case, the 2017 Spätlese from the Juffer-Sonnenuhr vineyard shows a bit more depth and complexity than the bottling from its next door neighbor. The bouquet is quite beautiful in its constellation of pear, white cherry, a beautiful potpourri of floral and herb tones (iris blossom, mint and a touch of mossiness), a lovely base of slate, a hint of petrol and a topnote of wild yeasts. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish, complex and vibrant, with a good

core, fine focus and grip, excellent acids and a long, pure and classy finish. This is a touch broader-shouldered than many middle Mosel Spätlesen, but this is Brauneberg after all, and this is destined to be an absolute classic in the fullness of time. 2018-2050. **93+**.

2016 Brauneberger Juffer-Sonnenuhr Riesling Spätlese- Weingut Fritz Haag

The 2016 Juffer-Sonnenuhr Spätlese was not served during my visit to the winery, but during one of the press events surrounding Mythos Mosel. The wine is excellent on both the nose and palate, with the bouquet offering up scents of lime, bee pollen, gentle smokiness, a nice touch of wild yeasts, salty slate minerality and a topnote of iris blossoms. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish, fresh and zesty, with fine bounce and grip, lovely cut and a long, complex finish. Fine juice and already drinking with plenty of distinction. 2018-2045+. **92**.

2017 Brauneberger Juffer Riesling Auslese- Weingut Fritz Haag

The 2017 Auslese from the Juffer vineyard here was made with only shriveled berries in this vintage, with no botrytis, and it is a beautiful wine in the making. The lovely nose wafts from the glass in a very refined blend of pear, a touch of yellow plum, bee pollen, gentle notes of mint and moss, citrus zest and a fine base of slate minerality. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish and focused, with lovely backend mineral drive, bright, zesty acids and a long, complex and vibrant finish. Classy juice. 2020-2060. **93**.

2017 Brauneberger Juffer-Sonnenuhr Riesling Auslese AP #6- Weingut Fritz Haag

The 2017 Juffer-Sonnenuhr Auslese from Oliver Haag is absolutely stunning in its youth, but is built for the long haul and deserves to be forgotten in a cool corner of the cellar for at least another four or five years! The wine is again not a botrytis Auslese, but one made from golden, shriveled berries and offers up a superb bouquet of peach, white cherry, salty minerality, honeycomb, lime zest and a pungent topnote of violets. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish, elegant and intensely flavored, with excellent complexity and bounce, superb cut and grip and very impressive mineral drive on the long, vibrant and utterly refined finish. Stellar wine. 2023-2075. **95**.

2017 Brauneberger Juffer Riesling Goldkapsel Auslese- Weingut Fritz Haag

The 2017 Goldkapsel Auslese from the Juffer vineyard was made with one-third botrytized berries in this vintage, so this is still a fairly gently glazed example. The nose is excellent, wafting from the glass in a blend of white cherry, a hint of pineapple, spring flowers, honeycomb and citrus zest. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish and nicely light on its feet, with a good core, sound framing acids and a long, reserved and promising finish. This may be the one wine that was still a bit reticent after its bottling five weeks previous, so my score could prove a touch conservative, but at this stage, it seems to not have quite the same cut and precision as the regular Auslesen. 2022-2055+. **92**.

2017 Brauneberger Juffer-Sonnenuhr Riesling Goldkapsel Auslese- Weingut Fritz Haag

The 2017 Gold Kap Auslese from the Juffer-Sonnenuhr has about the same percentage of botrytis as the above, but the wine was showing more cut and backend bounce at the time of my visit. The bouquet is lovely, delivering a fine mix of *mirabelle*, peach, a touch of mint, bee pollen, a lovely mix of fruit blossoms and a touch of anise in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and complex, with a very elegant profile, fine mid-palate depth, zesty acids and a long, refined and promising finish. Fine, fine juice. 2022-2065+. **93+**.

Weingut Julian Haart (Piesport)

Julian Haart has made simply stellar wines in 2017 and they may well be the finest collection he has produced so far in his young career. As I mentioned a few issues back in my

article on the 2016ers from Klaus-Peter Keller, Klaus-Peter has reached an agreement with the Vereinigten Hospitien in Trier to produce a wine from the Schuberstlay vineyard in the heart of the Goldtröpfchen, starting in 2018, and the 2017 vintage will be the last to feature the Schuberstlay in the Haarts' lineup of wines. Previously, Julien had leased the vineyard from the Vereinigten Hospitien, who owns it as part of their absolutely superb lineup of vineyards. Julian Haart, in his turn, will begin to produce in 2018 some limestone-based Riesling from the Frauenberg vineyard in the Hügelland (rented from a friend of the Kellers), and will also begin to produce a bit of pinot noir soon from the vineyard of Hergott in Wintrich that they planted a few years back. As it takes a good hour and a half to drive from Piesport to Flörsheim, the two good friends will help each other out a bit with minor farming details for the new plots for each and keep an eye on the vineyards on a daily basis, but the important work such as pruning, leaf-pulling and picking will be done by the Julian and Nadine Haart in their new parcel in the Frauenberg, while the Kellers will do the same in the Schubertslay. It will be very interesting to see what each talented winegrower can do with different terroirs than they are accustomed to working with and I am already looking forward to taste Julian's Frauenberg Riesling and KPK's Schuberstlay wine. But, that will be next year, and for the moment, the focus here is on the stunning array of 2017ers that Julian Haart has fashioned, which are about as precise, pure in fruit tones, minerally-infused and racy as any wines to be found in the vintage. The frost of April hit the Haarts' parcel in the Schuberstlay hardest of all, as the entirety of this small slice of steep-pitched, centenarian vines was frozen, and the crop was down fully seventy percent this year in the Schuberstlay. However, from the remaining grapes in this parcel, Julian has fashioned some of the absolute legends of the vintage!

Julian began harvesting in 2017 on September 25th and brought the last of his grapes in by October 16th, with a concerted effort to leave any unclean botrytized berries out in the vineyards. He has produced a full range of bottlings in this vintage, though in smaller quantities than normal, due to the frost damage, with his dry Rieslings every bit as stunning as his noble sweet wines in this vintage. These are classic 2017ers that vie with the most beautiful wines produced anywhere in this vintage, as the fruit is very pure, nicely concentrated and absolutely pristine and vibrant in profile. This is coupled to the great salty minerality of the vintage, and with plenty of acidity in each and every wine, the wines are razor-sharp and absolutely focused and racy. One does not have quite the same sense of a "high wire act" that could be found in many 2010ers, as in this stellar range of 2017ers, everything is perfectly measured and the very ripe acidity and strong sense of extract gives the wines a seamless beauty right out of the blocks. Julian had bottled the entire range two weeks prior to my visit on the 25th of May, but most of the wines had generally not started to shut down post-mise and were absolutely singing at the time of my visit. There is an absolute consistence of excellence across the board here that is stunning in 2017, with the dry Rieslings every bit as superb as the Kabinetten, Spätlesen and Auslesen. Of the three Auslesen that Julian crafted from the Schubertslay in 2017 (thanks to Nadine unconquerable, late night patience in the cellars selecting the grapes for these wines!), the One Star bottling will be saved all for the Haart's daughter, Ellie, as there are only fifty-four bottles produced. However, both the regular and Three Star versions will be available in small quantities for clients. With this small vineyard parcel now going over to Klaus-Peter Keller starting in 2018, once gets the sense that Julian wanted to make sure he squeezed every ounce of potential out of these grapes in 2017, so that Klaus-Peter will have a bit of a challenge ahead of

him when it comes time to make his own wine here in 2018! This is the kind of friendly competition that we could all benefit from in the future!

2017 Moselle Riesling- Weingut Julian Haart

The entry level bottling of dry Riesling from the Haarts this year is absolutely superb and will be one of the true steals of the vintage for outstanding dry Riesling. The wine has eight grams per liter of residual sugar to balance its eight grams per liter of acidity and is really a lovely wine right out of the blocks, offering up a pure and expressive bouquet of white peach, a touch of tart orange, wild yeasts, a touch of currant leaf, a fine base of salty minerality and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is fullish, pure and very suave on the attack, with a fine core, excellent focus and balance, bright acids and impressive length and grip on the complex finish. Alcohol in this bottling in 2017 is a cool eleven percent. This is really refined. 2018-2035+. **90.**



Julian Haart in the afterglow of a few of his brilliant 2017ers.

2017 Piesporter Riesling Trocken- Weingut Julian Haart

The 2017 Piesporter bottling is also outstanding, coming in a point higher in alcohol than the Moselle bottling, to go along with 7.8 grams per liter of acidity and six grams of residual sugar. Like the Moselle cuvée, this is so beautifully balanced that it will drink very well out of the blocks, but has the structure to also age long and gracefully. The lovely nose wafts from the glass in a very refined blend of cassis, a touch of gooseberry, salty minerality, lemongrass, orange peel and gentle notes of dried flowers and wild yeasts in the upper register. On the palate

the wine is full-bodied, pure and already quite complex, with a fine core, ripe, seamless acids, excellent focus and a very long, pure and dancing finish. High class juice. 2018-2045+. **92+**.

2017 Wintricher Riesling Trocken- Weingut Julian Haart

The 2017 Wintricher is another excellent dry Riesling in the making. The bouquet delivers a fine blend of peach, cassis, a touch of wild yeasts, gentle smokiness, citrus peel, just a whisper of intriguing botanicals and a great base of salty slate tones. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and shows off lovely mid-palate depth, with ripe, zesty acids, excellent balance and grip and a long, nascently complex and very classy finish. The Piesporter Trocken may be just a hair more precise on the backend than the Wintricher, but the wines are extremely close in overall quality and it will be fascinating to watch them unfold over the coming decades. 2020-2045+. **92.**

2017 Goldtröpfchen Riesling Grosses Gewächs- Weingut Julian Haart

Julian Haart's Grosses Gewächs bottling from the Goldtröpfchen was probably the very finest dry Riesling I tasted from the middle Mosel in 2017. The wine has a simply stunning nose, bursting from the glass in a very elegant blend of tart orange, pink grapefruit, a touch of currant leaf, wild yeasts, a beautifully complex base of slate and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and complex, with a lovely core of fruit, laser-like focus, bright, seamless acids and stunning length and grip on the electric finish that simply exudes elegance and refinement. A stunning dry Riesling. 2025-2075. **95+**.

2017 Ohligsberg Riesling Grosses Gewächs- Weingut Julian Haart

The 2017 Ohligsberg GG is nipping at the heels of the Goldtröpfchen in this vintage and is another stellar wine. It too is very elegant and Julian observed that part of this must be attributed to the small basket press that he used for this wine, where he could only press ten kilograms of grapes per day, but which gave just beautifully pure juice. The wine is aromatically superb, wafting from the glass in a mix of lemon, apple, smoky overtones, a touch of currant leaf and a lovely base of salty soil tones. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and very precise, with a fine core, excellent backend mineral drive, ripe acids and a very long, zesty and complex finish. The Goldtröpfchen GG is just a tad more polished texturally on the backend this year, but the Ohligsberg is another magical dry wine in the making. 2023-2060. **94.**

2017 Goldtröpfchen Riesling Kabinett- Weingut Julian Haart

The 2017 Goldtröpfchen Kabinett from Julian Haart is absolutely beautiful and is classically filigreed and light as a feather. I did not write down the acidity levels for this wine (which are nicely tensile), but the wine ended up at eight percent alcohol and carries forty-five grams per liter of residual sugar this year. The wine is delicate, filigreed and simply beautiful, offering up a complex bouquet of white peach, apple, salty soil tones, bee pollen, a touch of wild yeasts and a classic Goldtröpfchen touch of currant leaf in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, medium-bodied and gossamer-strung, with lovely intensity of flavor coupled to absolute weightlessness. The finish is very, very long, complex and zesty with ripe acidity, with outstanding backend lift and cut. This is the kind of weightless Kabinett that would make Dr. Manfred Prüm very proud! 2020-2050. **94.**

2017 Schubertslay Riesling Kabinett- Weingut Julian Haart

Given how short the yields were in the Schubertslay in 2017, I was quite surprised to see a Kabinett and three different Auslesen from the vineyard, but clearly Julian found perfect grapes for all four wines in his small crop this year. This stunning Kabinett is again only eight percent alcohol and carries forty-one grams per liter of residual sugar and a snappy 10.8 grams of acidity. The numbers add up this year to one of the most beautiful young Kabinetten I have ever had the

pleasure to taste, as the wine offers up a truly stunning bouquet of tart pear, apple, currant leaf, crystalline minerality, white flowers and a topnote of *fleur de sel*. On the palate the wine is crisp, pure and delicately medium-bodied, with marvelous filigree, laser-like focus and truly superb length and grip on the perfectly balanced and electric finish. The combination of elegant delicacy and stunning depth of flavor is haunting! Truly a brilliant young Kabinett. 2022-2050+. **97.**

2017 Ohligsborg Riesling Kabinett- Weingut Julian Haart

The 2017 Ohligsborg Kabinett is also outstanding from Julian, but it has the tough honor of following the above wine in the lineup. The wine is lovely and again, so classically Kabinett in profile, offering up a refined and complex nose of gooseberry, lemon, salty soil tones, a gentle touch of botanicals, spring flowers and a bit of wild yeasts in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, pure and seamless, with lovely mineral drive, vibrant, ripe acids and excellent focus and grip on the nascently complex and filigreed finish. This is another beautiful Kabinett in the making. 2020-2050. **94.**

2017 Goldtröpfchen Riesling Spätlese- Weingut Julian Haart

The 2017 Goldtröpfchen Spätlese from Julian Haart was one of the few wines here that was a bit closed down post-bottling, so my score may end up proving just a tad conservative in the fullness of time. With a bit of coaxing, the wine offers up an aromatic constellation of pear, a touch of black currant, orange zest, bee pollen, slate and a topnote of fruit blossoms. On the palate the wine is medium-full, focused and racy, with a juicy core, superb backend, salty minerality and lovely focus and grip on the very long and vibrant finish. A lovely bottle. 2020-2055+. **93+.**

2017 Ohligsborg Riesling Spätlese- Weingut Julian Haart

The 2017 Ohligsborg Spätlese was showing very nicely at the time of my visit, wafting from the glass in a fine mélange of pear, apple, wild yeasts, a fine base of slate, a touch of currant leaf and just a bit of the vintage's saltiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is crisp, medium-full and nicely filigreed, with a fine core, excellent focus and balance and a long, bouncy and absolutely delicious finish. This will age every bit as well as the Goldtröpfchen Spätlese, but unless it closes down at some point, it is going to be very, very hard to resist drinking the wine in its youth! 2018-2055. **93.**

2017 Goldtröpfchen Riesling Spätlese*- Weingut Julian Haart

Julian Haart noted that there was one small section of the Goldtröpfchen that he brought in with just a whisper of botrytis- "a touch of purple on the cheeks of the berries" as he put it, and he decided to make a separate One Star Spätlese from these lovely grapes in 2017. The wine is excellent, offering up a fine and very discreetly glazed nose of peach, cassis, honeycomb, slate, a bit of smokiness and a lovely floral topnote that smells distinctly of lavender. On the palate the wine is crisp, medium-full, vibrant and quite long, with a fine core, excellent focus and a long, complex and energetic finish. The discreet glazing of botrytis adds a different facet to the vintage here, but it works beautifully and was a lovely interlude before the magic of Julian's 2017 Auslesen was unleashed. 2018-2050. **93.**

2017 Goldtröpfchen Riesling Auslese- Weingut Julian Haart

The 2017 Auslese from the Goldtröpfchen is quite an old school style of Auslese, carrying only seventy-one grams per liter of residual sugar and plugged in with eleven grams per liter of acidity. The wine is superb, wafting from the glass in a fine blend of white cherries, cassis, honeycomb, a lovely base of minerality, citrus zest, gentle smokiness and a nice touch of the vineyard's signature topnote of currant leaf. On the palate the wine is very pure, fullish and

vibrant, with fine bounce and grip, excellent focus and very impressive backend mineral drive on the long and very refined finish. A lovely bottle. 2021-2065+. **93+**.

2017 Ohligsberg Riesling Auslese- Weingut Julian Haart

The 2017 Ohligsberg Auslese from Julian Haart is just a touch richer than the Goldtröpfchen, with eighty-three grams per liter of residual sugar and acids at 10.5. The wine is outstanding, exuding all of the elegance and balance of the very best wines of 2017, with a complex nose of peach, tangerine, lovely minerality, spring flowers and orange zest. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish and shows off beautiful mineral undertow, with bright, zesty acids, excellent focus and grip and a very, very long, energetic finish. 2021-2065. **94.**

2017 Schubertslay Riesling Auslese- Weingut Julian Haart

The elegance and refinement of the 2017 Schubertslay Auslese are truly remarkable and I would have clearly labeled this as one of the most beautiful, precise and complex Auslese of the vintage if it were not for the other two wines listed below! But, make no mistake, this is a legend in the making, as it offers up a spectacularly pure bouquet of gooseberry, cassis, white cherries, bee pollen, a stunning cornerstone of slate minerality and a topnote of spring flowers. On the palate the wine is crisp, fullish and laser-like in its focus, with a lovely core, stunning backend mineral drive, racy acids and simply impeccable balance and grip on the very, very long and complex finish. This is a brilliant wine! 2024-2075+. **98.**

2017 Ohligsberg Riesling Auslese*- Weingut Julian Haart

Julian Haart noted that the Ohligsberg Auslese One Star was selected at pressing, based solely on elegance, rather than botrytis or must weight. The wine has turned out beautifully, wafting from the glass in a pure and very precise aromatic constellation of peach, white cherries, a touch of cassis, sea salts, honeycomb and a perfumed topnote of citrus blossoms. On the palate the wine is very pure, very elegant and fullish in profile, with a lovely core, zesty acids and superb grip and bounce on the long, vibrant and classy finish. This has one hundred and twenty-two grams per liter of residual sugar and 10.5 grams per liter of acidity. It is a stellar and very refined Auslese. 2022-2075. **95.**

2017 Schubertslay Riesling Auslese*- Weingut Julian Haart

It was very generous of Julian and Nadine Haart to open a sample of the One Star Auslese from the Schubertslay at our tasting, as there is so little of this wine and it is reserved for their daughter's pleasure somewhere down the line. But, I am thrilled to have had a chance to taste it, as it is one of the most beautiful young Auslesen I have ever tried, offering up a profound bouquet of pear, apple, salty minerality, white flowers, bee pollen, a touch of cassis and gentle smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish, refined and utterly seamless in its balance, with a great core, vibrant, bouncy acids and laser-like precision on the very, very long, very complex finish. Breathtaking beauty. 2024-2075. **100.**

2017 Ohligsberg Riesling Auslese*- Weingut Julian Haart**

The 2017 Ohligsberg Auslese Three Star is another superb wine in the making from Julian Haart. The bouquet is complex and nicely glazed, delivering a fine bouquet of peach, cassis, honeycomb, a lovely base of slate, white lilies and just a whisper of currant leaf in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish, pure and very refined in personality, with a good core, lovely complexity and grip and a very long, vibrant and racy finish. This wine is impeccably balanced and has superb lift on the finish. 2025-2075. **95.**

2017 Schubertslay Riesling Auslese*- Weingut Julian Haart**

We all owe a supreme debt of gratitude to Nadine Haart for spending those long hours down in the cellar sorting out the berries for all of these great Auslesen on a grape by grape basis

to make sure everything was just right. And, of course, to Julian as well for “not screwing up” the fermentations! The three star Schubertslay is another magical wine in the making, and I was so swept away by its sheer beauty that I did not even bother to write down the technical details of the wine. The celestial bouquet is composed of scents of pear, yellow fruit, a touch of cassis, complex, salty minerality, bee pollen, white flowers and a dollop of wild yeasts in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full, pure and supremely elegant, with a fine core, great complexity and focus, ripe, seamless acids and absolutely great length and grip on the Porsche-like finish. This wine is the essence of great Auslese from a great *terroir*. It is hard to believe something this beautiful can still be found in this world. 2027-2080. **100.**



Weingut Reinhold Haart (Piesport)

Johannes Haart has made a lovely range of 2017ers, with seventy percent of the production being made up of his Grosses Gewächs bottlings, as the perfectly ripe grapes of this vintage has allowed him to cater his lineup to the desires of his clientele, who have fallen in love with his dry wines from this bucolic corner of Piesport. Johannes noted that 2017 was the first frost vintage here at the estate since 1997 and he lost thirty percent of his crop to the April freeze. However, Piesport was lucky to avoid the August hail that hit many of his colleagues in other parts of the Mosel, so that was a blessing. Johannes and his team started picking on the 21st of September in 2017, which was again the earliest start to a harvest on record at the estate, and the last grapes were brought in on October 21st. Due to the shortness of the crop, as well as

the excellent quality of the grapes, there are no entry level Trocken wines at Weingut Haart this year, as everything was saved to go into the Grosses Gewächs bottlings on the dry side of the ledger. For off dry and sweet wines, there is a Piesporter Feinherb bottling, as well as the ever popular Haart to Heart cuvée, with everything else Kabinett and above. During my visit, we only tasted up to the Spätlese level, but there is also a bit of Auslese, Goldkapsel Auslese and Beerenauslese as well in the cellars, with some still finishing up their fermentations and others not yet decided how they will be blended or if they will be bottled on their own. Rather than report on wines that may or may not end up being the same down the road, it made more sense to just stop the tasting with the finished Spätlesen and look to taste some of the other 2017ers next year. The 2017 Haart to Heart and Piesporter Feinherb were bottled at the end of March, while the Kabinetten and Spätlesen had all been bottled four weeks prior to my visit, with the Grosses Gewächs still in fuder and awaiting their bottling in the near future.

2017 Ohligsberg Grosses Gewächs- Weingut Reinhold Haart

Johannes Haart surmised that the 2017 Ohligsberg GG comes in at around 12.8 percent alcohol (the final analyses were not yet complete for the un-bottled Grosses Gewächs wines) and has between three and four grams per liter of residual sugar. The wine is already very expressive on the nose, offering up scents of tart orange, a touch of cassis, citrus peel, salty minerality and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, long and very elegant in profile, with a fine core, ripe acids and impressive length and grip on the focused and nascently complex finish. Fine juice in the making. 2022-2050+. **92+**.

2017 Goldtröpfchen Grosses Gewächs- Weingut Reinhold Haart

I tasted two different examples of 2017 Grosses Gewächs from the Goldtröpfchen during my visit, with this sample certain to be bottled on its own as a GG. The wine below was still not decided upon by Johannes, as it still contained about eight grams per liter of residual sugar, which Herr Haart thought would be too much for a GG, but it was already 12.5 percent alcohol, so allowing it to keep fermenting might make it a bit too weighty in terms of alcohol. However, this wine was done fermenting and showing very nicely, at around 12.8 percent alcohol and between three and four grams per liter of residual sugar and it will be lovely. The nose is a tad riper and more expressive than the Ohligsberg GG, wafting from the glass in a fine blend of blood orange, wild years, a bit of currant leaf, citrus peel, lemongrass and a touch of fresh pineapple in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely juicy at the core, with bright acids, fine focus and grip and a long, complex and promising finish. This is both a bit flashy on the nose right now and nicely primary still on the palate and should prove to be an excellent wine with a bit of bottle age. 2021-2050. **92+**.

2017 Haart to Heart- Weingut Reinhold Haart (screwcap)

The 2017 version of Haart to Heart is going to be very popular, as this is really a lovely wine. It comes in at eleven percent alcohol and carries nineteen grams per liter of residual sugar to balance its zesty 9.6 grams per liter of acidity. The wine was showing beautifully at the end of May, wafting from the glass in a blend of peach, delicious apple, orange zest, floral tones and a nice touch of salty minerality. On the palate the wine is medium-full, juicy and vibrant, with quite impressive backend mineral drive, lovely balance and a long, classy finish. This is really a fine wine for a basic, entry level bottling! 2018-2025. **89**.

2017 Piesporter Riesling Feinherb- Weingut Reinhold Haart

I really like the 2017 Piesporter Feinherb, which is really the only basic bottling made here in this vintage, with the exception of the Haart to Heart. The wine is twelve percent alcohol

and was finished with nineteen grams per liter of residual sugar. It offers up a really lovely bouquet of peach, tangerine, very salty minerality, a nice touch of wild yeasts and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a fine core, very suave balance, bright, ripe acids and a long, complex and focused finish. This has the proper, broad shoulders of Piesport and is a very fine value. 2018-2040. **91.**

2017 Piesporter Goldtröpfchen Riesling Kabinett- Weingut Reinhold Haart

The 2017 Goldtröpfchen Kabinett is a fine bottle in the making. The numbers on this wine are nine percent alcohol, nine grams per liter of acidity and thirty-seven grams per liter of residual sugar. The wine delivers fine aromatic sophistication in its mix of cassis, peach, salty slate undertow, a touch of citrus zest and a lovely, esthery topnote of bee pollen. On the palate the wine is medium-full, complex and well-balanced, with a superb touch of backend salinity and lift on the long and zesty finish. Fine juice. 2018-2040. **92+.**

2017 Piesporter Goldtröpfchen Riesling Spätlese AP #25- Weingut Reinhold Haart

There are two different Goldtröpfchen Spätlesen in 2017, with the AP #25 coming in at eight percent alcohol, 8.2 grams per liter of acidity and seventy-two grams per liter of residual sugar. The wine is lovely and succulent right out of the blocks, delivering a fine, complex nose of peach, a touch of passion fruit, cassis, salty minerality, spring flowers and bee pollen. On the palate the wine is medium-full, zesty and offers truly lovely fruit on the attack, with a good core, bright, zesty acids and fine backend salinity from the extract on the long and vibrant finish. This is really pretty and will drink well from the outset. 2018-2040. **92.**

2017 Piesporter Goldtröpfchen Riesling Spätlese AP #26- Weingut Reinhold Haart

The 2017 Spätlese AP #26 from the Goldtröpfchen is a tad lower in acidity than the above, coming in at 7.7 grams per liter and is a bit more laid back in profile as a result. The very expressive bouquet offers up a mix of peach, tangerine, musky floral tones, bee pollen and a nice dollop of minerality. On the palate the wine is pure on the attack, medium-full and succulent, with good focus and grip and a long, tasty finish. This is not showing today quite the same backend lift and mineral salinity of the AP #25 version, but it is still quite an enjoyable glass of Spätlese. 2018-2040. **90.**

Weingut Johann Joseph Prüm (Wehlen)

Readers will recall that I wrote up a range of 2016ers from Katharina Prüm back in Issue 74, as I had the chance to attend a lovely tasting here in New York of this iconic middle Mosel winery's recent releases back in February of this year. Our host for that tasting, the estate's US importer, generously provided several older vintages in the dinner lineup, so our exploration of the 2016 vintage was a bit circumscribed by the inclusion of these more mature wines (and believe me, no one at the dinner was complaining!). I had the pleasure to meet Katharina Prüm's charming husband, Wilhelm Steifensand, at the tasting back in February, which added to the pleasure of the event, but the fine selection of 2016ers at this tasting had me very curious about the rest of the lineup from the estate in this vintage. Consequently, when I scheduled a visit with Katharina Prüm this May, she suggested that we taste through the full range of 2016ers here, rather than wade into the still very young 2017ers. As this great estate makes wines in a very reductive method that makes them the slowest wines in Germany to unfold in any given vintage, the 2016ers seemed like a far more desirable option for tasting and this is what we focused on during my visit here at the very end of May. Given how beautiful the 2016ers that I did have a chance to taste had shown here in New York, I was more than excited to taste through a much wider range of wines from this excellent vintage and the wines were every bit as

beautiful as I anticipated. Happily, Katharina included several of the wines I had tried in New York in February as well in our tasting, which allowed me a chance to revisit the wines at the estate, rather than tasting them soon after their having crossed the Atlantic. In each case, the wines showed even more expressively without their trans-oceanic voyage and it was pretty clear that I had underrated a couple of them a bit. On my next visit to this beautiful winery in the village of Wehlen, I will focus on the 2017ers from Katharina and her father Dr. Manfred Prüm, which I am sure will be legends in the making, but this report focuses on the superb range of 2016ers here, which are an equally stellar roster of great wines in the making. Weingut Johann Joseph Prüm was also one of the key participants in the Mythos Mosel events this year, with Katharina Prüm showing several wines at their table at Weingut Willi Schaefer in Graach, as well as a selection of older Goldkapsel Auslesen from the Wehlener Sonnenuhr vineyard for one of the Mythos press events. For the older wines that I did not have recent notes on in recent editions of the newsletter, I have appended these to the notes on the 2016ers listed below. The only exceptions here were any older Spätlesen from the estate that were served, as I am currently working on an article on the beauty of Spätlese with bottle age and it seemed more logical to save notes on maturing wines at this Prädikat level from Weingut Prüm for that feature.

2016 Bernkasteler Badstube Riesling Kabinett- Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm AP #3

At the February tasting in New York of the winery's 2016ers, only the Himmelreich Kabinett was shown, so I was delighted to find that there are also a Badstube and Wehlener Sonnenuhr Kabinett bottlings also made here in this vintage. The 2016 Badstube Kabinett is lovely and already showing beautifully, wafting from the glass in a complex blend of pear, apple, slate, wild yeasts, spring flowers and just a whisper of the white cherry to come with a bit of bottle age. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, pure and delicately styled, with lovely intensity of flavor, zesty acids and a long, vibrant and filigreed finish. Lovely Kabinett that will drink very well out of the blocks, but also age long and gracefully. 2018-2050. **92+**.

2016 Graacher Himmelreich Riesling Kabinett- Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm AP #1-18

This 2016 Himmelreich Kabinett had a different AP number from the one we tried here in New York in February (the note on which I have included just below) and I am assuming that there are two different Kabinetten made from this superb vineyard here in 2016. The AP #1 (which I noted was bottled after a slightly longer *elevage* in 2018) is superb and quite youthful in profile. The bouquet delivers a classic aromatic profile of apple, lime, lovely minerality, wild yeasts, citrus zest and a potpourri of white flowers in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, medium-full and beautifully focused, with lovely complexity and inner tension, great backend mineral drive and a long, nascently complex and dancing finish. Gorgeous wine. 2022-2060. **94**.

2016 Graacher Himmelreich Riesling Kabinett- Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm AP #7

This is the note from the AP #7 Kabinett tasted in New York in February. The 2016 Himmelreich Kabinett AP #7 is a beautiful wine in the making. The nose wafts from the glass in a youthfully classic blend of pear, green apple, complex minerality, lime peel, a touch of petrol and a salty topnote. On the palate the wine is crisp, medium-bodied and still quite reserved on the palate, with ripe acids, lovely focus and grip and a long, nascently complex and very nicely balanced finish. This will be excellent, but like all J. J. Prüm wines, it will need some more bottle age before it starts to stir. 2024-2055+. **93**.

2016 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Kabinett- Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm AP #11

The 2016 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Kabinett AP #11 is an outstanding wine in the making, though as is typical of this *terroir*, the wine is even a bit more youthfully reserved than the Himmelreich Kabinett AP #1-18. The superb nose offers great promise in its mix of white cherries, apple, slate, vanilla bean, petrol and a topnote of fruit blossoms. On the palate the wine is pure, filigreed and medium-full in profile, with great focus and cut, laser-like focus and a very long, youthful and very promising finish. The best wines from the Wehlener Sonnenuhr always take their time to unfold, and this will certainly be the case with this outstanding Kabinett, but it will be stellar when it is ready to drink. 2024-2060. 94+.

2016 Bernkasteler Badstube Riesling Spätlese- Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm AP #4

The 2016 Spätlese AP #4 from the Badstube vineyard was in our lineup in New York in February, but the wine was still very closed down and I was delighted to see it served in Wehlen in May. The wine was showing far more open on this second occasion, offering up a refined bouquet of delicious apples, pear, bee pollen, white flowers, a fine base of slate and a touch of wild yeasts up high. On the palate the wine is pure, medium-full and youthfully complex, with lovely bounce and focus, a long, juicy finish and great promise for down the road. This will not take a great many years in the cellar to start to hit on all cylinders and will be an excellent glass of Spätlese for many decades to come! 2022-2060. 92+.



2016 Zeltinger Sonnenuhr Riesling Spätlese- Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm AP #6

I was very happy to revisit the Zeltinger Sonnenuhr Spätlese from 2016 during my visit to the estate in May, as I always have a warm spot in my heart for this *terroir* in the Prüm family's lineup. The wine remains quite open and tasty, offering up a beautiful bouquet of pear, white cherries, a fine base of slate, bee pollen, still a hint of youthful wild yeasts and a superb floral topnote redolent of orange blossoms. On the palate the wine is pure, nascently complex and fullish in profile, with great intensity of flavor, bright, zesty acids and great length and grip on the vibrant and very, very promising finish. Lovely juice. 2022-2060. **94.**

2016 Graacher Himmelreich Riesling Spätlese- Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm AP #8

The 2016 AP #8 Spätlese from the Himmelreich is another wine that I had a chance to revisit at the estate and came away every bit as impressed by it in May as I was back in February, though it has started to blossom a bit and it seems likely that it will begin to drink with generosity a few years earlier than I thought when tasting the first bottle. The bouquet is pure, complex and a beautiful expression of the Himmelreich, wafting from the glass in a vibrant blend of green apple, lime, a hint of tangerine, a fine base of slate minerality, wild yeasts and a topnote of citrus blossoms. On the palate the wine is medium-full, pure and nicely succulent on the attack today, with fine intensity of flavor, bright, zesty acids and excellent focus and grip on the long, complex and perfectly balanced finish. Classic Spätlese from the Himmelreich. 2020-2060. **94.**

2016 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Spätlese- Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm AP #12

The 2016 Wehlener "Sonnenuhr" Spätlese AP #12 was another wine from the vintage that I had a chance to retaste in May at the estate and came away as impressed as I was back in February. The gorgeous nose jumps from the glass in a classic blend of pear, white cherry, orange zest, bee pollen, vanilla bean, a great base of slate, spring flowers and the faintest hint of petrol. On the palate the wine is medium-full, zesty and absolutely precise, with great depth and nascent complexity, perfect balance and a very long, very youthful and very, very promising finish. This will be a great bottle of Spätlese from the Wehlener Sonnenuhr! 2025-2065. **95.**

2016 Zeltinger Sonnenuhr Riesling Auslese- Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm AP #18

We did not taste any of the Auslesen from 2016 back in February, so I was delighted to see three included in our lineup at the estate in May. The 2016 Zeltinger Sonnenuhr Auslese is shade lighter in color than the Himmelreich paired with it and Katharina noted that "this wine has only a very light touch of botrytis in it in 2016." The bouquet is beautiful, offering up scents of pear, white cherries, honeycomb, plenty of slate undertow and a lovely floral topnote redolent both of apple and citrus blossoms. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish and very transparent in personality, with an ethereal palate impression, bright, seamless acids and outstanding length and grip on the nascently complex finish. A very pure and very pretty Auslese in the making. 2022-2075+. **94.**

2016 Graacher Himmelreich Riesling Auslese- Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm AP #9

Katharina Prüm noted that "there is not a much more botrytis here than in the Zeltinger Auslese, but there are more golden berries" and this gives the wine just a touch more of an exotic profile as a result. The very complex nose delivers a magical constellation of fresh pineapple, white cherries, slate, lime zest, bee pollen, a touch of wild yeasts and a lovely topnote of iris blossoms. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish, zesty and very deep at the core, with racy excellent acids, fine focus and grip and a very long, vibrant and perfectly balanced finish. Great juice. 2023-2075+. **95.**

2016 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Auslese- Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm AP #13

The 2016 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Auslese from Katharina Prüm is another great wine in the making. The bouquet is pure, classic and still a tad youthfully reserved, offering up scents of white cherry, pear, slate, a hint of its future honeycomb elements, vanilla bean, wild yeasts and a topnote of spring flowers. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and succulent on the attack, with a lovely core, fine, bright acids and excellent focus and grip on the very long and vibrant finish. All this needs is some time to blossom! 2026-2085. **95.**

2016 Graacher Himmelreich Riesling Auslese Goldkapsel- Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm AP #9

The 2016 Himmelreich Gold Kap Auslese is going to be outstanding. The bouquet has a beautiful sheen of clean botrytis in its constellation of peach, tangerine, salty minerality, citrus zest and a lovely topnote of lilacs. On the palate the wine is crisp, fullish and beautifully balanced, with impressive mid-palate depth, impeccable balance, zesty acids and great backend energy and bounce on the complex and focused finish. Fine, fine juice. 2026-2085+. **95**

2016 Bernkasteler Lay Riesling Auslese Goldkapsel- Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm AP #5

The 2016 Bernkasteler Lay Gold Kap hails from a parcel of fifty to sixty year-old vines in the heart of the original section of this vineyard (whose official boundaries were expanded in 1971), and Katharina Prüm noted that “this was the last parcel to be picked in 2016.” The wine is beautiful and a very, very elegant expression of young Goldkapsel, wafting from the glass in a complex blend of pear, white cherries, a fine base of slate, honeycomb and a topnote of fruit blossoms. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, clean and very gently glazed, with a fine core, a lovely sense of filigree, bright, ripe acids and a very long, complex and utterly refined finish. A beautiful wine. 2024-2080. **95.**

2016 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Auslese Goldkapsel- Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm AP #14

The 2016 Goldkapsel Auslese from the Wehlener Sonnenuhr is going to be a magical wine in the fullness of time. The bouquet is pure, still fairly primary and utterly classical in depth and proportion, delivering a superb constellation of white cherries, delicious apple, a touch of the yellow plum to come in time, a gorgeous signature of slate minerality and a topnote of apple blossoms. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, pure and precise, with lovely depth, ripe, vibrant acids, great focus and grip and a very, very long, pure and energetic finish. This will need at least a decade in the cellar to start to stir, but it will be a great Goldkapsel once it is ready to drink and will live for a very, very long time! Great juice. 2026-23085+. **96.**

2013 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Auslese Goldkapsel- Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm AP #2

The 2013 Goldkapsel Auslese from the Wehlener Sonnenuhr is still a fairly young wine and deserves another eight to ten years in the cellar to really hit its stride, but its ultimate quality is now very easy to read. The superb bouquet jumps from the glass in a blaze of pear, vanilla bean, slate, wild yeasts, a lovely base of slate and a topnote of white flowers. With a bit of extended air, the first hint of the honeycomb to come starts to become apparent as well. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish, complex and beautifully racy, with lovely intensity of flavor, superb focus and grip and impressive backend energy on the long, complex and vibrant finish. Great juice in the making, but give it some more time to fully blossom! 2025-2085+. **96.**

2009 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Auslese- Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm AP #5

The 2009 Auslese from the Wehlener Sonnenuhr from Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm is really starting to drink beautifully as it closes in on its tenth birthday, but I would still try to keep my hands off of bottles for another decade, as there is plenty more to unfold with further bottle age! The bouquet is pure and blossoming very nicely, offering up scents of pear, vanilla bean, a hint of wild yeasts, a beautiful base of slate and an esthery topnote of bee pollen. On the palate the

wine is pure, fullish and youthfully complex, with fine bounce and grip, good acids and a long, focused and very refined finish. Lovely juice. 2028-2085. **94+**.

1983 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Auslese Goldkapsel- Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm AP #20

I am always happy to taste examples of the 1983 Gold Kap Auslese from the Prüm family, as this is the wine that I really cut my teeth on from the estate and I have had the good fortune to drink several different versions of this wine since the late 1980s. The AP #20 version was bottled in 1985 and offers up a beautiful, fully mature bouquet of pear, *mirabelle*, salty soil tones, honeycomb, vanilla bean, lavender, slate, citrus zest and just a hint of the tea leaves to come with further bottle age. On the palate the wine is fullish, complex and still very vibrant at age thirty-five, with a lovely core, excellent focus and grip, and beautiful balance on the long, complex and still very zesty finish. A beautiful wine. 2018-2040. **95**.

Weingut Willi Schaefer (Graach)

Christophe Schaefer is very, very happy with the quality of his range of 2017ers, but the quantities this year were cut back dramatically by the combination of spring frost, early August hail and then a very, draconian selection in the vineyards. Between the three, the harvest of 2017 ended up producing half of the crop of 2016 at Weingut Schaefer. As Christophe commented, “we wanted to be very strict with our selection of grapes this year, and it was all negative selection- rejecting anything that might be even a bit subpar, and so we ended up using virtually no botrytized grapes in 2017.” As I mentioned in the introduction, Christophe’s wife Andrea was in charge of the picking teams in the vineyards during the harvest and she recalled “that I do not think I had ever seen a worse harvest, as we kept sorting out so many bunches and leaving them on the ground, but when I asked Christophe what he thought of the grapes coming into the winery, he was very, very happy with the quality of what we had kept and I felt relieved a bit.” Christophe remembered that as the back half of September arrived, he was constantly in the vineyards, tasting grapes and for several days, thinking, “they are not quite ready”, but as the last week of the month arrived, “everything tasted great and then we were faced with wanting to bring everything in as quickly as possible.” Most vintages in Germany will allow for a more leisurely harvest, as parcels are selected and picked for a certain type of wine- this plot for a Kabinett, that for a Spätlese or a further plot for a Grosses Gewächs, but 2017 was quite different, as the rain in late September and then the subsequent warm temperatures started the botrytis rolling and it quickly became less than clean botrytis. So when picking time struck, the Schaefers were very quick, with Andrea’s family coming up from their own vineyards in Baden (where they had just finished their own harvest) to help bring everything in very briskly in Graach.

The hustle to bring in the grapes as pristine as possible has been rewarded here in 2017, as the entire range is absolutely stellar, with crystal clear fruit tones, piercingly pure minerality and great, snappy acids that promise very, very long and productive lives for all of the 2017ers from Weingut Schaefer. There are only single cuvées of Kabinett from the Himmelreich and Domprobst this year, one Spätlese each from the Wehlener Sonnenuhr and Himmelreich and three distinct Spätlesen from the Domprobst vineyard, one of which will be auctioned in Trier in September. As I mentioned above, there is a small lot of Auslese from the Domprobst as well, which will also be an auction wine. The 2017ers here had been bottled three weeks before my visit and were still a bit shy on the nose after their recent bottling, but the palates were in fine, fine form and absolutely singing. I can only imagine just how stunning these wines will be

showing once the bouquets have also recovered from their bottling! My impression is that these will all want a bit of bottle age to allow some of their secondary layers to emerge and the brisk acidity to bury itself more firmly into the bodies of the wines, but once they start hitting on all cylinders, they are going to be pure magic! The 2017 vintage has produced some great long-distance runners at Weingut Willi Schaefer and this is going to be yet another great, great vintage for Christophe and Andrea Schaefer and will rival the very best of the wines produced here in the last decade or so, which is saying something, as this winery has been on quite a roll since the turn of the new millennium!



The last of an early morning fog burning off in the Domprobst vineyard up above the village center of Graach.

2017 Graacher Himmelreich Riesling Kabinett AP #2- Weingut Willi Schaefer

The 2017 Himmelreich Kabinett from Christophe Schaefer is emblematic of the entire range this year, with snappy acids giving an electric charge to absolutely beautiful fruit tones and striking minerality. The bouquet offers up a lovely blend of lime, apple, a touch of wild yeasts, salty minerality and a topnote of spring flowers. On the palate the wine is pure, medium-bodied and filigreed, with lovely intensity of flavor, a classic sense of weightlessness, bright, ripe acids and laser-like focus on the nascently complex finish. 2022-2055. **94.**

2017 Graacher Domprobst Riesling Kabinett AP #3- Weingut Willi Schaefer

The 2017 Domprobst Kabinett is again outstanding and utterly classical in profile, with the more reserved youthful profile of the vineyard. The still quite primary nose delivers scents of apple, pear, a touch of bee pollen, stony minerality, citrus zest and a nice touch of lilac in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, medium-full and very promising, with a very stony personality, a superb core, crisp acids and a very long, racy and youthful finish. This will be excellent, but it will need at least a couple of years more in the cellar than the Himmelreich

Kabinett before it starts to blossom. It should prove to a very ageworthy Kabinett. 2024-2060+. **94.**

2017 Graacher Himmelreich Riesling Spätlese AP #8- Weingut Willi Schaefer

This is the only Himmelreich Spätlese this year and it is a beauty. The wine has eleven grams per liter of acidity, sixty-five grams per liter of residual sugar and comes in at a cool seven percent alcohol. The bouquet is pure and will probably be quite extroverted once it has recovered from the recent bottling, offering up scents of pear, orange zest, salty minerality, bee pollen and a topnote of lime blossoms. On the palate the wine is medium-full, vibrant and focused, with a lovely core of fruit, superb focus and cut, a long, perfectly balanced and electric finish. Fine, fine juice. 2025-2075. **93+.**

2017 Graacher Domprobst Riesling Spätlese AP #10- Weingut Willi Schaefer

The 2017 Domprobst Spätlese AP #10 is a superb wine in the making, but like all of the wines here in this vintage, a bit of cellaring is going to be very richly rewarded. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a nascently complex constellation of apple, pear, a fine base of slate, orange zest, a touch of iris blossom and citrus flowers in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, medium-full and shows lovely fruit on the attack, with a fine core, racy acids and a long, mineral-driven and snappy finish. This will be outstanding when it has started to show some secondary layers of complexity. It will be drinkable earlier, but I would try to leave this alone in the cellar for seven or eight years before drinking it in earnest, as there is an awful lot here lying below the surface. 2025-2075. **94.**

2017 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Spätlese AP #- Weingut Willi Schaefer

The sole Wehlener Sonnenuhr bottling from the Schaefer family this year is a Spätlese, and what a Spätlese it is! The numbers here are seventy grams per liter of residual sugar to buffer 11.5 grams per liter of acidity and seven percent alcohol, with the wine as seamless and vibrant as one can imagine. The wine offers up a beautiful and classic nose of pear, delicious apple, vanilla bean, white flowers, bee pollen and a marvelous base of slate. On the palate the wine is medium-full, vibrant and laser-like in its focus, with great purity of fruit, salty minerality and great grip and bounce on the very long, perfectly balanced finish. A great bottle in the making. 2022-2075. **95.**

2017 Graacher Domprobst Riesling Spätlese AP #5- Weingut Willi Schaefer

The AP #5 Spätlese from the Domprobst vineyard is another great wine in the making. The acidity here is a tad higher than in the Wehlener Sonnenuhr Spätlese, coming in at 11.9 grams per liter, which is perfectly balanced with seventy-five grams per liter of residual sugar. The acids here are so beautifully ripe and the sense of extract in the wine so evident that the overall impression is of complete seamlessness on the palate and a very classic profile. The bouquet delivers scents of apple, tangerine, salty slate minerality, floral tones, bee pollen and a lovely topnote of citrus zest. On the palate the wine is pure, medium-full and utterly refined, with bright acids, a juicy core and superb backend mineral drive on the very long and dancing finish. This is an absolute charmer for a young Domprobst Spätlese, which can often produce wines that are a bit more bound up in their structure than utterly tempting out of the blocks, but this is not the case with the AP #5 in the 2017 vintage. Stellar juice. 2023-2075. **95+.**

2017 Graacher Domprobst Riesling Spätlese AP #13 (Auction)- Weingut Willi Schaefer

The 2017 Auction Spätlese from the Domprobst is going to be very special this year, but this has been true for many years now and there is a very good reason this is one of the most popular bottlings in Trier every year. The wine's technical details are very similar to the wine above, with 11.8 grams per liter of acidity and eighty grams per liter of residual sugar. The wine

is a tad more reserved in profile today than the AP #5, offering up a very pure and classical bouquet of apple, pear, bee pollen, orange blossoms, crystalline minerality and a nice touch of iris blossoms in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, medium-full and supremely elegant, with great complexity and grip, a fine core, laser-like focus and a very, very long, poised and electric finish. Magical Spätlese in the making. 2024-2075+. **96+**.



A very content Christophe Schaefer standing in front of his grandfather's roses at the winery in Graach.

2017 Graacher Domprobst Riesling Auslese (Auction)- Weingut Willi Schaefer

The 2017 Domprobst Auslese is a non-botrytis bottling, made from golden berries and desiccated bunches and is a paradigm of purity and precision. The nose wafts from the glass in a pristine blend of yellow plum, clementines, crystalline minerality, citrus blossoms, bee pollen and lilacs. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish and very racy and focused, with a lovely core, impeccable balance and a very, very long, nascently complex and beautifully vibrant finish. I love non-botrytized Auslesen, as I find they age amazingly well, and this is one of the best of its genre to be found in the stellar 2017 vintage. 2027-2090. **97**.

Weingut Schloss Lieser (Lieser)

Not surprisingly, Thomas Haag and Philip Vesper have fashioned one of the most beautiful collections of 2017ers in all of Germany. As Thomas Haag commented about the vintage, "there is a bit more extract than in 2016 and the wines are more precise and have a bit

more fruit (than the preceding vintage); I am very happy with how 2017 has turned out.” The estate had a bit of the hail damage of August to augment the frost damage of April, with their parcels in the Wehlener Sonnenuhr particularly affected by the hail. Consequently, the yields here in 2017 are down by one-third from the 2016 vintage. Selection was also quite draconian here in this vintage, as Thomas Haag noted that “we had to be very strict with our selection of botrytis this year, as not everything was good botrytis, and we wanted our sweet wines to be as clean as possible.” Picking started here on the 12th of September in 2017, which again was a record for the earliest start to harvest at the estate since Herr Haag purchased it. As is customary at Schloss Lieser, I did not taste the 2017 Grosses Gewächs bottlings, which were still quite yeasty in their tanks in the cellars and not yet ready for showing, but as I had the opportunity a few days earlier during one of the Mythos Mosel press events to try three of the superb 2016 Grosses Gewächs here, I was perfectly content to wait until next year to try the 2017 dry Grand Crus. This is a big collection in 2017, despite yields being down by a third, as the vintage presented such perfect possibilities to make both dry and sweeter styled Rieslings that Philip and Thomas made the full range of wines, all the way up to Goldkapsel Auslese, and if memory serves me correctly, there was also a bit of dessert wine still bubbling away in the cellars as well. Everything here is very, very strong in 2017, but particular mention again should be made of the stunning lineup of Kabinetten at Schloss Lieser in this vintage, as they are truly brilliant. This vintage is the first vintage in a very, very long time that there is a Kabinett produced from the Niederberg Helden vineyard in Lieser, as the fruit here is usually reserved for one of the Trocken bottlings or higher Prädikat wines, but the potential for Kabinett in 2017 was so good that Thomas decided to make one. All of the 2017 Kabinetten come in at a classic eight percent alcohol and are feather light and ethereal in their personalities, with each vineyard’s terroir shining through.

The estate Riesling bottlings, as well as the Kabinetten had all been bottled four weeks prior to my visit, with everything still quite open and showing beautifully. The un-tasted 2017 Grosses Gewächs were still on their fine lees down in the cellars, as well as some of the higher Prädikat dessert wines from the vintage, which were still fermenting slowly. Like many of the very best examples of the vintage, the high extract levels of all of these 2017ers from Schloss Lieser give the wines a veritable saltiness to their expression of minerality, and this works so beautifully particularly in the off-dry and classically sweet wines, as the gorgeous fruit of the vintage is coupled to backend saltiness that gives the wine bounce and freshness on the backend that is not always evident in other vintages with such generous and concentrated fruit elements. The 2017 Spätlesen here are also very, very special. They were bottled three weeks prior to my tasting on the 29th of May and all the wines share alcohols between seven and seven and half percent, with sugar ranges from eighty to eighty-five grams per liter. None of the Spätlesen have even a touch of botrytis, as Cellar Master Philip Vesper was very careful to select out any noble rot for higher Prädikat wines in 2017. As they were bottled a touch later than the Kabinetten, it is possible that I have underrated this excellent lineup of Spätlesen a touch, as these were the only wines I tasted during my visit where they still seemed a tad more closed from the bottling, so I have scored a couple of them within a small range to reflect their still being just a bit grumpy post-bottling. I would fully expect that they will all place at the top of their respective ranges once they have fully recovered from the mise. There were also two beautiful Auslesen that I tasted during my visit- one from the Helden and one from the Wehlener Sonnenuhr, that also had absolutely no botrytis and were made from perfectly ripe golden berries and some

desiccated grapes from dehydration. They are both beautiful. The two Goldkapsel Auslesen were also not particularly botrytized, as Thomas Haag figured between twenty-five and thirty percent botrytis in the Juffer-Sonnenuhr Gold Kap and around thirty-five percent botrytis for the Helden Goldkapsel, so the entire range that I tasted here were among the prettiest, purest and most minerally-infused sweet wines that I can recall from this great estate. Thomas Haag has made a great many truly brilliant wines at Schloss Lieser since his first vintage here as winemaker in 1992, but it is hard not to say that the 2017ers are the best yet from this golden age at Schloss Lieser! And I have still not had a chance to taste the Grosses Gewächs or the dessert wines still working their way through fermentation in the cellars here! Do not miss these wines.

2017 Schloss Lieser “SL” Riesling QbA Trocken- Schloss Lieser AP #1 (screwcap)

The 2017 SL Trocken is about as fine an estate Riesling bottling as one could ask for and will be an excellent value in this vintage. The wine offers up a quite refined nose of apple, lime, a touch of mossiness, wild yeasts, a lovely base of slate and a topnote of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and nicely complex, with a good core, ripe acids and lovely focus and balance on the long and classy finish. This is really, really good entry level wine! 2018-2030+. **89.**

2017 Schloss Lieser Riesling Kabinett Trocken- Schloss Lieser AP #3 (screwcap)

The 2017 Kabinett Trocken comes in at 11.5 percent alcohol and is a notable step up from the very good SL Trocken. The bouquet is complex and beautifully expressive, wafting from the glass in a blend of pear, lime blossoms, wild yeasts, a touch of mint, salty slate tones and a topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is crisp, fullish and nicely reserved in profile, with a fine core, excellent backend mineral drive, zesty acids and impressive, nascent complexity on the long and very vibrant finish. Serious juice. 2020-2040. **91.**

2017 Helden Riesling Spätlese Trocken- Schloss Lieser AP #5

The 2017 Helden Spätlese Trocken is a touch higher in alcohol than the above wine, coming in at twelve percent, but it shares the same svelte, elegant profile and great mineral drive on the backend. The aromatic constellation delivers scents of lime, apple, gentle mossy tones, wild yeasts, a fine base of salty minerality, iris blossoms and a bit of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and seamless in its balance, with a very solid core, lovely soil inflection, ripe, snappy acids and excellent length and grip on the focused and zesty finish. This is excellent. 2021-2055. **92.**

2017 Schloss Lieser “SL” Riesling QbA Feinherb- Schloss Lieser AP #2 (screwcap)

The Estate Riesling Feinherb is also very strong in 2017 and again offers up terrific value. The wine comes in at 10.5 percent alcohol and is probably around seventeen or eighteen grams per liter of residual sugar (I did not write down the exact measurements). The bouquet is pretty and very floral, offering up scents of pear, lilacs, a touch of bee pollen, salty soil tones, and a gentle topnote of wild yeasts. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and nicely juicy on the attack, with good backend mineral drive, fine focus and grip, bright acids and a long and essentially, quite dry finish. This is serious Estate Riesling. 2018-2035. **89.**

2017 Schloss Lieser “SL” Riesling Kabinett - Schloss Lieser AP #4 (screwcap)

The 2017 Estate Riesling Kabinett “SL” bottling is also excellent and was a wonderful harbinger of the Kabinett magic that lay just ahead in our lineup. This wine is 8.5 percent alcohol and really quite filigreed for an entry level Kabinett, offering up a pretty and quite esthery bouquet of pear, white cherries, bee pollen, spring flowers, lime zest and a lovely base of salty minerality. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, crisp and quite delicate in style, with

lovely intensity of flavor, crisp acids and fine closing notes of minerality on the long and complex finish. This is an excellent wine by any measure. 2018-2040. **91.**



Thomas Haag in the doorway at Schloss Lieser- just in from working out in the vines.

2017 Lieser Niederberg Helden Riesling Kabinett- Schloss Lieser AP #6

The first Kabinett from the Helden in ages is truly stunning in 2017 and one of the very best of this superlative lineup of Kabinetten in the cellars at Schloss Lieser this year! The bouquet is pure and refined, wafting from the glass in a mix of bee pollen, wild yeasts, fresh lime, pear, salty slate tones, citrus zest and a lovely topnote of fresh-culled mint. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, filigreed and beautifully detailed, with a fine sense of weightlessness, great focus and cut, ripe acids and impressive complexity and grip on the vibrant and absolutely dancing finish. Stunning Kabinett. 2018-2050+. **94.**

2017 Graacher Himmelreich Riesling Kabinett- Schloss Lieser AP #7

The 2017 Himmelreich Kabinett from Schloss Lieser is every bit as beautiful as the Niederberg Helden, but a bit cooler and more reserved out of the blocks and probably could do with a couple of years in the cellar to fully blossom. The bouquet is pure and extremely promising, delivering a fine mélange of apple, lime, wild yeasts, a beautiful base of slate minerality, gentle smokiness, bee pollen and a touch of citrus zest in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, crystal clear and marvelously defined on the backend by its

complex minerality, with fine focus and grip and a long, bouncy and classy finish. 2021-2050+. **93+**.

2017 Brauneberger Juffer Riesling Kabinett- Schloss Lieser AP #8

The 2017 Juffer Kabinett is also outstanding this year, wafting from the glass in a fine blend of white cherry, lime, a touch of petrol, a fine base of slate, a touch of violet, wild yeasts and just a whisper of the mossiness of Brauneberg on top. On the palate the wine is medium-full, minerality and succulent on the attack, with bright acids, impeccable focus and balance, very good grip and a long, complex and lovely finish. This is not quite as filigreed as the Helden Kabinett this year- that is the nature of the Juffer vineyard, but the wine is a beautiful Kabinett in its own right and offers great drinking already and plenty of potential for aging. 2018-2050. **93**.

2017 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Kabinett- Schloss Lieser AP #9

I have loved the examples of Wehlener Sonnenuhr that I have tasted from Schloss Lieser since Thomas Haag acquired a small slice in this great *terroir*, but this 2017 Kabinett may be the most pure and classic expression of this vineyard I have yet tasted from the estate. This magical Kabinett is utterly pure and refined, offering up a complex bouquet of apple, pear, vanilla bean, a touch of petrol, wild yeasts, a beautiful base of grey slate and a topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is crisp, medium-full, pure and precise, with lovely filigree, bright, zesty acids and outstanding focus and grip on the very long, dancing and complex finish. A brilliant example. 2022-2050+. **94+**.

2017 Piesporter Goldtröpfchen Riesling Kabinett- Schloss Lieser AP #10

Once again, the Goldtröpfchen 2017 Kabinett is a quintessential expression of this beautiful vineyard. The nose delivers a very refined expression of this great site, jumping from the glass in a superb mix of peach, delicious apple, slate, fruit blossoms, bee pollen and plenty of citrus zest. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, bright and again, very delicate in profile, with lovely intensity of flavor, great purity and complexity, bouncy, ripe acids and a very long, very pure and complex finish. The Goldtröpfchen vineyard is a big, beautiful amphitheater of vines and it is one of the warmer sites in the middle Mosel, so it is pretty rare to get this kind of delicacy and filigree in a Kabinett from this vineyard (unless your name is Julian Haart) and it is this quality that makes the 2017 Schloss Lieser Goldtröpfchen Kabinett so special this year. Kudos to Philip and Thomas! 2020-2050+. **94+**.

2017 Lieser Niederberg Helden Riesling Spätlese- Schloss Lieser AP #11

To my knowledge, this is the only Spätlese produced from the Helden vineyard this year and it is a beauty. The bouquet offers up a lovely nose of fresh lime, white cherries, a touch of mint, gentle notes of wild yeast, a lovely base of slate and a topnote of orange blossoms. On the palate the wine is crisp, pure and medium-full, with a juicy core, a fine touch of minerality on the backend, fine focus and grip and excellent lift on the long finish from excellent acidity. The closing tapestry of pure fruit and salinity from the extract is marvelous. 2018-2050. **93-94**.

2017 Brauneberger Juffer-Sonnenuhr Riesling Spätlese- Schloss Lieser

I failed to write down the AP number on the Juffer-Sonnenuhr Spätlese during my visit, as I was starting to get overwhelmed by the sheer beauty of each wine as it followed on the heels of the one before it. But, the wine is outstanding, offering up a very classic bouquet of delicious apple, pear, lovely mintiness, wild yeasts, slate and a perfumed topnote of lilacs. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish, succulent and complex, with ripe, zesty acids, excellent focus and grip and a very long, bouncy and flat out delicious finish. 2018-2050. **92-93+**.

2017 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Spätlese- Schloss Lieser AP #13

The 2017 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Spätlese seemed to be on perfect form after bottling, so I did not score this one in a range. It is a beautiful example of the vintage, wafting from the glass in a classic aromatic constellation of pear, cherries, vanilla bean, bee pollen, a very complex base of slate and a topnote of spring flowers. On the palate the wine is pure, medium-full, very long and zesty, with laser-like focus, great grip and backend bounce, zesty acids and a very, very long, complex and transparent finish. A great Spätlese. 2020-2055+. **94+**.

2017 Piesporter Goldtröpfchen Riesling Spätlese- Schloss Lieser AP #14

Of the four Spätlesen that I tasted, the Goldtröpfchen was the least recovered from its recent bottling, but there were enough raw materials on display to know that this too is going to be a beautiful wine, despite its grumpiness at the end of May. The reserved nose offers up scents of white cherries, a touch of honeycomb, mirabelle, lilacs, a nice touch of minerality and an esthery topnote of bee pollen. On the palate the wine is pure, creamy on the attack and fullish in profile, with zesty backend acidity, a lovely core, nascent complexity and a long, balanced and promising finish. The precision this wine no doubt possesses was not self-evident on the day of my visit, but it is hard to imagine that this will not be as special as the other Spätlesen when it has had a chance to fully recover from the bottling. 2022-2055. **92-93+**.

2017 Lieser Niederberg Helden Riesling Auslese- Schloss Lieser AP #15

The regular Auslese from the Helden vineyard is a beautiful wine in 2017. The wine is seven percent alcohol and carries ninety-five grams per liter of sugar, with great snappy acids to balance the sweetness. As I mentioned in the introduction, there is no botrytized grapes at all in this bottling. The bouquet is beautiful and very, very precise, offering up scents of white cherries, yellow plum, a touch of wild yeasts, gentle notes of honeycomb, lilacs and bee pollen. On the palate the wine is fullish, pure and beautifully creamy on the attack, with a fine core, bright, ripe acidity and great focus and grip on the very long, balanced and complex finish. 2024-2085. **93+**.

2017 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Auslese- Schloss Lieser

The 2017 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Auslese from Schloss Lieser is also a beautiful example of a clean, golden berry Auslese. The bouquet is pure, refined and celestial in its blend of mirabelle, ripe peach, honeycomb, orange blossoms, a nice touch of salty minerality and a topnote of violets. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish, young and very classical in profile, with a lovely, creamy core of fruit, excellent soil signature, ripe and snappy acids and excellent lift on the long, nascently complex and very vibrant finish. High class juice. 2025-2085. **94+**.

2017 Brauneberger Juffer-Sonnenuhr Auslese Goldkapsel - Schloss Lieser AP #19

The Gold Kap from the Juffer-Sonnenuhr vineyard is really elegant as well in 2017, with a very gently glazed bouquet of yellow plum, white cherry, a touch of mint, violets and honeycomb wafting from the glass. On the palate the wine is deep, full and very pure and zesty, with elegant complexity, ripe acids, laser-like focus and a very long, balanced and zesty finish that closes with that signature element of salty minerality that is the hallmark of the best wines of 2017. 2023-2085. **94+**.

2017 Lieser Niederberg Helden Riesling Auslese Goldkapsel- Schloss Lieser

There is a touch more botrytis here in the Helden Goldkapsel Auslese in 2017, but once again, this wine is remarkable for how clean the botrytis is and it was clearly made with very, very strict selection. The exceptional nose jumps from the glass in a blaze of fresh pineapple, passion fruit, lime zest, salty minerality, honeycomb, tangerine and a lovely topnote of violets. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, vibrant and complex, with a creamy core, bouncy

acids, great focus and length and impressive grip on the poised, balanced and electric finish. Great wine in the making. 2023-2085. **95.**



The 2016 Grosses Gewächs

2016 Juffer-Sonnenuhr Riesling Grosses Gewächs- Schloss Lieser

The 2016 Grosses Gewächs from the Juffer-Sonnenuhr vineyard in Brauneberg is a superb young wine. It comes in at 12.5 percent alcohol and offers up a fine young nose of lime, pear, a pinch of grapefruit, wild yeasts, slate, gentle smokiness and a lovely topnote of fresh mint. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nascently complex, with a rock solid core, bright acids and excellent length and grip on the focused and promising finish. 2026-2060+. **93+.**

2016 Helden Riesling Grosses Gewächs- Schloss Lieser

The GG bottling from the Helden vineyard in Lieser is made from a parcel of eighty to ninety year-old vines. It is excellent in 2016, delivering a fine bouquet of lime peel, grapefruit, sea salts, plenty of smokiness, a fine base of minerality, citrus peel and a nice touch of fresh herb tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, tight and racy in profile, with a fine core, excellent focus and grip and a very long, balanced and youthful finish. This needs some time in the cellar to blossom properly, but it will be a lovely bottle. 2028-2060. **93.**

2016 Doctor Riesling Grosses Gewächs- Schloss Lieser

The 2016 Grosses Gewächs from Thomas Haag's new small parcel in the Bernkasteler Doctor vineyard is excellent. The nose wafts from the glass in a fine constellation of green apple,

pink grapefruit, wild yeasts, a lovely base of soil tones, lime peel and a touch of saltiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very precise, with a great mid-palate depth, fine focus and grip, snappy acids and excellent cut on the long and complex finish. This will need at least another dozen years in the cellar to reach its apogee, but it is going to be great wine when it is finally ready to drink. 2030-2065+. **94+**.

Weingut Selbach-Oster (Zeltingen)

Though I have long admired the wines of Weingut Selbach-Oster and sold them from the 1985 vintage forwards during my wine merchant days, this was the first time I had ever had the opportunity to visit and taste with Johannes Selbach at the family estate in Zeltingen. These have always been classic middle Mosel wines to my palate, with lovely mineral undertow, classy and complex fruit elements and plenty of floral tones to complete their profiles. In my experience, the wines age very gracefully and are even better with extended bottle age than they are in their first decade, but I am sure that many fans of the estate have no difficulty drinking them in their first blush of youth. The winery was preparing to host one of the Mythos Mosel tastings during the weekend and had been pushing their contractors to finish up their brand new tasting room facility just outside of the center of Zeltingen in time for the Mythos events. They managed to do so and the Selbachs hosted an aged Kabinett tasting for journalists on the Saturday morning prior to the start of the Mythos Mosel main event in their brand new tasting room, which is spacious and very nicely appointed. The paint had only finished drying the night before, showing how tight the contractors had been on completion, but everything was in order at 9:00 AM on Saturday morning and the lineup of Kabinetten going back into the early 1980s was excellent. I will report on those wines in a coming issue. I had tasted the 2017ers with Johannes Selbach a couple of days prior to the older Kabinett tasting in the estate's offices right on the main street of Zeltingen, with the Mosel River just across the way and the lineup showed very nicely. The Selbach family began harvesting on September 14th in 2017, which was the earliest harvest start date of Johannes Selbach's career. The frost damage here in April took about twenty percent of the crop, and this was also the first time in Johannes' career that they had ever suffered any frost damage in their vineyards in Zeltingen and Bernkastel. Many of the 2017ers were already bottled here, but not all of them, as the Auslesen and Beerenauslesen were still in fuder, as well as one or two other bottlings. Johannes Selbach showed a couple of 2016ers as well during our tasting, as I had not been for a visit the previous year and I have included notes on those wines as well below. Most of the 2017ers were tasted at the estate in Zeltingen on May 26th, but Johannes showed a few more 2017ers a couple of days later at the Mythos event that we had not tried together a couple of days earlier, and I have added those notes below in the order that they would normally have been served, if all included as part of the same lineup.

The estate has been a big proponent of screwcaps for many years now and all of the Kabinetten bottlings and a couple of Spätlese are bottled solely under screwcap here. As readers know, I think this is a terrible waste of aging potential for the Kabinetten (which do age very long and gracefully from the Selbachs- at least under cork), and Johannes Selbach and I had a conversation about the advisability of putting one of their best-aging Prädikat wines exclusively under screwcap. Johannes commented that he has been very happy with the evolution of the estate's Kabinetten under screwcap and offered to organize a tasting of older wines under screwcap for me on my next visit to the winery, which I will be delighted to take him up on and I look forward to seeing for myself how these wines age here over the longer haul under the screw.

I should note that the oldest Kabinetten that we had at the press tasting from Weingut Selbach-Oster were aged under cork and they were stellar. I would love to be proven wrong and find that the oldest screwcapped Kabinett can age as beautifully as wines such as the 1990 Zeltinger "Himmelreich" Kabinett Halbtrocken, the 1990 Zeltinger "Schlossberg" Kabinett, and the 1986 and 1983 Kabinetten from the Zeltinger "Sonnenuhr" vineyard which were shared by Johannes during our tastings. Time will tell.

2017 Gewurztraminer Trocken- Weingut Selbach-Oster (Screwcap)

These Gewurztraminer vines are still quite young, having only been planted six years ago and the 2017 vintage is only the second where Johannes Selbach has produced a wine from them. They are planted at the base of the Himmelreich vineyard in Zeltingen, where the slate is interspersed with a bit of loam. The wine comes in at 12.5 percent and the wine is quite lovely, offering up a delicate and quite refined nose of apple, rosewater, a touch of spices meats and a good base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is fullish, suave and elegant in profile, with ripe acids and lovely length and grip on the well-balanced finish. This is a touch high-toned in style from the young vines, but it is very well-made and quite tasty. 2021-2045. **90.**

2017 Zeltinger Sonnenuhr Riesling Spätlese Trocken- Weingut Selbach-Oster

The 2017 Sonnenuhr Spätlese Trocken is a lovely wine in the making. It came in at twelve percent octane in this vintage and offers up an excellent nose of apple, slate, a touch of petrol, white flowers, wild yeasts and a nice touch of salinity in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish and racy, with a fine core, ripe, snappy acids and a long, well-balanced and complex finish. This is very good juice. 2021-2050. **92.**

2017 Zeltinger Schlossberg Riesling "Bömer"- Weingut Selbach-Oster

The 2017 Zeltinger Schlossberg Riesling "Bömer" from Johannes Selbach was still in cask, so he was not sure of where it had ended up in terms of residual sugar, but "probably around ten grams per liter." The wine is 12.8 percent octane and offers up an excellent nose of white peach, a touch of sweet corn, white flowers, wild yeasts and a fine base of slate minerality. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nascently complex, with fine focus and grip, racy acids and a long, poised and very promising finish. 2023-2050. **92+.**

2016 Zeltinger Sonnenuhr Riesling Spätlese Trocken- Weingut Selbach-Oster

The fermentation for the 2016 Sonnenuhr Spätlese Trocken was very slow to finish up, so this had only been bottled a short time before my visit at the end of May. This wine is lovely on both the nose and palate, with the bouquet wafting from the glass in a complex blend of apple, pear, wild yeasts, a lovely base of slate soil tones and a topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is fullish, crisp and complex, with a good core, fine focus and grip, zesty acids and impressive balance on the long and classy finish. This is fairly ripe at 12.8 percent alcohol, but is quite seamless and carries it well. 2018-2040+. **92.**

2016 Zeltinger Sonnenuhr Riesling *- Weingut Selbach-Oster**

This is a special dry bottling of Riesling from the Sonnenuhr vineyard in Zeltingen that Johannes Selbach left on its fine lees for an extended period of aging, probably to try and get the wine to tick over the line into official Trocken levels of residual sugar (I did not note if it had made it or not, so this wine may end up being labeled as Trocken if the RS got low enough). There are two casks of this wine and it has turned out beautifully, delivering a complex nose of apple, slate, wild yeasts, a nice touch of fresh almond, dried flowers and a hint of the vineyard's botanicals in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite elegant in

profile, with a fine core, lovely focus and grip, zesty acids and impressive complexity on the long and very well-balanced finish. Fine, fine juice. 2024-2055+. **93.**

2017 Zeltinger Sonnenuhr Riesling Spätlese Feinherb “Ur” Alte Reben- Selbach-Oster

This bottling hails from a parcel of very old vines (planted in 1909) that produce tiny berries and very loose clusters. Johannes Selbach has been keeping them separate for an old vine cuvée for several vintages now and in 2017, the wine is labeled as Spätlese Feinherb. It is twelve percent alcohol an excellent on both the nose and palate. The bouquet is a fine blend of white cherries, pear, slate, wild yeasts, a hint of vanilla bean and a topnote of spring flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and quite filigreed in profile, with a good core, fine cut and grip and a long, nascently complex and very promising finish. This is delicious, but deserves a handful of years in the cellar to allow it to fully blossom. 2023-2060. **94.**

2017 Zeltinger Kabinett Trocken- Weingut Selbach-Oster (Screwcap)

The 2017 Zeltinger Kabinett Trocken comes in at eleven percent alcohol and carries seven grams per liter of residual sugar in this vintage. It is a very nice entry level Kabinett, offering up a stylish bouquet of pear, grapefruit, slate, a nice touch of wild yeasts and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is pure, medium-full and long, with good balance and grip, bright acids and a long, zesty finish. Good juice. 2018-2030. **89.**

2017 Zeltinger Himmelreich Riesling Kabinett Halbtrocken- Weingut Selbach-Oster (SC)

I really like the Selbach-Oster Kabinetten and wish they were still bottled under natural cork, as they are always an extremely ageworthy lot here. The 2017 Himmelreich Kabinett Halbtrocken is lovely, offering up a fine aromatic constellation of apple, pear, a hint of vanilla bean, salty soil tones and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and complex, with impressive backend mineral drive, ripe acids, fine focus and balance and a long, zesty finish. A very tasty example. 2018-2040. **90+.**

2017 Zeltinger Schlossberg Riesling Kabinett- Weingut Selbach-Oster (Screwcap)

I quite liked the 2017 Schlossberg Kabinett, which still shows a bit of CO2 on the palate from its recent *mise*. The bouquet is pure and classy, wafting from the glass in a blend of pear, pink grapefruit, slate, a touch of wild yeasts and a nice spread of dried flowers in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and complex, with fine balance and grip, zesty acids and a long, vibrant finish. Good juice. 2018-2030+. **91.**

2017 Zeltinger Sonnenuhr Riesling Kabinett- Weingut Selbach-Oster (Screwcap)

This cuvée had been bottled three weeks before my visit, but was showing well. The wine is nine percent alcohol in 2017 and carries forty-five grams per liter of residual sugar, which beautifully balances the brisk acids of the vintage. The bouquet is a classic mix of pear, apple, a fine base of salty slate minerality, vanilla bean and a topnote of apple blossoms. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and filigreed, with lovely intensity of flavor, bright acids, excellent balance and a long, focused and zesty finish. Good juice in the making that deserves a cork for the long haul! 2018-2040. **91+.**

2016 Estate Riesling Kabinett- Weingut Selbach-Oster (Screwcap)

The entry level Estate Riesling Kabinett here all hails from fruit picked in the Schlossberg vineyard in Zeltingen. The wine came in at 8.5 percent alcohol and carries thirty-seven grams per liter of residual sugar in 2016. This is really a lovely entry level wine, with a classy bouquet of tart pear, wild yeasts, gentle vanilla bean, slate and white flowers in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and focused, with fine length and grip and a blossoming note of petrol starting to inform the finish. This seemed to just be starting to get a touch clipped and compacted on the backend from its closure, but we simply opened it and

poured and did not give it a chance to blossom with any aeration. I would recommend doing so with future bottles. 2018-2030. **90.**



Johannes Selbach in his tasting room in Zeltingen.

2017 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Kabinett- Weingut Selbach-Oster (screwcap)

Johannes Selbach noted that the grapes for this were harvested very early on in the 2017 picking, but still had a whisper of botrytis. The particular bottle we tasted had been opened for a week, but Herr Selbach thought it was showing properly. The bouquet offers up a classic nose of pear, apple, vanilla bean, slate and a nice touch of orange zest in the upper register. On the palate the wine is crisp, medium-full and complex, with good cut and grip, but not quite the filigree found in the Zeltinger Sonnenuhr Kabinett this year. Perhaps this impression is just a reflection of the bottle having been open a week? 2018-2035. **90.**

2017 Zeltinger Schlossberg Riesling Spätlese- Weingut Selbach-Oster (screwcap)

The 2017 Schlossberg Spätlese had been bottled one week before my visit, but was showing very nicely still. The bouquet is bright and quite extroverted, offering up a mélange of pear, white cherry, slate, a hint of honeycomb and a topnote of spring flowers. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, zesty and succulent on the attack, with a good core, bright acids and fine length and grip on the bouncy finish. This seems to have a touch of botrytis to it as well. Good juice, but a bit broad-shouldered in profile. 2018-2040. **90+.**

2017 Zeltinger Sonnenuhr Riesling Spätlese- Weingut Selbach-Oster

Happily, the 2017 Zeltinger Sonnenuhr Spätlese is sealed under natural cork. This bottling was made from a parcel of eighty to ninety year-old, ungrafted vines and the wine is lovely. The nose is superbly elegant and precise, wafting from the glass in a mix of white cherry pear, white flowers, a nice dollop of wild yeasts, lime zest and an esthery topnote of bee pollen. On the palate the wine is medium-full, focused and racy, with lovely intensity of flavor, ripe acids and lovely length and grip on the complex and filigreed finish. This is really good Spätlese! 2021-2050. **93.**

2017 Zeltinger Sonnenuhr Riesling Auslese- Weingut Selbach-Oster

I really like the Auslese from the Sonnenuhr this year from Johannes Selbach. The gently glazed nose jumps from the glass in a fine blend of pear, a touch of vanilla, white cherries, fruit blossoms, a nice undertow of slate and a topnote of bee pollen. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and quite light on its feet, with a suave attack, a fine creamy core, superb acidity and lovely complexity and grip on the very long and zesty finish. This is flat out delicious and will age beautifully. 2024-2065+. **93+.**

2017 Zeltinger Himmelreich Riesling Auslese “Anrecht”- Weingut Selbach-Oster

The Anrecht section of the Himmelreich vineyard is one of the blocks of old vines that Johannes Selbach and his team now pick *en masse*, rather than making a selection for different Prädikat levels. In 2017, this resulted in a beautiful Auslese from this block of old vines, which offers up a bright and complex bouquet of pear, white cherries, wild yeasts, a stunningly complex base of slate minerality (particularly for Auslese!), a hint of the honeycomb to come and a topnote of apple blossoms. On the palate the wine is pure, full, complex and nicely reserved in profile out of the blocks, with superb focus and grip, bright, snappy acids and a very, very long, nascently complex finish. This is outstanding! 2026-2075. **95.**

2017 Zeltinger Sonnenuhr Riesling Auslese *- Weingut Selbach-Oster**

The 2017 Three Star Auslese from the Sonnenuhr had not yet been bottled at the time of my visit. This is a beautifully glazed Auslese offering up an aromatic profile of peach, white cherries, a touch of tangerine, fruit blossoms and honey. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish, long and racy, with a fine core, plenty of zesty acids and fine focus and grip on the long and well-balanced finish. A nice bit of slate pokes through the lovely fruit tones on the backend of the palate. Good juice. 2024-2075. **92+.**

2017 Zeltinger Sonnenuhr Riesling Beerenauslese- Weingut Selbach-Oster

The 2017 Sonnenuhr Beerenauslese is a lovely wine, with a very clean sheen of botrytis glazing the nose and palate beautifully, while the wine retains lovely precision and bounce. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a mix of pineapple, white cherry, orange zest, fruit blossoms and honeycomb. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, elegant and complex, with a lovely core, fine focus and grip and zesty acids adding lift and bounce on the long and classy finish. A very refined BA. 2018-2060. **93+.**

Weingut Wwe. Dr. Thanisch Erben Thanisch (Bernkastel)

Sofia Thanisch and her team have made an absolutely superb set of 2017ers. The family estate was hit hard by frost and also caught a bit of the August hail in 2017, so that the yields here are nearly fifty percent less than was the case in 2016 (thirty-two fuders in '17 versus fully sixty in '16), but everyone is very happy with the quality of the wines in this most recent vintage. The picking started on September 25th in 2017 and proceeded quickly, with the harvesting team very careful about selection in this vintage and the last bunches collected on October 12th. Sofia

Thanisch has a broad range of dry to sweeter styled wines available in the 2017 vintage (though none in the same quantities as was the case in 2016), with a pair of truly beautiful Grosses Gewächs bottlings from the Graben and Doctor vineyards, a classic range of Kabinetten (including one of the best young Doctor Kabinetten I have ever tasted) and both Spätlesen and Auslesen from the Badstube and Doctor vineyards. In addition to the lineup I tasted during my visit at the end of May, there are also some Goldkapsel and Beerenauslese cuvées still down in the cellars that had not yet been bottled. The remainder of the 2017ers had been bottled two weeks prior to my visit (with the exception of the Estate Riesling Kabinett, which was still in cask), but the recently-bottled wines were still nicely open and really showing beautifully. Sofia Thanisch and her team here have been on quite a hot streak in the last ten to fifteen years and the wines at the estate have never been better than they are today. 2017 is a vintage that presented great possibilities to those who were draconian with their selections and only worked with perfect grapes, which was clearly the case here! Perhaps there is no better example of just how good the 2017 vintage could be across a wide array of styles than is the Doctor vineyard here at Weingut Dr. Thanisch Erben Thanisch, as Sofia Thanisch has a brilliant 2017 Grosses Gewächs awaiting release from the Doctor, as well as stunning Kabinett, Spätlese and Auslese as well! All of these will be absolute classics and amongst the finest examples of their level and style from this great vineyard to be crafted here in many, many vintages! And there are still Goldkapsel Auslese and Beerenauslese from the vineyard still unfinished down in the cellars and awaiting discovery next year, the Doctor vineyard has clearly decided to play Santa Claus in 2017! A great, great range of wines from Dr. Thanisch Erben Thanisch in this vintage.

2017 Estate Riesling QbA Trocken- Wwe. Dr. Thanisch Erben Thanisch AP #11

For the last five or six years, this has been one of my absolute favorite bottlings of Estate Riesling Trocken, as the wine delivers excellent complexity and palate presence for its very reasonable price tag. The 2017 is another fine example in the making, offering up a superb bouquet of apple, wild yeasts, slate, a touch of petrol and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with a fine core, bright, ripe acids and excellent length and grip on the focused finish. Entry level dry Riesling on the Mosel does not get better than this. 2018-2035. **90.**

2017 Graben Grosses Gewächs- Wwe. Dr. Thanisch Erben Thanisch AP #10

The first vintage of Graben Grosses Gewächs from Sofia Thanisch was the 2014 and this *terroir* has turned out to be a beautiful source for great dry Rieslings. The 2017 is absolutely superb, with the inherent elegance of the best 2017ers very much in evidence here. The bouquet offers up a superb blend of apple, pear, wild yeasts, spring flowers, a touch of orange peel and a complex base of salty soil tones. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and seamless in its balance, with a rock solid core, great delineation and grip, vibrant acids and a long, nascently complex and very classy finish. 2021-2060. **94.**

2017 Doctor Grosses Gewächs- Wwe. Dr. Thanisch Erben Thanisch AP #9

When I think about it, I am not sure if there is a better vineyard in the middle Mosel for producing dry wines, as the broader shoulders of the Berncasteler Doctor really work perfectly with a drier style. The 2017 Doctor Grosses Gewächs from Dr. Thanisch Erben Thanisch may well be the greatest young vintage of this wine I have ever tasted in the GG style, as the wine has the depth and palate impression of this great *terroir*, coupled to uncanny refinement and elegance this year. The stellar bouquet wafts from the glass in a youthful blend of grapefruit, lemon, wild yeasts, salty soil tones, citrus peel, dried flowers and plenty of upper register smokiness. On the

palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and properly reserved in profile, with a rock solid core, great focus and bounce, ripe, zesty acids and a very, very long, complex and perfectly balanced finish. This is unequivocally a legend in the making! 2024-2065+. **96+**.

2017 Estate Riesling Kabinett- Wwe. Dr. Thanisch Erben Thanisch

I did not write down the AP # for the Estate Riesling Kabinett in 2017, but the wine is really quite lovely. The nose offers up a fine constellation of green apple, pear, bee pollen, slate and a fine topnote of spring flowers. On the palate the wine is pure, medium-full and juicy on the attack, with lovely focus and balance, bright acids and a long, complex and bouncy finish. This is really a fine example and a great value in 2017! 2018-2040. **90**.

2017 Bernkasteler Badstube Riesling Kabinett Feinherb- Wwe. Dr. Thanisch AP #8

The 2017 Badstube Kabinett Feinherb is a lovely wine, coming in at 10.5 percent alcohol and carrying twenty-five grams per liter of residual sugar. It was bottled under a screwcap this year. The wine offers up a fine bouquet of lemon, apple, slate, a touch of petrol, apple blossoms and a gentle topnote of wild yeasts. On the palate the wine is medium-full, pure and complex, with beautiful balance, zesty, ripe acids and impressive length and grip on the focused finish. Fine juice. 2018-2040. **91+**.

2017 Estate Riesling QbA- Wwe. Dr. Thanisch Erben Thanisch AP #12 (screwcap)

The 2017 Estate Riesling QbA is also really good this year (as is the case with everything I tasted from Weingut Dr. Thanisch this year!), with a bit more body than the Kabinette Feinherb, but the same sense of balance and grace. The nose delivers a classic blend of apple, a touch of mirabelle, salty minerality, dried flowers and a bit of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is fullish, complex and quite solid at the core, with impressive delineation and grip, bouncy acids and a long, poised and zesty finish. Good juice. 2018-2035. **90**.

2017 Bernkasteler Badstube Riesling Kabinett- Wwe. Dr. Thanisch AP #13

The 2017 Kabinett from the Badstube vineyard is excellent. The nose wafts from the glass in a complex blend of apple, a touch of white cherry, wild yeasts, slate, a touch of sea salts and a topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is pure, medium-full, complex and filigreed, with bright acids, excellent focus and balance, fine lift and grip on the finish and impressive length and salty mineral drive on the complex finish. Really lovely Kabinett. 2018-2040+. **93**.

2017 Bernkasteler Doctor Riesling Kabinett- Wwe. Dr. Thanisch Erben Thanisch AP #2

There is only a single bottling of Kabinett from the Doctor vineyard this year from Sofia Thanisch, rather than the customary one for regular release and one for the auction in Trier. It is a great, great wine in 2017 and will repay cellaring with sheer brilliance when it is fully mature. The outstanding nose offers up scents of apple, pear, salty soil tones, spring flowers, a hint of the yellow plum to come with bottle age and an esthery topnote of bee pollen. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and nascently complex, with a great core and even better cut, impeccable balance, ripe acids and a very, very long, focused and absolutely stellar finish. A great wine in the making. 2022-2060. **95**.

2017 Bernkasteler Badstube Riesling Spätlese- Wwe. Dr. Thanisch Erben Thanisch AP #6

The 2017 Badstube Spätlese from Dr. Thanisch is a lovely wine in the making, but it is more reserved in personality than the Kabinett and could do with at least a couple of years in the cellar to start to stir. The bouquet delivers a fine blend of apple, pear, bee pollen, salty soil tones and apple blossoms in the upper register. On the palate the wine is fullish, pure and very precise, with a good juicy core, bright acids and excellent focus and grip on the long and dancing finish. Classic Bernkasteler Spätlese in the making! 2020-2055+. **92+**.

2017 Berncasteler Doctor Riesling Spätlese - Wwe. Dr. Thanisch Erben Thanisch AP #3

In the hands of Sofia Thanisch and her talented team, the Doctor vineyard seems to have excelled in 2017 to the full extent of its potential, and this Spätlese is another great wine in the making. The bouquet is pure, deep and nascently complex, offering up a fine mix of apple, peach, a very complex base of soil tones, bee pollen and plenty of fruit blossoms. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and still quite youthful in personality, with a great core, zesty acids and a very, very long, elegant and juicy finish. Like all good Doctor Spätlesen, this wine will need a good eight to ten years in the cellar to truly start to blossom and show all of its layers of complexity, but once it starts drinking well, it is going to be very, very hard to keep one's hands off of bottles in the cellar! Great juice that should prove to be extremely long-lived. 2025-2075. **95.**

2017 Bernkasteler Badstube Riesling Auslese- Wwe. Dr. Thanisch Erben Thanisch AP #7

The 2017 Badstube Auslese from Dr. Thanisch is another stellar wine in the making. Sofia Thanisch noted that this was produced mostly with shriveled grapes this year and includes a touch of botrytis. The wine is pure and vibrant on both the nose and palate, with the bouquet offering up scents of white cherry, pear, spring flowers, a gentle touch of honeycomb, a fine base of soil and a touch of lime zest in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, zesty and very light on its feet, with a fine core, excellent backend lift and grip and a long, complex and pristine finish. A lovely wine. 2023-2085. **93+.**



Sofia Thanisch and her husband Hans outside of the tasting room at Weingut Dr. Thanisch Erben Thanisch.

2017 Berncasteler Doctor Riesling Auslese - Wwe. Dr. Thanisch Erben Thanisch AP #8

The 2017 Doctor Auslese AP #8 is the only Auslese bottling from this great vineyard this year, and it is again, a legend in the making. This is still properly young and reserved, but the depth, precision and structural elegance of this wine this year promises nothing but greatness in the fullness of time! The bouquet is pure and nascently complex, offering up scents of pear, mirabelle, salty soil tones, lime zest, lilacs, bee pollen and a wide array of spring flowers. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, long and utterly seamless, with ripe, zesty acids, great focus and grip and a very, very long, poised and complex finish. Like many of the very best 2017 Auslesen, the Doctor closes with a lovely push of salty minerality that dovetails magically with the gorgeous fruit tones. A great, great Auslese. 2027-2100. **96.**

Weingut Weiser-Künstler (Traben-Trarbach)

I had the pleasure to visit and taste with Alexandra Künstler during my trip in May, but also found an opportunity to say hello to her husband Konstantin Weiser a few days ahead of my winery visit while the couple was pouring wines at Weingut Willi Schaefer during Mythos Mosel. While this is still a very young estate, having only been established in 2005, it is clearly already one of the superstars in the region and the 2017ers here are truly outstanding examples of the vintage. Konstantin and Alexandra are in the midst of conversion of their farming practices over to biodynamics, having been eschewing the use of herbicides and pesticides since they began and increasingly having worked the vines in an organic manner as they moved inexorably in the direction of biodynamics. So far, the conversion has been completed in the Steffensberg and Ellergrub vineyards in Enkirch, so all of the bottlings from these two vineyards are now bio. The couples' other vineyards are in transition and will be certified in the coming years. However, the conversion to biodynamics came with a price in 2017, as between the frosts of April, a bit of hail and mildew pressure in the first half of the summer, the cropload here took quite a beating and Alexandra Künstler reported that their yields here were down forty-five to fifty percent in the vintage of 2017. As the family only farms around four hectares of vineyards in the first place, these beautiful 2017ers are going to be hard to come by, but they will be worth a special search of the market to find, as they are racy, tensile and beautifully pure wines of pristine fruit tones and layers of salty minerality.

As readers may recall, Konstantin and Alexandra settled on Traben-Trarbach as their winery location due in part to the significant number of old, ungrafted Riesling vineyards to be found in this sector of the Mosel, and they farm several parcels of vines today that are in excess of one hundred years of age. They were also a bit ahead of the curve in anticipating the movement of serious winegrowers to recover some of the old, side valleys that stand back a bit from the riverside in this region, where the vineyards were planted back in the early years of the twentieth century (in the Mosel's last golden age of international renown), but which became less desirable in the latter half of the twentieth century, due to their struggling to ripen to the same levels as the vineyards along the river, which benefit immeasurably from the reflected sunlight coming off of the surface of the Mosel. Today, vineyards the side valleys are becoming far more in demand by top estates who have come to realize that in an age of global warming, it is these cooler microclimates that now offer the finest vineyards on the Mosel for producing old school, delicately styled Kabinetten. The estate has one of the finest such vineyards for these wines in their section of the Mosel, the grey slate-based Sonnenlay vineyard in their next door neighbor village of Wolf, from which they have produced an absolutely classic, filigreed example

of Kabinett in 2017. Picking here started early in 2017, with the first grapes collected on September 28th and the harvest proceeded at a fairly brisk pace from that point forward, as there were not all that many bunches to bring in. Konstantin Weiser had no interest in de-acidification in 2017 and the resulting wines are beautifully tensile, precise and minerally-infused and cut along the lines of the electric collection of producers such as Julian Haart and Christophe Schaefer. The entire lineup of 2017ers from Weingut Weiser-Künstler is outstanding and comes very, very highly recommended, with the two off-dry Kabinetten amongst the very finest to be found anywhere on the Mosel in 2017. Many of the cuvées here will want a few years in the cellar to blossom from behind their snappy acidities, but they will all be stellar cellar treasures once they have started to stir and will have very long, graceful evolutions in bottle. I have not tasted here as often as I would like in the past, so my experience with the wines from Konstantin and Alexandra is not as deep as it should be, but this is clearly the finest range of young wines I have had the pleasure to taste from this very talented couple. A truly great lineup of 2017ers!

2017 Weiser-Künstler “Estate” Riesling- Weingut Weiser-Künstler (screwcap)

The 2017 Estate Riesling from Weiser-Künstler is not quite a Trocken wine this year, as the snappy acids of the vintage found their perfect balance point with twelve grams per liter of residual sugar in the cuvée. The wine is 10.5 percent octane and offers up a lovely bouquet of grapefruit, green apple, wild yeasts, a fine base of slate, citrus peel and a nice touch of *fleur de sel* in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and focused, with a fine core, lovely grip and a long, complex and very energetic finish. This is outstanding entry level Riesling and my only (minor) complaint is that it gets bottled under screwcap, as in a vintage like 2017, this has the potential to age like an old fashioned vintage of Maximin Grünhäuser QbA, but I do not know how this will be affected by the screw. But, for at least the near-term, this is an absolute steal! 2018-2035? **90.**

2017 Wolfer Sonnenlay Riesling Kabinett Trocken- Weingut Weiser-Künstler

The estate’s parcel of vines in the Sonnenlay are some of the youngest with which they work, as these vines are thirty-five to forty years of age. The 2017 Kabinett Trocken from this vineyard is outstanding in this vintage, with the wine coming in at 10.5 percent octane and only two grams per liter of residual sugar. The bouquet is very refined, wafting from the glass in a mix of apple, tart orange, a nice touch of wild yeasts, salty slate minerality and a topnote of orange peel. On the palate the wine is medium-full, pure and marvelously defined by its minerality, with great focus and grip, ripe, snappy acids and lovely balance on the long, complex and filigreed finish. Very high classy juice. 2021-2050. **92.**

2017 Steffensberg Riesling Trocken- Weingut Weiser-Künstler

The Steffensberg bottling in 2017 was fermented and aged in the same old *fuder*, with five hours of skin contact prior to the onset of fermentation giving the wine a quite unique and compelling character. This is a terrific wine that finished with only 2.8 grams per liter of residual sugar, but the acids are so ripe and the sense of extract so present that the wine is in perfect balance and there is no sense of austerity. The lovely nose offers up a complex constellation of grapefruit, tart orange, wild yeasts, spring flowers, a fine base of soil, a touch of lemongrass and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is fullish, focused and still quite tightly-knit, with impressive nascent complexity, a rock solid core and excellent cut and grip on the very long and promising finish. The bit of extended skin contact has given this wine a singular personality that I find very attractive, but this is not your typical, filigreed Enkircher. 2023-2050+. **91+.**

2017 Wolfer Sonnenlay Riesling Kabinett- Weingut Weiser-Künstler

The regular Sonnenlay Kabinett is pure beauty in 2017. The wine is 8.5 percent alcohol, carries 9.5 grams per liter of acidity and is buffered with forty-five grams per liter of residual sugar. The overall harmony and delicacy of this bottling are very impressive, with the nose jumping from the glass in a superb blend of green apple, lemon, sea salts, wild yeasts, a beautiful base of slate and a topnote of spring flowers. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, focused and filigreed, with a lovey core of fruit, great mineral drive, bright, vibrant acids and great bounce and complexity on the perfectly balanced finish. A stunning and utterly classic young Kabinett. 2018-2050+. **94.**



The flowering starting out in the vines at the end of May of 2018.

2017 Enkircher Ellergrub Riesling Kabinett- Weingut Weiser-Künstler

The 2017 Ellergrub Kabinett is also a stunning young wine, with the wine carrying about the same level of acidity at 9.6 grams per liter as the above wine, but coming in at only eight percent alcohol. The acids are perfectly buffered with the wine's fifty grams per liter of sugar and the wine is just a touch fuller in personality than the Sonnenlay, though with the same sense of classic Kabinett filigree. The nose offers up scents of lemon, tart pear, slate, wild yeasts, white flowers and a nice touch of upper register saltiness from the high extract. On the palate the wine is medium-full. pure and racy, with lovely intensity of flavor, perfect focus and balance, racy

acids and lovely filigree on the very, very long, complex finish. Great juice. It is very hard to pick a favorite between these two superb Kabinetten! 2023-2060. **94+**.

2017 Enkircher Ellergrub Riesling Spätlese “Goldkapsel”- Weingut Weiser-Künstler

There are only three hundred and fifty liters of this beautiful Spätlese, so this is going to be one of the hardest 2017ers to find in the market from Weingut Weiser-Künstler. Alexandra Künstler commented that about four percent of the bunches used here had a touch of botrytis, hence the Goldkapsel moniker. The wine is beautiful and will drink with great style right from release, as the nose wafts from the glass in a fine mélange of white peach, white cherry, a beautiful base of salty slate, spring flowers and an esthery topnote of bee pollen. On the palate the wine is pure, medium-full and filigreed, with a lovely core, laser-like focus, bright acids and great lift and balance on the very long, complex and dancing finish. The tiny amount of botrytis here gives the wine a gentle sheen of exotica, while still keeping it true to its Prädikat. 2018-2050. **94**.

2017 Enkircher Ellergrub Riesling Auslese- Weingut Weiser-Künstler

The 2017 Ellergrub Auslese is one hundred percent botrytized berries, but as Alexandra noted, “the berries had just a hint of violet color from the botrytis when we picked them, but had not yet started to raisin”, so this is a very clean and discreet style of botrytis. The wine is only seven percent octane this year, with ten grams per liter of acidity and one hundred and thirty-one grams per liter of residual sugar. The wine is stunning on the nose, offering up a very gently glazed constellation of pear, passion fruit, a touch of honeycomb, lovely saltiness from the extract, orange zest and a topnote of fruit blossoms. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish and creamy on the attack, with a lovely core, great focus and grip, ripe, snappy acids and a lovely sense of saltiness carrying the fruit on the very long and complex finish. This is an absolutely beautiful bottle of Auslese in the making! 2023-2075. **94+**.

Nahe

Weingut Hermann Dönnhoff (Oberhausen)

I almost missed having an opportunity to taste at Weingut Dönnhoff this year, as I had painted myself into a corner by scheduling my tastings in the Nahe for the last day of my trip, only to find out (after filling up the schedule prior to that day) that it was a holiday and no one was going to be working. I could not imagine doing a twelve day trip to Germany and missing one of my favorite estates in the Nahe, but Helmut Dönnhoff was very kind to say that he would be around during the holiday and would be willing to share a bit of his morning to show me the 2017ers from the estate. I felt very bad taking away from family time for the Dönnhoffs- at least until I put my nose in the first glass of wine, after which I was just thrilled that I had not missed tasting here, as the 2017 vintage is absolutely phenomenal from the Dönnhoff family. As I mentioned in the introduction, 2017 was the earliest harvest in Helmut Dönnhoff's long career, as the family began picking on his birthday of September 21st. The spring frost in the Dönnhoff vineyards hit on April 20th of 2017 and knocked down potential yields by thirty to forty percent in each vineyard affected, which were most of the estate's fine stable of grand cru sites. Cornelius Dönnhoff and his wife celebrated the birth of their first son in 2017, so the estate decided to take advantage of the perfect grapes in their top grand cru vineyards and make at least a small amount of Grosses Gewächs from each one, so that the next generation of the family will have the ability to track all of these vineyards at an advanced age in a Trocken style. It made for a great tasting, as this was the first time I had ever had a chance to taste a Grosses Gewächs bottling from the Höllenpfad or Krötenpfuhl vineyards and the wines have turned out beautifully

in the 2017 vintage. I suspect, given the excellent quality of these two wines, that we may see future bottlings of Grosses Gewächs from either vineyard from time to time in the future, if a future growing season delivers such beautiful grapes again.

Cornelius Dönnhoff has made an absolutely stellar collection of 2017ers, with the vintage equally strong in the wider array of dry bottlings in the lineup this year and for the noble sweet wines, which are truly exceptional as they climb from Kabinett to Spätlese to Auslese Goldkapsel. In the last several vintages, Mother Nature seems to have favored dry or noble sweet wines over the other in this bucolic corner of the Nahe, but this was not the case in 2017 and Cornelius had absolutely perfect grapes to work with for each style of bottling he selected to craft this year. The results are a remarkably exhilarating lineup to taste through, with great wines of every style and sweetness level and this is one of the most beautiful vintage of wines from Weingut Dönnhoff since the very start of this new millennium. None of the Grosses Gewächs had been bottled at the time of my visit, so final analyses had not been done on the wines, but Helmut Dönnhoff guessed that they all fell into the 12.8 to thirteen percent alcohol range, with residual sugars between four and five grams per liter. The high extract of the vintage makes itself felt across the board with the 2017 Dönnhoff wines with a nice sense of saltiness on the backend of the palate of virtually every wine, and several of the Grosses Gewächs bottlings showed a lovely and overt note of sea salts in their aromatic profiles as well. The high acids are seamlessly buried in the wines here, as they are very ripe and provide great lift and precision on the palates, without ever seeming strident. It has been a few years since the noble sweet wines and the Trocken bottlings have excelled equally, but this is exactly what the 2017 vintage at Weingut Dönnhoff delivers and it is a great, great vintage for this iconic Nahe estate! Cornelius' son is going to be very, very happy to start drinking his birth year wines sometime down the road!

Dry Wines

2017 Estate Riesling Trocken- Weingut Dönnhoff (screwcap)

The 2017 Estate Riesling Trocken is a very strong indication that the entire lineup is going to be excellent here in this vintage, as this is a very high quality, entry level wine. The wine comes in at twelve percent alcohol and carries 4.5 grams per liter of residual sugar this year. It offers up a fine bouquet of tart orange, grapefruit, slate, a touch of wild yeasts and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is medium-full, focused and very well-balanced, with a good core, ripe, seamless acids and excellent length and grip on the open and precise finish. This is a serious bottle! 2018-2030. 89.

2017 Tonschiefer Riesling Trocken- Weingut Dönnhoff (screwcap)

The 2017 Tonschiefer Trocken is also excellent, showing a bit more depth and complexity than the Estate Trocken. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a classy mix of grapefruit, lemongrass, a touch of wild yeast, a complex base of slate and a topnote of orange peel. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and well-balanced, with a fine core of fruit, lovely, salty mineral drive on the backend, crisp acids and a long, poised and complex finish. Fine juice. 2018-2035+. 90+.

2017 Kahlenberg “Erste Lage” Riesling Trocken- Weingut Dönnhoff

The 2017 Kahlenberg Trocken comes in at 12.5 percent alcohol and three grams per liter of residual sugar in this vintage and is a beautifully balanced, elegant example of the vintage that will age long and gracefully. As Helmut Dönnhoff notes, “the Kahlenberg is a warmer

vineyard and we are now picking it a bit earlier to get this raciness.” The bouquet wafts from the glass in nascently complex blend of blood orange, grapefruit, wild yeasts, complex minerality, citrus peel and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is crisp, fullish and complex, with a fine core, excellent, seamless balance, ripe acids and superb focus and grip on the long and vibrant finish. This will need at least a couple of years in the cellar to start to blossom from behind its suave structural elements, but will drink well from that point on for several decades. 2020-2050. **91+**.

2017 Höllenspfad “Erste Lage” Riesling Trocken- Weingut Dönnhoff

The 2017 Höllenspfad Erste Lage Trocken is an excellent wine and close to GG quality in this vintage. The bouquet is pure, focused and quite impressive, offering up scents of pink grapefruit, lemon, a wild yeasts, a touch of caraway seed, salty minerality, dried flowers and orange peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and seamlessly balanced, with racy, ripe acids, excellent focus and grip and a fine sense of extract on the long and complex finish. A superb wine in the making. 2022-2055+. **92+**.

2017 Krötenpfuhl Riesling Grosses Gewächs- Weingut Dönnhoff

The 2017 vintage is the first that has produced a GG bottling from the Krötenpfuhl vineyard and the wine has turned out beautifully. The wine was still in fuder at the time of my visit, so Helmut Dönnhoff did not have a final analysis on the wine, but feels it is probably around 12.8 percent octane and approximately four grams per liter of residual sugar this year. The bouquet is young and very promising, jumping from the glass in a blaze of tart orange, apple, dried flowers, citrus peel, gentle notes of wild yeasts and a superb base of salty minerality. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and impressively light on its feet, with a rock solid core, great soil inflection, ripe, zesty acids and fine focus and balance on the long and complex finish. Classy juice. 2022-2055+. **94**.

2017 Höllenspfad im Mühlenberg Riesling Grosses Gewächs- Weingut Dönnhoff

The first example of GG from the Höllenspfad was made from a parcel of forty year-old vines in the filet section of the vineyard known as Mühlenberg and comes in with a similar alcohol and residual sugar level to the Krötenpfuhl. This too is a lovely example, offering up a fine bouquet of pink grapefruit, tart orange, a bit of briny ocean breeze, citrus peel, lemongrass and wild yeasts. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and a bit more reserved structurally than the Krötenpfuhl, with a fine core, ripe acids and excellent length and grip on the nascently complex finish. 2023-2060. **93+**.

2017 Felsenberg “Felsentürmchen” Riesling Grosses Gewächs- Weingut Dönnhoff

The 2017 Grosses Gewächs bottling from the Felsenberg is another absolutely superb wine in the making. The bouquet is deep, pure and youthfully complex, delivering a constellation of pink grapefruit, wild yeasts, a superb base of volcanic soil tones, dried flowers and a bit of fleur de sel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is crisp, deep and full, with a rock solid core, a great sense of elegance out of the blocks, ripe, seamless acids and a long, focused and perfectly balanced finish. This will take more time to blossom than either of the GGs above, but it will be well worth the wait! Superb juice. 2027-2075. **94**.

2017 Dellchen Riesling Grosses Gewächs- Weingut Dönnhoff

The 2017 Dellchen GG from Cornelius Dönnhoff is exceptional and one of my favorite recent vintages of this iconic dry Riesling. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a classy mix of blood orange, wild yeasts, lemongrass, complex minerality, citrus peel and again, a touch of sea salts in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very, very elegant out of the blocks for the Dellchen, with a lovely core, fine focus and grip, zesty acids and a nice

touch of salty minerality defining the long and nascently complex finish. A great vintage for the Dellchen. 2027-2075. **95.**

2017 Hermannshöhle Riesling Grosses Gewächs – Weingut Dönnhoff

The 2017 Hermannshöhle Grosses Gewächs is again, one of the very finest recent vintages of this bottling that I have had the pleasure to taste. The complex bouquet offers up a fine mélange of grapefruit, tart orange, citrus zest, a complex base of salty slate minerality, dried flowers, a touch of wild yeasts and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very sleek in profile out of the blocks, with a superb core of fruit, excellent mineral drive, bright acids and a very, very long, complex and perfectly balanced finish. Great juice. 2027-2075. **96.**

2017 Brücke “Monopol” Riesling Grosses Gewächs Versteigerung- Weingut Dönnhoff

The very rare sighting of a Brücke Grosses Gewächs is again present in the lineup in 2017, as Helmut commented “that of course, my grandson will need a bit of Brücke GG to complete the range in his birth year!” This is another absolutely superb dry Riesling in 2017, wafting from the glass in a complex mix of apple, tart orange, slate minerality, a nice touch of Brücke spice elements, citrus blossoms, orange peel and a delicate dollop of wild yeasts in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and complex, with a very good core, excellent mineral drive, ripe, seamless acids and a very long, nascently complex and inherently elegant finish. Another stellar GG from the Dönnhoff family in 2017. 2025-2075. **95.**



Helmut Dönnhoff, very pleased with the family estate's superb range of 2017ers, in his tasting room.

Classic Off-Dry and Noble Sweet Wines

2017 Dönnhoff Estate Riesling Feinherb (screwcap)

Helmut Dönnhoff joked that the “grapes were so good in 2017 that we ended up with wines that were *too serious* for basic wines in this vintage.” Such is the case with this lovely Estate Riesling Feinherb, which offers up a fine bouquet of apple, spring flowers, a fine sense of minerality, a bit of citrus zest and a nice touch of saltiness. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and poised in its balance, with lovely focus and grip and a long, vibrant finish. Good juice. 2018-2030. **89+**.

2017 Kreuznacher Krötenpfuhl Riesling Kabinett – Weingut Dönnhoff (screwcap)

The family made their selection of grapes for the Kabinett bottling from the Krötenpfuhl vineyard quite early, taking away bunches that would not go to the GG this year. The wine has turned out beautifully, with 9.5 percent octane and classical Kabinett balance and lightness of step. The bouquet offers up scents of apple, white peach, spring flowers, a touch of citrus zest and a lovely base of minerality. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, filigreed and perfectly balanced, with bright acids, fine focus and grip and a nice touch of closing saltiness on the long finish. Lovely wine. 2018-2035+. **91**.

2017 Oberhäuser Leistenberg Riesling Kabinett- Weingut Dönnhoff (screwcap)

It broke my heart to see this beautiful Leistenberg Kabinett bottled under screwcap, as this wine has the potential for a very long life in bottle, but such is the nature of the market these days. In any event, the wine itself is outstanding, wafting from the glass in a refined bouquet of white cherries, apple, a fine base of slate, a nice touch of wild yeasts and a bit of upper register sea salts. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and vibrant, with lovely purity to the fruit element on the attack, excellent backend mineral drive and lovely bounce on the complex and filigreed finish. Classy Kabinett. 2018-2040. **93**.

2017 Norheimer Kirschheck Riesling Spätlese- Weingut Dönnhoff

The 2017 Kirschheck Spätlese is a lovely example of the vintage, offering up a very pretty bouquet of white cherries, apple, wild yeasts, a touch of sea salts, bee pollen, apple blossoms and a superb base of minerality. On the palate the wine is medium-full, pure and dancing, with a juicy core, great cut and grip and a long, vibrant and perfectly balanced finish. This is going to be delicious to drink in its youth, but will have no trouble keeping several decades. 2018-2045. **93**.

2017 Oberhäuser Brücke Riesling Spätlese- Weingut Dönnhoff

The 2017 Brücke Spätlese is an absolute classic in the making and one of the best version of this Prädikat level from the vineyard since the stellar pair from the 2001 and 2002 vintages. The nose wafts from the glass in a complex constellation of apple, tangerine, wild yeasts, a complex base of salty, slate soil tones, white flowers and a nice touch of apple pie spices in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, young and vibrant, with a medium-full format, lovely depth at the core, bright, ripe acids and superb length and grip on the complex, pure and very light on its feet finish. A beautiful wine. 2021-2060. **95+**.

2017 Niederhäuser Hermannshöhle Riesling Spätlese- Weingut Dönnhoff

The 2017 Hermannshöhle Spätlese from the Dönnhoffs is also excellent this year, but it was a bit more reserved in personality at the time of my tasting and perhaps does not have quite the same precision as the Brücke this year? The bouquet offers up a superb, youthful mix of apple, a touch of blood orange, salty minerality, bee pollen and a nice touch of wild yeasts up high. On the palate the wine is focused, medium-full and racy, with a fine core, excellent focus and grip and a long, youthful and still quite primary finish. Perhaps this has just started to close

down a bit from its recent bottling and will end up every bit as fine as the Brücke Spätlese in the fullness of time, but right now, I have to give a very slight edge to the above wine. That said, this is hardly disappointing, as it has enormous potential! 2022-2060. **94+**.

2017 Oberhäuser Brücke Riesling Goldkapsel Auslese- Weingut Dönnhoff

Helmut Dönnhoff noted that the 2017 Brücke Goldkapsel Auslese includes about thirty percent botrytized grapes, with the rest of the bunches comprised of perfectly golden berries. The wine has a must weight of one hundred and ten Oechsle and 10.8 grams per liter of acidity this year. The youthful nose is flat out beautiful, offering up scents of pear, white cherries, a touch of passion fruit, honeycomb, fruit blossoms and a nice touch of salty minerality. On the palate the wine is fullish, pure and vibrant, with a lovely core of fruit, juicy complexity and fine focus and grip on the long, balanced and nicely salty finish. A superb bottle in the making. 2023-2085. **95+**.

2017 Niederhäuser Hermannshöhle Riesling Goldkapsel Auslese- Weingut Dönnhoff

The 2017 Hermannshöhle Auslese Gold Kap has about the same ratio of botrytis to golden berries as the Brücke Auslese in this vintage and offers up a beautiful, gently glazed and quite complex nose of white cherries, clementine, slate, honey, orange zest and just a hint of saltiness from its excellent extract. On the palate the wine is medium-full, elegant in profile and very vibrant in structure, with a lovely core, excellent focus and grip and a very, very long, zesty and perfectly balanced finish. Great juice that will age for decades and decades, but will want at least a year or two more in the cellar than the Brücke Auslese before it starts to really blossom. 2024-2085. **96**.



Weingut Emrich-Schönleber (Monzingen)

As I had originally intended to spend a day in the Nahe towards the end of my trip, on what turned out to be a holiday when almost everyone would be closed, I had a bit of a convoluted schedule trying to get to see my favorite producers in this region. Frank Schönleber was kind enough to see me on an alternative day, but it required my driving from the middle Mosel to the Monzingen after a couple of earlier appointments there and I naturally arrived on the late side. As this was Frank's daughter's third birthday and the family had a special day planned for her, we squeezed an early afternoon appointment in ahead of the party and limited our lineup of 2017ers to the Rieslings here, so my report is not quite as broad as it normally would be at Weingut Emrich-Schönleber. The spring frosts here cut back yields by about twenty percent, but again, Frank noted that they felt pretty lucky in this regard, as neighbors had been hit harder. The team here began picking at the end of September in 2017 and the lineup is heavily tilted towards dry Riesling bottlings this year, as Frank Schönleber estimated that only about seven percent of their production was of off dry or sweeter Prädikat wines in this vintage. The bottling was completed here in mid-March and the wines had bounced back nicely and were showing beautifully at the time of my visit. Frank's father, Werner Schönleber feels that the 2017 vintage is quite similar in style and quality to the superb 2002 vintage here, which he prefers to 2001 and ranks as one of the greatest vintages in the Nahe in the last quarter century. It is pretty easy to understand his enthusiasm, both for the 2002ers and these young, crisp and beautifully complex 2017ers. A fine, fine range from Weingut Emrich-Schönleber this year!

Dry 2017ers

2017 Estate Riesling Trocken- Weingut Emrich-Schönleber (screwcap)

The 2017 Estate Riesling Trocken from the Schönleber family comes in at twelve percent octane and carries 6.5 grams per liter of residual sugar. It is an excellent entry level wine, offering up a beautiful bouquet of pink grapefruit, orange peel, a touch of caraway, lovely minerality and a topnote of lemongrass. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and beautifully balanced, with ripe, zesty acids and excellent focus and grip on the long and classy finish. 2018-2030+. **89.**

2017 Riesling "Lenz"- Weingut Emrich-Schönleber (screwcap)

The 2017 Lenz bottling is also a superb dry wine, though with its snappy acids of 8.4 grams per liter, it found its optimal balance with 13.9 grams per liter of residual sugar and is not listed as Trocken. The wine is 11.5 percent alcohol and utterly refined on both the nose and palate, offering up fine aromatic complexity in its mix of blood orange, grapefruit, a touch of wild yeasts, lovely soil tones, orange peel, lemongrass and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and juicy on the attack, with a lovely core, excellent acids and grip and a long, vibrant and nascently complex finish. This is serious juice that will drink well out of the blocks, but has the inherent structure to age nicely as well. 2018-2035. **90+.**

2017 Riesling "Mineral" Trocken- Weingut Emrich-Schönleber

The 2017 Mineral bottling from Frank Schönleber is outstanding. The wine's technical details are twelve percent alcohol, 5.5 grams per liter of residual sugar and 8.3 grams per liter of acidity. The bouquet is precise and nicely smoky, wafting from the glass in a mix of grapefruit, lemon, wild yeasts, a beautiful base of minerality, dried flowers and smoky overtones. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, racy and very well-balanced, with a superb core, a very suave profile and excellent length and grip on the nascently complex and zesty finish. This will

need a few years of bottle age to blossom, but it will be excellent and a fine, fine value. 2021-2050. **91+**.

2017 Frütau Riesling Trocken- Weingut Emrich-Schönleber

The 2017 Frütau Riesling Trocken from Weingut Emrich-Schönleber is another excellent dry Riesling. The bouquet is pure and nascently complex, offering up scents of blood orange, sweet grapefruit, lemongrass, a fine base of salty minerality and plenty of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and focused, with a fine core, ripe, seamless acids and excellent length and grip on the youthful and very promising finish. This too is twelve percent octane and carries just under five grams per liter of residual sugar. Lovely juice and a superb expression of the *terroir* of the Frühlingsplätzchen vineyard. 2022-2050. **92**.

2017 Halgans Riesling Trocken- Weingut Emrich-Schönleber

Like the above wine, the 2017 Halgans Trocken is at the same level of quality as many a Grosses Gewächs in lesser vintages. This wine offers up stunning precision in its vibrant bouquet of lime, grapefruit, stony minerality, smoke and a topnote of wild yeasts. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and seamlessly balanced, with a fine core, excellent grip and focus, ripe, snappy acids and a very, very long, nascently complex finish. Fine, fine juice. 2022-2050. **92+**.

2017 Frühlingsplätzchen Grosses Gewächs- Weingut Emrich-Schönleber

The 2017 Grosses Gewächs bottlings here are going to be legends in the making and will clearly vie with any previous vintages produced. The 2017 Frühlingsplätzchen GG is a brilliant young wine, coming in at 12.5 percent octane and delivering a very elegant and complex bouquet of lime, tangerine, salty soil tones, white flowers, wild yeasts and a topnote of lemongrass. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with seamless balance, laser-like focus, ripe, vibrant acids and stunning length and grip on the utterly suave and very promising finish. Great wine. 2027-2085. **95**.

2017 Halenberg Grosses Gewächs- Weingut Emrich-Schönleber

At this early stage, it is impossible to choose a favorite between these two stunning young Grosses Gewächs bottlings! The 2017 Halenberg GG jumps from the glass in a superb blend of blood orange, a touch of white peach, smoky overtones, salty minerality, spring flowers and grapefruit peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full and nascently complex, with a lovely sense of reserve in the core, ripe, perfectly integrated acids, great focus and grip and a very, very long and complex finish. Another stellar bottle in the making. 2027-2085. **95**.

2017 Monzinger Frühlingsplätzchen “Auf de Lay”- Weingut Emrich-Schönleber

I have been lucky enough to taste some stellar examples of Auf de Lay from the Schönleber family, but the 2017 vintage may well be the finest young vintage of this wine I have yet had the pleasure to taste. The wine is nicely reserved out of the blocks on both the nose and palate, but its underlying breed and complexity are still very much in evidence. The bouquet delivers a constellation of grapefruit, sea salts, tart peach, a touch of lime, wild yeasts, stunningly complex minerality, smoke and a topnote of citrus blossoms. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and utterly complete, with a lovely core, ripe, seamless acids and stunning grip and length on the nascently complex and vibrant finish. Great, great juice in the making. 2027-2085. **97**.

Prädikat 2017ers

2017 Monzinger Riesling Kabinett- Weingut Emrich-Schönleber

The 2017 Monzinger Kabinett is a lovely wine and a clear indication that the dry wines here are not the only outstanding examples of the vintage. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a

lovely blend of peach, sweet grapefruit, gentle herbal tones, citrus zest, salty minerality and a topnote of wild yeasts. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and nicely filigreed, with a lovey nexus of fruit, minerality and zesty acidity coming together on the long, bouncy and complex finish. Fine juice. 2018-2040. **92.**

2017 Monzinger Frühlingsplätzchen Riesling Spätlese- Weingut Emrich-Schönleber

I wondered if the 2017 Frühlingsplätzchen Spätlese had not quite recovered from its bottling in mid-March, as this wine seemed just a tad soft and easy-going by the high standards of the vintage here at Weingut Emrich-Schönleber, despite the wine carrying 9.4 grams per liter of acidity. So, perhaps it had not bounced back entirely from the *mise* and is a bit racier than it showed at the time of my visit? The bouquet is certainly lovely, offering up scents of pear, lime, bee pollen, lovey minerality and a touch of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is medium-full, pure and focused, with a good core and bouncy framing acids, but not quite the cut and grip one expects from its acidity level. If I am correct in my guess that this is not quite recovered from the bottling and is racier, then my score will seem conservative. 2018-2040+.

91+?

2017 Monzinger Halenberg Riesling Spätlese- Weingut Emrich-Schönleber

In contrast to the Frühlingsplätzchen Spätlese, the 2017 Halenberg Spätlese was showing very nicely and is a pretty and stylish example of the vintage. The nose wafts from the glass in a fine blend of peach, honeycomb, slate, a potpourri of floral tones and a nice topnote of citrus zest. On the palate the wine is medium-full, pure and vibrant, with lovey acidity and grip, fine focus and a long, succulent and complex finish. This has the bounce and cut one expects from a 2017 Spätlese! 2018-2040+. **92+.**

2017 Monzinger Frühlingsplätzchen Riesling Spätlese- Weingut Emrich-Schönleber

Frank Schönleber's 2017 Frühlingsplätzchen Auslese was showing a better chassis of acidity than the Spätlese from this vineyard, despite being more than a gram per liter lower in acidity (8.2 grams per liter versus 9.4- a further indication that the Spätlese was still a bit bottle shocked) and is a lovely wine in the making. The aromatic constellation delivers a fine blend of lime, pineapple, honeycomb, a fine base of soil tones and a floral topnote redolent of both white flowers and fruit blossoms. On the palate the wine is fullish, pure, complex and zesty, with very good focus and grip, bright acids and a long, poised and very well balanced finish. Fine juice. 2002-2060. **93.**

2017 Monzinger Halenberg Riesling Auslese- Weingut Emrich-Schönleber

The 2017 Halenberg Auslese is another really lovely and elegant example of the vintage. Its technical details are very, very similar to the Frühlingsplätzchen Auslese, coming in at 112 grams per liter of residual sugar, eight percent alcohol and 8.5 grams per liter of acidity. The beautiful bouquet delivers a mix of peach, passion fruit, excellent underlying minerality, honeycomb, orange zest and spring flowers. On the palate the wine is fullish, pure and filigreed, with lively acids, excellent focus and balance and a long, complex finish that closes with admirable minerality. A lovely bottle. 2022-2075. **94.**

2017 Monzinger Halenberg Riesling Beerenauslese- Weingut Emrich-Schönleber

The 2017 Halenberg Beerenauslese is also strikingly mineral in personality this year. The bouquet is flat out gorgeous, jumping from the glass in a mix of pineapple, peach, honey, tropical flowers and that impressive touch of minerality. On the palate the wine is fullish, pure and vibrant in profile, with great depth at the core, stellar complexity and great acidity giving the wine cut and exceptional precision on the very long and dancing finish. A great BA. 2018-2065+. **97.**

Weingut Schäfer-Fröhlich (Bockenau)

Tim Fröhlich has made absolutely stunning 2017ers, but this has been a constant refrain for many years now, as he has been one of the most consistently excellent winegrowers in Germany for all of the twenty-first century. As the estate was somehow fortunate with frost damage, yields were no shorter here in 2017 than they were in 2016 and Tim Fröhlich felt they had been very, very lucky in this regard. As I mentioned in the introduction to this article, several of the Schäfer-Fröhlich parcels are right next door to those of the Dönnhoffs, and the latter were heavily frosted, while Tim's parcels escaped with quite modest damage. Of the three principal villages that Tim Fröhlich farms in, Schlossböckelheim was the most affected by frost, with damage in Monzingen less and Bockenau escaping nearly unscathed by the April freeze. Such are the vagaries of Mother Nature and everyone at Weingut Schäfer-Fröhlich was quite thankful of their relative good fortune in this regard in 2017. With the early flowering of the spring, the harvest here began on September 25th, which was a record, but Tim Fröhlich noted that they were able to take their time making selections, as the autumn weather turned quite cool at night from late September on, which allowed the grapes to retain their great, high levels of acidity and selection could be made with the precision as the sugars were increasing incrementally throughout October, but the acids were not dropping perceptibly because of the diurnal swings. As Tim mentioned, "once the evening temperatures dropped and we had very cool evenings, I started to get really excited about the potential of this vintage, as I knew we were going to have very good sugar levels and not need to worry about flabby, low acid wines."

The team here finally finished up the harvest on October 22nd and Tim was absolutely delighted with the quality of the grapes brought in, with lots of golden berries, great sugar and acidity levels and very high extracts from the short crop. The estate was just at the start of its bottling at the time of my visit, with a few wines bottled over the last week or two, but most in tank and prepared for bottling in the coming days after my visit, so I was very fortunate to catch many of the wines at a great moment for tasting. All of the brilliant range of Grosses Gewächs bottlings were due for their mise in the coming week and were showing beautifully, with the extra couple of months of elevage between my customary visits in late March and this year's trip in late May allowing the youthful yeastiness to have moderated quite a bit and the wines were showing in an absolutely celestial manner. All of the Grosses Gewächs from the estate this year are in the twelve to twelve and a half percent alcohol range and utterly seamless in their balance. They perfectly capture the inherent elegance of the best wines of 2017 and will certainly rank amongst the greatest lineup of GGs in recent memory from Tim Fröhlich! However, the fireworks here are not limited to the stunning array of dry Rieslings in 2017, as there are some beautiful Feinherb bottlings as well (made principally from casks or tanks that stopped fermenting with a bit more residual sweetness than is allowed for Trocken, but with such beautiful balances that it would have been senseless not to take them just as they were!) and the noble sweet Prädikat wines here are also stunning in quality. As I do not normally taste here in late May, it is hard to compare the showing of these 2017ers with previous vintages I have tasted during my spring trips in March, as the wines are really in different stages of their evolutions with two months more elevage, but my gut feeling is that this may well be Tim Fröhlich's finest vintage to date, as this is a simply magical lineup of wines in 2017!

2017 Fröhlich Blanc de Noirs Trocken- Weingut Schäfer-Fröhlich

The 2017 Blanc de Noirs Trocken is a lovely bottle of pinot noir-based wine, offering up a lovely nose of white cherries, tart orange, a lovely base of salty minerality and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish, crisp and very racy this year, with a lovely core, excellent backend mineral drive and impressive length and grip on the very well-balanced finish. 2017 is unequivocally the finest vintage of this bottling I have yet tasted from Tim Fröhlich! 2018-2030+. **89.**

2017 Estate Riesling Trocken- Weingut Schäfer-Fröhlich

The 2017 Estate Riesling Trocken here was really showing beautifully, having been bottled six weeks before my visit and having bounced back completely. This is really stunning in 2017, as the relatively low yields have given this extraordinary depth for its level, with the bouquet offering up a precisely ripe blend of grapefruit, tart orange, salty minerality, white flowers and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is crisp, fullish and racy, with an excellent core of fruit, fine cut and grip and outstanding backend minerality on the long, complex and utterly refined finish. This is made from the younger vines in all the top grand crus and with the reduced yields of 2017, this is approaching Grosses Gewächs quality! The wine is twelve percent octane and carries five grams per liter of residual sugar in 2017 and is an absolute steal! 2018-2040. **91.**

2017 Vulkangestein Riesling Trocken- Weingut Schäfer-Fröhlich

The 2017 Vulkangestein Trocken was bottled two weeks prior to my visit, but showing wonderfully. The blend this year is more heavily tilted to the Stromberg vineyard than the usually one-third each of Stromberg, Felsenberg and Kupfergrube fruit, as the Stromberg was not frosted and the Schlossböckelheim vineyards were hit a bit by the freeze. As is the case with the 2017 Estate Riesling, the wine has an extra level of depth and complexity this year. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a superb nose of grapefruit, lemon, wild yeasts, citrus peel, a very complex base of volcanic minerality and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is racy, full and very elegant in profile, with a superb core, stunning length and grip and a very complex, vibrant and refined finish. This is a superb bottle of wine by any measure! 2021-2050. **92+.**

2017 Schiefergestein Bockenaaur Riesling Trocken- Weingut Schäfer-Fröhlich

The 2017 Schiefergestein Bockenaaur Riesling Trocken had only been in bottle one week before my visit, but again, was still showing very well indeed. The wine offers up a very flinty profile on both the nose and palate this year, with the bouquet delivering scents of lemon, green apple, salty, slate minerality, wild yeasts, plenty of smokiness and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and absolutely rock solid at the core, with ripe, snappy acids, great focus and grip and a very long, mineraly and complex finish. Another village wine at grand cru quality! 2020-2050. **92+.**

2017 Felsenberg Riesling Grosses Gewächs - Schäfer-Fröhlich

The 2017 Felsenberg GG is a masterpiece in the making, with the bouquet soaring from the glass in a youthful and very elegant constellation of pink grapefruit, wild yeasts, tart peach, plenty of smokiness, a great base of salty soil tones, dried flowers and a topnote of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with ripe, snappy acids, superb complexity and great length and grip on the poised and perfectly balanced finish. This is a stunning young vintage of Felsenberg! 2024-2085. **96.**



Tim Fröhlich in his tasting room at the estate in Bockenau.

2017 Kupfergrube Riesling Grosses Gewächs - Weingut Schäfer-Fröhlich

The 2017 Kupfergrube Grosses Gewächs from Tim Fröhlich is every bit as profound as the Felsenberg and again, shares the stunning elegance of the greatest 2017ers. The wine delivers a superb nose of tart orange, grapefruit, a beautiful base of minerality, lemongrass, wild yeasts and a lovely topnote of *fleur de sel*. On the palate the wine is deep, pure, full and utterly refined, with a great core, ripe, racy acids, laser-like focus and a very, very long, nascently complex and utterly refined finish. One does not often see this degree of elegance from the Kupfergrube! 2025-2085. **96.**

2017 Frühlingsplätzchen Grosses Gewächs- Weingut Schäfer-Fröhlich

The 2017 Frühlingsplätzchen Grosses Gewächs from Weingut Schäfer-Fröhlich is another beautiful wine in the making. The bouquet is already very polished, wafting from the glass in a superb blend of lime, white peach, wild yeasts, smoky overtones, a wisp of petrol, great minerality and a nice touch of cress-like topnotes. On the palate the wine is pure, full and a very refined in personality, with fine mid-palate depth, ripe acids and great focus and grip on the long, vibrant and nascently complex finish. Fine, fine juice. 2023-2075+. **95+.**

2017 Halenberg Grosses Gewächs- Weingut Schäfer-Fröhlich

Tim Fröhlich's 2017 Halenberg GG is utterly brilliant and perhaps, my favorite grand cru in the cellars this year (though the Felseneck is also transcendent in quality). The wine is a step up in refinement from the very, very good Frühlingsplätzchen, offering up a brilliant young bouquet of grapefruit, fresh lime, smoky overtones, wild yeasts, dried flowers, a hint of botanicals and a glorious base of salty minerality. On the palate the wine is pure, full and

supremely elegant, with a superb core, ripe, electric acids, great buffering extract and stunning focus and grip on the very, very long, complex and energetic finish. This wine has great backend lift, but is effortless. A truly brilliant young wine. 2025-2085. **97+**.

2017 Stromberg Riesling Grosses Gewächs- Weingut Schäfer-Fröhlich

The Stromberg GG here is often not quite as elegant as the very top grand cru bottlings, but this is not the case in 2017, as the lower yields from the frosts have given this wine a precision I can seldom recall in previous young vintages. The bouquet is pure and complex, wafting from the glass in a superb blend of grapefruit, tart orange, lime zest, ocean-like salinity, white flowers and a great base of minerality. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and racy, with outstanding mid-palate intensity, seamless balance and a very long, focused and superbly complex finish. This is the finest young vintage of Stromberg I have ever tasted from Tim Fröhlich! 20125-2085. **96+**.

2017 Felseneck Riesling Grosses Gewächs- Weingut Schäfer-Fröhlich

The 2017 Felseneck Grosses Gewächs is yet another utterly brilliant young wine. The nose soars from the glass in a youthfully complex blend of tart orange, pink grapefruit, blood orange, spring flowers, a beautiful base of salty slate minerality, a touch of petrol and a gentle topnote of wild yeasts. On the palate the wine is full, pure and again electric with ripe acidity this year, with a rock solid core, laser-like focus and great cut and grip on the complex, long and utterly seamless finish. This is pure magic. 2027-2085. **99**.

Pinot-Based Wines

2017 Bockenaur Weissburgunder Trocken- Weingut Schäfer-Fröhlich (screwcap)

The 2017 Weissburgunder Trocken is a very good wine, but following in the wake of the symphony of Riesling GGs here, it was really hard to come back down to earth and appreciate this wine properly. The nose offers up a fine mix of apple, peach, spring flowers and a nice base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and juicy at the core, with good focus, length and grip. This is not overly complex, but a good, solid wine for everyday drinking. 2018-2025. **87**.

2017 Bockenaur Grauburgunder “S” Trocken- Weingut Schäfer-Fröhlich

The 2017 Grauburgunder “S” is another excellent wine, with a ripe and pure aromatic profile of peach, apple, a touch of fresh almond, apple blossoms and a very good base of minerality. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and zesty, with a good core and very good length and grip on the well-balanced finish. This is a very good example of Pinot Gris that will drink well from the outset, but has the depth and balance to also age very nicely. It is thirteen percent octane this year and quite tasty. 2018-2035. **89+**.

2017 Bockenaur Weissburgunder “S” Trocken- Weingut Schäfer-Fröhlich

The 2017 Weissburgunder “S” bottling hails from a parcel of fifty year-old Pinot Blanc vines, mostly grown on red slate in the village of Bockenau. This has turned out really well in this vintage, delivering a classy bouquet of apple, peach, spring flowers, a nice touch of wild yeasts, citrus zest, slate and a hint of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with a fine core, lovely focus and grip, very good acids and a long, well-balanced and classy finish. Good juice. 2018-2030+. **90**.

2017 Bockenaur Weissburgunder “R” Trocken- Weingut Schäfer-Fröhlich

The 2017 Weissburgunder “R” bottling was barrel-fermented in a combination of three, four and fifteen year-old *barriques*. This is the best pinot blanc cuvée I have yet tasted from Tim Fröhlich, as the wine offers up a superb nose of apple, peach, a touch of citrus zest, a nice

youthful touch of Coche-Dury-like iodine and a very gentle base of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and zesty, with a fine core, excellent focus and grip and a long, bouncy and very well-balanced finish. Very high class Pinot Blanc! 2018-2035. **92.**

2017 Bockenaur Spätburgunder Trocken- Weingut Schäfer-Fröhlich

The 2017 Pinot Noir from Tim Fröhlich is still a young wine, but it is showing beautiful promise and is my favorite vintage of this wine that I have tasted to date from the estate. The lovely nose wafts from the glass in a fine blend of dark berries, red cherries, a lovely base of soil tones, dark chocolate, a touch of smokiness and a very discreet framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish, complex and tangy, with a good core, moderate tannins and fine length and grip on the well-balanced and youthful finish. I love the aromatic complexity this wine is showing already, but the wine is still a puppy in terms of structure on the palate and will need some cellaring to blossom. 2023-2045+. **90.**

Feinherb

2017 Schiefergestein Bockenaur Riesling Feinherb- Weingut Schäfer-Fröhlich

This is essentially the same wine as the Trocken version, except that there was a barrel and a tank that stopped fermentation at fourteen grams per liter of residual sugar, so we have a Feinherb version of Schiefergestein this year. The wine comes in at twelve percent octane and is excellent, wafting from the glass in a complex blend of white peach, pink grapefruit, slate, wild yeasts and a topnote of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and very mineral in profile, with a lovey core of fruit, impressive complexity, ripe, zesty acids and excellent length and grip on the vibrant finish. This is essentially a dry wine as well and is outstanding in quality. 2018-2040. **92.**

2017 Felseneck “Unterm Brunnchen” Riesling Feinherb- Weingut Schäfer-Fröhlich

The “Unterm Brunnchen” Riesling Feinherb from Tim Fröhlich is made from a filet section of the Felseneck vineyard, which he produced for the first time in the 2015 vintage and has auctioned off in Bad Kreuznach in the last couple of years. This wine was finished at fourteen grams per liter of residual sugar and is absolutely brilliant in 2017, soaring from the glass in a complex constellation of grapefruit, blood orange, wild yeasts, a glorious base of slate minerality, floral tones and a topnote of orange zest. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, very complex and racy, with laser-like focus, a superb core, great backend mineral drive and outstanding lift and grip on the very, very long, vibrant and perfectly balanced finish. Breathtakingly beautiful young wine! 2022-2085. **97+.**

Noble Sweet 2017ers

2017 Bockenaur Felseneck Riesling Kabinett- Weingut Schäfer-Fröhlich

The 2017 Felseneck Kabinett is a beautifully pure, delicate and filigreed example of its Prädikat level. The wine is eight percent alcohol and carries forty-eight grams per liter of residual sugar to buffer its 9.8 grams per liter of acidity. The gorgeous bouquet offers up scents of white cherries, pear, a salty base of slate, gentle smokiness and an esthery topnote of bee pollen. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, pure and zesty, with lovely intensity of flavor, a classic delicacy of footstep and a very long, complex and dancing finish. A beautiful bottle of Kabinett! 2018-2040. **93+.**

2017 Bockenaur Felseneck Riesling Spätlese- Weingut Schäfer-Fröhlich

The 2017 “regular” Spätlese from the Felseneck vineyard is also outstanding. The wine is pure and succulent, wafting from the glass in a blend of pear, white cherries, bee pollen, lovely

slate undertow and a bit of exotic mintiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, elegant and filigreed, with a lovely core, excellent focus and grip and great bounce and cut on the long and complex finish. Delicious. 2018-2045. **93.**

2017 Bockenaur Felseneck Riesling Spätlese Goldkapsel- Weingut Schäfer-Fröhlich

Tim Fröhlich commented that he “made the Goldkapsel Spätlese from a selection based on elegance, rather than sugars or botrytis, so this wine actually has a bit more green berries than the regular Spätlese.” This is from the oldest vines in the Felseneck in 2017 and it is stunning, offering up a very refined and vibrant bouquet of pear, white cherries, a touch of petrol, wild yeasts, spring flowers and bee pollen. On the palate the wine is pure, medium-full and very elegant and energetic, with a fine core, snappy, ripe acids and laser-like focus on the very, very long, pure and vibrant finish. This is a brilliant young Spätlese! 2020-2055+. **96.**

2017 Bockenaur Felseneck Riesling Auslese- Weingut Schäfer-Fröhlich

This wine is made entirely from botrytized bunches, “but it was a very, very clean botrytis in 2017” notes Tim Fröhlich. The wine is absolutely pure and refined on both the nose and palate, with the bouquet delivering a gorgeous constellation of white cherries, pear, honeycomb, beautifully complex floral tones, orange zest and a fine base of salty minerality. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish and zesty, with great bounce and lightness of step, a superb core and outstanding cut and grip on the focused, complex and extremely long finish. Brilliant juice. 2023-2085. **95.**

2017 Bockenaur Felseneck Riesling Auslese Goldkapsel- Weingut Schäfer-Fröhlich

The 2017 Gold Kap Auslese was again selected based on elegance, not richness, so this wine was made with thirty percent golden berries in this vintage. It will end up being auctioned off in Bad Kreuznach in September. The wine is stellar on both the nose and palate, with the bouquet delivering a superb blend of *mirabelle*, pear, tangerine, a stellar base of slate for a young Auslese, honeycomb and a topnote of spring flowers. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish, racy and extremely light on its feet, with a fine core, laser-like focus and excellent cut and grip on the long, pure and complex finish. Stunning. 2025-2085. **96.**

2017 Bockenaur Felseneck Riesling Beerenauslese- Weingut Schäfer-Fröhlich

In addition to this great bottle of Felseneck Beerenauslese, the 2017 vintage has also produced a wine that is today hovering between BA and TBA from this vineyard and which Tim is not sure of how he will label it- probably a BA Goldkapsel. There are also several small lots of TBA bubbling away in the cellars here in Bockenau. The finished Felseneck Beerenauslese, which was made entirely from shriveled berries, is stunning in 2017, delivering a beautiful aromatic constellation of peach, tangerine, a touch of passion fruit, honeycomb and a potpourri of tropical fruit blossoms in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish and very racy, with superb focus and grip, lovely nascent complexity, impeccable balance and outstanding acid lift on the long and vibrant finish. Great juice. 2018-2075. **95+.**

Rheinhessen

Weingut Keller (Flörsheim-Dalsheim)

Klaus-Peter Keller has once again fashioned an absolutely stellar collection of wines in the 2017 vintage, and given the hot streak that he has been on for the last dozen years or more, it is hard to come to the conclusion that this could be his finest vintage yet, but that is clearly a possibility with this stunning lineup of wines. In addition to crop reduction from April frosts here in the Hügelland, the Keller family also had to deal with a heavy hailstorm on the evening of August 27th, which hit the two grand cru vineyards of Morstein and Abtserde the hardest, so that

these two vineyards lost between seventy and eighty percent of their crop in 2017. The nearby Hubacker vineyard was grazed far less severely by the hail and the Kirchspiel escaped with only a touch of damage, so things were not as bad as they could have been. Klaus-Peter Keller commented that “with the warm days and cool nights of October, we had ideal conditions for precise selection for sweet wines, with plenty of good botrytis developing in the Hubacker, but most of the other grand crus resisting any botrytis and any sweeter wines made from these parcels were made from shriveled berries.” Klaus-Peter and Julia Keller and their talented vineyard team were very careful at harvest time, with much of the harvest done berry by berry in the grand crus this year, with very little Spätlese produced in 2017, as berries were either targeted for dry cuvées, Kabinetten or Auslesen and sweeter wines in this vintage. As Klaus-Peter noted, “we are lucky with the success that we have realized in recent times, as our clients do not want one specific kind of wine each year, and this allows us to focus our winemaking decisions based on what Nature has given us each vintage and make the style of wines that are going to be the best examples of what the vintage has given us.” Of the range of 2017ers, wines such as Scheurebe, Sylvaner and the like had been bottled a few weeks before my visit, but almost all of the dry Rieslings were still in cask and would be bottled a handful of weeks after my late May tasting at the estate.

Klaus-Peter Keller compared his 2017ers a bit to his 2010ers, as both vintages were defined by a very short cropload and extraordinary depth and mineral intensity as a result. I had the gut feeling that he may well rank the 2017ers just a bit higher, due to their exceptional acidity which has translated into wines of uncommon precision and purity of fruit expression. The very low yields have given the 2017 Kellers a stunning sense of extract, which shows up as an overt saltiness to the underlying minerality in so many of the wines, and this is true from the more basic bottlings all the way up to the Grosses Gewächs. I do not trust my memory when comparing these young 2017ers to the young dry wines from the 2010 vintage here, but my instincts are that this more recent vintage is going to be a step up in elegance and seamless beauty from the 2010s and will ultimately land just a touch higher on the quality hierarchy. Worthy of particular mention in 2017 are just how brilliant the wines from the red slate vineyards in Nierstein- Pettenthal and Hipping- have turned out in this vintage. As I talk about a bit more in the article on the Keller G-Max bottling further on in this issue, starting in the 2013 vintage, the estate has added a second basket press that is used for the dry wines and this has produced even better wines to Klaus-Peter’s thinking. As he notes about the Pettenthal GG of 2017, “there was a bit of millerandage after flowering here and consequently, we lost thirty percent of the crop and yields were extremely low at twenty hectoliters per hectare” and by using the basket press, “we could press the grapes for several days in 2017, very gently increasing the pressure” and it has resulted in the “best Riesling we have yet produced” from the Pettenthal. He continued that it was the same for the Roter Hang section of the Hipping as well in 2017.

While much of the wine world knows Weingut Keller for its beautiful lineup of dry wines, the classic Prädikat wines here in 2017 are also stellar and this is an estate that should be as well-known these days for its beautiful noble sweet wines as it should for its great dry bottlings. For the last several vintage, Klaus-Peter Keller has been one of the leading producers of delicate, filigreed Kabinetten in all of Germany and the two I tasted from 2017 (again from the Hipping and Pettenthal vineyards in Nierstein) were both beautiful and light as well water. The

Spätlese from the Abtserde vineyard is also absolutely classical in profile and I loved the range of sweet wines I tasted from this great terroir as well from 2017. As the range of wines being produced here seems to expand a bit with each passing vintage, I did not taste all of the 2017ers at Weingut Keller, despite two visits to the estate to work on the vintage, and I am sure that there are several other brilliant wines in the cellars here that I did not taste, but which will also merit serious attention if found on your wine merchant's list. This is a great, great vintage for one of Germany's greatest contemporary winegrowers and I would not pass on any bottle of 2017 that proudly wears the Weingut Keller label. In short, I was absolutely dazzled by the wines across the board here in 2017 that I did taste and I expect that long-time fans of Weingut Keller are going to feel the same. It will be fun as the years unfold to debate where the collection of 2017ers from Klaus-Peter will ultimately rank in the hierarchy of great vintages here, but my gut instinct at this early stage is that it is going to rank right up at the very top!



A very content Klaus-Peter Keller in his tasting room at the estate, after working through the 2017ers.

Pinot Noir

Klaus-Peter Keller's bottlings of pinot noir continue to stand alone at the very summit of red wines in Germany, and with each passing vintage, he continues to fine tune his approach and make the wine even more precise, complex and refined in style. Amongst the recent changes that he has made to his pinot noirs are hand de-stemming the bunches and then adding back in a percentage of the stems if they are pristine in quality, so for example, with his 2016 pinot noir

from the Frauenberg vineyard, the grapes were completely de-stemmed and then twenty percent of the best quality stems were layered back into the casks for fermentation. The reds wines at Weingut Keller no longer see any new oak during their élevage, as Klaus-Peter Keller is very content to purchase once-used barrels from Burgundy for any cask replacements that he needs, and the wines have gained in soil signature and complexity with the change over the last decade to all used barrels for the élevage. The vines here are also getting older, which again contributes to heightened quality of all of the pinot noir bottlings from the estate, and I often think as I am tasting the new vintage of pinot noir here that if I was restrained to only buying red wines from Klaus-Peter Keller, I would have absolutely no issues with that at all, as the wines are stellar. The 2016s are a very elegant group of pinots, with great aromatic complexity and transparency down to their respective soils, refined, elegant structural chassis and the potential to age long and very gracefully. As Klaus-Peter observed about his 2016 pinots, “they are not quite as powerful as the 2015ers- much like the difference between 2015 and 2016 in Burgundy- but they are probably more elegant and complex wines.” The 2016 wines were just finishing up their élevage when I visited here on May 24th and were destined for bottling a week or so after my visit, so I could not have caught them at a better moment for tasting!

2016 Spätburgunder “S”- Weingut Keller

The 2016 Spätburgunder “S” from Weingut Keller is made up primarily from a parcel of twenty-five year-old vines in the Morstein vineyard, with just a touch of production added from both the Bürgel and the Frauenberg. This is a lovely, entry level pinot noir from Klaus-Peter, offering up a lovely bouquet of black cherries, a touch of blood orange, woodsmoke, a good base of chalky soil tones and a bit of cedar. On the palate the wine is medium-full, complex and tangy, with moderate tannins, good focus and grip and a long, intensely flavored and quite stylish finish. Good juice. 2021-2050. **89+**.

2016 Bürgel Spätburgunder Grosses Gewächs- Weingut Keller

The 2016 Bürgel pinot noir is absolutely superb and goes to show just how good one can make a pinot noir from German clones if the vines are old and the *elevage* is gentle enough to allow the fruit and soil tones to take center stage. The bouquet is superb, wafting from the glass in a complex mix of red berries, black cherries, woodsmoke, bitter chocolate, chalky and a nice touch of fresh herb tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, tangy and nicely sappy at the core, with lovely focus and grip, fine-grained, seamless tannins and a long, tangy and beautifully balanced finish. This wine is already showing lovely complexity out of the blocks and is going to be excellent. 2022-2060. **93+**.

2016 Frauenberg Spätburgunder Grosses Gewächs (Selection Massale)- Weingut Keller

The 2016 Frauenberg pinot noir is more black fruity in personality than the Bürgel this year. The wine delivers a refined and vibrant nose of black cherries, raw cocoa, a great base of soil tones, a hint of the beetroot to come and gentle smokiness. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and bouncy, with lovely sappiness at the core, stellar transparency, suave, perfectly integrated tannins and a long, tangy and supremely elegant finish. *Tout en finesse*. 2022-2060+. **94+**.

2016 Morstein Spätburgunder Grosses Gewächs “alte Reben”- Weingut Keller

All three of Klaus-Peter’s pinot noir bottlings are defined by their soil elements in 2016, but the Morstein is clearly the most soil-driven of the three. This is a brilliant middleweight in the making, offering up a gorgeous bouquet of cherries, red plums, a stunningly complex base of limestone minerality, a whisper of stems, gamebird, raw cocoa, fresh nutmeg and just a touch of

vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, refined and very transparent, with a lovely core of fruit, exceptional focus and grip, fine-grained tannins and a very, very long, vibrant and nascently complex finish. This is a wine that will have stunning intensity of flavor and complexity when it is fully mature and ready to drink. 2024-2060+. **96.**

2017 Spätburgunder Rosé Trocken- Weingut Keller

This wine was made by special request from a bit of younger pinot noir fruit grown in the Morstein vineyard. One of Klaus-Peter's winery team mentioned how much they loved Rosé and it was too bad that the winery did not offer one and *voilà*, this bottling was crafted in 2017. It truly is an exceptional Rosé, very pale in color and loaded with aromatic and flavor personality. The bouquet offers up a superb mix of white cherries, tart orange, wild yeasts, a fine base of chalky soil tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is fullish, crisp and complex, with a lovely core, fine focus and backend mineral drive, racy acids and a long, zesty and quite serious finish. Fine juice that I hope is repeated in future vintages! 2018-2035. **93.**

Scheurebe, Silvaner and Other Off the Beaten Path Varietals

2017 Scheurebe Trocken- Weingut Keller

The 2017 Scheurebe Trocken is a beautiful wine that was fashioned entirely from fruit grown in the Morstein vineyard, with these vines right next to the pinot noir vines. The wine comes in at twelve percent octane and was made from very low yields of eighteen hectoliters per hectare in this vintage, as opposed to the typical forty hectoliters per hectare in a normal year. The bouquet is beautifully expressive and classy, wafting from the glass in a blend of cassis, tar orange, salty limestone minerality, gentle smokiness and a topnote of lemongrass. On the palate the wine is crisp, fullish and beautifully complex, with racy, ripe acids, excellent focus and grip and a long, poised and energetic finish. Great juice and a stellar value. 2018-2035+. **91+.**

2017 Grüner Silvaner Trocken- Weingut Keller

The 2017 Grüner Silvaner Trocken from Weingut Keller is another wine of extraordinary depth this year from the vintage's very short yields. The wine offers up excellent aromatic complexity in its mélange of pink grapefruit, apple, gentle smokiness and a complex base of minerality. On the palate the wine is fullish, racy and beautifully balanced, with a fine core, great focus and grip and outstanding backend energy on the long and zesty finish. This too is an even twelve percent octane in 2017 and a superb bottle for its price tag. 2018-2035+. **91.**

2017 Sylvaner Trocken "Feuervogel" alte Reben- Weingut Keller

The 2017 Feuervogel Sylvaner was one of the most recently bottled wines in the lineup, having only gone into bottle two weeks prior to my visit, but the wine had not yet shut down post-bottling and was showing beautifully. This is a bit riper than the above, coming in at thirteen percent and offering up a deep and primary bouquet of apple, a touch of wild yeasts, lemongrass, stony minerality and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and vibrant, with laser-like focus, a rock solid core from the short yields and great cut and grip on the long, nascently complex and snappy finish. This is a stellar wine in the making, but it will need at least a couple of years in the cellar to start to stir. 2020-2040+. **93.**

Riesling Trocken

2017 Riesling Trocken- Weingut Keller

There is nothing "basic" about the basic 2017 Riesling Trocken from Klaus-Peter Keller, as this wine has turned out superbly well- probably due in part to the insanely low yields here in this vintage. The bouquet is pure and beautiful, wafting from the glass in a mix of apple, a touch

of grapefruit, a lovely base of salty minerality, wild yeasts and dried flowers. On the palate the wine is medium-full, complex and racy in personality, with a lovely core, ripe, seamless acids and excellent length and grip on the poised and focused finish. Fine, fine juice and an outstanding bargain this year. 2018-2040. **91+**.

2017 Riesling “von der Fels” Trocken- Weingut Keller

Again, I was struck by just how stunning the 2017 von der Fels Riesling has turned out this year, due to the short yields. The nose jumps from the glass in a complex blend of sweet grapefruit, blood orange, a discreet touch of wild yeasts, complex minerality, lemongrass and a lovely topnote of orange blossoms. On the palate the wine is pure, deep and full-bodied, with great grip and cut, seamless balance and a very long, vibrant and complex finish. This is simply outstanding and probably the best young vintage of von der Fels I have ever tasted! 202102945+. **92+**.

2017 Nierstein Riesling Trocken- Weingut Keller

The 2017 Nierstein Riesling Trocken is another lovely wine and a cuvée I cannot recall tasting previously at the estate. The bouquet offers up a very refined mix of white peach, a touch of grapefruit, a beautiful base of slate minerality, a touch of smokiness, wild yeasts and a topnote of orange peel. On the palate the wine is pure, medium-full and very elegant in profile, with lovely complexity and lift, seamless elegance and a long, vibrant and perfectly focused finish. This is a refined and stellar dry Riesling. 2021-2050. **92**.

2017 Hipping Riesling Grosse Gewächs- Weingut Keller

The 2017 Hipping GG is absolutely stunning and at such a high quality level that I wondered if there was going to be much room for even better wines further along in the lineup! The beautiful bouquet jumps from the glass in another very elegant constellation of sweet grapefruit, blood orange, a gorgeous base of slate, dried flowers, wild yeasts and a gentle topnote of petrol. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish and filigreed, with a lovely core of fruit, ripe, juicy acids and excellent length and grip on the vibrant and very well-balanced finish. Great juice! 2025-2075. **94+**.

2017 Pettenthal Riesling Grosse Gewächs- Weingut Keller

The 2017 Pettenthal GG from Klaus-Peter Keller is simply the greatest single wine I have ever tasted from this superb vineyard. The wine is absolutely brilliant on both the nose and palate, with the bouquet offering up an almost exotic mix of grapefruit, tart orange, a touch of nuttiness, wild yeasts, slate, petrol, orange peel and plenty of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is deep, pure, full-bodied and utterly seamless, with great focus and cut, a rock solid core, ripe, racy acids and tremendous backend lift on the very, very long, refined and minerally finish. My tasting note cannot hope to do justice to the sheer beauty of this magical young wine! 2027-2085. **98+**.

2017 Kirchspiel Riesling Grosses Gewächs- Weingut Keller

The 2017 Keller Kirchspiel GG is another outstanding wine, but it had the bad luck to have to follow in the wake of the otherworldly Pettenthal in the tasting this year. The nose here is refined and complex, offering up scents of tangerine, pink grapefruit, a superb base of limestone minerality, spring flowers, a hint of petrol, citrus peel and a gentle dollop of wild yeasts in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, vibrant and nascently complex, with impeccable balance, bright acids and excellent focus and grip on the very long, snappy finish. 2027-2085. **94+**.

2017 Hubacker Riesling Grosses Gewächs- Weingut Keller

The yellow limestone base of the Hubacker vineyard is so evident in the 2017 vintage, as the very low yields give this element a central role in the aromatic and flavor profile of this beautiful young wine. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a lovely mix of blood orange, a hint of the *mirabelle* to come, smoky overtones, wild yeasts, lemongrass, citrus peel and a glorious base of yellow limestone minerality. On the palate the wine is deep, full, complex and very transparent, with a lovely core, excellent grip and mineral drive and a very long, focused and nascently complex finish. A great young Hubacker. 2027-2085. **94+**.



2017 Morstein Riesling Grosses Gewächs- Weingut Keller

Morstein is usually the most powerful GG in this lineup here at Weingut Keller, but the inherent elegance and refinement of the best 2017ers is very much apparent in this wine right out of the blocks this year. The nose delivers a beautiful constellation of tart orange, sweet grapefruit, lemongrass, chalky minerality, a touch of smokiness and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and sports great mid-palate depth, with a very precise and seamless sense of balance, racy acids, laser-like focus and stellar length and grip on the nascently complex and utterly refined finish. Fine, fine juice. 2030-2085. **97**.

2017 Abtserde Riesling Grosses Gewächs- Weingut Keller

Given the style of the vintage and the very, very low yields in the Abtserde in 2017, I was expecting a great GG from this vineyard and that is exactly what Klaus-Peter has fashioned. The

superb bouquet wafts from the glass in a fine array of pink grapefruit, blood orange, complex, very pure limestone minerality, wild yeasts, dried flowers and a touch of citrus zest in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, complex and full-bodied, with stunning mineral drive, a great core, ripe, perfectly integrated acids and a stunningly long, pure and dancing finish. This is still a very, very young wine, but it will be a legend when it is ready to drink! 2027-2085. **98+**.

2017 G-Max Riesling- Weingut Keller

The 2017 G-Max from Weingut Keller is simply brilliant. Again, the inherent elegance of the vintage is very much in evidence here, with the wine showing magical minerality and lift from the short crop and the great quality of the growing season. The youthful nose offers up scents of pink grapefruit, tart orange, a touch of lemongrass, gentle notes of wild yeasts, a very refined base of limestone soil elements, a nice dollop of smokiness and an exotic topnote of spiced meats. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and racy, with a great core, outstanding focus and grip and impeccable balance on the very long, vibrant finish. There is a sense of seamless electricity and endless backend lift in the 2017 G-Max that is simply amazing. 2030-2095. **100**.

Noble Sweet Wines

2017 Limestone Riesling Kabinett - Weingut Keller

I am not certain, but I am guessing that the fruit for this lovely Kabinett hailed from the Kirchspiel, as it was affected less by the August hail and production figures here were a bit better than in the Morstein or Abtserde in 2017. The wine is really pretty, wafting from the glass in a mix of peach, a touch of orange zest, bee pollen, a lovely base of limestone minerality and a topnote of fruit blossoms. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, crisp and filigreed, with lovely delicacy of step, fine focus and grip and excellent backend minerality on the long and complex finish. A lovely Kabinett. 2018-2040. **91+**.

2017 Niersteiner Pettenthal Riesling Kabinett - Weingut Keller

The 2017 Pettenthal Kabinett from Klaus-Peter Keller is stellar. The bouquet is pure and delicately strung, offering up scents of apple, white peach, a superb base of slate, white flowers and an exotic topnote of violet. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, refined and filigreed, with lovely intensity of flavor, great purity and complexity and a long, vibrant and perfectly balanced finish. Lovely juice. 2018-2045. **92**.

2017 Niersteiner Hipping Riesling Kabinett- Weingut Keller

The 2017 Hipping Kabinett is even a step up from the lovely Pettenthal this year. The nose wafts from the glass in a refined blend of pear, white peach, a touch of passion fruit, a lovely base of slate, citrus blossoms, a bit of bee pollen and a nice touch of salinity in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, complex and dancing, with laser-like focus, fine grip and cut and a very, very long, elegant and zesty finish. Just a classic bottle of old school, filigreed Kabinett. 2020-2050. **94+**.

2017 Westhofener Abtserde Riesling Spätlese- Weingut Keller

The 2017 Abtserde Spätlese from Weingut Keller is a beautiful and very expressive young wine that is already very easy to drink, though it has the structural chassis to carry it far, far into the future. The sole problem is going to be resisting the temptation to drink this gorgeous wine in its youth! The bouquet delivers a fine blend of peach, pear, white lilies, chalky minerality, a hint of smokiness and an esthery topnote of bee pollen. On the palate the wine is medium-full and juicy on the attack, with a lovely core, great mineral drive, snappy acids, superb focus and grip and a very long, energetic and filigreed finish. Great juice. 2018-2050+. **94**.

2017 Westhofener Riesling Auslese- Weingut Keller

The 2017 Westhofener Auslese is a lovely and beautifully succulent example of the vintage. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a vibrant blend of sweet peach, fresh pineapple, honeycomb, salty limestone minerality and a topnote of orange blossoms. On the palate the wine is medium-full, pure and racy, with beautiful balance, a fine core and superb cut and grip on the long, complex finish. There is really impressive backend mineral drive and lift here. 2023-2060. **93.**

2017 Westhofener Kirchspiel Riesling Auslese- Weingut Keller

The 2017 Kirchspiel Auslese is another outstanding example of the vintage, with lovely purity to its fruit component coupled with great acidity and chalky minerality. The nose offers up a complex blend of white peach, a hint of the yellow plum to come, limestone soil tones, citrus blossoms and an esthery topnote of bee pollen. On the palate the wine is crisp, full and succulent on the attack, with great refinement and balance, zesty acids and a long, complex and energetic finish that closes with lovely limestone mineral drive. Fine, fine juice. 2023-2075+. **94+.**

2017 Westhofener Abtserde Riesling Auslese- Weingut Keller

Klaus-Peter noted that the Abtserde Auslese was made almost entirely from shriveled berries in 2017. This wine is a bit more closed on the nose than the Spätlese, but equally pure and vibrant in its constellation of pear, ripe apple, tangerine, limestone minerality, a touch of honeycomb, orange zest and a floral topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, medium-full, refined and nascently complex, with racy acids, laser-like focus and stellar grip on the very, very long, pure and oh, so promising finish. This will probably start to drink well in five or six years, but its true apogee will be a decade or two down the road. Brilliant young wine! 2024-2075. **95.**

2017 Westhofener Abtserde Riesling Auslese Goldkapsel- Weingut Keller

The 2017 Gold Kap Auslese from the Abtserde is equally stunning. The bouquet has a gentle and truly beautiful glaze to it, offering up scents of white cherries, yellow plums, honeycomb, citrus blossoms, violets and a lovely undertow of limestone minerality. On the palate the wine is pure, full, complex and very light on its feet, with a lovely core, great grip and length and a very complex, refined and zesty finish. Gorgeous juice. 2022-2075. **95.**

2017 Westhofener Abtserde Riesling Beerenauslese Goldkapsel- Weingut Keller

Amazingly, both the BA and TBA from the Abtserde include almost no botrytis as well, as Klaus-Peter noted that “this and the TBA are probably ninety percent shriveled berries and have only about ten percent botrytis included in them.” The BA from the Abtserde is beautifully pure and elegant on both the nose and palate, with the bouquet offering up scents of peach, fresh apricot, honey, orange blossoms and a hint of new leather. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and quite zesty, with a superb spine of acidity, excellent focus and grip and a very, very long, vibrant and nascently complex finish. A beautiful Beerenauslese. 2021-2060+. **96+.**

2017 Niersteiner Hipping Riesling Beerenauslese- Weingut Keller

I love the 2017 Beerenauslese from the Hipping vineyard from Klaus-Peter Keller. The bouquet is pure and very elegant, delivering a fine constellation peach, tangerine, pineapple, honeycomb, a lovely base of salty minerality and a topnote of orange blossoms. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, suave on the attack and seamless in its balance, with a fine core, bright, zesty acids and stunning length and grip on the dazzling finish. A gorgeous and supremely elegant BA. 2018-2065. **95.**

2017 Westhofener Abtserde Riesling Trockenbeerenauslese Goldkapsel- Weingut Keller

The 2017 Abtserde TBA from Klaus-Peter Keller is a magical young wine and again, it is defined by its elegance and is extremely light on its feet for its level. The stunning bouquet soars

from the glass in a blaze of *mirabelle*, tangerine, a touch of mango, violets, lilacs, honey and just a hint of the leather to come with bottle age. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and extremely racy in personality, with a rock solid core, laser-like focus and a very, very long, electric and perfectly balanced finish. Sheer brilliance! 2018-2075. **98.**

2017 Monsheimer Silberberg Rieslaner Trockenbeerenauslese- Weingut Keller

Having cut my teeth with the electric Rieslaners from Hans-Günther Schwartz at Müller-Catoir back in the decade of the 1980s, this is a varietal that I have a very soft spot for in my heart and the Kellers' examples are the closest thing I have crossed paths with to those legendary bottlings from thirty years ago. The 2017 Rieslaner TBA from the Silberberg vineyard is magical this year, soaring from the glass in a beautiful blend of yellow plum, guava, a touch of blood orange, wild yeasts, a lovely base of minerality, honey and orange zest in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and very, very pure, with a great core, superb focus and cut and a very, very long, electric finish of perfect balance. This is as good as Rieslaner ever gets! 2018-2055. **97.**

A Few More Keller 2016ers Not Reviewed Previously

2016 Westhofen "R" Riesling Trocken- Weingut Keller

This is a cuvée made from a parcel of vines planted in 1963 that was raised fully eighteen months in *fuder* prior to bottling. The bouquet is pure and complex, offering up scents of tart orange, grapefruit, wild yeasts, lemongrass, a fine base of chalky soil tones and a topnote of lemon zest. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and classy, with a lovely core, bright acids and a long, elegant and vibrant finish. This is really a superb bottle and very closer in quality to the Grosses Gewächs. 2023-2055+. **93.**

2016 Nierstein Riesling Trocken- Weingut Keller

The 2016 Trocken bottling from Nierstein is a fine example of the vintage, coming in at 12.5 percent alcohol and virtually bone dry, as Klaus-Peter noted that there is only one gram per liter of residual sugar in this wine. The superb nose jumps from the glass in a mix of grapefruit, wild yeasts, lemongrass, orange peel and a complex base of slate. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, complex and rock solid at the core, with great balance and grip, fine focus and a long, poised and racy finish. This is a marvelous contrast with the limestone minerality of the above wine, with both being simply excellent, but quite different in soil signatures. 2021-2050. **93.**

Mythos Mosel Estates

I tasted quite a bit more wine during the weekend Mythos Mosel events than the notes that appear below. But, as this article is already sufficiently long, I have not included notes on wines that I tasted and with which I was a bit less impressed, of which there were quite a few. There seem to be quite a few estates that are emulating the more muscular style of dry wines found at estates such as Weingut van Volxem or Weingut Loosen, and which I find rather heavy-handed and less interesting than the more delicate side of the Mosel. The Loosen wines, which I tasted a few over the course of the weekend, were consistent with what I have come to expect from the estate, with the Prädikat wines rather sweet and burly for their respective levels and the dry wines broad-shouldered and a tad blunt in style. They are well-made in their respective style, but not what I look for in great German wines. In a variation on a similar theme, I have found that the Weingut van Volxem wines, which purport to harken back to a more ancient "traditional Mosel style" of the early twentieth century when the wines were known widely as Hock and

internationally very popular, all end up tasting pretty much the same, as the methodology in the cellars to craft these bigger-bodied wines with relatively higher alcohol levels seem to somehow lose their signature of terroir. They are again quite well-made in their style, but it is awfully hard for me to tell the difference between one vineyard and another when they are produced as they are today. I only mention these two estates, as they are two of the “bigger stars” on the Mosel for their particular styles of more muscular wines, and I tasted examples during Mythos Mosel from several other estates (often with younger winemakers taking over) that seem to want to emulate these styles and whose wines were rather alcoholic in their Trocken guises and rather overtly sweet and heavy-handed at their various Prädikat levels of noble sweet wines. So, there are plenty of less than inspiring wines that I tried during the Mythos events that I have not bothered to include in this article as a result. However, the small handful of estates whose wines appear below stood out sufficiently for their quality and lovely stylistic sensibilities to merit inclusion in this feature and would be producers I may add to my travel schedule one of these days and certainly merit attention from subscribers who love classically styled Mosel wines.



Thomas Haag, left, playing the consummate host at one of the Mythos Mosel events held at Schloss Lieser.

Weingut Dr. Hermann (Erden)

I had never tasted a wine previously from Weingut Dr. Hermann in Erden, but as they were invited by the Richter family to show their wines at Weingut Ferdinand Max Richter during the Mythos Mosel events, I figured that they had a good chance of being pretty serious in quality

and classical in style, so I happily waded into their lineup on the warm Sunday afternoon of the Mythos weekend. I was very happy that I did, as several of the wines I tried were excellent, and though not every bottling shown was in the top division, there were enough high water marks in their lineup to warrant a visit to the winery to taste the whole range here on one of my upcoming trips. The estate farms a bit over nine hectares of vines in top villages such as Erden and Ürzig, but I was unsuccessful in finding out a lot about their estate through my internet searches (as the estate's website is under construction and most other information I found was written in German and not particularly in-depth when translated). Christian Hermann ferments his wines both in stainless steel and fuder, depending on the bottling and what he is looking for in the structure of the finished wine. He has been also one of the early proponents of placing the names of specific "lieux à dits" on the labels of some of his bottlings, as German wine laws have changed and now allow this. I will plan to visit here one of these tasting trips and get to know the estate better. I did note that the estate bottles all of its Kabinetten under screwcap, which is too bad, as the two examples I tasted from the 2017 vintage were lovely and really deserved natural corks for a longer life in bottle.

2016 Erdener Treppchen Riesling Feinherb Goldkapsel- Weingut Dr. Hermann

The 2016 Treppchen Feinherb Goldkapsel was going to be a Grosses Gewächs bottling from this fine vineyard in Erden, but the fermentation stopped with still twenty grams per liter of residual sugar. The wine is 10.5 percent alcohol and was fermented in *fuder*. It is quite attractive on the nose, offering up scents of apple, pear, slate, dried flowers and a delicate topnote of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is fullish, crisp and well-balanced, but pretty muscular in style, with a good core and fine length and grip on the zesty finish. It is not quite as refined in personality as many of these other wines from Dr. Hermann, but then again, it was not intended to end up the way it has. Good, solid wine. 2020-2040. **88+**.

2017 Kinheimer Hubertuslay Riesling Kabinett- Weingut Dr. Hermann (screwcap)

The 2017 Kinheimer Hubertuslay Kabinett from Dr. Hermann is a very pretty wine with good cut and backend lift. The wine comes in at eight percent alcohol in 2017, with forty grams per liter of residual sugar balancing nicely its 9.5 grams per liter of acidity in this snappy vintage. The nose is bright and wide open, offering up scents of apple, lime, a lovey base of slate, a touch of bee pollen and a floral topnote redolent of lilacs. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and nicely mineral on the backend, with lovely intensity of flavor, ripe acids and fine focus and grip on the well-balanced finish. Good juice. 2018-2035. **89**.

2017 Ürziger Würzgarten Riesling Kabinett- Weingut Dr. Hermann (screwcap)

The estate has old vines in the Würzgarten, with this Kabinett made from a parcel that ranges from sixty to one hundred years of age. The 2017 is utterly classic in profile and a lovely bottle of Kabinett, wafting from the glass in a vibrant blend of apple, lime, spring flowers, a beautiful base of salty minerality and that signature topnote of spices. On the palate the wine is medium-full, pure and filigreed, with excellent balance and grip, lovely nascent complexity and a long, bouncy and beautifully focused finish. Just lovely- wish it was bottled under cork! 2018-2035+. **92**.

2017 Erdener Treppchen "Kearsley" Riesling Spätlese- Weingut Dr. Hermann

The Kearsley is one of the top *lieux à dits* in the original Treppchen vineyard, situated on one of the steepest sections of the vineyard. The vines here are only twenty years of age, but ungrafted, and the 2017 Spätlese is very pretty and filigreed in style. The bouquet offers up an aromatic constellation of apple, white cherry, a lovely base of slate, a touch of wild yeasts and a

lovely, esthery topnote of bee pollen. On the palate the wine is medium-full, complex and beautifully light on its feet, with fine focus and grip, ripe, zesty acids and a long, poised and classy finish. Good juice. 2018-2045. **91.**

2017 Erdener Treppchen Riesling Spätlese Alte Reben “Herzlei” Goldkapsel- Dr. Hermann

Herzlei is another prized *lieu à dit* in the Erdener Treppchen vineyard. Formerly, Herzlei was its own vineyard, but was subsumed into the larger Treppchen back when the German wine laws were last formalized. Christian Hermann has a parcel of one hundred and twenty year-old vines here in the Herzlei, which lie on blue slate right on border of the Erdener Prälat vineyard. The 2017 Gold Kap Spätlese from the Herzlei is stellar, wafting from the glass in an aromatic constellation of white cherries, pear, a complex base of salty slate minerality, lilacs and bee pollen. On the palate the wine is medium-full, complex and shows wonderful old vine creaminess at the core, while still staying light on its feet and filigreed. The finish is long, the acids are ripe and zesty and there is terrific lift and bounce on the long and classy finish. Fine, fine Spätlese! 2020-2050. **93.**

Weingut Peter Lauer (Ayl)

Peter Lauer is one of the winegrowers I would have liked to have visited at his winery during my trip in May, but I could just not find room. I have tasted at the estate in Ayl in the past and have very much liked what I have tasted here, so I was happy to at least have a chance to camp out in front of the winery's table at one of the Mythos Mosel events and at least taste through a small range of their excellent 2017ers. The wines which I tasted from Peter at the Mythos event were all excellent and I have to assume that the entire portfolio here in 2017 is equally compelling.

2017 Ayler Kupp Riesling Trocken- Weingut Peter Lauer

The 2017 Ayler Kupp Riesling Trocken from Peter Lauer is a lovely wine. It offers up a bright and expressive bouquet of green apple, pink grapefruit, wild yeasts, a lovely base of slate and a topnote of lime peel. On the palate the wine is crisp, medium-full and racy, with a fine core, lovely precision and grip and a long, snappy, complex and beautifully balanced finish. Fine juice. 2018-2040. **90.**

2017 Ayler Kupp Riesling Feinherb- Weingut Peter Lauer

With the high acids of the 2017 vintage, it is not surprising that I tasted so many excellent examples of Feinherb, and this one from the Ayler Kupp from Peter Lauer is excellent. The wine has Spätlese sweetness on the palate, though I would suspect the residual sugars are significantly below the actual Spätlese bottling this year. The lovely nose offer sup a fine mix of pear, apple, citrus blossoms, bee pollen, slate and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is medium-full, pure and zesty, with a lovely synthesis of ripe fruit, backend minerality and ripe and snappy acids. The finish is long, focused and nascently complex, with lovely inner tension and lift. Fine juice. 2018-2040. **91.**

2017 Ayler Riesling Feinherb- Weingut Peter Lauer

This too is an excellent example of Feinherb. The nose wafts from the glass in a bright and bouncy blend of apple, blood orange, slate, citrus zest and a nice touch of wild yeasts in the upper register. On the palate the wine is crisp, fullish and succulent at the core, with fine acids and focus, good nascent complexity and a long, vibrant and classy finish. This is a touch bigger wine than the Ayler Kupp Feinherb, but equally impressive. 2018-2040. **91.**

2017 Ayler Kupp Riesling Kabinett- Weingut Peter Lauer

The 2017 Ayler Kupp Kabinett from Peter Lauer is an absolute classic example of this Prädikat, with the delicacy and filigree one hopes for, but so seldom finds in this era of global warming. The first class nose delivers a lovely mix of white cherries, lime, a salty base of slate minerality, bee pollen and spring flowers. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, pure and utterly refined, with a lightness of step, superb complexity, zesty acids and lovely focus and grip on the elegant and perfectly balanced finish. An excellent Kabinett. 2018-2050. **93.**

2017 Ayler Kupp Riesling Spätlese- Weingut Peter Lauer

The 2017 Spätlese from the Kupp vineyard in Ayl is another excellent wine from Peter Lauer. This is every bit as classical in its profile as the Kabinett, offering up a complex and juicy bouquet of white cherries, pear, slate, a touch of honeycomb, salty soil elements and a topnote of orange blossoms. On the palate the wine is medium-full, zesty and noteworthy in its purity, with excellent focus and grip, a succulent core and lovely backend mineral drive on the long, bright and bouncy finish. Fine, fine juice. 2018-2050. **93+.**

2017 Ayler Kupp Riesling Auslese- Weingut Peter Lauer

The 2017 Auslese from the Ayler Kupp includes about twenty percent botrytized bunches in this vintage. The wine is pure and classy, wafting from the glass in a lovely mix of white cherries, fresh pineapple, a touch of honeycomb, spring flowers and a gentle bass note of slate minerality. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish and nicely detailed, with a good core, fine focus and grip and a long, succulent and zesty finish. At this early stage, this is more defined by its beautiful fruit than the Spätlese, which has retained far more backend minerality, but this may only be a youthful stage of puppy fat for this very refined Auslese. 2018-2060. **93.**

Weingut Carl Loewen (Leiwen)

Weingut Carl Loewen was new to me prior to Mythos Mosel, but I had the chance to share a dinner with the young and dynamic Christopher Loewen at the start of the event and tasted a nice range of the estate's drier Riesling bottlings from 2017 at one of the weekend tastings. Christopher is now running the estate alongside of his father, Karl-Josef, with the family farming fifteen hectares of vines in the villages of Leiwen, Longuich, Detzem and Thörnich. The origin of the estate dates back to 1805, when Napoleon confiscated the vineyards and cellars of the Maximin monastic order and had the brothers' property split up and sold; this was the same sale where the von Schubert family purchased what is today Maximin Grünhäus. The Loewen family purchased the vineyard of Maximin Klosterlay at this time and this has been the cornerstone of their family estate ever since. Throughout the 1990s, Karl-Josef Loewen sought out and purchased steep parcels of old vines in the area that were on the verge of abandonment, adding to the family vineyard patrimony. In 2013, they were able to add another of the old monastic vineyards to their family portfolio, buying the Maximin Herrenberg vineyard in the village of Longuich, which is still planted to vines from 1896. More than half of the family's holdings today are now in old, ungrafted vineyards, ranging from sixty to more than one hundred and twenty years of age. Christopher Loewen simply showed a range of his dry Rieslings at the Mythos Mosel event, as he has become quite well known for these wines in recent vintages, but the family also produces a full range of noble sweet wines as well. Christopher ferments solely with indigenous yeasts, uses older, thousand liter fuders for the higher level wines (and plans to switch everything to fuder eventually) and seems to be one of the bright, up and coming stars on the Mosel. The 2017ers had all been bottled at the end of March and were

showing very nicely two months later. I was very impressed with what I tasted at Mythos Mosel and hope to have a chance to visit the estate on future trips to Germany.

2017 Riesling “Alte Reben”- Weingut Carl Loewen

The 2017 Riesling Alte Reben bottling comes in at twelve percent alcohol and found its balance with twelve grams per liter of residual sugar, so it is not labeled as Trocken. This cuvée is made from a parcel of fifty to seventy year-old vines in the Klostergarten vineyard in the village of Leiwen. This is an excellent wine, and with the high acids of 2017, this is essentially a dry wine, despite not being below ten grams per liter of sugar. The bouquet offers up a complex nose of tart orange, salty minerality, a touch of menthol, a fine base of slate and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is fullish, complex and light on its feet, with a good core, fine focus and grip and a long, vibrant and very well balanced finish. Good juice and a fine value! 2018-2035. 91.



Christopher Loewen of Weingut Carl Loewen at one of the Mythos Mosel events.

2017 Laurentiuslay Riesling “Alte Reben” Trocken- Weingut Carl Loewen

This wine hails from a parcel of one hundred year-old, ungrafted vines in the Laurentiuslay vineyard in Leiwen and was fermented and raised in *fuder*. The 2017 is twelve percent alcohol and carries eight grams per liter of residual sugar. This is absolutely superb on both the nose and palate, with the bouquet offering up scents of sweet grapefruit, tart orange,

wild yeasts, a beautiful base of slate, citrus peel and a nice touch of lemongrass in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, suave and complex, with excellent balance and grip, snappy, ripe acids and superb length and grip on the focused and racy finish. A lovely wine. 2021-2050+. **93.**

2017 “Maximin 1896” Herrenberg Riesling Trocken- Weingut Carl Loewen

The Maximin Herrenberg vineyard is the lower section, closest to the Mosel River, of the larger Herrenberg vineyard in the village of Longuich. This bottling is made from ungrafted vines planted in 1896, as the name suggests, and is 12.5 percent octane in the 2017 vintage. This section of the vineyard is red slate, rather than the blue slate found in the Laurentiuslay, and the wine is again fermented and raised in twenty-five year-old *fuder*. The nose is very refined in its blend of pear, a touch of clementine, lovely floral tones, slate, orange zest and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish and a bit more reserved in profile out of the blocks than the Laurentiuslay, with a fine core and lovely cut and grip on the long and precise finish. This is probably every bit as good as the Laurentiuslay this year, but it is more closed today and I have to give a slight nod to the above wine for the present time. 2023-2050+. **92+.**

2017 Maximin Herrenberg Riesling Grosses Gewächs- Weingut Carl Loewen

The parcel of vines used for the Grosses Gewächs bottling from the Maximin Herrenberg are a touch less venerable than those above, as these ungrafted vines were only planted in 1902! The wine is 12.5 percent alcohol and ended up with eight grams per liter of residual sugar. It is a superb young wine in the making, offering up a very promising bouquet of pink grapefruit, blood orange, white flowers, citrus peel and a superb base of salty minerality. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and elegant in profile, with a fine core, lovely grip and a long, poised and perfectly balanced finish. Another excellent wine in the making. 2023-2055+. **93.**

2017 Ritsch Riesling Grosses Gewächs- Weingut Carl Loewen

The grand cru vineyard of Ritsch is in the village of Thörnich and is planted with relatively younger vines, by the high standards of the Loewen family, as these vines range from forty to sixty years of age. The soils here are grey slate with quartzite. The 2017 GG comes in at 12.5 percent octane and was finished with 8.2 grams per liter of residual sugar. This wine delivers an outstanding aromatic constellation of grapefruit, green apple, a nice touch of wild yeasts, salty slate minerality, orange zest and a topnote of lemongrass. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, racy and very elegant in profile, with a rock solid core, lovely length and grip and an impressively refined, nascently complex finish. High class juice. 2024-2055+. **93+.**

2017 “1896” Riesling- Weingut Carl Loewen

This special bottling of 1896 from the Maximin Herrenberg vineyard was made using a basket press (one of Klaus-Peter Keller’s techniques in recent years to retain more elegance in the dry wines) and raised in the oldest *fuder* in the Loewen cellars. The wine is twelve percent alcohol in 2017 and ended up with thirteen grams per liter of residual sugar, so essentially still a dry wine, though above the official level of Trocken. The bouquet is outstanding, offering up a complex and quite floral mélange of tart orange, pink grapefruit, citrus blossoms, salty minerality, orange peel and a dollop of wild yeasts in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, vibrant and beautifully balanced, with a fine core and excellent focus and grip on the very long and classy finish. Fine, fine wine. 2023-2055+. **94.**

Weingut Max Ferdinand Richter (Mülheim)

Weingut Max Ferdinand Richter was an estate that I really knew next to nothing about prior to this trip in May, as I had tasted a wine of theirs here or there over the last decade or so,

but really had never planned to visit the property and had no real sense of where in the firmament of Middle Mosel stars they might fall. However, during one of the early press tastings associated with Mythos Mosel, David Rayer, Jean Fisch and I were chatting and Jean mentioned this estate and said that he felt I would really like the style of the wines here these days. As Jean and David (who write the Mosel Fine Wines report) are about as up to date on goings on in this beautiful wine country as anyone, I took their suggestion seriously and made a note to make sure I visited the winery during the Mythos Mosel tastings over the coming weekend. Happily, they were one of the hosting wineries for the weekend and had a fine range of wines available to sample. The estate is in the midst of a generational change, as long-time proprietor Dirk Richter has been slowly handing over the winemaking reins here to his son, Constantin, and the wines are really excellent examples of the Middle Mosel. The family estate has been in the Richter hands for more than three hundred years now, as an ancestor of the Richters managed somehow to keep Napoleon out of their town of Mülheim during the French conquest of this part of Germany in the early nineteenth century, and consequently, they have been able to keep the family vineyard legacy intact. The Richters farm seventeen and a half hectares of vines here in the heart of the middle Mosel, with vineyards in their home village of Mülheim augmented by fine plots in some of the most famous vineyards in the area: Graacher Himmelreich and Domprobst, Wehlener Sonnenuhr and Brauneberger Juffer-Sonnenuhr.



This is a good-sized estate with excellent holdings and I have been quite remiss to have not known about the family's wines prior to this trip, as they were absolutely classic in style and excellent in quality. While chatting with Constantin Richter at the Mythos tasting, I found out that their importer here in New York, Massanois Imports (whose portfolio I quite like) had a goodly range of 2015s and 2016s in the market as well, and they very generously offered to send

samples of some of these two vintages to augment what I had tasted at the estate in Mülheim in May. Consequently, the notes that follow are much deeper than I had initially hoped and I was very delighted to have these 2015ers and 2016ers chilled and ready for tasting once I had recovered a bit from my knee surgery and could start tasting again. Needless to say, my convalescence was really quite pleasant with these wines on hand! I have grouped the wines below by vintage, rather than differentiating between those tasted here in New York in June and those tastings in Mülheim in May (for those keeping score at home, I did not take down AP numbers of the wines tasted at the winery). Weingut Max Ferdinand Richter is a superb producer of classically filigreed, terroir-driven middle Mosel Rieslings (which I should have known about before) and I can recommend them very highly. From what I have seen of their pricing, they offer up exceptional value! Based on the lovely range I have now tasted of their 2017, 2016s and 2015s, this is an estate that will definitely be on my regularly-scheduled winery visits in future spring tours of the Middle Mosel.

2017 Mülheimer Sonnenlay “Zeppelin” QbA- Weingut Max Ferdinand Richter AP #14

The Zeppelin label bottling of QbA from the Sonnenlay vineyard is the estate riesling bottling from Max Ferdinand Richter. The 2017 comes in at ten percent alcohol and is sealed under screwcap. The wine shows a lovely spiciness on the nose, offering up scents of apple, a touch of fresh pineapple, salty minerality and a topnote of lemongrass. On the palate the wine is crisp, medium-full and zesty, with lovely mineral drive, a good core and fine focus and grip on the long and bouncy finish. I would guess the residual sugar here is just over the minimum for Trocken in 2017, but it balances the good acids of the vintage perfectly and the overall impression is of a quite dry wine. Good juice. **89.**

2017 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Kabinett- Weingut Max Ferdinand Richter

The 2017 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Kabinett from Dirk and Constantin Richter is utterly classic and will age long and gracefully. The pure and vibrant nose jumps from the glass in a blend of pear, white cherry, a lovely base of slate minerality, a dollop of wild yeasts, incipient notes of vanilla bean and a topnote of spring flowers. On the palate the wine is pure, medium-bodied and light on its feet, with fine filigree and focus, ripe, vibrant acids and a long, complex and weightless finish. Classic Kabinett from one of Germany’s greatest *terroirs*. 2018-2045. **92+.**

2017 Veldenzer Elisenberger Riesling Kabinett- Weingut Max Ferdinand Richter

The village of Velden lies just a bit back from the river front, behind the villages of Brauneberg and Mülheim. Consequently, the base of soil in the Elisenberger vineyard is quartzite, rather than grey slate. This is a *monopole* of the Richter family and the vines here are forty to fifty years of age. The vineyard has produced a lovely Kabinett in 2017, offering up a complex aromatic constellation of apple, white cherries, a touch of herb tones, bee pollen and a lovely base of salty minerality. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and flat out delicious out of the blocks, with lovely intensity of flavor, impressive focus and grip and a long, complex and zesty finish. This is a tad more fruit-driven in personality than the Wehlener Sonnenuhr Kabinett, but it too is a lovely example of Kabinett. 2018-2040. **91.**

2017 Brauneberg Juffer-Sonnenuhr Riesling Spätlese- Weingut Max Ferdinand Richter

The estate’s vines in this great vineyard range from forty to fifty years of age and they have produced a fine Spätlese in 2017. The nose is pure and classic in profile, offering up scents of pear, white cherry, a hint of the *mirabelle* to come, a fine base of salty slate, bee pollen and a nice touch of herbs in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bouncy and

classic in flavor profile, with fine depth at the core, ripe acids, impeccable balance and outstanding cut and lift on the long and complex finish. Fine, fine juice. 2018-2050. **93.**

2016 Brauneberg Juffer Riesling Kabinett Trocken- Weingut Max Ferdinand Richter

The 2016 Juffer Kabinett Trocken from the Richter family is a lovely, delicate wine, coming in at eleven percent octane and carrying seven grams per liter of residual sugar. It offers up a fine bouquet of lime, apple, a fine base of slate, a touch of Brauneberg's gentle herb tones and a topnote of orange peel. On the palate the wine is crisp, fullish and nicely focused, with a good core, fine balance and grip, bright acids and excellent grip on the long and nascently complex finish. Good juice. 2018-2045. **90+.**

2016 Graacher Domprobst "Alte Reben"- Weingut Max Ferdinand Richter

Constantin Richter raises ferments and raises his Alte Reben dry bottlings all in *fuder* and the 2016ers were bottled in September of 2017, after an extended *elevage*. The 2016 from the Domprobst vineyard in Graach finished at twelve percent alcohol and five percent residual sugar and is a lovely wine in the making. The nose wafts from the glass in a fine mix of blood orange, apple, citrus peel, wild yeasts and a fine base of slate minerality. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and youthfully complex, with a good core, fine focus and grip, zesty acids and a long, pure and still fairly youthful finish. This was tasted at Mythos Mosel on a steamy afternoon, and perhaps I have underrated it just a tad under the less than ideal conditions. But, there is depth and promise here and I would not be surprised if the wine ends up a point or so higher down the road. A fine bottle. 2022-2050. **92.**

2016 Mülheimer Sonnenlay "Alte Reben" Feinherb- Weingut Max Ferdinand Richter

The Sonnenlay is the top vineyard site in the village of Mülheim, which lies next door to Brauneberg. The 2016 Alte Reben from this vineyard was best balanced with just a touch over Trocken levels of residual sugar, hence its Feinherb designation, but it is essentially still a dry Riesling and a lovely bottle in the making. The bouquet delivers a fine blend of tart orange, apple, a bit of wild yeasts, a lovely base of slate and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is medium-full, pure and shows just a blush of sweetness on the attack, with a fine core, zesty acids and excellent focus and balance on the long and promising finish. As was the case with the above wine, this was tasted at Mythos Mosel and it may be even a shade better than my score. It is a bit more open out of the blocks than the Domprobst Alte Reben bottling, and every bit as promising. 2018-2045+. **91+.**

2016 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Kabinett- Weingut Max Ferdinand Richter AP #24

The 2016 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Kabinett from Max Ferdinand Richter is a lovely example of the vintage and its Prädikat, offering up a complex nose of apple, a touch of wild yeasts, vanilla bean, slate, spring flowers and a bit of petrol in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, crisp and juicy at the core, with lovely lightness of step, bright acids and fine backend mineral drive on the long, well-balanced and complex finish. This has the focus and filigree of classic Kabinett and is already a pleasure to drink, but it will age very nicely and probably be even better six to ten years down the road. 2018-2040+. **90.**

2016 Graacher Himmelreich Riesling Auslese- Weingut Max Ferdinand Richter AP #7

The 2016 Himmelreich Auslese from Max Ferdinand Richter is excellent on both the nose and palate. The classic bouquet jumps from the glass in a blend of pineapple, apple, a nice touch of honeycomb, orange zest, a nice touch of minerality and a topnote of lilac blossoms. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish and filigreed, with a lovely glossiness of sweet fruit on the attack, a good core, bright, zesty acids and fine focus and grip on the long, complex and dancing finish. This is a lovely, quite delicately styled bottle of Auslese. 2022-2055+. **93.**

2015 Graacher Domprobst “Alte Reben”- Weingut Max Ferdinand Richter AP #35

The 2015 version of Domprobst “Alte Reben” from the Richter family tips the scales at eleven percent alcohol, so it is a touch leaner than the lovely 2016 version. The wine delivers a complex aromatic constellation of peach, hints of *mirabelle*, lovely smokiness, a fine base of slate, dried flowers and a hint of the beeswax tones to come with further bottle age. On the palate the wine is crisp, fullish and beautifully balanced, with a fine core of fruit, excellent soil signature, bright, ripe acids and a long, complex and perfectly focused finish. This is a superb bottle of dry Riesling that is already starting to drink nicely, but clearly will age long and gracefully. 2018-2040+. **93.**

2015 Graacher Himmelreich Riesling Kabinett- Weingut Max Ferdinand Richter (mag)

The lovely 2015 Himmelreich Kabinett from Max Ferdinand Richter was served from magnum for the opening night festivities of Mythos Mosel, amongst dozens and dozens of superb magnums supplied by all of the participating wineries in the weekend festival. This wine was showing just beautifully out of magnum, offering up an excellent and utterly classic bouquet of lime, apple, a lovely base of minerality, orange zest and a topnote of fruit blossoms. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, pure and filigreed, with crisp acids, excellent focus and grip and a long, crystalline and classy finish. Classic Kabinett. 2018-2040+. **92+.**

2015 Brauneberger Juffer-Sonnenuhr Riesling Auslese- Weingut Max Ferd Richter AP #11

The 2015 Auslese from the Juffer-Sonnenuhr vineyard from the Richters is a lovely and wide open example of this superb *terroir*, offering up a gently glazed nose of pineapple, yellow plum, gentle mossiness, slate, honeycomb and a touch of citrus blossoms in the upper register. On the palate the wine is fullish, complex and fairly delicately profiled, with a fair bit of botrytis, moderate acids and a long, complex and wide open finish. This is not the cleanest botrytis I have ever encountered, but the wine is nicely balanced and still quite tasty. 2018-2040. **89.**



Photos of Weingut Max Ferdinand Richter courtesy of David Bowden.

Weingut von Kesselstaat (Trier)

Weingut von Kesselstaat is another estate whose wines I have long admired from afar, but never had the time to visit and taste a full range from a new vintage at the winery. The lineup the winery chose to show as part of the Mythos Mosel events was pretty limited, as they selected a few of their quite basic bottlings, figuring, no doubt, that the big and happy crowds of the weekend tastings would be in the mood for easily quaffable wines to continue their celebrations on into the evening, so there were only two bottlings in their presentation that struck me as worthy of taking proper notes on for inclusion in this article. Both wines were from the 2016 vintage and quite tasty, in the filigreed, understated style of von Kesselstaat. However, given the truly stunning array of great vineyards that the winery owns, I was kind of hoping for a bit more sizzle in their selection of wines to show for the Mythos events.

2016 Scharzhofberger Riesling Kabinett Feinherb- Weingut von Kesselstaat

The 2016 Scharzhofberg Kabinett Feinherb from Weingut von Kesselstaat is a very pretty middleweight, offering up a bright and inviting bouquet of tart orange, pear, a dollop of wild yeasts, spring flowers and a lovely base of slate. On the palate the wine is crisp, medium-full and zesty, with fine focus and grip, solid depth and a long, well-balanced finish. This is quite tasty, but perhaps a bit undernourished for the Scharzhofberg? 2018-2030+. **89.**

2016 Kaseler Nies'chen Riesling Spätlese- Weingut von Kesselstaat

The 2016 Kaseler Nies'chen Riesling Spätlese from Weingut von Kesselstaat is again a very pretty and stylish wine aromatically, with the nose wafting from the glass in a blend of apple, pear, salty minerality, bee pollen and a lovely topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is medium-full, juicy at the core and nicely filigreed, with bright, snappy acids, lovely focus and very good length and grip on the wide open and very tasty finish. There is an easy-going aspect to this wine that makes it very, very easy to drink today, but it also has the structure to age quite nicely. 2018-2040. **91.**

**A VERTICAL REPORT ON CUVÉE DOM PÉRIGNON
ONE OF CHAMPAGNE'S LONGEST-LIVED AND BRILLIANT WINES**



Perched up on the southwestern flank of the Montagne de Reims lies the premier cru village of Hautvillers. From here one has a sweeping view of the Vallée de la Marne unfolding to the west, with the village of Cumières immediately below, but also off towards the southeast is the city of Épernay and beyond it, the start of the Côtes de Blancs. This is clearly right in the heart of Champagne's top vineyard country, but Hautvillers is classified as a premier cru, rather than a grand cru. Despite this, not only is Hautvillers home to some the finest vineyards to be found in the region, but back in the second half of the seventeenth century, it was also called home by Dom Pérignon himself, who directed the Abbé de Saint-Pierre d'Hautvillers here during the time of Louis XIV. As many know, during his time at the abbey, he greatly contributed to Champagne as we know it today. The Abbé de Saint-Pierre d'Hautvillers was a Benedictine monastery founded in 650 AD by Saint Nivard, who was the Archbishop of Reims at this time. Legend has it that a dove alighted near Saint Nivard during a visit to the village and indicated that this was the place for him to build his new monastery. The abbey flourished during the era of the Carolingian dynasty, due to its growing library of ancient texts and the skeletal remains of Saint Helena, which had been brought back from Rome in 841 and created a pilgrimage destination for the faithful in the decades that followed. The pilgrims brought a steady income to

the Benedictines here, which eventually allowed them to purchase their first *hectares* of vineyards in the surrounding villages.

Pierre Pérignon was born in either December of 1638 or January of 1639, and lived a very long life by the standards of his era, passing away at the ripe age of seventy-five in September of 1715. The France that he knew his entire life was that under the Sun King, Louis XIV, and as the Pérignon family was quite well to do, there were ample opportunities for a young man of ambition such as Pierre. He entered a Benedictine monastery in Verdun in 1656 at the age of seventeen and took his vows two years later. He became an ordained priest ten years later in 1666. The Benedictine order placed an emphasis on both physical labor and sequestered time for prayer and reflection, and in 1668 Dom Pérignon relocated from the monastery in Verdun to the Abbé d'Hautvillers and took over the responsibilities for managing the monastery's vineyards and winemaking. At this time, Champagne was a still wine, but Dom Pérignon would eventually learn the contemporary methods used in Limoux to make sparkling wines there and began to experiment with the techniques in the cellars at Hautvillers. At this time, the Abbé d'Hautvillers was not the same prospering monastery it had been in its earliest days, as more worldly orders had been attracting the more important pledges from wealthy families than the more religious orders such as the Benedictines, as the younger sons of the nobility of this era (who were most often the candidates to the church) were less inclined to be enamored of the Benedictines' alternating of hard manual labor and cloistered prayer. There were better monastic options in the Sun King's France where they could join the church and still live a far more luxurious life as befitted their noble backgrounds. The Champagne region was also not one of the most illustrious wine-producing areas of France at this time, as its more northerly climate had not yet been wed to the production of sparkling wines, for which it was perfectly suited, and in this era, the still wines of the region were often thin, aggressively snappy with very high acids and lacked the subtle richness and complexity that the Cistercians at this same time were realizing in the warmer climes of Burgundy.

However, Dom Pérignon did have at his disposal at the Abbé d'Hautvillers a wide selection of grapes from the neighboring villages of the monastery, as not only the production from order's own vineyards were available to him, but also taxes to the church at this time were paid in grapes from the local *vignerons* and the Dom immediately began to understand that a superior wine could be produced by the art of blending grapes from different villages or varying the *cépages* as opportunity allowed or vintage characteristics might dictate. Through his insight and his growing skill as a blender, the vintage variations came to enhance the finished wines, perhaps by using a bit more pinot meunier from Cumières or pinot noir from Aÿ, or a bit more chardonnay from Avize or Cramant in the final blend, depending on how each variety had fared in a given growing season. The art of blending that is still so prized at so many of the *Grandes Marques* today can really be said to originate with Dom Pérignon at the Abbé d'Hautvillers in the latter half of the seventeenth century and this was by far his most important contribution to the Champagne that we know and love today. Dom Pérignon was very active during his long days as the cellar master here to visit the vineyards as harvest approached, tasting grapes from different villages and parcels in his dormitory at the abbey each day (legend has it that the grapes were delivered to him from various plots of vines late in the afternoon and he would taste them the following morning, prior to breakfast, when his palate was as fresh as possible) and he would set the date of harvest according to his grape tastings. The quality of the wines made at the abbey

began to grow exponentially under his stewardship, and they began to acquire a reputation across France that they had heretofore seldom known.

Dom Pérignon's time at the Abbé d'Hautvillers was also coincident with the development by the English of glass wine bottles in the 1660s and the introduction of cork as a wine stopper for the new bottles a few years later, which the English again introduced from their familiarity with cork in Portugal and Spain. So Dom Pérignon's timing was very good for making the significant strides forward in the quality of his wines from the abbey, though at this time, the sparkle in Champagne was still considered a flaw in a wine and it was not until the later days at the end of the seventeenth century that sparkling wines became fashionable at the court of Louis XIV and demand for them started to grow amongst the nobility. The advent of stronger, thicker glass bottles that could withstand the pressure of sparkling wines was very important in assisting in the growth of their popularity, as it was rare for the earliest versions of wine bottles to be able to survive the rigors of travel from their place of origin. But, for the vast majority of Dom Pérignon's era as the head of the winemaking for the Benedictines in Hautvillers, sparkling wine was not the standard wine product of the region and the tales that attribute the creation of Champagne as a sparkling wine to Dom Pérignon are more romantic legend than historical fact. His true contribution to Champagne as we know it today really has more to do with the realization that quality started in the vineyard and that each year's unique personality needed to be recognized and blending decisions taken accordingly to maximize the potential quality of the wines.

Moët et Chandon arrived on the scene in Champagne about a quarter century after the passing of Dom Pierre Pérignon in 1715, as the *Grande Marque* was originally founded in 1743 by Claude Moët. Eighty years later, in 1823, the director of the family Champagne house at the time, Pierre-Gabriel Chandon, purchased the Abbé de Saint-Pierre d'Hautvillers and its associated vineyards. The monastery had been sacked and burned many times over the preceding centuries and did not fare particularly well during the revolution of 1789, but it has been beautifully restored in recent times to serve as the welcoming center and historic window back into the past for connoisseurs of Cuvée Dom Pérignon. The final renovations at the abbey were begun in 2012 and took three years to complete, with much of the property lovingly restored to the way it could have been at the time of Dom Pérignon's tenure here, though one has to remember that he had arrived originally at the abbey at one of its nadirs of fortune and his fine winemaking was one of the main engines that allowed the monastery to again flourish by the end of his career. The anti-clerical nature of the French revolution seventy-five years later would certainly take its toll on the abbey and it was in disrepair when Pierre-Gabriel Chandon stepped in to rescue the historic site in 1823. Today, the Abbé de Saint-Pierre d'Hautvillers is a breathtakingly beautiful place to visit, perched on the side of the hillside village overlooking the Marne Valley below, and one can still visit the grave of Dom Pérignon himself that rests in church of Saint-Sindulphe next door to the abbey and wander the grounds and truly imagine what things could have been like here during the forty-seven years that Dom Pérignon called Hautvillers home. However, while the grounds still retain the sequestered feel of his era, the impeccably tasteful, luxuriant comfort and modern amenities of the welcome center in much of the interior today are certainly a number of steps up from Benedictine days!



A bas relief of Father Pierre Pérignon in the beautifully renovated Abbé de Saint-Pierre d'Hautvillers.

Moët et Chandon first began marketing their luxury cuvée bottling named after Dom Pérignon in 1937, with the first vintage released being the 1921 which had been aging in the *maison's* cellars in Épernay for fifteen years prior to its release. Over the years, it has become the world's most widely recognized *Tête de Cuvée*, and even people who have no real affinity for Champagne know and revere the brand, which is often seen as *de rigueur* for marking any important celebration in one's life- even if Champagne is not regularly part of one's dietary regimen. The bottling is made in fairly large quantities these days, though the exact production figures are kept from the public eye, but is always impeccably well-made and is one of Champagne's greatest wines. For nearly the last thirty years, the man responsible for the exceptional quality of Cuvée Dom Pérignon has been Richard Geoffroy, who has been with the house since 1990 and the *Chef de Cave* and chief architect of the wine for many, many years now. Given the nearly insatiable worldwide demand for Dom Pérignon, which necessitates millions of bottles be produced each year, Monsieur Geoffroy's time at the helm of the brand, which has been unblemished and produced some of the greatest vintages ever in the long history of the cuvée, must be seen as one of the great renaissance moments in Champagne. Today, the *maison* is owned by the luxury conglomerate of LVMH, which was formed when Louis-Vuitton and Moët-Hennessy merged in 1987. In recent years, the marketing team at LVMH has sought to create a separate brand identity for Dom Pérignon, distancing it a bit from Moët et Chandon, and

the latter's name no longer graces the labels of DP- though this is a relatively recent phenomenon.

One of Champagne's greatest ironies is that the vast majority of bottles of Cuvée Dom Pérignon are drunk fairly soon after their release into the market, with so many celebrations the world over marked by bottles of the newest release of this superb Champagne, despite the very obvious fact that Dom Pérignon continues to be a wine crafted for long-term aging and only reaches its true apogee of peak perfection twenty or thirty years out from the vintage. The house has long recognized this fact and began a program of holding back a percentage of bottles for later release, allowing the wines to blossom in their cellars prior to re-releasing them into the market for connoisseurs who might be interested in perfectly-stored bottles of past vintages that have begun to truly blossom and drink with the inherent generosity of this cuvée. For Dom Pérignon is crafted in a properly-structured style for long-term aging, as the *maison* has always prized a very reductive winemaking style that avoided oxidation anywhere along the path from vineyard to release in bottle, making the wine racy, minerally and tightly-knit in almost every vintage when it is first delivered onto the market. There are occasional exceptions to this rule, such as the 1982 or 1990 Dom Pérignon, where the opulence of the vintage translates into an uncharacteristically generous early showing of the bottling, but vintages in this character remain the absolute exceptions and almost all new releases of Dom Pérignon start out with plenty of *nervosité* and are built for long-term cellaring. It is much to the credit of Monsieur Geoffroy and his team here, as well as their predecessors, that the structured and reductive style of the wine has never wavered, despite the reality that so many thousands of bottles are drunk in their relative youth. But, given how brilliantly the wine ages and the magic that unfolds in this wine with decades of bottle age, perhaps the temptation to alter things was never really felt in the cellars here.

One of the recent changes that has arrived with Cuvée Dom Pérignon is the desire to bottle it in more vintages in the last two decades than had been the case in the 1970s or 1980s. As Richard Geoffroy related during my visit to the Abbé d'Hautvillers in March of this year, "I do regret that we did not start thinking about producing Dom Pérignon in more vintages earlier on in my career, as often, with careful selection, we have the capability to produce something very special, even if the overall quality of the year is not exceptional." He gives some of the credit for this realization at Dom Pérignon to the smaller *vignerons* in the Champagne region who prize the expression of each vintage character in their own wines, and which began to filter up to some of the bigger producers such as Dom Pérignon. Monsieur Geoffroy notes that "the younger and smaller *vignerons*, led originally, of course, by Anselme Selosse, have introduced a degree of change in Champagne that has not always been welcome at the big houses, but which is important and is truly transforming Champagne today." As he continues, "sometimes it is important to shake things up." Prior to Monsieur Geoffroy's arrival here, Cuvée Dom Pérignon often was crafted in only the top vintages in Champagne, following along closely the perceptions of the other top *Grandes Marques* and the market in general about the overall potential of a given vintage and whether or not a DP should be crafted. For example, in the decade of the 1980s, Dom Pérignon was produced in the vintages of 1982, 1983, 1985, 1988 and 1990, but Monsieur Geoffroy points to the "1989 as a vintage where we could have really made an interesting wine at that time, if we had the same philosophical approach to vintage variations that we do today."

The newest vintage release of Cuvée Dom Pérignon is the 2009, which is just beginning to find its way into the market, and is a product of the more adventurous approach to vintages here. Monsieur Geoffroy points to the creation and release of the 2003 as the watershed vintage of Dom Pérignon, as he points out that “the ’03 has really turned out very well and is a perfect blend of the character of the vintage and the Dom Pérignon style, and its success has given us confidence when we are presented with other very solar vintages like 2009.” The philosophical evolution here seems to have replaced the old approach of only producing Cuvée Dom Pérignon in what were considered top vintages in Champagne and broadened the horizon by recognizing that many more vintages than what were declared thirty or forty years ago present opportunities to craft a very compelling example of Dom Pérignon, and allowing the vintage to speak through the selective voice of the cuvée is perhaps even more interesting than attempting to stamp the imprimatur of Dom Pérignon style on only the top vintages. Throughout, the character of the bottling has not changed and it remains a wine that starts out life tightly-knit, racy, mineral and fairly reductive, with its future generosity and sumptuous personality nicely hidden behind its brisk girdle of acidity and gently “green” fruit profile. As Monsieur Geoffroy noted as we were tasting the young and absolutely stellar 2008 DP, “there is a good green element in the young wine, which we seek each year through our traditionally reductive style and which promises so much when the wines have aged for a long time.”

Cuvée Dom Pérignon has always been made from a blend of solely chardonnay and pinot noir, with the exact percentages varying a bit depending on the relative strength of each variety in a given vintage, but with the point of departure each year generally a close to fifty-fifty split between the two varietals, with chardonnay most often slightly in the ascendency in the blend. Despite Moët et Chandon owning a very significant number of *hectares* of vineyards in the region, mostly in the very top premier and grand crus, the bottling of Dom Pérignon has always been made from a mix of both estate-owned vineyards and purchased grapes. The purchased fruit hails from very long-term contracts that the *maison* holds with some of the very top growers in Champagne, always from the finest crus, and is consistent in supply from year to year as if the house owned the vineyards themselves. The chardonnay used in Dom Pérignon hails from the villages of Avize, Chouilly, Cramant and Mesnil-sur-Oger, all grand crus in the Côte des Blancs. For pinot noir, Monsieur Geoffroy and his team draw upon production from the villages of Aÿ and Bouzy in the eastern Marne Valley, Mailly and Verzenay up and around on the eastern side of the Montagne de Reims and the home base vineyards of Hautvillers on the western flank of the Montagne.

In the cellars, the winemaking of Dom Pérignon has been consistent for many, many decades. For the following discussion of some of the technical details of the crafting of Dom Pérignon, I am deeply indebted to Nicholas Lane, who took time out from his summer holidays to answer my long list of questions. The bottling has had its own dedicated team for more than a generation, and though the bottles of Dom Pérignon continue to be crafted and aged in Moët et Chandon’s deep cellars underneath Épernay, they are sequestered off from the rest of the *grande marque*’s production. The *vins clairs* that form the cornerstone of every vintage of Dom Pérignon are always fermented in stainless steel tanks, to keep away oxidation and maintain that reductive style that is so prized in this wine and contributes mightily to the amazing longevity of the wine in bottle. All of the *vins clairs* also undergo a full malolactic fermentation, and this has been the case for as long as anyone can remember and does not waver, even in very “solar” years

such as 2009. The wine is then blended and bottled and ages *sur latte* for eight to ten years prior to its disgorgement and release into the market. The team at Dom Pérignon calls this first stage of blossoming, when the wine is first released into the market, its first *Plénitude* or plateau of blossoming. As each vintage of Dom Pérignon is structured a bit differently, depending on the style of the year, there is no hard and fast rule of when the wine will make its debut and it is the structure of the wine and its stage of evolution that determines the timing of its release, rather than the dictates of the market. After disgorgement, each vintage is given its own proper level of *dosage* to balance the wine, but no vintage in the last several decades has been given a *dosage* of more than six grams per liter, so effectively, Dom Pérignon is always an Extra Brut bottling.

As alluded to above, late in the 1990s, Richard Geoffroy and his team decided to craft a program of later-released vintages of Dom Pérignon, seeking to counteract some of the cuvée's worldwide popularity that witnessed so much of the wine drunk up in the first couple of years after its release. This was originally called the Oenothèque Series and was first officially launched in the year 2000. It was a two tiered strategy from the outset, looking to re-release vintages that had reached two distinct plateaus in their evolutionary cycle, so the first two wines released under the Oenothèque Series were the 1980 (then recognized as into its second *Plénitude* by the team at DP) and the 1959, which was into its third level of developmental maturity. The two vintages were newly disgorged and re-released into the market with special labels. The Oenothèque Series was greeted with great enthusiasm by connoisseurs of Dom Pérignon and further older vintages followed in the subsequent years. The Oenothèque Series was envisioned as a parallel universe of evolution for Dom Pérignon, with it contrasting with standard bottle aging of the originally disgorged vintage, as the wine remains aging for many years longer on its fine lees. The longer lees contact introduces a variation of evolution for the wines in the Oenothèque program. This is a far slower aging process, as the fine lees act as anti-oxidants and nurture the wine in a more relaxed evolutionary fashion that retains more of the *nervosité* of youth in the wine, even as the decades unfold. What has been striking since the very first releases under the Oenothèque Series is that the wines when re-released are still quite youthful in profile and, not surprisingly, are often several years behind the original vintage release in terms of aromatic and flavor evolution, seemingly turning back time, while introducing a discreet variation of development from longer contact with the yeasts. So, just because a bottle of Dom Pérignon may be a recent re-release under this program does not mean that it is immediately ready to drink!

The Oenothèque Series eventually evolved in the spring of 2014 into the P2 and P3 series, which are named for their *Plénitude* or plateau of evolutionary maturity of the wines. According to the team here, P2 is the second *Plénitude* for Dom Pérignon (and the first of true coming maturity), where the wine starts to blossom and show some of its inherent generosity of aroma and flavor, while still retaining the great energy and vivacity of a young wine entering its prime. In the minds of the team here, P1 (or its first *Plénitude*) is when the vintage is ready for original release after eight to ten years aging *sur latte*. Today, the P2 stage is generally pegged at the fifteen to eighteen year mark out from the vintage, though this may vary a bit depending upon the individual character of a given vintage. The very first vintage of DP that was re-released under the P2 program was the 1998, with previous vintages having been branded as from the Oenothèque Series when they were disgorged and re-released into the market at age fifteen or so. The newest vintage in the P2 Series to be released from the *maison* will be the

majestic 2002, which I had the pleasure to taste during my visit with to the Abbé d'Hautvillers in March. In the mind of Richard Geoffroy, the P3 stage or third *Plénitude* occurs between twenty-five and thirty years out from the vintage, and the future will continue to see P3 releases as well in small quantities of Dom Pérignon. When I asked Nicholas Lane about the upcoming vintage of Dom Pérignon that would be disgorged and re-released as a P3 bottling, he observed that “the current release of P3 is 1990” and noted that “many other vintages have been released as P3: ‘59, ‘62, ‘66, ‘69, ‘71, ‘73, ‘75... the journey continues.”



The Abbé de Saint-Pierre d'Hautvillers in all its restored beauty- the tasting library is above the cloisters.

One of the interesting facets of the P2 and P3 re-releases of Dom Pérignon is that the *dosage* of these bottles will typically vary from what was given the wine when it was initially released into the market in its first *Plénitude*. As Nicholas Lane commented about this decision in the P2 and P3 programs, “each wine is ‘*dosaged*’ according to its palate structure” and this can vary from what was the case when the vintage was first released, as, for example, “the 1976 had zero sugar at *dosage*” when it was re-released under its P3 guise! This variation of course makes perfect sense, as one of the chief functions of *dosage* in the first place is to buffer the acidity in the younger wine and bring it into the finest balance. As the girdle of acidity relaxes a bit with an extended cellaring protocol of fifteen or twenty years or more, the point of balance is going to be different than when the wine was eight or ten years of age, and hence a different *dosage* is the logical decision when preparing a P2 or P3 re-release for the market. I should mention that once a vintage is designated by the DP technical team for P2 or P3 preparation, the entire lot that will be re-released at that time is disgorged over a short timeframe (usually within two or three months) and finished with the exact same *dosage*, so there are no variations on the *dosage* of a given vintage released in its P2 or P3 guise.

However, it is not only the finishing *dosage* that is different between a P2 and P3 release and the first iteration of a given vintage, as the aging process is not the same as for the original bottling, and, in consequence, they are in reality slightly different examples of Dom Pérignon

from a given vintage and represent a slight variation on the vintage theme. The extended aging on their yeasts produces a far more youthful example of a given vintage, given that the fine lees act as anti-oxidants and slow the evolution of the wine in the cellars, so the evolutionary arc of the wine is captured within a different lens of time and this will continue to define the P2 or P3 re-release throughout its continuing long life in bottle. Based on my experience with the Oenothèque and P2 Series wines, I would generally advise holding the newest releases under these programs for at least a few more years after their arrival in the market, as they are invariably still fairly young wines when re-released (despite being fifteen to twenty years out from the vintage when they emerge from the cellars) and will blossom dramatically if given a bit more bottle age prior to opening. I am not sure if Messieurs Geoffroy and Lane would agree with me on this point, but it makes sense to me to give a new release of P2 at least a few years to recover fully from its more recent disgorgement and start to come into a state of perfect harmony. Sadly, I do not yet have as much experience with P3 releases and cannot comment on how they typically show when they emerge from the cellars again, as much of my experience with the oldest vintages listed below has all been with the original releases. But, as these notes will attest, it is not necessary to buy the P2 or P3 releases to have a properly aged example of Dom Pérignon, as the original releases, purchased early and aged properly in a cool cellar also evolve beautifully with long cellaring.

The only vintage where I have had the pleasure to compare the original disgorgement alongside the Oenothèque Series was the 1996, when we drank the two versions of the vintage side by side at a horizontal tasting of the '96 Champagnes back in the summer of 2016. The 1996 vintage was quite special in its combination of plenty of sunshine and very good ripeness of fruit, coupled to high acids, and the vintage generally has aged slowly and gracefully, and this was particularly apparent with both these versions of the 1996 DP. At age twenty, the originally-disgorged version was starting to approach full maturity, with both the aromatics and flavors starting to evolve nicely and starting to show the first signs of the true generosity and gentle nuttiness that will arrive at peak maturity. I pegged it to be really ready to drink starting around 2020. The 1996 Oenothèque Series, on the other hand, was still quite a bit more mineral and structurally racy than the original disgorgement, with less inherent complexity showing at age twenty and to my palate, at least another eight to ten years behind in evolution from the first release. I think that Richard Geoffroy would agree with my assessment that the P2 releases will ultimately be perhaps just a whisper superior to the original disgorgements (benefiting from their extended time on the yeasts in the perfect conditions in the cellars in Épernay), but the differences will be more of style and potential longevity than absolute quality of the two releases, and at least based on the two 1996 versions tasted side by side, the ultimate quality of the two releases remained really quite close.

Cuvée Dom Pérignon is certainly one of the great long-distance runners in the firmament of Champagne's luxury bottlings, and either in its original disgorgement or in its P2 or P3 series release, the wine is ultimately built to age long and gracefully. The dramatic change of personality that time brings to the wine is truly remarkable, and for those who know Dom Pérignon best for the young wines consumed to mark special moments, the transformation of the wine's aromatic and flavor profile would be quite surprising. The reductive style championed by the winemaking team at Dom Pérignon for decades and decades produces a wine that starts out life very structured and relatively tight on the palate. As Richard Geoffroy mentioned above,

there is always a search to get a bit of “green fruit” tones into the young blend that will eventually become DP, which is always a signature element in the young wine when it is first released. This can even be found in a young vintage of great ripeness such as the 2009. For the first ten years out after release, Dom Pérignon is a wine that is far more defined by its underlying minerality than it is by generosity of fruit tone, with notes of green apple, lime, lemon only hinting at the beautiful, chardonnay-defined fruit succulence that will follow twenty-five or thirty years down the road. At full maturity, notes of apple, pear and peach come forth as the more tart, green fruit tones recede, with citrus elements always more orange or tangerine than lime when the wine is truly at its apogee. The fruit element in this wine, which really takes a backseat to other aromatic and flavor nuances when Dom Pérignon is young, eventually becomes the focal point of the wine at its apogee of maturity.

When the wine is still on the young side, it is the minerality and other elements in the wine that take center stage, with an almost saline note to the soil elements here quite common. For the first couple of decades after disgorgement, Dom Pérignon is a wine that is truly defined by its impressive mineral complexity. There is also always a signature slice of the bouquet of young DP that suggests menthol or gentle botanical tones, as these are part of the “good green” signature that Monsieur Geoffroy and his team seek in each year. This is often coupled with a gentle smokiness in the upper register. As the wine is always raised quite reductively, it is not uncommon to find a bit of youthful iodine notes in the wine as well. So, for many people who only get a chance to drink Dom Pérignon in its relative youth, this is the wine that they know: minerally, tinged with green fruit and layered with notes of menthol and gentle botanicals or smokiness in the upper register. It is always a wine of superb depth and balance, but the generosity of fruit that comes to absolutely define Dom Pérignon at its peak of maturity is truly hidden behind the structure of a younger vintage.

However, once the wine has truly had sufficient time in the cellar, the transformation in personality is quite remarkable. As alluded to above, the fruit tones blossom and show the slight preponderance of chardonnay in the *cépages*, with beautiful and very generous elements of pear, apple and peach coming to the fore. The great minerality of youth is always retained here as well, but it moves to a supporting role as the fruit emerges, with the balance between fruit and minerality not unlike that of a great example of mature Corton-Charlemagne. Often, the gentle smokiness and botanicals of youth can still be found here at peak maturity, but always having receded to the background and adding just a bit more complexity to the bouquet and flavor profile of the wine. Added layers of notes such as toasted nuts, citrus peel and later on, even a touch of coffee or mocha tones, are further layers of complexity that a truly mature vintage of Dom Pérignon exudes on both the nose and palate. All the time, due to the brisk girdle of acidity with which the wine always starts out life, the fully mature example remains vibrant, light on its feet and continues to deliver superb cut and bounce, making for a truly breathtaking glass of Champagne at its peak. Though, this report does not go as far back as would be ideal to show Dom Pérignon at the peak of its powers, I have had the good fortune to drink several fully mature vintages of the wine in the not too distant past and really prefer to drink the wine once it has crossed the thirty year threshold (I guess this makes me a P3 fan). For example, my favorite vintages of DP for current drinking are the 1985, 1982, 1973 and the glorious pair from the 1960s: 1962 and 1964. It is truly one of Champagne’s greatest wines and is so deserving of the extended bottle aging that allows it to reach its apogee.



The vast majority of the following vintages of Dom Pérignon were tasted with Richard Geoffroy in the beautifully restored library at the Abbé d'Hautvillers in March of this year, during my very abbreviated trip to Champagne. The only recent vintages where I have added notes, as they were not served in the Hautvillers vertical, are the 1996 original disgorgement and the 1993 magnum, both of which were tasted here in New York just prior to my March trip. Happily, my spring flu that eventually cut my Champagne trip short, did not start to bite until the following day, for if I had missed this tasting due to illness, I would have been extremely unhappy! As we only went as far back as the 1995 P2 bottling during our tasting at the abbey, I have also appended previous notes I have on older vintages here of Dom Pérignon to give a bit more historical perspective for the article. It would not make much sense to write an article on Dom Pérignon and its extraordinary capacity to age long and gracefully and then only include notes back to the 1993 DP, so older vintage notes are included here to underscore just how beautifully this wine ages over its first half century or more, despite the fact that they have been printed previously in Champagne reports. I do not have as deep a tasting experience with very old vintages of Dom Pérignon as I do with a few other *Tête de Cuvées*, but my gut instincts suggest that this is a wine that clearly can cruise along and drink splendidly for at least seventy-five or eight years, and I suspect that one hundred year-old DP can still be stunning. I have not included any notes of Dom Pérignon Rosé in this report, as I have less experience with how this cuvée ages over the long haul, but that could be a project for another day. As Nicholas Lane so eloquently put it, “the journey continues!”

Original Disgorgements

2009 Dom Pérignon Brut (Moët et Chandon)

The 2009 Dom Pérignon is going to be one of those atypically generous vintages of this bottling in its youth, as the warm, “solar year” of 2009 will make this a star to drink relatively early on. The superb bouquet wafts from the glass in a mix of apple, peach, a touch of orange zest, salty minerality, fruit skin, a touch of iodine and a gently floral topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very, very long and precise, with a bit more of a fruit-forward personality than most releases, coupled with excellent grip and focus on the backend. The *mousse* is tight and utterly refined, as is the case with every vintage of Dom Pérignon. A superb wine. This is one vintage where it will not border on a crime to drink the wine young! 2018-2065. **94+**.

2008 Dom Pérignon Brut (Moët et Chandon)

The 2008 vintage of Dom Pérignon is an absolute classic in the making and this is destined to be one of the great recent years for this iconic cuvée. It is far more classically structured out of the blocks than the relatively generous 2009 version, offering up a deep, complex and very youthful bouquet of menthol, green apple, a touch of tangerine, a very complex base of minerality and notes of dried flowers in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with precise *mousse*, brisk acids and stunning length and grip on the primary and laser-like finish. This will demand some cellaring to start to really stir and should prove to be an extremely long-lived vintage of DP. Stellar juice. 2024-2085+. **98**.

2006 Dom Pérignon Brut (Moët et Chandon)

The 2006 version of Dom Pérignon is another wine that probably owes its existence to the very real success that Richard Geoffroy realized with the 2003 vintage and the willingness to more fully explore each vintage as a possible release of this bottling. 2006 is not a great vintage in Champagne, but the '06 Dom Pérignon has turned out beautifully, offering up an almost exotic nose of peach, *mirabelle*, chalky soil tones, a touch of menthol, saline mineral elements and again, a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and already wide open in personality, with a good core, a lovely synthesis of fruit and minerality, sound acids and impressive length and grip on the frothy and complex finish. Not a classic DP in the traditional sense, but a very, very worthy DP that beautifully captures the potential of 2006 with precise selection and a great blending palate. It will not prove to be a particularly long-lived vintage of this wine, but it is drinking beautifully already and will provide plenty of pleasure during its plateau of maturity. 2018-2035+. **94**.

2005 Dom Pérignon Brut (Moët et Chandon)

The 2005 Dom Pérignon is another slightly anomalous vintage here, at least if one looks at it through the glasses of past generations, but it is a deep, complex and truly refined example of the growing season. The fruit tones here are more deeply-pitched than in the 2006, with the bouquet offering up scents of peach, a bit of red berry, *patissière*, chalky soil tones and a bit of spring flowers in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, complex and completely blossomed, with a good core, fine focus and balance, elegant *mousse* and a long, poised and very tasty finish. Along with the 2003, the 2005 DP is probably the least classically-inclined wine in terms of aromatics and flavors, but there is depth, length and complexity in abundance here that persuasively argue that more vintage variations in Dom Pérignon is a very good thing! 2018-2040. **94**.

2004 Dom Pérignon Brut (Moët et Chandon)

The 2004 Dom Pérignon is another great classic in the making, and this is one of those vintages that will truly deserve all of thirty years' worth of bottle age, so that it can fully blossom and deliver fully its formidable potential. The beautiful bouquet delivers a refined still youthful constellation of green apple, menthol, salty minerality, white flowers, a touch of iodine and already, the first hints of the *crème patissière* to come with more bottle age. On the palate the wine is pure, full and very racy in personality, with a lovely core, excellent complexity, refined *mousse* and superb focus and grip on the very long and energetic finish. This is still a puppy and needs several more years in the cellar to start to blossom, but it will be stunning once it reaches its plateau of peak maturity. Expect it to first start to properly open at age twenty and really hit its stride at age thirty and beyond. 2024-2075+. **96+**.

2003 Dom Pérignon Brut (Moët et Chandon)

My March visit to the Abbé d'Hautvillers was my first opportunity to have a look at the 2003 Dom Pérignon, which caused quite a stir when it was announced that it had been produced in this sultry French summer. The wine has defied expectations since its initial release in 2011 and today is drinking very well indeed, wafting from the glass in a mix of ripe apple, yellow plum, salty minerality, rye bread and plenty of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and quite vibrant in personality, with a fine core, refined *mousse* and great backend mineral drive on the long and very well-balanced finish. A wine crafted by the intrepid cellar team at Dom Pérignon, the 2003 has turned out beautifully and fully delivers the complexity and pleasure one has come to expect from this iconic bottling. 2018-2040. **94**.

1996 Dom Pérignon Brut (Moët et Chandon)

This is the original release of 1996 Dom Pérignon and I drank this bottle with friends only a few weeks before I left New York for my planned month on the road tasting in France in March. This bottle is not a whole lot further along its evolutionary path than the P2 reported on below, but still shows the excellent promise of the 1996 vintage. The bouquet offers up a complex blend of wizened apples, lemon peel, stony minerality, sourdough bread, just a hint of the sweet nuttiness to come and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with excellent focus and grip, lovely *mousse*, still quite brisk acids and a very long, nascently complex and beautifully balanced finish. 2023-2065+. **95**.

1993 Dom Pérignon Brut (Moët et Chandon) Served from Magnum

I have drunk a few magnums of the 1993 Dom Pérignon to start off tastings in the last handful of months and this is at a lovely place in its evolution at age twenty-five. This is not a great vintage of DP, but a very good one that has retained a nice sense of its "good green" personality, as it offers up an aromatically complex mix of green apple, menthol, stony minerality, lime peel and plenty of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and still quite steely in personality, with a good core, elegant *mousse* and lovely grip and cut on the long, complex and energetic finish. This was a slightly leaner vintage of Dom Pérignon in its youth and it has retained this personality as it has started to blossom, but it remains a fine drink with a long future ahead of it. 2018-2040. **92+**.

P2 and Oenothèque Series Re-Releases

2002 Dom Pérignon Brut "P2" (Moët et Chandon)

Somehow, I never managed to cross paths with the initial disgorgement of the 2002 Dom Pérignon, so I was delighted to see the coming P2 version waiting in the wings in our tasting lineup in March at the Abbé d'Hautvillers. It would be fascinating to compare the P2 with the

first release of the 2002 Dom Pérignon, in much the same way I tasted the two 1996 versions side by side, as this is a great Champagne vintage that dovetails so beautifully with the house style of this bottling. The 2002 P2 delivers a stunning young nose of pear, apple, stony minerality, iodine, dried flowers a touch of nuttiness, menthol and gentle upper register botanicals so emblematic of this cuvée as it starts to first stretch its wings. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and absolutely rock solid at the core, with lovely *mousse*, laser-like focus again and stunning backend mineral drive on the very, very long, perfectly balanced finish. The 2002 Dom Pérignon P2 looks to be almost unreachable by the passage of time and could easily last a century. 2022-2095+. **98.**

2000 Dom Pérignon Brut “P2” (Moët et Chandon)

The 2000 vintage of P2 is drinking beautifully today. This is not a great Champagne vintage, but this is a superb bottle of Dom Pérignon. The wide open bouquet is starting to show some lovely secondary layering in its mélange of apple, citrus peel, menthol, almond, chalky soil tones and dried flowers. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very accessible in personality, with good mid-palate depth, pinpoint bubbles and fine focus and grip on the long and classy finish. This does not seem likely to be long-lived by the standards of this cuvée, but there is a lot of pleasure to still be had from the 2000 DP. 2018-2035. **93.**

1998 Dom Pérignon Brut “P2” (Moët et Chandon)

As mentioned above, the 1998 vintage of Dom Pérignon was the first to be officially classified as “P2” when it was re-released in the spring of 2014. The wine is aging beautifully and offers up an absolutely classical aromatic profile in its scents of dried apple and peach, salty soil tones, menthol, a touch of citrus peel and plenty of smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, complex and full-bodied, with a lovely core, fine focus and grip, elegant *mousse* and a long, refined and *à point* finish. This is now twenty years of age, but as it is not as structured of a vintage as years like 1996 and 2002, the 1998 is now fully into its apogee and drinking with generosity and panache- though there are still decades and decades of life ahead. 2018-2050. **94.**

1996 Dom Pérignon Brut “P2” (Moët et Chandon)

The 1996 P2 version of Dom Pérignon is stellar and every bit as promising as the Oenothèque version I drank a couple of summers ago. I do not know if the disgorgement dates for this bottle, sampled at the Abbé d’Hautvillers was the same as the Oenothèque version drunk in the summer of 2016, but presumably, that would be the case. The wine has begun to blossom nicely on the nose and is now really lovely aromatically, offering up scents of apple, pear, hazelnut, complex minerality, still a youthful touch of iodine, smoky nuances and a topnote of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and racy, with a fine core, great cut and grip, frothy *mousse* and still a lovely sense of reserve on the very, very long and zesty finish. Great wine in the making, but, at least to my palate, still deserving of at least another handful of years in the cellar. 2025-2080. **96+.**

1995 Dom Pérignon Brut “P2” (Moët et Chandon)

For drinking today, it is hard to go wrong with the beautiful 1995 P2. The bouquet is pure, complex and very nicely evolved, delivering a blend of apple, yellow plum, chalky soil tones, wild fennel, sea salts and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, complex and *à point*, with a good core, elegant *mousse*, fine focus and grip and a long, poised and beautifully balanced finish. At age twenty-three, this has now reached its apogee of P2 maturity and is drinking with the generosity and blossoming opulence that is Dom Pérignon at one of its plateaus of maturity. Lovely juice. 2018-2050. **95.**



Older Vintages of Dom Pérignon Tasted In the Not Too Distant Past
1990 Dom Pérignon Brut (Moët et Chandon)

I had loved this vintage of Dom Pérignon well enough out of the blocks to buy a case for long-term cellaring, and though the wine has been thoroughly enjoyable over the years, it seems to me that it is now time to drink it up in regular-sized bottle, as it has matured at a fairly brisk pace, and like a lot of 1990 Champagnes, it is already probably starting to look over the far side of its plateau. The wine today is already showing a bit oxidative in style, but with plenty of complexity and still good structure for current consumption, but it certainly seems likely to start to slide in the coming years. The bouquet is a mature blend of toasted nuts, apple, peach, a bit of honey, lovely, chalky soil tones and incipient notes of new leather in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still reasonably crisp, with fine focus, plenty of mid-palate stuffing, sound *mousse* and very good length and grip on the gently honeyed and fairly advanced finish. Given that other examples from the 1990 vintage, such as Clos des Goisses and Comtes de Champagne, are decidedly fresher than this wine, I would term this a bit of a disappointment, though this seems quite correct for the general vintage's stage of evolution today and the wine remains quite tasty in its slightly decrepit style. I should note that there are reports of quite a bit of bottle variation with the 1990 Dom Pérignon, so perhaps there are still far better examples out there. However, I wish I had bought the 1985, rather than the 1990 for my own cellar! Drink up in regular-sized formats. 2014-2020+? **90.**

1988 Dom Pérignon Brut (Moët et Chandon)

Out of the blocks the 1988 Dom Pérignon was tight and a tad on the green side and I never expected it to blossom as beautifully as it has at age twenty. It is still not a very top vintage of DP, but it is now drinking very well indeed and has plenty of life still ahead of it. The bouquet offers up a lovely mélange of warm bread, tart apples, grapefruit, complex minerality, a touch of straw, lemon zest and a delicate touch of DP's youthful herbal complexity. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and still quite crisp and racy, with a fine core of fruit, fine *mousse*, and good length and grip on the complex and classy finish. A very good and unfolding vintage of Dom Pérignon that may still be on its way up and will be even better with further bottle age. 2010-2030+. **92+**.

1985 Dom Pérignon Brut (Moët et Chandon)

The 1985 Dom Pérignon is still several years away from its peak of drinkability, and while it is certainly quite approachable at this stage in its evolution, this wine will continue to improve with further bottle age. The bouquet is deep, complex and still a tad adolescent, as it offers up scents of tart apples, pink grapefruit, gentle herbal tones, a touch of limepeel, stony minerality and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and still quite young, with a rock solid core of fruit, bright acids, fine focus and balance, tiny bubbles and superb length and grip on the racy finish. While some tasters around the table thought this wine was drinking beautifully, for my palate it remains still a bit bound up in its minerally adolescence and will offer up significantly more opulence and toasty charm with another five to ten years of bottle age. It should prove to be an absolutely classic vintage of Dom Pérignon. 2016-2050. **96**.

1976 Dom Pérignon (Oenothèque Release 2003)

The late-disgorged 1976 Dom Pérignon is a very pretty and classy bottle that is now fully into its apogee of maturity and drinking well. The bouquet offers up a mature and vibrant mélange of brioche, pear, caramelized apple, chalky soil tones, delicate notes of nuttiness and just a hint of toasted marshmallow that I often find in older DPs from hot vintages. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, fresh and complex, with lovely cut and bounce, excellent mid-palate depth, fine *mousse* and excellent length and grip on the complex and classy finish. There remains here on the palate just a touch of the youthful herbal streak of Dom Pérignon, which may indicate that even further elegance will emerge with further bottle age, though the slight touch of marshmallow makes me wonder if it might not be better to drink this wine up in regular-sized format over the next several years, rather than hold it in the cellar and wait for a bit more polish. Good juice. 2008-2020+? **92**.

1975 Dom Pérignon Brut (Moët et Chandon)

The 1975 Dom Pérignon is at its apogee of peak drinkability and is a glorious glassy of Champagne. The deep and complex nose soars from the glass in a blaze of apple, pear, herbal tones, complex minerality, warm biscuits and a beautiful, gentle toastiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and perfectly balanced, with fine mid-palate depth, fine *mousse*, crisp acids and flawless focus on the very long, refined and magical finish. A beautiful bottle of DP. 2009-2025. **95**.

1973 Dom Pérignon Brut (Moët et Chandon)

The 1973 Dom Pérignon is at a beautiful point in its evolution and is a great pleasure to drink. The deep and mature nose offers up a complex mélange of rye seed, oranges, fresh figs, honeycomb, a gentle touch of walnut, a beautiful base of soil that is both chalky and shows some signs of clay and a very gentle hint of DP's signature herbal streak. On the palate the wine is fullish, very deep and utterly seamless, with impeccable balance, lovely focus and complexity,

very gentle bubbles that frame the wine these days, rather than offer up youthful effervescence and a very long, refined and vibrant finish. I would opt for drinking the '73 Dom Pérignon up over the next decade in regular-sized formats, while it remains at its apogee of peak drinkability, as there is not anything left in reserve at age thirty-five. Of course magnums (which should be absolutely brilliant right now) will cruise along significantly longer. A lovely bottle. 2008-2018+. **93.**

1971 Dom Pérignon Brut (Moët et Chandon)

The 1971 Dom Pérignon is a beautiful and fully mature example of this fine bottling. The wine has blossomed from its steely youth into the opulent, chardonnay-driven style of Dom Pérignon at its apogee of peak drinkability and offers up a stunning nose of baked apples, orange zest, honeyed almonds, really lovely and complex minerality and a nice touch of citrus peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very fresh, with a great core of fruit, lovely acidity, laser-like focus, very elegant *mousse* and outstanding length and grip on the perfectly balanced and very complex finish. I love Dom Pérignon at this age! 2011-2025+. **94.**

1964 Dom Pérignon Brut (Moët et Chandon)

The 1964 DP is a lovely, mellowed and deeply complex wine that retains a lovely filigree of bubbles and acidity, which act to nicely frame the mature, grand cru white Burgundy flavors and aromatics. The nose offers up a lovely, harmonious blend of honeyed apples, pear, sweet browned butter, candied orange peel and a lovely base of chalky minerality. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, fresh and round, with a gentle attack, but outstanding mid-palate depth and complexity, and sufficient acidity to keep it light on its feet, if not particularly racy on the long, complex finish. I am sure that some tasters would find this wine beginning to get a little long in the tooth, but to my palate this is a lovely stage at which to drink this wine. Not that this wine has lost all of its effervescence, but if one demands that their Champagne bounce across the palate with significant carbonation still extant, then knock three points off of my score. For me this is a beautiful place to enjoy a superb Tête de Cuvée. 2007-2015+? **93.**

1962 Dom Pérignon Brut (Moët et Chandon)

This particular bottle of 1962 Dom Pérignon was significantly younger than the 1964 paired up with it, and was a brilliant example. The bouquet is deep and quintessential DP, as it soars from the glass in a blaze of toasted almonds, pear, fresh oranges, wheat toast, chalk and a delicate topnote of honey. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and aristocratic, with great freshness coupled to the complexity of maturity, with a rock solid core of fruit, brilliant focus and *mousse*, and a very, very long, fine and elegant finish. Champagne simply does not get much better than this pristine bottle of 1962 Dom Pérignon, which is one of my all-time favorite vintages for this magnificent cuvée. This bottle of '62 has years and years of life still in it. 2007-2025. **96.**

BEAUJOLAIS TRIP SPRING 2018
TASTING MORE 2016S AND OLDER VINTAGES



Happily, my three days scheduled in Beaujolais in March arrived ahead of my spring flu, so I was able to taste just fine during my visits and cover quite some ground here at some of my favorite estates in the region. As the timing of my tastings was still quite early in the month of March, I opted to forego tasting the still very young 2017s in the region (which *vignerons* are quite excited about) and instead worked my way through lineups of 2016s and older wines at each visit. I will report fully on the 2017s once the wines are bottled and start to ship into New York, which will probably be late summer or early autumn, but will at least mention the style that the winegrowers in the region are attributing to the young 2017s, which they rank as excellent in quality. Pierre-Marie Chermette commented that “the 2017s look like a cross right now between the 2015s and 2016s, with more sappy, dense fruit tones than the 2016s, but also far more classical personalities and better *terroir* than the very powerful 2015s.” It sounds like a very good combination and I am looking forward to sinking my teeth into the 2017 vintage and reporting on the wines in the coming months! Most of my tastings were comprised of a combination of 2016s and 2015s, with some older bottles rounding out each session where the domaine had a few older wines still kicking around in the cellars. Many *vignerons* in the region do not keep back a lot of older wine for their own drinking, as the tradition in Beaujolais remains

to drink the wines on the younger side, reflecting still the preferences of the market. There are a few domaines where the tradition of keeping bottles of wines to mature fully in their cellars is a generation strong, such as Château Thivin or Clos de la Roilette, but at many estates, most of the daily drinking done by the family is of relatively recent vintages and there are not always older bottles in the cellar. So I did not taste a lot of older wines during my trip, but enough to keep me on the lookout for older Cru Beaujolais whenever opportunity allows!

One of the more difficult aspects of this short trip to Beaujolais was following up the pure and classically-styled 2016s with the riper and more powerful 2015s. As readers are well aware, the style of the most successful 2016s fits far more seamlessly into my own palate preferences, and it was hard not to be let down at each stop when the 2016s were tasted and we transitioned into the 2015s from the property. It is not that the riper, more powerful wines from the torrid summer of 2015 are bad (at least in their most successful iterations- there are plenty of overripe wines to be found in this year), but stylistically, they are a far, far cry from what I would reach for out of my own cellar, whereas the 2016s (or at least those that avoided the worst damage from the hail of this summer) are cut in a style that is exactly what I look for in Beaujolais and consequently are far, far more exciting to my palate. But, not every property showed a full range of their 2015s, so the tasting was not as arduous as it could have been, and there were those older vintages to follow-up at several domaines and which helped to keep the energy level up. Several of the 2016s I tasted during my stops at these domaines I had already tried back here in New York last fall, but I found that the wines generally were showing even better in Beaujolais, probably due to their having a bit more distance out from their bottling and not having had to recover from travel across the Atlantic Ocean. It underscored just how fine the 2016 vintage is for Beaujolais, where the wines were not adversely affected by the two rounds of hail that summer. There are certainly a small percentage of wines that have a bit of a dry edge to their tannins from the midsummer storms of 2016, but this is not hail taint *per se*, but rather just chewier tannins from less than perfect ripening, or so it seems to my palate when tasting the wines. However, this is only a small slice of the wines that I have tasted- even from the most adversely affected communes of Morgon, Chiroubles and Fleurie- and a great many of the wines from the villages that were hit by the hail still have retained plenty of the sappy charm and beautiful transparency that is the hallmark of the vintage in luckier villages that were spared any hail damage in 2016. Clearly, 2016 is the finest vintage in Beaujolais since 2011.

The following article covers the eight domaines which I was able to visit during my short trip to the region in early March of this year. I have listed these domaine visits in the order that I scheduled them (rather than geographically), so that one can get a feel for the flow of my trip through Beaujolais. It was a great few days in the region and I wish I had the flexibility with my annual travel schedule to get to Beaujolais each and every year, rather than once every few years, as I love visiting this beautiful and soaring countryside and sampling such a fine array of wines each time I am here. The *vignerons* are always welcoming and friendly (not always the case in some of the other, tonier wine regions the world over) and very generous with both their time and their wines. I highly recommend visiting Beaujolais if you have a chance, as not only are the wines exceptional, but there are lots of excellent dining options in the region as well, as Beaujolais is really part of the orbit of the gastronomic capital of France, nearby Lyon.



A gloriously warm March afternoon in the vineyards of Saint Amour.

Domaine de la Pirolette (Saint Amour)

Domaine de la Pirolette is a brand new project of Virginie and Grégory Barbet, whose family has long owned and managed the finest property in Saint Amour, Domaine des Billards. The domaine was originally formed in the 1600s, so there is quite some history to the winegrowing here. This is a fifteen *hectare* estate that encompasses several different *lieux à dits* in the commune of Saint Amour, with many of the parcels lying on the other side of the village from the family's Domaine des Billards and hence, producing quite different expressions of Saint Amour. This commune is one of the most geologically complex of the crus in Beaujolais, with certain sectors composed of crumbling granite and sandstone (where the most forward wines hail from), but others with plenty of clay (the Clos des Billards) and others very granitic and more akin to Fleurie or Morgon in soil composition. Virginie and Grégory are just starting to bottle a few single vineyard bottlings from Domaine de la Pirolette to highlight these different soil signatures, and Grégory Barbet related during our visit that the plan was to perhaps increase these in number a bit more once they have settled in at the property. The first vintage produced by the Barbets at Domaine de la Pirolette was 2013 and they introduced their first single vineyard bottlings here only in the 2016 vintage. Not surprisingly, the fermentation techniques and *elevage* programs for the regular bottling of Domaine de la Pirolette are quite similar to those of Domaine des Billards, with the exception that *elevage* takes place currently in stainless steel tanks, as the couple is now on the lookout to buy some older oak *foudres* for aging future

vintages, which will bring their methodology completely in line with that practiced by the Barbet family at Billards. A semi-carbonic fermentation is done in cement tanks, with a grill submerging the cap during fermentation and allowing for more gentle extraction. Aging is done until the month of June following the vintage, with the wines bottled at the end of this month. The wines are typically more black fruity out of the blocks than those crafted from vineyards across the commune at Domaine des Billards, with excellent purity and mineral undertow, suave, moderate tannins and good acid structures to allow them to blossom nicely with bottle age.

The single vineyard wines are treated a bit differently than the regular cuvée of Saint Amour, but one has the sense that this is still in its formative stages and the regimen will continue to evolve over the next several years, as Virginie and Grégory see what works best for these wines. Right now, the la Paulette bottling is one hundred percent barrel-fermented in older, nine hundred *liter* casks and raised in the same barrels. The le Carjot bottling was half barrel-fermented in the same size casks and have fermented in cement and raised in stainless steel tanks. Both of these wines in 2016 showed outstanding potential, but will demand some bottle age prior to blossoming. All the wines from Domaine de la Pirolette generally need at least a couple of years in the cellar to really start to stir properly and are clearly built for cellaring, much like the Clos des Billards bottling from the Barbet family's iconic estate on the other side of the village. These are very, very good, ageworthy examples of Saint Amour, with the wines progressing markedly from vintage to vintage (as Grégory and Virginie get more familiar with their *terroirs* at Pirolette) and this is a fine new addition to the firmament of top cru Beaujolais estates and already a very, very good source for cru bottlings for the cellar. I can only imagine that subsequent vintages will continue to show incremental improvement, as the Barbets settle in completely here at Pirolette. We started our tasting with the 2014 and moved forward to the 2015 and three of the four bottlings produced here in 2016, as this allowed us to nicely chart the progress made by the Barbets as they have settled in at Domaine de la Pirolette.

2014 Saint Amour- Domaine de la Pirolette

The 2014 Domaine de la Pirolette is a very good, black fruity example of Saint Amour, with its tannins just now starting to drop into the background nicely. The complex bouquet wafts from the glass in a blend of dark berries, black cherries, woodsmoke, a touch of pepper, burgeoning autumnal soil tones and a nice touch of spice in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely structured, with a good core of black fruit, fine soil signature and still a touch of tannin on the fairly complex finish. This still has plenty of life ahead of it, but it is starting to drink quite well. 2018-2030. **89.**

2015 Saint Amour- Domaine de la Pirolette

The differing ripeness between the 2014 and 2015 is quite striking, but so too is the progress that the Barbets were making here as they approached their third vintage at Pirolette. The wine is a bit over fourteen percent octane in 2015, but quite pure, well-balanced and sappy at the same time. The nose offers up scents of ripe and sappy black cherries, black raspberries, a touch of apricot, chocolate, violets and dark soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, powerful and full, with a rock solid core, ripe, moderate tannins, good acids and impressive length and grip on the opulent and nascently complex finish. This carries its ripeness very well and clearly shows the step forward that each passing vintage currently brings at this domaine. 2020-2045.

92.



Two of the 2016 single vineyard bottlings from Domaine de la Pirolette, with their respective granites.

2016 Saint Amour- Domaine de la Pirolette

While the 2015 Domaine de la Pirolette is very much a reflection of its vintage, so too is the utterly refined and seamlessly structured 2016 and this is a classic in the making. The harvest here started the first week of October and delivered perfectly measured ripeness on both the nose and palate, with the classic bouquet offering up scents of pure black cherries, sweet dark berries, espresso, gamebird, woodsmoke and violets in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely generous on the attack, with a fine sappy core, suave, seamless tannins and a long, focused and tangy finish. This is certainly very easy to drink today, as it is perfectly balanced, but it is still a puppy and will only get better as more complexity emerges with bottle age. Classy juice. 2018-2045+. 92+.

2016 Saint Amour “la Poulette”- Domaine de la Pirolette

The *lieu à dit* of la Poulette is founded on a soil of red granite, which Grégory Barbet notes “is quite similar to much of Fleurie” in its soil signature. As noted above, this was completely barrel-fermented in 2016 and the wine was showing excellent, youthful potential at the time of my visit. The superb bouquet jumps from the glass in a blend of sappy red and black cherries, a lovely vein of granite, gamebird, a bit of bonfire and a fine topnote of fresh thyme. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully structured out of the blocks, with a lovely core, excellent focus and grip and a long, complex and suavely tannic finish. This will need four

or five years for the tannins to start to fall away convincingly, but it is going to be excellent wine once it blossoms. 2022-2055+. **94.**

2016 Saint Amour “le Carjot”- Domaine de la Pirolette

The vineyard of le Carjot is planted on blue granite which Grégory describes as quite similar to Côte du Py in Morgon. This was raised half in tank and half in barrel, but it seems that the oak here was a bit newer than what was used for the la Paulette bottling, and the 2016 le Carjot still needs some time to integrate its bit of spicy oak completely. The bouquet underneath is refined and shows excellent potential, delivering scents of red and black cherries, complex minerality, a touch of red berry, lovely spice tones and an exotic topnote of dried eucalyptus. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, sappy on the attack and displays outstanding mid-palate depth, with ripe tannins and superb length and grip on the nascently complex and still youthful finish. There is plenty of stuffing here to eventually absorb its oak completely and the wine is going to be excellent in the fullness of time, but it is a bit too young for early exploration. 2022-2055+. **93+.**

Domaine des Billards and Friends (Saint Amour)

As I have written about in the past, the Barbet family owns and manages several other properties that originated with the important Lorton family back in the day, with the Domaine des Billards being the best known. The other two estates are the fine Château de Fleurie and a relatively new Moulin-à-Vent project owned by the two Barbet brothers, Xavier and Nicolas, Grégory Barbet’s father and uncle respectively. Happily in 2016, the Domaine des Billards vines in Saint Amour were spared from the hail damage further south amongst the crus, but the family’s property of Château de Fleurie was hit pretty hard. After Grégory Barbet and I had finished up our tasting of the fine range of Domaine de la Pirolette wines, he turned his attention to his family’s portfolio of other properties in the region, to complete our afternoon tasting. Later that evening, we were joined by his father Xavier Barbet for dinner at Auberge du Cep in the center of Fleurie and we drank a couple more of the wines from the family’s portfolio of fine estates to accompany our meal, including one of my favorite vintages from Domaine des Billards, the lovely 1989. The other dinner wine that night was a single vineyard bottling from the very well-known *lieu à dit* of la Madone produced at the Château de Fleurie from the 2011 vintage, which was a wine I was completely unaware had ever been made by the Barbets! During our dinner, Messieurs Barbet did not indicate if the la Madone bottling had been made here in subsequent vintages, but I will keep a lookout for this wine in future iterations, as the 2011 showed lovely potential. I had written about the fine restaurant of Auberge du Cep several years ago, when Madame Chagny was still the formidable personage overseeing the kitchen and dining room here. She has recently retired and sold the restaurant, with the new owner and chef having worked in Madame Chagny’s kitchen several years ago and he has returned to his roots to run the restaurant today. The food was every bit as fine as it was back in the day under Madame Chagny, though the service is somewhat slower than was the case then, so allocate a fair bit of time for your dinner, as the pace of the restaurant falls off a bit after the first couple of courses. However, the cuisine is still excellent and this remains a lovely place to dine in the region.

2016 Fleurie- Château de Fleurie

The production at the Château de Fleurie was down by fully fifty percent in 2016, due to hail damage, but the wine has really turned out beautifully and its biggest problem is going to be limited availability in this vintage. The beautiful, red fruity bouquet is pure, expressive and

sappy, offering up notes of cherries, sweet cranberries, gamebird, woodsmoke, a lovely base of soil and Fleurie's signature topnote of fresh thyme. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and vibrant, with a fine core, tangy acids and lovely focus and balance on the long and complex finish. Really pretty juice. 2018-2030+. **92.**

2016 Saint Amour- Domaine des Billards (Héritiers Loron)

I last tasted the regular bottling of 2016 Domaine des Billards in September of last year and the wine has continued to blossom as it has moved further out from its bottling and this is clearly a great vintage in the making of this fine Saint Amour. At our tasting in early March, the wine was absolutely singing on both the nose and palate, with the bouquet a glorious blend of cherries, blood orange, beautiful spice tones, *pigeon*, a very complex base of soil and a bit of Chambolle-like mustard seed in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with stunning transparency, a sappy core, great focus and grip, moderate tannins and a very long, dancing finish. This is great cru Beaujolais in the making and I clearly underrated this wine a bit six months ago! 2020-2060+. **94+.**

2015 Fleurie- Château de Fleurie

The 2015 Château de Fleurie is a pretty fresh and vibrant example of this vintage and one of my favorite 2015s I have tasted from the commune, but it is quite a bit more structured than the above. The bouquet jumps from the glass in a ripe blend of red and black cherries, roasted squab, dark soil tones, a touch of coffee grounds and a topnote of Italian herbs. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite a bit more tannic than the 2016 version, with a thick core of fruit, good focus and grip and a long, powerful finish (particularly for a Fleurie). This is hardly a classic example of Château de Fleurie, but it is well made and is quite a successful 2015. 2018-2035. **91.**

2015 Saint Amour "Clos des Billards"- Domaine des Billards (Héritiers Loron)

It will be very interesting to follow the evolution of the 2015 Clos des Billards in the cellar and see how this wine ultimately evolves. It is one of the best-balanced examples of the vintage that I have tasted in recent times, despite coming in pretty close to 14.5 percent octane, as it offers up very good purity on both the nose and palate. This vintage was raised entirely in *foudres*. The bouquet is a sappy, black fruity mélange of black cherries, blackberries, dark chocolate, a fine base of soil tones, woodsmoke and a topnote of red curry. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still quite primary in profile, with a rock solid core, very good balance and grip, ripe, well-integrated tannins and a very long, youthful finish. This should prove to be outstanding and age for a very long time. 2023-2075. **93.**

2015 Moulin-à-Vent- Xavier et Nicolas Barbet

The Barbet brothers first began producing their bottling of Moulin-à-Vent in the 2001 vintage. The 2015 is a good, solid example of the vintage, but shows a bit of *sur maturité* on both the nose and palate and is not as precise and transparent as is usually the case with this cuvée. The bouquet is a blend of black cherries, cassis, coffee grounds, dark soil nuances and a nice touch of upper register spiciness. On the palate the wine is deep, full and ripe, with a good core, chewy tannins and no signs of backend heat on the long and balanced finish. This is a good example of the 2015 vintage, but stylistically, I prefer the cooler and more classical shape of the leaner 2014 version. 2020-2050. **91.**

2014 Moulin-à-Vent- Xavier et Nicolas Barbet

The 2014 vintage of Moulin-à-Vent from the brothers Barbet is an excellent wine and is very classic in profile and personality. This is a young and refined wine in the making, offering up a nascent aromatic constellation of dark berries, chicory, espresso, gamebird, a fine base of

dark soil tones and a whiff of bonfire in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and still quite primary, with a good core, moderate tannins and superb balance on the long, focused and refined finish. All this needs is time. 2022-2060. **92+**.



2011 Saint Amour “Clos des Billards”- Domaine des Billards (Héritiers Loron)

The 2011 Clos des Billards is just beginning to blossom and drink with generosity and has softened up a bit sooner than I expected, based on the last bottle I drank a couple of years ago. Today, the youthful nose is showing nice signs of secondary complexity in its blend of red and black cherries, spit-roasted *pigeon*, lovely spice tones, woodsmoke, incipient *sous bois* and a nice dollop of violets in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still a bit more reserved in profile than the nose, with a rock solid core, lovely focus and grip, fine-grained, seamless tannins and a very long, vibrant and promising finish. It is not a crime to start drinking the 2011 Clos des Billards, but the wine is still in climbing mode and will be even better with further bottle age. 2018-2050+. **94**.

2011 Moulin-à-Vent- Xavier et Nicolas Barbet

The 2011 Moulin-à-Vent from Xavier and Nicolas Barbet is aging very nicely and is only a few years away now from primetime drinking. The bouquet is quite stylish, offering up scents of cassis, dark berries, chicory, venison, woodsmoke, dark soil tones and a nice topnote of mustard seed. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still a bit closed, with a fine core, modest tannins, tangy acids and excellent focus and grip on the long and nascently complex

finish. This is going to be very good and quite long-lived, but give it a few more years in the cellar to truly open up. 2020-2050+. **92.**

2011 Fleurie “la Madone”- Château de Fleurie

The Château de Fleurie holdings in la Madone are one *hectare* in size, and this is in the same shaped bottle and adorned with the same style of label as the Clos des Billards bottlings today. Eighty percent of the cuvée was raised in older *foudre* in 2011 and the wine offers up a deep, youthful and black fruity nose of cassis, black cherries, gamebird, espresso, dark soil tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is focused, full-bodied and quite concentrated for Fleurie, with a rock solid core, good balance and grip and a long, gently tannic and still quite primary finish. This needs at least a couple more years in the cellar to start to really soften up on the backend. 2020-2040+. **92+.**

1989 Saint Amour “Réserve de Caveau”- Domaine des Billards (Héritiers Loron)

The old bottling of Réserve de Caveau at Domaine des Billards was made solely from the Clos des Billards, though this designation did not exist back in 1989. I have had the good fortune to drink this wine on two occasions, with the last previous bottle having been back in the fall of 2010, when I was visiting with Xavier Barbet at his home in Saint-Véran. So, I was delighted to have another opportunity to drink this wine at Auberge du Cep during our dinner together this spring. The wine continues to drink beautifully, offering up a complex and mature bouquet of desiccated cherries, *sous bois*, gamebird, tobacco smoke, lovely spice elements, woodsmoke and a bit of Chambolle mustard seed in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, vibrant and focused, with lovely complexity and grip, seamless balance and a very long, transparent and bouncy finish. Just a beautiful wine, but starting to show the first signs of real structural aging. 2018-2030+. **94.**

Clos de la Roilette (Fleurie)

The Coudert family's Clos de la Roilette is one of the iconic estates of the Cru Beaujolais, and as the stellar 1964 vintage of this wine so eloquently pointed out on this trip, it is every bit as ageworthy as all but the most structured examples of Morgon or Moulin-à-Vent. In fact, back in the nineteenth century, this wine was not sold as Fleurie, but as Moulin-à-Vent, and the owner of the estate back in the 1930s refused to allow the Fleurie appellation to appear on his labels for several decades after the vines here at Clos de la Roilette were officially sanctioned as Fleurie. The domaine and its vineyards lie down in the lower valleys of Fleurie, abutting the vineyards of the neighboring appellation of Moulin-à-Vent and it is quite easy to see that the wines of Clos de la Roilette often bear more similarity to those of Moulin-à-Vent than they do to some of the more forward wines of Fleurie. As I have recounted in the past, Alain's father, Fernand Coudert purchased this great old property in the mid-1960s from the previous owners, the Crozet family, who in addition to owning this fine property on the Fleurie-Moulin-à-Vent boundary, were the most important négociants in the region in the early years of the twentieth century. In the 1920s, when the delimitations of Fleurie and Moulin-à-Vent were officially prescribed, Monsieur Crozet was absolutely incensed when his estate was designated as belonging to Fleurie, as the wine had previously been sold as Moulin-à-Vent. It was at this time that he began to sell the wine as Clos de la Roilette, named after his very successful thoroughbred racehorse, with no mention anywhere on the label of Fleurie.

Monsieur Crozet was so upset with “*les Officials*” that he vowed to never again sell a bottle of his wine in France, and from the day Clos de la Roilette was officially made a Fleurie, the production of the estate was sold exclusively to clients in Switzerland, England and

Germany. By the 1960s, his descendants had relented and the appellation of Fleurie now adorned the labels of Clos de la Roilette, but they had lost most of their interest in the property (though as the note below on the 1964 will attest, the wines were still very, very good) and the Coudert family stepped into buy this historic estate in 1967 and reinvigorated the domaine. The vineyards were in pretty poor shape by this time, and the entire property had to be replanted beginning in 1967, so the vines here are a bit younger than in many of the other top cru estates, who can often point to ninety or hundred year-old vines in their best *lieux à dits*. But, the Coudert family has taken Clos de la Roilette to greater heights of quality and renown than even Monsieur Crozet could have envisioned, while retaining the image of Roilette the racehorse on their labels, and this is one of the very top estates in the entire Beaujolais region today. The wines here continue to age long and gracefully, with their now being four distinct bottlings of Fleurie, as well as a bit of Brouilly produced as well. The regular bottling of Clos de la Roilette is made in a deep, often sappy style that makes it very easy to drink in its relative youth, but which has the depth and stuffing to also age very well in the cellar. Monsieur Coudert notes that the clay and manganese soils of his vineyards give the wine its signature sappiness and surprising structure for Fleurie. There is also now a “Cuvée Tardive” of Clos de la Roilette that is crafted in a slightly more structured manner and is designed for maximum longevity, and consequently, is always better if given at least four or five years’ worth of bottle age prior to opening. It is usually made from older parcels of vines and is partially barrel aged in older casks. There is also now a bottling called “Griffe du Marquis” which is barrel-fermented and sees a bit of new oak during its *elevage* and is another splendid variation on the theme of Clos de la Roilette Fleurie. In the 1998 vintage, Alain Coudert also began to produce a more forward (or one might say typical) example of Fleurie which he calls Cuvée Christal, which is made to be drunk on the younger side than the regular bottling of Clos de la Roilette and is always delicious right out of the blocks. The Brouilly here is also made to be drunk young and is eminently quaffable, if perhaps not quite as serious as the bevy of exceptional Fleurie bottlings.

This was my first look at the 2016s from Clos de la Roilette. Monsieur Coudert was fortunate to have some vines in Brouilly in 2016, where there was no hail, as the damage to his vineyards in Fleurie was quite substantial and he reported that yields were down sixty-five to seventy percent there. Due to the very short crop in the Fleurie vineyards in 2016, the various Clos de la Roilette bottlings that I tasted on this visit were quite concentrated in style, albeit very pure and sappy (rather than the more muscular profile of the 2015s) and should prove to be a very long-lived vintage for the domaine. After we tasted through the 2016s and 2015s here, Monsieur Coudert opened bottles of the 2014, 2011 and 1993 Clos de la Roilette cuvées to finish up our tasting. The bottle of 1964 Clos de la Roilette had been drunk the week previously in Beaune, as a friend from Alsace, David Rayer (who is co-author of the superb Mosel Fine Wines publication) had found a couple of bottles of the 1964 in an old cellar and had generously brought one with him to a dinner we shared with others in Beaune. This was obviously still a few years ahead of the purchase of the Clos de la Roilette by the Coudert family in 1967, with the label still bearing the name of the Crozet family, but it was fascinating to taste a bottle from a top vintage of this era and see just how long and gracefully the Clos de la Roilette can age. Given that the Crozet children were not all that interested in the property by the 1960s, the superb quality of the 1964 will probably be outpaced by top recent vintages here.



The very generous and affable Alain Coudert in his cellars at Clos de la Roilette.

2016 Brouilly- Alain Coudert

Monsieur Coudert's 2016 Brouilly is quite black fruity in profile for this cru, but is quite tasty out of the blocks and will be at its best over its first eight to ten years in the bottle. The bright bouquet offers up scents of cassis, black cherries, a touch of dark chocolate, a good base of soil and a topnote of violets. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, long and sappy, with lovely focus and grip, very good balance, little tannin and a long, juicy finish. This is very tasty Brouilly, but it does not possess the inherent complexity of the range of Fleurie bottlings here. 2018-2025+. **88.**

2016 Fleurie- Clos de la Roilette

Due to the very short crop here in 2016, there are some similarities here between this vintage and the quite structured 2011 Clos de la Roilette out of the blocks, and when I remarked upon this impression, Monsieur Coudert made note to fetch a bottle of the 2011 out of the cellars a bit later to compare. The 2016 Clos de la Roilette is quite deep and concentrated on both the nose and palate, with the primary bouquet offering up a lovely blend of sweet dark berries, black cherries, violets, bitter chocolate and a fine base of dark soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite sappy at the core, with suave tannins, excellent focus and grip and a very long, nascently complex finish. This is drinkable today, but it is still a puppy and I would not touch a bottle for at least another two or three years. It will probably age several decades with ease. 2018-2040+. **93.**

2016 Fleurie “Cuvée Tardive”- Clos de la Roilette

As is the custom with the Cuvée Tardive bottling, the 2016 version is a bit more tannic and a bit more primary in profile than the regular Clos de la Roilette at this stage in the proceedings. The bouquet is deep, youthful and quite promising, offering up scents of black plums, black cherries, chocolate, dark soil tones and a fine topnote of woodsmoke. On the palate the wine is deep, sappy and full-bodied, with a rock solid core, ripe, fairly firm tannins, excellent focus and grip and a very long, very youthfully reticent finish. Today, it is hard to say that the Cuvée Tardive is going to be the better bottling, though it will certainly be a bit longer-lived, but I often have this impression when the wines are still quite young, and then give the edge to the Cuvée Tardive once the wines have a few years' worth of bottle age under their belt. It will probably prove to be the same with these two impressive 2016s further on down the road! 2022-2060. **93.**

2016 Fleurie “Griffe du Marquis”- Clos de la Roilette

The 2016 Griffe du Marquis bottling was really showing beautifully at the time of my visit. The concentrated, sappy aspect to the fruit of the 2016 vintage here has absolutely devoured the oak impression of the wine and this characteristic augurs very, very well for the evolution of this fine young wine! The nose jumps from the glass in a vibrant blend of sweet cassis, black cherries, raw cocoa, gamebird, a lovely base of soil tones, a nice touch of vanillin oak and a pungent topnote of violets. On the palate the wine is pure, full and quite primary, but with lovely sappiness at the core, plenty of soil signature, fine-grained, seamless tannins and excellent length and grip on the perfectly balanced and youthfully complex finish. This is going to be excellent as well. 2020-2050. **93+.**

2015 Fleurie- Clos de la Roilette

The 2015 Clos de la Roilette is a very good wine, with very good purity for the vintage and little signs of *sur maturité*, but it is not in the same league as the 2016 version. The nose offers up a deep and ripe blend of black raspberries, a touch of boysenberry, chocolate, a good dollop of soil, hung game and crushed violets. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite opulent in fruit tone, with a good core, hidden tannins and a long, fruit-driven and opulent finish. This is a quite broad-shouldered vintage of Clos de la Roilette, and given my stylistic preferences, I respect it more than I like it. 2018-2035+. **90.**

2015 Fleurie “Cuvée Tardive”- Clos de la Roilette

The 2015 Cuvée Tardive from Alain Coudert is a step up from the regular bottling of Clos de la Roilette in this vintage. The bouquet is deep and serious, delivering a constellation of cassis, black cherries, chocolate, a nice touch of balsamic overtones, a good base of soil and violets in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full and sappy at the core, with good, ripe tannins, fine focus and grip and a long, balanced and fairly powerful finish. The additional structural elements always found in the Cuvée Tardive bottling have proven a very good thing in the torrid vintage of 2015. 2020-2045+. **92.**

2014 Fleurie- Clos de la Roilette

It had been two and a half years since I last drank a bottle of the 2014 Clos de la Roilette and the wine was showing beautifully at the time of my visit to the domaine's cellars in March. The bottle we opened was a touch reductive when first poured and it took a bit of swirling to coax the wine out of its shell, but once it had blossomed, it was lovely. The nose eventually offers up scents of cassis, bitter chocolate, a fine base of dark soil tones, violets, hug game and plenty of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and nicely soil-

driven, with blossoming complexity, excellent focus and balance, melting tannins and a long, tangy and classy finish. Just a classic vintage of Clos de la Roilette. 2018-2045. **93.**

2011 Fleurie- Clos de la Roilette

It had been even longer since I last tasted a bottle of the 2011 Roilette, as I am not touching the bottles in my cellar right now, so my last visit with this exceptional vintage of this wine was back in the fall of 2012! The wine is aging very gracefully and its tannins are starting to fall away nicely, though still present in their diminished state on the backend. The wine is really expressive on the nose today, wafting from the glass in a mix of black cherries, cassis, bitter chocolate, a fine base of soil tones, violets and gamebird. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and nicely light on its feet, with a sappy core, classic focus and grip and a very long, vibrant and complex finish. This was a pretty chewy vintage of Clos de la Roilette out of the blocks, and there remains still a bit of tannin to resolve, but the wine is aging beautifully and is only a couple of years away from drinking with stunning complexity and generosity. It may well prove every bit as long-lived as the 1964! 2021-2065. **94.**

1993 Fleurie- Clos de la Roilette

The 1993 Clos de la Roilette is really drinking beautifully at age twenty-five and shows emphatically just how well this wine can age. The gorgeous nose has now developed a nice touch of tertiary exotica, revealing scents of baked cassis, menthol, lavender, dark soil tones, saddle leather, *sous bois*, a touch of dried eucalyptus and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish and *à point*, with lovely intensity of flavor, sound acids and lovely focus and grip on the long and complex finish. Lovely juice in a slightly leaner style. 2018-2030. **92.**

1964 Fleurie- Clos de la Roilette

The 1964 Clos de la Roilette is a beautiful wine that is at its absolute apogee of peak drinkability today, which is rather remarkable (to say the least)! This is not a wine that is hanging onto the edge of its plateau and notable solely for its longevity, but a pure, complex and velvety wine that is still full of fruit, soil and spice elements and absolutely delicious to drink. The perfumed and classy bouquet wafts from the glass in a complex blend of desiccated cherries, lovely spice tones, coffee, a touch of cinnamon, autumnal soil tones redolent of fallen oak leaves and a touch of strawberry in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, fresh and perfectly balanced, with a good core, lovely *sous bois* elements, seamless acids and a long, focused and velvety finish. Beautiful old Fleurie with plenty of life still in it. 2018-2030+. **93.**

Château Thivin (Odenas)

I had not had a chance to visit the iconic Côte de Brouilly estate of Château Thivin in a few years and was delighted that the Geoffray family had time to see me in March. This is always one of my favorite visits in the entire Beaujolais region, as Claude and Evelyne Geoffray have recognized for their entire careers just how ageworthy their wines are and they have always kept a goodly number of bottles in their cellars for drinking and sharing at full maturity. On this visit, I had the pleasure to meet for the first time their son, Claude-Edouard Geoffray, as he is preparing to take his place as the sixth generational head of this outstanding estate in Odenas, which was founded back in 1877. The tasting was typical of each visit I have made to the estate in the past, with the cold, foggy morning quickly forgotten as we settled into seats at a small table set comfortably in front of the fireplace, with a couple of loaves of fresh-baked bread already laid out to nibble on through the course of the tasting. One of the loaves was actually blue in color and is quite the rage in the nearby town of Cercié where the *boulangerie* is located, and though I cannot recall now exactly what gives the baguette its blue color, it was indeed one of

the finest loaves of bread I have ever had the pleasure to sample. Claude-Edouard Geoffray was as gracious and informative a host as his parents have always been on my previous visits and it seems very clear that Château Thivin will not miss a beat under the sixth generation of the family.

Château Thivin is known as the leading estate in the appellation of Côte de Brouilly (which they were instrumental in helping to establish in 1937), and with very good reason, as the Geoffray family have been tireless promoters of the quality of their appellation for several generations and are rightly regarded as one of the leading families in all of Beaujolais. The estate farms about eighteen *hectares* of vines, with the majority found in the Côte de Brouilly or Brouilly appellations, with small parcels also found just outside of these two Crus and rated as Beaujolais and Beaujolais-Villages. The Geoffrays have been converting all of their vineyards over to organic farming in recent times, having begun this process a decade ago and they are now nearing the finish line in the next couple of years. In addition to their stellar lineup of Côte de Brouilly bottlings, the Geoffray family also produced the very finest Beaujolais Rosé that I have ever tasted (made with a twenty-four maceration with the skins), a very fine, barrel-fermented Beaujolais Blanc “Clos de Rochebonne” and a lovely example of Brouilly from hillside vineyards to the west of Mount Brouilly. There are also two distinct bottlings of Beaujolais-Villages produced here and bottled under the Manoir du Pavé label, which hail from Evelyne Geoffray’s family and lie just outside of the boundaries of Brouilly, but we did not taste the most recent releases of these wines on my March visit.

2017 Beaujolais-Villages Rosé- Château Thivin

I have never tasted as serious an example of Beaujolais Rosé as those from Château Thivin and the 2017 vintage is going to be another outstanding bottle from the estate. The grapes macerate for twenty-four hours with their skins to give this wine its pale salmon hue, which is made from some of the production of their vineyards in Brouilly. The 2017 is an excellent wine, offering up a bright and fairly complex nose of peach, melon, lovely, salty minerality and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and zesty, with a lovely core and grip, impeccable focus and truly impressive backend mineral drive that sets this bottling far above most examples of Beaujolais Rosé! 2018-2023+. **90.**

2016 Beaujolais Blanc “Clos de Rochebonne”- Château Thivin

The Clos de Rochebonne bottling of Beaujolais Blanc hails from a small outcropping of limestone soil that pops up on the southern flank of the Mount Brouilly. The first vintage of this wine was the 2004 and the wine is barrel-fermented and aged seven months in cask prior to bottling. The 2016 Clos de Rochebonne is a superb example in the making, wafting from the glass in a refined and quite complex blend of apple, peach, chalky soil tones, acacia blossoms, just a whisper of vanillin oak and an esthery topnote of bee pollen. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and juicy on the attack, with crisp acids, fine focus and grip and a long, bright and bouncy finish. Lovely wine. 2018-2025. **90.**

2016 Brouilly- Château Thivin

The 2016 Brouilly from Château Thivin is a lovely wine in the making and it should prove to be quite long-lived for its appellation. The bouquet delivers a fine constellation of red and black cherries, cranberries, bonfire, a bit of pepper, a fine base of soil, gamebird and a touch of fresh thyme in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, young and sappy at the core, with a touch of backend tannin, tangy acids and lovely length and grip on the well-

balanced finish. I would opt for giving this a year in the cellar to allow it to blossom a bit more prior to drinking. 2019-2030+. **91.**



Claude-Edouard Geoffray, with our fine lineup of Château Thivin wines in the foreground.

2016 Côte de Brouilly- Château Thivin

The 2016 Côte de Brouilly is one of the best young vintages from Château Thivin that I have tasted in quite some time and this is clearly going to be a very, very top vintage in the pantheon of long-lived wines at this address. The great and sappy nose soars from the glass in a refined blend of cassis, sweet dark berries, woodsmoke, fresh herbs, bitter chocolate and a complex base of stony soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with a nice sense of early sappiness, suave, seamless tannins, bright acids and impeccable balance on the very long and nascently complex finish. I suspect that this wine will shut down for several years before it really starts to stir, but once it opens up again, it is going to be stellar. 2024-2075. **94+.**

2016 Côte de Brouilly “Cuvée Zaccharie”- Château Thivin

The 2016 Cuvée Zaccharie was raised in a range of Burgundy barrels that are one to fourteen years of age. This too is going to be outstanding in this vintage, as the bouquet delivers a superb blend of sappy black cherries, sweet dark berries, a lovely base of soil, dark chocolate, and a complex floral topnote redolent of both violets and peonies. The oak here is awfully hard to spot on the nose! On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and sappy at the core, with a

lovely spine of acidity, fine-grained tannins and impeccable focus and balance on the long and youthful finish. Another absolutely stellar 2016 *chez* Geoffray. 2022-2060+. **94+**.

2005 Côte de Brouilly- Château Thivin

The 2005 vintage at Château Thivin was another outstanding success, with the inherent structure of '05 providing a series structural chassis for the wine to age on, and in the early days after bottling, this wine was hermetically sealed. At age thirteen, the wine is just now starting to blossom truly and is starting to drink with lovely generosity. The complex nose offers up a fine, fairly black fruity mix of cassis, black cherries, just a touch of wild strawberry, dark soil tones, espresso, plenty of smokiness and the first hint of black truffle in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and complex, with generosity starting to blossom on the attack, a fine core and still a bit of backend tannins perking up the long and complex finish. A classic vintage at Château Thivin, the 2005 has miles to go before it sleeps! 2018-2050. **94**.

2000 Côte de Brouilly “Cuvée la Chapelle”- Château Thivin

The Geoffray family has always vinified each *lieu à dit* that they have on Mount Brouilly separately, preferring to make a final blend in the spring following the harvest. In certain vintages, they will also bottle a bit of some of the *lieux à dits* on their own, if they deem them sufficiently individual in personality and promising. Such was the case with their parcel of la Chapelle, which has a plain south exposition and is planted with forty year-old vines. In both 2000 and 1999 Claude Geoffray decided to bottle a bit of this *lieu à dit* on its own and Claude-Edouard was kind enough to open up the two side by side for comparisons to finish up our tasting. Monsieur Geoffray was convinced that our bottle of the 2000 was ever so slightly advanced, compared to recent bottles he tasted, so my score may ultimately prove to be a bit conservative. The nose is complex and nicely tertiary, offering up scents of red berries, autumnal tones, gamebird, coffee and a lovely base of soil. On the palate the wine is medium-full, delicate and long, with lovely complexity, melted tannins and fine length on the autumnal finish. I would rate this particular bottle about **87** points, but based on Claude-Edouard Geoffray's observation, I suspect that a pristine bottle would be closer to **90** points.

1999 Côte de Brouilly “Cuvée la Chapelle”- Château Thivin

In contrast to the 2000, our bottle of the 1999 Cuvée la Chapelle was spot on and absolutely singing. The bouquet is bright, wide open and complex, offering up a vibrant blend of black cherries, baked dark berries, a touch of saddle leather, black tea, dark soil tones and a beautiful mélange of spice elements in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and tangy, with a lovely core, still a whisper of backend tannin and impressive length and grip on the beautifully balanced finish. I would love to taste this wine side by side with the blended Côte de Brouilly, as I have the impression that the blend is slightly more elegant in profile than the Cuvée la Chapelle. But, in any case, this is an outstanding bottle of Cru Beaujolais that is now at its apogee of peak drinkability and still has decades of life ahead of it. 2018-2040. **93**.

Domaine de la Voûte des Crozes- Nicole Chanrion (Cercié)

Madame Nicole Chanrion is one of my favorite producers in all of Beaujolais, and I drink as many bottles of her lovely Côte de Brouilly as any other wine from the region. For many years, she has been the President of the Côte de Brouilly Grower's Association and is one of the great *personages* in the region. Her vineyards lie on the opposite side of the Mount Brouilly from those of Château Thivin, facing mostly towards the east and north, and the soils here are blue schist over the subsoil of volcanic rock that defines the Mount Brouilly. With more morning sun,

she tends to get more red fruity notes in her wines in most vintages than those made at Château Thivin, and though they keep nicely in the cellar, they do not generally possess the same chassis of tannin to carry them thirty or forty years out from the vintage. The wines are raised in large, old oak *foudres* for seven or eight months prior to bottling and tend to drink best over their first ten to fifteen years in bottle. I have a few bottles of Madame Chanrion's 2005 somewhere in my cellar and should try and dig one out to see how it is evolving, but after more than a decade of drinking her wines now with great regularity, I have come around to the conclusion that I like them best over the first half dozen years or so after they are bottled. They certainly possess the capability to last longer in bottle than this, but I tend to reach for them in most vintages (a very structured year like 2011 would be the exception) when they are five to seven years of age. I was surprised on this visit to see different labels on her wines than I was accustomed to here in the US and asked Madame Chanrion if she had recently switched, and she laughed and said "no, I have used these labels now for quite a long time, but Kermit Lynch never liked them and has kept the old label for the bottles he imports to the United States ever since I made the switch!" In addition to putting out four fine vintages of her wine for our tasting, Madame Chanrion was also kind enough to introduce me to a fine new restaurant in the center of Cercié, right on the Grand Rue, called l'Ecume Gourmande, which is highly recommended for those dining in the area.

2016 Côte de Brouilly- Domaine de la Voûte des Crozes (Nicole Chanrion)

The 2016 Côte de Brouilly from Nicole Chanrion is absolutely lovely and sizzles with the succulent, sappy fruit of the best wines of this vintage. The bouquet is a beautiful blend of red and black cherries, woodsmoke, a touch of raw cocoa, stony soil tones and a topnote of gamebird. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and plenty sappy at the core, with fine focus and grip, perfect balance, just a whisper of tannin and a long, complex and tangy finish. An utterly classic vintage *chez* Chanrion. 2018-2030+. **93.**

2014 Côte de Brouilly- Domaine de la Voûte des Crozes (Nicole Chanrion)

The 2014 vintage here was showing beautifully at the time of my March visit and is in its sweet spot of its evolution, offering up lovely precision and purity in a middleweight format that is very, very appealing at the moment. The very classy bouquet wafts from the glass in a bright blend of black cherries, *pigeon*, dark soil tones, espresso, woodsmoke and a topnote of fresh thyme. On the palate the wine is full, transparent and very refined in personality, with a good core, vibrant acids and fine grip on the long and *à point* finish. This is more black fruity today than it was upon release, but every bit as inviting. 2018-2025. **92.**

2011 Côte de Brouilly- Domaine de la Voûte des Crozes (Nicole Chanrion)

I had not tasted a bottle of the 2011 Côte de Brouilly from Domaine de la Voûte des Crozes since the summer of 2013, as this wine was a classically-structured example of the vintage out of the blocks and in need of some bottle age, so I have left the bottles in my cellar untouched since release. Madame Chanrion kindly opened a bottle for our tasting and the wine is starting to blossom very nicely, offering up a fine (and again, quite black fruity) constellation of dark berries, black cherries, a touch of saddle leather, bitter chocolate, lovely soil tones and a topnote of roasted game. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with tangy acids, still a touch of backend tannin perking up the finish and impressive length and grip. Fine juice that is really just starting to drink well and has plenty of life still ahead of it. 2018-2035+. **92+.**



The European labels of Nicole Chanrion's lovely Côte de Brouilly- I kind of like them better than the old label.

2003 Côte de Brouilly- Domaine de la Voûte des Crozes (Nicole Chanrion)

Madame Chanrion does not keep large stocks of her older wines, as she prefers to drink them on the relatively younger side, but she found a bottle of the 2003 and asked if it was of interest for me to taste. Of course, was my reply! The wine is really drinking beautifully still at age fifteen and Madame Chanrion noted that “this vintage has aged surprisingly well, given that it had so little acidity from the start.” The nose is deep, complex and again, quite black fruity in profile, offering up scents of cassis, baked blackberries, a touch of brown spice, hung game, *sous bois* and a topnote of bonfire. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and ready to drink, with a surprisingly fine soil signature, good complexity and a long, completely resolved, but still quite energetic finish. Good juice- especially for a wine from the torrid summer of 2003, and quite the pleasant surprise! 2018-2025+. **90.**

Domaine Daniel Bouland (Villié Morgon)

I have long enjoyed the wines of Daniel Bouland, but this was my first visit ever to his domaine in Morgon. Monsieur Bouland is a soft-spoken and thoughtful *vigneron*, and he is very gracious with his time and his wines when one is visiting, but one always has the feeling he would rather be out working in the vines, rather than conducting a tasting in the cellar. He farms a bit more than seven *hectares* of mostly very old vines, in some of the top *lieux à dits* of Morgon, but also in Chiroubles and Côte de Brouilly. Monsieur Bouland's Chiroubles hails from

the *lieu à dit* of Chatenay, which is only a kilometer to the north of Morgon's "Corcelette", which is high up on the hill on a base of sandstone. The wine is raised in stainless steel *cuve*. There are two different Côte de Brouilly bottlings here, with the one produced from a choice parcel of seventy-five to eighty year-old vines called Cuvée Mélanie. With the domaine's fine range of Morgon cuvées, Monsieur Bouland raises them slightly differently in the cellars, with his straight Corcelette raised entirely in *cuve*, the Corcelette "Vieilles Vignes" raised in two thousand liter *foudres*, and the Bellevue and very old vine Delys bottlings both also raised in *foudres*. I was quite pleased to find that there are a couple of additional bottlings produced *chez* Bouland than what I was familiar with in the US market, and not surprisingly they too were excellent in quality. To my palate, Daniel Bouland is one of the very top four or five producers in all of Beaujolais and his wines are as cellar-worthy as those from Château Thivin and any other producer one can think of in the constellation of Beaujolais' greatest estates! The 2016s in particular *chez* Bouland are cellar treasures waiting to happen!

2016 Chiroubles "Chatenay"- Domaine Daniel Bouland

The 2016 Chiroubles "Chatenay" was really showing beautifully at the time of my visit. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a sappy and quite refined blend of red and black cherries, raw cocoa, gamebird, woodsmoke, a nice touch of spice and a fine base of soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely tangy, with a sappy core, fine focus and grip and a long, complex and perfectly balanced finish that is perked up by just a touch of backend tannin. Really serious Chiroubles! 2018-2030+. **92.**

2016 Côte de Brouilly- Domaine Daniel Bouland

This is one of the bottlings that Monsieur Bouland does not export. This is a made from some of his younger vines on Mount Brouilly, which have a southeasterly exposition. The 2016 version is quite promising, though a bit more closed structurally than the lovely Chatenay. The nose delivers scents of cherries, strawberries, a touch of dark berry, bonfire, *pigeon*, a touch of nutskin and a great base of minerality. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and well-balanced, with fine transparency, moderate tannins and a long, youthful and tangy finish. 2020-2035. **91.**

2016 Côte de Brouilly "Cuvée Mélanie"- Domaine Daniel Bouland

The first vintage that Monsieur Bouland produced his Cuvée Mélanie was the 2002. This is one of my favorite examples of Chiroubles produced in the appellation, with the forty year-old vines always delivering a lovely combination of sappy fruit and lovely underlying soil signature. The 2016 is outstanding, offering up a fine and quite youthful nose of black cherries, cassis, stony soil tones, woodsmoke, venison and a lovely array of spice tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still quite primary, with a sappy core, excellent focus and grip, moderate tannins and a long, slightly chewy and impeccably balanced finish. This deserves at least a few years in the cellar to properly blossom. It will be excellent. 2021-2050. **93+.**

2016 Morgon "Corcelette"- Domaine Daniel Bouland

The regular bottling of Corcelette is another that Monsieur Bouland does not export. As I mentioned above, this wine is raised entirely in stainless steel, rather than in *foudres* as is the case for the old vine bottling from this superb vineyard. The 2016 is a superb wine, offering up a deep and quite black fruity nose of dark berries, black cherries, *pigeon*, bonfire, dark soil tones, cigar smoke and a discreet and quite exotic topnote of eucalyptus. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with fine soil signature, moderate, seamless tannins and a

long, nascently complex and focused finish. This is a serious example of Corcelette! 2021-2050. **93.**

2016 Morgon “Bellevue Schiste”- Domaine Daniel Bouland

Interestingly, the 2016 Bellevue Schiste bottling was showing more closed at the domaine than the bottle I tasted back here in New York last October. The bouquet is quite shut down at the present time, but with some coaxing offers up scents of red and black cherries, cranberries, gamebird, a complex base of soil, a touch of chicory and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and classy, with a fine, sappy core of fruit, good mineral drive and a long, reserved and moderately tannic finish. This needs a few years to blossom, but it will be excellent. 2020-2040+. **92+.**

2016 Morgon “Corcelette” Vieilles Vignes- Domaine Daniel Bouland

The 2016 Corcelette Vieilles Vignes was really showing beautifully at the time of my visit, with the additional six months out from its bottling allowing the wine to really sing and it is quite apparent that I underrated this wine a bit last autumn. The bouquet is pure and very complex, wafting from the glass in a mix of black cherries, sweet dark berries, a touch of cranberry, gentle autumnal tones, gamebird, granite and a fine smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is full, pure and absolutely seamless, with a rock solid core, bright acids, fine-grained tannins and a very long, focused and nascently complex finish. Very, very high class Morgon in the making! 2022-2060+. **95.**

2016 Morgon “Delys” Vieilles Vignes- Domaine Daniel Bouland

The very old vine Delys bottling, produced from vines planted in 1926, is one of the stars in the cellar here in 2016. As Monsieur Bouland commented, “the very friable soils in this parcel really let the old vine roots to dig deep and produce great minerality in the wine.” The bouquet of the 2016 is stellar, delivering a superb aromatic constellation of sappy black cherries, woodsmoke, *pigeon*, dark soil tones, a touch of mustard seed and a lovely, almost exotic topnote of lavender. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and sappy at the core, with great soil signature, ripe, suave tannins, excellent focus and grip and a very long, beautifully balanced and tangy finish. Great juice. 2022-2060+. **95.**

2015 Morgon “Corcelette” Vieilles Vignes- Domaine Daniel Bouland

The 2015 Corcelette Vieilles Vignes bottling from Daniel Bouland was showing quite well at the time of my visit, offering up a sappy and black fruity nose of black cherries, cassis, spit-roasted game, chocolate, woodsmoke and some balsamic overtones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and opulent at the core, with a bit of ripe tannins perking up the long, powerful and fairly well-balanced finish. This is clearly a point higher in alcohol than its counterpart from 2016, but it shows no signs of heat and is quite fresh for a 2015. Good juice. 2020-2060. **93+.**

2005 Morgon “Corcelette”- Domaine Daniel Bouland

Monsieur Bouland was only making a single bottling of Corcelette back in this era, and the 2005 is a beauty. The bouquet is deep, excellent and still a bit on the youthful side, offering up scents of black cherries, dark berries, bonfire, *pigeon*, hints of the *sous bois* to come, a touch of menthol and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a still very solid core of fruit, fine soil signature, a superb girdle of acidity and a long, moderately tannic and very well-balanced finish. Amazingly, at age thirteen, this wine still needs a few more years in the cellar to reach its full maturity! Fine, fine juice. 2020-2050+. **93+.**



Château Grange Cochard (Villié Morgon)

Château Grange Cochard is one of the new superstar domaines in Morgon, though the estate has been around since 1759. The property was bought by the English couple, James and Sarah Wilding in 2008 and they have set their sights on rejuvenating its reputation as one of the top producers in all of Beaujolais. The Wildings looked around for a few years before settling on Morgon as the center of their second career as winemakers, having thoughtfully scouted out several other regions around the globe before settling on this property. As James Wilding recounts, “we knew we wanted to make red wine, and as we spoke reasonable French already, France was a logical place to look, but once one starts poking around a bit in the Côte d’Or, one quickly realizes that the best parcels are never going to come your way unless it is for some ungodly amount of money, so it is not the most fertile ground for newcomers to be looking.” As the couple wanted to produce true *vins de gardes* wines, they then took a look around in Beaujolais and Morgon was a very logical fit for their aspirations, as the Château Grange Cochard was available and came along with old vines in some of the choicest parcels in the appellation of Morgon. The only problem was that one had to buy the château along with the vineyards, and the building was in pretty bad shape by the time it hit the market. After a bit of deliberation, the Wildings decided that they could simply not pass up on the great parcels of vineyards and decided to take the estate, despite the château in rather desperate need of a bit of TLC to bring it up to comfortable standards. A new heating system was the first item on the agenda, as the old one, if it worked at all, did so only intermittently! Eventually, everything was

addressed in the *grand maison*, which today is the epitome of good taste and comfort, but one can easily imagine just how much work had to be done to bring it up to its current level of hospitality! The vineyards though, were a real treasure and the Wildings have been making superb bottlings of Morgon since their first vintage here, with the wines only getting better with each passing year, as they have a chance to further work the soils and lavish attention on the vines.

All of the parcels of vines that came along with the château are old, with the youngest vines on the estate now forty years of age and the vast majority of parcels planted with vines in the seventy-five to one hundred year-old range. This includes an absolutely choice morsel in the Côte du Py, located at the very crown of the hill and planted with vines average sixty years of age. The Wildings related during our visit to the vineyard that the village is contemplating putting an observation platform at the top of the Côte du Py for tourists, as one can get a great view of the Alps on clear days from here, but the problem is that there are vines up here that would be lost (or at least, potentially damaged by lots of tourists taking in the view) and it is hopeful that the village will find the intelligence to abandon this plan. The centenarian vines owned by the Wildings are across from the château in a parcel known as les Charmes, which gets a lot of TLC from Sarah when she has a chance to “get out into my garden.” The Wildings had initially intended to raise their wines in old *foudres* in the tradition of the region, but the problem was that the old ones that they inherited when buying the property were not usable and had to be replaced. They bought two used, three thousand liter *foudres* as replacements, but found they were too large to get into the cellar and they had to take them apart and have them reconstructed in the cellars, once the pieces had been brought in. After that experience, they decided that used Burgundy barrels would also be quite a good aging option for their Morgons!

The Wildings produce three distinct bottlings of Morgon these days, and old vine cuvée and their single vineyard wines from Les Charmes and the Côte du Py. All three are excellent. The Vieilles Vignes cuvée is the bottling that is raised in the two, reconstructed *foudres* that they brought in at the start of their venture at Grange Cochard. The two other bottlings of Les Charmes and Côte du Py are now raised in older Burgundy barrels, which have the supreme benefit of fitting through the cellar doors and can be gotten down the stairs! The age of the vines used for the Vieilles Vignes bottling range from forty to eighty years of age, with most of the fruit from the parcel of Les Charmes, after the hundred year-old vines have been segregated off for the single vineyard bottling that bears the name of the *lieu à dit* on the label. The Côte du Py vines range from forty up to sixty-five years of age and are beautifully located, on the blue granite outcrop that defines the soil at the very summit of this vineyard. Part of this bottling is barrel-fermented. All three cuvées at Château Grange Cochard are aged for nine to twelve months (in either *foudres* or cask) prior to bottling with a very, very light filtration. Presently, the Wildings bottle with quite low levels of sulfur as well, but I hope this might raise up a bit in the future, as these are true *vins de gardes* bottles of Morgon and when one is crafting a wine to age forty or fifty years, what is the point about being squeamish about the SO₂ levels at the outset? I know this view is quite politically incorrect on my part, as low sulfur is very stylish today, but I am not a fan of this fashion and always prefer my wines to have a traditional level of SO₂ when bottled to ensure their stability over the long, long haul that I intend for the bottles of Morgon I put in my own cellar, including the lovely wines from Château Grange Cochard! These are some

of the true superstar bottlings in Morgon these days and I urge readers to check them out before they become “discovered” and prices start to climb up!

I should mention that we tasted a few older vintages with dinner, but as James Wilding is a bit of a “policy wonk” (in his own words) and my university degree is in Political Science, so we had such a lovely time with our free-ranging discussions over dinner that I did not stay organized enough to take notes on the wines we drank with the meal! At least I still was working studiously when we tasted the superb 2016s here prior to dinner, so those notes appear below. This was my first look at the couple’s 2016s, as they like to ship their wines a bit later, and I was very, very impressed with the quality! Sarah and James mentioned that they got hit quite hard by the hail of 2017 (there were three separate storms over Morgon in the summer of 2017!) and their crop level was reduced by two-thirds in that vintage, but they were luckily spared in 2016 and have normal production in the former year. Given that these are absolutely stellar 2016s, it would make sense for fans of the domaine (new and old) to make a special search for extra bottles to put in the cellar, as the 2017s are going to be hard to find and may not rise up to the stellar quality levels of these three exceptional 2016 Morgons. This was my first visit to taste with the Wildings *sur place* at Château Grange Cochard, but it will certainly not be the last, as this is one of the rising stars in the firmament of great Cru Beaujolais and I have a sense that the wines here are only going to get finer and finer with each passing year.

2016 Morgon “Vieilles Vignes”- Château Grange Cochard

The 2016 Vieilles Vignes bottling from Château Grange Cochard is outstanding. The nose jumps from the glass in a sappy blend of sweet dark berries, black cherries, dark soil tones, woodsmoke and an exotic touch of juniper berry in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and beautifully balanced, with plenty of sappiness at the core, lovely transparency, fine-grained, seamless tannins and a long, tangy and superbly focused finish. Fine, fine Morgon in the making that will be all too easy to drink in its youth, but will age beautifully as well. 2018-2040. **92+.**

2016 Morgon “les Charmes”- Château Grange Cochard

The 2016 les Charmes bottling is just outstanding! These one hundred year-old vines, planted on pink granite schist, have absolutely excelled in this vintage and offer up all of the purity, old vine sappiness and impeccable precision that is found only in the very best wines of this classic vintage. The bouquet offers up a simply stunning constellation of black cherries, cassis, a complex base of soil tones, gamebird, a touch of menthol, a very discreet base of smoky oak and a topnote of bonfire. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and sappy, with great mineral drive, suave tannins, great acids and laser-like focus on the very long, nascently complex and very promising finish. This is so beautifully balanced that it will drink well with only a few years in the cellar, but it is really built for the long haul and deserves to be forgotten in a cool corner of the cellar for a decade! Great juice. 2021-2060. **94.**

2016 Morgon “Côte du Py”- Château Grange Cochard

The 2016 Côte du Py bottling from the Wildings has more red fruity elements to its bouquet and flavor profile than the lovely les Charmes, but it shares the same purity and sappy quality to the fruit and great transparency of the 2016 vintage. The nose is complex and very refined, wafting from the glass in a blaze of red and black cherries, raw cocoa, lovely, granitic minerality, a touch of lavender, woodsmoke and a bit of orange peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with fine-grained tannins, great

focus and grip and a very, very long and complex finish. This is a classic example of Côte du Py in a great vintage and the wine will be stellar for many decades to come. 2023-2060+. 94+.



James and Sarah Wilding in their parcel at the very top of the Côte du Py.

Domaines Chermette- Domaine du Vissoux (Saint-Vérand)

Jean-Étienne Chermette is in the process of taking over the reins of this superb Beaujolais domaine from his father, Pierre-Marie, and the family has decided to start labeling their wines in the future as Domaines Chermette, rather than Domaine du Vissoux. Jean-Étienne will be the sixth generation to head his family's fine estate in Beaujolais. However, other than a slight label change, everything is poised to remain the same here as the estate moves from one generation onto the next, with the wines still crafted in a beautifully classical and natural manner that has made the Chermette family's wines the reference point (along with Jean-Paul Brun) of the southern half of the region for decades and decades. The first vintage of Pierre-Marie Chermette's wines that I sold were the 1988s, so I have had the good fortune to cellar and drink these wines now for thirty years, and they have never strayed from their brilliantly pure and complex expressions of their various *terroirs* of Beaujolais. The wines are all fermented with indigenous yeasts, whole clusters in a semi-carbonic style and aged in large, ancient *foudres* prior to bottling after a relaxed *elevage*, so that the wines always show outstanding depth, soil signature and structural integrity to age long and gracefully. This is as true for the old vine bottlings of Beaujolais (I drank my last bottle of the 1988 Cuvée Traditionnelle- the old name for

today's cuvée Origine- in 2000 and the wine was still cruising along at its apogee at age twelve and was in no hurry to be drunk up!) as it is for the long-lived, utterly brilliant Cru bottlings from Fleurie and Moulin-à-Vent. On this visit, which was my first to the estate since 1990, I was very happy to see that a new Cru has been added to the Chermette family roster, as the 2017 vintage will usher in the first bottling of Saint Amour from the domaine.

I had been under the false impression in the past that a few of the Crus were now being raised partially in Burgundy casks, with a small percentage new, but found out from Jean-Étienne on this trip that the only wine that the Chermette family has ever raised in this manner is their bottling of Moulin-à-Vent “la Rochelle”, which is indeed aged solely in two hundred and twenty-five liter Burgundy barrels, with twenty percent new in most vintages. But, all of the other bottlings here continue to be raised in the large, old oak *foudres* that line the cellars here. The Chermette's' Cru bottlings are amongst the very finest expressions of their respective appellations as one can find in the entire region. I was very pleased to learn from Jean-Étienne Chermette on this visit that the domaine is going to make more of their Cru bottlings available for the American market in the future, as these have always been relatively scarce here in the states and it is going to be easier to find the wines in the coming years, as more will be made available for merchants and sommeliers who ask to re-order. In fact, it is still possible to order a handful of the magical 2016 Crus from the domaine (I bought a case of the brilliant 2016 Moulin-à-Vent “les Trois Roches” for my cellar in France), so if one has run through their supply of the 2016s from the Chermette family already, make enquiries, as there remains some of this great vintage *chez* Chermette still in the pipeline! Jean-Étienne Chermette organized mostly bottles of 2016s to taste during my visit, as it was still generally a bit early to be tasting the 2017s here. However, we did dip into a couple of early 2017s during the course of our tasting, if the 2016 version was already sold out from the winery, and then finished up with a couple of older bottles. The Chermette family is one of the great producers in all of Beaujolais, with their Cru bottlings at the very summit of the region (and their old vine Beaujolais cuvées always of Cru quality as well!) and thirty years on, I still cannot recommend these wines highly enough!

2016 Beaujolais Blanc- Domaines Chermette

The 2016 Beaujolais Blanc from Domaines Chermette is a very pretty wine, offering up a bright and juicy nose of apple, peach, chalky minerality and a topnote of spring flowers. On the palate the wine is ripe, full-bodied, round and already drinking with lovely generosity, with good framing acids, fine focus and grip and a long, bouncy finish. Good juice. 2018-2023+. **89.**

2016 Beaujolais Rosé “les Griottes”- Domaines Chermette

Jean-Étienne's 2016 Beaujolais Rosé “les Griottes” is also very stylish and wide open in personality, offering up a vibrant bouquet of melon, white cherries, chalky soil tones and a potpourri of floral tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, crisp and quite long on the backend, with a good core, fine focus and grip and plenty of succulence. This is very good juice. 2018-2023. **89.**

2017 Beaujolais “les Griottes”- Domaines Chermette

The Chermette's' 2017 Beaujolais “les Griottes” had been bottled a month before my visit and was starting to bounce back nicely. There is a bit more amplitude on both the nose and palate from the fine 2016 version (which is already sold out at the domaine), due to the differences of style of the two vintages. The youthful bouquet delivers scents of cherries, sweet cranberries,

woodsmoke and a fine base of granitic soil tones. On the palate the wine is fullish, pure and nicely round on the attack, with a sappy core, fine grip and balance and a long, focused and energetic finish. This is still in the midst of bouncing back from its bottling and will clearly show more delineation with a bit more distance out from the *mise*, but it is easy to see that this is going to be a lovely example. 2018-2030. **90+**.

2016 Beaujolais “Origine”- Domaines Chermette

The 2016 Beaujolais “Origine” Vieilles Vignes from the Chermette family is very classic, and the wine was showing every bit as well at the domaine in March as it did the previous September, when I had a chance to taste it here in New York. The wine remains notable for its purity and nascent complexity, with the bouquet wafting from the glass in a fine blend of red and black cherries, woodsmoke, a superb base of granitic soil, a nice touch of fresh thyme and a bit of gamebird in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full and very suave on the attack, with an excellent core, refined, modest tannins and great balance on the very long and vibrant finish. Thinking back, this is probably not a whole lot dissimilar to the 1988 Cuvée Traditionnelle that I started my experience with the Chermette's' wines, though with more sappy depth of fruit at the core- which augurs very, very well for its future development. 2018-2035+. **93.**

2016 Beaujolais ‘Coeur de Vendanges’ Vieilles Vignes- Domaines Chermette

The 2016 “Coeur de Vendanges” cuvée from Jean-Étienne and Pierre-Marie Chermette is truly an old vine cuvée, with the vines now having passed the century mark! This is a great wine in the making, but as I noted a couple of issues back, it is still on the young side and it would be very beneficial for the wine to spend at least a few years in the cellar and allow its inherent complexity to truly emerge. The bouquet is pure and old vine sappy, offering up scents of black cherries, sweet dark berries, espresso, a complex base of granite, *pigeon* and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very elegant in profile, with a superb core of fruit, excellent transparency and a very long, tangy and modestly tannic finish. With sufficient bottle age, the distance between the Origine and the Coeur de Vendanges will likely expand a bit. 2020-2040+. **93+**.

2016 Brouilly “Pierreux”- Domaines Chermette

I have often wondered how the Chermette family's bottling of Pierreux seems to have more structure and mineral drive than the vast majority of Brouilly bottlings that I taste each year, and was happy to discover that the reason for this is that this small vineyard is actually located on the slopes of Mount Brouilly, just outside of the appellation of Côte de Brouilly. So its fine structure is now explained! As I mentioned last fall, this is a superb example of the vintage, offering up a beautiful and quite black fruity nose of cassis, black cherries, fresh thyme, vinesmoke, a fine base of soil tones and a delicate floral topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and beautifully sappy at the core, with excellent mineral drive, modest tannins and a long, tangy and perfectly focused finish. This is great Brouilly in the making, but it needs a couple more years in the cellar to truly blossom. 2020-2040. **93+**.

2017 Fleurie “Poncié”- Domaines Chermette

The Poncié vineyard from the Chermette's sits up in the steepest section of Fleurie, not far from the well-known la Madone, and is quite different in *terroir* from the les Garants bottling from the family. The 2017 Poncié is the first Cru from this vintage that I have tasted and it is lovely, offering up an excellent aromatic constellation of black cherries, dark berries, fresh herb tones, plenty of smokiness and a lovely base of minerality. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and youthfully tangy, with a sappy core of fruit, fine focus and grip and a long,

moderately tannic and very well-balanced finish. This has more mid-palate amplitude than the utterly classic 2016 version, but is not quite as powerful as the 2015 example. The 2017 Poncié had been bottled only two weeks before my March visit, so my score may ultimately prove to be a tad conservative, once the wine has had a chance to fully re-settle after its *mise*. 2021-2040+. **92+**.

2016 Fleurie “les Garants”- Domaines Chermette

As I mentioned in the fall, the les Garants vineyard is located down in the valley area of Fleurie that borders on Moulin-à-Vent. It is not far from the Clos de la Roilette, and like that vineyard, was actually once part of Moulin-à-Vent and only officially placed in Fleurie in the 1920s. The 2016 was showing as beautifully at the domaine as it did in the fall, offering up a pure, sappy and very refined bouquet of dark berries, black cherries, woodsmoke, a fine base of dark soil tones, gamebird and a touch of currant leaf in the upper register (which is very Volnay-like). On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very pure on the attack, with a superb core of fruit, excellent soil inflection, fine-grained tannins and a long, energetic and complex finish. Superb young Fleurie! 2020-2045+. **94**.

2016 Moulin-à-Vent “les Trois Roches”- Domaines Chermette

As I noted mentioned last autumn, the 2016 les Trois Roches from the Chermettes is one of the greatest young bottles of Moulin-à-Vent I have ever had the pleasure to taste! Six more months of evolution has not dampened my enthusiasm for this wine at all, as it is still utterly brilliant in its aromatic expression of black cherries, cassis, espresso, a very complex base of dark soil tones, woodsmoke, gamebird and a gentle topnote of exotic spices. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and sappy at the core, with great purity of fruit and transparency down to the soil, suave tannins and a very long, perfectly balanced and complex finish. A brilliant wine in the making. 2021-2060+. **95**.

2017 Saint-Amour “les Champs Grillé”- Domaines Chermette

The new cuvée of Saint-Amour “les Champs Grillé” from Domaines Chermette hails from forty-five year-old vines and is going to be one of the superstars of the commune in the years to come. The 2017 version offers up a beautiful bouquet of black cherries, dark berries, gamebird, a complex base of soil, a touch of espresso and a bit of bonfire in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and very mineral in profile for young Saint-amour, with a full-bodied format, a fine core, bright acids and a very long, suavely tannic and complex finish. Great juice and a stellar new addition to the Chermette family lineup! 2020-2045. **94**.

2014 Moulin-à-Vent “la Rochelle”- Domaines Chermette

The La Rochelle bottling of Moulin-à-Vent is the only one *chez* Chermette that is raised in smaller Burgundy casks, rather than large *foudres*, and the 2014 version is a superb example of its vintage. The very refined and wide open nose offers up scents of black cherries, sweet cassis, espresso, dark soil tones, raw cocoa and a touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and utterly refined in personality, with a good core, fine, moderate tannins and lovely length and grip on the complex and classy finish. I really like how the oak is done so discreetly in this bottling. 2018-2040+. **94**.

2015 Moulin-à-Vent “la Rochelle”- Domaines Chermette

The Chermettes made some of my absolutely favorite examples of the buxom 2015 vintage and their La Rochelle is stellar. The deep and very sappy nose soars from the glass in a complex blend of cassis, dark berries, woodsmoke, *pigeon*, raw cocoa, dark soil tones vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, primary and rock solid at the core, with a bit more power than the 2014, ripe, seamless tannins and excellent length and grip on the well-balanced

and still very primary finish. This is going to be a long-distance runner and will need several years in the cellar to start to shed some of its formidable tannins. 2025-2075. **94+**.

2001 Fleurie “les Garants”- Domaines Chermette

The 2001 les Garants is fully mature at age seventeen and drinking very well indeed. The deep and tertiary bouquet wafts from the glass in a red fruity blend of dried cherries, cranberries, gamebird, a touch of nutskin, fresh thyme, *sous bois* and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and quite suave on the attack, with perfect resolution, good mid-palate depth and a very long, focused and beautifully autumnal finish. This was not a great vintage, but the les Garants has aged flawlessly and is now at its apogee, but still with plenty of life still ahead of it. 2018-2030. **91**.



Jean-Étienne Chermette in the family domaine's cellars in the village of Saint-Vérand.

Jean-Paul Brun- Domaine Terres Dorées (Charnay)

Jean-Paul Brun was away from the domaine on the day of my visit (he was in Norway), but his assistant cellar master, Joachim, was kind enough to meet me and show me the entire range of 2016s from this outstanding domaine in Charnay, as well as one or two 2017s or 2015s. It was a deep and compelling tasting, and I was able to taste several single vineyard Cru bottlings that were new to me or to the Brun lineup. I was very happy to see almost the entire range from 2016 lined up in the tasting room at the domaine when I arrived, as I had only tasted the Beaujolais Blanc and a couple of the reds from Monsieur Brun from this vintage prior to my

visit. New cuvées to me on this visit included a bottling of Beaujolais “Le Ronsay” which is made from younger vines than the Cuvée l’Ancien, a bottling of Morgon “Côte du Py-Javernières” (first vintage here 2015), Brouilly “Pisse Vieille” (first vintage 2014) and two single vineyard Moulin-à-Vent bottlings to augment the blended version: La Rochelle and Les Thorins. The la Rochelle was first produced by Monsieur Brun in the 2015 vintage and the les Thorins celebrates its inaugural vintage here with the 2016. A couple of these were a bit grumpy and not really showing at their best, but most of the others were absolutely stellar and superb new additions in the lineup of Domaine des Terres Dorées. I did not think to confirm, but my impression was that both the fine Fleurie bottlings here in 2016 were hit by the hail, as they were a bit more chewy than is customary and they will need time to blossom in this vintage. The only sad thing about Monsieur Brun having been absent on the day of my visit (as I was taken very good care of by his second in command) was that I did not get a chance to taste Jean-Paul’s outstanding, old school example of Côte-Rôtie, which he makes in tiny quantities and which one has to know enough to ask to taste to have a chance to try it! Jean-Paul Brun has made absolutely stellar wines in 2016 and this is a great, great vintage from this consistently excellent domaine.

2016 Chardonnay “Classic”- Domaine des Terres Dorées (Jean-Paul Brun)

The 2016 Chardonnay “Classic” from Jean-Paul Brun is a very pretty example of a stainless steel fermented chardonnay made for early quaffing. The nicely ripe nose wafts from the glass in a mix of peach, apple, chalky soil tones and spring flowers. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and wide open in personality, with a respectable core, modest acids and good length and grip on the finish. This is very easy to like, but it is not particularly complex. 2018-2020. **87.**

2016 Roussanne- Domaine des Terres Dorées (Jean-Paul Brun)

I can only recall tasting the Roussanne bottling from Monsieur Brun when visiting the domaine in Charnay, and it may be that this wine is not exported. The wine is fermented and raised in stainless steel tanks to keep it bright and light on its feet, which the 2016 certainly is, as it offers up a stylish bouquet of pear, acacia blossoms, coriander and a fine base of chalky soil tones. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, bouncy and quite solid at the core, with sound framing acids, good focus and grip and a long, succulent finish. The acids here are not particularly brisk and for that reason, this wine will certainly be best if drunk up in its youth. 2018-2022. **88.**

2017 Beaujolais “Le Ronsay”- Domaine des Terres Dorées (Jean-Paul Brun)

The Le Ronsay bottling is a young vine cuvée of Beaujolais that I had never tasted before from the domaine. The 2017 version had been bottled at the start of February of 2018, so it had about five weeks to settle in prior to my visit. It was still a bit grumpy in its recovery phase after the *mise*, so I have scored it in a range and would expect it to eventually settle in at the top of the spread. The wine is pretty and shows good depth of fruit for a young vine bottling, wafting from the glass in a blend of red and black cherries, woodsmoke, a hint of pepper and a good base of soil. On the palate the wine is fullish, juicy and has a good core, with fine length and a bit of tannin perking up the finish. This has still not recovered its focus or balance after the bottling, but the raw materials seem promising. 2018-2025. **87-89.**

2016 Beaujolais “Cuvée l’Ancien” V.V.- Domaine des Terres Dorées (Jean-Paul Brun)

The 2016 Cuvée l’Ancien is one of the wines I had already tasted from this vintage from Monsieur Brun and the wine was showing every bit as well at the domaine as it did in New York last fall. The beautiful bouquet wafts from the glass in a spicy blend of cherries, raspberries,

cranberries, Vosne-Romanée-like spice tones, woodsmoke and a lovely base of soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very transparent, with a fine core, moderate tannins and excellent focus and grip on the long finish. This deserves at least a year or two in the cellar to start to show its secondary layers. 2019-2035. **91+**.

2016 Beaujolais “Cuvée l’Ancien” Le Buissy- Dom. des Terres Dorées (Jean-Paul Brun)

The 2016 Le Buissy is one of the single vineyard bottlings I had never seen before from the domaine. When I checked with Denyse Louis, the domaine’s long-time importer here in New York, she noted that the wine has been made for many years, but as it was raised in small barrels, they had never offered it. This hails from a parcel of forty to fifty year-old vines and is quite a bit more black fruity than the blended Cuvée l’Ancien in 2016. The youthful bouquet delivers a blend of black cherries, dark berries, a touch of cranberry, vinesmoke, pepper and a topnote of fresh thyme. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely soil-driven, but very young in personality and a bit grumpy today. There is good length and grip on the chewy finish, but all a bit of *herbacité* that seems a bit out of place in the suave 2016 vintage- perhaps this is just in a sullen stage of adolescence? Today, I have to say that I respect its raw materials more than I love its shape and style. 2021-2030. **88+?**

2016 Côte de Brouilly- Domaine des Terres Dorées (Jean-Paul Brun)

The 2016 Côte de Brouilly from Domaine des Terres Dorées is a superb young wine in the making, but it will need a couple of years in the cellar to start to blossom properly. However, there is not a hair out of place in this refined young wine today, as it offers up a precise and nascently complex bouquet of red and black cherries, gamebird, stony soil tones, fresh thyme, woodsmoke and a dollop of youthful peppery tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, long and full-bodied, with lovely detail and underlying minerality, suave, fine-grained tannins and a long, promising and perfectly balanced finish. Whereas I am not totally certain of how the Le Buissy is going to evolve, the 2016 Côte de Brouilly is clearly a superb young wine that simply needs some bottle age to blossom and will be excellent with a bit of patience. 2021-2040+. **92.**

2016 Brouilly “Pisse Vieille”- Domaine des Terres Dorées (Jean-Paul Brun)

The *lieu à dit* of Pisse Vieille in Brouilly is actually quite well known in the appellation, but I have never encountered a single vineyard bottling of it prior to this new release from Monsieur Brun. This is quite black fruity in 2016 and pretty easy-going structurally, by the classic standards of the domaine, as it offers up scents of black cherries, cassis, gamebird, raw cocoa, dark soil tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, a bit reserved and sappy at the core, with very gentle acids, good soil signature and a long, chewy finish. Perhaps it was just this bottle, but the quite low acids here seemed to leave the wine a touch flat. 2018-2030? **88+?**

2016 Morgon- Domaine des Terres Dorées (Jean-Paul Brun)

The 2016 straight Morgon from Jean-Paul Brun is outstanding, wafting from the glass in a pure and youthful aromatic constellation of red and black cherries, espresso, granitic soil tones, a nice touch of spice, gamebird and woodsmoke. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with excellent focus and grip, fine-grained tannins and a long, tangy and nascently complex finish. This is an absolute classic in the making and will be a quite long-lived bottle of Morgon. 2021-2050. **94.**

2016 Morgon “Côte du Py-Javernières”- Domaine des Terres Dorées (Jean-Paul Brun)

The only single vineyard bottling of Morgon I have ever had the pleasure to taste from Monsieur Brun in the past was a 2008 version from the *lieu à dit* of Grand Cras. He may have

made others in the past, but I had never had the pleasure to taste them, so I was very surprised to see a 2016 bottling from Côte du Py-Javernières in our lineup at the estate. This is made from a parcel of seventy to seventy-five year-old vines and it is excellent, offering up a superb, youthful bouquet of black cherries, sweet dark berries, woodsmoke, stony soil tones, *pigeon* and a nice touch of raw cocoa in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and impressively soil-driven, with a fine core of black fruit, excellent focus and balance, moderate, ripe tannins and a long, primary and very promising finish. This too is an excellent young Morgon in the making. 2021-2050. **94.**

2016 Moulin-à-Vent- Domaine des Terres Dorées (Jean-Paul Brun)

The blended bottling of Moulin-à-Vent from Domaine des Terres Dorées is always one of the very finest to be found in the appellation, and this is indeed the case again in 2016. It was nice to see that it has been augmented this year by two single vineyard bottlings as well! The straight 2016 Moulin-à-Vent is a great young wine in the making, wafting from the glass in a nascently complex blend of red and black cherries, chicory, gamebird, dark soil tones, woodsmoke and a fine vein of granitic minerality. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and properly structured for a young Moulin-à-Vent in a top vintage, with a rock solid core, excellent soil inflection, fine-grained tannins and a very long, youthful and promising finish. Fine, fine juice. 2021-2060. **94.**

2016 Moulin-à-Vent “la Rochelle”- Domaine des Terres Dorées (Jean-Paul Brun)

Having just come from a visit with Jean-Étienne Chermette and tasting their version of la Rochelle, I was very happy to see that Jean-Paul Brun has one as well in 2016. The la Rochelle bottling is also outstanding, delivering a fine nose of dark berries, red and black cherries, a touch of incipient meatiness, dark soil tones and a bit of bonfire in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, young and fairly chewy out of the blocks, with an excellent core, ripe, nicely integrated tannins and a long, youthful and promising finish. This is more reserved out of the blocks than the blended version of Moulin-à-Vent, but it has superb potential and should be excellent in the fullness of time. 2023-2060. **93+.**

2016 Moulin-à-Vent “les Thorins”- Domaine des Terres Dorées (Jean-Paul Brun)

The 2016 single vineyard bottling of Moulin-à-Vent from les Thorins is more suave in its youth than the more structured la Rochelle, and this may well end up being the finest of the three excellent examples from this appellation *chez* Brun in this vintage. The superb bouquet jumps from the glass in a quite elegant mix of cassis, dark berries, chicory, bonfires, gamebird and a very complex base of dark soil tones. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and shows off excellent mid-palate depth, with fine-grained tannins, a nice sense of sappiness waiting to spring forward, refined soil signature and a very long, nascently complex and perfectly balanced finish. Great juice. 2021-2060. **94+.**

2016 Saint-Amour- Domaine des Terres Dorées (Jean-Paul Brun)

The 2016 Saint-Amour from Jean-Paul Brun is a lovely wine and one of the more forward Crus in his stable in this vintage. The pure and sappy bouquet delivers a fine blend of red and black cherries, woodsmoke, a lovely base of soil tones, *pigeon* and a touch of peonies in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, wide open and tasty, with a good core, plenty of soil tones, modest tannins and lovely length and grip on the tangy finish. This is not the most serious Cru bottling here in 2016, but it is very tasty and very easy to drink out of the blocks! 2018-2030. **91.**



2016 Fleurie- Domaine des Terres Dorées (Jean-Paul Brun)

The straight bottling of Fleurie in 2016 seems a bit more structured out of the blocks than normal, which I attribute to the hail that pummeled this commune in this vintage. The wine has good potential, but will require a bit of patience to allow it to blossom properly. The complex nose delivers scents of black cherries, cassis, gamebird, dark soil tones, chicory and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, chewy and very long, with a rock solid core, ripe tannins and a long, cool finish. I am guessing the grapes did not ripen up quite as well as in the communes unaffected by the 2016 hail, so this wine will need to shed a bit of its tannin before it starts to drink with generosity. It is clean and promising and all it needs is time in the cellar. 2020-2040. **91.**

2016 Fleurie “Grillé-Midi”- Domaine des Terres Dorées (Jean-Paul Brun)

The 2016 Grillé-Midi *chez* Brun is another fairly structured young customer, which again I attribute to the hail. The bouquet is deep, complex and meaty in personality, offering up scents of dark berries, cassis, dark soil tones, roasted venison, a bit of coffee grounds and woodsmoke in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and again, a rock in the mid-palate, with firm, chewy tannins, fine focus and grip and a long, nascently complex finish. This is more structured than normal (though this is always a *vin de garde* bottling of Fleurie) and will need some bottle age to blossom. 2022-2045. **91+.**

2016 Bourgogne Pinot Noir- Domaine des Terres Dorées (Jean-Paul Brun)

The 2016 Bourgogne Pinot Noir from Domaine des Terres Dorées is a bit weedy out of the blocks, but not in an unpleasant manner. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a youthful

blend of cherries, beetroot, coffee, a lovely base of soil, woodsmoke and a bit of fresh herb tones. On the palate the wine is medium-full, tangy and quite long, with respectable depth at the core, a touch of backend tannin and a long, tangy finish. Good juice. 2019-2030. **89.**

Crémant de Bourgogne “Charme de Jean-Paul Brun” Brut NV

The new release of Crémant de Bourgogne from Monsieur Brun is a lovely wine, which is aged nine months *sur latte* prior to disgorgement. The nose offers up a vibrant blend of apple, peach, chalky soil tones, a touch of nutskin and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, vibrant and frothy, with good length and grip on the well-balanced and quite finish. A tasty example. 2018-2028. **89.**

FRV 100- Jean-Paul Brun

FRV 100 is Monsieur Brun’s sparkling Rosé, which I find absolutely delicious year in and year out. This is finished with a fair bit of residual sweetness to balance the youthful acids and it makes it far easier to drink in its youth than the Crémant de Bourgogne Brut bottling, which I generally find improves with a couple of years in the cellar. The new version of FRV 100 (“effervescent” if you sound it out in French) is excellent, wafting from the glass in a vibrant bouquet of white cherries, strawberries, a lovely base of soil tones and a topnote of rose petals. On the palate the wine is full-bodied bright and gently sweet, with frothy *mousse*, lovely focus and balance and a long, succulent and bouncy finish. This is flat out delicious! 2018-2023. **90.**

THE SUMMER OF 2018 REPORT ON SPANISH WINES



Harvest-ready vineyards under the autumn equinox at Contino in Rioja Alavesa.

Spain continues to produce more and more classically-inspired, *terroir*-infused wines from its wide variety of different wine-producing regions, and my bi-annual reports on these wines continues to grow each year as a result. The country is still plenty awash in high octane, overripe and over-oaked wines that came to prominence in the last decade of Robert Parker's full-time career and which have never been of interest to my palate, as I find the wines clumsy, simple and too alcoholic and oaky to be worth paying attention to in the marketplace. But, happily, there are plenty of winegrowers within the country that feel the same way about that style of wine and have stayed aloof from that stylistic paradigm, choosing rather to champion wines that speak beautifully of their underlying diversity of *terroirs* and the beautiful mosaic of various varietals grown in this most varied of wine-producing countries. Many of the producers who are today turning out such beautifully soulful and soil-driven wines are young *vignerons* who have only started out in the last decade or so and have a very different vision of vinous excellence than the over the top style of wines that came to prominence in the 1990s. They look to old school producers like López de Heredia, C.V.N.E, La Rioja Alta, Goyo Garcia and Paco Dovalo for their inspiration, not to mention the great *terroirists* of Burgundy, Piemonte, Germany and other great wine regions around the globe. These classical producers can now be

found in all corners of Spain, with reemerging regions such as Ribeira Sacra and Bierzo leading the way into a new renaissance, and almost forgotten areas such as the Sierra de Gredos Mountains outside of Madrid, rife with old, head-pruned bush vines, also rising again and starting to produce some absolutely beautiful wines of breed, transparency and impressive complexity. What was written a decade ago about Spanish *Haute Cuisine* (and with which I have some issues) is far more true about many of the wine regions in Spain today, and there are many, many exciting things happening in the world of wine in this beautifully rugged and varied country.

The most recent vintages have not been the easiest in Spain, as the spring frosts of 2017 that pummeled many parts of Europe also wreaked havoc in many of Spain's D.O.s, and crops were cut back seriously in many of the top regions of Spain in 2017. The hot summers of 2015, 2016 (and again 2017) have also given plenty of buxom wines that sometimes lack underlying soil nuance, and these are certainly not my favorite types of vintages. The last really classically styled year in Spain was 2014, so one already has to go back a few vintages to find a growing season that afforded classicists great raw materials with which to work. Despite the challenges imposed by Mother Nature, all of the recent vintages in Spain can offer a great many wines that will please classically-inclined palates such as my own, and I continue to be very, very impressed with a great many of the Spanish wine samples that find their way to my doorstep every six months. As there are so many wines to taste each year from this growing sector of old school or neo-classicists in the Spanish wine market, I try to break down my coverage of these wines to a pair of big reports each year, which allows for the size of the articles to be just a bit more manageable. For this report, I did not cover any of the wines from two of my very favorite importers of Spanish wines to the US, Gerry Dawes and José Pastor, as I was so behind with the mountain of samples in my cellar and back hall (when the cellar was filled to capacity) from other top-notch importers that I could not possibly taste the wines from two of the most important and broad-base Spanish wine portfolios this time around. These two importers, whose selection of Spanish wines is absolutely superb, will form the cornerstone of my next report on the wines of Spain in two issues.

I should take a moment to mention another of the really good Spanish wine importers in the US, who has been sending me more and more very, very good samples in the last couple of years and is worth noting for subscribers who are out in the market looking for great wines at very fair prices. This is Grapes of Spain, whose portfolio of wines is selected by Aurelio Cabestrero. The company has been sending me samples for three years now and I continue to be absolutely blown away by many of the wines, which not only offer outstanding quality for their respective regions, but also, often, truly stunning value! I am getting to the point that when I am in a wine store shopping for Spanish wines and confronted with a lineup on the shelf that is unfamiliar to me, I simply turn over the bottles to look at the importers' label on the backside. I have often done this in the past and been introduced to new gems from Gerry Dawes or José Pastor in this manner, and now, I would certainly add Grapes of Spain and Señor Cabestrero to my list of "can't miss" importers whose strip label on the back is about as close as one can come to a "guarantee of quality" for the bottle. The one exception to this is their selection of wines from Priorat, which are very well made, but still very much creatures of their region and too high in alcohol in most cases for my palate, but this is the exception to the rule. To get some idea of just how well they are selecting wines, take a look at some of their outstanding estates in Ribera

del Duero (once the poster child for everything that was wrong with modern wine in Spain), as their estates such as Astrales, Finca la Mata, Arrocal and Garmón are really exciting wines and have led me to conclude that Goyo Garcia is not quite as singular in the D.O. as I once thought. And Grapes of Spain is doing stellar work in places like Jumilla and La Mancha as well, to mention a couple of other regions where they absolutely excel.

The following notes are arranged geographically, to the best of my ability, from west to east and north to south. The idea is to start with Cava (which of course, is not listed geographically, but it is always nice to start with bubbly!), and then to work from the Atlantic Coast of Galicia with Rías Baixas and work across Spain to the eastern coast, and then to descend a slice to the south and repeat the same pattern of west to east, until all of the myriad of D.O.s in Spain are covered. Within each geographic section, wines are listed first by vintage, from youngest to oldest, and then within each vintage section, alphabetically by producer. As I always do in these reports, there are plenty of notes on older wines tasted as well included here, in addition to the myriad of fine new releases that have formed the mountain of bottles I have been trying to scale in the wake of my knee replacement. Within the tasting notes, I have tried to give some in-depth background information on producers who may be new to me this year- there are quite a few of these in the Rioja region, with some new (or old) twists on this classic region that harken back to the pre-phylloxera days of Rioja, so some notes can be quite long. Other wines have now been covered for several years in these reports and my background detail on the bottlings is more cursory, but further detail can always be found by searching the producer in the database or previous iterations of this report. There is also a nice vertical report here on the wines of Descendientes de J. Palacios, produced by Alvaro Palacios of l'Ermita renown in Priorat and his nephew, Ricardo Perez, who is the winemaker and been in charge of the project since its inception in the late 1990s. I have placed the feature on the wines of Señor Perez in the Bierzo geographical section of the article.

Cava

As I have written in the past, my very favorite sparkling wines in the world, after Champagne, remain the top producers of Cava who are part of the “Six Percent Club” (as I have dubbed them) and who grow their own grapes and produce their own wines. As the name implies, this is not the story for the vast, vast majority of Cava produced, which is made by large concerns who buy in the grapes or juice for their wines. Often, they can be rather indifferent to the quality of the grapes that they purchase, as they are just trying to fill orders and as they are often parts of huge conglomerates and brand merchandising is often given a priority over high quality raw materials. However, this is emphatically not the case with producers in the “Six Percent Club” who make wines on a human scale, tend their own vineyards, and emphasize that quality begins in the vineyards. The world of Cava has been in a bit of an uproar for several years now, as the governing wine bodies of Spain a few years back extended the wine name of Cava to sparkling wines made in any wine-producing region of Spain, provided that the fundamental regulations are adhered to for producing the wines. The most important of these is that the wines be fermented in the bottle, rather than just pumping in carbon dioxide to the wines in large tanks *à la* Coca-Cola or Prosecco. Previously, the term Cava was exclusive to wines produced in Cataluña and given the long simmering grievances (both real and imagined) between the Catalans and Castilians in Spain, it is not surprising that the change in regulations was greeted with less than widespread support within traditional Cava-producing sections of

Cataluña. Many of the very top producers in the “Six Percent Club” in Cataluña have stopped using the term “Cava” altogether for their wines, but I have not followed their lead. As I have yet to taste any sparkling wines from outside of Cataluña that are now allowed to be labeled as Cava, I do not know if the extension of this term has hurt the image of Cava on the international market or allowed vastly inferior examples to now trade on the name. Given how much industrial plonk is sold as Cava from the giants in Cataluña (made from oceans of purchased juice or wine), it seems to me that it is pretty hard to argue that the brand identity of Cava has been hurt appreciably by allowing sparkling wines from outside of Cataluña to use the name, but I have not tasted any examples to see if my supposition is correct or not. In any case, the wines that are written up below are true Catalan Cavas from producers who grow their own grapes and make their own wines, and these members of the “Six Percent Club” are very serious estates who produce excellent sparkling wines and which I reach for to drink on any occasion when a bottle of Champagne is not handy.



As I have written in the past in features devoted to Cava, it is the one sparkling wine where I generally tend to prefer Extra Brut levels of *dosage* to Brut bottlings. I do not know why this is so, as in Champagne, I tend to prefer either low *dosage* Brut or generously sweet versions of Extra Brut to those with very low or no *dosage*, but with Cava, it is usually the Extra Brut bottlings that hit the sweet spot on my palate. Perhaps it is the personalities of the three major grape varieties that are used for top flight Cava: Xarel-lo, Macabeo and Parellada, or perhaps the

style of the *terroir* where the best Catalan examples of Cava have traditionally hailed from, but for whatever reason, Extra Brut is my favorite sweetness level for these lovely sparkling wines. For this report, I pulled a few bottles of Cava out of my cellar that I have been aging to see how they developed. I have several more, but will give most of those a few more years to allow them to blossom a bit more with extended bottle age. But, I thought it would be interesting to include at least a few that I had tucked away several years ago, just to give an idea of how well many of these wines can evolve with cellaring. It is my impression that the non-vintage bottlings are not as ageworthy as the same wines from Champagne, but they do indeed improve nicely with at least a handful of years in the cellar, and the vintage-dated wines and the Gran Reservas seem to be the best options if one is interested in giving a bottle a decade or more in the cellar. That said, I do not have a lot of experience with aged Cava, but it is something that interests me quite a bit and on the couple of occasions I have been in Cataluña in the last several years and tasting Cava, I have always asked about the possibility of tasting older examples and typically bent quite impressed with the results.

1+1=3 Cava Brut NV (Lot 17200- Disgorged September 2017)

The most recent disgorgement of 1+1=3 Cava is a blend of forty-five percent Xarel-lo, thirty percent Parellada and twenty-five percent Macabeo. The wine was aged for twenty-one months on its fine lees and was finished with a *dosage* of eight grams per liter. The wine offers up a classy bouquet of lemon, tart orange, sea salts, menthol and stony minerality. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and complex, with a nice sense of brininess, a fine core, elegant *mousse* and good length and grip on the balanced finish. I am accustomed to drinking more Extra Brut Cava and the *dosage* here, while done very well, seems to stick out just a bit on the backend of the wine at the present time. It may just need a bit more time in the bottle. 2018-2028. **87+**.

1+1=3 Cava Brut NV (Lot 17028- Disgorged January 2017)

This earlier disgorgement of 1+1=3 Cava Brut is made from a similar *cépages* to the above, but I did not have technical details on *dosage* at my fingertips at the time of my tasting the wine, but I would guess the *dosage* is also eight grams per liter for this release. The wine is just lovely on the nose, wafting from the glass in a fine blend of lemon, a touch of tangerine, lemongrass, a bit of wild fennel, complex, salty minerality and a touch of upper register menthol. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and very nicely balanced, with a lovely core, elegant *mousse* and a long, complex and nicely mineral finish. I am assuming that this is the same blend as the above wine, with just an additional six or seven months to come into balance after its disgorgement, and I like the way the *dosage* here has been eaten up by the minerality inherent in the wine. This is fine juice and makes me think that the above wine will rise in score as it too settles in a bit more. 2018-2028. **89**.

1+1=3 Cava Brut Rosé NV (Disgorged April 2017)

The current release of 1+1=3 Cava Brut Rosé is quite pale in color, with just a gentle kiss of pink. The *cépages* here is again quite unique in my experience for Cava Rosé, being composed of a mix of seventy-five percent Garnacha, fifteen percent Pinot Noir and only ten percent Trepát. It is aged for a minimum of twelve months *sur latte* and again, finished with a *dosage* of eight grams per liter. The bouquet here is quite delicate and stylish, offering up scents of strawberries, a touch of tangerine, gentle smokiness, rose petals and a fine base of white soil tones. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with fine depth in the mid-palate, frothy *mousse* and excellent length and grip on the complex and quite elegant finish. This is lovely juice. 2018-2028. **90**.

Albet I Noya Cava Brut Reserva NV (Disgorged May 2012)

This particular bottle of Albet I Noya Brut Reserva had been in my cellar for five years, as I was struck by how well I thought it would age when I first tasted it upon release. The wine here is composed of a rather unique blend of twenty-five percent each of Chardonnay and Parellada, twenty percent Macabeo and thirty percent Xarel-lo. It was made entirely from certified organically-grown grapes, but I do not have any information on its *dosage*. The wine has aged beautifully, offering up today a pure and complex nose of tart peach, gentle smokiness, a nice touch of *fleur de sel*, a very complex base of stony minerality, dried flowers and a discreetly savory topnote redolent of wild fennel. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, complex and quite dry for a Brut *dosage* wine, with a rock solid core, excellent backend mineral drive, pinpoint bubbles and a long, complex and well-balanced finish. This has aged very nicely and still has several years of life ahead of it. 2018-2025+. **90.**

Biutiful Cava Brut NV

The Biutiful Cava non-vintage Brut is made up of a rather surprising blend of eighty percent Macabeo and twenty percent Chardonnay. It is aged only twelve months on its fine lees and finished with a *dosage* of eight grams per liter. The wine offers up a nose of peach, apple, salty soil tones and dried flowers. On the palate the wine is young, full-bodied and zesty, with slightly coarse *mousse* and a bit of *dosage* still sticking out on the fairly long finish. This is okay, but could use a few more months in the cellar to better integrate its *dosage*, as today, the impression is that it is a bit sweet for Brut. 2018-2025. **86+?**

Biutiful Cava Brut Nature NV

The Brut Nature bottling from Biutiful has the same *cépages* as the Brut non-vintage: eighty percent Macabeo and twenty percent Chardonnay, but the wine is aged an additional three months *sur latte* prior to disgorgement, to allow the acids to soften up a bit more. The nose offers up a mix of tart pear, straw, salty minerality, a touch of citrus peel and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and nicely balanced, with a respectable core, pinpoint bubbles and good length and grip on the modestly complex finish. Maybe it is just the rather unfamiliar combination of Macabeo and Chardonnay, but I do not find the same complexity here as with comparably priced examples that include Xarel-lo and Parellada in the blend. I like this better than the Brut NV, but this is still lacking a certain spark. 2018-2025. **87.**

Biutiful Cava Brut Rosé NV

The Biutiful Cava Brut Rosé non-vintage bottling is made entirely from Garnacha, grown in high elevation vineyards in Valencia. It is aged twelve months on its lees and finished with a *dosage* of eight grams per liter. The wine has a lovely, pale salmon color and delivers nice brightness in its aromatic mix of cherries, tangerine, a nice base of salty soil and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and pretty nicely balanced, with frothy *mousse*, bright acids and good length and grip on the focused finish. This is not overly complex, but it has absorbed its *dosage* far better than the straight Brut and I like the wine quite a bit better today for that reason. This is a good partner at the table. 2018-2025. **88.**

Marie Casanovas Brut de Brut Reserva NV

This is a Brut Nature bottling from Marie Casanovas. The wine is composed of a blend of one-third each of the “big three” traditional grapes of great Cava, Xarel-lo, Macabeo and Parellada. There is a bit of purchased juice in this cuvée, though the majority is from estate grown fruit. The wine sees a year and a half to two years aging *sur latte*, with this bottling disgorged in May of 2017. The wine delivers fine aromatic complexity in its mix of lemon, grapefruit, salty minerality, wild fennel and a touch of ocean breeze. On the palate the wine is

bright, full-bodied and very well-balanced for a non-*dosé* wine, with a good core, elegant *mousse* and lovely length and grip on the complex finish. This is really well done. 2018-2030+. **91.**

Marie Casanovas “Glaç” Brut Nature Reserva NV

Marie Casanovas’ Brut Nature Reserva bottling called “Glaç” is made of a blend of forty percent of Pinot Noir and the other sixty percent of the “big three” of Xarel-lo, Macabeo and Parellada. The wine spent eighteen months aging *sur latte* and saw no *dosage*. The nose is pure, precise and classy, offering up scents of white peach, breadfruit, salty soil tones, dried flowers and a touch of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and very well-balanced, with good acids, fine *mousse* and a long, bouncy and quite refined finish. I am not normally a fan of pinot noir in Catalunya (as growing seasons here are very, very hot), but this blend really works well! 2018-2028. **91+.**

Conde de Subirats Cava Brut NV

The Conde de Subirats Cava non-vintage Brut does not include any Xarel-lo in its *cépages*, as the blend here is fifty-five percent Macabeo, forty percent Parellada and five percent Chardonnay. The wine carries a *dosage* of eight grams per liter and was aged fifteen months on its fine lees. The bouquet is very nicely expressive, wafting from the glass in a mix of breadfruit, a touch of olive, sea salts, straw and a nice base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and nicely focused, with a good core, elegant *mousse* and just a touch of backend sweetness poking out on the pretty long finish. I like this, but the *dosage* at six grams per liter might have given the wine just a bit more backend tension and grip. Still, this is quite tasty. 2018-2026. **88.**

Conde de Subirats Cava Rosé Brut NV

The Brut Rosé from Conde de Subirats is composed of a mix of ninety percent Trepát and ten percent pinot noir, with the *sur latte* aging lasting fifteen months and the finishing *dosage* being eight grams per liter. The wine has a nice, deep salmon color to it from the Trepát and delivers bright and nicely vinous bouquet of cherries, blood orange, a touch of clove, a good base of soil and a touch of rye. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and nicely light on its feet, with solid depth, frothy *mousse* and respectable length and grip on the well-balanced finish. This has quite a bit more personality on the nose than on the palate, but it is well-made juice. 2018-2025. **88.**

Cygnus Cava Brut Reserva NV (Disgorged March 2017)

This bottling of Brut Reserva from Cygnus is quite unique in having come entirely from certified organic vineyards, with the *cépages* being a blend of thirty-five percent each of Xarel-lo and Parellada and thirty percent Macabeo. The wine was aged fifteen months *sur latte* prior to disgorgement and a finishing *dosage* of eight grams per liter. The bouquet is deep and classy, delivering a complex mix of lemon, breadfruit, a touch of straw, a fine base of salty soil tones, just a touch of menthol and a very discreet topnote of smokiness. On the palate the wine is deep, complex and full-bodied, with a fine core, lovely focus and grip, slightly large bubbles, but good length and cut on the well-balanced finish. This bottling is not aged as long *sur latte* as several others in this report and this shows a bit in its more adolescent profile, but the raw materials here are excellent and the *dosage* is really beautifully buried in the wine already. Good young juice and a bottle of Cava that would repay a couple of years’ worth of cellaring. 2018-2030. **88.**

Cygnus Cava Brut Nature Reserva NV (Lot # 16209)

The current release of Cygnus Brut Nature NV is made from a blend of forty percent of Xarel-lo and thirty percent each of Macabeo and Peralada. Again, this is produced entirely from fruit picked in certified organic vineyards and was aged for twenty to twenty-four months *sur*

latte. The wine delivers excellent depth and complexity in its aromatic constellation of breadfruit, sea salts, white soil tones, dried flowers and a nice touch of menthol in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and complex, with beautifully buffered acids, a fine core, very elegant *mousse* and impressive length and grip on the classy finish. This is excellent Brut Nature. 2018-2030. **91+**.

Mestres “1312” Cava Reserva Brut NV (Disgorged July 2016)

The *cépages* of the Mestres “1312” Cava Reserva non-vintage Brut is thirty percent each of Macabeo and Xarel-lo and forty percent Peralada. Like all of the Mestres wines, it is aged *sur latte* under cork, rather than crown cap, and spent a minimum of twenty months on its fine lees prior to disgorgement. It is finished fairly dry for a Brut bottling, with *dosage* of under six grams per liter. The wine offers up a fine bouquet of green apple, a touch of lime, salty minerality, a bit of menthol and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and still quite youthful, with a lovely core, excellent soil signature, pinpoint bubbles and a long, snappy and nascently complex finish. This is tasty today, but I would be inclined to tuck it away in the cellar for a couple more years and let its girdle of acidity relax a bit more. There is excellent potential here. 2020-2035. **89+**.



2015 Mestres “Cupage Rosé” Cava “Reserva Especial” Brut

As I have mentioned in the past, the house of Mestres is based in the village of Sant Sadurní d’Anoia, in the heart of the finest area for Cava in all of Penedès. Their 2015 Cupage

Rosé is made up of a blend of fifty percent Trepát, thirty percent Monastrell and twenty percent Pinot Noir. It was finished with less than six grams per liter of *dosage* and was disgorged in September of 2017. The wine offers up lovely aromatic complexity in its nose of strawberries, a touch of rhubarb, woodsmoke, salty minerality, a bit of orange peel and a spicy topnote redolent of cloves. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and very nicely balanced, with bright acids (nicely buffered by moderate *dosage*), a fine core, frothy *mousse* and a long, focused and classy finish. A lovely Cava Rosé. 2018-2025+. **89.**

2014 Bohigas Cava “Gran Reserva” Extra Brut

Bohigas has many high altitude vineyards, planted at four hundred meters above sea level and open to the cooling evening air, so much of their production is from fairly cool vineyard sources (in the context of Catalunya). Their vintage bottling of Extra Brut is comprised of a blend of forty percent Xarel-lo, thirty percent Macabeo, twenty percent Parellada and ten percent Chardonnay. The *vins clairs* are fermented in stainless steel and the wine is aged thirty months *sur latte* prior to disgorgement and a finishing *dosage* of three grams per liter. The current release is from the 2014 vintage, though this information is on the back label. The wine offers up a fine nose of lemon, tart pear, ocean breeze, wild fennel, a fine, complex base of salty soil tones and just a hint of menthol in the upper register. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and beautifully balanced, with a fine core, frothy *mousse* and impressive length and grip on the complex finish. This is lovely Cava! 2018-2030. **90.**

2013 Mestres “Cupage Rosé” Cava “Reserva Especial” Brut

The 2013 Mestres “Cupage Rosé” is made from the same *cépages* as the lovely 2015 version. It was disgorged in July of 2016, meaning it spent fully two and a half years aging *sur latte*. The wine is fairly deep in color (so typical of Rosés with a substantial percentage of Trepát and Monastrell in the blend) and delivers fine aromatic complexity in its nicely evolved bouquet of cherries, blood orange, rye toast, salty soil tones, cloves and gentle smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and more vinous than the 2015 version, with a fine core, elegant *mousse* and good acids adding lift and bounce on the long and complex finish. Fine juice, though stylistically, quite a bit different than the 2015 version. 2018-2030. **90.**

2013 Mestres “Coquet” Cava “Gran Reserva” Brut Nature

The 2013 Mestres “Coquet” Cava “Gran Reserva” Brut Nature is made from a blend of forty percent Xarel-lo and thirty percent each of Macabeo and Peralada and was disgorged in January of 2018. The wine delivers a superb aromatic constellation of bread fruit, salty soil tones, lemongrass, menthol and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is beautifully balanced, complex and full-bodied, with bright acids, elegant *mousse* and superb focus and grip on the long, classy and bone dry finish. Though this wine has no *dosage*, its having spent four and a half years aging *sur latte* prior to disgorgement has allowed it to blossom beautifully and is perfectly balanced. Fine juice. 2018-2030. **91.**

2012 Mestres “Coquet” Cava “Gran Reserva” Brut Nature

The 2012 Mestres “Coquet” Cava “Gran Reserva” Brut Nature is outstanding in quality, with the additional year of bottle age *vis à vis* the 2013 has really allowed this wine to blossom beautifully. The *cépages* is the same as the 2013 version and the wine wafts from the glass in a refined mix of breadfruit, a touch of lime, salty soil tones, gentle smokiness and a topnote of lemongrass. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a good core, frothy *mousse* and excellent backend mineral drive on the long and very well-balanced finish. This is classic, soil-driven Cava that is absolutely superb at the table. 2018-2030. **92.**

2011 Mestres “Visol” Cava “Gran Reserva” Brut Nature

The Mestres “Visol” bottling of Brut Nature is the oldest running cuvée of non-*dosé* sparkling wine in Spain, as it was first produced in the 1945 vintage! This is an old vine bottling from the Mestres family, with all of the vineyards over fifty years of age. The *cépages* is forty percent Xarel-lo, thirty-five percent Macabeo and twenty-five percent Peralada. The wine was disgorged in November of 2017, giving it five and a half years aging *sur latte* under natural cork. The 2011 Visol offers up a superb bouquet of desiccated pear, lemon, salty minerality, a bit of sourdough bread, lovely smokiness and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and beautifully soil-driven, with a fine core, elegant *mousse*, superbly integrated acids and a long, poised and complex finish. This is about as refined and complex as Cava ever gets! 2018-2030. **93.**

2010 Mestres “Visol” Cava “Gran Reserva” Brut Nature

The 2010 Mestres “Visol” Gran Reserva is as complex and classy as its 2011 counterpart. The bouquet shows superb depth in its combination of breadfruit, lemon, salty soil tones, a touch of rye bread, wild fennel, dried flowers and a topnote of *fleur de sel*. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and rock solid at the core, with elegant *mousse*, fine focus and grip and a long, classy and very well-balanced finish. I love the old vine depth the wine displays at the core and this is clearly one of the finest bottlings of Cava produced in Spain today. 2018-2030. **93.**

2006 Mestres “Clos Nostre Senyor” Cava Gran Reserva Brut Nature (Disgorged Feb. 2017)

The 2006 Mestres “Clos Nostre Senyor” is a single vineyard, old vine bottling from this superb Cava producer. The name of the vineyard is “Clos Nostre Senyor, which is planted to a blend of sixty percent Xarel-lo and twenty percent each of Macabeo and Peralada. The vines are in excess of fifty years of age. The *vins clairs* for this cuvée are fermented in ancient chestnut barrels and aged ten months prior to bottling for their secondary fermentation, with *sur latte* aging taking place under cork for a minimum of seven and a half years prior to disgorgement. In this case, the wine spent more than nine years on its fine lees! The bouquet is deep, complex and beautifully refined, offering up scents of dried peach, orange peel, a touch of hazelnut, beautifully complex soil tones, a touch of leesiness, ocean breeze, plenty of smokiness and a topnote of lemongrass. On the palate the wine is crisp, complex, full-bodied and beautifully evolved, with a fine core, very refined *mousse*, still lovely acids and a long, soil-driven and perfectly balanced finish. This has developed beautifully secondary layers of complexity on both the nose and palate, a lovely roundness in the mid-palate and is drinking at its apogee today, but still with plenty of life in it. Outstanding, fully mature Cava of pedigree and distinction! 2018-2026+. **94.**

Albariño- Rías Biaxas

2017 Albariño- Bodegas La Val (Rías Biaxas) Screwcap

The regular bottling of 2017 Albariño from Bodegas La Val is sealed under a screwcap, but it is still young and fresh on the nose and shows no signs of anything untoward from its closure. The texture of the wine on the palate is okay for now, but already shows a touch more “digital” and a bit shorter on the backend than I imagine it would under cork. Then nose is a pretty blend of tart pear, a touch of orange, briny ocean breeze, good minerality and a bit of lemongrass in the upper register. On the palate the wine is crisp, medium-full and tasty, with good acids, sound focus and grip and a slightly short, slightly shredded finish from the screw.

This is still fine to drink now, but the issue of reduction is already hovering on the horizon, so drink it young. 2018-2020. **87.**

2016 Albariño “Tête de Cuvée”- Envidiacochina

The 2016 “Tête de Cuvée” from Envidiacochina is really a fine bottle of Albariño, offering up a salty and citric bouquet of lime, sweet grapefruit, gentle lees tones, salty minerality, a touch of ocean breeze, lemongrass and a topnote of orange peel. On the palate the wine is crisp, fullish, complex and very nicely balanced, with a good core, fine cut and grip and a long, focused and classy finish. Makes me wish I was back in Cambados with some scallops baked in their shell to go with the wine! 2018-2022. **90.**

2016 Albariño “Mar de Viñas”- Adegas Gran Vinum (Val do Salnés)

The Mar de Viñas bottling is the entry level Albariño from Adegas Gran Vinum, with the wine hailing from thirty year-old vines and raised in stainless steel. The 2016 delivers fine aromatic complexity in its mix of lemon, pear, ocean breeze, a hint of beeswax and a nice dollop of soil. On the palate the wine is crisp, fullish and nicely balanced, with a good core and solid complexity on the long and bouncy finish. This is not overly ambitious, but really well done in its style and a good value. 2018-2025. **88.**

2016 Albariño “Esencia Diviña”- Adegas Gran Vinum (Val do Salnés)

The Albariño “Esencia Diviña” from Adegas Gran Vinum is a very pretty wine that is aged three months on its fine lees prior to bottling. The 2016 offers up a bright and inviting bouquet of pear, lime blossoms, salty minerality, a nice touch of gentle leesiness and a topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and racy, with an excellent core of fruit, fine focus and grip and an impressively long, vibrant finish. This has real depth and backend energy! Fine juice. 2018-2025. **91+.**

2016 Albariño “Sketch”- Bodegas y Viñedos Raúl Pérez (Rías Baixas)

Raúl Pérez’s 2016 Albariño “Sketch” from a parcel of forty year-old vines that he harvests on the late side each year. The wine is fermented with indigenous yeast and allowed to nurture on its fine lees for a year in fourteen year-old Burgundy barrels prior to bottling. The 2016 Sketch is an excellent example of the vintage, with its extended lees contact adding depth to both the nose and palate. The bouquet offers up a fine blend of pear, white peach, gentle leesiness, white flowers and a lovely base of salty soil tones. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, complex and nicely citric in personality (which is not particularly evident on the nose), with a fine core, excellent acids and grip and a long, complex and serious finish. A fine bottle of Albariño. 2018-2030. **91+.**

2016 Albariño- Zarate (Meaño)

The regular bottling of Albariño from Eulogio Pomares’ Zarate estate is produced from his youngest vines, which average thirty-five years of age, but even the entry level wine is given six months aging on its fine lees. The 2016 version offers up a superb nose, wafting from the glass in a classy blend of lime, green apple, salty oceanic overtones, dried flowers and a fine base of wet stone minerality. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with excellent cut and grip, impressive focus and a long, complex and very well-balanced finish. This is very tasty already, but it is clearly built to age and will be even better with some time in the cellar. Fine juice. 2018-2030+. **92.**

2016 Albariño “Balado”- Zarate (Meaño)

The Balado bottling is not a single vineyard wine from Señor Pomares, as he composes this wine from two parcels that were both planted ungrafted in 1950, which are not particularly old vines by his standards! This bottling sees nine to twelve months aging on its lees prior to

bottling and the 2016 is excellent, offering up a precise and nascently complex bouquet of fresh lime, pear, complex, granitic minerality, white lilies, citrus peel and a touch of *fleur de sel* in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full and very refined in profile, with a fine core, snappy acids, excellent backend mineral drive and a long, focused and tensile young finish. This is a superb bottle of Albariño in the making, but it is still fairly tightly-knit and really demands at least a couple of years in the cellar to fully blossom. Very impressive! 2020-2035+. 93+.



2015 Albariño “Tras de Viña”- Zarate (Meaño)

The Tras de Viña vineyard was planted in 1970 from cuttings taken from the oldest vines at the estate, the El Palomar vineyard, which was planted in 1850. Pretty good genetic material! Señor Pomares ages this bottling fully thirty months on its fine lees prior to bottling, so the 2015 is the newest release. The 2015 Tras de Viña Albariño offers up a superb and complex nose of tart pear, lime peel, a very refined base of salty mineral tones, a touch of dried flowers, ocean breeze and a gentle hint of fresh tarragon in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish and soil-driven, with a fine core, excellent focus and grip and a very long, bouncy and nascently complex finish. This is just starting its journey and will be even better with another three to four years of bottle age. A beautiful bottle of Albariño, and truly admirable in its purity and bounce for the hot summer of 2015. 2018-2030. 93+.

2014 Albariño- Do Ferreiro (Meaño)

The 2014 Albariño from Do Ferreiro is drinking nicely now, though it has not developed more complexity with bottle age and still drinks much as it did when it was a young wine. The bouquet remains bright and vibrant, offering up notes of lime, tart pear, salty soil tones, a touch of leesy tones and a bit of menthol in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and nicely balanced, with good acid bounce on the backend and nice generosity on the attack. This is a very tasty drink, but I was hoping for just a bit more developmental complexity by age four. 2018-2023. **91.**

2013 Albariño “Sólo Albariño, Doble Lías”- Frore de Carme (Vinolok)

The 2013 “Sólo Albariño, Doble Lías” from Frore de Carme is a lovely example of mature Albariño that is still drinking beautifully and bright and vibrant on both the nose and palate. The secondary layers of complexity inform the nose of fresh lime, a bit of pineapple, lovely leesy tones, salty minerality, candied citrus peel and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, complex and well-balanced, with a fine core, still very good acidity and a long, focused and classy finish. This is at its peak at age five, but still has plenty of life ahead of it. 2018-2025+. **90.**

2011 Albariño “Sobre Lias”- Bodegas La Val (Rías Baixas)

The 2011 Albariño “Sobre Lias” from Bodegas La Val is drinking beautifully at age seven and still bright, vibrant and at the peak of its powers. The wine spent fully three years on its lees in tank prior to bottling and is currently available in the market. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a beautifully evolved blend of tart orange, a touch of candied lemon, sea salts, gentle leesy tones, lovely minerality and a topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, crisp and vibrant, with impressive mid-palate depth, lovey acids and excellent length and grip on the complex and very long finish. This is a pretty broad-shouldered example of Albariño, coming in at a full thirteen percent alcohol, but it is also elegant and has evolved very well indeed with some extended bottle age. 2018-2025+. **92.**

Rías Baixas Tinto**2016 Caiño Tinto- Zarate (Meaño)**

The Caiño Tinto bottling from Eulogio Pomares (one of three, old vine reds he produces) is fermented in open top, old oak vats for a month prior to being raised for twelve months in old *foudres* prior to bottling. The 2016 Caiño Tinto is a lovely wine, offering up a complex and quite vibrant bouquet of pomegranate dark berries, tree bark, a touch of cola, saddle leather, a fine base of soil and a touch of botanicals in the upper register that recall reds from the Canary Islands. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, tangy and very transparent, with good intensity of flavor, very modest tannins and a long, soil-driven and complex finish. This is light on its feet and a bit tart (remember this is an old vine red from the heart of Albariño country), but balanced and really works nicely with food. Good juice. 2018-2040. **91.**

Ribeiro Blanco**2016 Ribeiro Blanco- Casal de Armán**

The regular bottling of Ribeiro Blanco from Casal de Armán is composed of a blend of ninety percent Treixadura and five percent each of Godello and Albariño. The wine is fermented and raised in stainless steel and the 2016 version offers up a lovely nose of apple, pear, salty soil tones, a bit of Treixadura’s olive tones and a topnote of spring flowers. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and beautifully balanced, with bright acids, a fine core and impressive

length and grip on the zesty finish. The addition of a touch of Godello and Albariño here has given this wine lovely mid-palate depth and complexity. Fine, fine juice. 2018-2025. **92.**

2016 Eira Dos Mouros Blanco- Bodegas Casal de Armán

The 2016 Eira Dos Mouros Blanco from Bodegas Casal de Armán is made entirely from Treixadura and comes in at a cool 12.5 percent octane. The wine delivers a fine and vibrant bouquet of lime, tart pear, a touch of green olive, lovely, stony minerality and a topnote of lemongrass. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and well-balanced, with a good core, fine focus and grip and a long, bright and nicely complex finish. This is really a lovely middleweight that works admirably well at the table. 2018-2023+. **90.**

2015 Eira Dos Mouros Blanco- Bodegas Casal de Armán

The 2015 vintage of Eira Dos Mouros Blanco is a lovely wine that is aging gracefully and starting to pick up some nice secondary layers in its aromatic constellation of lime, orange, peel, a touch of nuttiness, salty minerality and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and wide open, with a lovely core of fruit, excellent soil signature, bright acids and impeccable balance on the long and complex finish. This is a bit fuller-bodied than the 2016 version and an excellent wine. 2018-2025. **91.**

2009 Ribeiro Blanco- Emilio Rojo

This is one of the most famous white wines in Ribeiro, but this 2009, which was served to me by my friend Markus when I first arrived in Germany in May, was the first time I had ever had the pleasure to taste it. The 2009 is excellent and clearly shows how well this wine will age, as it is in its prime today, but with decades of life still ahead of it! The bouquet is superb, wafting from the glass in a mix of pear, lemon peel, salty minerality, a nice touch of green olive and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and vibrant, with a fine core, still plenty of acidity and lovely length and grip on the well-balanced finish. Fine juice. 2018-2035. **93.**

Ribeiro Tinto

2016 Ribeiro Tinto- Casal de Armán

The 2016 Ribeiro Tinto from Casal de Armán is composed of a traditional blend of indigenous grapes in the region: Souson, Caino and Brancellao. The wine is fermented and raised in stainless steel and does not see any oak. The 2016 version comes in at thirteen percent octane and offers up a lovely nose of dark berries, cherries, pepper, woodsmoke, a fine base of soil, a touch of tree bark and a lovely mix of gentle botanicals in the upper register that recall Emidio Pepe's young Montepulciano a bit. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright, soil-driven and complex, with a good core, fine focus and grip, lovely acids and a quite long, bouncy and impressively complex finish. This is good juice that will drink well out of the blocks, but has the balance to also age nicely and will probably be even more interesting with a few years in the cellar. 2018-2035. **90.**

2016 Ribeiro Tinto "Eira Dos Mouros"- Casal de Armán

The 2016 Eira Dos Mouros bottling from Casal de Armán is made from a blend of Souson, Caino Longo and Brancellao and is really lovely. The wine is raised entirely in stainless steel, comes in at a cool 12.5 percent alcohol in this vintage and offers up a fine bouquet of dark berries, a touch of tree bark, chicory, cigar smoke and an excellent base of dark soil tones. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and intensely flavored, with a fine core, excellent transparency and grip, impeccable balance and a long, complex and modestly tannic finish.

There is a touch of volatile acidity here when the wine is first opened, but give it ten or fifteen minutes in decanter and it blows off nicely. This is an excellent value! 2018-2035+. **92.**

Ribeira Sacra Tinto

2017 Mencía- Adega Algueira (Amandi)

The 2017 Mencía from Adega Algueira is a lovely wine that shows fine ripeness, coming in at thirteen percent octane, but with plenty of red fruit in evidence on both the nose and palate. The very refined bouquet wafts from the glass in a mix of red berries, pomegranate, graphite, a touch of tree bark, woodsmoke, a beautifully complex dollop of botanicals and a fine base of granitic soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely transparent, with fine intensity of flavor, bright acids, excellent focus and grip and a long, modestly tannic and complex finish. This is really a lovely bottle of Mencía. 2018-2040. **92+.**

2016 Adrás Mencía- Isaac Fernandez Selección (Ribeira Sacra)

The 2016 Adrás Mencía from Isaac Fernandez is another excellent value, as it has been every vintage that I have had the pleasure to taste it. These fifty-plus year-old Mencía vines have succeeded nicely in 2016, offering up a fine aromatic constellation of cassis, pepper, espresso, graphite, a superb base of slate and a topnote of bonfire. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and nicely sappy at the core, with impressive transparency, modest tannins and a long, tangy and complex finish. This is still a young wine and will gain in complexity with further bottle age, but it is very nicely balanced out of the blocks and already a pleasure to drink. Quite a classic example of the slightly more delicate style of Mencía planted on the terraces above the Miño River. 2018-2035. **91.**

2015 Risco - Adega Algueira (Amandi)

The Risco bottling from Adega Algueira is made from the Merenzao grape variety (the local name for Trousseau or Bastardo), from a parcel of more than eighty year-old vines grown on a terraced vineyard of schist. The grapes for this bottling are crushed by foot and fermented with indigenous yeasts, with the wine then aged twelve months in older barrels prior to bottling. The 2015 Risco is beautifully light in color and offers up a very transparent bouquet of cherries, tree bark, orange peel, a superb base of stony minerality, espresso, just a touch of botanicals and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is fullish, complex and very soil-driven, with excellent focus and grip, a good core and a surprisingly chewy backend of ripe tannins and tangy acids. This is a young and exceptional wine, but it needs some time in the cellar to blossom properly. 2023-2055+. **94.**

2014 Amaral- Adega Algueira (Amandi)

The Amaral bottling from Algueira is composed entirely of Caiño, grown in steep terraced vineyards planted on schist. It is aged twelve months in older barrels and the 2014 version is outstanding on both the nose and palate. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a very complex mélange of dark berries, pomegranate, woodsmoke, a bit of sarsaparilla, graphite, gentle herb tones that recall a bit Canary Islands' tinto and a superb base of stony soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and beautifully balanced, with ripe, well-integrated tannins, excellent focus and a very, very long, promising finish. In a perfect world, this wine would be tucked away in the cellar for three or four more years to allow the tannins to

fall away a bit more, but it is so well balanced that it is already pretty easy to drink with a proper meal. Fine, fine juice. 20201-2055+. **94.**

2014 Castagaia - Adega Algueira (Amandi)

Adega Algueira's bottling of Castagaia is produced from the Souson varietal, which I have never tasted bottled on its own from this winery. In the past, it has played a cameo appearance in blends that were primarily based on Mencía, but I was quite impressed with it on its own. Like the Amaral and Risco bottlings, the grapes here are trodden by foot and the wine is aged twelve months in older *barriques* prior to bottling. The 2014 Castagaia is absolutely beautiful on the nose, delivering a superb constellation of cassis, bitter chocolate, tree bark, a bit of roasted venison, dark soil tones and chicory. On the palate the wine is pure, full and tangy, with a fine core of fruit, excellent transparency, ripe, moderate tannins and excellent focus and grip on the long and complex finish. This is excellent. 2020-2050+. **93.**



2014 Mencía “Pizarra” - Adega Algueira (Amandi)

As readers may recall from my visit to the winery back in the fall of 2014, the Pizarra bottling from Señor González and his team is their old vine cuvée of Mencía, with the vines here in excess of eighty years of age. The wine is produced entirely with whole clusters, foot-trodden

and undergoes an extended period of maceration that lasts forty-five to sixty days. The wine is raised entirely in older, six hundred liter barrels for fourteen months prior to bottling. The 2014 Pizarra is pretty ripe, coming in at 13.5 percent alcohol, but also complex and very promising. The bouquet offers up a youthful blend of sweet dark berries, charred earth, cola, tree bark, a lovely touch of spiced meats, a superb base of soil tones, a bit of Chartreuse-like botanicals and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and nicely sappy at the core, with great soil inflection, outstanding focus, firm, well-integrated tannins, impressive grip and a long, complex and very slightly warm finish. I would guess that the octane here is closer to fourteen percent than 13.5, but the wine carries it pretty well and should age gracefully. If this was just a touch lower in alcohol, it would approach perfection, but it is still a superb wine- even in its riper guise. 2024-2055. **93.**

Valdeorras Blanco

2017 Godello “Montenovo”- Bodegas Valdesil

As I have mentioned in the past, Bodegas Valdesil was one of the very first proponents of the virtues of Godello in Spain back in the wake of phylloxera and this lovely white wine varietal continues to be their specialty. Their Montenovo bottling is from their younger vines, ranging from five to twenty years of age and the wine is fermented and raised entirely in stainless steel. The 2017 is a good solid wine, offering up a nose of pear, salty soil tones, dried flowers and a touch of fresh almond. On the palate the wine is deep,. full-bodied, crisp and well-balanced, with good acids and fine grip on the fairly long finish. 2017 was not an easy vintage and this is not quite as precise and complex as it has been in previous iterations, but it is a good solid effort for the year. 2018-2023. **88.**

2015 Godello “Sobre Lias”- Bodegas Valdesil

The Sobre Lias bottling of Godello from Valdesil is made from much older vines than the Montenovo and spend six months aging in its fine lees, with weekly stirring. The 2015 Sobre Lias is a very good wine, offering up a deep and nicely focused bouquet of pear, gentle leesy tones, a touch of citrus peel, salty minerality and a topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and wide open and at its peak, with a good core and fine length and grip on the well-balanced finish. 2015 was a hot summer in Valdeorras and the acids here are still sound framing acids, but they will not be around forever and this is a vintage of this cuvée that will want drinking up over the relative near-term. 2018-2023. **89.**

2014 Godello “Pezas da Portela”- Bodegas Valdesil

Pezas means “plot of vines” in the local dialect, and this wine hails from eleven different parcels of old vines in the vicinity of the village of Portela. The vines were all planted in the early 1900s, so these have to be some of the oldest Godello vines in the world. 2014 was a classic year and the Pezas da Portela is drinking beautifully today, wafting from the glass in a fine blend of lemon, citrus peel, a touch of beeswax, salty minerality and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and beautifully complex today, with a lovely core, fine focus and grip, bright acids and a long, poised and vibrant finish. This is a terrific example of old vine Godello that is now at its peak, but still has plenty of life ahead of it. Fine, fine juice and far more emblematic of the excellence of the wines at Bodegas Valdesil than the atypical vintages of 2015 and 2017. 2018-2030. **93.**

Descendientes de J. Palacios (Bierzo)

In the spring of this year, I was invited to take part in a fine vertical of the wines from Descendientes de J. Palacios, one of the top producers in Bierzo. I had not found space in a previous issue to publish the notes, so include them here in this report on Spain. Descendientes de J. Palacios is the realized dream of Alvaro Palacios (of l'Ermita fame in Priorat) and his nephew, Ricardo Perez, who runs this fine, old vine-based Bierzo winery focused around the town of Corullón on the western edge of the DO. The two started out their partnership in 1998 and the first vintage here was the rainy year of 1999. Today, Ricardo Perez and his uncle Alvaro Palacios own thirty *hectares* of vines (fifteen of these are within the town limits of Corullón) and Ricardo produces five distinct bottlings of Bierzo tinto, all based ostensibly on Mencía (though with the vineyards old enough to also be inter-planted with a few other varieties in a traditional field blend). From these thirty *hectares* Ricardo produces two blended bottlings: Pétalos de Bierzo (crafted from a variety of different vineyards and vinified with an eye towards earlier drinking) and a Villa de Corullón bottling that is made from three parcels of vines ranging from sixty to one hundred years of age, surrounding the town and made more for cellaring over at least the mid-term. The Pétalos de Bierzo bottling sees a few weeks in new casks during its initial *elevage*, followed by eight to ten months in two and three wine barrels prior to bottling. The Villa de Corullón sees quite a bit more new oak than the Pétalos de Bierzo cuvée, with eighty percent of the casks new each vintage for this wine.

Beyond these two blended bottlings, Ricardo Perez now also produces three old vine, single vineyard bottlings: Monçerbal, Las Lamas and La Faraona, which are crafted for the cellar and generally need some extended bottle aging to blossom. These vineyards are so steep that they must be worked by hand or mule. They are now all farmed under biodynamic principals by Señor Perez. Monçerbal is a very steep, rocky slope, composed of slate and a bit of limestone and marble that sits between six hundred and ten and seven hundred meters above sea level. The vineyard comprises 1.74 *hectares* and is planted with vines that are sixty to ninety years of age. There are trace amounts of other red varieties (such as Alicante Bouschet) and white varieties (Godello amongst them) co-planted with the Mencía in Monçerbal. Las Lamas is just under one and a half *hectare*, faces due south and has more clay in the soil, mixed with the crumbling slate of this end of Bierzo; it cascades down from a hilltop at seven hundred thirty meters above sea level to six hundred seventy meters, with a very thin topsoil. It is planted with some of the oldest vines of these three single vineyards, as they range up to one hundred years of age. La Faraona is the stoniest of all the single vineyards, as well as the smallest at only fifty-five *ares*, with a southeast exposition and only thirty centimeters of topsoil over the slate bedrock. It sits at the highest elevation of these vineyards, at eight hundred and fifty-five meters above sea level and is the only one planted entirely to Mencía, with the vines now seventy years of age. The single vineyard wines are all made from low yields (generally fifteen to twenty-five hectoliters per hectare), raised entirely in new French oak barrels for one year prior to bottling without fining or filtration. Interestingly, I had no idea they were raised in all new oak prior to researching the winery, as at our vertical tasting, all of the wines had seamlessly integrated their wood component. Across the board, these are outstanding examples of Bierzo Mencía-based wines that offer outstanding potential for long-term aging and are amongst the finest to be found in this up and coming region.



Working the soils by mule in one of the high elevation, very steep Descendientes de J. Palacios vineyards.

2016 Pétales de Bierzo- Descendientes de J. Palacios

The only previous vintage of Pétales de Bierzo that I had tasted from Ricardo Perez was the 2011, which I drank at a restaurant in Madrid four or five years ago. I was not overly impressed with the 2011, which was listed at 14.5 percent octane, but the 2016 version comes in a full point lower in alcohol and offers up a far more precise and complex bouquet of dark berries, pomegranate, woodsmoke, licorice, a fine base of soil, a touch of chicory, cloves and a hint of cedary wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, ripe and rock solid at the core, with fine backend soil signature, moderate tannins, a good core of fruit and a long, focused and gently warm finish. I would guess this is closer to fourteen than 13.5 in octane, but it is well-balanced and quite tasty out of the blocks, with the potential to age quite well and will probably be even more interesting to drink with a few years in the cellar. 2018-2038+. **91+**.

2016 Monçerbal- Descendientes de J. Palacios (Bierzo)

The 2016 Monçerbal from Descendientes de J. Palacios is a fine young wine in the making. The bouquet is deep and black fruity, offering up scents of dark berries, tree bark, a touch of curry, a fine base of slate and a topnote of wild fennel. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and nascently complex, with a fine core, excellent balance and a long, moderately tannic finish that will need some time in the cellar to blossom. This needs five or six years in the cellar to start to blossom, but it will be excellent. 2023-260. **92+**.

2016 Las Lamas- Descendientes de J. Palacios (Bierzo)

The 2016 Las Lamas from Ricardo Perez is a bit broader-shouldered than the Monçerbal, probably owing to the clay in the soils here. The nose is more powerful as well, offering up scents of cassis, pomegranate, espresso, dark soil tones and a bit of pepper in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, nicely muscular and very well-balanced, with a fine core, ripe, suave tannins and impressive length and grip on the youthful finish. This will be fine, but will need a couple more years in the cellar to blossom than the 2016 Monçerbal. 2025-2060. **92.**

2015 Villa de Corullón- Descendientes de J. Palacios (Bierzo)

The 2015 Villa de Corullón from Ricardo Perez is plenty ripe, coming in listed at 14.5 percent alcohol. This is almost entirely Mencía, but it is hard to recognize the varietal character at this octane, as there are some Garnacha-like spice and meaty overtones to be found in this vintage of Villa de Corullón. The complex nose offers up scents of raspberries, pomegranate, smoked meats, *garrigue*, some balsamic tones, cloves, a fine base of soil and cedary oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and carries its alcohol pretty well, with a good core, impressive soil signature for this octane, a bit of backend, fairly firm tannin and good length and grip on the tangy and slightly warm finish. At higher octane levels, one always pulls a bit more wood tannin out of the casks and a bit of the tannin here is oak-derived, but there is sufficient stuffing to absorb them with a bit of bottle age. This has turned out quite well, but it makes me long for the precision of lower octane Bierzo. 2022-2050+. **89+.**

2015 La Faraona- Descendientes de J. Palacios (Bierzo)

According to Ricard Perez, 2015 is a very good vintage in Bierzo, as it was generally Atlantic in climate, but with very good ripeness. The 2015 La Faraona is a stellar young wine of enormous potential, offering up a superb, nascently complex nose of cassis, pomegranate, lead pencil, tree bark, a very complex base of slate minerality and incipient botanicals in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very pure on the attack, with a rock solid core, great transparency, ripe, suave tannins and a very long, well-balanced and vibrant finish. I did not note the octane level of the 2015 La Faraona, but it seems quite a bit cooler than the Villa de Corullón in this vintage. This is going to be a great wine in another decade and is a marvelous example of the magic of Mencía and a great *terroir*! 2028-2075+. **95.**

2014 Monçerbal- Descendientes de J. Palacios (Bierzo)

2014 was generally a cooler year in Bierzo (what Ricardo Perez likes to term an “Atlantic” growing season), but marked by a scorching heat spike at the end of August that sent sugar levels soaring and prompted hurried plans to start harvest on the 8th of September. The 2014 Monçerbal is very classically proportioned and shows lovely promise, wafting from the glass in a youthful blend of cassis, smoke, slate, pepper, graphite and a touch of coffee grounds. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and nicely soil-driven in profile, with fine mid-palate depth, ripe, seamless tannins and very good length and grip on the well-balanced finish. This will be a fine, fine vintage of Monçerbal. 2020-2055. **93.**

2014 Las Lamas- Descendientes de J. Palacios (Bierzo)

As is typical of the difference between the two vineyards, the 2014 Las Lamas is a bit more powerful and tannic than the Monçerbal, but it too shares the fine definition of the vintage. The youthful bouquet offers up scents of cassis, dark berries, espresso, a fine base of slate soil tones, a touch of tree bark and a peppery topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and

nicely reserved in profile, with a rock solid core, ripe tannins and fine focus and grip on the long and promising finish. Good juice. 2024-2060. **92.**

2012 Monçerbal- Descendientes de J. Palacios (Bierzo)

I loved the pair of 2012s I tasted from Ricardo Perez at our vertical in December, as these are absolutely classical in profile and show outstanding potential. The bouquet of the 2012 Monçerbal is starting to blossom nicely, wafting from the glass in a complex blend of cassis, pomegranate, espresso, lovely, dark soil tones, gentle meatiness and a touch of Bierzo's wild botanicals in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and perfectly balanced, with a good core, lovely transparency and grip, fine-grained tannins and a long, bouncy and complex finish. This is just starting to enter its plateau, where it should age gracefully for many decades. Impressive! 2018-2050. **94.**

2012 Las Lamas- Descendientes de J. Palacios (Bierzo)

The 2012 Las Lamas is less developed than the Monçerbal, but it shares the same classical proportions of the vintage and will be every bit as stellar when it is ready to drink. The more reserved bouquet delivers scents of dark berries, a touch of pomegranate, espresso, superb soil tones, a touch of grilled meats and a topnote of bonfires. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nascently complex, with an excellent core, suave, seamless tannins and impressive balance on the long, focused and classy finish. Fine juice in the making. 2022-2050. **93+.**

2010 Monçerbal- Descendientes de J. Palacios (Bierzo)

The 2010 vintage in Bierzo was hot and rainy and the wines have ended up more fruit-driven in personality than the superb 2012s. That said, the 2010 Monçerbal is impressively transparent for the vintage, offering up an aromatic constellation of cassis, tree bark, graphite, slate, coffee grounds and a nice touch of licorice in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full and moderately tannin, without the same precision of *terroir* as the 2012, but still complex and well-balanced, with a bit of backend tannin and fine focus and grip on the long finish. Good juice that could still use a few more years in the cellar to soften up more, but which will provide plenty of enjoyment in the near future. 2020-2045+. **92.**

2010 Las Lamas- Descendientes de J. Palacios (Bierzo)

The 2010 Las Lamas from Ricardo Perez is more primary today than the Monçerbal, offering up a deep and powerful bouquet of pomegranate, dark berries, coffee grounds, dark soil tones and a bit of roasted *pigeon*. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still fairly chewy, with a good core, mounting soil inflection and a long, ripely tannic and well-balanced finish. The backend soil signature that is starting to emerge here may well indicate that both of these 2010s will show more of their underlying *terroir* with extended bottle age, and if this proves to be the case, my scores will seem slightly conservative. 2022-2050+. **91+.**

2009 La Faraona- Descendientes de J. Palacios (Bierzo)

2009 was a hot summer that produced ripe wines, so the '09 La Faraona cannot match the 2015 version for precision of expression of its underlying minerality. Nevertheless, this is a fine wine in the making, wafting from the glass in a mix of pomegranate, roasted venison, slate, licorice, coffee grounds and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is ripe, full-bodied and shows off plenty of mid-palate depth, with moderate tannins, very good mineral drive for such a ripe year and a long, complex and focused finish. Good juice, which shows how mineral this *terroir* is even in torrid growing seasons! 2020-2050+. **92+.**

2008 Monçerbal- Descendientes de J. Palacios (Bierzo)

The 2008 vintage was a hot year in Bierzo (Señor Perez calls these years “Continental Vintages”) and both of these single vineyard wines do not show the same elegance and inherent complexity of some of the cooler years. The bouquet of the 2008 Monçerbal offers up a complex blend of pomegranate, graphite, coffee grounds, roasted game, slate and a beautiful topnote of botanicals. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and ripe in personality, with plenty of mid-palate muscle, a fair bit of tannin and a long, complex and robust finish. This is a good bottle that is already not a bad drink with food today (despite still some tannin), but I like the greater refinement found in some of these previous, cooler vintage examples. 2018-2040. **91.**

2008 Las Lamas- Descendientes de J. Palacios (Bierzo)

The 2008 Las Lamas was the ripest wine in our vertical tastings, probably coming in a bit over 14.5 percent, but it was still nicely balanced on the palate and showed no signs of heat. But, the ripeness has taken away a bit of complexity in the wine, for at age ten, it is not as complex as many of these other vintages. The nose offers up scents of cassis, roasted meats, dark soil tones, coffee grounds and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and powerful in profile, with a ripe core, modest tannins and a long, focused and wide open finish. 2018-2040. **89.**

2001 Villa de Corullón- Descendientes de J. Palacios (Bierzo)

The 2001 Villa de Corullón has aged beautifully and is drinking with admirable complexity and breed at age seventeen. As I mentioned in the introduction to the wines from Descendientes de J. Palacios, this cuvée is aged in eighty percent new oak, and even at this advanced age, the wine is just a whisper rigid from its wood treatment. But, that said, the wine is also beautifully complex in its aromatic constellation of pomegranate, a touch of red currant, woodsmoke, spiced meats, chicory, dark Bierzo soil tones, wild fennel, gently savory overtones and a bit of spicy oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and nicely tertiary in its layers of complexity, with fine delineation and balance, still a bit of tannin and a long, classy and vibrant finish. This has aged very gracefully, but my gut feeling is that the more recent vintages, with a bit more refinement in the use of new wood, are going to be even better at a similar point in their evolution. That said, this is a very enjoyable glass of wine today and still has plenty of life ahead of it. 2018-2030+. **91.**

2001 Monçerbal- Descendientes de J. Palacios (Bierzo)

2001 was a classic vintage in Bierzo, and though Ricardo Perez is probably making better wines today, due to an additional fifteen years of experience with the vineyards, he crafted a pair of lovely single vineyard 2001s. The bouquet of the 2001 Monçerbal wafts from the glass in a superb mélange of cassis, pomegranate, slate, licorice, woodsmoke, espresso and gentle botanicals in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and *à point*, with a good core of fruit, lovely soil signature, melting tannins and a long, complex and beautifully balanced finish. Fine, fine juice now at its prime, but still with plenty of life ahead of it. I like the balance here even better than in the 2001 Villa de Corullón, as the oak is seamlessly integrated. 2018-2040. **94.**

2001 Las Lamas- Descendientes de J. Palacios (Bierzo)

The 2001 Las Lamas is also now into its plateau of maturity, and though it was not showing quite the vibrancy of the Monçerbal, this too is an excellent wine for current drinking. Given how beautifully the other two 2001s showed, it is possible that this bottle of La Lamas was not the best and my score may prove to be conservative. The bouquet on this particular

bottle offers up scents of cassis, a touch of eucalyptus, pomegranate, anise, slate, hung game and again, a discreet topnote of botanicals adding further complexity. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and well-balanced, with fine mid-palate stuffing, fine resolution, modest tannins and a long, complex finish. This is drinking very well today, but does not show quite the vibrancy I was anticipating, based on how beautifully the 2001 Monçerbal was showing. 2018-2035+. **91.**

Bierzo Blanco

2016 Godello- Bodegas Luna Beberide (Bierzo)

The Godello bottling from Bodegas Luna Beberide hails from sixty year-old vines and is fermented and raised in stainless steel tanks. The 2016 version is a lovely middleweight in the making, wafting from the glass in a bright and youthful blend of lime, tart pear, a bit of green olive, salty soil tones and white flowers. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish and vibrant, with a good core, fine focus and grip, zesty acids and a long, crisp and youthful finish. This is tasty out of the blocks and will only get better as it has a chance to open up a bit from behind its girdle of acidity with some bottle age. 2018-2025. **89.**

2015 Godello “Ultreia La Claudina”- Bodegas y Viñedos Raúl Pérez (Bierzo)

The La Claudina bottling of Godello from Raúl Pérez is quite unique in its *elevage*, as it is fermented and raised in large *foudres*, in which a *flor* is allowed to develop and which the wine ages on for anywhere from a year to two before it is bottled. The 2015 La Claudina seems a tad less defined by its *flor* elements, offering up a complex nose of pear, salty soil tones, fruit blossoms, a bit of nuttiness and incipient notes of beeswax in the upper register. On the palate the wine is crisp, full and rock solid at the core, with a fairly powerful personality, fine focus and grip and a long, complex and well-balanced finish. This is a beautifully made and quite individual wine, and though it may not be for every palate, there is a lot here to like! 2018-2030. **91.**

2015 “La Del Vivo” La Vizcaína- Bodegas y Viñedos Raúl Pérez (Bierzo)

As I mentioned last year in my note on the 2014 vintage, the “La Del Vivo” La Vizcaína from Raúl Pérez is an old vine blend of Godello and Doña Blanca. The fermentation technique for this wine is quite singular in my experience, as Señor Pérez has eighty percent of the cuvée barrel fermented in older casks (in which they spend their twelve months of *elevage*) and the other twenty percent is fermented in clay amphora and ages there for a year, prior to the two parts being reunited prior to bottling. The 2015 vintage is pretty ripe at 13.5 percent octane and offers up a deep and complex nose of pear, apple, a hint of beeswax, citrus peel, salty soil tones, dried flowers and just a touch of upper register dustiness from the amphora. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and nicely racy, with a rock solid core, fine soil inflection, impressive complexity and a long, fairly powerful and well-balanced finish. To my palate, the 2014 version seemed just a tad less ripe and was a bit more up my stylistic alley as result, but this is a wine of serious substance and complexity and offers up plenty of pleasure in its own right. It clearly has the chassis to age well. 2018-2030+. **92.**

Bierzo Tinto

2016 Mencía- Bodegas Luna Beberide (Bierzo)

I have been very impressed with the quality of the straight Mencía bottling from Bodegas Luna Beberide in the last few vintages and the 2016 is again, an excellent wine and a superb value. As readers may recall, this is the entry level bottling from the bodegas and is raised solely

in stainless steel tanks. The 2016 offers up a fine and impressively complex nose of pomegranate, dark berries, graphite, cola, a fine base of soil tones, a bit of roasted meats, wild fennel and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and marvelously transparent, with a good core, tangy acids and fine focus and grip on the moderately tannic, complex and classy finish. This is still priced well under twenty dollars a bottle and is a stunning bargain. Buy it by the case, as it will age beautifully! 2018-2040. **91.**

2016 Mencía “Ultreia Saint Jacques”- Bodegas y Viñedos Raúl Pérez (Bierzo)

The Saint Jacques bottling from Raúl Pérez hails from a field blend that is principally Mencía, with a touch of Trousseau and Alicante Bouschet co-planted. These vines are old, having been planted between 1900 and 1940. The 2016 Saint Jacques is an excellent wine on both the nose and palate, with a full-bodied and very nicely balanced palate impression, good old vine depth at the core, modest tannins and a long, focused and nicely tangy finish. The bouquet is a very promising blend of sweet dark berries, pepper, a bit of cola, graphite, a good base of soil and a touch of pomegranate in the upper register. This is still young, but it is so well-balanced that it is certainly approachable out of the blocks, but it really deserves a bit of bottle age to allow it to soften a bit more on the backend and for its secondary layers of complexity to truly emerge. Very impressive juice. 2021-2055. **92.**



2015 Finca la Cuesta (Mencía)- Bodegas Luna Beberide (Bierzo)

The Finca la Cuesta bottling of Mencía from Luna Beberide is an old vine cuvée, with the vines ranging from sixty to seventy years of age and the wine raised in a blend new and one year-old French barrels. The 2015 version is an excellent follow-up to the fine 2014 bottling, delivering a refined bouquet of cassis, pomegranate, espresso, a complex base of soil, cigar smoke, a touch of tree bark and a very discreet base of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full and plenty solid at the core, with good acids, ripe tannins and excellent focus and grip on the beautifully-balanced, nascently complex finish. This has a bit more mid-palate depth than the 2016 regular bottling of Mencía, as well as a bit more tannin and deserves a year or two in the cellar to start to blossom properly. Another superb value from Luna Beberide! 2020-2040+. **92.**

2015 Mencía “Art”- Bodegas Luna Beberide (Bierzo)

The 2015 “Art” bottling of Mencía from Luna Beberide is from their oldest parcel of vines, ranging from seventy to eight years of age. The wine sees all new oak during its year and a half of *eleveage*, but the old vine depth of fruit here in the 2015 has no difficulties carrying the wood seamlessly. The very complex nose wafts from the glass in a classy blend of dark berries, pomegranate, graphite, dark soil tones, cola, a bit of meatiness, a lovely touch of wild fennel, cigar ash and a very well done framing of new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and full-bodied, with a very refined attack, a lovely core of fruit, excellent soil signature, moderate, seamless tannins and great focus and grip on the very long, complex and impeccably-balanced finish. This is going to be absolutely first class and long-lived Bierzo Mencía! 2018-2050. **93+.**

2015 Paixar Mencía- Bodegas y Viñedos Paixar

The Paixar bottling from this fine winery is made from very old, bush vines, all in excess of eighty years of age and planted on pure slate, which is far more typical in Ribeira Sacra than it is in Bierzo. The wine is raised entirely in new French oak, but I noted that the 2015 version spent twenty months in cask, rather than the twenty-two months of the 2013 version I reported on last year. The 2015 Paixar Mencía is an outstanding young wine, with the new oak beautifully integrated into the fruit and soil elements here. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a very refined constellation of cassis, pomegranate, espresso, licorice, great minerality, a touch of tree bark, cigar smoke and a very well done framing of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and impressively transparent, with a good core, excellent backend mineral drive, ripe tannins and a long, youthful, complex and tangy finish. This needs at least a couple of years in the cellar to start to blossom and more completely absorb its new wood, but it is very well balanced and will be a superb bottle with a bit of patience. 2021-2050. **93.**

2015 Mencía “Ultreia”- Bodegas y Viñedos Raúl Pérez (Bierzo)

The 2015 entry level Mencía from Raúl Pérez’s Ulteia label is a fine follow-up to the lovely 2014 I reported on last year. As readers may recall, this Mencía cuvée actually is an old field blend, with small percentages of grapes such as Bastardo and Garnacha Tintorera co-planted with the Mencía. The wine offers up a superb bouquet of dark berries, espresso, a touch of tree bark, chicory, a fine base of dark soil tones, wild fennel and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and quite tangy, with a good core of fruit, fine soil signature, moderate tannins and a long, ripe and well-balanced finish. I am guessing this is a bit riper than the 2014 version, but it is still very well-balanced and drink nicely now with a bit of air. It will be even better with a few years in the cellar. 2018-2035+. **90+.**

2015 Mencía “Ultreia Valtuille”- Bodegas y Viñedos Raúl Pérez (Bierzo)

As I mentioned last year, this wine hails from extremely old vines planted in the late 1800s and is primarily Mencía, though there is a small percentage of other varieties also co-planted in this vineyard. It is fermented whole cluster with indigenous yeasts and raised in older casks. The 2015 version of “Ultreia Valtuille” bottling from Raúl Pérez is a fine follow-up to the excellent 2014, offering up a deep and youthfully complex nose of black fruit, chicory, a bit of tree bark, espresso, a superb base of dark soil tones, graphite and just a touch of coffee grounds in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and ripely tannic, with a fine core of fruit, excellent transparency, good acids and fine length and grip on the well-balanced and youthful finish. This already shows nice generosity on the attack, but it is still quite primary on the backend and could use some time in the cellar to fully blossom. Fine juice. 2022-2055. **92.**

2015 Mencía “Las Gundiñas”- La Vizcaína- César Márquez y Raúl Pérez (Bierzo)

The La Vizcaína label is another line of wines from Raúl Pérez, and this is another very old vine bottling, as Las Gundiñas was planted back in 1910 on a soil mixture of limestone and clay. The vineyard lies on the western end of Bierzo, towards the ancient pilgrimage center of Santiago do Compostela, near the boundary of Ribeira Sacra. The 2015 comes listed at 13.5 percent, but I cannot remember if this is higher than the superb 2014 bottling. In any case, the wine is excellent this year as well, offering up an excellent bouquet of cassis, dark soil tones, espresso, a touch of sarsaparilla, incipient meatiness and a nice touch of wild fennel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with superb depth at the core, impressive transparency, fine-grained tannins and a long, youthful and tangy finish that promised outstanding complexity in the years to come. There is a bit of old vine creaminess in the center of this wine that is almost Burgundian in texture. This is great Bierzo in the making and worthy of a pilgrimage to find a few bottles! Though it is certainly approachable today, I would not touch a bottle for another four or five years, just to allow its secondary layers to start to emerge. 2022-2055. **94.**

2015 Mencía “La Poulosa”- La Vizcaína- César Márquez y Raúl Pérez (Bierzo)

The La Poulosa vineyard is not as old as some of these farmed by César Márquez and Raúl Pérez, as it was “only” planted in 1940! As is the case with many of the older vineyards in this region, it is planted to a field blend that is primarily Mencía, but also includes Bastardo, Garnacha Tintorera and a few white grapes as well. Everything found out in the vineyards eventually finds its way into the fermentation tanks, making for quite the complex blend down the road. This vineyard has a fairly high percentage of clay in the soils and does not include much slate, which defines the vineyards further to the west in Bierzo in the direction of Ribeira Sacra. The 2015 La Poulosa is beautifully complex aromatically, delivering scents of dark berries, chicory, black cherries, dark soil tones, wild fennel and a touch of violet in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and quite suave on the attack, with a very good core, good soil signature, ripe, well-integrated tannins and a long, tangy and nascently complex finish. This is going to be excellent with a bit of bottle age! 2022-2050. **93.**

2015 Mencía “El Rapolao” La Vizcaína- César Márquez y Raúl Pérez (Bierzo)

The La Vizcaína “El Rapolao” bottling hails from a vineyard that was partially planted in 1920 and partially in 1980. As is the case with many of these vineyards, it is planted to a field blend that is mostly Mencía, with a bit of Trousseau and Alicante Bouschet interspersed in the rows. The 2015 El Rapolao is a step up from the very good 2014 edition, offering up a refined bouquet of sweet dark berries, espresso, a touch of spiced meats, cola, woodsmoke, a beautiful base of soil tones and a hint of anise in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-

bodied and quite elegant in profile, with a fine core, excellent transparency and grip, ripe, fine-grained tannins and a long, focused and tangy finish. I loved the 2014 version of El Rapolao and the 2015 is every bit as refined and complex. Great Bierzo! 2023-2055+. **94.**

2015 Mencía “La Vitoriana” La Vizcaína- César Márquez y Raúl Pérez (Bierzo)

As I mentioned last year, the La Vitoriana bottling from La Vizcaína hails from some of the oldest vines with which they work, as the vineyard was planted in 1890. It is the field blend of mostly Mencía, with small percentages of Trousseau, Alicante Bouschet, and the white grapes of Palomino and Doña Blanca. This mix of varieties was very typical in the nineteenth century, where the blend would protect the winegrower from problems that might be targeted at a single variety, with the white wines added to the planting mix to increase the alcohol of the finished wine. The 2015 La Vitoriana is a very fine young wine in the making, wafting from the glass in an aromatic blend of cassis, a bit of grilled meat, a lovely base of soil, espresso, cola, bonfire, chicory and graphite. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully soil-driven in personality, with a fine core of fruit, moderate, moderately chewy tannins, excellent focus and grip and a long, complex and youthful finish. Last year I found the 2014 version to be a touch more extracted in style than ideal, but this is not the case with this excellent 2015, which only needs some time in the cellar to fully blossom! Fine, fine juice. 2023-2050. **93.**

Monterrei

2016 Godello “Fraga do Corvo” - Fragas do Lecer

Fragas do Lecer’s 2016 Godello “Fraga do Corvo” is produced from thirty year-old vines and fermented and raised in stainless steel. The 2016 offers up a refined and classic expression of Godello, delivering scents of pear, lemon blossoms, salty soil tones, a hint of olive and a gentle topnote of butter. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and zesty, with a fine core, excellent soil signature, lovely balance and a long, complex and energetic finish. This is excellent Godello! 2018-2028. **92+.**

2016 Mencía “Fraga do Corvo” - Fragas do Lecer

The 2016 Mencía “Fraga do Corvo” from Fragas do Lecer is raised in a combination of stainless steel and oak casks. The vineyards here are a mix of granite and slate primarily, with some sandy soils as well, so the underlying soil tones are quite complex. The wine offers up a fine, youthful nose of dark berries, pomegranate, graphite, a fine base of minerality, a touch of meatiness, chicory and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and tangy, with a superb core of fruit, excellent soil signature, ripe, modest tannins and a long, complex and intensely flavored finish. This is the first vintage of Fraga do Corvo that I have tasted and it is very, very impressive! 2018-2040. **92.**

Tierra de León

2016 Los Arrotos del Pendón- Bodegas y Viñedos Raúl Pérez

The Los Arrotos del Pendón from Raúl Pérez is an old vine bottling made from Prieto Picudo. The vineyard was planted in 1900! The wine is whole cluster fermented in cement vats and raised in old, four and five hundred liter French *demi-muids* prior to bottling without fining or filtration. The 2016 version is pretty ripe at 14.5 percent, but offers up a deep and complex nose of cassis, bitter chocolate, a hint of apricot, dark soil tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full and carries its octane quite well, with a good core of fruit, ripe tannins and very good length and grip on the well-balanced and nascently complex finish. This

closes with a nice balsamic note and should age very nicely, but it really deserves a few years in the cellar for the backend tannins to soften up a bit. 2021-2045+. **89+**.

Terra Alta

2016 Las Colinas del Ebro Garnaxta Blanca- Bodegas Abanico (screwcap)

The 2016 Las Colinas del Ebro Garnaxta Blanca from Bodegas Abanico is again an excellent wine suffering under a reductive screwcap. With some aggressive swirling, the wine unlocks to offer up a fine nose of grapefruit, lemon, salty minerality, white flowers and a touch of green olive. On the palate the wine is even more reductive than the nose and never quite fully blossomed. But underneath the stillborn aspect of the reduction, the wine is full, crisp and nicely transparent, with good focus and grip and a long, potentially complex finish. But, the screwcap has given this a permanent note of reduction already, which comes across as vegetal on the nose and attack on the palate, with a short, clipped finish. This is clearly a closure issue and Bodegas Abanico would be so well-served to go back to natural cork for this wine, as the closure is killing a very, very good wine in its youth. ???

2016 Las Colinas del Ebro Tinto- Bodegas Abanico (screwcap)

The 2016 Las Colinas del Ebro Tinto is composed of a blend of eighty percent Garnaxta and twenty percent Syrah, with the former ranging from thirty to fifty year-old vines and the syrah vines twenty-five years old. The wine is fermented and raised in stainless steel prior to bottling. The 2016 version comes in at 14.5 percent octane and needs a little coaxing in decanter to shake off a touch of early reduction, but it is much better than the 2016 Blanco and eventually blossoms to offer up scents of raspberries, *garrigue*, coffee, a bit of roasted game and stony soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite robust, with a good core, plenty of personality and a long, modestly tannic and ever so slightly hot finish. This is only thirteen dollars here in the states and is a very good value, but I would suggest a change back to natural cork would do the wine good, as there is the depth and structure to age this wine nicely over the mid-term, but I would not trust it under screwcap in the cellar. 2018-2023? **87**.

Rueda

2017 Nosis- Buil & Giné (screwcap)

The Nosis bottling from Buil & Giné is composed entirely of Verdejo and the 2017 vintage comes in at thirteen percent octane. The wine offers up a lovely bouquet of pear, lime peel, a touch of green olive, a bit of sea salts, good soil tones and a topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is crisp, medium-full and complex, with good acids and grip, fine focus and a long, youthful and promising finish. When first poured, this wine is already showing just a touch of backend bitterness from incipient reduction from its closure, but this blows off nicely with a bit of air. I would opt for drinking it early on because it is under screwcap, but it would be great to see this wine next year under natural cork, as it clearly has the depth and structural integrity to age gracefully for several years under a different closure. Fine juice. 2018-2020+? **91**.

2016 Nosis- Buil & Giné (screwcap)

The 2016 Nosis from Buil & Giné has aged very quickly under screwcap and is already an old wine, which it would not be under natural cork, as Verdejo ages quite nicely over the medium term. The wine has a touch of fallen apple in its bouquet of pear, green olive, damp herbs and salty soil elements. On the palate the wine is medium-full, complex, but just a touch vegetal on the finish from the screwcap reductive elements. The length here is still good and this was clearly a good wine a year or so ago, but it has not aged up to its potential and this is clearly

a bottling that the winery would be so well-served to change over to agglomerated corks. 2018-2019. **82.**

2016 Verdejo- Egeo (Isaac Fernandez Selección)

The 2016 Verdejo “Egeo” from Isaac Fernandez is produced from sixty year-old vines planted on sandy clay soils. The wine is lovely, wafting from the glass in a classic bouquet of Granny Smith apple, lime peel, green olive, salty soil tones and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is crisp, medium-full and zesty, with fine focus and grip, a lovely core, good backend mineral drive and a long, complex and succulent finish. Just a lovely bottle of Verdejo and a superb value! 2018-2022. **90.**

Toro

2015 Toro- Viñas Elias Mora

The 2015 Toro from Elias Mora is made entirely from tempranillo, with the vines a good age of thirty-five years of age. This bottling sees all new American oak for its *elevage*, but happily this is only for six months. The wine comes in at 14.5 percent alcohol and manages it quite well, offering up a bright and complex bouquet of sweet dark berries, black cherries, bonfire, a bit of roasted game, smoky new oak and a touch of licorice in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, robust and well-balanced, with a good core, focus and grip and a long, nascently complex and robust finish. I like this quite a bit. 2018-2030+. **89.**

2015 Toro “Prima”- Bodegas y Viñedos San Roman

The 2015 Toro “Prima” from Bodegas y Viñedos San Roman is not made from particularly old vines, with the age ranging from fifteen to twenty years of age, but they are farmed organically. The *cépages* here is eighty-five percent tempranillo and fifteen percent garnacha, with the wine raised for one year in older casks (both of French and American origin). The wine comes in at 14.5 percent octane and offers up a fine bouquet of black cherries, black raspberries, a bit of pepper, a good base of soil, woodsmoke, a touch of cola and hung game. On the palate the wine is ripe, full-bodied and nicely spicy, with a good core, chewy tannins and a long, well-balanced and robust finish. This is ripe, but not particularly warm on the backend and is really quite a good example of Toro. 2018-2030+. **89.**

2014 Toro- Buil & Giné

The 2014 Toro from Buil & Giné is composed entirely of tempranillo and tips the scales at 14.5 percent octane (or thereabouts). The bouquet here is deep and nascently complex, offering up scents of red and black raspberries, a touch of fruitcake, beautiful spice elements, a touch of roasted venison, a goodly dollop of soil, wild fennel and cedary oak. On the palate the wine is ripe, full-bodied and quite nicely balanced for its octane, with a rock solid core, sound acids, ripe, firm tannins and very good length and grip on the gently heady finish. The 2014 seems just a touch riper than the lovely 2013 version, but this is quite well-balanced for its octane and I like its prospects to develop very nicely with some bottle age. I would guess that it will never quite match the elegant profile of the 2013, but it is not far off that refined Toro and is another very strong effort. 2022-2040+. **90.**

2014 Toro Crianza- Viñas Elias Mora

2014 is a slightly cooler vintage than 2015, but the Crianza bottling from Elias Mora tips the scales at a full fifteen percent alcohol. The wine is made from fifty year-old tempranillo vines and raised for a year in a fifty-fifty mix of French and American oak barrels, which had been used once previously, rather than being new. The wine is ripe and extroverted on the nose,

jumping from the glass in a mix of black cherries, chocolate, gentle spice tones, chicory and a well done framing of smoky new oak. On the palate the wine is plush, full-bodied and fairly tannic, with plenty of depth in the mid-palate and a long, youthful and chewy finish. Even though this wine was raised in one wine barrels, there is still a bit of wood tannin here that needs time to be integrated into the wine. This should eventually happen, but the wine is a bit rigid on the backend today and needs some cellaring. It carries its alcohol pretty well out of the blocks. 2021-2035. **88+?**

2014 Toro “San Roman”- Bodegas y Viñedos San Roman

The San Roman bottling from the winery of the same name is one of their old vine cuvées, produced entirely from tempranillo, with the vines ranging from sixty to more than ninety years of age. The vineyards here are far stonier than those used for their Prima bottling. The wine is raised in fifty percent new oak for two years, with the *barricas* a combination of both French and American oak. The 2014 San Roman comes in at 14.5 percent octane and offers up excellent complexity in its aromatic constellation of cassis, licorice, dark chocolate, a fine base of soil, a bit of saddle leather and a well done base of cedary new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, broad-shouldered and rock solid at the core, with firm, ripe tannins, good focus and grip and a long, nascently complex and robust finish. This carries its alcohol pretty well, but it is still a touch warm on the backend. But, in the context of Toro today, this is pretty classy juice. 2020-2040. **91.**

2013 Toro- Buil & Giné

The 2013 Toro from Buil & Giné is also entirely tempranillo and again is listed at 14.5 percent alcohol, and this level seems pretty accurate to my palate. The 2013 is really starting to develop a nice touch of secondary layers in its aromatic constellation, which delivers a fine blend of raspberries, cherries, a touch of spiced meats, a fine base of soil, fresh nutmeg and a very well done framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still fairly tannic, with a fine core of fruit, good soil signature, fine focus and just a whisper of heat poking out on the long and moderately tannic finish. I really like how this is developing on the nose, but the palate is a bit behind in its evolutionary arc and the wine could use a couple more years in the cellar to more fully soften up on the backend, but it is aging quite gracefully and is one of the best examples of Toro I have tasted in quite some time. It is still plenty ripe, but carries it well. 2020-2040. **91+.**

2013 Toro “Cartago Paraje del Pozo”- Bodegas y Viñedos San Roman

This bottling from Bodegas y Viñedos San Roman is a single vineyard wine from the Paraje del Pozo vineyard, which is planted with forty-five year-old tempranillo vines planted at seven hundred meters above sea level. The wine’s *elevage* is quite long at three years, in a combination of both new and older casks, with both French and American oak barrels in the rotation. The 2013 Cartago is 14.5 percent octane and offers up a very fine bouquet of black cherries, cassis, licorice, a bit of roasted meats, dark soil, a touch of nice balsamic overtones and a discreet framing of oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and plenty powerful, with a fine sense of elegance to go with its broad shoulders, ripe, chewy tannins and a long, complex finish. Despite this wine having not seen all new oak, there are some wood tannins sticking out on the backend still today, from its long sojourn in oak. I like it quite well, but if one is going to keep a wine this long in cask, I think it would make sense to ensure that none of the barrels are new. But, this is still a good wine. 2020-2040. **89.**

2012 Toro “Reserva”- Viñas Elias Mora

The 2012 Toro “Reserva” from Viñas Elias Mora is again listed at a full fifteen percent alcohol. This is the oldest vine cuvée from Señor Mora, hailing from vines that are fully eighty years old and the wine is raised entirely in new French oak *barricas* for two full years prior to bottling. The wine delivers impressive complexity in its ripe nose of black cherries, roasted game, woodsmoke, a touch of wild fennel, dark soil tones and a well done framing of smoky new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, ripe and well-balanced for its octane, with a fine core, good focus and a long, moderately tannic and plush finish. There is not heat on the backend, but just a wisp of residual oak tannin still in evidence on the finish. This is riper than I would like, but very well done. 2018-2040. **90.**

2012 Toro “2V Premium”- Viñas Elias Mora

The 2012 Toro “2V Premium” from Elias Mora is a five barrel selection of the above wine. It is aged one year in new French casks prior to the selection, with the five best barrels then separated out into another set of new barrels, so this affectively a two hundred percent new oak wine *à la* Dominique Laurent. The 2012 version is fully fifteen percent alcohol, but does not show this on the nose, which is nicely complex and evolved, delivering scents of dark berries, bonfire, roasted venison, dark chocolate, a touch of coffee grounds and a fairly discreet framing of cedary new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and plush on the attack, with a good core, some backend heat and some uncovered oak tannins on the long finish. I am not overly sanguine about the overall balance of the wine, as this seems as likely to dry out from the oak tannins as blossom. ???

Ribera del Duero

2016 Bodegas Arrocal Tinto (Ribera del Duero)

There is a slight change in the *elevage* procedure for the 2016 Bodegas Arrocal Tinto this year, as the wine saw no new oak in 2016. Previously, twenty percent of the casks were renewed each vintage, but in 2016 the estate decided to just utilize older oak barrels for the wine. The wine is very pretty, coming in at fourteen percent octane and offering up a lovely bouquet of plums, cherries, a touch of mint, cocoa powder, a bit of wild fennel, a very good touch of soil and still a good foundation of spicy oak from the used casks. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and moderately tannic, with a fine core, very good focus and grip and a long, nascently complex and very well-balanced finish. This could use a few years in the cellar to soften a bit more, but it shows fine potential and will be excellent when it has had a chance to blossom. In a region where prices can be a bit steep for what is in the bottle, this is an outstanding value! 2021-2045+. **91.**

2016 Finca La Mata- Isaac Fernandez Selección (Ribera del Duero)

As I have mentioned in the past, the Finca La Mata bottling is truly and old vine cuvée, hailing from sixty to eighty year-old tempranillo vines. It is raised in a combination of American and French casks, with one-third of the wood new each year. The 2016 Finca la Mata is an excellent young wine, wafting from the glass in a complex blend of cherries, red plums, a touch of clove, good soil tones, a lovely touch of nuttiness and a deft framing of new wood. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and still fairly youthful, with a good core, fine soil inflection, moderate tannins and a long, nascently complex and very nicely balanced finish. This is still in the process of incorporating its one-third new oak and is showing a tad woody on the backend today, but this is clearly only a stage and once this wine settles in, it will drink with plenty of

style and grace, so give it at least a few more months. A fine, old school, and quite red fruity example of Ribera del Duero and a great value at under twenty dollars! 2018-2035+. **91.**

2016 Aptus Tinto- Bodegas Peñalba Herraiz (Ribera del Duero)

I quite liked the 2015 Aptus Tinto from Bodegas Peñalba Herraiz last year and the 2016 vintage is a fine follow-up. Readers may recall that this is a blend of ninety-five percent Tempranillo and the other five percent a mix of Garnacha and Monastrell, with the vineyards farmed organically and in conversion to biodynamics. The 2016 version comes in at the same 14.5 percent alcohol as the 2015 and offers up a complex nose of red and black cherries, a touch of cassis, cigar smoke, a nice touch of spice, good soil elements and a gentle framing of cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nascently complex, with good soil signature, a fine core, moderate, well-integrated tannins and a long, well-balanced finish. This is not your typical, plush, fruit-driven Ribera del Duero, but a wine with good soil signature and fine promise for down the road, but it will need a couple years in the cellar to blossom. A superb value! 2021-2045+. **90.**



2015 Passión Arrocal Tinto- Bodegas Arrocal (Ribera del Duero)

As readers may recall the Passión Arrocal cuvée also sees no new wood, with its *elevage* done in a fifty-fifty mix of two and three year-old French barrels. The wine hails from the Los Corrales Vineyard, which is planted with forty year-old tempranillo vines at an elevation of eight hundred meters above sea level. The 2015 Passión Arrocal tips the scales at fourteen percent

alcohol and is a fine follow-up to the excellent 2014 bottling reviewed last year. The wine offers up a bouquet of black cherries, black plums, a touch of cigar smoke, dark chocolate, a fine signature of soil and a discreet touch of smoky oak. On the palate the wine is ripe, full-bodied and very nicely balanced, with a rock solid core, firm, well-integrated tannins and excellent focus and grip on the still quite youthful finish. This is a touch riper in personality than the lovely 2014, but that is the nature of the 2015 vintage, and with sufficient bottle age, it should approach the fine quality of the previous vintage. I would tuck it away in the cellar for five or six years and then drink it with pleasure over the ensuing two or three decades. Fine juice. 2023-2050. **92.**

2015 Astrales Tinto- Bodegas los Astrales (Ribera del Duero)

The 2015 Astrales Tinto is pretty ripe, coming in at 14.5 percent octane, but offers up fine purity in its bouquet of red plums, red and black cherries, cocoa powder, a good base of soil and smoky new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, nascently complex and very well-balanced, with a fine core of fruit, ripe, seamless tannins and lovely focus and grip on the poised and classy finish. Despite its 14.5 percent alcohol, this wine is cool in the mouth and beautifully balanced. I would give it four or five years in the cellar to allow some of its secondary layers of complexity to emerge. 2022-2050. **93.**

2015 Astrales “Christina” Tinto- Bodegas los Astrales (Ribera del Duero)

As readers may recall from last year’s report on Bodegas los Astrales, the cuvée Christina is produced from a ninety year-old parcel of vines grown at an elevation of nearly nine hundred meters above sea level, allowing for a good diurnal temperature swing during the growing season. The wine is raised entirely in new French wood for eighteen months prior to bottling. The 2015 Christina is a superb follow-up to the very strong 2014 vintage of this wine, offering up a pure and complex nose of red plums, cherries, a touch of pomegranate, cocoa powder, soil tones and a well done framing of nutty new oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and rock solid at the core, with lovely focus and balance, ripe, well-integrated tannins and outstanding length and grip on the vibrant and very promising finish. This is still a puppy and deserves some bottle age to fully blossom, but it is going to be very classy wine when it is ready to drink! 2025-2075. **94.**

2015 Finca La Mata- Isaac Fernandez Selección (Ribera del Duero)

The 2015 Finca La Mata is listed at the same fourteen percent as the 2016 version, but it is a riper and more black fruity example of Ribera del Duero, as it should be given the differences in the two vintages. The bouquet is deep and complex, offering up scents of black cherries, a bit of cassis, dark chocolate, cigar smoke, a fine base of soil, a bit of nuttiness and a nicely done base of new oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and nicely ripe at the core, with fine focus and grip, well-integrated tannins and a very long, nicely soil-driven and youthful finish. This is probably just a tad higher in actual octane than the 2016 and is a bit more structured out of the blocks, so I would tuck this wine away in the cellar for at least a couple of years and drink the more red fruity 2016 version first. But, this too will be a very tasty and old school example of Ribera del Duero with a bit of bottle age. 2020-2035+. **89+.**

2015 Garmón Tinto

Garmón is the new project from Mariano Garcia and his family, who used to man the helm at Vega Sicilia and is now responsible for such Ribera del Duero icons as Mauro. The 2015 Garmón is 14.5 percent octane, crafted entirely from tempranillo and aged for sixteen months in French casks prior to bottling. The 2015 offers up a fine nose of red plums, cherries, a bit of cocoa powder, good soil tones and plenty of smoky new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-

bodied and ripely tannic, with a good core of fruit, a nice bass line of soil tones and fine length and grip on the nascently complex and focused finish. I find this less extracted than Mauro and therefore, to my palate, even better. This is good juice that needs some cellaring to allow its complexity to start to emerge. 2025-2055. **92+**.

2015 Carravid Tinto- Bodegas Peñalba Herraiz (Ribera del Duero)

The Carravid bottling from Bodegas Peñalba Herraiz is the next step up in their hierarchy from their Aptus cuvée. The wine is made entirely from tempranillo, with its malo in barrel and its *elevage* done in a mix of fifty percent new French casks and fifty percent used American barrels for eighteen months. The 2015 Carravid tips the scales at fifteen percent octane and offers up a ripe, but not overripe bouquet of plums, black cherries, chocolate, a nice touch of soil and a well done framing of smoky new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nascently complex, with a good core of fruit, ripe tannins and very good length and grip on the well-balanced and promising finish. This carries its octane quite well (though I would love to see it a point lower!) and the wood tannins here are far better integrated in the 2015 than was the case with the 2014 version. This is good juice that could be a great wine if the alcohol level could be reined it just a bit! 2022-2045+. **89**.

2015 El Pedrosal- Bodegas Perez Pascuas

The 2015 El Pedrosal from Bodegas Perez Pascuas is made entirely from tempranillo and is aged twelve months in a combination of French and American casks. The wine is really terrific on both the nose and palate, with the bouquet jumping from the glass in a vibrant blend of red plum, cherries, nutmeg, lovely soil tones and a well done framing of smoky new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, ripe and complex, with a plush core of fruit, good focus and grip, moderate tannins and a long, ripe and slightly warm finish. This is listed at 14.5 percent octane on the back label (though fourteen percent on my tech sheet) and shows just a bit of alcohol on the backend, but carries it very well and is essentially a very well-balanced wine. Good juice. 2018-2035+. **89+**.

2015 Viña Pedrosa Crianza- Bodegas Perez Pascuas

The bottle of 2015 Viña Pedrosa Crianza that I tasted was a sample sent from Spain, so it did not have any of the back label information affixed to it yet and consequently, I am not sure of its octane level. Based on color and vintage, I would guess it is around 14.5 percent, but it is pretty well-balanced and carries its octane pretty well. The nose is a ripe and stylish blend of black plums, black cherries, chocolate, a touch of balsamic overtones, a bit of hazelnut and quite nicely-done new vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely plush on the attack, with a fine core of fruit, ripe, well-integrated tannins and a long, sappy and fairly complex finish. This is a tad riper than a wine I would reach for out of my cellar, but it is not hot on the backend and shows quite good purity for its alcohol level. Good juice from one of the consistently finest producers in Ribera de Duero. 2018-2030+. **89+**.

2014 Arrocal “Ángel”- Bodegas Arrocal (Ribera del Duero)

The Ángel bottling from Bodegas Arrocal is an old vine cuvée made from seventy-five year-old tempranillo vines grown in the vineyard of El Portillo. The wine is raised entirely in new French oak, with the malolactic fermentation also taking place in barrel. The wine is quite new oaky on the nose, but nicely done in this style, as it wafts from the glass in a mix of red plums, black cherries, cocoa powder, a hint of blood orange and plenty of smoky new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and really well-balanced, with a classy core of fruit, fine-grained, well-integrated tannins and excellent length and grip on the nascently

complex finish. This is fourteen percent octane and will be superb to drink with some cellaring. It needs a couple of years to fully integrate its new oak, though it has plenty of depth of fruit to do so with a bit of patience. It will be very interesting to see if it will be as complex as the 2014 *Passión Arrocal* bottling when it is ready to drink, but it is certainly a step up from that excellent wine in terms of palate polish out of the blocks. This is an excellent wine, but it might be even better with less new oak! 2022-2050+. **92+**.

2014 Arrocal “Máximo”- Bodegas Arrocal (Ribera del Duero)

The 2014 vintage of the *Máximo* bottling from Bodegas Arrocal is their top of the line *cuvée*, made from seventy-five year-old vines in a prime section of the El Portillo Vineyard. Interestingly, though the 2014 is again raised all in new French barrels, the winery has cut back on the new oak, as the 2011 version I tasted last year had been racked from ne barrels into new casks again, *à la* Dominique Laurent and had used his recipe of “two hundred percent new oak”. The 2014 *Máximo* was aged in all new French oak for twenty-six months, but at least the racking was not done into another set of new barrels and the wine is much less woody as a result. The bouquet is deep, complex and very refined, wafting from the glass in a mix of black cherries, plums, raw cocoa, a nice touch of Cuban cigar wrapper, a lovely dollop of soil tones and a really well done framing of spicy and nutty French oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and elegant, with lovely complexity, excellent depth at the core, well-measured tannins and excellent length and grip on the very well-balanced finish. I would still love this wine even more in fifty percent new oak, but the wood here is already integrating beautifully and the wine carries it very well indeed. This is first class juice. 2020-2050. **94+**.

2014 Garmón Tinto

The 2014 vintage of *Garmón* is listed at the same 14.5 percent as the 2015 version, but it seems just a tad riper in its aromatic profile than its younger sibling. The bouquet is deep and blossoming nicely, offering up scents of black cherries, black plums, Cuban cigar wrapper, a nice touch of soil, woodsmoke and a very well done framing of nutty new oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, ripe and very well-balanced, with a good core of fruit, fine focus and grip, well-integrated, chewy tannins and a long, focused and promising finish. This is a fine wine in the making, but it needs some cellaring time to blossom properly. 2024-2055+. **92**.

2014 Viña Pedrosa Reserva- Bodegas Perez Pascuas

The 2014 *Viña Pedrosa Reserva* is composed entirely of *tempranillo* and was raised in a combination of French and American casks for two years prior to bottling. The 2014 vintage comes in at just under 14.5 percent octane and offers up a classic bouquet of black cherries, raw cocoa, black plums, a bit of cigar smoke, good soil tones and smoky new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, nascently complex and very nicely balanced, with a good core of fruit, a nice base of soil, ripe tannins and fine focus and grip on the classy finish. This could still use a few more years’ worth of bottle age to really blossom, but it is already a pretty tasty drink with grilled meats and the like. 2020-2045+. **91**.

2014 Viña Pedrosa “La Navilla” Reserva- Bodegas Perez Pascuas

The 2014 *Viña Pedrosa “La Navilla” Reserva* hails from one of the higher altitude vineyards in this sector of Ribera del Duero (2700 feet above sea level) and this gives the wine a nice sense of precision on both the nose and palate, from the cooler evening temperatures here. The 2014 *La Navilla* is a lovely wine, offering up a complex bouquet of red and black cherries, plums, cocoa powder, good soil tones, a touch of cigar wrapper and a fine coating of new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nascently complex, with a good core, fine focus and grip, moderate tannins and a long, well-balanced finish. This is listed on the back label at

14.5 percent, but seems a tad lower than this and is really quite a good example of today's Ribera del Duero. 2021-2045. **91.**

2014 Pinea

This is the flagship wine from this new project in Ribera del Duero, founded by partners Vincente Pilego and Hugo Del Pozzo. They have hired the very talented Isaac Fernandez as their winemaker for the project. The 2014 vintage is the first release from the estate, with the wine composed entirely of tempranillo from thirty year-old vines and the *elevage* done for thirty months in all new French oak. The 2014 Pinea comes in at 14.5 percent octane and really blossoms nicely with some extended breathing. The bouquet eventually offers up a fine blend of black cherries, plums, Cuban cigar wrapper, a fine base of soil, dark chocolate and smoky new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite elegant in profile, with a plush core of fruit, very good focus and grip, ripe, well-integrated tannins and a long, ripe and well-balanced finish. This carries its 14.5 percent octane quite well and should drink very nicely with a few more years' worth of bottle age. This is a very impressive first release of the flagship wine here, which is clearly aiming for the very top division in Ribera del Duero. I would love to see it just a touch lower in alcohol and the use of some one and two wine barrels would allow even more of the underlying *terroir* here to come to the fore. But, this is serious juice. 2023-2060. **92+.**

2013 Seventeen By Pinea

The Seventeen bottling from Pinea is composed entirely of tempranillo and the 2013 version comes in at 14.2 percent octane. This is a relatively new project where Isaac Fernandez is the winemaker, whose wines I have enjoyed very much in the past. The vineyards here are planted at nine hundred meters above sea level, allowing for dramatic diurnal temperature swings (evening temperatures can be forty degrees lower than the peak afternoon heat during the summer!), with plenty of limestone in the soils. The wine is aged in a combination of American and French oak casks for eighteen months prior to bottling. The 2013 vintage of "Seventeen" offers up a new oaky and deep bouquet of plums, black cherries, chocolate, plenty of smoky new oak and some sweet balsamic tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and youthfully chewy, with a good core, fine focus and grip, nascent complexity and a long, fairly tannic and still quite primary finish. 2013 was a difficult vintage in Ribera del Duero, with hail and rain at harvest, and this wine has turned out pretty well for the vintage, but perhaps a bit less oak would have worked better in this year? I like what lies beneath the wood and there is probably enough stuffing to eventually carry it pretty well, but I can envision this wine raised in one and two wine casks and turning out even better! But, all in all, not bad for a tough vintage. I am already looking forward to tasting the 2014 vintage of this cuvée! 2021-2045+. **87+.**

2011 Viña Pedrosa Gran Reserva- Bodegas Perez Pascuas

The 2011 Viña Pedrosa Gran Reserva is the only wine from the bodegas that is not comprised entirely of tempranillo, as the blend here is ninety percent tempranillo and ten percent cabernet sauvignon. The wine spends two years in a blend of French and American casks prior to bottling and fully three years in the cellars gaining bottle age after the *mise*. The 2011 is a ripe wine, coming in at 14.5 percent octane, but also balanced and classy, as it wafts from the glass in a complex blend of black plums, dark berries, cigar smoke, a touch of hazelnut, good soil signature and a judicious framing of new oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and impressively complex and elegant, with a fine core, excellent underlying soil pull, good acids, fine-grained tannins and a long, balanced and very classy finish. This is certainly approachable

today, but it is still a fairly young wine and four or five years of additional bottle age would really bring this to a lovely point in its evolution. 2018-2040+. **93.**

Vega Sicilia Unico “Reserva Especial” (blend of 1968, 1970 and 1973 vintages)

This has long been one of the fabled versions of Reserva Especial from Vega Sicilia, but I had not tasted the wine in more than twenty years, so I was thrilled to see a friend unpacking a bottle during his visit in Burgundy in November of last year. The wine is drinking brilliantly today, having transitioned into a distinguished and very complex state of maturity. The bouquet is beautiful, offering up a tertiary blend of dried black cherries, a touch of orange, sweet walnuts, a bit of road tar, cigar ash, dark soil and a lovely touch of wood from the ancient oak barrels the wine spent so many years aging in. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and velvety, with a lovely core, still a touch of tannin remaining on the backend and superb focus and grip on the very, very long, very pure and complex finish. A glorious bottle of Vega! 2018-2045. **95.**

Valtiendas

2013 Evolet- Pago el Amendo

As I mentioned last year, Evolet is made from twenty year-old tempranillo vines planted at an elevation of nine hundred meters above sea level in a vineyard with high limestone content. The wine is fermented in stainless steel and raised entirely in older oak, with a mix of seventy percent French and thirty percent American wood used. The 2013 Evolet is a fine follow-up to the 2012, though a bit tight when first poured and in need of a bit of aeration. Eventually it blossoms nicely to offer up a bouquet of raspberries, cherries, woodsmoke, a good base of chalky soil tones, a touch of clove and a topnote of cigar smoke. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, young and very well-balanced, with a fine core, good soil signature, ripe, well-integrated tannins and a long, tangy and youthful finish. This needs some bottle age to blossom, but will be a very good wine when it is ready to drink and is a fine value. 2022-2045. **90.**

Txakoli

2017 Txakoli “Luzia de Ripa”- Bodegas Arzabro

The 2017 Txakoli “Luzia de Ripa” from Bodegas Arzabro is composed of ninety percent Hondarrabi Zuri and ten percent Izpiriotza Txikia, with the wine fermented at low temperatures and aged six months in stainless steel tanks prior to bottling. The bottling takes its name from a famous nun from the sixteenth century in the region who was in charge of her order’s vineyards and was quite meticulous with her note taking about vineyard and vintage conditions. The 2017 Luzia de Ripa Txakoli is a young and a bit reductive when first opened, but eventually offers up a bright nose of lime, green olive, salty soil tones and dried flowers. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and nicely balanced, with a good core and soil signature, sound acids and good length and grip on the finish. This is a good example, but give it some decanting time to unlock it properly before drinking it. 2018-2025. **87.**

2017 Antxiola Rosado Getariako Txakolina- Bodegas Zudugarai

The 2017 Antxiola Rosado from Bodegas Zudugarai is made entirely from Hondurrabi Beltza grape. The wine is a cool eleven percent octane, pale salmon in color and offers up a very pretty bouquet of strawberries, melon, salty soil tones and a touch of lime blossom in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and has a nice touch of CO2 in it, with lovely transparency, good intensity of flavor and a long, zesty and well-balanced finish. Good juice. 2018-2020. **89.**

Valencia

2016 Casa l'Angel Cabernet Sauvignon- Anecoop

The 2016 Casa l'Angel Cabernet Sauvignon hails from a vineyard lying at six hundred meters above sea level, with good diurnal swings during the growing season. It is raised primarily in stainless steel tanks, with the wine only seeing three months in older French casks during its *elevage*. The wine offers up a good bouquet of red and black cherries, cigar wrapper, a touch of *garrigue*, lovely soil tones and a touch of cedar in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and moderately tannic, with a good core of ripe fruit, gently chewy tannins and a long, youthful and focused finish. This could use a year or two in the cellar to soften up a bit on the backend, but I like the depth and potential complexity here, and this is a lot of wine for fourteen dollars here in the US! Good honest juice! 2020-235+. **87+**.

La Mancha

2016 Fatum Blanco- Manuel Manzaneque Suárez

The Fatum Blanco is composed of a blend of fifty percent Airen, thirty-five percent Macabeu and fifteen percent Sauvignon Blanc and comes in at a brisk 12.5 percent octane in the 2016 vintage. The wine offers up a superb bouquet of pear, a hint of green olive, white peach, salty soil tones, a bit of fresh almond and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and not quite as interesting as the nose promises, with a good core, sound acids and grip and a long, well-balanced finish. The palate is not quite as well-delineated as the nose and leaves the wine a touch chunky in personality, but one has to admit that there is a lot of personality here in any case for a wine that only retails here in the US for twelve dollars! If the palate can eventually catch up with the precision of the nose, my score will seem conservative! 2018-2025. **87+**.

2016 Viña Jaraba Cosecha

The 2016 Viña Jaraba Cosecha is produced from a *cépages* of eighty percent tempranillo and ten percent each of cabernet sauvignon and merlot. It sees only four months in a combination of French and American oak casks prior to racking into tank and eventual bottling. The wine offers up a very good bouquet of black cherries, cassis, a bit of cigar smoke and a nice base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and shows good mid-palate depth, with a bit of backend tannin and good length and grip on the finish. This is not overly complex, but it has depth and plenty of personality and sells for the princely sum of ten dollars a bottle here in the US, so it is an excellent value! 2018-2025+. **88**.

2015 Fatum Tinto (Tempranillo-Bobal)- Manuel Manzaneque Suárez

This particular bottling of the 2015 Fatum from Manuel Manzaneque Suárez again is a slightly different blend from the first 2015 version I reported on a year ago, as this time the *cépages* is ninety percent Tempranillo and only ten percent Bobal (the blend is listed on the back label). This version of 2015 is the same octane level as last year, coming in at 13.5 percent alcohol. The new version of 2015 Fatum offers up a fine and more red fruity aromatic constellation of cherries, a bit of blood orange, venison, bonfire, discreet savory elements (wild fennel?) and a good base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and very nicely balanced, with a good core, impressive soil signature, moderate tannins and lovely focus and grip on the long and complex finish. Bobal and Tempranillo really work nicely together in this blend! This is again a terrific value! 2018-2025+. **89**.

2015 EA!- Manuel Manzaneque Suárez

The 2015 EA! from Manuel Manzaneque Suárez is another excellent wine. This made from forty to seventy year-old Cencibel vines (the local name for Tempranillo) and these old vines produce a very small, intensely flavored crop each year. The wine is aged in twenty-five percent new French casks. The 2015 EA! offers up impressive depth and complexity on the youthful nose of black cherries, sweet dark berries, a bit of coffee bean, a fine base of soil, cola, wild fennel, a dollop of new oak and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely plush on the attack, with a fine core, good soil tones, moderate, well-integrated tannins and impressive length and grip on the well-balanced finish. This is really a terrific wine for its price tag, which is just over twenty dollars here in the US. 2018-2030+. **91.**

2015 Mil Cepas- Manuel Manzaneque Suárez

The 2015 Mil Cepas bottling from Manuel Manzaneque Suárez is a single vineyard bottling of Tempranillo from thirty-five year-old vines that are cropped at a very low fifteen hectoliters per hectare. The parcel is planted on quite sandy soil sand has been farmed organically now for the last five years. The 2015 Mil Cepas was fermented with indigenous yeasts and included fifteen percent whole clusters this year, with the *elevage* taking place in older French barrels. The wine offers up a superb bouquet, drifting up from the glass in a refined blend of red and black cherries, a lovely touch of cinnamon and clove, plenty of soil tones, cigar ash and a very discreet base of spicy oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, suave on the attack and plenty deep at the core, with modest tannins, tangy acids and excellent length and grip on the complex and very classy finish. This is the most Rioja-like wine I have ever had the pleasure to taste from La Mancha! Fine, fine juice. 2018-2040. **92+.**

2015 Viña Jaraba Crianza

The 2015 Viña Jaraba Crianza is made from the same blend as the 2016 Cosecha (eighty percent tempranillo and ten percent each of cabernet and merlot), but it spends double the time in barrel- eight months- prior to racking. Again, the casks are a mix of French and American oak. The longer sojourn in barrel has given the wine a bit more refinement on the nose, which wafts from the glass in a classy mix of red and black cherries, a nice touch of tempranillo spice elements, lovely soil, woodsmoke and a bit of cedary oak in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish and nascently complex, with a good core, fine focus and grip, a bit more tannin than the Cosecha bottling and lovely precision on the long finish. This is a very good bottle and again, an excellent value, as it retails here in the states for all of thirteen dollars per bottle! 2018-2030. **90.**

2015 Viña Jaraba “Selección Especial”

The *cépages* for the 2015 Viña Jaraba “Selección Especial” is slightly different from the Crianza, as this is seventy percent tempranillo, ten percent merlot and twenty percent cabernet sauvignon. The wine is again raised in a combination of French and American barrels, this time for a period of twelve months. Happily, the wine comes in at the same civilized octane of 13.5 percent as the Crianza in this vintage and delivers a fine aromatic constellation of black cherries, dark berries, a bit of saddle leather, cigar wrapper, soil tones and a nice touch of smoky oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely focused, with a good core, fine-grained tannins and very good length and grip on the quite refined finish. There is a bit of brett here that may scare away some folks (though certainly less than many a vintage of Beaucastel back in the day), but there is fine depth and complexity here as well. 2020-2040. **88+.**

2014 Pago De La Jaraba

The 2014 Pago De La Jaraba is made from the same *cépages* as the Selección Especial, with the malolactic done entirely in new French *barricas* and the wine then aged in a mix of French and American barrels for ten months. Not surprisingly, the wine is a bit oakier on the nose than these other bottlings, but it is well done and nicely integrated into both the nose and palate. The bouquet offers up a very fine mix of black plums, black cherries, cigar wrapper, a gentle touch of spice, good soil tones and a nice base of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite elegant in profile, with a good core, impressive nascent complexity and a long, well-balanced and moderately tannic finish. This needs a few years for the tannins to soften (and the bit of oak tannin here to be absorbed more completely), but all of the constituent components are in place and this will be a serious wine when it is ready to drink. 2022-2045. **92.**

2011 Viña Jaraba “Reserva”

The Reserva cuvée from Viña Jaraba is again a blend of seventy percent tempranillo, twenty percent cabernet sauvignon and ten percent merlot, with the wine aged in French and American barrels for twelve months prior to bottling. The wine is evolving very gracefully at age seven, offering up a deep and complex nose of black cherries, cassis, woodsmoke, a nice base of spice elements, just a whisper of the walnuts to come with further bottle age, a bit of chicory and a nice touch of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and resolving beautifully, with impressive complexity, a good core and fine length and grip on the classy finish. There is still a bit of tannin here to continue to carry the wine into the future, but it is wide open today and drinking very well indeed. 2018-2035. **92.**



October vines in the beautiful and rugged wine country of Navarra.

Navarra

2015 Xi'ipal Graciano "Gracia Vid" - Bodegas Caudalia

The 2015 Xi'ipal Graciano "Gracia Vid" from Bodegas Caudalia is not made from particularly old vines, as these were only planted twelve years ago, but on a fine vineyard of stony limestone soils. Like all of the Xi'ipal bottlings, the vines are farmed organically (though not yet certified) and the wine is fermented with indigenous yeasts and raised in five hundred liter French oak puncheons for eighteen months prior to bottling. The 2015 Graciano comes in at fourteen percent octane and is a lovey example of this underrated varietal, offering up a complex nose of raspberries, cherries, a touch of *garrigue*, smoked meats, a lovely base of soil, a touch of bonfire and a discreet framing of cedary wood. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and very nicely balanced, with a good core, fine soil signature, moderate tannins and a long, tangy and focused finish. This is good juice. 2018-2040+. **91+**.

2015 Xi'ipal Garnacha "La Abejera"- Bodegas Caudalia

The 2015 Garnacha Xi'ipal is a full point higher in alcohol than the Graciano (fifteen versus fourteen percent), but the wine shows surprising precision in its bouquet of raspberries, pepper, *garrigue*, stony soil tones and a topnote of spiced meats. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely soil-driven for its octane, with a good core, but some uncovered alcohol poking out on the long and moderately tannic finish. This is quite good for its high alcohol level, but the ripeness still gets in the way a bit and the wine is slightly hot on the backend. I would like it far better at fourteen percent! 2018-2030+? **86**.

2015 Xi'ipal Tempranillo "La Abejera"- Bodegas Caudalia

The 2015 Xi'ipal Tempranillo is again very heady, tipping the scales at a full fifteen percent alcohol. As the vineyard is planted at seven hundred and fifty meters, it would seem that it could be a bit lower in octane. The nose shows its ripeness in a jammy blend of raspberries, spice tones, a bit of meatiness, soil and cedary oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and hot, with a good core, a bit of soil tones, moderate tannins and a long, slightly alcoholic and blurry finish. Of the four different varietal bottlings under the Xi'ipal, the Graciano and Syrah are by a good measure the most interesting. 2018-2030+? **85**.

2014 Paal Syrah- Bodegas Caudalia

This is the first time I have tasted the Syrah from Bodegas Caudalia, which is grown in a vineyard up in the Baja Montana at five hundred meters above sea level. The wine is fermented and raised in cement tanks for twenty-seven months prior to bottling. The 2014 version is a touch reductive when first opened (not unusual with syrah), but blossoms nicely with a bit of aeration to reveal scents of black raspberries, pepper, a fine base of soil tones, roasted meats, licorice and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and beautifully balanced, with a superb core, fine soil inflection, ripe, moderate tannins and a long, focused and classic Syrah finish. There is more than a passing resemblance to old school Cornas here that is quite enticing. Fine juice- just be patient and let it breath a bit before serving! 2018-2040. **91+**.

2014 Xi'ipal Syrah "La Celada"- Bodegas Caudalia

The Xi'ipal Syrah from Bodegas Caudalia is from the single vineyard of "La Celada", which is a very stony *terroir* situated at five hundred meters above sea level. The vineyard is farmed organically (though not yet certified) and the wine is fermented with indigenous yeasts in cement tanks, with the malolactic fermentation taking place in French puncheons. The 2014 version is again a bit reductive when first poured and needs some time in decanter to open up (this is syrah after all), but eventually blossoms to offer up a fine nose of black raspberries,

cassis, pepper, a bit of shoe polish, smoked meats, vanillin oak and a very good base of soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very well-balanced, with a fine core of fruit, good mineral drive, ripe, well-integrated tannins and good length and grip on the nascently complex finish. This is very good syrah in the making, but it deserves a few years in the cellar to soften up a bit and more fully blossom. Really quite a serious effort! 2021-2045+. **92.**

Campo de Borja

2017 Garnacha Rosato- Legado del Moncayo (Isaac Fernandez Selección)

The 2017 Garnacha Rosato from Legado del Moncayo is sealed under screwcap, but the wine is still very fresh and vibrant at this stage in its evolution. The pretty nose wafts from the glass in a blend of strawberries, melon, salty spice tones and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, juicy and pretty soft in terms of acidity, with a good core, nice focus and balance and a long, easy-going and tasty finish. This is not complex, but it offers up good, uncomplicated drinking. 2018-2020. **87.**

2016 Garnacha Blanca- Legado del Moncayo (Isaac Fernandez Selección)

The 2016 Garnacha Blanca from Legado del Moncayo comes in at 13.5 percent alcohol and delivers fine aromatic complexity in its nose of lemon, tart pear, wild fennel, salty soil tones, spring flowers and a hint of beeswax. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and well-balanced, with a good core, fine soil signature and a long, bright and still quite primary finish. There is a bit of youthful bluntness on the finish today that will work out with a bit of bottle age, but this is a good, solid wine with plenty of personality in the more robust style of white grenache. 2018-2025. **88.**

2016 Garnacha- Legado del Moncayo (Isaac Fernandez Selección)

The 2016 Garnacha Legado del Moncayo from Isaac Fernandez comes in at fourteen percent alcohol and once again is a very well-made wine and a fine value. The bouquet jumps from the glass in a mix of baked raspberries, black cherries, hung game, *garrigue*, wild fennel, a good base of soil and a bit of spice tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, robust and has plenty of ripe fruit at the core, with moderate tannins, good focus and grip and just a whisper of heat on the long finish. Good juice that could use a couple of years in the cellar to soften up a bit more on the backend. 2020-2040. **88.**

2016 Garnacha “Montaña” Old Vines- Legado del Moncayo (Isaac Fernandez Selección)

The Montaña bottling from Legado del Moncayo is made from forty year-old garnacha vines and aged in used French casks for seven months prior to bottling. The 2016 is a fine follow-up to the lovely 2015, though it seems just a touch riper, offering up a fine bouquet of baked raspberries and cherries, spiced meats, a touch of *garrigue*, coffee, pepper and a fine base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and robust in personality, with ripe tannins, plenty of spiciness, good soil signature and a long, complex finish. This is a superb value, though not quite as precise as the 2015 was showing at this stage a year ago. 2018-2030+. **89.**

Calatayud

2016 Garnacha “Acentor”- Isaac Fernandez Selección

The Acentor bottling from Isaac Fernandez has been a consistently well-made bottle of garnacha since the first vintage I had the pleasure to try, which was the 2014. Readers may recall that this wine is produced from vines that are fifty-plus years of age, planted at an altitude of seven hundred and fifty to nine hundred meters above sea level, with the soils composed of iron-

rich clay. The wine is fermented with indigenous yeasts in cement tanks and aged in a combination of French and American casks. The 2016 comes in listed at the same 14.5 percent octane as the 2015, and this seems just a tad on the low side to my palate in this vintage. Nevertheless, the wine is another very good value, offering up a deep and complex nose of baked raspberries, a touch of fruitcake, hung game, *garrigue*, a fine base of soil tones and plenty of spices in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and really quite well balanced for its octane, with a good core of fruit, impressive soil signature, moderate tannins, impressive nascent complexity and a long, ever so slightly heady finish. I liked the 2015 vintage here just a tad better, but this too is a serious wine that delivers an awful lot of complexity for its extremely reasonable price point! 2018-2030. **89+**.

Sierras de Málaga

2015 La Encina del Inglés Blanco- Finca La Melonera

The 2015 La Encina del Inglés Blanco is made from a unique blend of one-third each of Moscatel Morisco, Pedro Ximénez and Doradilla. The wine is nicely ripe, but still fresh, coming in at thirteen percent and offering up a quite complex nose of pear, desiccated peach, a touch of beeswax, green olive, gently musky floral tones and a good base of salty soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a fine core, good focus and grip, sound framing acids and a long, well-balanced finish that closes with a nice touch of citrus peel. Good juice. 2018-2021. **89**.

2014 La Encina del Inglés Tinto- Finca La Melonera

The 2014 La Encina del Inglés from Finca La Melonera is composed of a blend of fifty percent Tempranillo, twenty percent each of Garnacha and Tintilla de Rota and ten percent Syrah. The wine is plenty ripe at fifteen percent alcohol, but offers up pretty good acidity to go with its plush fruit, as the diurnal temperature swings here at six hundred to nine hundred meters above sea level can be quite dramatic. The bouquet offers up a ripe and roasted blend of black cherries, *garrigue*, coffee grounds, hung game, dark soil tones and a bit of wild fennel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and robust, with a good core, moderate tannins, tangy acids and just a bit of backend heat poking out on the long and quite complex finish. This is a bit too high in octane for my palate, but there are good raw materials here and I would love to see it in another vintage with a bit lower alcohol, as it might be really, really good wine. But, at fifteen percent, it is just a bit too hot for its own good. 2018-2025. **87**.

Cataluña Tinto

2009 Sauvella “Luscinia Canta” (Costers del Segre)

The 2009 Sauvella “Luscinia Canta” is composed of a blend of syrah, garnacha, tempranillo, cabernet sauvignon and Sumoll. The wine is aged for ten months in “one wine” barrels and sees no new oak during its *elevage*. The bouquet is very fine, wafting from the glass in a complex mix of dark berries, coffee bean, pepper, cigar smoke and a fine base of stony soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and impressively transparent in profile, with a good core, moderate, ripe tannins and very good length and grip on the quite complex finish. Good juice that is drinking well at age eight, but still has plenty of life ahead of it. 2018-2030+. **90+**.

Montsant

2015 Montsant “17-XI” Crianza- Buil & Giné

The 2015 Montsant “17-XI” from Buil & Giné is a blend of garnacha, carignan and tempranillo, with the 2015 version coming in listed at 14.5 percent alcohol. The wine offers up a ripe and spicy nose of baked raspberries, hung game, lovely spice tones (clove and cinnamon stick mostly), a touch of sultana raisin and a good base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, ripe and fairly powerful in profile, with a good core, moderate tannins, a bit of backend heat and good length and grip on the focused finish. This is just a touch hot for my palate, but for those who like their octane a bit higher, there is a lot of depth here, and the wine offers good value within the context of its ripeness. I would guess this is really quite close to fifteen percent in alcohol, and a bit lower would benefit the wine, but 2015 was a scorching summer. Not bad. 2018-2025. **84-88** (depending on how tolerant your palate is too fairly high octane).

Priorat

2016 Ginérosat- Buil & Giné (Screwcap)

The 2016 Ginérosat from Buil & Giné is a hefty wine at 14.5 percent octane and is a pretty dark color for a Rosé, as it is clearly made to go with cuisine. The wine offers up good, deep bouquet of baked cherries, orange peel, salty soil tones, a touch of clove and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and nicely balanced, with pretty good complexity, sound acids and good length and grip on the focused finish. This is a nice bottle of Rosato for drinking over the next year or two. 2018-2020. **88**.

2016 Giné-Giné Tinto- Buil & Giné (Screwcap)

The *cépages* of the 2016 Giné-Giné Tinto from Buil & Giné is sixty percent Cariñena and forty percent Garnacha, with the alcohol coming in at a robust fifteen percent. Despite its ripeness, the wine is really quite precise on the nose, offering up scents of black raspberries, grilled meats, clove-like spices, a good base of soil, woodsmoke and a bit of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely focused, with a creamy attack, a good core, moderate, slightly hard-edged tannins and good length and grip on the slightly hot finish. This is really pretty nicely balanced for fifteen percent, but it loses the precision of the nose on the backend of the palate, due to the octane. A very strong effort for its ripeness level. 2018-2030. **87**.

2016 Giné-Giné Tinto- Buil & Giné (Natural Cork)

It is interesting that Buil & Giné decided to bottle both their 2016 and 2015 Giné-Giné Tinto under both screwcap and natural cork and sent me samples of both vintages under both closures. The 2016 version under natural cork seems a tad more vibrant on the nose than the screwcapped version, but shares the same nice sense of aromatic precision in its mix of components. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and a bit more nicely structured (the screwcapped version was a touch more overtly jammy at the core than the cork version), with the tannins ripe and well-integrated on the long, fairly complex and gently hot finish. This seems just a bit longer on the backend as well. At this early stage, the difference between the two closures is not dramatic, but one does get the sensation that five or six years down the road, the cork-finished version is going to be superior. 2018-2035+. **87+**.

2015 Joanginé Blanco- Buil & Giné

The Joanginé Blanco bottling from Buil & Giné is composed of a blend of fifty-five percent Garnaxta Blanco, thirty-five percent Macabeo and ten percent Pedro Ximénez and is

barrel-fermented and aged in cask for a year prior to bottling. The 2015 version tips the scales at 14.5 percent octane and offers up a fine nose of lime, pear, a touch of green olive, salty soil tones, wild fennel and a whisper of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and nicely balanced for its ripeness, with a good core, fine soil signature, sound framing acids and good length and grip on the focused finish. The alcohol here is very nicely managed, and though it is probably a good time to be drinking it at age three, it shows no signs of imminent decline and is quite a tasty bottle. Perhaps the best white wine I have ever tasted from Priorat! 2018-2021. **89.**

2015 Giné-Giné Tinto- Buil & Giné (Screwcap)

The 2015 Giné-Giné Tinto is composed of a blend of forty percent Garnacha and sixty percent Cariñena and comes in at a full fifteen percent octane. The wine has retained nice freshness on the nose after more than a year under screwcap (no easy feat and quite laudable!) and offers up a jammy nose of raspberries, black cherries, spiced meats, a bit of pepper, good soil tones and a bit of spicy oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, robust and already quite velvety on the attack, with a plush core, moderate tannins and a long, jammy and slightly hot finish. This is okay at its octane level, but riper than a wine I would reach for at the dinner table. 2018-2028? **86.**

2015 Giné-Giné Tinto- Buil & Giné (Natural Cork)

The difference between the screwcapped and cork-finished version of the 2015 Giné-Giné Tinto is more dramatic than the 2016s, with the wine under natural cork showing decidedly more aromatic development than the screwcapped version. There is less jamminess and more definition in its aromatic mix of red and black raspberries, smoked meats, cola, fresh rosemary, wild fennel, a good base of soil and a touch of sweet balsamic tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is robust, full-bodied, ripely tannic and plenty deep at the core, with good focus and grip and a long, slightly hot finish. While the cork does not tame the bit of uncovered alcohol here from the high octane, it is a more complete wine on the backend, with more length and better delineation of flavors on the finish. 2018-2030. **87.**

2014 Genium “Costers Vi de Guarda” Tinto

The 2014 vintage of Costers Vi de Guarda from Genium is again a very ripe wine, as these old vines seem to often bring in wine above fifteen percent. The 2014 is a full 15.5 percent alcohol on the label and is actually, quite well balanced for such a hefty octane- though still hot on the finish. The bouquet offers up a very ripe, but surprisingly fresh blend of black raspberries, *garrigue*, hung game, pepper, a bit of stony soil tones and cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and powerful in profile, with a fair bit of chewy tannin on the long and hot finish. Honestly, I do not quite understand wines like this, as with more than ninety year-old vines, one would think there would be some way to tame the alcohol and really let the old vines express themselves more fully! This is the best 15.5 percent wine I have tasted in a year, but bring it down a point or a point and a half in alcohol and it might be really something special and far, far more drinkable. 2020-2030+? **87.**

2013 Genium “Poboleda” Vi de la Vila Tinto

The 2013 Genium “Poboleda” is composed of a blend of sixty-five percent garnacha and thirty-five percent cariñena. The wine was aged for one year in new French oak and is listed at fifteen percent octane. The nose is nicely black fruity from the cariñena in the blend, offering up scents of sweet cassis, black raspberries, marinated meats, a bit of chocolate, woodsmoke and a touch of licorice in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and

ripenly tannic, with a fine core of fruit, lovely focus and a fair bit of heat sullyng what would be a long finish. As I have written before, I really like the inherent elegance found across the board in the Genium wines, but to get to the next level, they have to figure out some way to lower the octane. Add four points to my score if you do not mind overt and uncovered alcohol on the finish. 2022-2035. **87.**

2013 Genium “Ecològic” Tinto

The 2013 Genium “Ecològic” Tinto comes in at the customarily hefty fifteen percent octane that seems to be typical of so many reds from Priorat. The wine is a blend of sixty-five percent Garnacha, fifteen percent Cariñena, eight percent each of Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot and five percent Syrah. It is raised in fifty percent new French casks and bottled unfiltered. The wine offers up an overripe bouquet of stewed raspberries, spiced meats, raisins, *garrigue* and cedary new oak. On the palate the wine is plush, full-bodied and hot on the backend, with some chewy tannins and good length and grip on the finish. I really do not know what to say about this wine, which is well-made enough in its idiom, but leaves me as cold stylistically as it is hot on the finish. I just do not understand wines like this. 2020-2030+? **84.**

2012 Joan Giné Tinto- Buil & Giné

The 2012 Joan Giné Tinto is a blend of forty percent each Garnacha and Cariñena and twenty percent Cabernet Sauvignon. The wine is raised in a mix of older American and French casks and the 2012 vintage tips the scales at fifteen percent alcohol. The bouquet is deep and nascently complex, offering up scents of baked black raspberries, *garrigue*, hung game, a bit of pepper a good base of soil and a bit of spicy oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and chewy, with a very good core, ripe, well-integrated tannins and a long, powerful finish that shows just a hint of backend heat. All in all, this carries its octane pretty well and is not overtly hot on the finish, but it still lacks a bit of freshness from its high alcohol. Not bad in the context of Priorat these days, but again, the wine is a bit too high in alcohol for its own good. 2020-2035+. **87.**

2011 Pleret Tinto- Buil & Giné

The Pleret bottling from Buil & Giné is composed of a blend of thirty percent of Garnacha and Cariñena, twenty percent Cabernet Sauvignon and ten percent each of Merlot and Syrah. This cuvée is raised entirely in French barrels and is given five years of bottle age in the cellar prior to release. The 2011 Pleret is a big wine, logging in at fifteen percent octane, but also quite complex on the nose as it offers up scents of raspberries, a bit of fruitcake, roasted meats, a good base of stony soil, cedar and an array of spices in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep and full-bodied, with a fine core of fruit, good soil signature, ripe tannins and a long, complex and moderately hot finish. This carries its fifteen percent octane pretty well, but the alcohol is still a bit of a problem and takes a wine that could be really exciting (if only a half point lower in alcohol) and makes it simply a big, solid effort. One of the better Priorat wines I tasted for this article, but not a great wine. 2020-2040. **87.**

2010 Pleret Tinto- Buil & Giné

The 2010 Pleret Tinto from Buil & Giné is made from the same blend as the 2011 and is also fifteen percent alcohol. Surprisingly, given its long aging in the cellars prior to release, it was a touch reductive when I first poured it (maybe the syrah in the blend was feeling its oats?), but with some air, opened up to deliver a black fruity bouquet of black raspberries, cassis, a bit of pepper, hung game, brown spices and a good base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a fine core, good soil signature, ripe, fairly well-integrated tannins and a long, focused and gently warm finish. Though this is listed at the same fifteen

percent as the 2011 Pleret, it seems just a touch lower in octane and I like it a bit better for this reason. If the alcohol was really in balance here, this would be an excellent wine, but as it is, it is still not too bad and one I could drink at least a glass of with some little lamb chops cooked over an open fire. It is pretty clear that if the alcohol could be lowered to 14.5 percent or a bit lower, this could be a superb wine! 2018-2040+. **88.**



Jumilla

2016 Monastrell “Old Vines”- Porta Regia (Bodegas Sierra Norte)

The 2016 Monastrell “Old Vines” from Porta Regia is once again a terrific wine for its price tag, and I was absolutely delighted this year to see it sealed under a natural cork, rather than the synthetic cork of the last couple of years. The bouquet is deep and beautifully expressive, wafting from the glass in a complex blend of red and black raspberries, *garrigue*, spiced meats, a touch of chicory, woodsmoke and a fine base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with a velvety attack, plenty of mid-palate stuffing, refined, seamless tannins and excellent focus and grip on the complex finish. This has to be one of the greatest bargains to be found anywhere in the world of red wine, as this sells for all of thirteen dollars here in the states! Great juice. 2018-2030+. **90.**

2016 Monastrell “Barrica 5 Meses”- Porta Regia (Bodegas Sierra Norte)

As I mentioned last year, the Monastrell “Barrica 5 Meses” from Porta Regia is essentially the same wine as the above, except that it is aged for five months in “one wine” casks, whereas the Old Vines bottling spends its entire *elevage* in stainless steel tanks. The 2016 Barrica 5 Meses is another excellent wine, showing just a bit more precision on both the nose and palate from its short stay in barrels than the regular Old Vine bottling. The nose offers up a fine blend of black cherries, roasted meats, chicory, beautiful, salty soil tones, wild fennel, a touch of oak and a topnote of bonfires. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a fine core, excellent soil signature, suave tannins and impressive length and grip on the very well-balanced finish. Fine, fine juice. 2018-2030+. **91+**.

2015 Altos de la Hoya- Bodegas Olivares

The Altos de la Hoya bottling from Bodegas Olivares is composed of ninety percent old vine Monastrell (from ungrafted vines) and ten percent Garnacha. The wine is fermented with indigenous yeasts and raised in a combination of used smaller casks and large vats. The 2015 offers up a deep and complex bouquet of cassis, desiccated dark berries, roasted game, cola, pepper, a hint of chicory and a fine base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is ripe, full-bodied and a bit raisiny in personality, with plenty of mid-palate stuffing, moderate tannins and a long, complex finish that closes with just a touch of bitterness that works quite well at the table. The 2015 Altos de la Hoya comes in listed at fourteen percent octane and probably just a touch higher than this, but it is very well-balanced. This wine is loaded with personality and is a great, great value. 2018-2030. **90**.

2015 Monastrell “Barrica 12 Meses”- Porta Regia (Bodegas Sierra Norte)

This is the top of the line bottling from Porta Regia, produced from fifty year-old vines and raised in two year-old barrels (forty percent American oak and sixty percent French oak) and it is excellent in 2015. The bouquet offers up lovely depth and complexity in its constellation of dark berries, woodsmoke, hung game, a complex base of soil, cigar ash and just a touch of oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and suavely tannic, with a fine core of fruit, excellent soil drive and a long, complex and perfectly balanced finish. Monastrell is a terrific grape variety and this is a first class example (not to mention a bargain)! 2018-2035. **92**.

Bullas

The higher elevations in Bullas tend to produce wines with a bit “cooler” fruit profile than in neighboring Jumilla, and François Chidaine has been producing a wine here since the 2010 vintage.

2014 Bullas “PYP”- François Chidaine

I had not tasted a vintage of François Chidaine’s Spanish wine since the inaugural vintage of 2010. This wine is a blend of sixty percent Monastrell and forty percent Tempranillo and is raised in stainless steel for eight months prior to bottling. The 2014 again tips the scales at 14.5 percent alcohol, the same as the 2010 vintage. The 2014 delivers a bright bouquet of black cherries, cassis, woodsmoke, a touch of cola, gentle meatiness and a good base of soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a good core, modest tannins and a long, gently warm finish. This carries its alcohol pretty well, but it is still 14.5 percent and this cannot be covered up completely. On a cold winter’s night in Montlouis, this would be quite tasty, but it

is not the wine I would reach for on a steamy New York summer evening. But, still very well-made in its style. 2018-2028. **88.**

Utiel-Requana

2015 Bobal- Tempermento

This is a wine that I have liked very much in the past, as it hails from a parcel of sixty year-old Bobal vines grown at an altitude of three thousand feet above sea level. The wine is fermented with indigenous yeasts and aged in French casks for six months. The 2015 Tempermento offers up a fine nose of black cherries, gentle balsamic overtones, cola, a lovely base of soil, a nice touch of brown spices and a very discreet framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and moderately tannic, with a lovely core, excellent focus and grip and a long, well-balanced and very well done finish. Even in the torrid summer of 2015 this wine only comes in at fourteen percent octane, showing the good diurnal swings at three thousand feet and it is really an excellent example of this underrated varietal. Fine juice. 2018-2035. **90.**

Rioja Blanco and Rosado

2017 Rioja Rosado- Bodegas Hermanos Peciña

The 2017 Rioja Rosado from Bodegas Hermanos Peciña is a lovely wine that is light on its feet and intensely flavored. The bouquet offers up scents of melon, strawberries, a touch of orange peel, salty soil tones and a topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is crisp, medium-full and nascently complex, with fine depth at the core, bright acids and fine focus and grip on the long and well-balanced finish. This is still a young wine and will be more complex with bottle age, but it is already quite tasty. 2018-2025+. **89.**

2016 Rioja Blanco “Solarce”- Bodegas Casa La Rad (Rioja Baja)

The Rioja Blanco “Solarce” from Bodegas Casa La Rad is composed of an unorthodox blend of fifty percent Chardonnay, thirty percent Malvasia and ten percent each of Viura and Tempranillo Blanco. The chardonnay portion of the blend is barrel-fermented and raised in French oak, while the remainder of the blend is fermented and raised in stainless steel tanks prior to blending in preparation for bottling. The 2016 version of Solarce offers up a unique and complex blend of apple, a touch of casaba melon, coriander seed, salty soil tones, a hint of beeswax and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, ripe and focused, with good depth at the core, fine acids and a fair bit of new oak that has not yet quite integrated completely into the wine. There is fine depth here, but the wine is still on the young side and needs a bit of bottle age to better integrate its components. With time, it will be a good drink, though with half its *cépages* made up of chardonnay, this does not have a classical white Rioja profile. 2019-2030. **88+.**

2016 Viña Otano Rioja Blanco- Union de Viticultores Riojanos (Rioja Alta)

As I mentioned last year, the Viña Otano Rioja Blanco is produced from thirty year-old Viura vines and is fermented and raised entirely in stainless steel. I note that the 2016 is now sealed with a screwcap. It offers up a bright and wide open nose of lime, green apple, salty soil tones, dried flowers and a touch of wild fennel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is crisp, full and precise, with good depth at the core, bright acids and good length and grip on the finish. This seems a touch pinched already on the finish from the screwcap and I sense that reduction is going to become an issue for this wine in six months or so. Therefore, I would drink

it young, though if it were sealed under cork, it would have no problems aging ten to fifteen years. 2018-2021+? **87.**

2016 Viña Otano Rioja Blanco “Fermentado en Barrica”- Union de Viticultores Riojanos

I had not loved the 2015 version of this wine, but the 2016 is a notable step up and far more interesting. The barrel-fermented version of 2016 Viña Otano Rioja Blanco is a blend of seventy-five percent Viura and twenty-five percent Tempranillo Blanco, with the wine aged for four months in the French wood. Interestingly, only the Viura is barrel-fermented in new casks, while the Tempranillo Blanco is fermented in stainless steel. The new vintage of 2016 offers up a fine nose of yellow fruit, white soils, a bit of citrus peel, wild fennel and a gentle base of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, young and nicely balanced, with good acids, fine focus and grip and a long, still quite primary finish. This is quite tasty today, but only hints at the complexity to come with bottle age. Good juice. 2018-2035. **89.**



2015 Rioja Blanco- Alegre Valgañón

The 2015 Rioja Blanco from Oscar Alegre and Eva Valgañón is composed of a blend of ninety percent Viura and ten percent of Garnacha Blanco. The wine is raised entirely in older, used French oak *demi-muids* for a year prior to bottling. The 2015 vintage offers up an outstanding, youthfully complex bouquet of lemon, tart pear, menthol, salty soil tones, wild fennel, white flowers and just a touch of vanillin oak from the older *demi-muids*. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and impeccably balanced, with a great core, outstanding soil

signature and a long, zesty and focused finish. This is just starting to show its secondary layers of complexity and is clearly an old school example of Rioja Blanco and built for a very long life in bottle, so this is only the tip of the iceberg right now. But, it is already so tasty to drink, that I fear that not all that many bottles are going to make it fifteen or twenty years down the road, when the wine will truly be at its apogee! 2018-2045. **93+**.

2015 Rioja Blanco- Bodegas Casa La Rad (Rioja Baja)

The regular bottling of Rioja Blanc from Casa La Rad is again a rather surprising blend of fifty percent Chardonnay, thirty percent Malvasia and twenty percent Viura. The chardonnay vines are fully forty years of age, so obviously this has been an important component here for quite some time. The chalky vineyards are farmed organically and the wine is barrel-fermented and then aged in one hundred percent new French *barriques* for twelve months prior to bottling. The 2015 Blanco offers up a pretty nose of white peach, coconut, limestone soil tones, a bit of almond and a well done framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, nascently complex and very nicely balanced, with a fine core and good acidity, lovely focus and a long, quite classy young finish. I have no experience with how a Rioja Blanco with this much chardonnay in the blend will age, but this seems to have the balance to do so. Good juice in a rather unique style. 2018-2030+? **91+**.

2008 Rioja Blanco “Viña Gravonia”- López de Heredia

To my mind, the Viña Gravonia bottling from López de Heredia is the finest value in classically-styled Rioja Blanco that one can find on this wide earth. The 2008 version is once again excellent, offering up a complex nose of fresh coconut, lemon, chalky soil tones, a bit of fresh almond, citrus peel and a nice touch of oak. On the palate the wine is crisp, complex and full-bodied, with a superb core, excellent soil signature, bright, zesty acids and superb focus and grip on the long and complex finish. Great juice and a superb value. 2018-2030. **91+**.

2008 Rioja Rosado “Viña Tondonia”- López de Heredia

The 2008 “Viña Tondonia” Rosado from López de Heredia is a lovely wine that is drinking beautifully at age ten, but has the cut and grip to go another fifteen to twenty years in the bottle. The bouquet is pure and complex, offering up scents of desiccated cherries, clove-like spice tones, salty soil elements, orange peel, dried flowers and a hint of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and beautifully balanced, with a fine core, excellent complexity and grip and a very, very long, tangy and focused finish. Fine juice. 2018-2040. **92**.

2004 Rioja Blanco “Viña Tondonia” Reserva- López de Heredia

The 2004 “Viña Tondonia” Rioja Blanco Reserva from López de Heredia is an outstanding bottle of wine. The bouquet has reached a beautiful point of evolution at age fourteen, wafting from the glass in a sophisticated blend of white cherries, a touch of orange peel, sweet almonds, salty soil tones, vanilla bean, a nice touch of coconut and a discreet floral topnote of lilac blossoms. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, complex and beautifully balanced, with a fine core, bright acids, excellent focus and grip and a long, vibrant and lovely finish. Fine, fine juice. 2018-2040. **93**.

2003 Rioja Blanco “Viña Tondonia” Reserva- López de Heredia

Given how hot the summer of 2003 was in Europe, I was expecting the 2003 Viña Tondonia Blanco Reserva to be a bit more marked by its vintage, rather than the classical style of this bottling, but this is not the case. This is a beautiful bottle of white Rioja that is drinking

splendidly at age fifteen, wafting from the glass in a vibrant and complex aromatic constellation of white cherries, toasted coconut, orange peel, salty soil tones, hazelnut and a nice touch of oak. On the palate the wine is deep, bright and full, with a good core, fine focus and grip and a long, well-balanced and complex finish. This will not make old bones, as the acids here are not as prominent as is the case in the 2004, and this is of course attributable to the torrid summer of 2003, but in all other respects, this is a very classically-inclined vintage of Viña Tondonia Blanc Reserva. A fine, fine result from 2003. 2018-2028. **91.**

Rioja Tinto

2017 Rioja “Bozeto de Exopto”- Exopto

Exopto is the fairly new Rioja project of French winemaker Tom Puyaubert, who decamped to Rioja in 2000 for the opportunity to make great wine from vineyards that are far less prohibitively priced than comparable quality *terroir* in France’s most famous wine regions. His Bozeto de Exopto bottling is composed of a blend of fifty percent Garnacha, forty percent Tempranillo and ten percent Graciano, with the Garnacha and Graciano coming from old bush vines in the Rioja Baja planted on the top of a small mountain, and the Tempranillo hailing from Rioja Alta. The wine is made in an extremely old-fashioned manner, fermented and raised in concrete *lagars*, with an occasional old cask used for overflow in more generous yielding vintages. The 2017 Bozeto de Exopto is plenty ripe, coming in at 14.5 percent octane and offering up a deep and complex nose of cherries, a bit of fruitcake, smoked meats, *garrigue*, fine soil tones and Rioja spice in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, plump and nicely balanced for its alcohol level, with good focus and grip, nascent complexity and just a whisper of backend heat poking out on the long, modestly tannic finish. I like this wine quite well, but 2017 is an anomaly of a vintage and the wine is even better in the slightly more classic year of 2016. I am looking forward to tasting the wine in a future vintage of more classical proportions. But, that said, this is quite good for the vagaries of 2017, but could use a year or two in the cellar to blossom a bit. 2020-2040+. **88.**

2016 Rioja “Lá Grimas de Graciano”- Bodegas Bhilar (Rioja Alavesa)

The winemaker at Bodegas Bhilar is David Sampedro, who is one of the staunch defenders of the varietal of Graciano, which usually only makes an appearance as a minor component of a blended Rioja and is almost never bottled on its own. His 2016 Lá Grimas de Graciano is a ripe wine, coming in listed at fourteen percent and offering up a fine, nascently complex nose of black cherries, a bit of pepper, smoked meats, a fine base of soil tones and a nice touch of Rioja spice in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, robust and very well-balanced, with a good core, ripe tannins and a long, slightly warm finish. This needs a few years in the cellar to allow its complexity to start to emerge, but all of the constituent components are in place to make a good bottle of Graciano in the fullness of time. 2022-2040. **88+.**

2016 Rioja “Solarce”- Bodegas Casa La Rad (Rioja Baja)

The Rioja “Solarce” from Bodegas Casa La Rad is produced from an interesting blend of sixty percent Tempranillo, thirty percent Garnacha and five percent each of Maturana and Cabernet Sauvignon. The wine is fermented in stainless steel and raised in new French barrels for eight months prior to bottling. The 2016 Solarce offers up a fine nose of raspberries, cherries, lovely Rioja spice tones, a fine base of soil, a touch of coconut and a fairly generous framing of cedary French oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and focused, with classic Rioja

velvetiness on the attack, a good core, but a bit of uncovered oak tannin stiffening up the long and complex finish. I really love the wine here, but I am not in love with the oak treatment, which is not as deftly done as the winemaking itself. The oak tannins stick out a bit on the finish, which takes away a couple of points from the score, but the raw materials here are first rate and the potential here is outstanding. This is only eighteen dollars retail in the US, which makes it a pretty good value, but without buying new oak and seasoning up the barrels in the cellar with a few more vintages, this could become one of the greatest bargains in all of Rioja, as the underlying wine is that good! My score reflects that the wine is slightly over-oaked, but it is still a good drink in this condition, and if the Bodegas can start using older casks for the *elevage*, this is going to be a name to watch in Rioja! 2018-2030+. **88.**

2016 Rioja “Bozeto de Exopto”- Exopto

The 2016 vintage of Bozeto de Exopto is a touch lower in octane than the 2017 version, coming in at fourteen percent and the wine is showing very well today. The bouquet delivers a fine mélange of black raspberries, woodsmoke, a bit of roasted game, *garrigue* and a complex base of dark soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nascently complex, with a rock solid core, fine focus and grip, moderate tannins and a long, well-balanced and youthful finish. I really like the influence of the higher altitude, old vine Garnacha and Graciano in the blend here, and though the wine probably gains a bit of octane from the inclusion of this old vine fruit from the hot Rioja Baja, it is a very fair trade-off for the depth and complexity found in the fruit from these old bush vines. 2018-2035. **90+.**

2016 Rioja “Horizonte de Exopto”- Exopto

The Horizonte de Exopto cuvée from Tom Puyaubert is quite different in *cépages* from the Bozeto, as this wine is a more traditional Rioja blend of eighty percent Tempranillo and ten percent each of Garnacha and Graciano, all hailing from vineyards in the Ábalos area of Rioja Alta. The wine is fermented in concrete vats and aged in older French oak puncheons for twelve months prior to bottling, but as this is a relatively new project, the oak is probably only four or five years old at the present time. The wine is fully 14.5 percent alcohol in 2016 and offers up a ripe bouquet of black cherries, dark berries, roasted game, a fine base of soil and a topnote of cigar smoke. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and powerful in personality, with a good core, fine focus and grip and a long, slightly heady finish. This wine is probably closer to fifteen percent, due to the style of the vintage, but it manages its octane pretty well, though it lacks a bit of backend precision from its ripeness level. That said, I would love to try it in a more classically-inclined vintage such as 2014. The 2016 version needs a couple of years in the cellar to soften up its tannin a bit. 2020-2045+. **88.**

2016 Rioja “Placeres Sensoriales”- El Vino Prodigio

El Vino Prodigio is a new side project from Pedro Peciña Gil, who is likely to eventually assume the reins of his family outstanding Bodegas Hermanos de Peciña. In the interim, he is working this side project, which was started to make a wine from a vineyard he inherited from his mother’s family, La Merce (please see below). His Placeres Sensoriales is a separate vineyard project, made from a parcel of seventy year-old vines in the San Vicente area that were farmed formerly by a neighbor with whom Pedro is now collaborating, as his neighbor has now gotten old enough to have difficulties with the joints and tending his vineyard is no longer possible on his own. This wine is made from foot-trodden grapes in ancient concrete vats in an even older winery built in the eleventh century. The wine is completely old school, with a semi-carbonic style, as some bunches are crushed by the feet and others remain intact. The 2016 is a very good bottle, with a certain noble rusticity to its aromatic profile of cassis, black cherries,

Rioja spice tones, a fine base of soil and a touch of cigar smoke in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nascently complex, with good balance, a bit of well-integrated tannin on the backend and fine length and grip on the focused finish. This is a young wine that is already quite tasty, but should improve with a bit of bottle age. A very interesting window into the ancient past of Rioja, before the *Bordelais* arrived in the wake of phylloxera. 2018-2030+. **89+**.



2016 Rioja “Señorío de P. Peciña”- Bodegas Hermanos de Peciña

As readers know, I have loved the classic wines from Bodegas Hermanos de Peciña since I was first introduced to them more than a decade ago. The wine are very classical in style, mirroring a bit those of La Rioja Alta, and the 2016 Señorío de P. Peciña bottling is lovely. It shows a bit of the ripeness of the 2016 vintage, tipping the scales at fourteen percent, but offers up lovely purity in its vibrant bouquet of raspberries, cherries, Rioja spice tones (mostly clove), good soil signature, lavender and a bit of coconutty American oak. On the palate the wine is full, complex and very well-balanced, with a good core of fruit, fine soil tones, modest tannins and a long, tangy and focused finish. Fine juice. 2018-2045+. **89+**.

2016 Rioja “Campellares”- Bodegas San Pedro Apostol (Rioja Alta)

The 2016 Rioja “Campellares” from Bodegas San Pedro Apostol is produced from vines in excess of fifty years of age, but the wine is raised entirely in stainless steel tanks and made for early accessibility. The 2016 offers up a fine bouquet of black cherries, cassis, a nice dollop of Rioja spices, a good base of soil and a touch of cigar wrapper in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and tangy, with a good core, just a bit of backend tannin and fine focus and grip on the nascently complex finish. This is the bodegas’ entry level bottling and it is

very well made, but I keep thinking fifty year-old vines deserve some extended aging in older American casks! This is a veritable steal at twelve dollars a bottle here in the US. 2018-2025. **89.**

2015 Rioja Tinto- Alegre Valgañón

The 2015 Rioja from Alegre Valgañón is only the fifth vintage for the husband and wife team of Oscar Alegre and Eva Valgañón, who produce a small number of cases from the three hectares of vines that they farm in the far western end of the Rioja region. Or sort of their fifth vintage, as they made and bottled a bit of wine in their inaugural vintage of 2010, then lost both 2011 and 2012 when the cellars where their tanks were stored in were inadvertently blended in with the wines from the winery where they were storing their tanks. They did not bottle anything in the difficult vintage of 2013 and 2014 was their first to get rolling again after the small quantity of 2010 that they bottled. Their vineyards sit at an altitude of 580 meters above sea level and this is one of the coolest corners of Rioja, with their blended Rioja made from a blend of seventy-five percent tempranillo and twenty-five percent garnacha. The wines are aged quite uniquely for Rioja, in older French *barriques* and *demi-muids*, as the couple wishes to make wines in the classic manner that predates the arrival of the French winemakers to Rioja in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Their 2015 Tinto is excellent, offering up a deep and complex nose of black cherries, Rioja spice tones, a bit of espresso, a fine base of soil, cigar smoke and a touch of cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and moderately tannic today, with an excellent core, fine tangy acids and excellent focus and grip on the nascently complex finish. This is approachable today, but is really built to cellar and will not properly blossom without five or six years of bottle age. It is an excellent wine from an exciting new winemaking couple in the firmament of old school Rioja. 2022-2050. **93.**

2015 Rioja Tinto- Bodegas Casa La Rad (Rioja Baja)

The 2015 Rioja Tinto from Casa La Rad is produced from forty year-old bush vines in the La Rad vineyard, with the *cépages* ending up forty percent each of Tempranillo and Garnacha, ten percent Graciano and ten percent Maturana. The wine undergoes malo in eight hundred liter oak barrels and this is aged in all new French *barricas* for fourteen months prior to bottling. The 2015 comes in at fourteen percent alcohol and delivers a deep and serious bouquet of red and black cherries, cigar smoke, Rioja spice tones redolent of cloves and nutmeg, a fine base of soil and a very suave, understated framing of nutty new oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and nicely light on its feet, with a good core, lovely focus and grip, plenty of complexity and a long, moderately tannic and quite promising finish. The new oak is a bit more evident on the palate than it is on the nose today, but there seems to be sufficient stuffing to absorb the wood nicely with a bit of cellaring. This is a young and very good bottle of Rioja in the making, but it will need at least four or five years in the cellar to start to blossom properly. Fine juice. 2023-2050+. **92+.**

2015 Rioja Tinto- Exopto

The flagship bottling of Rioja from Exopto is composed of a blend of sixty percent old vine Graciano from the mountainside in Rioja Baja, blended in with thirty percent Tempranillo and ten percent Garnacha from the cooler sector of Rioja Alta. The 2015 comes in listed at fourteen percent octane, is fermented in large format French *fuders*, and aged in *barriques* from oak that is now two to four years-old. The plan is to use older oak for the foreseeable future, so the influence of the wood will diminish in future vintages, but as the barrels and *fuders* are still pretty young, the wine is a bit marked by its oak in personality today. The bouquet is excellent, wafting from the glass in a mix of sweet dark berries, bitter chocolate, bonfire, a bit of roasted

meats, dark soil tones and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and shows off excellent mid-palate depth, with fine focus and grip, nascent complexity and a long, ripely tannic and promising finish. This is serious juice that will need three or four years' worth of bottle age to fully integrate its bit of oak influence, but which will drink very well indeed once it settles in. 2021-2050. **92+**.

2015 Rioja- Bodegas Pingao (Isaac Fernandez Selección)

As readers may recall, this bottling from Bodegas Pingao is produced from old vines in Rioja Alta, fermented in stainless steel tanks and aged for a few months in a combination of seventy-five percent American and twenty-five percent French barrels prior to bottling, so this is what many *bodegas* would call their "Joven" bottling. I tasted the 2013 vintage, but seemed to have missed the 2014. The current release is from 2015 and offers up a fine bouquet of red and black cherries, a nice touch of spices meats, fresh nutmeg, a touch of wild fennel and a judicious base of coconutty American oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and impressively complex, with a good, solid core of fruit, lovely soil signature, moderate, well-integrated tannins and very good length and grip on the well-balanced finish. This is a very good bottle of Joven and a great value at under fifteen dollars here in the US! A couple of years in the cellar would not hurt this wine one iota, but it is very easy to drink already. 2018-2030+. **89+**.

2015 Viña Otano Rioja "Crianza"- Union de Viticultores Riojanos

The *cépages* of the 2015 Viña Otano Rioja "Crianza" is the same as last year, ninety percent Tempranillo and ten percent Mazuelo, with the wine raised for one year in a combination of American and French, older casks. The 2015 is a bit more black fruity in profile than the 2014 was on the nose, offering up a superb blend of black cherries, Rioja spices, cigar smoke, an excellent base of salty soil tones, a touch of celery seed and a well done framing of oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and shows off excellent mid-palate depth, with moderate, well-integrated tannins, good acids and fine focus and grip on the long, nascently complex and stylish finish. This is much more ready to go out of the blocks than the slightly stern 2014 and is an excellent bottle in the making. 2018-2040. **89+**.

2015 Rioja Crianza- La Viña de la Merce (El Vino Prodigio)

As mentioned above, La Viña de la Merce is a new vineyard project of Pedro Peciña Gil, the future heir of the outstanding traditionalist estate of Bodegas Hermanos Peciña. The base for the new side project was the La Merce vineyard that he inherited from his mother's side of the family and from which the project takes its name. These are thirty year-old tempranillo vines which are raised in three year-old American oak barrels (as the project is so young) which are bottled unfinned and unfiltered after three rackings in the traditional style. The 2015 Crianza is a very good wine from a ripe year, offering up a youthfully complex nose of red and black cherries, Rioja spice tones, a fine base of soil, a bit of meatiness and a fair bit of influence still from the oak casks. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and nicely balanced, with fine transparency and core, moderate tannins and a long, tangy finish. I assume that subsequent vintages here are going to show less of the oak, as the casks have a chance to get a bit older, but there is plenty of stuffing to eventually absorb the oak. However, the wine could do with a few years in the cellar to do so, as it is still showing a bit woody right now. Good juice. 2021-2040. **89**,

2014 Rioja "Viñas de Laguardia"- Bodegas Artadi (Rioja Alavesa)

The 2014 Rioja "Viñas de Laguardia" from Artadi is a very well-made, modern styled Rioja that has blossomed a bit since I last saw a bottle fifteen months ago, though it is still several years away from true maturity. The nose offers up a deep and sappy blend of plummy

fruit, black cherries, chocolate, violets, gentle spice tones and a nice base of smoky, nutty new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and sappy at the core, with plenty of ripeness, well-integrated tannins and fine length and grip on the well-balanced and nascently complex finish. As I mentioned a year or so ago, this has plenty of stuffing at 14.5 percent alcohol, but carries its ripeness beautifully and will have no problems aging well. 2024-2055. **90+.**

2014 Rioja Crianza- La Viña de la Merce (El Vino Prodigio)

The 2014 La Viña de la Merce, from a classically high quality vintage in Rioja, is a fine bottle in the making. The aromatic constellation wafts from the glass in a mix of black cherries, plums, a touch of American oak, a fine base of soil tones and a nice topnote of Rioja spice elements. On the palate the wine is fullish, focused and nascently complex, with a very good core of fruit, good transparency and fine balance and grip on the moderately tannic and promising finish. This is approachable today, but with a few years to blossom properly, will really start to drink well and will age long and gracefully. 2018-2040. **91.**



Ripe Tempranillo grapes ready to be picked in October of 2014- the last great classic vintage in Rioja.

2013 Rioja “Valdeginés”- Bodegas Artadi (Rioja Alavesa)

I had a chance to taste the 2013 Rioja “Valdeginés” from Bodegas Artadi fifteen months ago as well, and the wine is aging gracefully and will be an excellent wine when it is fully

mature. Today, it still seems a good five to six years away from really blossoming, but the constituent components are in place for good things down the road. As I mentioned last year, this vineyard is a south-facing, seven *hectare* parcel planted on clay and sandstone. The wine delivers a fine bouquet of pomegranate, sappy black cherries, Rioja spices, a fine base of soil, spicy new oak and a smoky topnote that will probably turn more cigar-like with extended aging. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very nicely balanced, with a good core of ripe fruit, a good dollop of soil tones, ripe, well-integrated tannins and fine length and grip on the well-balanced finish. The wood tannins were still being absorbed when I last tasted this wine, but they are now nicely buried in the fine fruit of this wine and it is poised to start drinking well a handful of years from now. 2024-2060. **92+**.

2013 Rioja Crianza “Señorío de P. Peciña”- Bodegas Hermanos de Peciña

The 2013 Rioja Crianza from Bodegas Peciña is a beautiful wine that has blossomed marvelously at age five and is now drinking with style and grace. The pure and classic bouquet jumps from the glass in a mix of cherries, toasted coconut, a bit of cigar smoke, lovely spice tones and a fine base of salty soil elements. On the palate the wine is pure, medium-full, complex and beautifully balanced, with a lovely core of red fruit, excellent soil signature, fine-grained, very modest tannins and a long, velvety and vibrant finish. Beautiful wine. 2018-2045+. **92**.

2013 Rioja Crianza “Finca San Martín”- Torre de Oña (Rioja Alavesa)

Torre de Oña is now owned by La Rioja Alta, who purchased the relatively young estate (founded in 1987) back in 1995. Their Finca San Martín Crianza bottling is raised in a combination of fifty percent used French oak (two and three wine barrels) and fifty percent new American barrels. The 2013 Finca San Martín is still pretty marked by its new American oak on the nose, offering up scents of smoky oak, black cherries, black raspberries, a nice touch of spice, a bit of wild fennel and dark soil tones. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and focused, with a good core, a good flavor profile, but also a bit overwhelmed by the new American oak in the equation. The finish turns woody at the end, with a bit of bitterness seeping in from the wood tannins. The wine has lovely raw materials under the oak, but the decision to use new American wood does not seem to have benefited the wine. I would love to see the same wine raised entirely in older American casks, *à la* the flagship wines at La Rioja Alta, as I suspect the results would be far more convincing. 2018-2030? **87**.

2012 Rioja Reserva- Torre de Oña

The 2012 Rioja Reserva from Torre de Oña is composed of a blend of ninety-five percent tempranillo and five percent mazuelo, with eighty percent of the blend undergoing malolactic fermentation in new oak barrels. It was raised in cask for eighteen months, in a combination of seventy-five percent French oak (forty percent new) and twenty-five percent older American barrels. The wine is quite good on both the nose and palate, with the bouquet wafting from the glass in a blend of black cherries, black raspberries, a touch of toasted coconut, smoky oak and a fine mix of Rioja spice elements in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still fairly young, with fine focus and grip, incipient velvety on the attack, a very good core and moderate tannins perking up the long and complex finish. This still needs a couple of years in the cellar to really blossom on the backend, but there is depth, complexity and dimension here and it will be an excellent wine when it has fully opened up. This is the first wine I have tasted from Torre de Oña and it is quite impressive. 2020-2045+. **91+**.

2012 Viña Otano Rioja Graciano- Union de Viticultores Riojanos (Rioja Alta)

I have seldom tasted a one hundred percent Graciano bottling from Rioja, other than the version made at Contino, so I was quite intrigued to try this 2012 from the Union de Viticultores Riojanos. The wine spends two years in cask, which is a combination of American and French barrels. The 2012 is excellent, offering up a deep and nicely sappy bouquet of cherries, cloves, cigar ash, a complex base of salty soil tones, a bit of spiced meats, incipient nuttiness and a nice framing of older oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and nicely velvety on the attack, with a fine core, excellent soil signature, moderate tannins and a long, tangy and complex finish. The balance is impeccable here and this wine will age very nicely, but it is going to be very hard to keep one's hands off in its relative youth, as it is already very tasty! Impressive juice. 2018-2040. **92+**.

2011 Rioja Reserva “Viña Alberdi”- La Rioja Alta

The 2011 Viña Alberdi is really a lovely wine from La Rioja Alta and is a fine value. The bouquet is quite fine, offering up scents of cherries, strawberries, toasted coconut, Rioja spice tones and a lovely base of soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and velvety on the attack, with a good core, modest tannin and fine length and grip on the very well-balanced finish. Despite this being two years younger than the Viña Arana reported on below, this wine is the bottling that is more ready to drink. Fine juice. 2018-2035. **90+**.

2010 Rioja Gran Reserva “Finca Iscorta de Peciña”- Bodegas Hermanos Peciña

The 2010 Rioja Gran Reserva “Finca Iscorta” is the first single vineyard bottling from Bodegas Hermanos Peciña that I have had the pleasure to taste. This vineyard is located at five hundred meters above sea level and planted to fifty year-old tempranillo vines. It is aged four years in older American oak casks prior to bottling, and another three years in bottle prior to its release. The wine is deep, still fairly youthful at age eight, and very promising aromatically, offering up scents of black cherries, Rioja spice tones, cigar smoke, a superb base of soil, bitter chocolate and a nice touch of coconutty American oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and quite black fruity, with a fine core of fruit, good soil signature, tangy acids and a long, moderately tannic finish. This still needs several years in the cellar to blossom, but it will prove to be outstanding when it is ready to drink. Stylistically, it stands out quite a bit from the blended Peciña bottlings of Rioja, which are usually far more red fruity and spicy in personality than the 2010 Finca Iscorta, but the wine shares the customary Peciña refinement and classic sensibilities that has made this *bodegas* so popular amongst traditionally-minded Rioja lovers. 2020-2050. **92+**.

2009 Rioja Reserva “Viña Arana”- La Rioja Alta

The 2009 Viña Arana Reserva from La Rioja Alta is absolutely lovely and completely classical in personality. This is composed of a blend of ninety-five percent tempranillo and five percent Mazuelo. The bouquet is bright and very expressive, offering up scents of cherries, raspberries, lovely spice tones, just a whisper of cigar smoke, plenty of toasted coconut and a very good base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is fullish, suave on the attack and nicely deep at the core, with modest tannins, bright acids and excellent focus and grip on bouncy and complex finish. This is really a lovely bottle of Rioja, which will develop more of a velvety palate texture and great complexity with more aging, but which is already drinking very well indeed and will be difficult to keep one's hands off of in the cellar! 2018-2040. **91**.

2009 Rioja “Viña Cubillo” Crianza- López de Heredia

The 2009 Rioja “Viña Cubillo” Crianza from López de Heredia is really a pretty wine that is just starting to drink with generosity at age nine, but has the balance to age gracefully for at least another twenty years. This is a bottling from López de Heredia that I do not drink often and I really should, as it offers up excellent value. The 2009 Viña Cubillo delivers a fine and utterly classic bouquet of cherries, red plums, fresh nutmeg, incipient notes of Rioja nuttiness, a fine base of soil, gentle notes of clove and a fine base of toasty coconut American oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and beautifully balanced, with a bit of backend tannin, fine complexity and grip and a long, classy and vibrant finish. This is really good Rioja that will be drinking even better with a few more years in the cellar. 2018-2040. **91.**

2009 Rioja Gran Reserva “Señorío de P. Peciña”- Bodegas Hermanos de Peciña

The 2009 Rioja Gran Reserva from the Peciña family is a superb example of this warmer vintage in the region. The deep and complex bouquet wafts from the glass in a riper mix of red and black cherries, spices meats, a fine base of soil, smoke, toasted coconut, allspice, clove and a delicate topnote of cigar wrapper. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and velvety on the attack, with a lovely core, great focus and grip, modest, seamless tannins and a long, tangy and perfectly balanced finish of excellent complexity and grip. This is old school Rioja of the highest order, which is just starting to drink at its apogee and has decades of life ahead of it. Fine, fine juice. 2018-2045+. **94.**



2008 Rioja Reserva “Viña Ardanza”- La Rioja Alta

The 2008 vintage of Viña Ardanza is the seventy-fifth anniversary for this iconic Rioja Reserva bottling from La Rioja Alta. The wine is its traditional blend of eighty percent tempranillo and twenty percent garnacha, but with this vintage, the garnacha is being sourced from a high altitude, stony vineyard in the Rioja Baja region, that the *bodegas* feels produces exemplary garnacha. The bouquet of the '08 is outstanding, wafting from the glass in a complex blend of red plums, raspberries, a touch of meatiness, lovely spice tones redolent of cloves and cinnamon stick, a lovely base of almost salty soil and a nice touch of toasted coconut, old American oak. On the palate the wine is pure, deep, full-bodied and velvety on the attack, with an excellent core of fruit, impressive complexity and grip, moderate, well-integrated tannins and fine length and grip on the perfectly balanced finish. This is a beautiful vintage of Viña Ardanza and very much worthy of a seventh-fifth anniversary cuvée! 2018-2045+. **93.**

2007 Rioja “904” Gran Reserva- La Rioja Alta

The 2007 Rioja “904” Gran Reserva from La Rioja Alta is truly an exceptional bottle of Rioja in the making, but at age eleven, this is still patently a young wine and deserves several more years in the cellar to allow it to really blossom completely and show all of its multi-layered levels of complexity. The nose today is complex and very promising of greatness down the road, as it offers up scents of raspberries, cherries, cloves, cinnamon, a touch of nutskin, salty soil tones, toasted coconut and a bit of cedar. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and tangy, with a plush core of fruit, excellent soil signature, ripe, buried tannins and a very long, complex and still youthful finish. The 904 Gran Reserva continues to be aged solely in American oak casks, but they were only four years old for the 2007 and this has imparted a bit of cedary oak spice to the wine. This needs plenty more time in the cellar to reach its apogee, but it will be a great wine when it is truly ready to drink. 2025-2075+. **95.**

2005 Rioja “Viña Bosconia” Reserva- López de Heredia

López de Heredia’s 2005 Viña Bosconia Reserva is an excellent young wine. The bouquet is not quite as open today as the 2005 Viña Tondonia Reserva (see below), but every bit as complex and promising. The red fruity aromatic constellation offers up a mix of raspberries, cherries, cloves, incipient nutskin, a complex base of soil and a fine base of coconutty American oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused, tangy and still a bit tannic, with a lovely core of fruit, great transparency and grip, impressive precision and a long, nascently complex and extremely promising finish. Whereas it is no crime to be drinking bottles of the 2005 Viña Tondonia Reserva today, I would still tuck away this Bosconia in the cellar for at least a few years and let it blossom more fully. It is a superb bottle in the making and will be a classic example of Bosconia with a bit more bottle age. 2022-2060. **93+.**

2005 Rioja “Viña Tondonia” Reserva- López de Heredia

The 2005 Viña Tondonia Reserva from López de Heredia is a beautiful example of classical Rioja, with the developing aromatic and flavor complexity of a thirteen year-old wine that is, in reality, just beginning its vinous journey. The bouquet is pure, old school and stellar, jumping from the glass in a mix of black cherries, raspberries, Rioja spices, a refined base of soil elements, incipient notes of cigar smoke, fresh nutmeg and a lovely bass-line of coconutty, old American oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and already nicely velvety on the attack, with a fine core, lovely soil signature, modest tannins and a long, tangy and still fairly primary finish. This is very easy to drink already, but will be so much better with another five to

ten years' worth of bottle age. A very fine example of why one does not have to focus exclusively on Gran Reservas to get the best of Rioja! 2018-2055+. **93.**

2004 Rioja “890” Gran Reserva- La Rioja Alta

The 2004 La Rioja Alta “890” Gran Reserva is a superb bottle of Rioja, but even at age fourteen, this is still a fairly young wine and really deserves further bottle age before it is broached. The bouquet is deep, pure and vivid, offering up scents of red and black cherries, raspberries, toasted coconut, Rioja spice tones, a touch of cigar ash, a superb base of soil, just a bit of cedar and a topnote of clove. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, ripe and very well-balanced, with a rock solid core of fruit, fine acids and grip, moderate tannins and outstanding complexity on the long, still slightly youthful finish. 2004 was a ripe year in Rioja and this is felt here a bit on the backend, which never strays over the line into signs of heat on the finish, but one can tell this wine is probably a good fourteen percent in this vintage. It will be an excellent wine, perhaps in the style of a 1982, when it is fully mature, but it still could do with a bit more bottle age. 2024-2085. **94.**

1991 Rioja “Prado Enea” Gran Reserva- Muga

The 1991 Prado Enea Gran Reserva is starting to really drink at its peak at age twenty-seven, but still has decades of positive evolution in front of it. The complex nose wafts from the glass in a fine blend of black cherries, roasted game, fresh bay, a fine base of soil, coffee and a fine topnote of Rioja spice tones. On the palate the wine is full, velvety and gently robust, with an excellent core of fruit, still a moderate level of backend tannin, tangy acids and very good grip on the long, complex and vibrant finish. The last time I drank a bottle of this was back in 2009 and the wine had not yet blossomed, but it is singing today and it is quite clear that I underrated it back in 2009! This is a superb vintage of Prado Enea that may one day approach the brilliance of the 1981 version, which remains the finest vintage of this iconic bottling as I have ever had the pleasure to taste. 2018-2040+. **93.**

1973 Rioja “Imperial” Reserva- Cuné

Sometimes I am under the impression that many wine lovers believe that only Gran Reserva bottlings have the potential to age long and gracefully, but I have found that Reservas are every bit as ageworthy and I am often confused as to just what is the difference between the two after three or four decades of cellaring. The 1973 Imperial Reserva is a perfect case in point, as the wine is stunning today, wafting from the glass in a superb blend of cherries, black raspberries, a touch of dill, cigar ash, a beautifully complex base of soil tones and a nice touch of coconutty American oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very refined in profile, with a lovely core, melted tannins and a long, tangy and utterly suave, velvety finish. A classic vintage of Imperial at the peak of its powers! 2018-2045. **95.**

1970 Rioja “Viña Tondonia” Gran Reserva- López de Heredia

The 1970 Viña Tondonia Gran Reserva is at its apogee and is drinking with beauty and grace at age forty-eight. The refined and complex bouquet delivers a lovely constellation of raspberries, cherries, spices meats, a beautiful base of salty soil tones, cloves, gentle autumnal tones and a touch of nutskin in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and vibrant, with a lovey core, melted tannins, impressive focus and a long, *à point* finish. Despite being nearly fifty years of age, the 1970 Viña Tondonia has a bit of a robust

personality, which is the style of the vintage here and will always be part of the wine's profile, so this is not the most elegant, mature Viña Tondonia out there. But, it has plenty of depth and merit in its slightly more robust guise. 2017-2035+. **93.**

Vinos de la Tierra de Castilla

2016 Tempranillo “Sinfonía”- Bodegas Abanico

The 2016 Sinfonía” Bodegas Abanico is yet again a ringing success (I was very impressed with both the 2014 and 2015 versions) and is about as fine a substitute for the great old wines that used to hail from Ribera del Duero in the 1980s as I can think of today. The bouquet jumps from the glass in a classic combination of plums, black cherries, lovely spice tones, a nice touch of meatiness, sandy soil tones, cigar smoke and just a bit of coconutty oak influence in the upper register. On the palate the wine is ripe, full-bodied and impeccably balanced, with a good core of fruit, fine soil signature, ripe, suave tannins, good acids and excellent focus and grip on the complex finish. As I mentioned last year, this wine is crafted from forty-plus year-old tempranillo vines in the hills outside of Madrid, where the elevation gives a nice diurnal temperature swing and keeps the wine light on its feet. The 2016 version again comes in at fourteen percent octane and is perfectly balanced. At under fifteen dollars a bottle here in the US, this is an absolute steal! 2018-2035. **91.**



Viños de Madrid and Sierra de Gredos Mountains

2016 Blanco de Navaherreros- Bernabeleva (Viños de Madrid)

The white wine at Bernabeleva is made of a blend of Abillo and Macabeo, with the vines ranging from thirty up to eighty-five years of age, with some of the vines from the original plantings done by Dr. Vincente Alvarez-Villamil. *Elevage* is done in five and six hundred French barrels. The 2016 Blanco from Bernabeleva comes in at a cool 12.5 percent octane and offers up a fine nose of pear, green olive, salty soil tones, a touch of beeswax and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and focused, with a lovely core, fine soil signature and grip, sound framing acids and a long, nascently complex and very nicely balanced finish. This does not show quite the same zesty acidity as the 2015 Garnacha bottling, but it is equally transparent and classy and will just need drinking a bit sooner. 2018-2025. **91.**

2016 Garnacha- Cendal (Sierra de Gredos)

The 2016 Garnacha from Cendal is made from seventy year-old, head-pruned bush vines up in the Gredos Mountains. The wine is fermented with indigenous yeasts and aged simply in stainless steel prior to bottling. The 2016 is plenty ripe at 14.5 percent octane, but offers up a bright and pretty nose of raspberries, *garrigue*, a touch of pepper and a good base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, pure and tasty, with a touch of backend tannin and good length and grip on the well-balanced finish. This is not overly complex, but it delivers very well within its more limited range of notes. 2018-2028. **88.**

2015 Navaherreros Garnacha- Bernabeleva (Viños de Madrid)

These Garnacha vines are more than eighty years old, as the vineyard land was purchased all the way back in 1923 by Dr. Vincente Alvarez-Villamil. With the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War in 1936, Dr. Alvarez was not able to make wine here any longer in the foothills of the Sierra de Gredos Mountains, but his family was able to hold onto the vineyard land and finally, in 2006, two of his grandchildren restarted the Bernabeleva winery and began to make wine from these old vines. With the vines planted at more than two thousand feet altitude, the nights are plenty cool here, which gives the wine excellent acidity and vibrancy. The team here enhances this by raising this wine only in two and three year-old barrels. The 2015 version is a lovely wine, with a beautifully light color and a complex and vibrant bouquet of raspberries, strawberries, lovely spice notes of cloves and cinnamon, a hint of meatiness, salty soil tones, wild fennel and a touch of other savory elements in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, pure and very transparent in personality, with a fine core, ripe, moderately chewy tannins and excellent focus and grip on the long, tangy and complex finish. This is an outstanding bottle of Garnacha, which is beautifully light on its feet and very soil-driven in personality! It is approachable today, but really deserves at least a few years in the cellar to allow the backend tannins to soften up a bit more. Very impressive juice! 2020-2040+. **93.**

Tierra de la Cádiz

2016 Palomino Fino “Ojo de Gallo”- José Estévez (Valdespino)

The 2016 Palomino Fino “Ojo de Gallo” from José Estévez is a lovely wine that shows off its Sherry sensibilities on both the nose and palate. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a complex and salty combination of lemon, *fleur de sel*, gently nutty overtones, green olive and a lovely base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and focused, with a fine core, excellent salty soil signature, bright acids and impressive length and grip on the nascently complex finish. This is essentially a low octane bottle of Fino, as the aromatics and flavor profile

tracks a great Sherry, but with the alcohol nicely cool at twelve percent octane. Fine juice that just calls out for tapas! 2018-2025. **90.**

Canary Islands

2015 La Araucaria Tinto- Dolores Cabrera Fernández (Tenerife)

The 2015 La Araucaria Tinto from Dolores Cabrera Fernández is an excellent wine on both the nose and palate. The bouquet offers up a nascently complex mix of sweet dark berries, espresso, volcanic soil, bitter chocolate, elegant Canary Islands botanicals, a touch of meatiness and a gently medicinal topnote that really recalls young Hermitage! On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and soil-driven in personality, with an excellent core, moderate, seamless tannins, vibrant acids and impressive length and grip on the complex and quite refined finish. This is a beautiful bottle. 2017-2035+. **92+.**

WEINGUT KELLER'S FABLED RIESLING G-MAX



A lot has changed with Weingut Keller since I first wrote my historical feature on the estate back in the autumn of 2007. Then, Klaus-Peter Keller and his wife Julia were young, relatively unknown winegrowers setting their sights on producing great wines from the ancient heart of the Rheinhessen, the Hügelland, which had not been in the wine limelight since the Middle Ages. Eleven years down the road, the Kellers are widely recognized as two of the finest winemakers in all of Germany and their wines are cherished on a global scale that would have been virtually unimaginable a decade ago. The credit for this, of course, has to be given to the quality of the wines themselves, which have proven themselves over the last eleven years to be simply some of the very finest made in all of Germany. Back in 2007 when I was working on my article, Klaus-Peter and his wife Julia had only been running the family estate in Flörsheim-Dalsheim since 2001 and we were just settling in to taste the 2006 vintage from the winery, which was the very first to include wines from the Abtserde vineyard. Klaus-Peter's father, Klaus Keller had bought his two and a half *hectare* parcel here back in 1996, despite the fact that the production from the vineyard was still contracted out to another domaine for the next decade and the first vintage that they would be able to produce from this fine *terroir* would be the 2006! Clearly, Klaus Keller had done his homework, for back in 1996, the Abtserde was almost

completely obscure, even to those with expertise in this corner of the Rheinhessen, but this vineyard had been one of, if not the most prized vineyard, back when the Hügelland was the heart and soul of wine production in the Rheinhessen in the middle ages. It turned out to be a very prescient purchase on the part of Klaus Keller, as under the watch of Klaus-Peter and Julia, it has become one of the most famous bottlings in all of Germany and is at least as famous today as it was back in the Middle Ages when the church hierarchy in Worms insisted on reserving all of its production each year for the ecclesiastical elites in the city.

However, while the new addition to the grand cru portfolio of that year, the Abtserde, has blossomed under the care of the Kellers and is now one of their most cherished vineyards, producing not only stunning dry Rieslings at the Grosses Gewächs level, but also contributing to blended dry bottlings such as the estate's fine "von der Fels" cuvée and also producing beautifully filigreed Prädikat wines, it is now only one of the estate's six Riesling grand cru vineyards. Klaus-Peter and Julia Keller were able to further add parcels in the two great Nierstein grand crus of Hipping and Pettenthal a few years later (adding a pair of steep, classical red slate *terroirs* along the Rhine River to their excellent array of limestone-based grand crus in the Hügelland) and they now have the finest array of grand cru bottlings to be found anywhere in Germany. The vineyards of Kirchspiel, Hubacker, Morstein, Abtserde, Hipping and Pettenthal make for a formidable portfolio of Riesling grand crus by any measure, and with Weingut Keller crafting gorgeously mineral and refined dry Rieslings from these sites, not to mention utterly classical Prädikat wines as well, it is not surprising that they are now ranked as the greatest producer of dry Riesling anywhere in Germany and the once backwaters of the Hügelland have found a chapter of fame in the last decade that has not been part of the winemaking landscape here for many centuries. On top of all these fine grand cru sites, Klaus-Peter Keller continues to craft a special old vine cuvée of dry Riesling, called G-Max, which has become his most highly sought after wine. It is quite rare, and when an invitation came from Claude Bicheler to taste a vertical of the cuvée in Beaune at the end of February (after a formidable lineup of Coche-Dury Corton-Charlemagne), I could not say "yes" fast enough! I reported on the Coche-Dury portion of our tasting in the last issue, and here turn to the amazing lineup of G-Max that Monsieur Bicheler generously assembled for the evening.

Klaus-Peter Keller has been making G-Max since his first official vintage in charge of the family winery of 2001, with the bottling taking its title from the name of his grandfather, who ran the estate back in his era, George Keller, and Klaus-Peter and Julia's younger son, Max. Klaus-Peter Keller's father had been making a special bottling of Auslese Trocken from the Hubacker vineyard for a few vintages, starting in the late 1990s, that he added the moniker of "G" to in tribute to his father, George Keller. The first "G" bottling from the Hubacker was in the 1998 vintage and the "G" was first prominently displayed on the label of this vintage. In the late 1990s, Klaus-Peter was working alongside of his father Klaus Keller and preparing to make the transition to the head of the family estate, which would take place in the 2001 vintage, though of course, he continued to collaborate very closely with his father for several years after the official transition in '01. In 2000, the year before the reins were officially passed from father to son at Weingut Keller, Klaus-Peter and Julia's son Max was born and the family wished to make a special bottling in honor of his birth year vintage. Consequently, the Hubacker Auslese Trocken bottling that had been labeled as "G" since 1998 was labeled as "Max" in the 2000 vintage. All of these vintages of G or Max had been made in very small quantities, mostly for the family to

keep and share amongst themselves and very few were offered for sale to clients at this time. In the following vintage of 2001, Klaus-Peter decided to keep the cuvée going on into the future, but decided that the proper thing to do would be to combine the names of the previous incarnations in deference to both his grandfather and his son and the name of “G-Max” was first coined. As Klaus-Peter recalls, “the intention was still just to keep the wine mostly for our family and we had no real intentions of commercializing it, as it was still made in a very small quantity.” He continues, “however, some of our most loyal clients knew of the wine and wanted to buy a bottle or two, so we had to come up with a price for it and eventually settled on fifty euros per bottle, figuring that it would make the wine expensive enough that no one would want it and we could continue keep it all for the family.” To his surprise, it sold out quickly at that unheard of price in this era for a dry Riesling from the Hügelland and G-Max was unintentionally on its way to being a commercial success for the Keller family.

I had heard back in the day that in its earliest incarnations from 2001 forwards, the sourcing for G-Max probably moved from the Hubacker vineyard to a small parcel of particularly old vines in the grand cru vineyard of Morstein, but it eventually proved to be such a cult wine in its earliest days that a very excited Japanese fan of G-Max (who had heard the same things I had about its vineyard source) went out to the Morstein vineyard around 2005 and picked a few bunches one day late in the summer to take home as a souvenir! At that point, Klaus-Peter decided that it would be best from that point forward to no longer disclose from which parcel he would make his G-Max bottling. As Klaus-Peter likes to say, “we have had vineyards in Westhofen since 1999 and I have never said that 2001 G-Max was Hubacker and 2002 was Morstein- it is just from a very old parcel of vines in the best, best soil.” He continues, “there is really no need to do too much speculation; it is just a great wine dedicated to our grandfather and Max.” To a certain degree, it makes it more fun to no longer fully know from which grand cru vineyard the fruit for G-Max hails from these days. However, it is always a limestone-based grand cru that donates grapes to the creation of G-Max, so it has to originate from one of the list of Abtserde, Hubacker, Kirchspiel or Morstein, but from which one now is not openly discussed, to keep those enthusiastic souvenir hunters out of the vineyards prior to harvest! As Klaus-Peter says, “the important thing to know is that we love this magic piece of land very much and there is a lot of heart-blood that we put into it each year”, as “it is a terrific piece of limestone rock soil” and we are very happy with the wine it gives us each year. G-Max is a beautiful wine, no matter where it is sourced in a given year, though interestingly, as it does not state the name of its vineyard source on the label, it cannot be officially called a grand cru and the wine is officially only a QbA. This has not seemed to dissuade any of its fans, as it has become the most highly sought-after wine in the Weingut Keller portfolio and its price is now the highest in the world for any dry Riesling bottling.

When I wrote my original domaine profile on Weingut Keller back in October of 2007, I speculated that this young and dynamic estate was well on its way to vying with Maison Trimbach’s fabled Clos Ste. Hune bottling as the finest source of dry Riesling anywhere in the world. The last decade or so has seen this supposition turn to reality and today, Clos Ste. Hune certainly has company at the very top of the dry Riesling hierarchy with the Grosses Gewächs bottlings and the G-Max from Klaus-Peter Keller. Back in 2007, the grand cru wines from Klaus-Peter were still too young to have reached any semblance of maturity, so one had to assume that the impeccable balances with which they started out life would carry them

beautifully to full maturity, and the passing years have born this out and today, it is quite clear that all of Klaus-Peter Keller's wines have aged beautifully and are all on their way to delivering on the very formidable promise each one showed in its youth. For all of the various Grosses Gewächs bottlings here, a minimum of ten to twelve years seems to be the requirement to start to see the wines really start to blossom a bit, and age fifteen is really the point of departure for any given wine where we can say that it is truly starting to drink at its plateau of maturity. Amongst the Hügelland, limestone-based grand crus, perhaps the Kirchspiel and Hubacker might be just a bit quicker to start to blossom than the Abtserde and Morstein bottlings, but all of these are long-distance runners and it is really a waste to open any of them before they are at least a decade out from their respective vintage, and my gut feeling continues to be that the twenty year mark is going to be the real sweet spot in the evolution for all of these beautiful dry Riesling cuvées. But, as we have not yet reached that point in the evolution of any of these wines, with 2001 being their first vintage under Klaus-Peter and Julia's tutelage, we are still waiting to see the true scope of a vintage of Keller G-Max at its peak of maturity!



The precursors to G-Max: the Hubacker "G" bottlings from 1997-1999 and the Max from 2000.

In any case, Klaus-Peter Keller's G-Max is probably the longest-lived of all of his dry Rieslings, so it is a wine that really deserves to be treated with patience and allowed to properly hibernate in a cool corner of the cellar for many years before it is opened. It was very kind of Claude Bicheler to supply some younger bottles of G-Max for our vertical, as this gave all of us

the opportunity to taste some of the younger vintages and see where they were on their evolutionary track, but at our tasting, it was really only the gorgeous 2004 G-Max that had started to approach its period of peak maturity and was drinking well, with the others still on the youthful side and asking for more time to sleep in the cellar. One of the interesting aspects of the G-Max to my palate is how it has jumped around a bit (presumably) from parcel to parcel over the years, and hails now perhaps from one of any of the four limestone-based grand crus that the Kellers farm in the Hügelland, but the wine has seemed to stay very true to its character from vintage to vintage, or this was at least my impression at our February vertical tasting. To be fair, I have never tasted two of the first three vintages, the 2001 or 2003, but both the 2002 and 2004 seem quite similar in profile to the examples of G-Max produced in more recent vintages. It should be noted though that Klaus-Peter's style has gotten a bit more refined with each passing vintage, with all of his grand cru bottlings showing more precision and perhaps a more delicate footprint as the years have gone by, so it is hard to say if a wine like the 2004 G-Max, which might have been sourced at that time from the Morstein vineyard (which makes slightly more powerful wines in general than say, the Abtserde or Kirchspiel), does not have quite the same inherent elegance of a wine like the 2014 G-Max because it originated with a different parcel of old vines, or if the latter wine is simply a bit more refined because the entire lineup across the board at Weingut Keller has gotten more precise with each passing vintage.

When I asked Klaus-Peter a bit about the evolution in the elegance of all of his grand cru bottlings from 2001 to today, as well as his G-Max, he noted a couple of important changes that he has made as the years have gone by to fine tune these wines during their crafting. The first he observed was that "since the 2013 vintage, we now have a second basket press for the dry wines, and this gives us a different phenolic extraction that I really like a lot." He continues, "it is a lot more work and we are often pressing all through the night, but the wines seem to have more grip and tension as a result and I think that this may make them even longer-lived." The second change he mentioned was that they have been able to reduce the alcohol levels of the grand crus and the G-Max bottling a bit over the course of the last fifteen years through changes in canopy management. He notes that "in former times, the GGs often would be 13.5 percent alcohol, but today we manage to have them in most cases between twelve and thirteen percent." He observes that "we have mainly managed to do this by shortening the canopy twenty to thirty centimeters, resulting in lower sugar production" and "we can harvest late, have a long hang time, good acidities and still a bit less sugar." In an era of climate change, this would perhaps be a good technique for others to start to use in their own vineyards when thinking of making dry Rieslings. Klaus-Peter is also moving the juice from the press to the tanks a bit earlier than he did at the start of the 2000s. As he notes, "fifteen years ago I did sedimentation a bit longer than I do today; the musts from the press were nearly clean when fermentation started." Klaus-Peter continues, "today, they are quite dull and cloudy, meaning that they have more food for the natural yeasts and often now will ferment all the way down dry to two or three grams of sugar, where before they might stop with seven or eight grams- so today, we end up with a really good balance." Probably all of these steps have contributed to the more refined and precise profiles of the GGs and the G-Max from Weingut Keller, and the vines are also older now and yields are a bit lower as well, which further adds to the elegance of the resulting wines.

So all of the estate's Grosses Gewächs bottlings, not to mention G-Max, are getting better with each passing vintage, at least to my palate, and this probably means that as stunning as

some of the early vintages are starting to drink today, the more recent vintages are going to be even better when they in turn have reached their own peaks of maturity in the years to come. All the GGs here, as well as some of the other top dry Rieslings such as the “von der Fels” are now prized by lovers of dry Rieslings, but it is the Kellers’ G-Max bottling that remains the most expensive and highly sought-after cuvée of dry Riesling produced anywhere Germany. As a fan of underdogs, I generally try to root for one of the other Grosses Gewächs bottlings here each year to out-perform (or at least equal) the G-Max, but it is yet to happen and I have been lucky enough to taste each new vintage at Weingut Keller now for a dozen years and the G-Max has continued to come out on top in each and every vintage. The qualitative difference between it and top vintages of Pettenthal, Morstein or Abtserde and the other grand crus is never particularly large, but the G-Max has continued to my palate to have a slight edge over any of these other bottlings in terms refinement and elegance, with a seamless beauty in its youth that cannot quite be matched by the other truly great grand crus in the Keller portfolio. I also have the gut instinct that the G-Max bottling will end up being the longest-lived of all of the grand crus here at Weingut Keller, but as we are only seventeen years out now from the inaugural vintage of 2001, it is still too early on in the evolution of these wines to know this with any certainty. But, unlike some cuvées around the globe that have attained “cult wine” status, G-Max is truly a brilliant wine and for those who are well-heeled enough to comfortably purchase the wine (it is routinely over a thousand euros a bottle these days in the secondary wine market), they are richly rewarded by the beautiful quality wine that is truly one of the greatest dry white wines produced anywhere in the world.

The following wines were primarily tasted at the great tasting in Beaune at the end of February hosted by Claude Bicheler. Again, my heart-felt thanks go out to Monsieur Bicheler for including me in this magical tasting! I have augmented our lineup from that evening in Beaune with notes from my archives of the 2016 G-Max reported on in last December’s issue, as well as the 2011 G-Max that I pulled out of my small cache of bottles during my trip in May to fill out our roster of vintages a bit more. I have not gone back to previous reports to include notes on vintages such as 2014 that I tasted in the winery prior to release, figuring that the wines have evolved a bit since I last tasted them in the spring of 2015 and the notes would now be a bit out of date and would not reflect the wine’s stage of evolution today. I now have in my archives notes from a Hubacker vertical tasting held at the end of May in Germany (that I will write up on their own down the road) of the precursor vintages of G-Max, the “G” bottlings of Auslese Trocken from 1997, 1998 and 1999, and the 2000 vintage of “Max” from the same vineyard, but as they are not really G-Max as it has come to be since the 2001 vintage, I have retained those tasting notes for inclusion in the article on the lovely Hubacker Grosses Gewächs bottling, rather than printing them here. As I hope the notes below will demonstrate, the Keller family’s now legendary G-Max is not a “cult wine” that was cooked up by some marketing team to realize the highest price possible from wealthy wine collectors, but rather a world class Riesling that was originally crafted simply to pay tribute to two different generations of the Keller family and was supposed to simply be kept for sharing amongst the family and good friends of the Kellers, but has somehow managed to take on an iconic life of its own in the marketplace and is now Germany’s most highly sought after dry Riesling bottling and also, to my palate, the country’s very finest.



Julia and Klaus-Peter Keller in one of their Hügelland vineyards during the harvest.

2016 Riesling “G-Max”- Weingut Keller

The 2016 vintage of G-Max is just an outstanding bottle in the making. The pure, deep and slightly exotic nose offers up sweet grapefruit, tart orange, wild yeasts, complex minerality, a hint of blood orange, incipient smokiness, lemongrass and orange peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full, pure and still rather reserved in profile, with a rock solid core, great focus and grip, ripe, racy acids and stunning length and grip on the seamlessly balanced finish. This has stunning backend energy and is once again the pick of the litter amongst the dry Rieslings in the Keller cellars in 2016, but it seems that the gap between this bottling and several of the other Grosses Gewächs bottlings gets smaller and smaller with each passing year. 2030-2075. **98.**

2015 Riesling “G-Max”- Weingut Keller

The 2015 G-Max from Klaus-Peter Keller is still a very young wine, but it has lost none of the magic it displayed when I first tasted it at the estate back in the spring of 2016. Two years’ worth of bottle age is just a drop in the bucket for this brilliantly promising young wine, and it has neither closed down nor started to stir in the last twenty-four months. The gorgeous bouquet offers up a youthful blend of tangerine, sweet grapefruit, petrol, wild yeasts, dried flowers and a lovely touch of citrus peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, racy and rock solid at the core, with great focus and grip, a supremely elegant profile and a stunningly long, nascently complex and vibrant finish. As far as I can tell, this remains as perfect today as it did in the spring of 2016 and all that is needed is another decade or so of bottle age! 2030-2075. **100.**

2013 Riesling “G-Max”- Weingut Keller

The 2013 vintage of G-Max is starting to stir a bit on the nose, but it remains hermetically sealed on the palate and is still many years away from truly blossoming. I had loved this wine upon release and it continues to dazzle with its potential today, with the first glimmer of what is to come down the road now evident in the beautiful bouquet of pink grapefruit, a touch of guava, a very complex base of limestone minerality, gentle notes of petrol, orange peel, lemongrass and a topnote of orange blossoms. On the palate the wine is pure, full and shows off beautiful mid-palate depth, with a very mineral profile, racy acids and superb cut and grip on the very, very long, energetic and reserved finish. This may well blossom five years ahead of the 2015 version, but my gut feeling is that it is going to be a waste of bottles to not give it almost as much time in the cellar before really opening bottles with expectations of a wine at its peak. This bottle was showing even better than one tasted in November of last year, but perhaps that was more a reflection of my down mood at the time. 2028-2075. **100.**

2011 Riesling “G-Max”- Weingut Keller

As my bottle of 2011 G-Max was still in good a friend’s cellar in Germany, I had this wine on my first evening there at the start of my May trip to the wine country. He generously suggested that we pair it up with a bottle of 2011 Morstein out of his cellar (he is a passionate collector of Weingut Keller wines and the gentleman who first introduced me to the family’s wines back when I was first starting the newsletter) and my May visit was off to a stupendous start! The 2011 G-Max is a brilliant wine and was quite a bit less evolved than the 2011 Morstein paired up with it on this evening, offering up a youthfully complex and utterly refined bouquet of pink grapefruit, tart orange, an exotic hint of guava, a delicate touch of wild yeasts, stunningly pure and complex limestone minerality, a dollop of petrol and a beautiful topnote of citrus blossoms. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, racy and still quite tightly-knit, with a rock solid core, laser-like focus and great cut and grip on the very, very long and hauntingly refined finish. This is a very, very elegant vintage of G-Max and my score will probably prove to be conservative when the wine has fully blossomed! 2023-2060. **98.**

2010 Riesling “G-Max”- Weingut Keller

I had not tasted a bottle of the 2010 G-Max from Weingut Keller since the spring of 2011, so I was very delighted to see it as part of our vertical tasting in Beaune. The wine is starting to blossom nicely on the nose and the palate too is starting to stir, so this wine is really not as far away from generosity as the 2013 version. The bouquet is deep, pure and complex, wafting from the glass in a blend of tart orange, sweet grapefruit, wild yeasts, lemongrass and a great, complex base of chalky mineral undertow. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and zesty, with laser-like focus, a superb core, impeccable balance and a very, very long, complex and soaring finish. This may well be one of the vintages of G-Max that starts to really drink nicely from age twelve to fifteen, rather than the more expected twenty year mark. Great juice. 2022-2075. **97.**

2009 Riesling “G-Max”- Weingut Keller

The inherent ripeness of the 2009 vintage was showing a bit in our vertical at the end of February, and I wondered if this was just the context that the wine was placed in besides so many very racy vintages, or if its 2009 personality was going to give this a bit of earlier than usual appeal. The bouquet is starting to open quite nicely as it approaches its ninth birthday, offering up scents of pink grapefruit, guava, petrol, complex minerality, wild yeasts, citrus peel and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and fairly broad-shouldered for this bottling, with a great core of fruit, superb backend mineral drive, bright acids and

excellent focus and grip on the long and complex finish. Another very fine vintage of G-Max. 2021-2065. **97.**

2007 Riesling “G-Max”- Weingut Keller

It had been almost a decade since I last sampled a bottle of the 2007 G-Max from Klaus-Peter and the wine is evolving beautifully and is getting closer to its plateau of maturity. In our vertical tasting, the 2007 stood out as the most floral wine aromatically and the classic elegance of this vintage early on has followed the wine as it has aged. The bouquet today is flat out stunning, soaring from the glass in a superb blend of orange, grapefruit, still a touch of wild yeasts, bee pollen, limestone, gentle notes of petrol and a gardenful of spring flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, elegant and racy, with a lovely core, bright, zesty acids and great focus and grip on the long, seamless and just starting to blossom finish. The bouquet is a couple of years ahead of the palate in terms of evolution, but this is getting pretty close to its point of departure of mature drinking magic! 2021-2065+. **98.**

2004 Riesling “G-Max”- Weingut Keller

The 2004 vintage of G-Max is a wine that I drank with great pleasure four years ago, after having never tried it previously. It has continued to evolve gracefully and is now really starting to blossom on both the nose and palate. The bouquet is very, very expressive today, delivering a beautiful constellation of sweet grapefruit, apple, complex limestone minerality, bee pollen, citrus peel and still a gentle topnote of wild yeasts. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and utterly refined, with a great core, superb length and grip, bright, zesty acids and a very, very long, poised and seamlessly balanced finish. This was all Morstein fruit back in 2004, but the refined profile of G-Max is still very much in evidence here. A great wine that has really started to hit on all cylinders since I last tasted it four years ago and is clearly even better than I thought then! 2018-2060. **98.**