

# VIEW FROM THE CELLAR

By John Gilman

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- ❖ *The 2018 Vintage In Germany- The Best Wines Are Brilliant.* (pages 1-102)
- ❖ *Domaine François Bertheau- One Of Chambolle-Musigny's Finest Winemakers.* (pages 103-113)
- ❖ *Revisiting the Twin Towers Of the 1989 and 1990 Bordeaux Vintages.* (pages 114-133)
- ❖ *New Releases And Grand Old Legends From the Rhône Valley.* (pages 134-162)
- ❖ *The 2017 Vintage From Volnay's Newest Superstar: Domaine Clos de la Chapelle.* (pages 163-171)

## *Coming Attractions*

- ❖ *Recently-Tasted Sparkling Wines and Champagne, Including Another Very Deep Vertical of Philipponnat's Magical Clos des Goisses and Juste Rosé.*
- ❖ *Checking In On the 1982 Bordeaux Vintage Today- True Profundity Or Simply Very Good, Ripe Wines?*
- ❖ *Round Two Of the Excellent 2017 Vintage in Beaujolais.*
- ❖ *Châteaux Bélair-Monange and Magdelaine- Is the Marriage Working?*
- ❖ *The Maestro of Avize- Anselme Selosse and His Hand-Crafted , Comprehensive Revolution In Champagne.*
- ❖ *Bodegas Riojanas- Another Of the Great Classicists In Rioja.*
- ❖ *The Excellent 1977 California Cabernet Vintage- Emerging From the Prolonged Slumber of a Very-Structured Drought Vintage To Finally Shine.*
- ❖ *The Annual Loire Valley Report, Château Pichon-Lalande, The Hill of Corton, Champagne Bruno Paillard, Château Montrose, Special Club Champagne, Aged Muscadet, The 2001 Bordeaux Vintage, Mature Loire Valley Reds, Chambertin and Clos de Bèze, Bernard Baudry, The Buried Treasure of Aged Kabinetten, Weingut Schloss Lieser, Chassagne Rouge and Château l'Evangile.*

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**THE EXCELLENT, BUT HETEROGENEOUS 2018 GERMAN VINTAGE  
A HOT SUMMER PRODUCES A WIDE RANGE OF STYLES**



*Perfectly ripe, golden berries in the vineyard of Zeltinger Sonnenuhr at harvest time 2018 (Johannes Selbach).*

How does one judge the quality of a vintage? Is it by the accomplishments of the very best winegrowers of a region and the successes that they have realized, or is it the general average of what was produced from a much wider cross-section of wine estates? This philosophical question is at the very heart of how one feels about the heterogeneous, but often breathtakingly brilliant, vintage of 2018 in Germany. The very best wines of 2018 are simply stunning, and there are indeed hundreds and hundreds of these to be found dancing across the horizons of the three regions that I visited on my annual spring trip: the Nahe, Rheinhessen and the greater Mosel river valley (including the beautiful Saar and Ruwer tributaries). But, there are reportedly many other wines from 2018 that are not so stunning, and are more fruit-driven, plump, soft and slightly coarse in style, without the elegance, filigree and mineral drive and complexity that have come to define what is true greatness in German wine in this century. As my itinerary in the spring is usually jammed full of the most talented producers (or at least, my absolute favorite estates), I often see a vintage through the eyes of Germany's greatest winemaking artisans, and so my ten days spent here in wine country at the end of March this year was like a mythological tour of the Alps, leaping from summit to summit, with always a

slightly different perspective from the next peak, but without having to do the hard work of the descent down to the valleys between each summit, nor the struggle to make the climb. And in the tasting rooms and cellars where I settled down my tasting book and picked up my glass, the 2018 vintage was truly, truly brilliant! That said, I have also heard many credible reports from people who tasted a far wider range of estates at the big Prowein trade tasting in Düsseldorf that was held just prior to my visit that there are plenty of less than exciting 2018ers to be found from down in the valleys and treacherous crossroads of the vintage.

Readers may recall that my annual visit to taste the 2017ers a year ago was a bit later than customary, as I was in German wine country towards the second half of May, rather than the backend of March, as is usually my custom. Last May, it was very hot in Germany, with temperatures in the high eighties and low nineties during much of my visit and most of the tasters flocking to the great events around Mythos Mosel at that time stripped down to shorts, tank tops and sandals, as beach attire was definitely the proper choice for those very hot days. The heat of May was not singular in the growing season of 2018, but rather the norm, and sun, high temperatures and cloudless skies were the defining elements of this vintage. The winter had been cold and wet, so at least there was an excellent foundation of water reserves in the soils leading into the growing season of 2018, which would prove to be very important for the ultimate quality of the best wines. As Andrea and Christophe Schaefer of Weingut Willi Schaefer wrote in their vintage report on 2018, “after a long, dim winter and a very cold March, no one believed in any early growing season,” but “suddenly in April, winter was replaced seamlessly by summer.” And summer stayed put, with very high temperatures and endless sun from May until the start of September, when at least the high temperatures started to moderate a bit and fall back more in line with the customary range in Germany for the last month of the growing season. With all of those hot sunny days, sunburnt skins on the grapes was certainly a possibility, and as Klaus-Peter Keller observed, “canopy management was very important to protect the bunches from the sun and we did almost no canopy trimming in 2018.” Tim Fröhlich of Weingut Schäfer-Fröhlich practiced exactly the same approach in his vineyards. This was not the case everywhere, as some estates just have their standard viticultural practices to which they adhere to every year, so not everyone was attuned to the needs of the vines in the extraordinary growing season of 2018 and some of the cause for the heterogeneous nature of the vintage can be found in the farming techniques adopted by each winery in this hot summer weather.

The flowering was very early in 2018, as spring was precocious and very warm, so the vines were out of the blocks very briskly and in April winegrowers knew it would be an early harvest, if the weather remained favorable all summer long. And this is exactly what happened almost everywhere in Germany, with only a bit of hail in May in the middle Mosel and in early June in the Rheinhessen dampening the spirits a bit of producers there. Christophe Schaefer noted that the hail of May was “only about ten minutes in length” and did not cause any damage to the vines, but in the Rheinhessen, it acted as crop thinning and Klaus-Peter Keller figured that he lost about thirty percent of the potentially large crop in the vineyards hit by hail in the village of Westhofen that June. Also, recall that the 2017 vintage in Germany had been a frost vintage (much like 2016 in Burgundy) and yields the year before had been very, very small, so there was plenty of pent up energy in the vines in Germany in 2018 and there were portends of a bountiful crop everywhere after the flowering in the second half of May. Take a look at the photo below of the quite developed flowering in the Lieser Niederberg Helden vineyard that I took on May 30<sup>th</sup>

of last year, which was probably at least two to three weeks ahead of normal schedule and predicted a very generous cropload and early start to harvest. But all of the heat and beautiful blue skies of the summer of 2018 meant that there was also very little rain, and hydric stress was an important factor in the shaping of this vintage as well. There were scattered thunderstorms in the heat of summer, but happily, none brought hail after the two small storms in May and June discussed above. But, they also did not provide a whole lot of extra water for the vines. As Klaus-Peter Keller observed, “old vines had a dramatic advantage in 2018, as they were able to reach down to the underground water sources and keep maturing in the drought of summer, while younger vines had to struggle to keep photosynthesis going in the heat and dry conditions.”

The heat of the summer of 2018 was the most severe in Europe since the summer of 2003, and the high temperatures, coupled with the drought conditions made for some challenges for producers with younger vines. Where the vines are mulched to guard water reserves in the soils, the hydric stress was lower, but this is a small minority of the vineyards in Germany. Some growers, like the Weber family of Hofgut Falkenstein, allow for ground cover in their vineyards, so that the slate “Mother Rock” is not exposed and they have far better water retention in their slopes than in those where the vines sit right on the slate and fast-arriving and departing precipitation from thunderstorms generally rolls down the steep hillsides, rather than soaking into the vineyards. Irrigation of the vines is allowed, at least on the Mosel (I did not think to ask if this was true in other regions), but the growers whom I spoke with about this during my visit opined that it is not a technique that they like, as they feel it adversely affects the potential quality of the resulting wines and very few have vineyards that are outfitted for drip irrigation in the event of an extremely dry summer like 2018. Some of the variations of quality and style of the wines of this year can certainly be attributed to the role played by the prolonged drought of 2018, as physiological ripeness was lagging in the vines that had to struggle with hydric stress up until September, and so not everyone was able to harvest as early as they would have possibly liked to do in this vintage.

However, the high temperatures, sunny skies and lack of precipitation also was a blessing in regards to potential vineyard maladies in 2018, so at least there was no pressure from potential rot or mildew during the summer. It was hot and tiring work being out in the vines during the blazing heat of midsummer, but there was no need to spray and where hydric stress was not causing a shutdown of the vines, the bunches were starting to look awfully good by the start of August! While it was generally a summer of drought in Germany in 2018, there was some gentle, localized rainfall once in a while as the summer started to wane, so that bunches continued to ripen very nicely in most vineyards during the month of August and the quality of what was out on the vines really started to look extraordinary in potential. With all of the pent up energy in the vines from the frosts of 2017, there was the possibility of the large number of bunches to all ripen up if the weather held into September and October, and this is indeed exactly what happened. As Dorothee Zilliken commented, “we almost never had a harvest such as we had in 2018, where the weather was perfect and you could just walk through the vines and make your selections of what to pick at the perfect time to make whichever style of wine you wanted to make.” And there was a wide range of styles that the most successful producers eventually settled on in 2018, so that some cellars made more dry bottlings than sweeter-styled wines, picking grapes earlier to make truly brilliant and seamless dry Rieslings; others opted to focus on Kabinetten and Spätlese for the majority of their collections (Weingut Willi Schaefer was one



estate that went in this direction), while others decided to make plenty of Auslese. There was some botrytis in 2018 in certain vineyards, of a beautifully clean and pure nature, while other vineyards had absolutely none at all, so one can find variety even in the style of Auslesen and Goldkapsel Auslesen in 2018, as for example, those bottlings from Weingut Zilliken in Saarburg are made with absolutely no botrytis and only from golden berries and gently shriveled grapes from desiccation, while over on the Scharzhofberger hillside, Egon Müller had botrytis in many parcels and even had some Spätlesen with a trace of noble rot in their blends. There are even small quantities of truly stunning Beerenauslesen and Trockenbeerenauslesen in 2018, from carefully selected pockets of botrytis.



*The very early and prolific flowering seen in the Niederberg Helden vineyard in Lieser on May 30<sup>th</sup> of 2018.*

The decision on when to pick was another important barometer of the relative quality of the resulting wines of the 2018 growing season, and as alluded to above, due to the periods of drought, not everyone had perfectly ripe grapes as the second week of September came to a close. So, some estates could get going quite early with their picking, while others had to wait a bit longer for the physiological ripeness of the grapes to catch up with the sugar levels, and where this was the case, one necessarily lost acidity as the sugars climbed and the skins and pips ripened up properly and the grapes could be harvested. So, some estates in 2018 felt it absolutely necessary to acidulate at least some of their wines in this vintage, and as this is a technique that is not always successful, another variation on the general quality of the vintage can be found here.

During the hot summer of 2018 in Germany, there were many references made to the 2003 vintage (which was probably more successful in Germany than anywhere else in Europe), but as Hanno Zilliken commented, “there was nowhere near the same level of physiological ripeness in the grapes at the start of September in 2003 as we had in 2018, and that is why the resulting wines have turned out so dramatically different in the two vintages.” While I like the quality of the best 2003ers that I have tasted, there is an idiosyncratic nature to their aromatic and flavor profiles that makes them easy to spot in blind tastings (we actually managed to do so at a couple of estates during my trip, where a few older wines were served after the 2018ers) and which is not found in this new vintage. The best wines of 2018 are utterly classical in their bouquets and flavor profiles, and they are also superbly reflective of their underlying *terroirs* and it is fairly easy to spot from which vineyards they hail. This is not typical of hot growing seasons in general (and may not be the case with the less successful wines of 2018 in Germany), but it is very much part of the personalities of the very best wines of this vintage.

The harvest start was different from estate to estate in 2018, but many reported this year as being the earliest commencement to the picking in the history of their wineries. This was true at Weingut Zilliken and at Weingut Willi Schaefer, with the former starting on September 24<sup>th</sup> in the cooler Saar (beating the previous record here set back in 2003) and the latter on September 17<sup>th</sup> in Graach. Egon Müller in the Saar also started picking on September 24<sup>th</sup> and the Weber family at nearby Hofgut Falkenstein got started picking even earlier on September 13<sup>th</sup>, but then they have almost exclusively old vines and good protection of their subterranean water supply through ground cover in their slate-based vineyards. The weather at harvest time was perfect, with sunny skies, more seasonable temperatures and optimal weather forecasts, as there was no rain or bad weather on the horizon for the end of September of first few weeks in October. As the harvest report from Weingut Schaefer notes, “for a long time, we could hardly believe our luck” as “harvest was just heavenly.” That said, Christophe Schaefer also observed that “maybe there was a point this year where you lost something by waiting too long to start picking”, as acids started to fall later in the harvest period and some of the precision and minerality in the resulting wines was sacrificed. As he noted, and this sentiment was also echoed by Klaus-Peter Keller, “we are lucky here to have clients who are happy to buy whatever styles of wines we produce each year, and so we can aim to make what we think are going to be the best wines to match the vintage conditions, rather than having to try to make a certain percentage of dry wines or a certain percentage of upper Prädikat wines to keep our clients happy.” He continued, “we know we are very fortunate in this regard and not every estate is in the same position.” So, harvesting dates are another important variation to keep in mind when observing the heterogeneous style of the 2018 vintage in Germany.

Once the grapes were brought in, how the bunches were pressed became another concern for winegrowers, as it was observed by several vintners I visited that a very gentle pressing was necessary in 2018 to prevent acidity levels from falling dramatically. Normally, the amount of pressure one presses with causes a drop in acidity, but a very gentle decline, but this was not the case in 2018, and if one pressed too vigorously, one lost an awful lot of acidity in the resulting wines. I imagine that for those with younger vines who had been forced to deal with hydric stress-related retardation of ripening and ended up having to harvest later, this pressing issue was less of a perceived problem, as they had already lost so much acidity by having to delay picking and were intending to acidulate many of the wines in any case. As I mentioned above, I have a

view of the vintage through rose-colored glasses, due to visiting only my favorite growers on this trip, but one might anticipate that the reports of blowsy and rather coarse 2018ers at some of the less successful estates can also be attributed to pressing a bit more vigorously and getting some less than desirable characteristics in their wines from this approach. Klaus-Peter Keller, Eric Weber, Julian Haart, Hanno Zilliken, Tim Fröhlich and Christophe Schaefer all commented about how very important the pressing was in 2018, and none of these had to acidulate any of their wines in this vintage.

So where are the acidity levels of the best 2018ers, as this is always a question in hot, hot vintages like 2018? In general, they tend to be lower than last year (at least where we are talking about natural acidities, rather than those in wines who have had their acids adjusted), with Klaus-Peter Keller observing that “generally, we are about one gram of acidity per liter lower in our 2018ers than we were with our 2017ers.” And this is pretty much typical at most estates I visited, with the exception of the wines at Hofgut Falkenstein and Schäfer-Fröhlich, who started picking very early in 2018 and have ripe and rather beautifully electric wines as a result. However, as they mentioned (and several other winegrowers whom I tasted with on this trip echoed these sentiments), the pH levels of the 2018ers are also atypically low this year, and this tends to give the levels of acidity a more pronounced palate impression than their respective numbers might suggest. Acid levels in many of the 2018ers I tasted are in the eight grams per liter range, give or take a half a point, but the wines do not seem soft or blowsy and the acidity seems plenty high and zesty in the finished wines. There is also a certain sense of seamlessness to the very best 2018ers that may result from the slightly lower acid levels, but the wines are crystal clear, sharp, mineral-driven and vibrant and certainly still have plenty of acidity to age very long and gracefully. As Christophe Schaefer so sagely commented about the 2018ers, “there just comes a point where you have to trust your palate and somewhat disregard the analysis, as the wines are balanced and have very good acidity, no matter what the numbers might lead you to expect.”

Most of the estates I visited in March were able to very leisurely conclude their picking over a three to four week window from mid-September to mid-October, targeting some parcels to make upper Prädikat wines, others for Kabinetten and Spätlesen and others for dry wines. If you had been lucky enough to have lots of old vines and the drought had not been a major factor in your bunches ripening, then by the third week in September you had a lot of bunches of really beautiful-looking grapes, some with just a whisper of botrytis perhaps, and perfect weather forecasts for the foreseeable future to allow one to absolutely optimize picking dates for each parcel and target specific styles of wines. Klaus-Peter Keller and his picking team was even able to do one better than many of their fellow winegrowers, as he noted “that in almost every vineyard this year, we made two pickings for each wine we were intending to make, with the first to give energy and lift to the wine from an earlier picking for slightly higher acids and a second picking a week or so later to get a bit more ripeness and give the wines a nice touch of creaminess.” Now that is an extremely insightful approach to the harvest! But, as I mentioned above, this type of leisurely matching of picking dates of each parcel to the intended wine to be produced from it was only possible if your bunches were indeed physiologically ripe come the third week of September, and the early summer drought had not made this possible for everyone.

The perfect weather at harvest time was also ideal for those fortunate enough to find a bit of botrytis in their vines as well- or at least lucky for those who have clientele for noble sweet

wines and are not trying to make mostly dry wines for their clients. This varied from vineyard to vineyard and region to region, but there are some very good patches of botrytis to be found in 2018 and some really beautiful noble sweet wines from those bunches. As Veronika Lintner of Weingut Egon Müller noted, “we had generally quite a lot of botrytis in 2018, but it was very, very clean and pure botrytis, with those beautifully purple-colored skins, and with the weather dry and sunny, there was simply no worries about that botrytis turning less noble.” Johannes Selbach of Weingut Selbach-Oster had lots of botrytis in his parcels in the Zeltingen Sonnenuhr vineyard in this vintage, with early morning fogs at the outset of October there getting botrytis going and perfect conditions keeping it as clean as could be until they brought in the bunches, so he has produced an amazing array of dessert wines from the Sonnenuhr in 2018. So, there are some truly beautiful, beautiful botrytized wines to be found in this vintage from certain vineyards. There are also a fair number of marvelously clean, non-botrytized bottlings at the Auslesen Prädikat level in 2018, made from golden and gently desiccated berries, and these are a style of wine that I absolutely adore and find age brilliantly. For example, at Weingut Zilliken, there was absolutely no botrytis at all in 2018, but there are some very special Auslesen and Goldkapsel Auslesen made from non-botrytized grapes, and Hanno Zilliken even was able to make a bit of magical Trockenbeerenauslese from desiccated, golden berries and zero botrytis! On the other hand, the 2018 vintage was not one that brought a lot of success to those who attempted to make Eiswein, as freezing temperatures did not arrive until January of 2019 this year, and so the grapes were in rather shoddy condition by this time and one cannot make good Eiswein from lousy grapes, no matter how much they freeze. However, because of the high yields found in many parcels in 2018, many winegrowers did try for a bit of Eiswein in this vintage and left out certain parcels of grapes hoping the freeze would arrive earlier in the year. Though this did not come to pass, no one really regretted the decision to try, as cellars are generally nicely full with 2018ers and this is a very welcome occurrence, after the very, very short crop of 2017.

We should turn our attention a bit to the potential pitfalls of the vintage, for as I mentioned several times above, not everyone had physiologically ripe bunches as mid-September arrived, so not all estates could pick on the early side in 2018. If one had to wait for skins and pips to ripen up, one obviously ended up with higher sugar levels and lower attendant acidity levels. For some estates, the wait for better ripeness meant that they felt it incumbent to adjust the acidity of their 2018ers, and not everyone can do this successfully and it is hard not to argue that natural acidity is always preferable to added acidity in the wines- no matter how sure the hand is that is doing the acid adjustments. The other issue for those who harvested later is the relative alcohol levels and size of the respective wines made from later-picked bunches. If one is intending to make a dry wine, then the alcohol levels can end up pretty high before one can get down below the threshold of ten grams per liter of residual sugar that is necessary to label the wine as Trocken or Grosses Gewächs. I have had scant positive experience with the aging of higher alcohol dry German wines, and though I did not taste too many of these during my trip, I have heard plenty of reports that the vintage has more than its fair share. The other possibility of course is to make a sweeter wine from grapes with these higher sugar levels, but again, one is moving out of the range of the classically-styled Prädikat wines if the sugars are too high. A Kabinett with seventy grams of residual sugar is not really a Kabinett, but a richer Spätlese, and the other option is to ferment a bit more sugar out of the wine and end up with a more traditionally off-dry style of Kabinett at forty grams or so of RS, but an alcohol of 9.5 or so,



rather than the traditional 7.5 or eight degrees. So the 2018 vintage provided plenty of possibilities for rather “distorted” examples of Prädikat level wines from those who could not harvest as early as they would have liked.



Going into my trip, I wondered if there would be any similarities with the wines of 2003, which was the growing season that the summer of 2018 most resembled. The short answer is that there are virtually no similarities in the styles of the wines from the two vintages and the 2018ers are a significant step up in ultimate quality from even the best 2003ers. There were several factors that played into 2018 eclipsing the quality of the wines in 2003, with the first being that the possibility for far superior physiological ripeness in the grapes at the outset of September of 2018 made for a significant break with the summer of 2003, and this has translated into far more classic, pure and precise aromatics and flavors than what are found in the more exotically-styled 2003ers. Also, as Tim Fröhlich noted, “after 2003, and again in the summer of 2011, we are starting to have more experience with how to deal with these extremely hot seasons like 2018, and this experience helped us immensely in this growing season.” He continued, “in fact, I do not think that we could have had the same success in 2018 if we had not had this previous experience with other very hot summers in this era of climate change.” Helmut Dönnhoff reflected upon this same thing when I was tasting with him towards the end of my trip, as he observed that “I am now seventy years-old, and for winemakers of my generation, we never would have picked our grapes as early as we did in 2018, given such a perfect forecast for good

weather through the end of October like we had this year, as we were always striving to get the best possible ripeness we could back in those days.” He continued, “for us in 2018, it was really Cornelius who saved the vintage for us, as he came to me and said ‘we are going to start picking tomorrow’ and I argued that we should still wait, as the weather forecast was still perfect.” However, Cornelius Dönnhoff countered with “Papa, do you really want to try to make dry wines at fifteen percent alcohol, as that is what we are going to have if we delay the start of harvest!” And then they started picking the next morning.

While a few producers have wines that are really remarkable for their higher acidity levels in this vintage, with the wines from Hofgut Falkenstein and Tim Fröhlich two of the most prominent examples of this style, most of the 2018ers are going to come in with a bit lower acidity than many of the previous, outstanding vintages in recent memory. As I mentioned above, though the acids are generally a bit below those in the 2017ers, the very low pH of the vintage offsets this to some degree and the perception on the palate is that the acids are really a bit higher than the numbers suggest. Consequently, there are really very few wines to be found amongst the most successful that seem a bit soft structurally, though there are a few of these. But, mostly, one has the sense of a vintage full of wines that have excellent acids! What I would expect from the style of the vast majority of the most successful 2018ers is that they will drink beautifully right from the outset and not close down perceptibly after their bottling and will start to provide tremendous charm and pleasure from their very earliest days in the market. In terms of structure, the vintage that I think of that the 2018ers seem likely to emulate in terms of their arc of drinkability is the superb vintage of 2002, which was delicious right from the outset, never really closed down during its life, but has aged beautifully and is now one of the most pleasing vintages to drink today and still has decades of life ahead of it. The 2018ers are differently styled wines, with greater depth of fruit than the 2002ers, but they seem very much headed in the same direction and should be gorgeous wines to drink from a very young age and yet, still age very long and gracefully.

As I have mentioned several times above, my tour was only ten days at the end of March and I focused exclusively on my favorite producers (and did not even have enough time to get to all of them on this trip) and hence tasted almost exclusively brilliant examples of the 2018 vintage. However, I am absolutely certain that not everyone has been able to seize the potential of this vintage and make great wines, so do be cautious when getting further afield into producers beyond the scope of my report, as this is a vintage where the potential for train wrecks was also very much part of the vinous landscape of 2018. The hot summer produced grapes with very high sugar levels for those who did not pick promptly, and the resulting wines from these berries are either going to be powerful, high alcohol dry wines or very sweet, blowsy Prädikat wines. However, amongst the most successful estates in this vintage, there is a very wide array of styles that are available from address to address, and fans of dry German Rieslings, classically-styled, crystal clear Prädikat wines and plush, exotically-botrytized wines produced from beautifully pure noble rot are all available as one goes from producer to producer, and sometimes this is the case even within the same winery’s portfolio. So, in the end, is 2018 a great vintage in Germany? To my palate, the answer is “yes”, as I have always felt that the ultimate quality of how a vintage should be judged is based on how the most successful winegrowers in any given year have approached the vintage and how their wines have turned out. By this measure, 2018 is truly a legendary vintage of extremely high quality. At the most successful estates, there is a little

something for everyone, as I have seldom tasted such a beautiful range of young, dry Rieslings in the same year where there are so many utterly breathtaking Prädikat wines as well. The vintage simply did not favor one style over the other, if you were a winegrower who could make all of the right decision leading into the harvest. Even at the Kabinett Prädikat level, there are some stellar, low octane, tensile and utterly classical examples to be found in 2018, which is almost miraculous, given how hot the summer of 2018 was from beginning to end, but there are some dedicated producers who absolutely love this Prädikat level (Julian Haart immediately comes to mind) and they are learning how to make these delicate wines even in torrid summers like 2018. There are so many treasures waiting to be bottled in the next few weeks at the top addresses in Germany from the 2018 vintage, and when these wines start to arrive that are going to make everyone a believer that truly great, great wines were indeed possible in the torrid summer of 2018.

The following notes are listed geographically by region, and within each region, alphabetically by producer. I have listed the wines in the order that they were served at each tasting. As has been the case in the last several vintage reports from Germany, I have tried to mix up which regions I list first to last, simply for variety's sake and this is no reflection of either the order of my visits on the trip or my perceived quality of the 2018ers from each estate. It just provides a little variety to these reports. As I mentioned above, even with ten days on the road here, I could not get around to all of my favorite estates and so a few well-known producers were not visited on this trip. One who I am yet to have the good luck to visit is Daniel Vollenweider, whose wines I admire immensely, but Daniel was bottling on the days that I wished to visit this year. As my trip is also pretty much right after the big Prowein trade fair in Düsseldorf, probably a few producers were ready for a quick vacation after those arduous three days and I am assuming this was the reason I could not get an answer back from Dr. Carl von Schubert at Maximin Grünhäus about a visit on this trip. As I was also working on an upcoming feature on how beautifully Kabinetten evolve with extended bottle age during my visits this March, and which so many winegrowers were generous in digging out older bottles from their cellars to share after we had worked through their 2018ers, I was very sorry not to be able to visit Maximin Grünhäus on this trip, as not only would the 2018ers have been great to taste, but their legacy of brilliantly aging Kabinetten is second to none in Germany! But, there is always next year.

## ***Saar and Ruwer***

### **Hofgut Falkenstein (Konz-Niedermennig)**

*It had been a few years since my last visit the lovely estate of Erich Weber of Hofgut Falkenstein, as I was last here to taste the 2013ers in the spring of 2014. A lot has changed here since my visit at that time- though not in the winemaking, which remains about as beautifully old school as one can find in the Saarland- but, rather in the estate's market position in the last few years, as these beautiful, mineral-driven Rieslings have been discovered by a very loyal legion of wine lovers in recent times and this is now one of the most high-profile Saar estates. The accolades that Hofgut Falkenstein receives these days are all very richly deserved, as the wines are beautifully made and utterly classical in profile. Visiting with Erich Weber is a great pleasure, as these days he is almost like that young boy on Christmas morning and cannot believe how many presents under the tree have his name on them, for the success of the estate today is far beyond anything he might have envisioned when he was first piecing his estate*

*together more than thirty-five years ago. At that time, there were plenty of old vineyards on beautiful terroirs to be found in this back valley of the Saarland, but it was not prized real estate and making wine here was more a labor of love than a sure path to fame and fortune. I am sure that many of Erich's neighbors thought he was crazy when he settled in and started renting out some of their old vine parcels to expand his production a bit. But, time has proven Erich quite prescient (climate change has certainly helped him a bit as well, as it has almost everywhere in the Saarland since 1990, as there are now far more thoroughly ripe vintages here each decades) and he now farms some of the most beautiful and prized vineyards in the Saar.*

*As I reported back in 2014, Erich started Hofgut Falkenstein on his own in 1981, piecing together old vine parcels in this back section of the Saar as opportunity allowed, so that today he has 7.5 hectares of vines scattered amongst the villages of Niedermennig, Krettnach and Falkestein. These villages are actually in a valley away from the Saar River, about equidistant between Wiltingen and Oberemmel, with most of the soils of these hillside vineyards either blue or red slate, though there is a bit of Diabas (as in the Saarburger Rausch) in the Altenberg vineyard. As this was a bit off the beaten path back in those days (though this was a very highly-regarded section of the Saar in the nineteenth century, when German wines were more fashionable on the international market and demand was sufficient for sites such as these to be cultivated), Eric Weber was able to buy prime parcels in these largely forgotten vineyards, planted with old vines (vine age ranges from forty to eighty years of age), and seventy percent of the vineyards are on ungrafted rootstocks. One has to imagine that there are plenty of other opportunities for great terroirs such as these that are also currently forgotten and largely abandoned scattered around the back valleys in German wine country these days. The estate is housed in a beautifully restored old press-house that used to belong to the Friedrich Wilhelm Gymnasium estate, and which Eric and his wife Marita restored themselves. It is a beautiful site and a wonderful place to visit, with the Niedermennig Herrenberg vineyard descending down from the cellar door and offering a beautiful view of this lovely back valley in Saarland.*

*The wines of Hofgut Falkenstein are now made by Erich's son, Johannes, who has really seized his opportunity at the head of the estate and is making simply beautiful wines these days. One can really sense Erich's paternal pride as he prepared samples for us to taste in the cellars during this visit! Johannes Weber's 2018ers are amongst the very finest examples of the vintage that I had a chance to sample on my recent trip to the region, and I was really only tasting at the very, very finest addresses along the wine route in Germany on this visit. Johannes Weber was away at the time of my visit, showing wines to some of the estate's growing clientele in Japan, so I have not yet had the pleasure to meet him when tasting at the property, but am looking forward to do so next year. Of all the estates that I visited during my ten days in German wine country in late March, Hofgut Falkenstein was the earliest harvester, as Erich, Johannes and their team of pickers got started on the 13<sup>th</sup> of September! Keep in mind, that the Saar is cooler than the middle Mosel for instance, and many of the earliest pickers there did not get started until the 17<sup>th</sup> or 18<sup>th</sup> of the month and this was their earliest start to picking in the history of their estates! And yet, the Webers had already been gathering bunches for four or five days! The resulting wines are racy, minerally and tightly-knit, with the cut and grip of a cooler vintage, coupled with the beautifully ripe fruit of this fine vintage. The dry wines here are decidedly lower in octane than many examples from this vintage, due no doubt to the early harvest. They are absolutely*

*exceptional across the board and my scores were almost uniform as we climbed from wine to wine during our tasting, as the consistency of excellence here in 2018 is truly remarkable.*



*Erich Weber of Hofgut Falkenstein, sharing a laugh on a beautiful spring afternoon in his vineyards.*

*As I mentioned in the past, the Hofgut Falkenstein wines are wonderfully old school: everything fermented and aged in old fuders, using exclusively indigenous yeasts, with no de-acidification or acidulation and no chapitalization; Erich used to favor allowing most of his wines to ferment out to quite dry editions of Saar Riesling, but it seems that Johannes is not averse to a bit more residual sugar in some of the cuvées to balance out the Saar minerality and acidity, or at least this was the case with the 2018ers. The cellars are really more in line with what one expects in a small domaine in Burgundy from yesteryear, with plenty of mold on the walls, dark, damp and decidedly “low tech” in the best traditions of old school winemaking. Erich has been resistant to the recent changes in the wine laws that encourage dry Rieslings to be bottled without Prädikat information on the label, as he prefers to use the old system from the 1971 wine laws and bottle his wines with both a Prädikat level (to indicate must weight) and a designation of Trocken or Feinherb. As there is a bit of ground cover in the vineyards over the “mother rock” of slate in the Falkenstein vineyards, not to mention almost all old vines, they handled the drought conditions quite well in 2018 and this was probably one of the key factors that allowed the Webers to start picking as early as they did this year. The wines are truly exceptional from top to bottom, and I received an email from the estate soon after my visit that*

*Eric was sorry that he had forgotten to show his absolutely favorite Spätlese from the vintage during our tasting, as we were having such a good time chatting that he missed one of the casks!*

*One of the reasons for this is that Erich has nicknames for every bottling that he makes, which derive from funny stories that date back to previous owners of the vineyards or friends he used to spend time with way back in the old days when he was just starting out and they would lend a hand with tasks in the vineyards or cellars, in exchange for sharing a few good bottles of Saar Riesling when the work was finished up. For some of the wines below, I have appended the nickname to the tasting note, as with nothing yet bottled, there are not AP numbers assigned for every wine as of yet and this will at least help differentiate some of the different bottlings from different sections of a given vineyard. I was strongly advocating that Erich and Johannes add back labels to their wines that includes the nickname of the cuvée, with the attendant antidotes available on the winery's website for the curious, as the back stories for the wines are really often quite hilarious and I spent much of my afternoon here laughing heartily to Erich's telling the tales of each wine and its nickname! So, it is probably no surprise that we missed tasting Erich's favorite Spätlese in the cellar this year. Most of the 2018ers here were still in fuder, with a few leisurely finishing up their fermentations, but a few had completed everything ahead of the majority of the cellar and were already bottled. In the notes below, unless the wine is specifically mentioned as having already been bottled, then it was still in fuder.*

#### **2014 Hofgut Falkenstein Riesling Sekt (Zero Dosage)**

The non-dosé bottling of Sekt from 2014 was made simply as an experiment by Erich in 2014 and this was never made commercially available, but it was a tasty way to start our tasting, standing around an old barrel in the warm spring sunshine, overlooking the Herrenberg vineyard. The wine offers up a bright bouquet of apple, lemon, slate and a touch of dried flowers in the upper register. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and nicely mineral on the palate, with pinpoint bubbles and good length and grip, though not tremendous complexity. Very satisfying and we really should have finished the bottle in the sun, but there was a fairly big collection of 2018ers awaiting us in the cellars! 2019-2035+. **88.**

#### **2018 Weissburgunder Trocken- Hofgut Falkenstein**

It was tough to make Pinot Blanc in 2018 that has a lightness of step, due to the heat of the summer, but this is certainly the case with this pretty example from Hofgut Falkenstein. The wine comes in around ten percent octane (very low for a 2018 dry Pinot Blanc!) and offers up a stylish and open nose of peach, apple, slate and dried flowers. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and youthful in structure, with a good core, bright acids and good length and grip on the nicely delicate finish. If this develops a bit more complexity with bottle age, my score will seem conservative. 2019-2035. **88.**

#### **2018 Niedermenniger Herrenberg Riesling Kabinett Trocken- Hofgut Falkenstein AP #19**

As I mentioned before, the Herrenberg vineyard in Niedermennig (which cascades down from the cellar doors here) has a section of blue-grey slate and a section of red slate, and Erich Weber prefers to bottle each section on its own. He has sixty to eighty year-old vines in both sections, so the primary difference here is simply the variations of slate type. The 2018 Kabinett Trocken #19 is from the blue slate portion of the vineyard and is known in the cellars by its nickname of "Egon". The 2018 Egon Kabinett Trocken is a good bottle in the making, offering up a fine nose of green apple, grapefruit, lovely slate undertow and a topnote of lemongrass. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and zesty, with fine mineral drive, excellent focus and



grip and a long, primary and promising finish. This is a good bottle in the making. 2022-2045+. **90.**

**2018 Niedermenniger Sonnenberg Riesling Kabinett Trocken- Hofgut Falkenstein AP #9**

The wine from this section of the Sonnenberg vineyard has the nickname of “Muny”, though I cannot remember the backstory here- though I guarantee I laughed hearing Erich recount it! The Sonnenberg vineyard in Niedermennig is a very stony, grey slate hillside, and as the name might suggest, it has produced a slightly riper wine from its excellent sun exposition. The wine comes in at an even ten percent octane and offers up a lovely, citrus-infused nose of lime zest, tangerine, dried flowers, a fine signature of slate and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, medium-bodied, crisp and classy, with lovely intensity of flavor, snappy acids and a long, focused and complex finish. Fine juice. 2021-2050. **91+.**

**2018 Niedermenniger Herrenberg Riesling Kabinett Trocken- Hofgut Falkenstein AP #1**

This Herrenberg Kabinett Trocken hails from the red slate portion of the vineyard, and has the nickname of “Mutter Anna” for the village personality who eventually sold Erich this parcel, despite his having spent plenty of time enjoying an extra bottle or two of Riesling with her husband late in the evening back in the old days. He said he was quite touched when she decided to sell the parcel to him at the end of her life (her husband had passed away a bit earlier). This is going to be an outstanding bottle with a few years in the cellar and has the potential to last in the cellar easily thirty or forty years, as it is perfectly balanced. The bouquet offers up an excellent combination of tangerine, grapefruit, salty slate minerality, dried flowers and a whisper of wild yeasts in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and racy, with a lovely core, excellent minerality and superb focus and grip on the long, vibrant and very precise finish. First class Kabinett Trocken! 2022-2050+. **93.**

**2018 Krettnacher Altenenberg Riesling Feinherb (?) - Hofgut Falkenstein**

This wine had not quite finished off fermenting, but Erich suspected that it was not likely to get under the ten grams per liter threshold of residual sugar to be labeled as Trocken and would probably end up as a Feinherb. As I mentioned in my report after my 2014 visit here, the Altenberg vineyard in Krettnach is a mix of grey slate and a bit of Diabas, and the still percolating 2018 here shows good potential, though the nose is still a bit yeasty from the ongoing fermentation. The palate is far more settled than the nose and delivers a crisp, medium-full format of precise mineral drive, very pure fruit, zesty acids and excellent length and grip on the energetic finish. This will clearly be an excellent wine. 2022-2050. **90-92+.**

**2018 Krettnacher Altenenberg Riesling Spätlese Trocken- Hofgut Falkenstein AP #7**

This was the ripest of the Trocken wines in 2018, coming in around 10.5 percent alcohol and really showing outstanding potential. Erich estimates that this will finish up around 10.5 percent octane, and the wine will be excellent, as the bouquet soars from the glass in a mix of tart orange, lemon, wild yeasts, lovely, salty minerality and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is medium-full and really rock solid at the core, with beautiful balance and focus, bright, seamless acids and very impressive length and grip on the poised and nascently complex finish. This is a bit more structured out of the blocks and will need a bit more cellaring time to blossom, but it is a lovely wine in the making. 2025-2065. **93.**

**2018 Niedermenniger Herrenberg Riesling Spätlese Feinherb- Hofgut Falkenstein AP #11**

The nickname for this parcel is “Meyer Nepal”, which had something to do with the steepness of the slope here and a gentleman named Meyer, but I cannot recall the exact story (and further evidence why we need those back labels!). The 2018 “Meyer Nepal” version of Herrenberg Spätlese Feinherb comes in around eight percent octane and carries seamlessly about

thirty grams per liter of residual sugar, which buffers its excellent acids and vein of minerality most admirably. The bouquet is an outstanding blend of tangerine, lime, complex slate tones, a touch of wild yeasts and a topnote of orange peel. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish and beautifully balanced, with a good core, racy acids, excellent focus and depth and a long, pure and complex finish that ends with plenty of lift and grip. 2019-2050. **93+**.

**2018 Niedermenniger Herrenberg Riesling Spätlese Feinherb- Hofgut Falkenstein**

There was no AP number yet for this cuvée, or I failed to write it down in the mirth of the old stories about the nicknames, but the proper nickname for this bottling is “Deutschen”. This Feinherb Spätlese version from the Herrenberg is made from sixty year-old vines and with the fermentation having finished up a month before my visit, it was showing beautifully. The nose wafts from the glass in a mix of tangerine, fresh lime, salty slate minerality and a floral note redolent of citrus blossoms. On the palate the wine is fullish, complex and zesty, with lovely purity and soil signature, really lovely, crunchy fruit and fine detail and balance on the long and snappy finish. Lovely juice. 2022-2050. **93+**.

**2018 Niedermenniger Herrenberg Riesling Spätlese Feinherb- Hofgut Falkenstein**

This is yet another Spätlese Feinherb bottling from a different section of the Herrenberg, with the nickname of this parcel “Deutschen Herbert”, but I do not know what its AP number will be. The wine is really pretty and enticing on the nose, offering up a lovely constellation of pear, quince, spring flowers, a superb base of slate undertow and an exotic touch of violet in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, filigreed and beautifully balanced, with fine interplay of pristine fruit, salty minerality and zesty acids, fine focus and grip and a long, complex and utterly delicious finish. 2023-2060. **93**.

**2018 Krettnacher Euchariusberg Riesling Kabinett “Alte Reben”- Hofgut Falkenstein**

The nickname of this bottling is “Gisela” for a famous beauty in the village in Erich’s youth who many of the local boys had a crush on, and I am sure the nickname came along because of the stunning beauty of the wines produced from this parcel of very old, ungrafted vines. It is certainly fitting for this outstanding bottle of 2018 Kabinett! The wine carries forty-five grams per liter of residual sugar this year to go along with eleven grams of acidity and it is a taught, pure and utterly pristine wine on both the nose and palate. The bouquet delivers a lovely mix of lemon, green apple, slate salts, fruit blossoms, a whisper of wild yeasts and a topnote of lime peel. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, dancing and refined, with great purity and nascent complexity, lovely balance and a long, filigreed and utterly classic finish. A brilliant bottle of young Kabinett- add me to the long list of Gisela’s admirers! 2019-2050. **95**.

**2018 Im Kleinschock Riesling Kabinett- Hofgut Falkenstein**

Kleinschock is a separate hillside in the Sonnenberg vineyard in Niedermenniger, which is planted also with ungrafted vines, those these are only thirty years of age. The 2018 Im Kleinschock Kabinett (this may be the nickname for the wine, in which case it will be listed as from the Sonnenberg) has forty grams of RS and again, a racy eleven grams per liter of acidity (almost unheard of in 2018!) and offers up a nicely reserved, refined bouquet of pineapple, pear, slate, a hint of petrol and a topnote of spring flowers. On the palate the wine is pure, medium-full, delicate and minerally, with snappy acids, lovely focus and grip and a long, nascently complex finish. This is outstanding, but less charming out of the blocks than the Gisela that preceded it in the tasting, so it may prove that I have underrated it just a tad. 2021-2050. **93**.

**2018 Niedermenniger Herrenberg Riesling Spätlese Trocken- Hofgut Falkenstein AP #3**

The Herrenberg Spätlese Trocken AP #3 had been bottled two weeks prior to my visit and carries the nickname of “Palm” (hopefully on a future back label). The wine was still

showing very nicely, despite its recent *mise*, wafting from the glass in a mix of lemon, tart orange, gentle smokiness, a lovely base of slate and a touch of wild yeasts in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and seamless in its balance, with a good core, excellent focus and grip and a very long, simply electric finish. Great juice. 2021-2050+. **93+**.

**2018 Krettnacher Scharlazberg Riesling Kabinett- Hofgut Falkenstein AP #12**

The Scharlazberg lies next door to the Gisela parcel, but these fifty-five year-old vines are on grafted rootstocks. The nickname for this parcel is “Kugel Peter”. This is a beautiful Kabinett in the making, delivering an utterly classic, racy and medium-bodied format, with lovely intensity of flavor, snappy acids and great backend mineral drive on the long, nascently complex and vibrant finish. The first class bouquet delivers a blend of green apple, pink grapefruit, slate, petrol and a nice touch of Saar herbal complications in the upper register. This is a dynamite bottle in the making. 2026-2060. **94**.



*The beautifully restored estate of Hofgut Falkenstein; the cellars lie under this courtyard.*

**2018 Krettnacher Scharlazberg Riesling Spätlese- Hofgut Falkenstein AP #6**

Erich has designated this section of the Scharlazberg as “Klaus Lang” for a nickname, but I cannot recollect the precise story behind the name. While the analysis here had not been completed, this is around sixty-five grams per liter of residual sugar and has 10.5 grams of acidity, so this is again another really bright and racy example of the 2018 vintage. The bouquet is excellent, delivering scents of green apple, lime, white flowers, wild yeasts, a touch of bee

pollen and a very refined signature of slate minerality. On the palate the wine is medium-full, pure and vibrant, with impressive nascent complexity, fine focus and grip and a long, bouncy and beautifully balanced finish. 2024-2065+. **92+**.

**2018 Krettnacher Euchariusberg Riesling Spätlese- Hofgut Falkenstein AP #14**

This bottling is known affectionately as “Forster Ternes”, but again, I did not write down the backstory and will eagerly await further historical insights via the website (perhaps?) in the future. This is an outstanding Spätlese, delivering a fine aromatic constellation of lime, quince, salty minerality, bee pollen and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish, racy and complex, with excellent focus and bounce, seamless balance and a long, energetic and complex finish. Fine juice. 2024-2065. **93+**.

**2018 Krettnacher Altenenberg Riesling Spätlese- Hofgut Falkenstein**

The nickname for this cuvée is “Ober Scheifershaus” and hails from one of the warmer sections of the vineyard, with the soils here a combination of Diabas (green basalt) and slate. In the 2018 vintage, a bit warmer microclimate was probably not much of an advantage, but this wine is come through very nicely, delivering a fine bouquet of pear, apple, spring flowers, salty slate minerality and a whisper of honeycomb in the upper register. On the palate the wine is fullish, suave and very nicely balanced, with a lovely core, good balance and grip and a long, quite open and succulent finish. The acids here are very good, but with the warmer site, there is not quite the same electricity as in some of these other bottlings this year. 2019-2050. **91**.

**2018 Krettnacher Euchariusberg Riesling Auslese- Hofgut Falkenstein AP #5**

As I mentioned back in 2014, the Euchariusberg vineyard in Krettnach is a blue-grey slate *terroir*, and Erich’s parcel of eighty year-old, ungrafted vines in this section of the vineyard are used for this Auslese (as was also the case here in the 2013 vintage). This is the only Auslese in the cellar in 2018 and it was made with absolutely no botrytis, just shriveled, golden berries. The bouquet is pure, precise and absolutely superb, jumping from the glass in a blaze of pear, a touch of white cherry, bee pollen, a fine base of slate minerality and a potpourri of fruit blossoms up high. On the palate the wine is pure, full and seamless, with vibrant acids, laser-like focus, excellent length and grip and a perfectly balanced, lifted finish. Outstanding Auslese. 2028-2060+. **94**.

**Weingut Forstmeister Geltz-Zilliken (Saarburg)**

*Hanno and Dorothee Zilliken have fashioned a truly brilliant range of 2018ers and this is likely to be ranked as one of the greatest recent vintages at this estate, which is indeed high praise, as Hanno has been on a serious hot streak since I first came to visit him and taste his extraordinary range of 2005ers. Hanno Zilliken is now a sixty-eight years of age (and a decade older than me, though far fitter!), but he has not seemed to slow down a whole lot as far as I can see, though I have little doubt that he is delighted to now work side by side with his daughter and son-in-law at the property. The wines here now are truly a family collaborative effort, with Dorothee and her husband playing large parts in the ultimate crafting of each vintage of the estate’s wines today. This was quite evident at our tasting of the 2018ers in March, as Dorothee hosted us for the first hour, while “the boys” were still down in the cellars finishing up the day’s bottling. And no doubt the bottling here is going to be a particularly strenuous affair with the 2018ers, as the estate has produced fully twenty-four different wines in this vintage! There are some new cellar treasures on the way from the 2018 vintage from the Zilliken family, as there are several new cuvées that have been added to the lineup this year. These include a rather dramatic expansion of Grosses Gewächs bottlings, as Dorothee Zilliken noted that “the 2018*

*vintage gave us absolutely perfect grapes for making dry wines this year and we thought it would be crazy not to take advantage of this.” Consequently, not only is there a Rausch Grosses Gewächs this year, but it is also the very first year that the family has made a GG from their one hectare parcel in the Ockfener Bockstein. In addition, they have now begun to rent a one and a half hectare parcel of forty year-old vines in the Ayler Kupp vineyard, which they farm themselves and there is a really lovely new GG bottling from these vines as well in 2018. And finally, as if this was not enough, there is also going to be a special bottling of GG from a prime sector of the Rausch vineyard in 2018, the climat of which was traditionally known as the “Auf de Rausch” and from which the estate will make a special Grosses Gewächs cuvée in 2018 and which will be eventually auctioned off in Trier one day down the road. The Auf de Rausch is a very particular section of the overall vineyard, with a very high percentage of Diabas soil (green basalt) to go along with the grey slate, and the Zillikens will age this wine for fully two years in an ancient fuder prior to its bottling. So, though we had a chance to taste it in March, it is still very much a work in progress and it is early days for what seems likely to be an absolutely brilliant GG.*

*As I mentioned above, the start to the 2018 harvest was the very earliest on record at Weingut Zilliken, with the picking team out in the vineyards on September 24<sup>th</sup> and the last grapes brought in just over three weeks after the start. In contrast to last year, where Hanno and Dorothee felt that the strength of the vintage was not going to be for dry wines, the 2018 vintage presented the possibility to make absolutely superb dry wines here and this is the primary reason that there will ultimately be four different Grosses Gewächs bottlings in 2018. As Dorothee commented, “my father and I felt that we had maybe never seen better grapes from which to make dry wines than in this vintage.” And, the GGs here are indeed all absolutely brilliant wines in the making, with the style of the acids in this vintage giving them elegant, seamless personalities, great purity and mineral drive and probably, the possibility to drink on the relatively earlier side, as the acids are beautifully ripe and integrated and are not the customary snappy young acids of Saar Riesling. All come in at the svelte alcohol level of around twelve percent. Dorothee joked that “it is good that the 2018 dry wines may drink well from an earlier age, as someone (with her eyes cast over to Hanno) has been drinking and awful lot of the 2009 Rausch GG in the cellars these days!” Hanno laughed and responded “why not, the 2009 is drinking really well right now!” It is not only the Grosses Gewächs level of dry wines at Weingut Zilliken that merit serious attention in 2018, as I cannot recall ever having tasted better examples of the more entry level dry Rieslings here, with the Saarburg Alte Reben Trocken bottling in particular as good as many vintages of GG.*

*The family took the decision to not acidulate anything in 2018 and Hanno commented “that this was probably the best decision of the vintage that we took”, as the wines lack nothing for acidity and share a brilliant purity and elegance that will come to be the calling card for the 2018ers from the Zilliken family. I do not know if this would have been possible with added acidity in the wines. Most of the 2018 Zilliken wines are still well above eight grams per liter of acidity here, and with the pHs quite low, it seems like there is even more in each wine and there is plenty of Saar Riesling cut and grip in each and every cuvée. While 2018 presented the family with an extraordinary opportunity to make great dry wines, that is certainly not the only success of the lineup this year, as the off-dry and noble sweet wines are also absolutely brilliant. The Rausch Diabas bottling (essentially their GG with Feinherb level sweetness) is the finest I have*



*ever tasted from the estate in 2018, and the Prädikat wines are stellar from Kabinett all the way up to TBA! A handful of the wines had already been bottled, and many others were to be bottled in the next few days, so I have noted the wines that were already in bottle in the tasting notes below and if this is not mentioned, then it was still a cask sample. There is a Spätlese from the Bockstein vineyard as well here in this vintage, but it was bottled on the day of my visit and we did not taste it. 2018 is a great, great vintage for Weingut Zilliken and these wines are going to be cellar treasures for decades and decades to come!*



### ***Dry Wines***

#### **2018 Zilliken Riesling Trocken- Weingut Geltz-Zilliken AP #24 (screwcap)**

The 2018 Estate Riesling Trocken is a lovely wine from the Zillikens this year, coming in at 11.5 percent octane and offering up a lovely nose of grapefruit, lemon, slate, a touch of sea salts, lemongrass and just a whisper of wild yeasts in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, complex and nicely energetic on the backend, with a good core, fine focus and grip and a nice closing note of salinity on the long finish. This wine was already bottled. Really a lovely entry level wine and a fine value! 2019-2040. **88+**.

#### **2018 Saarburer Riesling Trocken- Weingut Geltz-Zilliken AP #23**

The Saarburer Trocken is another excellent wine in 2018, with a bit more depth, polish and complexity than the above bottling. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a mix of pink grapefruit, tart orange, white flowers, a lovely base of slate, gently smoky overtones and a



topnote of lemongrass. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish and really rock solid at the core, with ripe acids, fine mineral drive and a long, poised and zesty finish of impressive complexity and grip. This had been bottled only three weeks prior to our visit, so it may be even a shade better than my score suggests! Fine juice. 2020-2045. **90.**

**2018 Saarburger “Alte Reben” Riesling Trocken- Weingut Geltz-Zilliken AP #22**

There was no old vines bottling of Saarburger Trocken last year, but it is back in a big way in 2018! This cuvée is produced from old vines that range from sixty to one hundred and thirty years of age! The wine was also bottled three weeks ago, but was showing beautifully, offering up a deep and very pure bouquet of grapefruit, tart orange, an exotic touch of fresh coconut, smoke, mossy undertow and a superb base of slate minerality. On the palate the wine is fullish and marvelously deep in the mid-palate, with lovely complexity and focus, impeccable balance and a very long, elegant and vibrant finish. Also bottled three weeks ago. This is GG quality this year without a doubt. 2022-2055+. **92+.**

**2018 Ayler Kupp Grosses Gewächs- Weingut Geltz-Zilliken AP #21**

The new Ayler Kupp bottling is a very welcome addition to the Zilliken lineup, as these forty year-old vines have really produced a suave and classy bottle of GG in 2018. Hanno noted that this parcel of vines is lower down on the slope in Ayler Kupp, but it has produced marvelous fruit from which to craft a dry wine in this vintage. The nose delivers a superb and quite floral blend of citrus blossoms, white flowers, green apple, lemon, slate, orange peel and a fine mix of upper register spice elements. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and beautifully precise, with a fine core of fruit, excellent mineral drive and impressive backend lift on the complex finish. First class juice in every respect- welcome to the family! 2025-2065. **93.**

**2018 Bockstein Grosses Gewächs- Weingut Geltz-Zilliken AP #20**

I had often wondered what a Bockstein GG might taste like from the Zillikens and 2018 finally provided an answer. This is going to be another beautiful wine, as it jumps from the glass in an aromatic constellation of lemon, pink grapefruit, *fleur de sel*, citrus peel, white flowers and lemongrass. On the palate the wine is pure, full and very elegant in personality, with a fine core, bright, zesty acids and excellent focus and grip on the long, complex and vibrant backend. This too is really, really good. 2026-2065. **93+.**

**2018 Rausch Grosses Gewächs- Weingut Geltz-Zilliken AP #19**

Have I ever tasted a better Rausch Grosses Gewächs from the Zillikens? Probably not, as the 2018 is truly a legend in the making. The youthful bouquet is already showing the great complexity to come, offering up scents of pink grapefruit, a hint of blood orange, wild yeasts, a glorious bath of salty, slate minerality, lemongrass and plenty of Rausch smokiness in the upper register. No doubt, the marvelous vein of botanicals that this *terroir* often shows with a bit of bottle age are also lurking here on the nose. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and very refined in its structural chassis, with a very impressive core, ripe, seamless acids and simply outstanding length and grip on the electric and perfectly balanced finish. 2028-2075. **95+.**

**2018 Rausch “Auf de Rausch” Grosses Gewächs- Weingut Geltz-Zilliken AP #18**

As I mentioned above, it is still very early days for this new, Auf de Rausch bottling of GG, as Hanno and Dorothee Zilliken intend to age it fully two years on its very fine lees in its ancient fuder before bottling it. With its high percentage of Diabas soil type, the Auf de Rausch 2018 has quite a different aromatic personality from the regular Rausch GG, offering up a beautifully mossy gloss to its bouquet of tart orange, lemon, beautiful minerality, really lovely Rausch herbal tones, lime peel and a topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and nascently complex, with a relatively full-bodied format (though all of these Zilliken

GGs are sports cars this year that will hug the curves and fly down the highway), a very fine core of fruit, stellar mineral drive and a very, very long, poised and laser-like finish that perfectly synthesizes elements of citrus peel, salinity and spice on the long and energetic finish. This is not quantitatively much different from the regular Rausch GG today, but it is stylistically quite different and really is its own wine in every respect. It will be fascinating to revisit it down the road and see what its long, cool *elevage* in fuder will add to the equation. 2030-2080+. **96.**

### ***Off-Dry Wines***

#### **2018 Zilliken Riesling Butterfly- Weingut Geltz-Zilliken AP #17 (screwcap)**

The Butterfly bottling is very charming in 2018, as it offers up a bright bouquet of grapefruit, tart orange, salty minerality, dried flowers and a gentle topnote of smokiness. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and long, with good acids, fine focus and grip and just a whisper of backend sweetness adding generosity to the closing note of minerality. This is eleven percent alcohol in 2018 and seamlessly carries eighteen grams of residual sugar. A lovely and very flexible value for the table. Already bottled. 2019-2030. **89.**

#### **2018 Saarburger Riesling Feinherb- Weingut Geltz-Zilliken AP #16**

I really liked a lot of the Feinherb bottlings I tasted from this vintage and the 2018 Saarburger Feinherb from the Zillikens is no exception. This wine had been bottled two weeks before my visit, but was showing nicely and may even be a hair better than my note suggests. The wine is again eleven percent octane, carries 16.4 grams per liter of residual sugar and has acids of 7.4 grams per liter, but with the low pH, seems snappier than that number might suggest. The wine wafts from the glass in an excellent blend of sweet grapefruit, orange, white flowers, a beautiful base of slate, quite a bit of the vintage's salinity, smoky overtones and a lovely glaze of Rausch herbal tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full and really long and vibrant on the backend, with a fine core of fruit, excellent soil signature, bright acids and excellent lift and complexity on the long finish. This is really, really good wine this year! 2019-2045. **91.**

#### **2018 Rausch "Diabas" Riesling Feinherb- Weingut Geltz-Zilliken AP #15**

I have long been a fan of Hanno Zilliken's Diabas bottling, as this is essentially a Grosses Gewächs that finds its perfect balance with a level of residual sugar a bit above the legal limit for Trocken. This year, the Diabas comes in carrying 17.5 grams of residual sugar and is 11.5 percent octane, making it a cool, precise and very classy customer. The bouquet is flat out gorgeous right out of the blocks, soaring from the glass in a mix of lime zest, pink grapefruit, lovely mossy tones, slate, smoke, orange blossoms and a quite overt note of *fleur de sel* in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish and marvelously complex, with a generous kiss of fruit on the attack, lovely backend mineral drive and filigree and superb cut, energy and lift on the long and complex finish. This is a great wine by any measure! 2019-2050. **94+.**

### ***Traditional, Prädikat Wines***

#### **2018 Zilliken Riesling- Weingut Geltz-Zilliken AP #14 (screwcap)**

The 2018 Estate Riesling from the Zilliken family had been bottled at the start of February and was showing very nicely indeed, with the wine coming in at 9.5 percent alcohol and carrying eight grams per liter of acidity and forty grams per liter of residual sugar this year, giving it a gently fruity personality. The bouquet is bright and stylish, wafting from the glass in a mix of fresh pineapple, tart orange, salty minerality and a floral topnote redolent of lemon blossoms. On the palate the wine is medium-full, vibrant and complex, with good bounce and cut

and just a whisper of new oak influence from the newer, large fuder in which it was raised this year. The whisper of vanillin oak is a very interesting addition here and actually works very nicely with this wine. 2019-2030+. **89.**

**2018 Rausch Riesling Kabinett- Weingut Geltz-Zilliken AP #13**

The 2018 Rausch Kabinett was scheduled for bottling on April 1<sup>st</sup> and was showing beautifully at the time of my visit. The bouquet is already showing some of the classical filigree of this Prädikat level at its best, offering up scents of grapefruit, pear, salty slate, white flowers, a hint of Rausch mossiness and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, crisp and complex, with fine mineral drive, excellent focus and grip and the delicate stop on the long finish of a classic example of Kabinett. Fine juice in the making. 2019-2050+. **92+.**

**2018 Rausch Riesling Spätlese- Weingut Geltz-Zilliken AP #11**

The “regular” bottling of Spätlese from the Rausch vineyard is outstanding in 2018, with a crystal clear personality and outstanding mineral undertow. The bouquet jumps from the glass in a mix of pink grapefruit, fresh pineapple, a hint of mossiness, wild yeast, citrus peel, a fine base of slate and an esthery topnote of bee pollen. On the palate the wine is pure, medium-full, vibrant and filigreed, with lovely intensity of flavor, impeccable focus and grip and a long, zesty and very complex finish. Excellent wine. 2023-2065. **94.**

**2018 Rausch Riesling Auslese- Weingut Geltz-Zilliken AP #10**

While I had been unlucky with my timing as far as tasting the Bockstein Spätlese this year, it was perfect for the Rausch Auslese, as this was to be bottled the following day and was still available to sample and showing beautifully. The bouquet is pure and shows a lovely touch of creaminess to its fruit expression, offering up a mix of pineapple, yellow plum, a beautiful base of minerality, bee pollen, violets, orange blossoms and a very, very discreet whisper of vanilla from its *elevage* in a newer fuder. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish, deep and complex, with lovely acids and grip, beautiful balance and a long, nascently complex and very energetic finish. This will be a lovely example of a zero botrytis Auslese. 2023-2075. **93.**

**2018 Rausch Riesling Spätlese (Auction Bottling)- Weingut Geltz-Zilliken AP #7**

The 2018 Auction Spätlese from the Zillikens was also bottled on the day of my visit, but Hanno had reserved a sample for us to try prior to the bottling. This is a brilliant wine in the making, with the beautiful concentration of flavors and aromatics from perfectly ripe, specially selected grapes, and an electric personality. The bouquet soars from the glass in a blaze of pineapple, a hint of mango, bee pollen, gentle smokiness, a great base of salty slate minerality and the first hints of the mossiness of the Rausch in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, precise and snappy, with stunning intensity of flavor, great cut and grip and a very, very long, soaring and stunning finish. Sheer brilliance. 2025-2065. **96.**

**2018 Rausch Riesling Auslese Goldkapsel- Weingut Geltz-Zilliken AP #5**

Hanno Zilliken has always been a master of botrytis, so it is a great pleasure to taste an amazing range of upper Prädikat wines from he and his daughter Dorothee that are utterly devoid of noble rot and simply the product of desiccated, golden berries in 2018. The Gold Kapsel Auslese from the Rausch is gorgeous, offering up a refined and vibrant constellation of orange, mango, pineapple, really gorgeous slate undertow, a whisper of the herbal character of this vineyard, incipient smokiness and a floral topnote of orange blossoms. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, zesty and laser-like in its focus, with a beautiful core, lovely transparency and grip and a very long, super clean and racy finish. Stunning juice in the making! 2026-2080. **94+.**

#### **2018 Rausch Riesling Auslese Lange Goldkapsel Verst.- Weingut Geltz-Zilliken AP #4**

The 2018 Lange Goldkapsel Auslese from the Rausch will be another auction wine in Trier in September and it seems likely to be one of the stars of the show when the time comes. This is even more concentrated and exotic from further concentrated, clean as a whistle golden berries, as the wine delivers a beautiful bouquet of lemon curd, lime, a hint of the *mirabelle* to come, gentle botanicals, honeycomb and a lovely base of mineral salts. On the palate the wine is very pure, very precise and gorgeously complex, with snappy acids, great focus and grip and a very, very long, utterly brilliant finish. Another beautiful wine. 2026-2080. **95.**

#### **2018 Rausch Riesling Trockenbeereenauslese- Weingut Geltz-Zilliken AP #2**

It is very rare to taste a stunning TBA that is made without any botrytis, but the Zillikens have a magical one waiting in the wings from the 2018 vintage. This wine has three hundred and fifty grams per liter of residual sugar and eight grams per liter of acidity, without even a whisper of botrytis! The youthful nose is magical, wafting from the glass in a mix of mango, pineapple, tangerine, yellow plum, honeycomb, citrus zest and a whisper of Rausch smokiness. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish, complex and amazingly light on its feet and electric, with great focus and grip, perfect balance and a very, very long, vibrant and utterly refined finish. This will drink brilliantly for a hundred years! 2018-2120. **98.**

#### **Weingut Peter Lauer (Ayl)**

*I had not had a chance to visit Florian Lauer at Weingut Peter Lauer in a few years, but my brief look into his 2017ers last May during the Mythos Mosel tastings reminded me of just how big a mistake it was not visiting the estate every year and I made a point of scheduling a proper visit here on this trip in March. As Florian was very busy in the cellars during my trip, with bottling imminent for many of his 2018ers, I was very graciously hosted for the tasting by his sister, Katharina Lauer. As I had only tasted a small slice of the family's lineup of 2017ers during last year's Mythos Mosel tastings, Katharina generously showed me a few more of the wines from the previous year as well, and we often had the opportunity to compare a certain cuvée from both 2017 and 2018 side by side during our tasting. The Lauer family began harvesting in 2018 on September 18<sup>th</sup> this year, and as was the case at so many other of the most successful estates, they were able to take their time and make their selections with great precision, as the weather held beautifully. Their last bunches, targeted for late harvest, upper Prädikat wines, were brought in at the end of October this year, so they had fully six weeks of good weather to bring in the grapes in 2018. The 2018ers were all still in cask and in preparation for bottling, so the final analyses were not yet completed, but Katharina supplied the general technical details for each wine, where she knew them. A few of the 2018ers were still a bit yeasty from later finishing fermentations (including all of the Grosses Gewächs here) and I have either scored them in a range or not scored them, if they were a bit too agitated still to be perfectly reflective of their underlying potential. But, in general terms, the 2018 vintage is clearly very successful for Florian Lauer and is a fine follow-up to his excellent 2017ers.*

*As readers will recall, Florian Lauer likes to use cask numbers for his wines, and hence almost of them are listed on the label with their "Faß" number, rather than the name of the village, vineyard and Prädikat level. Happily, Katharina Lauer had a sheet prepared for me that outlined each "Faß" number for me and it was quite easy to keep the wines straight, but I would have a hard time doing so without my "cheat sheet". I am sure this approach is preferable for Florian, as it allows him to make each cuvée in a general style of dry, off-dry or sweeter wine,*

*without having to try to push a vintage into a given box such as Trocken and get the residual sugars down under ten grams. In certain vintages, one can have a beautifully balanced dry wine at twelve or thirteen grams of residual sugar, and by labeling each wine with its own “Faß” number, one does not need to push a dry wine with a touch more sugar down below the official Trocken threshold. As the Lauer family has significant holdings in the beautiful Kupp vineyard in their home village of Ayl, their practice is to bottle different historic sections of this vineyard on their own, rather than make larger blends from different sections of the Kupp. A few examples of these sectional names within the Kupp would include Stirn, Unterstenberg and Kern. While we had a deep and broad tasting of both the 2018 and 2017 vintages during my visit here, I was a bit pressed for time (hoping to finish up the day with Helmut Dönnhoff in the Nahe many, many kilometers away!), I did not taste any of Florian’s sparkling wines on this trip, which to my palate, remain the very finest I have ever tried from Germany. However, I did not that the estate still has on their price list both the 1992 and the 1996 Sekt Réserve available for sale, and I was sorry not to have a chance to try either wine!*



*Katharina Lauer in the estate’s tasting room in the center of the village of Ayl.*

### **2018 Ayler Kupp Riesling “Faß 2”- Weingut Peter Lauer**

The Faß 2 is listed on the Lauer family’s price sheet as “Extra Dry” and with a residual sugar level of 1.2 grams per liter, which is the level for the 2017 version below. The 2018 has a touch more sugar in it, as Katharina estimated that it had finished up around 3.5 grams in this latter vintage. The wine is lovely, offering up a deep and nicely ripe bouquet of grapefruit, tart orange, a touch of peach, lemongrass, salty minerality and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate

the wine is crisp, fullish and shows a nice touch of ripe fruit on the attack, a lovely core, bright acids and fine length and grip on the very nicely balanced finish. This will be lovely and a fine, fine value. 2022-2045. **89.**

**2017 Ayler Kupp Riesling “Faß 2”- Weingut Peter Lauer**

The 2017 vintage of Faß 2 comes in at 12.5 percent octane and is quite dry, as mentioned above, at just over one gram of sugar. The wine is youthful, but shows lovely promise, with the nose wafting from the glass in a mix of pink grapefruit, orange peel, plenty of smokiness, a fine base of slate, wild yeasts and a nice hint of Saar herb tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, racy and nascently complex, with great focus, cut and grip and a long, poised and perfectly balanced finish. This will need a year or two longer in the cellar to start to stir than the 2018 version, but it too is going to be an excellent bargain. 2023-2055. **90.**

**2018 Ayler Riesling “Faß 25”- Weingut Peter Lauer**

The Faß 25 from 2018 was showing lovely potential at the time of my visit, but I did not get any of the approximate details on the wine in terms of acids or sugars. The bouquet is quite smoky out of the blocks (and still showing a bit of its yeasts from the cask), offering up scents of quince, tart orange, citrus peel, a lovely touch of wild yeasts, salty minerality and a topnote of lemongrass. On the palate the wine is pure, ripe and deep, with a full-bodied format, bright acids and lovely backend mineral drive on the long, nascently complex and zesty finish. This is a lovely bottle of dry Riesling in the making. 2022-2050. **90+.**

**2017 Ayler Riesling “Faß 25”- Weingut Peter Lauer (Screwcap)**

This is a really beautiful wine in 2017 and I would certainly have bottled it under a natural cork, as it could have aged for decades and decades! Alas, it is a screwcap, but inside is a stellar bottle, offering up a beautiful bouquet of green apple, pink grapefruit, spring flowers, a bit of orange peel, lovely soil tones and a topnote of lemongrass. On the palate the wine is crisp, fullish and razor-sharp in its focus, with an excellent core of fruit, racy acids and outstanding backend precision on the long and perfectly balanced finish. Serious juice. 2021-2055. **92.**

**2018 Feils Riesling Grosses Gewächs ” Faß 13”- Weingut Peter Lauer**

The 2018 Feils GG was still a bit yeasty and adolescent on the nose, but the palate was a bit less grumpy and easier to read. This will clearly be an excellent wine, as it is fullish, crisp and quite elegant in profile this year, with a superb core, fine focus and grip and lovely acid lift on the long and energetic finish. The bouquet was just too unsettled to take note of, but the overall wine is clearly going to be very, very fine. 2023-2065+. **92-93+.**

**2018 Kupp Riesling Grosses Gewächs “Faß 18”- Weingut Peter Lauer**

The 2018 Kupp GG was the most on form of the three that I sampled during my visit, and this is clearly going to be a superb example of the vintage. The bouquet is showing some lovely elements, wafting from the glass in a mix of tart peach, orange, a beautiful base of slate, lemongrass, gentle smokiness, a bit of sea salts and a topnote of wild yeasts. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, racy and nicely precise, with a fine core of fruit, excellent mineral drive, bright acids and lovely cut and grip on the long and very promising finish. This will be lovely. 2025-2065. **93-94+.**

**2018 Schonfels Riesling Grosses Gewächs “Faß 11”- Weingut Peter Lauer**

Unfortunately, the 2018 Schonfels GG was the most out of sorts of the three grand crus and was impossible to really get a read on in its youthfully yeasty and adolescent stage.

**2018 Lambertskirch Riesling Trocken- Weingut Peter Lauer**

The Lambertskirch is a new vineyard in the Lauer family’s lineup, as Florian had to clear and reclaim this vineyard and I believe that the 2018 will be the first bottling from this parcel



(but I am not certain of this); presumably it will be a Grosses Gewächs bottling, as it lies right next to the Schonfels and had an excellent reputation back in the day. In any event, the 2018 Lamberts Kirch Riesling Trocken is a young and very promising wine as well. The bouquet offers up a lovely blend of peach, grapefruit, tart orange, wild yeasts, citrus peel, lemongrass and a fine base of salty slate minerality. On the palate the wine is fullish, pure and quite elegant in profile, with a lovely core of fruit, excellent transparency and a long, complex and zesty finish. This has outstanding potential. 2023-2065. **93-94+**.

**2018 Ayler Kupp Riesling Faß 6 “Senior”- Weingut Peter Lauer**

The Senior bottling from Florian Lauer is one of his “village wine” bottlings, at least to his mind, though it comes entirely from the Ayler Kupp vineyard. This was one of the few 2018ers that had already been bottled prior to my visit, so its technical details were available and the wine comes in at 11.5 percent octane and carries thirteen grams of sugar this year, so it is essentially a dry wine, but not under the Trocken threshold. It is a fine wine in the making, offering up a complex nose of green peach, orange peel, salty minerality, dried flowers and plenty of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is crisp, fullish and beautifully pure on the attack, with vibrant acids, good focus and grip, plenty of mid-palate depth and a long, complex and very classy finish. This is a fine, fine value! 2019-2045. **91**.

**2018 Unterstenberg Riesling “Faß 12”- Weingut Peter Lauer**

The 2018 Unterstenberg Riesling “Faß 12” was still in cask, but was showing beautiful potential. Katharina Lauer estimated that this wine will settle in somewhere between twelve and thirteen grams of sugar in this vintage. The wine was showing lovely aromatic complexity, wafting from the glass in a blend of salty minerality, plenty of smokiness, tart peaches and oranges, lemongrass and wild yeasts. On the palate the wine is long, full-bodied, suave on the attack and very classy in overall personality, with a full-bodied format, lovely focus and grip and a long, zesty and very precise finish. The fruit tones here are really, really lovely, while still letting the minerality drive the bus. 2022-2060+. **92-93**.

**2017 Unterstenberg Riesling “Faß 12”- Weingut Peter Lauer**

The 2017 Unterstenberg Riesling “Faß 12” from Florian Lauer is an outstanding wine. This is twelve percent octane in 2017 and hails from a parcel that is at the foot of the hill in the Kupp. It jumps from the glass in a fine aromatic constellation of pink grapefruit, green orange, salty elements, dried flowers, lovely slate undertow and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish and nicely reserved out of the blocks, with a fine core, excellent acids and grip and a long, primary finish that closes with excellent mineral drive. First class juice and essentially dry in profile, no matter what the sugar numbers might indicate. 2023-2065. **92**.

**2018 Neuenberg Riesling “Faß 17”- Weingut Peter Lauer**

The parcel of Neuenberg lies near to the Unterstenberg at the foot of the Kupp vineyard, but this section has a westerly exposition. The 2018 version was still a bit yeasty and adolescent on the nose at the time of my visit, but the palate was more on form and really made a positive impression. The wine is fullish, pure and has a really lovely core of fruit, with great acids for the vintage, fine focus and grip and a long, vibrant and racy finish. Though the bouquet was still too yeasty to take a proper note on, this wine is clearly going to be excellent. 2022-2065. **92-94**.

**2017 Neuenberg Riesling “Faß 17”- Weingut Peter Lauer**

Happily, there was the 2017 Neuenberg sitting there ready to sample and it was really singing for such a young wine. This wine comes in at twelve percent alcohol and is very, very promising on both the nose and palate, albeit still properly reserved at such a young age. The bouquet delivers scents of lemon, grapefruit, tart peach, salty slate minerality, white flowers and

lemongrass. On the palate the wine is crisp, medium-full and very refined, with an excellent core, great soil signature, impeccable focus and balance and a long, nascently complex and classy finish. First class juice. 2024-2065. **93+**.

**2018 Riesling “Faß 3”- Weingut Peter Lauer**

Florian Lauer’s 2018 Riesling “Faß 3” was another of the wines already bottled at the time of my visit. The wine comes in at ten percent alcohol, carries thirty-six grams of sugar and has acids of 9.6 grams in 2018. The bouquet is superb and very salty in its expression of minerality this year, offering up a lovely blend of lemon, grapefruit, sea salts, a touch of Saar herb tones and a lovely topnote of citrus blossoms. On the palate the wine is medium-full, filigreed, complex and almost electric in its acids, with beautiful balanced between pure fruit, vivid minerality and those snappy acids. The finish is long, focused and shows off great grip and backend lift. Outstanding juice. 2019-2050. **93.**

**2018 Stirn Riesling “Faß 15”- Weingut Peter Lauer**

The Stirn parcel in the Kupp vineyard lies at the very summit of that grand cru vineyard and is very stony and windy. The 2018 version was still in cask, but was showing excellent potential. The bouquet offers up a mix of lemon, tart orange, smoky overtones, salty minerality, dried flowers and orange zest. On the palate the wine is medium-full, pure and nicely filigreed, with really lovely fruit tones, bright acids and plenty of mineral tug on the long and complex finish. This is going to be very, very good. 2023-2060. **93-94.**

**2018 Kern Riesling “Faß 9”- Weingut Peter Lauer**

The Kern is a top to bottom slice of the Kupp vineyard that lies over on the westerly side of the hillside and its exposition is southwesterly. With its higher percentage of afternoon sun, there is a bit more of an exotic overtone here in 2018, as the nose wafts from the glass in a fine blend of passion fruit, papaya, lemongrass, a fine, fine base of slate and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish, focused and rock solid at the core, with superb acids and grip, refined balance and a very long, vibrant finish. This too is going to be outstanding. 2022-2060. **93-94.**

**2018 Ayler Kupp Riesling Kabinett “Faß 8”- Weingut Peter Lauer**

The 2018 Faß 8 Kabinett from the Kupp is a beautiful example of this Prädikat level. The wine comes in at 7.5 percent alcohol and carries sixty-eight grams of sugar, but these are countered by truly exceptional acids of 10 grams this year. The bouquet is pure and nicely “cool fruit” in its composition, offering up a lovely blend of lemon, grapefruit, salty slate minerality, white flowers and an esthery topnote of bee pollen. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, filigreed and light on its feet, with lovely intensity of flavor, great purity and focus, zesty acids and a long, dancing and complex finish. There will also be an Auction Kabinett from the Kupp this year, which will be marked as Faß 5, but which I did not sample. However, the Faß 8 is a beautiful bottle of Kabinett. 2019-2060. **94.**

**2018 Ayler Kupp Riesling Spätlese “Faß 7” - Weingut Peter Lauer**

The 2018 Faß 7 Kupp Spätlese is also a very lovely wine in the making. The bouquet is bright and promising, wafting from the glass in a mix of apple, salty minerality, bee pollen, sea salts and a floral topnote redolent of lilacs. On the palate the wine is medium-full and again, beautifully filigreed, with a lovely core, excellent mineral drive, bright acids and lovely focus and grip on the long and complex finish. A fine Spätlese that comes in at eight percent octane, carries ninety grams of sugar and has nine grams of acidity. 2019-2060. **92+.**

### **2018 Ayler Kupp Riesling Auslese Goldkapsel “Faß 10”- Weingut Peter Lauer**

There is some very clean botrytis included in the Faß 10 Goldkapsel Auslese, which offers up a gorgeous nose of pineapple, tangerine, honeycomb, lilacs, salty soil tones, citrus peel and a topnote of wild yeasts. On the palate the wine is pure, delicate in style and medium-full, with lovely purity and mineral signature for a Gold Kap. The finish is very, very long, vibrant and almost delicate in style and very, very impressive. 2025-2075. 93.

### **2018 Ayler Kupp Riesling Auslese Lange Goldkapsel- Weingut Peter Lauer**

The Long Goldkapsel Auslese from the Kupp vineyard has a bit more botrytis than the Faß 10 bottling above, but again, it is striking with the how clean and pure the botrytis is here. The bouquet offers up a beautiful and gently tropical nose of passion fruit, pineapple, a hint of blood orange, a lovely dollop of soil salinity, honeycomb and a floral topnote of tropical flowers. On the palate the wine is pure, delicate and beautifully focused and balanced, with a creamy core, bright framing acids and a very, very long, refined and complex finish. This is lovely. 2019-2075. 94.

### **Weingut Egon Müller (Scharzhof)**

*As will come as a surprise to no one, Egon Müller and his team have made absolutely lovely wines in 2018. Demonstrating how very successful estates could attack the 2018 vintage in a wide variety of stylistic approaches, the wines here are mostly classically-styled Prädikat wines this year, with plenty of beautifully clean and pure botrytis in the Auslesen bottlings and even a touch of glaze in some of the Spätlesen. However, breaking with the long-standing tradition here, Egon has also tucked a little dry Riesling away from the Scharzhofberg this year that may well end up being the very first ever release of a Grosses Gewächs bottling in the history of the estate. Egon Müller once told me that every excellent bottle of dry German Riesling that he ever tasted always left him with the sensation that “yes, this is an excellent wine, but it would be even better if it had been made as a sweet wine!” However, the amazingly high quality of the grapes in 2018 have given him the opportunity to explore the possibility of a GG here and we may see one in the future from the 2018 vintage being trotted out for a future auction in Trier, but according to our host for this tasting, Veronika Lintner, nothing has yet been decided in this regard. In any event, the 2018 vintage was only the third harvest ever started in September in the history of this great estate, following on the heels of 2017 and 2003, with picking getting started on September 24<sup>th</sup> and every last bunch having been brought in by the middle of October. All the Prädikat wines here had already been bottled at the time of my visit, with the Kabinetten and Spätlesen having been bottled two weeks prior to my visit and the Auslesen only five days earlier. Despite the recent mise, everything was really showing beautifully at the time of my visit and this is very clearly destined to be a great vintage for Egon Müller, and in addition to the wines we tasted below, there was still a bit of Lange Goldkapsel and Trockenbeerenauslese still down in the cellars that were gently bubbling away and had not quite finished up their fermentations. There will be no auction Spätlese from the estate in 2018, as there is a lot more Auslese in the cellars than Spätlese this year, as the Scharzhofberg and the Braune Kupp vineyards both developed a good level of very clean botrytis this year and there will be more Auslesen as a result.*



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

*As was the case at several other top estates who realized success in the 2018 vintage, the wines here are generally between a half and a full percent higher in alcohol in this vintage than was the case in 2017. For example, the Scharzhof QbA bottling is 10.5 percent octane in 2018, whereas the 2017 version came in at 9.5 percent, so the younger vintage of this bottling is just a bit more powerfully styled this year. Though the acids are across the board a bit lower than in 2017 here, Veronika commented that the low pHs this year give the wines the impression of higher acidity than the numbers in the analyses suggest. This was echoed at almost every estate I visited this year that had good success in the vintage. Though the alcohol levels are a hair higher in 2018 than last year, the wines do not come across as more powerful in style (other than the Scharzhof QbA, which is a bit fuller-bodied than the 2017) or overly rich, but rather just classic Egon Müller wines from a top flight vintage. The acids here are perfectly respectable with many between 7.5 and 8.5 grams per liter, and they seem plenty snappy and the underlying mineral drive here is beautifully saline in personality this year, as is also the case at many other of the most successful estates in the 2018 vintage. There are changes to the team at the winery coming, as long time Cellar Master Stefan Fobian has moved on after the 2018 vintage had completed its fermentations and he has been replaced by his assistant, Heiner Bollig. As Herr Bollig had worked at his side for some time, it is hard to imagine that any changes will be afoot in terms of style or quality, especially given Egon Müller's hands on oversight here in any case, but it is*

*interesting that a change at Cellar Master has happened at the same time the first GG from the winery is potentially in the works down in the cellars from 2018.*

### **2018 Scharzhof Riesling QbA- Weingut Egon Müller**

The 2018 Scharzhof QbA was bottled a bit earlier than anything else in the cellars this year, as the *mise* for this wine was on the last day of February of 2019. The wine carries twenty-eight grams of residual sugar this year and is 10.5 percent alcohol, so it is a bit fuller-bodied in personality than the 2017. However, the wine is lovely in 2018, offering up a classic nose of green apple, petrol, pear, wild yeasts and a fine base of slate minerality. On the palate the wine is deep, full and nicely mineral in personality, with good, broad shoulders, fine cut and grip and a long, focused and nascently complex finish. Good juice. 2022-2050. **89.**

### **2018 Scharzhofberger Riesling Kabinett- Weingut Egon Müller**

There are only two Kabinetten from the Scharzhofberg this year, with an old vine bottling also produced. The “regular” Kabinett (this sobriquet seems rather inappropriate when discussing an Egon Müller wine!) is 9.5 percent in alcohol, carries around fifty grams per liter of residual sugar and has acids of 8.5 grams and very low pH this year. The wine is young and very promising, offering up scents of apple, lime, petrol, slate, wild yeasts and an exotic touch of violet in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and fairly powerful in personality, with excellent depth and focus, excellent mineral drive and simply superb grip on the long and very well-balanced finish. As this was just bottled, my score may even be a touch conservative. 2025-2065+. **91-92.**

### **2018 Scharzhofberger Riesling Kabinett “Alte Reben”- Weingut Egon Müller**

The old vine bottling of Kabinett from the Scharzhofberg in 2018 is an outstanding wine in the making. I did not jot down its technical details, but it is a more detailed and crystalline example than the regular bottling, offering up a lovely bouquet of pear, fresh lime, a nice touch of orange zest, salty slate minerality, lilacs and white flowers. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, complex and really snapped back into place after its recent bottling, with a lovely core, great mineral signature, snappy acids and a very, very long, very promising finish. This was really showing beautifully. 2028-2080. **94.**

### **2018 Braune Kupp Riesling Kabinett- Weingut le Gallais**

We do not see too many Kabinetten bottlings from the Braune Kupp vineyard these days, as this is a lower vineyard down by the river, and therefore really well positioned for botrytis, but in 2018 Egon Müller was able to produce a bit of Kabinetten as well. This is a lovely wine in the making, offering up a very stylish nose of pear, a touch of white cherry, fresh mint, slate, white flowers and a lovely base of slate. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish, long and complex, with a fine core of fruit, impressive focus and grip and a long, nascently complex and zesty finish. This sort of straddles the line between Kabinett and light Spätlese right now, but I am sure that with some bottle age and time for the puppy fat to fade a bit, it will be a very, very satisfying Kabinett. 2024-2065. **92.**

### **2018 Braune Kupp Riesling Spätlese- Weingut le Gallais**

The 2018 Braune Kupp Spätlese includes about twenty percent botrytis this year, according to Veronika Lintner, as the vineyard is down close to the river and prone to morning fogs. It is a very gentle touch of botrytis, as the wine is very pure and vibrant, offering up a nose of pear, white cherries, slate, bee pollen, a touch of wild yeasts and a lovely floral topnote of citrus blossoms. On the palate the wine is crisp, fullish and complex, with lovely detail and slate undertow, fine focus and excellent cut and grip on the bouncy finish. This is really good, and

given that it was only bottled a couple of weeks ago, I may only be seeing part of the picture here! 2023-2065+. **92+**.

**2018 Scharzhofberger Riesling Spätlese- Weingut Egon Müller**

This is the only Spätlese from the Scharzhofberg this year and it is a beauty. The wine is bright, pure and aromatically expressive (particularly for right after its *mise*), wafting from the glass in a refined blend of pear, white cherries, a lovely base of slate, bee pollen, lime blossoms and still a touch of wild yeasts in the upper register. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, complex and beautifully detailed, with a lovely core, bright acids and a long, vibrant and very classy finish. A quintessential Egon Müller Scharzhofberger Spätlese. 2026-2080. **94**.

**2018 Braune Kupp Riesling Auslese - Weingut le Gallais**

The 2018 Auslese from the Braune Kupp is really a lovely wine, with a glaze of beautifully clean botrytis defining the wine on both the nose and palate. The bouquet is a lovely mix of white cherries, pear, lime blossoms, fresh mint, slate, bee pollen and violets. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and racy in profile, with a creamy core of fruit, lovely mineral underpinnings, fine focus and grip and a long, zesty and lifted finish. Lovely juice. 2026-2080+. **94**.

**2018 Scharzhofberger Riesling Auslese- Weingut Egon Müller**

There is more botrytis character to the Scharzhofberger Auslese this year than in the Braune Kupp, and this is particularly evident on the more tropical touch found on the backend here. The nose is really refined and classy, wafting from the glass in a youthful blend of pear, lime zest, white cherries, a touch of mint, lilacs, honeycomb, gentle minerality and a wide array of citrus blossoms. On the palate the wine is deep, full, pure and complex, with a great core, impressive backend mineral drive and a long, zesty and beautifully balanced finish. This is going to take longer to fully blossom than the Braune Kupp Auslese, but it is going to be outstanding in the fullness of time. 2032-2100. **95**.

**2018 Scharzhofberger Riesling Auslese Goldkapsel- Weingut Egon Müller**

The 2018 Goldkapsel Auslese from the Scharzhofberg is utterly brilliant and shows how remarkably clean and pure the botrytis was in this vintage. This gloriously glazed beauty offers up an aromatic constellation of lime, mango, white cherries, honeycomb, violets, orange blossoms and a lovely dollop of slate keeping the tropical fireworks grounded in this terrestrial world. On the palate the wine is pure, full, racy and absolutely bottomless at the core, with great cut and grip, stunning lightness of step for such a beautifully botrytized wine and great lift and bounce on the very, very long and pure finish. This is a great, great wine in the making. 2030-2100. **97**.

**Reichsgraf von Kesselstatt (Morscheid)**

*This was my first proper visit to Reichsgraf von Kesselstatt as well, for though I have admired these wines for many, many years, I had never spent enough time on the road in Germany to have the opportunity to schedule a proper visit to this outstanding estate. Reichsgraf von Kesselstatt is one of the largest vineyard owners in the greater Mosel, with fully forty-six hectares of vines scattered amongst many of the crown jewel terroirs of the middle Mosel, the Ruwer and the Saar. In the middle Mosel, these include vines in the Goldtröpfchen in Piesport, the Juffer-Sonnenuhr in Brauneberg, the Sonnenuhr in Wehlen and the Domprobst and Monopole Josephshöfer in the village of Graach. Many estates would count themselves extremely fortunate to have just this lineup of grand crus, but in the Saar Reichsgraf von Kesselstatt also has parcels in the Scharzhofberg and Gottesfus in Wiltingen and the Bockstein in*



*Ockfen, and in the Ruwer, the Nies'chen and Kehrnagel in Kasel. And these are just their very best vineyard sites! It is an enviable lineup of truly great vineyards and the estate is making stellar wines from them today, building upon a rich legacy of outstanding wines from the previous years. And this is an estate with a very deep and rich history, as it can trace its origins back fully six hundred and fifty years. Originally part of the rich legacy of knights in this part of Germany, the modern day estate really dates back to the post-Napoleon era on the Mosel, as the von Kesselstatt family eventually purchased the former vineyards holdings of the four monasteries of Saint Maximin between the years of 1854 and 1889 and assembled the vineyard holdings into what would become the modern day estate. The property was eventually purchased by Günther Reh in 1978 and his daughter, Annegret Reh-Gartner would take the direction of Reichsgraf von Kesselstatt in 1983 and lead the estate until her untimely passing in the autumn of 2016.*

*The cellars for many, many years at Reichsgraf von Kesselstatt were located right in the center of downtown Trier, which was no doubt a great benefit way back in the day of horse-drawn wagons and limited means of transportation, but which became more and more problematic in the days of automobiles, trucks and tractors (not to mention the serious traffic getting in and out of the city that Trier seems to possess on most days). Finally, in 1999 the Reh family purchased the Schloss Marienlay in Morscheid in the Ruwer and moved their winery and cellars here. It is a far less logistically challenging location for a winery, not to mention a beautifully restored castle that I meant to take photos of for inclusion in this feature, but as I was running late going into the 10:00 AM tasting and running late again on the way out the door—after a very deep and generous lineup—so we will have to wait until next year to get a proper photo of this beautiful castle. My host for the tasting was Michael Weber, who is the Managing Director of the estate for exports and a very congenial host. Michael is originally from the region, but spent a full decade working as a “flying winemaker” throughout the world prior to returning to his origins and taking his current position at Reichsgraf von Kesselstatt a few years back. His Australian-accented English is a wonderful reminder of his varied and colorful past before returning to German wine country.*

*As this was my first proper visit to the winery, Michael generously set up a varied lineup of most recent vintages, with several of the young 2018ers augmented by the Grosses Gewächs bottlings from 2017 and an array of Prädikat wines ranging from 2018 all the way back to 2002 for our general tasting, and then a few 1988 and 1989 Kabinetten to finish up the tour of the von Kesselstatt wines, as Michael had been told that I was working on a feature on aged Kabinetten for an upcoming issue of the newsletter. I have retained the notes on the older Kabinetten (from 2012 back to 1988) for the feature on that underrated Prädikat, but include notes on everything else that we tasted during this visit below. The estate began picking in their holdings in the middle Mosel on September 17<sup>th</sup> in 2018, and I am looking forward to tasting more of their bottlings from this vintage on a future visit. There were no acid adjustments with any of the 2018ers here. Reichsgraf von Kesselstatt was for long the passionate domain of Annegret Reh-Gartner and she left behind a beautiful legacy of commitment to quality wines of terroir when she passed away suddenly at the untimely age of sixty-one back in October of 2016. She was one of the first of her generation to speak out eloquently for the use of indigenous yeasts for her wines, arguing that terroir can only be compromised to some extent by the use of commercial yeasts, and she pruned back her family's vineyard holdings rather substantially when she took*

*over from her father in the early 1980s, so that the estate could focus on their very finest vineyard parcels. She is also the person who invented the term “Feinherb” for off-dry bottlings (replacing Halbtrocken) and championed its adoption throughout Germany. The von Kesselstatt wines were beautifully made during her long and energetic tenure, always showing great underlying terroir and the lightness of step and filigree that are the hallmarks of great Mosel Rieslings. She had already assembled a fine management team prior to succumbing in her battle to cancer and the estate continues on in fine hands in the wake of her recent passing, but her spirit is still very much evident when one visits to taste at Schloss Marienlay today.*



#### **2017 Majorat Riesling Brut Sekt- Reichsgraf von Kesselstatt**

The 2017 Majorat Sekt Riesling Brut spends nine months aging on its fine lees prior to disgorgement and finishes up with between seven and eight grams of residual sugar. The 2017 is a fine example, offering up a bright bouquet of apple, a touch of toastiness from the less contact, a fine base of minerality and a touch of dried flowers in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, frothy and very nicely balanced, with a fine core of fruit, good mineral drive and a long, focused finish. A lovely bubbly. 2019-2030+. **89.**

#### **2018 Schloss Marienlay Riesling Trocken- Reichsgraf von Kesselstatt (screwcap)**

The 2018 Estate Riesling Trocken comes in this year at 12.5 percent alcohol and had been bottled just ahead of Prowein; it was showing pretty well, but may have been a tad reticent after its recent *mise*, so I have scored it in a range. The nose is quite pretty, offering up scents of

grapefruit, apple, a good base of slate, a touch of wild yeasts and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and nicely mineral-driven, with good focus and grip, but with acids that seem just a hair soft at the present time- though this could just be a reflection of the recent bottling. 2019-2030. **87-88+?**

**2018 Graacher Riesling Trocken- Reichsgraf von Kesselstatt (screwcap)**

The “village wines” were all bottled prior to my visit, with the Graacher and the Wiltinger having been bottled ahead of Prowein and the Kasseler only the day prior to my tasting at the Schloss Marienlay. This wine was showing quite nicely, coming in at 11.5 percent octane and offering up a bright nose of pear, tart orange, slate, a touch of bee pollen and a floral topnote. On the palate the wine is medium-full, pure and classy, with good, but not great depth at the core, sound framing acids and good length and grip on the focused and nascently complex finish. I would have liked to have seen just a bit more mid-palate stuffing here- particularly in 2018- but this may also still have been a bit upset from its recent bottling and there may well be a bit more concentration here than was currently on display when I tasted the wine. 2019-2040. **88-89+?**

**2018 Kasseler Riesling Trocken- Reichsgraf von Kesselstatt (screwcap)**

The 2018 Kasseler Trocken was only bottled the day prior to my visit and had not yet shut down after the *mise*, and based on how well this was showing, it is hard not to give the benefit of the doubt to the other two *villages* Trockens here that had been bottled a few weeks earlier. The bouquet on the 2018 Kasseler Trocken is lovely, showing a fine blend of yellow fruit, salty minerality, bee pollen, slate and a topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and again, very nicely mineral-driven, with a good core, zesty acids and lovely length and backend lift on the long and nascently complex finish. This is a very good entry level wine in the making. 2019-2035+. **90.**

**2018 Wiltinger Riesling Trocken- Reichsgraf von Kesselstatt (screwcap)**

The 2018 Wiltinger Trocken hails mostly from fruit grown in the fine Braunfels vineyard in this village. It comes in at 12.5 percent alcohol and again seemed a touch gentle in its expression of acidity, but my gut instinct is this is again due to its bottling a couple of weeks earlier. The bouquet is certainly quite lovely, offering up scents of green apple, lemon, gentle floral tones, a lovely base of slate and a nice touch of wild yeasts in the upper register. On the palate the wine is fullish, focused and beautifully generous on the attack, with a good core, lovely focus and grip and a long, promising finish. If the acids firm up a bit more with more recovery time from the bottling, then this wine will certainly merit a score at the top of my range. 2019-2040. **89-90+?**

**2017 Nies’chen Riesling Trocken Grosses Gewächs- Reichsgraf von Kesselstatt**

There is a lot to admire in the estate’s Grosses Gewächs program, as the team at von Kesselstatt holds back the release of their GGs for fully two years in the cellars after their bottling and these excellent 2017ers are not yet in the market! The 2017 Nies’chen shows beautiful potential, coming in at an even twelve percent octane and offering up a pure and youthfully complex nose of lemon, quince, a touch of wild yeasts, gentle smokiness, dried flowers and a lovely base of slate minerality. On the palate the wine is medium-full, complex and very elegant in profile, with a fine core, bright, snappy acids and very good focus and grip on the poised, well-balanced and very promising finish. 2027-2075. **92.**

**2017 Scharzhofberger Riesling Trocken Grosses Gewächs- Reichsgraf von Kesselstatt**

The 2017 Scharzhofberger GG from the von Kesselstatt estate is also quite promising, but I have a slightly preference for the other two 2017 GGs in the lineup this year. The bouquet is refined and already nicely complex, offering up scents of tar orange, grapefruit, lemongrass,

salty minerality, a dollop of wild yeasts and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is crisp, fullish and still very tight and primary, with fine focus and grip, plenty of acidity and a nice touch of backend salinity on the long, vibrant and still quite closed down finish. Perhaps I am just underestimating this wine in its shut down stage, but this seems to be slightly overshadowed this year by the other two grand crus flanking it. That said, I would hate to bet against the *terroir* of the Scharzhofberg and this wine may catch the others with sufficient bottle age! 2024-2060. **90.**

**2017 Josephshöfer Riesling Trocken Grosses Gewächs- Reichsgraf von Kesselstatt**

The Josephshöf is a beautiful, six hectare monopole of Reichsgraf von Kesselstatt, located in the village of Graach and situated in between the Wehlener Sonnenuhr on one side and the Domprobst vineyard on the other, with the Graacher Himmelreich up above it on the slope. It is a pretty good location! This vineyard has produced a really lovely GG in 2017, offering up a pure and complex bouquet of pink grapefruit, quince, a nice esthery note of bee pollen, dried flowers, a lovely base of slate, gentle smokiness, a dollop of botanicals and a whisper of vanillin oak (about fifteen percent of the cuvée is raised in five hundred liter casks that are now three to four years old). On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and nascently complex, with fine focus and grip, bright acids, a very good core and lovely complexity and bounce on the long, refined and very promising finish. This is excellent juice. 2026-2060+. **92+.**

**2017 Kanzemer Gottesfus Riesling Kabinett Feinherb- Reichsgraf von Kesselstatt**

The 2017 Kabinett Feinherb from the Gottesfus vineyard is excellent. The wine offers up classical Kabinetten filigree, wafting from the glass in a lovely bouquet of apple, lemon, bee pollen, a fine base of slate and a topnote of spring flowers. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, zesty and nascently complex, with lovely intensity of flavor, bright acids and fine focus and backend mineral drive on the long and complex finish. This only carries a tad over seventeen grams of sugar and is fairly dry, but beautifully filigreed. 2023-2060. **92+.**

**2018 Ockfener Bockstein Riesling Kabinett- Reichsgraf von Kesselstatt**

The 2018 Bockstein Kabinett was not yet bottled at the time of my visit and showing beautiful potential on both the nose and palate. The wine was really lovely on both the nose and palate, with the bouquet jumping from the glass in a fine blend of pear, lemon, white flowers, salty, slate minerality and a bit of wild yeasts. On the palate the wine is medium-full, focused and really impressively racy for the vintage, with fine filigree and grip, superb acids and a long, complex and vibrant finish of impeccable balance and classic Kabinetten sensibilities. First class juice. 2021-2060. **93.**

**2017 Piesporter Goldtröpfchen Riesling Kabinett- Reichsgraf von Kesselstatt AP #21**

The 2017 Goldtröpfchen Kabinett is another absolutely classic example of this lovely Prädikat. The wine comes in at eight percent alcohol, with fifty-two grams of sugar and 9.5 grams of acidity. The very floral nose offers up a lovely, gently musky bouquet of acacia blossoms, bee pollen, a hint of cream, white peach, apple and a lovely base of slate. On the palate the wine is pure, medium-full and complex, with lovely intensity of flavor, fine bounce and grip and a long, zesty and filigreed finish. A lovely Kabinett. 2026-2065+. **92+.**

**2016 Brauneberger Juffer-Sonnenuhr Riesling Spätlese- Reichsgraf von Kesselstatt AP #14**

The 2016 Juffer-Sonnenuhr Spätlese is also an excellent wine, wafting from the glass in a complex combination of pear, apple, a hint of honeycomb, wild yeasts, gentle mossiness and a topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is fullish, complex and vibrant, with bright acids, fine focus and grip, a gently succulent core and lovely slate undertow driving the long, classic finish. Fine juice. 2019-2060. **93.**

### **2013 Josephshöfer Riesling Spätlese- Reichsgraf von Kesselstatt AP #23**

The 2013 Spätlese from the Josephshöf vineyard is absolutely stunning. Its technical details are eight percent alcohol, 8.1 grams of acidity and seventy grams of sugar. The bouquet is starting to really blossom at six years of age, soaring from the glass in a complex blaze of peach, pear, white flowers, a touch of honeycomb, a beautiful base of slate, still a whisper of its wild yeasts and an esthery topnote of bee pollen. On the palate the wine is fullish, complex, beautifully balanced and soil-driven, with gorgeous fruit tones, fine acids and grip and a very long, focused and complex finish. Utter class. 2023-2070. **94+**.

### **2002 Kaseler Nies'chen Riesling Auslese Goldkapsel "Fuder 26"- von Kesselstatt AP #46**

It was a complete treat to finish up our tasting with the 2002 Goldkapsel Auslese from the Nies'chen vineyard and it was very generous of Michael Weber to include this in the lineup! The wine is beautifully complex and well into its apogee of peak drinkability today, offering up a gorgeous bouquet of fresh pineapple, tangerine, honey, a touch of mossiness, a lovely base of heather and a complex foundation of salty soil tones. On the palate the wine is medium-full, refined and very, very pure, with a lovely core of fruit, beautifully light on its feet and very long, complex, focused and zesty on the refined backend. A great bottle of Auslese that is now *à point*, but still has decades of life ahead of it. Bravo! 2019-2060. **94**.



## **Middle Mosel**

### **Weingut Fritz Haag (Brauneberg)**

*Oliver Haag has made an absolutely brilliant set of wines in 2018 and this may well be the single finest vintage collection of young wines I have ever tasted from this iconic estate in Brauneberg. The winery's team of pickers was out in the vines by September 17<sup>th</sup> to start bringing in the fruit, keeping acids nicely bright and zesty and not letting the sugars get out of control. As Oliver noted, "we were fortunate in Brauneberg in 2018 that we had three significant rainfalls during the very hot growing season- one each in June, July and August- that dropped sixty millimeters of rain each time and replenished the ground water supply enough to avoid hydric stress in the vines." Like several other estates, Herr Haag reported that in general, his bottlings are about a half a degree higher in alcohol across the board in 2018 than was the case in 2017, due to the exceptional ripeness of the grapes in this recent growing season, but that the bunches were absolutely beautiful and the acids in the wines were still sufficiently high (many in the 7.5 to 7.7 grams per liter range) that one does not feel any lack of acidity in the wines and they remain taught, minerally-driven and beautifully vibrant and zesty as a result. A portion of the 2018ers had been bottled a couple of weeks prior to my visit, so that there would be some 2018ers to show at Prowein in Düsseldorf, but most were still in preparation for bottling and were to have their "mise" in the coming weeks after my March 27<sup>th</sup> visit. In the notes that follow, I have mentioned if the wine was already bottled, and if it is not noted, then it was one of the cuvées that was still a few weeks ahead of its bottling and remained in cask or tank. As is the case in many of the most successful estates in the middle Mosel, the Fritz Haag 2018ers show a beautiful streak of salinity to their minerality this year, due to those old vines plunging deep in search of water in the heat of this summer and reflecting a very strong soil signature as a result. There is nothing blowsy or soft in any of these wines, which show outstanding filigree at the Prädikat levels, exceptional depth, very, very good cut and grip and impeccable balances for the dry wines and stunning purity and precision for the sweet wines. The vintage here is very strong from the very basic bottlings all the way up to the top Prädikat wines, and it is not really possible to say that the dry wines are stronger this year or the glorious sweeter bottlings, as everything is truly exceptional for its level, style and aspiration. The GGs are exceptional, the two Spätlesen truly superb and there are a pair of very clean, non-botrytized Auslesen that are poetry in motion. At the Goldkapsel level and above there is botrytis, and it is the very, very clean botrytis that only the finest sweet wines of the vintage can show. In short, there is something for everyone in the lineup from Oliver Haag this year and it is a flat out brilliant vintage for Weingut Fritz Haag; these are amongst Germany's very greatest examples of the 2018 vintage. Do not miss them! In addition to the stellar range of 2018ers that we sampled here, Oliver Haag also generously opened up his 2017 Grosses Gewächs wines for me on this visit, as I had not tasted them last May. Both come in around 12.5 percent alcohol and they too are superb wines and should not be overlooked in the rush to get some of the magical 2018ers from the estate.*

### **2018 Fritz Haag Riesling Trocken- Weingut Fritz Haag (screwcap) AP #2**

The 2018 Estate Riesling Trocken had been bottled a couple of weeks ahead of Prowein, but was still showing very nicely at the time of my visit. The wine comes in at twelve percent alcohol, carries 7.9 grams per liter of residual sugar and has 7.5 grams per liter of acidity, so it is very nicely balanced for drinking right out of the blocks, but has a good spine of acidity for medium-term aging as well. The fine bouquet wafts from the glass in a mix of lemon, lime, salty



slate minerality and a nice touch of citrus peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is fullish, crisp and very nicely balanced, with a good core, lovely mineral drive, zesty acids and a long, classy finish. This is very good for a basic Trocken. 2019-2040. **89+**.

**2018 Brauneberger Riesling Trocken- Weingut Fritz Haag (screwcap) AP #17**

The 2018 Brauneberger Trocken was not yet bottled at the time of my visit, but will be bottled under a screwcap when the time comes. The final analysis was not yet done for the wine, but Oliver Haag thought it would land right around twelve percent octane. The wine is lovely out of tank, offering up a fine, youthful nose of pink grapefruit, gentle smokiness, a nice touch of wild yeasts, a lovely base of slate, citrus peel and a gentle topnote of Brauneberg's herb tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and beautifully balanced, with a lovely core, excellent acids and impressive length and grip on the nascently complex and precise finish. This is a beautiful wine and it is a shame it will not be bottle under natural cork, as it could be a true long distance runner. In any event, it will be a stellar value and just need to be drunk a little sooner. 2020-2050. **91**.

**2017 Juffer Grosses Gewächs Riesling Trocken- Weingut Fritz Haag**

The 2017 Juffer Grosses Gewächs is an excellent wine and I was delighted to have an opportunity to taste this during my visit. The bouquet is pure, precise and quite expressive for such a young wine, offering up scents of gooseberry, grapefruit, lovely mossiness, a great base of slate, lemongrass and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, racy and very mineral in personality, with a rock solid core of fruit, outstanding focus and grip and superb cut on the long, snappy and perfectly balanced finish. This is first class juice. 2030-2080. **93**.



**2017 Juffer-Sonnenuhr Grosses Gewächs Riesling Trocken- Weingut Fritz Haag**

The 2017 Juffer-Sonnenuhr Grosses Gewächs is also a beautiful wine, with just a touch more refinement and inherent complexity evident on both the nose and palate. This is still very much a young wine (like the Juffer GG) and will deserve more than a decade in the cellar to reach its peak, but it is going to be stellar when it is ready to go. The wine offers up a superb aromatic constellation of sweet grapefruit, lime, wild yeasts, a beautiful array of botanicals, dried flowers, plenty of smokiness and a glorious base of slate minerality. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and racy, with laser-like focus, stellar mineral drive and a very, very long, very pure and nascently complex finish. A truly outstanding wine in the making. 2032-2080. **94+**.

**2018 Juffer Grosses Gewächs Riesling Trocken- Weingut Fritz Haag AP #24**

The 2018 GGs were still in cask and no analysis had been done, but Oliver Haag figured that they were both around thirteen percent in alcohol in this vintage. The 2018 Juffer Grosses Gewächs was showing outstanding potential, albeit still in a fairly youthful and yeasty phase at the time of my visit, but with an aromatic profile of yellow fruit, lime, mossy overtones, salty slate minerality, wild yeasts and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and shows off a powerful core, with great purity and focus, very good acids for the vintage and excellent cut and grip on the very long finish. This will drink a few years sooner than its 2017 counterpart, but will be every bit as good. 2028-2070. **93+**.

**2018 Juffer-Sonnenuhr Grosses Gewächs Riesling Trocken- Weingut Fritz Haag AP #17**

The 2018 Juffer-Sonnenuhr GG is another great wine in the making. Like the 2018 Juffer, this is a touch broader-shouldered than the 2017 version, but every bit as elegant in profile. The superb young nose wafts from the glass in a mix of lime, grapefruit, wild yeasts, lovely smokiness, citrus peel and a beautifully complex and saline expression of slate minerality. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and powerful in personality, but impeccably balanced at the same time, with a great core, superb cut and grip and a very long, complex and laser-like finish. The acids here are 7.5 grams per liter in 2018, but they seem notably higher than this, due to the low pH and the wine does not want for acidity in any way, shape or form. A beautiful wine in the making. 2028-2070. **94**.

**2018 Fritz Haag Riesling Feinherb- Weingut Fritz Haag (screwcap) AP #1**

The 2018 Estate Riesling Feinherb is really a lovely wine this year. It comes in at 11.5 percent alcohol, carries 17.5 grams per liter of residual sugar and is supported by 7.5 grams per liter of acidity, which gives its plenty of lift and bounce on the backend. The lovely bouquet offers up scents of lime, yellow fruit, slate, gentle smokiness and a floral topnote redolent of white flowers. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and complex, with a lovely core, fine mineral undertow and a long, complex and zesty finish. This had been bottled two weeks prior to my visit, but was showing beautifully and is a succulent and utterly charming example of Feinherb. 2019-2030+. **90**.

**2018 Brauneberger Riesling “Tradition”- Weingut Fritz Haag (screwcap) AP #4**

The Tradition bottling falls between Kabinett and Spätlese in must weight and was around fifteen grams per liter of residual sugar, though it had not yet been bottled and there was no final analysis yet done for the wine. It will be bottled under screwcap when the time comes. This is an excellent wine in the making, offering up a classy bouquet of gooseberry, lime, a touch of citrus peel, slate, smoke and a fine topnote of gentle herb tones. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and beautifully balanced, with a fine core of fruit, excellent mineral drive, zesty acids and lovely length and grip on the complex and utterly refined finish. This is superb bottle and will be a stellar value. 2019-2040. **91+**.

**2018 Brauneberger Riesling Feinherb- Weingut Fritz Haag (screwcap) AP #19**

The 2018 Juffer Feinherb had been filtered the day before my visit and was scheduled for bottling four weeks down the road. It will be eventually sealed under screwcap. The wine is around 14.5 grams per liter of residual sugar this year and approximately 12.5 percent alcohol. The bouquet was showing very nicely (especially for just having been filtered), wafting from the glass in a lovely blend of lime, sweet grapefruit, smoke, a nice touch of mossiness and a lovely foundation of slate. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and fairly powerful in style for a Feinherb, with a lovely core of fruit, excellent focus and grip, really marvelous backend mineral drive and a very long, very precise finish. Very serious juice and another stellar value. 2024-2050. **92.**

**2018 Brauneberger Juffer Riesling Kabinett- Weingut Fritz Haag (screwcap) AP #3**

The 2018 Juffer Kabinett had been bottled a couple of weeks ahead of Prowein and was showing very well at the time of my visit. The wine comes in at nine percent alcohol, with 7.7 grams per liter of acidity and forty-five grams of residual sugar this year. The wine is lovely and really quite classical in its Kabinett sensibilities, offering up a beautiful bouquet of apple, pear, salty slate minerality, spring flowers and an esthery topnote of bee pollen. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and beautifully mineral in personality, with excellent focus and grip, zesty acids and fine filigree on the long and complex finish. Given my recent research on just how brilliantly Kabinetten can age, it is a pity that this wine was not bottled under natural cork, as it could have lasted for half a century. We will have to see how it fares under screwcap, but there is no doubting the its impeccable quality out of the blocks. 2019-2040+? **92.**

**2018 Brauneberger Juffer Riesling Spätlese- Weingut Fritz Haag AP #5**

The 2018 Juffer Spätlese had already been filtered, but was still a few weeks away from being bottled at the time of my visit. This is a lovely young wine that will charm from day one, but is beautifully balanced and will also age very long and gracefully. The aromatic constellation is a refined blend of pear, fresh lime, a gentle touch of mossiness, citrus blossoms and bee pollen in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, vibrant and beautifully complex, with impressive filigree, excellent mineral undertow and impressive focus and grip on the vibrant and flat out delicious finish. A classic Juffer Spätlese in the making. 2019-2050+. **92+.**

**2018 Brauneberger Juffer-Sonnenuhr Riesling Spätlese- Weingut Fritz Haag AP #7**

Oliver Haag's 2018 Juffer-Sonnenuhr Spätlese was clearly one of the finest examples of this Prädikat that I tasted during my ten day visit to the region and I cannot recall ever tasting a better young vintage of Spätlese from this estate! The brilliant bouquet soars from the glass in a youthful blend of lime, pear, gorgeous, very salty slate minerality, violets, bee pollen and an exotic touch of fresh mint in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, laser-like and tensile, with beautiful complexity and filigree, snappy acids, perfect balanced and outstanding lift on the very, very long and utterly refined finish. Brilliant juice. 2019-2060. **95.**

**2018 Brauneberger Juffer Riesling Auslese- Weingut Fritz Haag AP #20**

The 2018 Juffer Auslese has not botrytis in it, as it was made from beautiful golden and shriveled berries this year. The wine is a beauty in the making, offering up a very pure and refined bouquet of white cherries, pears, spring flowers, mint, bee pollen, a lovely base of slate minerality and a nice touch of Juffer mossiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish and crystal clear, with a lovely core, impressive transparency, bright, zesty acid and outstanding focus and grip on the very, very long and refined finish. A beautiful bottle of Auslese. 2019-2060+. **93+.**

**2018 Brauneberger Juffer-Sonnenuhr Riesling Auslese- Weingut Fritz Haag AP #6**

The 2018 Juffer-Sonnenuhr Auslese is one of my absolutely favorite wines in the cellar this year, as again, there is no botrytis here and the wine is a legend in the making. The brilliant bouquet soars from the glass in a blaze of lime, pear, violets, a hint of the yellow plum to come, salty soil tones, honeycomb and a vibrant topnote of citrus zest. On the palate the wine is pure, refined and fullish in profile, with a creamy core of fruit, excellent acidity and grip and a very long, very precise and beautifully mineral-driven finish. This is stunning juice! 2025-2075+. **95+.**

**2018 Brauneberger Juffer Riesling Goldkapsel Auslese- Weingut Fritz Haag AP #22**

The 2018 Juffer Gold Kap Auslese has between twenty and forty percent botrytized grapes in the cuvée this year, but Oliver Haag noted that it was very, very clean botrytis this year. The wine offers up a gorgeous aromatic constellation of white cherries, pears, honeycomb, salty soil elements and a beautiful floral topnote redolent of both lime blossoms and violets. On the palate the wine is pure, racy and fullish, with great elegance and focus, a gorgeous core of fruit and a very, very long and complex finish. The acids here are vibrant and really lift the wine on the backend. Great wine. 2022-2080. **94.**

**2018 Brauneberger Juffer-Sonnenuhr Riesling Goldkapsel Auslese- Fritz Haag AP #9**

The 2018 Juffer-Sonnenuhr Goldkapsel Auslese is even a hair better this year, as it shows just a touch more exotic creaminess on the attack, simply stunning backend mineral drive and great acids for the vintage. The bouquet is celestial in its blend of lime, *mirabelle*, pear, a lovely foundation of slate, honeycomb, just a whisper of mossiness and notes of lilacs and violets in the upper register. On the palate the wine is fullish, pure, focused and impeccably balanced, with superb acids and grip, laser-like focus and a very, very long and complex finish. This wine just dances across the palate. 2026-2085. **96.**

**2018 Brauneberger Juffer Riesling Beerenauslese- Weingut Fritz Haag**

The 2018 Juffer Beerenauslese is another stunning young wine in the cellars here this year. The wine carries about one hundred and fifty grams of residual sugar and offers up a very, very pure bouquet of yellow plum, pineapple, lime blossoms, honeycomb, violets and a lovely tug of salty minerality. On the palate the wine is precise, full-bodied and vibrant, with beautiful creaminess on the attack, a great core, fine framing acids and a very long, complex and vibrant finish. Just a lovely BA. 2019-2100. **94.**

**2018 Brauneberger Juffer Riesling Trockenbeerenauslese- Weingut Fritz Haag**

The 2018 Juffer TBA is just a bit higher in residual sugar than the Beerenauslese this year, as Oliver estimates that it is around one hundred and eighty grams per liter. This too is a gorgeous wine in the making, offering up refined bouquet of *mirabelle*, honey, white cherries, candied violets, citrus zest and a nice touch of saltiness from the slate. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, creamy and very long and complex, with excellent focus and grip, sound acids and a very long, pure and zesty finish. Utterly captivating and borderline criminal to spit. 2019-2100. **95.**



*Looking down at traffic on the river from one of the vineyards in Piesport.*

### **Weingut Julian Haart (Piesport)**

*Julian Haart has made another absolutely brilliant set of wines in 2018. He began harvesting on September 18<sup>th</sup> of this year, specifically going through the vines to make selections for Kabinetten bottlings, and his are indeed, amongst the most beautifully filigreed and racy to be found in the vintage at this Prädikat level. Julian Haart was quite active in training the vines throughout the growing season to protect the bunches from the sun and slow down photosynthesis wherever possible, echoing comments I heard also from Klaus-Peter Keller and Tim Fröhlich, that it was necessary to let the bunches reside far back in the foliage this year to slow the maturation process a bit. Consequently, he was extremely successful with his early pickings for Kabinetten, bringing in grapes that still had a tinge of green to them and are marvelously tensile and filigreed examples for the vintage, with the acids for his Kabinetten coming in between ten and 10.5 grams per liter of acidity, which is just about unheard of in the middle Mosel in 2018! By the way, they are indeed brilliant wines. Julian noted that there was almost zero botrytis in Piesport in 2018, as the outbreak of noble rot was very much a localized phenomenon on the Mosel in this vintage and he estimated that maybe there was two percent of his bunches that had a slight kiss of botrytis with which to make higher Prädikat wines in 2018. There are no Prädikat wines in the cellar this year above Spätlese, and the strength of the vintage here is in the beautiful range of dry wines, the glorious Kabinetten and some of the most tensile and filigreed Spätlese one will ever find from Piesport. Several of the wines had just*

*been bottled in the days leading up to my visit (including all of the Prädikat wines), but they were still very much on form and showing beautifully. Julian has started using a small basket press for the vast majority of his bottlings, as he observes “that it really takes a lot more time to do the pressing, but you get so much more precision in the end that it absolutely worth the extra time it takes.” In the lineup that follows, everything from the Piesporter “villages” Trocken on up was pressed exclusively with this small basket press, and one has to imagine that this helped Julian retain such great acids in his 2018ers.*

*As readers may recall, 2017 was the last year for Julian to continue farming the Schubertslay vineyard, but he has added a little of Rheinhessen to his portfolio, as he is now producing a couple of Riesling bottlings from the Frauenberg vineyard in the Hügelland, which is most famous these days for the lovely pinot noir that Klaus-Peter Keller produces from this limestone-based grand cru vineyard. It was fascinating to taste the new Frauenberg bottlings here, as one is generally accustomed to slate minerality in a cellar in Piesport and it was a novel experience to taste a couple of absolutely beautiful, limestone-based wines from the Frauenberg. Julian observed that when Klaus-Peter Keller had tasted his Frauenberg wines a few weeks before my visit, he had quipped “congratulations Julian, you have made a pair of absolutely beautiful Piesporters from the Frauenberg!” The comment was in response to the very real Mosel spin that these two wines have, which I attribute to the large population of indigenous Piesporter yeasts in Julian cellars, who obviously felt that the best way to deal with an interloper from the Hügelland was to give plenty of Piesport character to the wines. The converse is also true of Klaus-Peter’s new efforts from the Schubertslay, which certainly show more Rheinhessen shadings that was the case when Julian was producing wines from those very same grapes and fermenting them in his cellars in Piesport! If one needed any evidence of the important role indigenous yeast populations play in the expression of terroir, the new bottlings from Julian and Klaus-Peter are perfect examples of this. But, that said, the Frauenberg bottlings from Julian Haart are absolutely exceptional and lovely counterpoints to the beauty of Piesport that unfolds in the rest of the lineup of brilliant 2018ers here; Julian Haart is fast becoming one of Germany’s superstars and his gorgeous lineup of wines from the 2018 vintage is not going to slow down the momentum on iota, as these are another set of absolutely brilliant wines!*

### **2018 Riesling “1,000 Liters”- Weingut Julian Haart**

As readers may recall, this bottling is produced by Julian at the behest of his New York importer, and it is one of the finest values for dry German Riesling to be found anywhere in the world! The 2018 version is 11.2 percent alcohol, carries 13 grams of residual sugar and has superb acidity of 9.2 grams per liter (which is quite high for the middle Mosel in 2018). The wine was bottled the day before my visit, but still showing marvelously, as it wafts from the glass in an excellent aromatic blend of tart orange, white flowers, salty minerality pink grapefruit and a discreet topnote of beeswax. On the palate the wine is fullish, crisp and beautifully detailed, with a fine core, excellent focus, cut and grip and a very long, vibrant and energetic finish. This is really first class juice. 2020-2045+. **91+**.

### **2018 Mosel Riesling- Weingut Julian Haart**

The 2018 Mosel Riesling had also just been bottled, but it too was showing no ill effects from the recent *mise*. The wine comes at twelve percent octane this year and sports all of one gram of residual sugar, but is impeccably balanced and far from tart or severe in style. The bouquet is beautiful and very elegant, wafting from the glass in a mix of pear, quince, a touch of



wild yeasts, a lovely base of slate and a topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is refined, focused and fullish, with a beautifully tensile profile, lovely mid-palate depth and outstanding focus and grip on the poised and racy finish. This will want at least a few years in the cellar to blossom. 2022-2060. **92+**.

#### **2018 RHH Riesling Trocken- Weingut Julian Haart**

The RHH bottling is one of the two new wines from the Frauenberg that Julian has produced in the 2018 vintage. The grapes for this bottling were picked on September 27<sup>th</sup> and the resulting wine is approximately twelve percent alcohol and Julian estimates it has between three and four grams of residual sugar and acids around 8.5 grams per liter. There is a chance that this wine will find its way mostly to restaurant clients in Germany, but I cannot recall for certain if this is correct. It was not yet bottled and showing beautifully, offering up a complex bouquet of limestone minerality, tart pear, a touch of quince, lemongrass and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, crisp and very elegant, with a lovely core of fruit, excellent focus and grip, zesty acids and a long, lifted and very precise finish. Fine, fine juice! 2019-2050. **92**.

#### **2018 Piesporter Riesling Trocken- Weingut Julian Haart**

The Piesporter is the only “village wine” in the cellars this year from Julian, and it had not yet been bottled at the time of my visit, so the final numbers on the wine were not yet available. The wine was half fermented in stainless steel and half in old *fuder*, coming in around twelve percent alcohol and with residual sugars somewhere between three and six grams; the acids hover around an excellent 8.5 grams per liter. The wine is absolutely stellar on both the nose and palate, with the bouquet jumping from the glass in a blaze of black currant, tart orange, gentle smokiness, lemongrass and a beautifully complex base of salty minerality. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite racy in personality, with a fine core, stunning backend mineral drive and a very long, complex and perfectly balanced finish. This is stunning wine in the making! As I mentioned above, this was made exclusively using the small basket press, as is the case for all of the following wines as well. 2021-2060. **93**.

#### **2018 Frauenberg Riesling Grosses Gewächs- Weingut Julian Haart**

The new GG quality bottling from the Frauenberg (as Julian is not a member of the VDP, he is not officially allowed to use the term Grosses Gewächs for these bottlings, but as I am a journalist, I do use the term as these wines are his top grand crus dry wines and are certainly superior to many a GG from some members of the VDP.) This is going to be a brilliant wine, as it offers up a pure and nascently complex bouquet of white peach, lemon, chalky minerality, a hint of cassis (from those Piesport yeasts?), complex, chalky minerality, just a dollop of wild yeasts and a topnote of lemongrass. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, zesty and seamlessly balanced, with a superb girdle of acidity, excellent focus and grip and a long, complex finish that closes with plenty of salty minerality. Gorgeous juice. 2024-2065. **94+**.

#### **2018 Ohligsberg Riesling Grosses Gewächs- Weingut Julian Haart**

Julian’s 2018 Ohligsberg GG comes in around 12.5 percent octane and is another beautiful wine in the making. The bouquet offers up a youthfully refined blend of tart orange, a touch of cassis, salty minerality, gentle smokiness, currant leaf and a topnote of citrus zest. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and supremely elegant in profile, with a lovely core, beautiful interplay of pure fruit, minerality and acidity and a very long, vibrant and perfectly balanced finish. A glorious future is in store here. 2024-2060. **94**.

#### **2018 Goldtröpfchen Riesling Grosses Gewächs- Weingut Julian Haart**

The 2018 Goldtröpfchen GG is no slouch either! The wine is a bit more reserved at this stage in its evolution than the Ohligsberg, but my gut feeling is that there is just a touch more

ultimate potential stored within here than in the beautiful 2018 Ohligsberg. The bouquet offers up scents of lemon, currant, salty minerality, a hint of beeswax, dried flowers and a nice dollop of lemongrass in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and rock solid at the core, with laser-like focus, racy acids and great cut and grip on the very, very long, nascently complex and electric finish. This wine closes in a veritable mineral bath of salty slate, and though it is about as chiseled as a young Riesling can be, there is none of the overt power that is found in some 2018 GGs from the middle Mosel, and svelte is the word that most comes to mind for this wine. It is like a top of the line Tesla, with a fully-charged battery and no one in front on a stretch of the autobahn with no limits! 2026-2060+. **95.**

**2018 Goldtröpfchen Riesling Kabinett- Weingut Julian Haart**

The 2018 Kabinett from the Goldtröpfchen had just been bottled, but it was showing beautifully. The wine comes in at 8.5 percent alcohol and carries forty-four grams of residual sugar, but this is countered by acids of 10.8 grams per liter and a pH of 2.87, so this wine seems absolutely classical in Kabinett sensibilities and really quite dry in personality. The bouquet is flat out beautiful already, wafting from the glass in a blend of currant, white peach, salty minerality, an exotic touch of vanilla bean, bee pollen and a floral topnote redolent of acacia blossoms. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, pure and filigreed, with great focus and transparency, excellent focus and backend structural tension and a very long, complex and dancing finish. A great Kabinett. 2019-2060. **94.**

**2018 Ohligsberg Riesling Kabinett- Weingut Julian Haart**

There are two distinct Kabinetten from the Ohligsberg this year and both are stellar. This one is nine percent octane, carries forty-six grams of residual sugar and comes in with a pH of 2.76, so it is plenty racy. The refined nose delivers a superb constellation of tart pear, slate, a touch of lovely herbal tones, wild yeasts and a topnote of spring flowers. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, pure and nascently complex, with a lovely, taut structural chassis, great focus and grip and a very long, vibrant and classic finish. Lovely juice. 2023-2060. **93+.**

**2018 Ohligsberg Riesling Kabinett “Alte Reben”- Weingut Julian Haart**

The old vine bottling of Kabinett from the Ohligsberg is another great bottle of Kabinett from Julian Haart in 2018. It is a touch more delicately strung than the regular version, coming in at only 8.3 percent alcohol, with 11.1 grams of acidity and forty-six grams of sugar. The bouquet is beautifully reserved out of the blocks and very much defined by its underlying slate, as it offers up scents of yellow fruit, gooseberry, currant leaf, salty minerality, a whisper of wild yeasts and a discreetly floral topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, complex and medium-bodied, with beautiful filigree, snappy acids and great cut and grip on the very, very long and electric finish. Kabinett at its finest. 2024-2060+. **95.**

**2018 Goldtröpfchen Riesling Spätlese- Weingut Julian Haart**

The Goldtröpfchen Spätlese from Julian Haart is another 2018er when I had to ask “how much acidity” after he had told me, for I could not believe my ears the first time when Julian had said it was 11.3 grams per liter! These are just unheard of acids for the middle Mosel in 2018! The wine has seventy-two grams per liter of sugar and the acids and beautiful minerality have gobbled almost all of it. This was one of the few wines that seemed still a bit unsettled after its recent bottling, so I have scored it within a range, but would fully expect it to track to the higher number once it has recovered properly. The nose shows notes of currant, gooseberry, slate at its most saline, bee pollen and a potpourri of spring flowers. On the palate the wine is medium-full, very pure and precise and nicely filigreed, with fine depth and grip and a long, mineral and

snappy finish. I hope I get a chance to see this again in its prime, as it seems poised for greatness. 2022-2070. **93-95.**

**2018 Ohligsberg Riesling Spätlese- Weingut Julian Haart**

The 2018 Ohligsberg Spätlese from Julian has a touch lower acidity than the Goldtröpfchen, coming in at 10 grams per liter, but it also has a lower pH (2.34 versus 2.7), so it seems every bit as racy on the palate. The wine is going to be a cellar treasure, as it delivers a superb aromatic constellation of white peach, gooseberry, slate, sea salts, apple blossoms and a nice touch of currant leaf in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, zesty and laser-like in its focus, with a lovely core, excellent focus and backend minerality, great grip and a very, very long, complex and perfectly balanced finish. Pure magic. 2024-2070. **95+.**



*Theo Haart in the family's tasting room in Piesport.*

**Weingut Reinhold Haart (Piesport)**

*Johannes Haart was away for a week of well-deserved holidays after all of the commotion of Prowein in Düsseldorf, so I had the pleasure to taste this year with his father, Theo Haart. Theo handed over the reins of the family winery several years ago, but I have a lot of his beautiful wines in my personal cellar from his time crafting the estates wines and was delighted to have an opportunity to spend an hour with him on this trip. We did not taste the full lineup of 2018ers here, as with Johannes away from the estate, I am sure he preferred to have only wines shown that he was certain of how they would be showing in his absence. The Haart*

*family began picking on September 17<sup>th</sup> in 2018 and seems to have earmarked a significant percentage of their crop to the production of Grosses Gewächs bottlings this year, which happen to be amongst the finest young GGs I have yet had the pleasure to taste from Johannes Haart. The style of the 2018 vintage will probably allow these Grosses Gewächs bottlings to drink relatively early on in their evolutions, but they are deep, pure and beautifully balanced and will have no trouble making “old bones” either. I am sure there are more Prädikat wines in the cellars from 2018 than what I tasted with Theo Haart on this visit, but we did try a Kabinett, Spätlese and Auslese from the Goldtröpfchen during my visit, all of which were quite lovely as well. The first two wines listed below had been bottled ahead of Prowein, but everything else was still a tank sample and due for bottling once Johannes had returned from his short vacation.*

### **2018 Haart to Heart- Weingut Reinhold Haart (screwcap)**

The 2018 Haart to Heart was showing very nicely at the time of my visit, despite having only been bottled a couple of weeks previous. The wine comes in at eleven percent alcohol this year and carries 17.7 grams of sugar. The bouquet is bright and quite stylish, offering up scents of gooseberry, cassis, a lovely base of slate, a touch of petrol and a topnote of orange peel. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and wide open on the attack, with a juicy core, lovely balance and good length on the finish, with the framing acids providing lovely lift and bounce. 2019-2030. **89.**

### **2018 Haart Riesling Trocken AP #1- Weingut Reinhold Haart**

The 2018 Estate Riesling Trocken is another tasty bottle in the making, but this was not quite as recovered from its recent *mise* as the Haart to Heart. The wine is twelve percent alcohol and carries just under nine grams of sugar this year. It offers up a fine nose of tart orange, gooseberry, lemongrass, slate, a touch of wild flowers and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is crisp, fullish and nicely balanced, with a good core, fine focus and grip and a long, svelte and classy finish. It was still a little grumpy from its recent bottling, so I have scored it in a range, but would fully expect it to place at the top of the range once it has settled back in. 2019-2035. **89-90+.**

### **2018 Goldtröpfchen Grosses Gewächs- Weingut Reinhold Haart**

The 2018 Goldtröpfchen GG from Johannes Haart is very elegant in profile this year and should age very long and gracefully. The bouquet jumps from the glass in a very expressive blend of gooseberry, a touch of wild yeasts, a beautiful base of salty slate minerality, lovely smokiness, lemongrass and just a hint of petrol. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish and quite refined, with a lovely core of fruit, fine soil signature, very sound, framing acidity and a very long, refined and complex finish. Unless this closes down significantly after it is bottled, it should prove to be quite charming in its youth, but will also age very nicely. A lovely GG in the making. 2021-2050. **93+.**

### **2018 Ohligsberg Grosses Gewächs- Weingut Reinhold Haart**

Theo Haart did not have the technical details on the two 2018 GGs, but, at least to my palate, the Ohligsberg seemed just a whisper riper than the Goldtröpfchen. The bouquet is lovely, wafting from the glass in a blend of pink grapefruit, a touch of pineapple, a lovely base of slate, currant leaf, citrus blossoms and wild yeasts. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and just a touch broader-shouldered than the Goldtröpfchen this year, with lovely depth at the core, good acids and fine focus and grip on the long and complex finish. This too is going to be pretty tasty from quite a young age, but unlike the more refined out of the blocks

Goldtröpfchen, this wine will need at least a few years in the cellar before it really starts to show its full potential. 2023-2050. **92+**.

**2018 Piesporter Goldtröpfchen Riesling Kabinett- Weingut Reinhold Haart**

This particular 2018 Goldtröpfchen Kabinett (and again, I am unsure if there are others in the cellars, as Johannes was away and this was what had been earmarked by him for our tasting) comes in around nine percent alcohol, but I do not have the other technical details on the wine. It offers up a lovely nose of gooseberry, cassis, slate, bee pollen, a touch of citrus peel and a lovely topnote of currant leaf. On the palate the wine is medium-full, suave and very nicely balanced, with a lovely core, good Kabinett filigree and a long, succulent and nicely framed finish with sound acids. This is not one of the racier examples of 2018 Kabinett that one will find amongst the top producers, but it is pure, complex and really very satisfying and will drink very well from the outset. 2019-2045. **90**.

**2018 Piesporter Goldtröpfchen Riesling Spätlese AP #25- Weingut Reinhold Haart**

This example of 2018 Goldtröpfchen Spätlese from Johannes Haart was really showing well at the time of my visit. Again, it is not a particularly racy or tensile example of the vintage and the acids are framing in nature, but they keep the wine bright and bouncy on the backend and really allow the gorgeous fruit tones here to be shown off to best advantage. The bouquet is very enticing, jumping from the glass in a mix of peach, tangerine, currant leaf, wild yeasts, salty slate minerality and a topnote of orange blossoms. On the palate the wine is pure, medium-full and suave and creamy on the attack, with a good core, fine mineral undertow and lovely length and grip on the complex and vibrant finish. This does not have the acidity to make a long run in the cellar, but it has some really lovely constituent components. This is very tasty. 2019-2045. **91**.

**2018 Piesporter Goldtröpfchen Riesling Spätlese AP #26- Weingut Reinhold Haart**

This particular bottling of Goldtröpfchen Auslese is one of the best wines in the cellar in 2018. This wine has absolutely no botrytis and was made entirely from golden berries this year and is really beautiful on both the nose and palate. The bouquet is already stunning, delivering a blend of pineapple, gooseberry, acacia blossoms, salty minerality, a hint of the honeycomb to come and the Goldtröpfchen's signature topnote of currant leaf. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish and creamy on the attack, with a lovely core, good mineral undertow, bright, vibrant acids and a long, energetic and very precise and complex finish that closes with a beautiful interplay of cassis and limepeel. The acids here again are on the softer side and playing a supporting role, but the balance is very lovely and the wine has all the complexity and charm one could ever ask for! This is superb. 2019-2055. **93**.

**2015 Goldtröpfchen Riesling "Réserve"- Weingut Reinhold Haart**

This was an experiment that Johannes Haart conducted with one cask of Goldtröpfchen in the 2015 vintage, as this did not ferment quite out to Trocken status and he decided to give it an extended *elevage* of one year on its fine lees in cask prior to bottling. The wine is twelve percent alcohol and was bottled in 2017. It offers up a fine bouquet of cassis, lovely herbal tones, limepeel, wild yeasts, just a whisper of older oak notes and a refined, smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is crisp, fullish, young and complex, with excellent cut and grip, fine backend mineral drive and a long, focused and still quite youthful finish. This still needs further bottle age, but it is a very good wine in the making. 2023-2060. **92**.

**Weingut Johann Joseph Prüm (Wehlen)**

*As is my custom each year now, I tasted through the full lineup of 2017ers here at Weingut Prüm during my March trip, as Katarina Prüm much prefers to show her wines once*

*they have had a full and proper elevage and are showing correctly after their bottling. Given the classically reductive house style here, this makes total sense, and it is always a pleasure to taste this way, as it is an opportunity to turn back the pages a year and see the 2017 vintage in its proper light. Readers will recall that the 2017 vintage was frost-damaged at the outset and ended up being a very, very small crop of very high quality wines, and there is not one collection of 2017ers that I tasted last year that were superior to the beautiful wines we worked through during my stop here on the 21<sup>st</sup> of March. The 2017 harvest started here at the end of September and the elevage was more leisurely this year than in most, so that the wines were not racked until the end of April of 2018, which is later than with most vintages here. The last grapes were gathered at the end of October in 2017. The crop was one-third of a normal-sized harvest in this vintage, due to the extreme frost damage in the spring. There was very, very little Kabinett made from the Wehlener Sonnenuhr this year, as the strength of the vintage in this great vineyard was at the Spätlese and Auslese levels in 2017. We did not taste through the 2017ers this year with Katarina, as she was only a couple of weeks away from delivering her second child and her doctor had her under strict orders to not work “any more than necessary”- no doubt implying no work at all- but, she did graciously stop by to say hello and join us for a few minutes at the end of our visit, as we attempted (quite poorly I might add) to guess the identities of a few older Kabinetten I had asked to taste for an upcoming feature I have planned on that lovely Prädikat level and its beautiful ability to age long and gracefully. The 2017ers from Weingut Prüm are unmistakably brilliant wines and will be worth a very concerted effort to search out in the marketplace this year!*

#### **2017 Graacher Himmelreich Riesling Kabinett- Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm AP #5**

The 2017 Himmelreich Kabinett from Weingut Prüm is a superb wine, offering up a bright and precise bouquet of lemon, pineapple, a beautiful base of slate, white flowers, a touch of wild yeasts and just a whisper of reductive petrol elements of youth. On the palate the wine is crisp, medium-fullish, complex and beautifully tensile in personality, with excellent intensity of flavor, outstanding focus and grip and a long, nascently complex and vibrant finish. Fine, fine juice. 2027-2060+. **93+**.

#### **2017 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Kabinett- Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm AP #6**

The 2017 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Kabinett AP #6 (there is also a tiny amount of another Kabinett from this vineyard that was bottled on its own for the auction) is another lovely bottle in the making, but this is a bit more reserved and youthful out of the blocks than the Himmelreich Kabinett. The still quite primary bouquet offers up scents of apple, pear, vanilla bean, a superb underpinning of slate, fruit blossoms and just a whisper of youthful reductiveness. On the palate the wine is pure, medium-full, young and sleek in profile, with great promise, bright acids and impeccable focus and grip on the long, energetic and beautifully precise finish. This is still a baby and it may well turn out that I am underrating it just a bit. 2029-2060+. **93+**.

#### **2017 Bernkasteler Badstube Riesling Spätlese- Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm AP #7**

There is no Badstube Kabinett in 2017, but a very pretty Spätlese from the Prüm family. As is so often the case, this is the most forward and succulent Spätlese in the lineup this year and it will drink very well from a relatively early age, but I would still be inclined to give it at least four or five years in the cellar and really let some of its secondary layers emerge before drinking it in earnest. The nose wafts from the glass in a stylish blend of apple, yellow fruit, wild yeasts, dried flowers, bee pollen and a lovely base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is pure, medium-



full and succulent on the attack, with a good core, lovely transparency and grip and a long, bouncy and promising finish. 2024-2060. **91+**.

**2017 Zeltinger Sonnenuhr Riesling Spätlese- Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm AP #8**

The Prüm family has two smaller parcels in the Zeltinger Sonnenuhr vineyard, with one surrounding the sundial found mid-slope in what was the ancient vineyard, and the other running right along the Wehlen-Zeltingen border and next to some of the family's vines in the Wehlener Sonnenuhr. Between the two, there is only a single hectare, so this is their smallest vineyard holding. The 2017 Zeltinger Sonnenuhr Spätlese is a beautiful and nicely reserved wine out of the blocks this year, delivering a promising aromatic constellation of pear, vanilla bean, a touch of wild yeasts, slate, dried flowers and a whisper of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish and already quite filigreed in profile, despite its youth, with a lovely core, beautiful soil signature, bright acids and a long, vibrant and nascently complex finish. This is more refined in personality than the very tasty Badstube Spätlese. Fine juice. 2027-2065+. **93.**



**2017 Graacher Himmelreich Riesling Spätlese- Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm AP #9**

The 2017 Himmelreich Spätlese is going to be stellar from Weingut Prüm. The bouquet is young, pure and utterly classical in profile, offering up scents of apple, pear, a touch of fresh pineapple, kaleidoscopic minerality, white flowers and a whisper of wild yeasts in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, pure and precise, with lovely intensity of flavor,

excellent cut and grip and a long, complex and youthful finish of breed, focus and enormous potential. 2030-2080. **94+**.

**2017 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Spätlese- Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm AP #10**

The 2017 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Spätlese AP #10 (I assume there is also an auction bottling of this wine in the cellars) is going to be a brilliant wine, but as is customary here, the wine is still quite youthful and structured out of the blocks. The beautiful nose offers up a glimpse of the magic to come, wafting from the glass in a blend of golden delicious apple, pear, a complex base of slate, a hint of vanilla bean, apple blossoms, gentle smokiness and an exotic and discreet topnote of fresh nutmeg. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish, primary and a quintessential expression of this great *terroir*, with a lovely core and mineral signature, bright, snappy acids and laser-like focus on the long, pure and very promising finish. A great wine in the making, but it will demand a bit of patience! 2032-2085. **95**.

**2017 Graacher Himmelreich Riesling Auslese- Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm AP #12**

The 2017 Himmelreich Auslese from Katarina Prüm is a beauty in the making. The bouquet is already marvelously expressive (despite the palate still being properly reserved), soaring from the glass in a very precise mix of golden berry fruit- pear, yellow plum, a touch of honey, bee pollen, marvelous slate undertow and a topnote of apple blossoms. On the palate the wine is pure, full and succulent at the core, with bright, zesty acids, marvelous mineral drive for a young Auslese, excellent focus and balance and a very long, dancing and filigreed finish. A beautiful wine. 2027-2100. **93+**.

**2017 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Auslese- Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm AP #13**

The 2017 Auslese from the Wehlener Sonnenuhr is another Prüm family masterpiece in the making. The bouquet is equally pure and vibrant as the Himmelreich, albeit, a bit more primary today, as it delivers a fine, fine blend of pear, *mirabelle*, vanilla bean, a beautiful base of grey slate, citrus zest and a topnote of orange blossoms. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and perfectly balanced, with lovely intensity of flavor, great cut and grip and a very, very long and extremely refined, vibrant finish. Stunning juice. 2033-2100. **96**.

**2017 Graacher Himmelreich Riesling Auslese Goldkapsel- Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm AP #15**

The 2017 Himmelreich Gold Kap is another absolutely beautiful wine in the making, with very pure and clean botrytis playing a supporting role to the golden berry purity that takes center stage here. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a mix of pear, passion fruit, exotic floral tones of lilac and lavender, a touch of honeycomb and a lovely bass-line of slate. On the palate the wine is pure, focused and fullish, with a very refined, seamless personality, lovely inner core depth and dimension, bright, zesty acids and great length and grip on the complex finish. Great juice. 2027-2090. **94+**.

**2017 Zeltinger Sonnenuhr Riesling Auslese Goldkapsel- Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm AP #14**

The Zeltinger Sonnenuhr Goldkapsel Auslese from the Prüm family is also beautiful pure in its glazing of botrytis, delivering a fine constellation of yellow plum, pear, slate, honeycomb, apple blossoms and an exotic topnote of clover. On the palate the wine is suave, vibrant and fullish, with marvelous precision and purity, vibrant acids, stunning length and truly remarkable backend mineral drive for a Gold Kap Auslese. A brilliant wine in the making. 2027-2090. **95**.

**2017 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Auslese Goldkapsel- Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm AP #17**

The 2017 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Goldkapsel Auslese from Katarina Prüm is another brilliant wine in the making, and this is going to be a monument to the vintage for the next three quarters of a century. I love the depth, mineral drive and intensity here from the very low yields, coupled with the beautifully pure glazing of botrytis, as the wine soars from the glass in an exotic

blaze of pear, *mirabelle*, candied violets, beeswax, honeycomb and lovely slate undertow. On the palate the wine is very, very pure, full-bodied and nascently complex, with magical intensity of flavor, great focus and grip, ripe, zesty acids and a very, very long, vibrant and extremely light on its feet finish. It is this weightless quality on the palate, coupled with the exotic flavors from the low yields and very clean botrytis that will make this a legend in due time! Breathtakingly beautiful young wine! 2035-2100. **97.**

**2017 Bernkasteler Lay Riesling Auslese Lange Goldkapsel- Weingut J. J. Prüm AP #18**

To my knowledge, the Bernkasteler Lay is the only Long Gold Kap in the Prüm cellars in 2017, but there may be a few treasures still down there awaiting unveiling in the future. This is a beautiful wine of lovely botrytis, but it had the misfortune in this tasting to follow the above beauty! The bouquet is complex, extremely floral and quite exotic in its fruit constellation, offering up notes of pineapple, yellow plum, honeysuckle, violets, apple blossoms and a nice dollop of honey. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and beautifully glazed, with a lovely core of fruit, fine focus and grip, bright acids and a long, lingering and nicely esthery finish. The Lay vineyard lies down lower on the slope, towards the Graach boundary (right behind Weingut Dr. Loosen for those who have visited the region) and is a great location for the development of botrytis in the morning fogs. This is a lovely wine. 2027-2080. **93.**

**Weingut Max Ferdinand Richter (Mülheim)**

*This was my first proper visit to Weingut Max Ferdinand Richter in Mülheim, as I first had occasion to taste here last May during the Mythos Mosel events. The style of the wines here is beautifully classical, with lovely underlying minerality, pure, delicate fruit tones and plenty of filigree and cut. The Richter family farms fully seventeen and a half hectares of vines in some of the finest terroirs in the Middle Mosel, including choice parcels in both the Himmelreich and Domprobst in the village of Graach, a parcel of very old vines right below the sundial in Wehlener Sonnenuhr, a lovely plot of vines in the Juffer-Sonnenuhr vineyard in Brauneberg, the monopole of the quartzite-based Elisenberg vineyard in the village of Velden (tucked back behind Brauneberg and Mülheim away from the river) and substantial holdings in the best vineyards in their home village of Mülheim. I was unaware of this previously, but apparently back in 1813, during the time of the occupation of the region by Napoleon's armies, the emperor had intended to rip up the vines in the villages of Mülheim and Velden, but one of Constantin's ancestors negotiated a cash payment from the winegrowers in the two villages to Napoleon to save the vineyards, and as a thank you, the village of Velden ceded the entire hillside vineyard of the Elisenberg to the Richters and it has remained a monopole of theirs since that day.*

*In 2018, Constantin, his father Dirk Richter and the picking team here were out in the vineyards on the 12<sup>th</sup> of September to start harvesting pinot noir, with the first Riesling bunches brought in on the 18<sup>th</sup> of the month. As this is a fairly big estate, I assume that we sampled a representative selection of the 2018ers here, and there are probably some very good dry bottlings also in the cellar that we did not try during my visit. Constantin did note that there were a few TBAs still bubbling away very gently down in the cellars (and one next to his desk in his office, as the fermentation was going very, very slowly and a bit warmer location was definitely merited if that wine was going to ferment enough to get over the minimum threshold alcohol level in due course! Constantin Richter commented that he was "inclined to perhaps give some of the 2018ers just a bit longer elevage prior to bottling than is customary", as he observed that "Manfred Prüm did this with his 2003ers and the results were very positive." Probably*

*about a third of the 2018ers we tasted together had been bottled just ahead of Prowein, but everything else remained in cask and was to be bottled a bit later in the spring. The range of 2018ers here that I tasted with Constantin were excellent, with lovely, zesty acids, very pure and precise fruit expressions, lovely, salty minerality and fine filigree for the lower Prädikat levels. At the level of Auslese, there was a bit of botrytis available to work with in the Himmelreich and Juffer-Sonnenuhr vineyards, so the Auslesen from the estate from these vineyards are defined by a delicate touch of really beautiful, very clean botrytis.*



*Constantin Richter of Weingut Max Ferdinand Richter in Mülheim.*

### **2018 Riesling “Classic”- Weingut Max Ferdinand Richter**

The 2018 Riesling “Classic” had been bottled just before Prowein. The wine carries ten grams per liter of residual sugar and comes in at twelve percent alcohol in this vintage. It is made mostly from side valley fruit, though Constantin was quick to point out that all of the vines that go into this bottling are a minimum of forty years of age. The wine was showing very nicely at the end of March, offering up a refined bouquet of quince, apple, a lovely base of slate, dried flowers and just a hint of wild yeasts in the upper register. On the palate the wine is fullish, crisp and very nicely balanced, with a good core of fruit, lovely slate undertow and very fine length and grip on the zesty finish. This is a very high quality wine for an entry level bottling. 2019-2040. **89.**

**2018 Graacher Himmelreich Riesling Kabinett Trocken- Weingut Max Ferdinand Richter**

The 2018 Kabinett Trocken from the Himmelreich was produced from a parcel of vines that are eighty to ninety years of age, situated right up at the top of the slope. This is outstanding in 2018 and very delicately-styled and filigreed, with the wine topping out at eleven percent octane this year. This had not yet been bottled and was really lovely on both on the nose and palate, with the bouquet wafting from the glass in a mix of apple, lemon, superb minerality, a dollop of wild yeasts and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, medium-bodied and beautifully mineral, with fine intensity of flavor, bright acids, excellent focus and superb cu Constantin Richter has been full-time back at the family estate since the 2012 vintage, and previous to this he did a few stages and cut and grip on the long and complex finish. This is first class juice! 2022-2060. **93+**.

**2018 Max Ferdinand Richter Riesling- Weingut Max Ferdinand Richter (screwcap)**

The Estate Riesling this year is not a Trocken, as it settled into a fine point of balance with still twenty grams of residual sugar. The wine is made from a selection of younger vines in the estate's top grand cru vineyards and is very elegant in profile in 2018, offering up 10.5 percent alcohol; it had been bottled just ahead of Prowein. The wine was still showing a touch timidly on the nose after its *mise*, but with a bit of coaxing showed elements of pear, slate, wild yeasts and a lovely topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine was much more on form, displaying a medium-full format, bright, zesty acids, fine focus and grip and lovely backend mineral drive on the long, balanced and classy finish. This is going to be a fine value and it is too bad it was bottled under screwcap, as it would have aged very long and gracefully. 2019-2035. **90.**

**2018 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Kabinett Feinherb- Weingut Max Ferdinand Richter**

The 2018 Kabinett Feinherb from the Wehlener Sonnenuhr had also just been bottled ahead of Prowein. This is made from a parcel of vines that are eighty to one hundred years of age and comes in at just over ten percent octane, with 7.8 grams of acidity and twenty-two grams of sugar. The wine is pure and a beautifully classical expression of this lovely *terroir*, offering up scents of apple, pear, vanilla bean, salty, slate minerality, spring flowers and a whisper of wild yeasts. On the palate the wine is pure, medium-full, filigreed and superbly transparent, with fine complexity and bounce, bright acids and fine focus and grip on the poised and vibrant finish. Fine juice. 2019-2055+. **93.**

**2018 "Zeppelin" QbA- Weingut Max Ferdinand Richter (screwcap)**

The Zeppelin label bottling of QbA from Max Ferdinand Richter is very, very good in 2018. This is made from a fifty-fifty blend of estate grown and purchased fruit, with most of the cuvée raised in *fuders*, but a small percentage in stainless steel. This had already been bottled (and was indeed already in the US market a few weeks after my return from Germany) and was showing very well, delivering a fine bouquet of apple, pear, bee pollen, salty soil tones, spring flowers and a bit of wild yeasts. On the palate the wine is fullish, pure and nicely filigreed, with fine focus and grip, a long, bouncy finish and fine nascent complexity. This shows beautiful acidity for a 2018ers (8.2 grams this year), to go along with around thirty-five grams of residual sugar and alcohol at ten percent. A very, very well made Estate Riesling bottling and an exceptional value. 2019-2045. **90.**

**2018 Veldenzer Elisenberger Riesling Kabinett- Weingut Max Ferdinand Richter**

The 2018 Elisenberger Kabinett was still in cask and was absolutely singing at the time of my visit. Constantin Richter estimates that the wine finished up around 8.5 percent in alcohol, with close to fifty grams of residual sugar and acids at 8.8 grams. The bouquet is superb, wafting

from the glass in a fine blend of gooseberry, bee pollen, a touch of red berry, salty minerality and a lovely topnote of currant leaf. On the palate the wine is pure, medium-full and nicely filigreed, with lovely intensity of flavor, superb, salty mineral drive, snappy acids and a very long, transparent and utterly classical finish. A beautiful Kabinett. 2019-2055+. **93+**.

**2018 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Kabinett- Weingut Max Ferdinand Richter**

These were the first Riesling bunches picked on September 18<sup>th</sup> and the wine has turned out beautifully. The bouquet is pure and very refined, delivering a fine constellation of pear, delicious apple, vanilla bean, a touch of petrol, slate, apple blossoms and a gentle, esthery topnote of bee pollen. On the palate the wine is medium-full and very pure and delicate, with fine intensity of flavor, excellent focus and grip and a long, vibrant and transparent finish. Another really fine Kabinett. 2022-2060. **93**.

**2018 Brauneberg Juffer Riesling Kabinett- Weingut Max Ferdinand Richter**

The Juffer 2018 Kabinett was the only grand cru at this Prädikat level that was already bottled. The wine is a touch more aromatically reserved after its *mise*, but with a bit of coaxing shows lovely potential in its blend of pear, apple, a nice touch of mossiness, wild yeasts, salty soil tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, medium-full, complex and vibrant, with really good acids, fine focus and grip and a long, complex finish. This seems just a touch riper in style than the Wehlener Sonnenuhr Kabinett, but without losing its Prädikat sensibilities. This finished off at 8.7 percent alcohol. Good juice. 2023-2060. **91**.

**2018 Veldenzer Elisenberger Riesling Spätlese- Weingut Max Ferdinand Richter**

The grapes for the Elisenberger Spätlese were some of the last brought in to the winery in 2018, as this parcel was picked on October 23<sup>rd</sup>, which just underscores how some of these back vineyards benefited from their relatively cooler expositions in the summer of 2018. The wine is lovely, offering up a bright bouquet of strawberries, apple, lime blossoms, a fine base of salty minerality, wild yeasts and an esthery topnote of bee pollen. On the palate the wine is pure, zesty and fullish in profile, with a pretty core, lovely mineral undertow, bright acids and fine focus and grip on the long and complex finish. 2019-2055+. **92+**.

**2018 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Spätlese- Weingut Max Ferdinand Richter**

These are the oldest vines that the estate owns, planted in the nineteenth century and located directly under the sundial in the Sonnenuhr. The wine is youthful and an absolute classic in the making, offering up a nascently complex bouquet of pear, white cherries, vanilla bean, slate, wild yeasts, bee pollen and a floral topnote redolent of orange blossoms. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and soil-driven, with a good core, fine bounce and grip and a long, zesty and very classy finish. This has a beautiful kiss of fruit on the attack and impressive backend mineral drive. 2024-2060+. **94**.

**2018 Brauneberg Juffer-Sonnenuhr Riesling Spätlese- Weingut Max Ferdinand Richter**

The 2018 Juffer-Sonnenuhr Spätlese is a touch riper in profile than its counterpart from Wehlen. The nose wafts from the glass in a lovely blend of pear, white cherry, bee pollen, gentle smokiness, a nice base of soil and a topnote of cress. On the palate the wine is fullish, round and nicely creamy on the attack, with a fine core, very good focus and grip and zesty acids adding brightness and bounce on the long and succulent finish. Another very tasty bottle of Spätlese. 2019-2050. **92**.

**2018 Graacher Himmelreich Riesling Auslese- Weingut Max Ferdinand Richter**

Constantin estimates that about fifteen percent of the bunches used for the Himmelreich Auslese in 2018 were affected by botrytis. The wine carries around one hundred grams of sugar this year and is superb and absolutely classical in personality, offering up a precise and vibrant



bouquet of apple, pineapple salty minerality, bee pollen and a lovely topnote of citrus blossoms. On the palate the wine is fullish, pure and zesty, with a very refined profile, fine depth at the core, impressive mineral signature and a long, vibrant finish that closes with the lift of very good acidity. 2024-2070. **93.**

**2018 Brauneberger Juffer-Sonnenuhr Riesling Auslese- Weingut Max Ferd Richter**

The 2018 Juffer-Sonnenuhr Auslese has a bit more botrytis to it, with about thirty percent of the bunches nobly rotten this year. The wine is still quite understated in its glazing, wafting from the glass in a lovely combination of lime, tangerine, honey, citrus zest, a touch of wild yeasts, a lovely base of soil and a topnote of bee pollen. On the palate the wine is fullish, pure and complex, with a lovely core, good backend salty mineral drive, bright acids and fine focus and grip on the long and zesty finish. This is delicious as well. 2023-2070. **93.**

**2018 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Auslese \*\*\*- Weingut Max Ferdinand Richter**

The three star Auslese from the Wehlener Sonnenuhr is absolutely stellar. This was made from a parcel of one hundred and twenty year-old vines and Constantin estimates that eighty percent of the bunches selected for this bottling were botrytized. The bouquet is gorgeous, offering up scents of white cherry, pineapple, honeycomb, citrus blossoms and a nice bass note of slate. On the palate the wine is precise, pure and fullish, with lovely creaminess on the attack, excellent focus and grip, bright acids and a long, complex and dancing finish that closes with a lovely dollop of minerality. Fine, fine juice. 2024-2070. **94.**

**Weingut Willi Schaefer (Graach)**

*Christophe Schaefer was yet another winegrower in the middle Mosel who reported the earliest start to harvest in 2018 in the history of their estate, as the picking teams were out on the slopes collecting grapes on September 17<sup>th</sup>. Everything was brought in within four weeks of getting started, which was again very fast for the estate, but as I mentioned in my introductory remarks about the vintage, Christophe was of the opinion that during the harvest of 2018, there may well have been a tipping point after which what was lost leaving the grapes out on the vines was more important than what was gained by allowing the sugars to climb a bit higher. Of course, with the weather absolutely perfect at harvest time, producers could take their time, target small parcels for specific styles of wines and the temptation was to not hurry bringing in the grapes and some people probably let their grapes hang a bit longer than was optimal as a result. Unlike in nearby Zeltingen, there was not much botrytis in the village of Graach in 2018, so the beautiful array of Auslesen produced here this year are primarily based on golden berries and shriveled, but non-botrytized grapes, and there is only a whisper of botrytis in these sweeter wines from Christophe Schaefer in 2018.; There is a small bit of dry wine here as well in 2018, though we did not taste the Grosses Gewächs from the Himmelreich during my visit, as the wine was not yet ready. However, Christophe feels that the real strength of the 2018 vintage is at the level of Kabinetten and Spätlesen, and this is where the lion's share of production ended up. But, there are also some stellar Auslesen, made in fairly small quantities (including one from a tiny new parcel for the Schaefer in the Wehlener Sonnenuhr) and a gorgeous Beerenauslese from the Domprobst as well, so for fans of Prädikat wines, there is a little something for everyone this year. The lone dry wine in the cellar is Graacher Trocken that is really tasty and will make fans of dry Riesling from the estate quite happy, as it will be an excellent value and there has not been much dry wine here in the last few vintages. There are single bottlings of Kabinett here from the Himmelreich and Domprobst this year, but Christophe noted that they have pretty good quantities of both of these wines this year. At the Spätlese level there are three distinct examples*

*from the Domprobst and one each from the Wehlener Sonnenuhr and Himmelreich. All the Auslesen in the Schaefer cellars this year are also breathtakingly beautiful young wines, with stunning purity and individuality. As the botrytis plays such a tiny, tiny role in their personalities, they are wines that show remarkable levels of minerality for their Prädikats and will be cellar treasures for many, many decades to come. Of the following notes, the first three wines had been bottled the week before my visit, with everything else still in cask and due for bottling in the coming weeks.*

**2018 Graacher Riesling Trocken AP #6- Weingut Willi Schaefer**

The 2018 Graacher Riesling Trocken from Weingut Schaefer is really a lovely wine and will drink well from a young age, but also evolve beautifully with extended cellaring. The bouquet offers up a lovely, complex nose of tart orange, grapefruit, a lovely base of slate, citrus peel and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is medium-full, complex and vibrant, with a good core, fine mineral drive, bright, ripe acids and lovely length and grip on the well-balanced and zesty finish. Good juice. 2019-2040+. **90.**

**2018 Graacher Riesling Feinherb AP #7- Weingut Willi Schaefer**

The 2018 Graacher Feinherb is also an excellent value in the making. The bouquet is pure and already quite expressive, wafting from the glass in a mix of pear, a touch of fresh pineapple, salty slate minerality, a touch of bee pollen and a topnote of apple blossoms. On the palate the wine is medium-full, pure and nicely juicy at the core, with lovely backend minerality, excellent focus and live and a long, bouncy, complex and flat out delicious finish. I really like the balance and vibrancy to this bottling this year. 2019-2045. **90+.**

**2018 Graacher Himmelreich Riesling Kabinett AP #2- Weingut Willi Schaefer**

The 2018 Himmelreich Kabinett from Christophe Schaefer is a superb bottle, with classic delicacy and filigree one expects from this Prädikat level. The lovely nose wafts from the glass in a very pure mix of grapefruit, lime, a touch of wild yeasts, a beautiful base of slate, a whisper of petrol and a lovely topnote of violet. On the palate the wine is pure, medium-full and succulent at the core, with lovely backend mineral drive, bright acids and excellent length and grip on the complex finish. This is eight percent alcohol this year, with eight grams of acidity and around fifty grams of residual sugar. Just a lovely bottle and really showing well for having just been bottled. 2023-2060+. **92+.**

**2018 Graacher Domprobst Riesling Kabinett AP #3- Weingut Willi Schaefer**

The 2018 Kabinett from the Domprobst is an absolute classic in the making. As is customary with wines from this great *terroir*, this is more reserved in profile than the Himmelreich Kabinett, but it is going to have a long and beautiful life ahead of it. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a youthful blend of pear, tangerine, a salty base of slate, citrus peel, gentle smokiness and a whisper of wild yeasts in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, medium-full, crisp and complex, with lovely transparency and grip, fine acids and a long, vibrant and filigreed finish. First class Kabinett. 2025-2065. **93.**

**2018 Graacher Himmelreich Riesling Spätlese AP #8- Weingut Willi Schaefer**

The Himmelreich has produced a beautiful Spätlese as well in 2018, and this is destined to be a long-lived and superb bottle. The complex nose is vibrant and refined, offering up scents of lime, pear, a nice touch of orange zest, bee pollen, elder flowers, lovely minerality and a topnote of citrus blossoms. On the palate the wine is medium-full, pure and zesty, with lovely inner tension between its beautiful fruit tones and mineral undertow. The finish is long, focused and bouncy, with lovely lift, cut and grip. 2022-2075. **93+.**

### **2018 Graacher Domprobst Riesling Spätlese AP #10- Weingut Willi Schaefer**

The AP #10 Spätlese from the Domprobst vineyard is also superb in 2018. The bouquet is bright and beautifully expressive for a young Domprobst, wafting from the glass in a blend of pear, apple, violets, bee pollen, a lovely base of slate and a gentle topnote of wild yeasts. On the palate the wine is fullish and nicely succulent on the attack, with truly beautiful purity to the fruit, fine soil signature and a long, perfectly balanced and zesty. I love the backend slate-acid duality that defines the backend of this wine. This is a Domprobst Spätlese that will only need three or four years in the cellar to really start drinking with style and generosity. 2023-2075. **93+.**

### **2018 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Spätlese AP #17- Weingut Willi Schaefer**

The 2018 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Spätlese from Christophe Schaefer is another absolutely stellar example of how strong this Prädikat level is in this vintage. The pure and utterly refined nose delivers an elegant aromatic constellation of white cherries, pears, a beautiful base of slate, a youthful hint of petrol, vanilla bean and a topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is pure, medium-full, complex and still youthfully reticent, with lovely detail and depth, bright acids and a long, filigreed and dancing finish. Classic. 2023-2075. **94.**



### **2018 Graacher Domprobst Riesling Spätlese AP #5- Weingut Willi Schaefer**

The 2018 Domprobst Spätlese AP #5 is far more reserved out of the blocks than the AP #10 version, and this wine will demand some extended bottle age before it really starts to hit on all cylinders. However, the potential here is outstanding and all that is needed is some patience to

outwait the inherent structural reserves of the Domprobst. The bouquet is a fine mix of pear, apple, salty slate minerality, bee pollen, petrol and spring flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and very, very precise, with superb cut, a great core and a veritable slate bath of minerality on the long, tightly-knit and focused finish. This is going to be stellar. 2028-2075+. **94+**.

**2018 Graacher Domprobst Riesling Spätlese AP #13 (Auction)- Weingut Willi Schaefer**

The 2018 Auction Spätlese from the Domprobst is even a shade better! The bouquet is pure, precise and absolutely stunning out of the blocks, offering up a youthful blend of pear, delicious apple, bee pollen, slate, a nice touch of salinity, exotic floral tones of violet and lavender and a whisper of honeycomb in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and beautifully structured, with a lovely core, great focus and mineral drive, bright, zesty acids and great complexity and precision on the very, very long, very elegant finish. This is a great, great Spätlese in the making! 2027-2075+. **96**.

**2018 Graacher Domprobst Riesling Auslese AP #11- Weingut Willi Schaefer**

According to Christophe Schaefer, the 2018 Domprobst Auslese AP #11 has just a tiny touch of botrytis in it, as it has almost exclusively been produced from golden berries. The wine is truly stunning on both the nose and palate, with the bouquet soaring from the glass in a blaze of pear, yellow plum, fresh pineapple, a gorgeous base of slate, citrus blossoms, bee pollen and lilacs. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and zesty, with a lovely core, great backend mineral drive and outstanding complexity and grip on the vibrant, snappy and electric finish. This is just beautiful Auslese! 2026-2085+. **95**.

**2018 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Auslese AP #18- Weingut Willi Schaefer**

This Auslese was produced from a tiny, new parcel in the Sonnenuhr of eight *ares* that lies right alongside the Schaefer's previous small plot of vines here, and which they planted four years ago. These very young vines produce a special wine their first year that they are old enough to make true wine-quality grapes, and Christophe felt it was sufficiently different from the rest of the parcel here that it merited being bottled on its own, rather than just being blended into the Spätlese from the Sonnenuhr. It is truly a stunning and beautifully pure example of Auslese, offering up a complex and detailed bouquet of white cherries, mango, vanilla bean, a beautiful base of slate, honeycomb and a topnote of orange blossoms. On the palate the wine is pure, full, transparent and zesty, with marvelous structure and precision, exquisite balance and a very, very long, vibrant and seamless finish. Great juice. 2023-2075+. **95**.

**2018 Graacher Domprobst Riesling Auslese AP #14- Weingut Willi Schaefer**

The 2018 Domprobst Auslese AP #14 is also an outstanding wine in the making, with just a touch more fruit-driven personality than the AP #11 version. The bouquet is very expressive out of the blocks, offering up a gorgeous mix of pear, *mirabelle*, tangerine, slate, gentle notes of honeycomb and a topnote of citrus blossoms. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and absolutely loaded with beautiful fruit on the attack and mid-palate, with a lovely undertow of slate, great focus and grip and a long, zesty and beautifully balanced finish. This is another breathtakingly beautiful Auslese from the estate in 2018! 2026-2085. **96**.

**2018 Graacher Domprobst Riesling Auslese (Auction) AP #15- Weingut Willi Schaefer**

The Domprobst Auction bottling of Auslese from Weingut Schaefer is even a hair more precise and pure than either of the other two from this vineyard in 2018. The nose soars from the glass in a magical blend of passion fruit, tangerine, yellow plum, honeycomb, a touch of violet, a lovely base of slate and a topnote of apple blossoms. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied

and filigreed, with great depth and grip, outstanding focus and cut and a long, zesty and hauntingly beautiful finish. A legend in the making. 2026-2085. 97.

**2018 Graacher Domprobst Riesling Beerenauslese AP #16- Weingut Willi Schaefer**

There has not been a Beerenauslese in the Schaefer cellars since the beautiful 2015 version, and this 2018 is a marvelous follow-up to that great wine. The bouquet here is beautiful complex and gently tropical in profile, wafting from the glass in a blend of *mirabelle*, mango, fresh pineapple, honey, violets, orange zest and a lovely bass-note of slate. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, zesty and laser-like in its focus, with a bottomless core, great elegance and lift, a creamy attack and a very long, absolutely electric finish. This is stunning. 2024-2100. 97.



**Weingut Schloss Lieser (Lieser)**

*I quite liked the 2018ers from Thomas Haag's Weingut Schloss Lieser, but they are very much emblematic of their vintage, rather than transcendental in the way Julian Haart's wines are this year. So, they are just a touch softer in structure and just a bit bigger-scaled than the magical 2017ers here, but still are beautifully complex, elegant and refined wines. Is that not what we want from our top wine estates, that they produce wines loyally reflective of their underlying vintage, rather than monkeying around with technical stopgaps in the cellar to try and homogenize their style into some square peg each and every year? The team at Schloss Lieser was out in the vineyards starting the harvest on September 17<sup>th</sup> this year, which is only the*



*second time in their history that they have started picking in September. They were finished up six weeks later at the end of October, having been able to make selections for everything from lovely dry Rieslings up to gorgeous Lange Goldkapsel Auslesen and Beerenauslesen. Thomas Haag observed about the vintage that “we generally have a half to a full degree higher alcohol in our dry wines this year than was the case last year, as this is just the style of the vintage, but I am still quite happy with their balances.” A few of the wines had been bottled two weeks prior to my visit, so that they could be shown at Prowein in Düsseldorf, with everything else in varying stages of preparation for spring bottling in the weeks following my visit. As Schloss Lieser is one of the most prominent members of the VDP, they began implementing new regulations with the 2018 vintage that no longer allows a Prädikat wine to be labeled as Trocken, so the Kabinett Trocken here has been renamed as “Kabinettstück” and the Spätlese Trocken from the Helden vintage as “Heldenstück”.*

*None of the “regular” Auslesen in the cellars in 2018 include any botrytis, as these bottlings were produced from shriveled golden berries, and the very clean and beautiful botrytis wines do not start here until one reaches the Gold Kap level. There are plenty of these beautiful, nobly glazed wines in the cellar this year in addition to the crystal clear Auslesen. The acids at Schloss Lieser are pretty typical of most estates on the middle Mosel in 2018, ranging from seven to eight grams on average, but with the lower pHs of the vintage also quite noticeable and the perception of acidity in the wines is really more marked than the numbers might suggest. There is a full range of Kabinetten this year and they are very strong across the board, though I did not get a chance to taste the new Graacher Domprobst version, as Thomas Haag has bought “one more” parcel of vines to further flesh out this all-star lineup of great terroirs. He told me he had promised his family that this was the last plot that he was going to buy himself as a Christmas present! With the exception of the Schloss Lieser and Helden Kabinetten, all the others at this Prädikat level had been bottled two weeks ahead of my visit, and a handful of the Spätlesen and Auslesen as well. The 2018 Grosses Gewächs bottlings were not yet ready to be shown by Thomas, so we contented ourselves with a wide selection of the other 2018ers here. Despite a slightly softer side of Schloss Lieser on display in this vintage, this is not to say that the wines are heavy-handed or blowsy, as they all possess plenty of bright acidity to add backend lift and vibrancy; they just seem likely to drink a bit earlier than the racier 2017ers. In any case, I would much prefer to have the wines as they are and truly honest interpretations of the vintage in the estate’s plots of vines, rather than have them acidulated to meet targeted numbers of acidity in the wines. No one is going to be worried about the acidity levels here, as there is plenty to carry them seamlessly for many, many decades to come.*

### **2018 Schloss Lieser “SL” Riesling QbA Trocken- Schloss Lieser (screwcap)**

The 2018 SL Riesling Trocken comes in at 12.5 percent this year and is a lovely entry level wine. The bouquet is complex and quite open for just having been bottled two weeks ago, wafting from the glass in a fine blend of pear, apple, smoky overtones, a fine base of slate and a topnote of lime peel. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and complex, with excellent acids for the vintage, impressive backend mineral drive and fine focus and grip on the well-balanced finish. One can sense the bigger scale from the 12.5 percent alcohol here, though the wine is cool on the backend, and just does not have the inherent delicacy of less ripe vintages of this bottling. That said, there is absolutely nothing here that is less than highly satisfactory (well, maybe the screwcap). 2019-2040. **89**



### **2018 Schloss Lieser Kabinettstück Riesling Trocken- Schloss Lieser**

The 2018 Kabinettstück Riesling Trocken was not yet bottled at the time of my visit, but Thomas Haag estimated that the wine is also around 12.5 percent octane and with acids just over seven grams per liter. The wine is very refined on the nose, wafting from the glass in a classy blend of pear, sweet quince, a touch of mossiness, lime blossoms, a fine base of slate and a touch of wild yeasts in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very nicely balanced, with a nice touch of creaminess to the pure fruit on the attack, good mineral undertow and fine cut and grip on the focused and complex finish. I like this very much and it should drink beautifully from soon after release. 2020-2045. **90.**

### **2018 Heldenstück Riesling Trocken- Weingut Schloss Lieser**

The name is new this year for the Spätlese Trocken from the Helden vineyard, but the quality is up to its customary high level. Again, the wine is around 12.5 percent alcohol, with the acids a bit higher here and around 7.5 grams per liter. This is still a cask sample and is beautifully expressive on both the nose and palate, offering up a beautiful bouquet of fresh lime, quince, slate, a touch of petrol, dried flowers, wild fennel and a gentle topnote of wild yeasts. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and a tad more svelte than the above, with a fine core, excellent focus and grip and a long, precise and zesty finish. This gets nicely smoky as it sits in the glass and is going to be an excellent wine. 2023-2050. **92.**

### **2018 Schloss Lieser “SL” Riesling QbA Feinherb- Weingut Schloss Lieser**

The Estate Riesling Feinherb is very pretty in 2018. The bouquet is pure and quite floral in personality, wafting from the glass in a mix of lime blossoms, pear, a hint of white cherry, fresh lime, wild yeasts, slate and a bit of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and vibrant, with a lovely spine of minerality, good, bright acids and fine focus and grip on the long and succulent finish. This is delicious and really a fine value. 2019-2035+. **89.**

### **2018 Brauneberger Juffer Riesling Kabinett- Weingut Schloss Lieser**

The 2018 Juffer Kabinett had already been bottled. It comes in at 8.5 percent octane and carries about sixty-five grams of sugar this year, but is nicely filigreed. The bouquet is tad reserved after its recent *mise*, but with some coaxing offers up scents of lime, pear, a touch of mossiness, orange zest and a lovely base of salty slate minerality. On the palate the wine is pure, medium-full and filigreed, with good framing acids, a lovely core and nice backend mineral drive on the poised and well-balanced finish. This is one of the softer Kabinetten in the cellar this year (or at least appears that way today, though this could also be affected by the bottling) and will drink beautifully from Day One. It has such lovely balance that it seems likely to also age quite gracefully. 2019-2050+. **91.**

### **2018 Piesporter Goldtröpfchen Riesling Kabinett- Weingut Schloss Lieser**

The 2018 Goldtröpfchen Kabinett from Thomas Haag was also already bottled at the end of March. This one of the higher acid Kabinetts in the lineup this year, carrying fully 8.5 grams per liter in 2018, to go along with alcohol also at 8.5 percent and sugars around sixty-five grams. The bouquet is very pure and classy, delivering a fine combination of pear, white cherries, salty slate minerality, spring flowers, bee pollen and a topnote of wild yeasts. On the palate the wine is medium-full, precise and filigreed, with lovely intensity of flavor, excellent focus and grip and a long, complex and quite snappy finish. I really like the backend lift here from the slightly higher acidity than in the Juffer Kabinett. First class juice. 2024-2060. **93.**

### **2018 Schloss Lieser “SL” Riesling Kabinett - Weingut Schloss Lieser**

The 2018 “SL” Kabinett had not yet been bottled and was showing very nicely indeed in late March. The nose here delivers a fine combination of pear, a touch of white cherry, a lovely base of slate, gentle wild yeast tones and a beautiful topnote of orange blossoms. On the palate the wine is pure, medium-full and nicely delicate and transparent in personality, with fine pedigree and backend bounce and a long, complex and quite classic finish. This is really good for an Estate level Kabinett. 2019-2040. **90+**.



### **2018 Lieser Niederberg Helden Riesling Kabinett- Weingut Schloss Lieser**

The 2018 Helden Kabinett was not yet bottled and was showing beautifully. The sugars here are a bit lower than in the Goldtröpfchen, coming in around fifty-five grams, but Thomas Haag did not have the details on acidity or alcohol yet for this wine. Again, its delicacy and filigree are readily apparent on the palate and the nose is really lovely, wafting from the glass in a blend of apple, sweet quince, pear, salty soil tones, a touch of wild yeasts, apple blossoms and a topnote of bee pollen. On the palate the wine is pure, medium-full and marvelously soil-driven in personality, with lovely backend bounce and grip, fine focus and a long, complex and perfectly balanced finish. 2023-2060+. **92+**.

### **2018 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Kabinett- Weingut Schloss Lieser**

The 2018 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Kabinett had already been bottled. The wine was showing very well and again, is a beautiful expression of this inimitable *terroir*, delivering an aromatic

constellation of pear, golden delicious apples, vanilla bean, bee pollen, apple blossoms and a beautiful base of slate. On the palate the wine is refined, fullish and succulent on the attack, with a lovely core, bright, zesty acids and excellent focus and grip on the nascently complex and very well balanced finish. Fine juice. 2019-2060. **92+**.

**2018 Bernkasteler Doctor Riesling Kabinett- Weingut Schloss Lieser**

The Doctor Kabinett from Thomas Haag in 2018 had also already been bottled, but was still showing beautifully. This is an extremely young bottle of Kabinett from the Doctor, which can often be a bit broad-shouldered in its youth. The wine is elegant and svelte on both the nose and palate, with the bouquet delivering scents of pear, salty minerality, apple, spring flowers, bee pollen and a gentle topnote of wild yeasts. On the palate the wine is very transparent, medium-full and already quite filigreed, with lovely purity and grip, precise focus and excellent cut on the long and impressively racy finish. This is really good juice. 2024-2060. **93+**.

**2018 Lieser Niederberg Helden Riesling Spätlese- Weingut Schloss Lieser**

The Niederberg Helden Spätlese from 2018 was not yet bottled at the time of my visit and was showing beautifully. Thomas Haag estimated that acids here are just over 7.5 grams and sugars are probably about eighty-five grams. The wine is very classy on the nose, offering up scents of white cherries, pears, bee pollen, a touch of fresh mint, slate, lime zest and citrus blossoms. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish, crisp and complex, with lovely backend tension between the pure fruit and the lovely minerality. The acids are bright and zesty and the finish is quite long. Lovely, lovely Spätlese. 2019-2060. **93**.

**2018 Brauneberger Juffer-Sonnenuhr Riesling Spätlese- Weingut Schloss Lieser**

The 2018 Juffer-Sonnenuhr Spätlese had been bottled two weeks before my visit and this was one of the recently-bottled wines that still seemed a bit reserved from the *mise*. The wine offers up a promising aromatic constellation of fresh lime, pear, slate, wild yeasts, a hint of petrol, esthery notes of bee pollen and a lovely topnote of this vineyard's signature mossiness. On the palate the wine is medium-full and nicely creamy on the attack, with very good acids and grip, exquisite balance and a long, complex and vibrant finish. I am sure this is going to be excellent, but given that it was still a tad shaken from the *mise*, I have scored it within a range. 2023-2060. **92-93+**.

**2018 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Spätlese- Weingut Schloss Lieser**

The 2018 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Spätlese from Schloss Lieser was also just bottled, but it was more on form and very easy to get a read on. The bouquet is youthfully reserved and very promising, delivering a nicely citric blend of orange blossoms, peach, pear, salty minerality, citrus zest and a lovely topnote of bee pollen. On the palate the wine is pure, medium-full, complex and tangy, with great focus, cut and grip and a very long, nascently complex and seamlessly balanced finish. This is very transparent in personality and is a beautiful bottle of Spätlese in the making. 2023-2060. **94**.

**2018 Piesporter Goldtröpfchen Riesling Spätlese- Weingut Schloss Lieser**

The 2018 Goldtröpfchen Spätlese was not yet bottled and also absolutely singing at the time of my visit. The excellent bouquet combines notes of pear, passion fruit, orange blossoms, a lovely base of slate, *fleur de sel* and a vibrant note of orange zest in the upper register. On the palate the wine is fullish, refined and bouncy, with lovely creaminess to the pristine fruit on the attack, excellent detail and balance and outstanding backend mineral drive on the long and complex finish. First class juice. 2024-2060. **94**.

### **2018 Bernkasteler Doctor Riesling Spätlese- Weingut Schloss Lieser**

The 2018 Doctor Spätlese from Thomas Haag was not yet bottled and it too was really a beautiful wine in the making. The bouquet is flat out superb, wafting from the glass in a blaze of white cherries, pear, salty minerality, bee pollen, spring flowers and a very exotic topnote (at least for the Doctor vineyard) of vanilla bean. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish and again, very, very refined in profile for a young Doctor, with lovely intensity of flavor, crisp acids and a long, complex and supremely elegant finish. 2022-2060+. **94.**

### **2018 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Auslese- Weingut Schloss Lieser**

The 2018 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Auslese was one of the wines at this Prädikat level that was already bottled on the 25<sup>th</sup> of March. It was showing very well, despite its recent *mise*, offering a really refined bouquet of pear, white peach, bee pollen, tropical flowers, a lovely bass-note of slate and a topnote of vanilla bean. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish and very elegant in profile, with fine complexity and grip, bright acids and a long, classy and vibrant finish that closes with an overt note of fresh pineapple. 2023-2070. **93.**

### **2018 Brauneberger Juffer-Sonnenuhr Riesling Auslese- Weingut Schloss Lieser**

The Juffer-Sonnenuhr Auslese from 2018 is another wine without botrytis, but it has a beautifully exotic fruit profile from those perfectly ripe, golden berries, as it wafts from the glass in a blend of passion fruit, *mirabelle*, honeycomb, slate, white cherries and spring flowers. On the palate the wine is full, suave and nicely creamy on the attack, with a good core, lovely purity and precision, sound framing acids and along, juicy and complex finish. This is a very, very pretty Auslese in the making. This was already bottled. 2022-2060+. **93.**

### **2018 Piesporter Goldtröpfchen Riesling Auslese- Weingut Schloss Lieser**

The 2018 Goldtröpfchen Auslese was also bottled two weeks before my visit, but it too was showing very well indeed. Again, despite no botrytis, this wine is beautifully exotic on the nose, delivering a constellation of mango, peach, white cherry, a dollop of slate salinity, orange blossoms and honeycomb. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and plenty vibrant, with excellent focus and grip, an enticing sense of creaminess and impressive bounce on the very long finish. A complete charmer. 2023-2070. **94.**

### **2018 Brauneberger Juffer-Sonnenuhr Auslese Goldkapsel - Weingut Schloss Lieser**

One does not find any botrytis in the Schloss Lieser 2018ers until one climbs up to the Goldkapsel terrace this year, where the botrytis is very, very clean and pure. All of the remaining wines in our tasting were still cask samples. The Juffer-Sonnenuhr Gold Kap is a beautifully glazed wine, offering up a complex bouquet of white cherries, pears, a touch of yellow plum, salty soil tones, honeycomb and a pungent topnote of violets. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, pure and zesty, with a creamy core, excellent focus and grip and a very long, snappy and perfectly balanced finish. Fine, fine juice. 2022-2080. **94+.**

### **2018 Lieser Niederberg Helden Riesling Auslese Goldkapsel- Weingut Schloss Lieser**

The Helden Goldkapsel Auslese is another beautifully botrytized 2018er. Aromatically, it is exotic and very precise, delivering a combination of cherries, salty soil tones, pear, fresh mint, apple blossoms and again, a topnote of vanilla bean. On the palate the wine is pure, full and beautifully creamy on the attack, with a super core of fruit, very good soil signature, zesty acids and a long, complex and very classy finish. 2-22-2080. **94.**

### **2018 Lieser Niederberg Helden Riesling Auslese Lange Goldkapsel- Weingut Schloss Lieser**

The Long Gold Kap Auslese from the Niederberg Helden is truly stunning in 2018 and this was one of my absolute favorite botrytis wines that I tasted during my ten days on the road here. The simply beautiful bouquet offers up scents of pear, passion fruit, pineapple, orange

blossoms and honeycomb. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, vibrant and supremely elegant in personality, with a lovely core, fine focus and grip, bright acids and excellent balance on the long, complex and zesty finish. Classic. 2023-2080. **96.**

**2018 Graacher Domprobst Riesling Auslese Lange Goldkapsel- Weingut Schloss Lieser**

The 2018 Lange Goldkapsel Auslese was the only bottling I had a chance to taste from the new Domprobst parcel at Schloss Lieser and it is also magnificent. The beautifully glazed bouquet is awash in sensations of pineapple, passion fruit, honey, a nice touch of salinity, violets and orange blossoms. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and creamy on the attack, with an excellent core, seamless balance and lovely focus and grip on the long and complex finish. A fine new addition to the Schloss Lieser family! 2023-2080. **95+.**

**2018 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Auslese Lange Goldkapsel- Weingut Schloss Lieser**

Schloss Lieser's 2018 Lange Goldkapsel Auslese from the Wehlener Sonnenuhr is a beautiful and utterly classical example of this Prädikat level synthesized with this magical *terroir*. The beautiful nose wafts from the glass in a nicely botrytized blend of pear, white cherry, vanilla bean, honeycomb, apple blossoms and a lovely touch of slate salinity. On the palate the wine is pure, refined and very, very elegant in profile, with a great core, superb focus and grip, very bright and zesty acids and a long, complex and utterly seamless finish. Great juice. 2025-2080. **95.**

**2018 Lieser Niederberg Helden Riesling Beerenauslese- Weingut Schloss Lieser**

The Niederberg Helden vineyard has also produced a dramatic BA at Schloss Lieser in 2018. The complex and vibrant nose jumps from the glass in a blaze of *mirabelle*, pear, mango, fresh mint, orange blossoms and honey. On the palate the wine is full, complex and gloriously glazed, with very good acids, exquisite focus and balance and a long, zesty and utterly refined finish. Great juice. 2023-2100. **95+.**

**2018 Brauneberger Juffer-Sonnenuhr Beerenauslese- Weingut Schloss Lieser**

The 2018 Beerenauslese from the Juffer-Sonnenuhr is another absolutely beautiful bottle in the making. The bouquet delivers an exotic blend of fresh lime, pineapple, tangerine, honey, citrus blossoms and again, a topnote of fresh mint. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, elegant in profile and simply dancing across the palate, with bottomless depth, great purity and precision, zesty acids and marvelous length and grip on the endless finish. Another great, great wine. 2022-2100. **96.**

**Weingut Selbach-Oster (Zeltingen)**

*Johannes Selbach's collection of 2018ers is one of the most unique to be found in all of Germany in this vintage (or at least amongst the estates that I visited during my ten day tour), as Zeltingen was blessed with a lot of botrytis towards the end of the growing season, due to blankets of early morning fog that enclosed the village's vineyards for several days in early October and led to some truly beautiful, clean botrytis. Johannes showed me a photo of five or six large tubs of shriveled grapes from noble rot that his team of pickers had gathered towards the middle of October, and he noted that he really had so much beautiful bunches of botrytized berries that "I could even play around a little in the cellar this year with TBA" and made one in new oak, just to see how it would work. During my visit I tasted some of the most brilliant young examples of Trockenbeerenauslese that I have ever tasted from the 2018 lineup here, and there really are several that are legendary in every conceivable manner. The harvest got started here quite early in 2018, and even not counting grapes being selected for sparkling wine, the Gewurztraminer picking got rolling on September 5th, the earliest Riesling brought in was on*



the 6<sup>th</sup> and the harvest went along in a leisurely fashion from then until its completion on October 17<sup>th</sup>. Most of the drier wines and lower Prädikat levels were made from grapes picked in the second half of September and then attention turned to the botrytis, as the conditions got rolling in Zeltingen for this in early October and it was some of the most beautifully clean and pure botrytis that Johannes Selbach has ever seen in his career. In general, other than the Gewurztraminer, almost nothing was acidulated here in 2018 (“one or two Rieslings” commented Johannes) and for the most part, the wines have very good levels of acidity for the vintage.



*Johannes Selbach, playing the role of proud papa to his amazing array of 2018 Trockenbeerenauslesen.*

The 2018 dilemma faced by Johannes and many other winegrowers in the middle Mosel was how to handle the beautifully ripe grapes when making the lower level Prädikat wines, particularly Kabinetten, which is a particular passion of Herr Selbach. As Johannes commented, “with the sugar levels that we had in 2018, one either has to live with slightly higher alcohol levels for the Kabinetten, or lose that filigree and delicacy that is Kabinett and end up with wines with too much sugar and which are really lighter Spätlese with Kabinett labels.” So, it was either a bit more alcohol across the board for the Selbach Kabinetten or lose that classical lightness of step of this Prädikat level and Johannes decided to allow the wines to ferment up anywhere from a half to a full degree more than in many vintages to keep the interplay of minerality, acidity and residual sugars at the classic Kabinett levels. The results are a very good



*range of Kabinetten, but with their slightly higher octane levels, the wines have just a touch more powerful personalities than in most vintages here, though they remain very true to the classic aesthetic sensibilities of that Prädikat level. This element is part of the equation for all of the Selbach-Oster wines in 2018 up to the level of Auslese, so with the dry wine bottlings, were are looking at generally between 11.5 and a full thirteen percent octane for the wines, the Kabinetten and Spätlesen range between 9.5 and ten percent alcohol and it is really only when one settles in at the Auslese level and above that the sugars do not really shape the alcohol level in the finished wines. With all of the botrytis in Zeltingen in 2018, the Auslesen from Selbach-Oster are more obviously glazed than at many addresses in the middle Mosel, with Johannes estimating that “for us, most Auslesen include about twenty-five percent botrytized bunches this year.” And then, after that, one climbs into the amazing range of dessert wines here in 2018, which are some of the most brilliant young botrytis wines I have ever had the pleasure to taste and are truly magical! The 2018 vintage at Weingut Selbach-Oster is very successful, and though not everything is absolutely classical in nature this year, they are across the board a very strong set of wines and will make fans of this excellent estate very, very happy when they are released! A handful of the wines that I tasted during my visit on the 27<sup>th</sup> of March had already been bottled a couple of weeks before so as to be ready to show at Prowein, but the lion’s share were still in cask and would be bottled in the coming weeks.*

#### **2018 Gutes Riesling Trocken- Weingut Selbach-Oster**

The 2018 Gutes Riesling Trocken had not yet been bottled, but was destined to be so under screwcap in the coming few weeks. The wine was showing very nicely at the time of my visit, offering up a ripe and pretty bouquet of apple, pineapple, salty slate minerality, white flowers and a touch of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is fullish, crisp and complex, with a good core, fine focus and grip and very good length on the well-balanced backend. Good juice and a lovely entry level wine. 2019-2035. **90.**

#### **2018 Zeltinger Riesling Kabinett Trocken- Weingut Selbach-Oster (Screwcap)**

The 2018 Zeltinger Kabinett Trocken was already bottled at the time of my visit. The wine finished up at 11.8 percent alcohol, with acids around seven grams per liter. The wine was still a tad shaken from its recent *mise* and a bit reticent on the nose, but with some swirling started to emerge nicely and offered up a complex mix of lemon, pink grapefruit, slate, bee pollen, citrus peel and a nice touch of petrol. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and complex, with lively acids, fine focus and grip and a long, vibrant finish. As this was still a bit unsettled from its *mise*, I have scored it in a range, but would expect it to land at the top of that range when it has fully recovered. 2019-2040. **89-91.**

#### **2018 Zeltinger Schlossberg Riesling Spätlese Trocken- Weingut Selbach-Oster**

The 2018 Zeltinger Schlossberg Spätlese Trocken was still in *fuder* and no final analysis had been done yet, but Johannes estimated the alcohol ended up here between 12.5 and thirteen percent. The bouquet is bright and expressive, delivering a fine blend of gooseberry, lime, slate, still a touch of youthful yeastiness, orange peel and an exotic topnote of fresh rosemary. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with bright acids, fine focus and grip and a long, nascently complex finish. This is going to be a bit broader-shouldered this year, but it will be a lovely wine. 2022-2050. **91.**

#### **2018 Zeltinger Riesling Trocken \*\*\*- Weingut Selbach-Oster**

The 2018 Zeltinger Riesling Trocken \*\*\* was harvested from parcels mid-slope and is going to come in with alcohol levels similar to the above. The wine offers up lovely precision on

both the nose and palate, with the bouquet delivering scents of tart orange, slate, grapefruit, dried flowers and a topnote of lemongrass. On the palate the wine is deep, ripe and full-bodied, with a quite powerful personality, very good focus and grip, bright acids and fine cut and grip on the long and nascently complex finish. This is going to need some time in the cellar to blossom. 2024-2055+. **91+**.

**2018 Zeltinger Himmelreich Riesling Kabinett Halbtrocken- Weingut Selbach-Oster**

The 2018 Zeltinger Himmelreich Kabinett Halbtrocken had been bottled ahead of Prowein, but was showing very nicely. This is bottled under screwcap for full bottles, but the halves are bottled under cork, and this is what we tasted from. The bouquet is quite lovely, wafting from the glass in a refined mix of pear, a touch of fresh pineapple, salty minerality, orange peel and white flowers. On the palate the wine is crisp, medium-full and juicy on the attack, with a fine core, lovely cut and grip and a long, vibrant and complex finish. Good juice. 2019-2050. **91+**.

**2018 Graacher Domprobst Riesling “Alte Reben” Feinherb- Weingut Selbach-Oster**

The 2018 Domprobst Alte Reben Feinherb was still in cask at the time of my visit and comes in around twelve percent octane this year. This is a lovely wine on both the nose and palate, with the classy bouquet wafting from the glass in a mix of pear, a touch of fresh pineapple, spring flowers, salty slate minerality and a topnote of lime zest. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and beautifully soil-driven in personality, with a fine core, excellent focus and grip and impressive lift and mineral drive on the long and complex finish. This is first class juice. It will be bottled under cork. 2019-2040. **93**.

**2016 Zeltinger Sonnenuhr Riesling “Alte Reben” Feinherb- Weingut Selbach-Oster**

The old vine Feinherb bottling from the Zeltinger Sonnenuhr vineyard hails from ungrafted vines planted in 1910. It should finish out around 12.5 percent octane and carry in the neighborhood of twenty grams of sugar. This is still in cask and offers up a lovely bouquet of white cherries, pear, fruit blossoms, bee pollen, a fine base of slate and a topnote of orange peel. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and quite suave, with a nice, juicy burst of fruit on the attack, lovely acids and fine focus and grip on the long, ripe and zesty finish. This is very good as well, but I like the precision of the Domprobst version a hair better this year. 2021-2050. **91**.

**2018 Zeltinger Schlossberg Riesling Kabinett- Weingut Selbach-Oster**

The 2018 Zeltinger Schlossberg Kabinett comes in around 9.5 percent alcohol and sports approximately forty-five grams of sugar. The wine is really lovely on both the nose and palate, with the bouquet offering up scents of apple, salty slate minerality, a touch of lime, spring flowers, bee pollen and a gentle topnote of wild yeasts. On the palate the wine is medium-full, filigreed and zesty, with beautiful transparency and bounce, very good focus and a long, complex and utterly charming finish. A lovely example. 2023-2060. **93+**.

**2018 Zeltinger Sonnenuhr Riesling Kabinett- Weingut Selbach-Oster**

The 2018 Zeltinger Sonnenuhr Kabinett is also very pretty this year, but it is a touch riper and softer than the Schlossberg version. This comes in at an even ten percent alcohol and delivers a refined bouquet of lemon, apple, salty slate, a touch of white cherry, spring flowers and bee pollen. On the palate the wine is pure, medium-full and gently creamy on the attack, with a good core, fine focus and complexity and a long, elegant and classy finish that is just a touch gentle in its acidity. 2019-2045. **91+**.

**2018 Zeltinger Schlossberg Riesling Spätlese- Weingut Selbach-Oster**

The 2018 Schlossberg Spätlese is a very pretty and stylish wine out of the blocks, offering up an aromatic constellation of pear, white cherries, bee pollen, a hint of violet, apple blossoms and slate. On the palate the wine is medium-full, juicy and has a fine core, with good mineral drive, bright acids and a long, bouncy and complex finish. This is lovely. 2019-2060. **92.**

**2018 Graacher Domprobst Riesling Spätlese- Weingut Selbach-Oster**

The 2018 Domprobst Spätlese from Weingut Selbach-Oster is also a fine bottle in the making, but this wine is a tad muscular in style this year, coming in at 9.5 percent octane. The bouquet is more reserved at the present time than the Schlossberg, but with some prodding offers up scents of apple, pear, slate, white flowers, a nice touch of salinity and an esthery topnote of bee pollen. On the palate the wine is fullish, crisp and vibrant, with a fine girdle of acidity, lovely cut and grip and a long, slightly broad-shouldered, but complex finish. Good juice. 2022-2060. **92.**

**2018 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Spätlese- Weingut Selbach-Oster**

The Spätlese from the Wehlener Sonnenuhr is another very good bottle in the making. This was the only Spätlese that had already been bottled at the time of my visit. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a blend of pear, white cherry, vanilla bean, orange blossoms, bee pollen and a lovely base of slate. On the palate the wine is medium-full, transparent and beautifully balanced, with a nice touch of pure, creamy fruit on the attack, a good core, sound acids and a long, complex and zesty finish. This is a tad less muscular than the very good Domprobst Spätlese this year, but they differ in terms of style, rather than absolute quality in 2018. 2019-2050+. **92.**

**2018 Zeltinger Sonnenuhr Riesling Spätlese \* - Weingut Selbach-Oster**

The 2018 Zeltinger Sonnenuhr Riesling Spätlese \* from Weingut Selbach-Oster is another very charming example of the vintage. Johannes Selbach notes that this includes a touch of botrytis and some beautiful golden berries in it this year. It delivers a fine bouquet of mango, white cherry, pear, apple blossoms, bee pollen, a hint of violets and a nice bass note of slate. On the palate the wine is medium-full, focused and zesty, with good acids, blossoming complexity and lovely length and grip on the very well-balanced finish. Good juice. 2023-2060. **92.**

**2018 Graacher Domprobst Riesling Auslese- Weingut Selbach-Oster**

The 2018 Domprobst Auslese from Johannes Selbach was really showing beautifully at the time of my visit. This wine included about twenty-five percent botrytized berries in it this year and comes in between 8.5 and nine percent alcohol, with sugars around 85 grams. The pure and classic nose wafts from the glass in a mix of white cherry, pineapple, a hint of the honeycomb to come, tropical flowers and a lovely dollop of salty minerality. On the palate the wine is deep, pure, full-bodied and exquisitely balanced, with a creamy core, bright acids and lovely lift and grip on the long, complex and dancing finish. A first class Auslese! 2025-2075. **94.**

**2018 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Auslese- Weingut Selbach-Oster**

The 2018 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Auslese had also already been bottled prior to my visit, but was showing beautifully. Like the Domprobst, this includes about twenty-five percent botrytis in it this year. This too is absolutely superb on the nose, soaring from the glass in a beautifully and gently glazed blend of white cherries, fresh pineapple, vanilla bean, acacia blossoms, a touch of saltiness from the slate and a lovely topnote of orange zest. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, refined and focused, with a creamy core, excellent purity and

intensity of flavor and a very long, youthful and vibrant finish. Fine, fine juice. 2028-2080+. **94+.**

**2018 Zeltinger Schlossberg Riesling Beerenauslese- Weingut Selbach-Oster**

The 2018 Zeltinger Schlossberg Beerenauslese from Weingut Selbach-Oster is outstanding this year, and it would really stand out in this lineup, if there was not so much dessert wine thunder still waiting in the wings! The gorgeous nose delivers a refined blend of pineapple, mango, white cherries, salty minerality, orange zest, fruit blossoms and a topnote of honey. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and nicely snappy, with marvelous depth at the core, great focus and grip and a long, complex and fairly powerful finish. This comes in at 7.5 percent alcohol, which is a pretty good level for BA. 2019-2100. **94.**



**2018 Zeltinger Sonnenuhr Riesling Trockenbeerenauslese- Weingut Selbach-Oster**

The Zeltinger Sonnenuhr vineyard was awash in botrytis in the Selbach parcels this year and Johannes commented that “we had so much botrytis that I was able to play a bit in the cellar in 2018.” Hence, there are two versions of this wine, with the one below fermented in a new oak cask. The non-oaked version is a magical TBA, offering up a gorgeous bouquet of passion fruit, pineapple, honey and a beautiful, tropical topnote of musky floral tones. On the palate the wine is medium-full, vibrant and gloriously focused, with a creamy core, outstanding lift and refinement and superb backend acids adding precision and bounce. Johannes comments that “this

has around one hundred and sixty grams of residual sugar and is the lightest TBA in the cellars this year!” A beautiful wine. 2019-2100. **97.**

**2018 Zeltinger Sonnenuhr Riesling “Barrique” Trockenbeerenauslese- Selbach-Oster**

And the version fermented in new oak? It too is outstanding. Johannes fermented this wine in a small, completely new oak barrel, but five weeks into its *elevage*, the wine was racked out of the barrel and only a very discreet memory remains of the oak. The bouquet shows that whisper of vanilla to go along with a similar blend of passion fruit, pineapple, pineapple and tropical flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, pure, refined and focused, with stellar depth and complexity, and perhaps just a touch more grip from a touch of tannin on the backend from its very brief sojourn in new oak. I would have never imagined that middle Mosel and TBA would work with a touch of new oak, but this wine is outstanding! 2019-2100. **97.**

**2018 Zeltinger Sonnenuhr Riesling Trockenbeerenauslese \* - Weingut Selbach-Oster**

The One Star Sonnenuhr TBA was picked later in October than the two wines above, so the sugars are a touch higher at around one hundred and eighty-five grams. This too is a gorgeous wine, with a slightly deeper-pitched nose of oranges, pineapple, honey, citrus blossoms and a discreet topnote of musky, acacia blossoms. On the palate the wine is deep, pure, complex and full, with vibrant acids, excellent focus and grip and a very long, complex and beautifully balanced finish. I have to give a very, very slight nod to the non-starred TBA for its esthery, ethereal and almost dream-like beauty, but this is no slouch! 2019-2100. **95.**

**2018 Zeltinger Sonnenuhr Riesling Trockenbeerenauslese \*\* - Weingut Selbach-Oster**

The Two Star TBA from the Sonnenuhr vineyard in 2018 is richer still, tipping the scales around two hundred and twenty-five grams of residual sugar. This is deeper, longer and more concentrated at the core, but still amazingly light on its feet and dancing on the backend. The bouquet delivers a magical blend of mango, guava, honey, an exotic note of lavender, orange zest and a hint of saltiness from the underlying slate. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and bottomless at the core, with racy acids, great focus and grip and a very, very long, vibrant and impeccably balanced finish. This is utterly brilliant. 2019-2100. **99.**

**Weingut Wwe. Dr. Thanisch Erben Thanisch (Bernkastel)**

*The 2018ers from Weingut Wwe. Dr. Thanisch Erben Thanisch are some of the richer, more opulently-styled wines of the vintage. They are very successful in their idiom, but it is clear that Sofia Thanisch and her team were after a different expression of the 2018 vintage than some of their neighbors. The picking here got started the last week of September in 2018, which was about a week behind many others in the middle Mosel in this vintage, and the Thanisch estate brought in beautifully ripe, golden berries as a result. A couple of the wines here had been acidulated in 2018, but the vast majority were not and did not show any shortage of acidity, but were a tad bigger in profile across the board than in 2017, due to the riper nature of the 2018 vintage. A couple of the entry level cuvées had already been bottled in anticipation of their being shown at Prowein the week before my visit, but most everything else was still in cask and was scheduled for bottling in the weeks following my visit. These are very good examples of the 2018 vintage, with a bit more alcohol and muscle than the last few years for the drier wines, but still lovely complexity and balance. Amongst the Prädikat wines, they too are a touch broader-shouldered than last year, but they are not out of scale with what others have crafted in this vintage and the Doctor vineyard in general seems to have really hit a homerun across the board in 2018. We did not taste the 2018 GGs this year, as they were still finishing up their fermentations (or had just done so) and were still a bit yeasty and not yet ready to be shown.*

*As the few wines that had already been bottled were served from samples prepared for Prowein, they did not have their finished AP numbers on them and so I do not have those listed below. There is going to only be a single Kabinett bottling from the Doctor vineyard this year, but there will be two 2018 versions at the Spätlese level from this great terroir, with one being offered at the auctions in Trier in September. I only tasted the “regular” version of Doctor Spätlese on this visit. Of the two 2018 Auslesen I tasted (one each from the Badstube and Doctor vineyards), they were both made primarily with golden berries and had “very, very little botrytis in them” according to Sofia Thanisch. When I asked if there were some wines still in the cellar that had more botrytis to them, she smiled and said “yes, we still have a few more surprises down there that are not quite finished fermenting, so there are a few more 2018ers still to come.” These are very successful 2018ers, but quite different from say the Bernkasteler wines made from Thomas Haag at Schloss Lieser for instance, with a bit bigger and more opulent personalities, but with no shortage of structure, focus and potential for long-term cellaring. Only the Estate Kabinett Feinherb stood out as really a bit larger in scale than its Prädikat (more light Spätlese than true Kabinett), but I am sure that there will be plenty of customers for that particular wine that will be delighted to be getting a lighter styled Spätlese priced and labeled as Kabinett! The summit of the 2018ers that I tasted here this year was the stunning Doctor Auslese and I have to imagine that some of those other higher Prädikat wines that were not yet ready to show down in the cellars will also be absolutely magical when they are finished up and ready to emerge for tasting. So stay tuned, there is more here than currently meets the eye from the 2018 vintage!*

### **2018 Thanisch Riesling Trocken- Wwe. Dr. Thanisch Erben Thanisch**

The Estate Riesling Trocken had not yet been bottled and was still a cask sample, but it was scheduled for its *mise* not long after my visit. As it had not been bottled, there were no analysis numbers for this cuvée, but the wine was showing quite nicely. The bouquet is ripe and classy, offering up scents of green apple, quince, salty slate minerality, spring flowers and plenty of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied bright and zesty, with a rock solid core of fruit, good acids and a long, complex and promising finish. I would guess this is between twelve and thirteen percent octane this year, but it is very nicely balanced and will be tasty right out of the blocks. Good juice. 2019-2030+. **89.**

### **2018 Thanisch Riesling Kabinett- Wwe. Dr. Thanisch Erben Thanisch (screwcap)**

The 2018 Estate Riesling Kabinett had already been bottled ahead of Prowein and was also showing quite nicely. Sofia Thanisch did not have the precise numbers for this wine, but recalled it being approximately nine percent alcohol, with twenty-five grams per liter of residual sugar and acids just over seven grams per liter. The lovely nose wafts from the glass in a mix of white peach, apple, salty minerality, white flowers and bee pollen. On the palate the wine is fullish, bright and nicely soil-driven in personality, with a good core of fruit, lovely focus and grip and zesty acids adding lift and bounce on the wide open and very tasty finish. 2019-2040. **89.**

### **2018 Bernkasteler Badstube Riesling Kabinett Feinherb- Wwe. Dr. Thanisch (screwcap)**

The 2018 Badstube Kabinett Feinherb had also been bottled right before Prowein. This was the one Kabinett in the cellars this year that really struck me more as a lighter Spätlese in style, but it was quite nicely done in this guise. The bouquet is ripe and very pretty, wafting from the glass in a mix of apple, pear, a nice dollop of fresh herbs, salty slate, lilacs and apple blossoms. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely generous on the attack, with



really beautiful fruit tones, solid underlying soil tones, fine focus and grip and a long, zesty and nicely transparent finish. I am sure this would have been labeled as Spätlese in most vintages, but the estate needed a Kabinett Feinherb for clients from the 2018 vintage and with the beautiful ripeness of this year, this was as close as they could get! Not a classic Kabinett in weight, but really a pretty wine nonetheless! 2019-2040. **89+**.

**2018 Thanisch Riesling- Wwe. Dr. Thanisch Erben Thanisch (screwcap)**

The 2018 Estate Riesling is another very nice wine that had been bottled right before Prowein. It comes in around nine percent octane and carries about forty grams per liter or residual sugar this year. The nose is ripe and pretty, delivering a mix of apple, a hint of *mirabelle*, a lovely base of soil tones, orange peel and a hint of wild yeasts in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and succulent on the attack, with a lovely core of fruit, very good focus, zesty acids and impressive grip and lift on the long and nicely saline finish. This has plenty of personality and is going to be very good value. 2019-2040. **89+**.



*The beautiful view along the Mosel from the porch at Weingut Wwe. Dr. Thanisch Erben Thanisch.*

**2018 Bernkasteler Badstube Riesling Kabinett- Wwe. Dr. Thanisch Erben Thanisch**

The 2018 Badstube Kabinett from Dr. Thanisch Erben Thanisch is another wine that is a touch richer than normal for its Prädikat level, due to the ripeness of the vintage, but has plenty of depth, complexity and purity of fruit and is a very attractive wine in its style. This was still in cask (as was the case with everything else that followed in the tasting lineup) and probably comes in around 8.5 percent octane this year. The bouquet is excellent, wafting from the glass in

a mix of apple, a hint of yellow plum, salty slate soil tones, spring flowers and an esthery topnote of bee pollen. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and on the cusp of Spätlese must weight, but lovely detail and balance, with very good focus, bouncy acids and a long, complex and juicy finish. Not a classic example of Kabinett, but truly a delicious bottle of wine that I would be happy to drink anytime! 2019-2050. **91.**

**2018 Berncasteler Doctor Riesling Kabinett- Wwe. Dr. Thanisch Erben Thanisch**

The Doctor is always one of the broader-shouldered wines on the middle Mosel, as this is just the nature of the *terroir* here, and perhaps the style of the 2018 vintage was perfectly suited to this vineyard. Sofia Thanisch's 2018 Doctor Kabinett is a simply outstanding wine in the making, offering up a deep, complex and very elegant bouquet of apple, white peach, wild flowers, salty soil tones and a whisper of upper register wild yeast tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very refined in profile, with lovely, pure fruit on the attack, an excellent signature of soil, fine depth at the core and very good length and grip on the zesty and well-balanced finish. The acids here are not snappy, but perfectly sound and this wine will age long and gracefully. Lovely juice. 2023-2060+. **93+.**

**2018 Bernkasteler Badstube Riesling Spätlese- Wwe. Dr. Thanisch Erben Thanisch**

The 2018 Badstube Spätlese from Dr. Thanisch Erben Thanisch is a fine bottle in the making, and this is not dramatically deeper or bigger than the Kabinett from this vineyard. The bouquet is elegant and classy, offering up scents of apple, white peach, salty slate, fruit blossoms and a gentle topnote of wild yeasts. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, bright and complex, with a good core, fine transparency, impressive, zesty acids and very good focus and grip on the long, well-balanced and complex finish. Good juice that will drink beautifully from release. 2019-2050. **91+.**

**2018 Berncasteler Doctor Riesling Spätlese - Wwe. Dr. Thanisch Erben Thanisch**

The regular version of the 2018 Doctor Spätlese from Sofia Thanisch and her team was really showing beautiful potential at the time of my visit. This is more reserved and more inherently elegant than the Badstube Spätlese this year, offering up a superb aromatic constellation of pear, white peach, wild yeasts, a very complex base of soil, bee pollen and a topnote of tiny white flowers. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and nicely broad-shouldered in profile (in the classic Doctor manner), with excellent mid-palate depth, bright acids, a lovely core of fruit and impressive grip on the long, perfectly delineated and vibrant finish. This is a touch richer style of Spätlese in the true 2018 mold here, but it has all of its parts in place for a very long, beautiful life in bottle. 2026-2075. **93+.**

**2018 Bernkasteler Badstube Riesling Auslese- Wwe. Dr. Thanisch Erben Thanisch**

The 2018 Badstube Auslese from the estate is another very lovely wine, coupling the richness of pure fruit of the vintage with fine balance and elegance of personality. The beautifully esthery aromatic constellation offers up scents of bee pollen, apple blossoms, pear, pineapple and a lovely base of salty soil tones. On the palate the wine is pure, plush and elegant, with lovely creaminess on the attack, a very good core, fine mineral undertow and very good length and grip on the bright and bouncy finish. This has virtually no botrytis and really is a beautiful bottle of Auslese without the influence of noble rot. 2024-2065. **92.**

**2018 Berncasteler Doctor Riesling Auslese - Wwe. Dr. Thanisch Erben Thanisch**

The 2018 Doctor Auslese from the Thanisch family is a brilliant wine in the making. As with the above wine, this is composed almost entirely from golden and shriveled berries, with only the faintest touch of botrytis here. The bouquet offers up a youthfully pure and refined blend of pear, *mirabelle*, a touch of laurel, white flowers, a beautifully complex base of soil tones

and a topnote of bee pollen. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and very precise, with a full-bodied format, great depth at the core, bright acids and marvelous length and grip on the complex, seamless and utterly refined finish. Great, great juice! 2028-2080. **95.**

### **Weingut Weiser-Künstler (Traben-Trarbach)**

*Alexandra Künstler and Konstantin Weiser have made absolutely brilliant 2018ers, and to my palate, these are the most brilliant wines yet from this most gifted winemaking couple. The couple started picking on September 21<sup>st</sup> in 2018, which was the earliest start to a harvest in their short history as an estate. Everything was brought in under perfect conditions by the 15<sup>th</sup> of October, with Alexandra reporting that the grapes were in perfect health and it was a relaxed time in the vineyards making parcel selections for specific wines all through the early autumn. Alexandra and Konstantin have a few vineyard parcels that are in side valleys and which they often target for Kabinett level wines, as these sites do not benefit from the reflected light off of the Mosel river and ripen a bit slower, so that sugar accumulations always lag behind the vineyards that overlook the river and hence, are perfect for producing Kabinett in this age of global warming. However, in the endless summer sun of 2018, one of these vineyards, the Sonnenlay in the village of Wolf produced its first ever Spätlese under the watch of Weingut Weiser-Künstler, as the cooling aspect of this side valley proved perfect for a lovely Spätlese in 2018! The couple's 2018 Estate Riesling and its Kabinett from the Schlossberg vineyard in Trarbach had been bottled two weeks prior to my visit, but everything else here remained in cask and was to be bottled in the following couple of weeks. So Alexandra had precise numbers for the two bottled wines, but the analyses for the others had not yet been completed. Happily, yields here were far more correct in 2018 than in the frost-shortened crop of 2017 and there should hopefully be more bottles of these beautiful wines on the market this year, though their exceptional quality and the strong following that the couple is garnering in recent years still means that one should move decisively when the first offers of 2018ers come out, as these beautiful wines are going to disappear into the cellars of fans of this excellent estate at breakneck speed this year. Weingut Weiser-Künstler is now clearly one of the undisputed superstars in the middle Mosel and their stellar collection of 2018ers- brilliant from top to bottom- was one of the absolute highlights of my ten day visit to Germany this year. Do not miss these wines!*

### **2018 Weiser-Künstler "Estate" Riesling- Weingut Weiser-Künstler (screwcap)**

As I mentioned above, this was the only wine that had been bottled prior to my visit on the 25<sup>th</sup> of March, as its *mise* had been two weeks previous. Despite having just been bottled, the wine was showing beautifully; it is 11.5 percent in alcohol, carries 14.5 grams of sugar and has acids at 7.5 grams per liter, which conspire to make this flat out gorgeous to drink right out of the blocks, but with the balance and spine of acidity to also carry it as far as its screwcap will allow. The bouquet is beautifully expressive already, jumping from the glass in a complex blend of apple, salty slate minerality, a touch of white cherry, spring flowers and just a whisper of more savory aromatics in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and superbly detailed, with a lovely core, fine acids and grip and a long, vibrant and utterly refined finish. This is a stunning value! 2019-2040+. **90.**

### **2018 Trarbacher Riesling Trocken- Weingut Weiser-Künstler**

The Estate Riesling bottling and this excellent Trarbacher Trocken both hail essentially from the same vineyards of Schlossberg and Talbenhaus in the village of Trarbach. The primary

difference is that this cuvée fermented down below the threshold to be labeled Trocken, whereas the Estate Riesling found its perfect balance with just a bit more residual sugar. This wine is still in cask and is excellent, offering up a superb bouquet of tart orange, salty minerality, a touch of wild fennel, green apple, dried flowers and a nice hint of botanicals in the upper register. On the palate the wine is fullish, crisp and rock solid at the core, with excellent complexity, impressive backend mineral drive and great length and grip on the zesty and very refined finish. Alexandra suspects this is closer to twelve percent octane, so just a touch more powerful than the Estate Riesling this year. First class juice. 2023-2050. **90+**.

#### **2018 Trabener Gaispfad Riesling Kabinett Trocken- Weingut Weiser-Künstler**

The estate farms eighty-five year-old, ungrafted vines here in the Gaispfad vineyard and it has produced a beautiful Kabinett Trocken in 2018. This is around nine percent octane and delivers a superb bouquet of green apple, a touch of quince, lemongrass, a beautiful base of slate and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, bright and transparent, with lovely intensity of flavor, excellent focus and grip and a long, poised and complex finish that closes with an overt note of salty minerality. Just lovely and absolutely classical in its Kabinett sensibilities- no easy feat in the summer of 2018! 2022-2055+. **91+**.

#### **2018 Steffensberg Riesling- Weingut Weiser-Künstler**

The Steffensberg vineyard in Enkirch is planted with forty-five year-old vines, on the south-facing slope of grey slate, and it is always a superb wine in the Weiser-Künstler cellars. The 2018 was lagging a bit in terms of finishing up its fermentation, and consequently was still a touch yeasty on the nose at the time of my visit, but Alexandra commented that it was just about complete. While the wine was still a tad adolescent on the nose, it was settled in and singing on the palate and it is clearly going to be excellent wine. The very youthful bouquet offers up scents of tart orange, a hint of green pear, a lovey base of slate, dried flowers and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, medium-full, pure and beautifully balanced, with an excellent core of fruit, lovely backend grip and mineral drive and a long, promising and vibrant finish. This will clearly be outstanding juice. 2023-2060. **92-93**.

#### **2018 Trarbacher Schlossberg Riesling Kabinett- Weingut Weiser-Künstler**

The Schlossberg vineyard is a relatively new parcel for the couple to be working with, and for the last couple of vintages, all of this fruit went into the Estate Riesling bottling, but 2018 sees its first Kabinett from the estate from these vines. They are relatively young by Weiser-Künstler standards, being only twenty-five years of age, but they have produced a classic Kabinett this year. The wine comes in at 9.5 percent alcohol and carries approximately fifty grams per liter of sugar, to go along with eight grams of acidity. This wine had been bottled for two weeks and was a touch reserved on the nose as a result, but very expressive on the palate. The bouquet is a mix of apple, white cherries, a beautiful base of slate, bee pollen and apple blossoms. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied and beautifully transparent and balanced, with impressive filigree, nascent complexity and a long, bouncy and delicate finish. I love how this wine has a generous kiss of the vintage's pure fruit on the attack, and then the salty slate takes over from the mid-palate back. Classic Kabinett. 2022-2065. **92+**.

#### **2018 Enkircher Ellergrub Riesling Kabinett- Weingut Weiser-Künstler**

The couple's hundred year-old vines in the Ellergrub have produced an absolutely brilliant Kabinett in 2018, and this was one of the best wines from this level that I tasted anywhere in Germany on this trip. I have to rank it right up there with what Julian Haart and Klaus-Peter Keller accomplished at this Prädikat level in 2018 and this wine is not to be missed! The bouquet is flat out brilliant in its youthful guise, soaring from the glass in a very precise

constellation of white cherry, apple, a hint of pear, a beautiful base of salty slate, white flowers and a lovely, smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and taught, with beautiful filigree and balance, laser-like focus and great cut and grip on the seamless and vibrant finish. A brilliant example of Kabinett! 2023-2070. **95**.



*Alexandra Künstler, basking in the glow of hers and Konstantin's brilliant 2018ers.*

### **2018 Wolfer Sonnenlay Riesling Spätlese- Weingut Weiser-Künstler**

It was lovely to see a Spätlese produced from the Sonnenlay vineyard this year and this is another really refined example of the vintage. The bouquet is pure and already very expressive, offering up scents of golden delicious apples, white cherries, a very complex base of slate, spring flowers and an esthery topnote of bee pollen. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and pure, with classic tension between the juicy fruit, zesty acids and salty slate mineral drive. The finish is long, complex and very classy and this wine is going to be hard to resist from the moment it is released! Alexandra was not sure of the exact numbers for the Sonnenlay Spätlese, but estimated it is around sixty-five grams of sugar and eight grams of acidity. Joyous juice. 2019-2050. **92+**.

### **2018 Enkircher Ellergrub Riesling Spätlese “Goldkapsel”- Weingut Weiser-Künstler**

According to Alexandra, the Ellergrub Spätlese in 2018 has just a touch more sugar than the Sonnenlay and the same level of acidity, but again, the final analysis was not yet done for this cask sample. In any event, this is a beautiful Spätlese in the making, delivering a deep and

properly reserved bouquet of white peach, quince, salty slate minerality, elder flowers and dogwood blossoms. On the palate the wine is very pure and precise, medium-full and zesty, with gorgeous focus and grip, lovely interplay of bright fruit, salty minerality and vibrant acidity and a very long, very elegant and complex finish. Another legend in the making from the Ellergrub in 2018. 2023-2070. **94.**

#### **2018 Enkircher Ellergrub Riesling Auslese- Weingut Weiser-Künstler**

The only Auslese in the cellars this year, the 2018 Ellergrub was made from a berry by berry selection of botrytized grapes, with Alexandra noting “that the botrytis here was very, very clean and pure.” The wine is brilliant on both the nose and palate, with the bouquet jumping from the glass in a mix of pear, passion fruit, a touch of white cherry, very pronounced and salty minerality, honeycomb and a gently musky floral topnote redolent of acacia blossoms. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, bright and supremely elegant, with a lovely, creamy attack coupled to outstanding backend mineral drive. The finish is very, very long, complex and zesty. This is gorgeous. 2024-2075. **95.**

### ***Nahe***

#### **Weingut Hermann Dönnhoff (Oberhäusern)**

*As I had a late afternoon appointment at Weingut Dönnhoff, I only had a chance to say a quick hello to Cornelius Dönnhoff, as he was in the midst of rushing off from the bottling line in the cellars to the vineyards to try and get in an hour or so of pruning in before darkness fell. Happily, his father Helmut had plenty of time to show the complete lineup of 2018ers, which are indeed brilliant from top to bottom and Trocken to Beerenauslese. As I mentioned in the introduction, Helmut Dönnhoff gives one hundred percent credit to Cornelius for making the call on when to start picking here this year and is fully convinced that early start to harvesting here was the deciding factor in shaping the excellent quality of the vintage at the estate. The picking teams were out in the vineyards here on the 21<sup>st</sup> of September to get rolling with the Pinot Blanc and Pinot Gris this year, with Riesling bunches starting to come in a few days later. The Dönnhoff family did not use any grapes from young vines in the 2018 vintage, preferring to just cut the bunches from the vines and leave them in the vineyards for the birds, as they were lagging behind in maturity and would not have contributed anything useful to the wines. Helmut Dönnhoff noted that their vineyards benefited immensely from heavy rains in May that allowed the subterranean water tables to rise and help ameliorate some of the worst of the drought conditions later in the summer, so that the old vines here never had any lag in terms of maturation during the driest months of the summer heat. The Dönnhoff family’s vineyards saw absolutely no botrytis in 2018, and the two Auslesen that they produced from the Brücke and the Hermannshöhle vineyards this year have to be the first, non-botrytized Auslesen from the estate in many decades. Even the small amount of Beerenauslese produced here in 2018 was made entirely from clean, desiccated berries and saw no botrytis.*

*In some vintages at Weingut Dönnhoff, one gets a sense that the year was stronger for dry wines or Prädikat bottlings, but this is emphatically not the case in 2018, as every wine is very strong and utterly classical in personality. Though a few of the wines were already bottled at the time of my visit, the mise was really only just underway and so the analyses of the wines had not yet been completed and Helmut kindly estimated some of the technical details, but I did not persist in asking, since the lab work had not yet been done. In general, most of the Trocken bottlings will fall between twelve and 12.5 percent alcohol, with the Grosses Gewächs closer to*



*an even thirteen percent, but nothing above this in 2018. Amongst the Prädikat wines, there is a new bottling this year, from the Klamm vineyard in the village of Niederhäusern, which is a volcanic soil-based vineyard and has produced a really beautiful Kabinett in 2018. I did note that for the Prädikat wines at the Spätlese level and up, only the Brücke and the Hermannshöhle were used this year, with all of the other vineyards devoted to either dry wines or Kabinetten in 2018. This is one of the greatest collections to be found in 2018 in all of Germany!*



### ***Dry Wines***

#### **2018 Dönnhoff Estate Riesling Trocken- Weingut Dönnhoff (screwcap)**

The 2018 Estate Trocken had been bottled three days before my visit, but was still showing very nicely. The fruit for this bottling hails from volcanic soils in and around Oberhäusern and the 2018 version comes in at 11.5 percent octane. The bouquet is bright and quite elegant in its constellation of lemon, grapefruit, a touch of wild yeasts, a lovely base of minerality and a topnote of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is crisp, fullish and nicely focused, with fine mineral undertow, good balance and grip and a long and classy finish. This is a really good entry level wine! 2019-2040. 89.

#### **2018 Tonschiefer Riesling Trocken- Weingut Dönnhoff (screwcap)**

The 2018 Tonschiefer was also bottled a few days prior to my arrival at the estate, but again, was not yet closed down from the *mise* and was showing very well indeed. The alcohol here is somewhere between twelve and twelve and a half percent this year and the wine offers up

a very refined and precise bouquet of tart orange, slate, grapefruit, a nice touch of the vintage's salinity, citrus zest and a topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and quite racy in personality, with a lovely core, excellent backend mineral drive and superb lift and grip on the very long finish. This may well be the finest vintage of Tonschiefer I have ever tasted! 2019-2045. **91.**

**2018 Kahlenberg “Erste Lage” Riesling Trocken- Weingut Dönnhoff**

The 2018 Kahlenberg Trocken was still in cask. This is superb and again, shows off the supreme elegance of the vintage at the winery this year, wafting from the glass in a very complex aromatic blend of pink grapefruit, tart orange, stony minerality, plenty of upper register smokiness, a touch of wild yeasts, orange peel and dried flowers. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, racy and focused, with an excellent core, fine soil signature and a very long, complex and seamlessly balanced finish. Excellent juice. 2025-2065. **92.**

**2018 Höllenpfad “Erste Lage” Riesling Trocken- Weingut Dönnhoff**

The 2018 Höllenpfad Trocken is outstanding as well this year, offering up a fine bouquet of pineapple, tart orange, a lovely base of minerality, spring flowers and a topnote of orange peel. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and shows off lovely mid-palate depth, with a lovely girdle of acidity, fine focus and grip and a long, snappy and quite youthful finish. This will need some time in the cellar to properly blossom, but will be excellent. 2026-2055+. **92.**

**2018 Krötenpfuhl Riesling Grosses Gewächs- Weingut Dönnhoff**

The 2018 Krötenpfuhl GG is absolutely superb this year. The wine is very pure on the both the nose and palate, with the bouquet delivering a lovely mix of pink grapefruit, tart orange, salty minerality, a touch of wild yeasts and a topnote of citrus blossoms. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very well-balanced, with a lovely core, ripe, vibrant acids and great focus and grip on the long, nascently complex and very elegant finish. Superb juice. 2026-2060. **93.**

**2018 Höllenpfad im Mühlenberg Riesling Grosses Gewächs- Weingut Dönnhoff**

The Grosses Gewächs bottling from the filet section of the Höllenpfad im Mühlenberg is also very promising and again, shows the beautifully elegant refinement of all the dry Rieslings from the Dönnhoff family this year. Helmut estimates that this is thirteen percent octane or just under in this vintage. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a very refined and expressive blend of tangerine, blood orange, salty minerality, citrus peel, smoky overtones and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and really packed at the core, with racy acids, great soil signature, laser-like focus and a very long, youthfully complex and very promising finish. 2028-2060+. **93+.**

**2018 Felsenberg “Felsentürmchen” Riesling Grosses Gewächs- Weingut Dönnhoff**

The 2018 Felsenberg GG is also absolutely outstanding this year. The bouquet is impressively expressive at this early stage, soaring from the glass in a blaze of pear, tart orange, a beautiful base of slate minerality, wild yeasts, a touch of *fleur de sel* and a potpourri of floral scents in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and seamless, with outstanding mid-palate depth, powerful mineral drive and great cut and grip on the long, perfectly balanced and youthful finish. This will be show stopping juice in the fullness of time. 2028-2070. **94.**

**2018 Dellchen Riesling Grosses Gewächs- Weingut Dönnhoff**

To my mind, the Dellchen often produces the most muscular Grosses Gewächs bottling from Weingut Dönnhoff, so I wondered how it might turn out this year, where there was already so much potential for power inherent in the vintage. Much to my surprise, the 2018 Dellchen is

supremely elegant this year, offering up a sophisticated bouquet of sweet grapefruit, tart apple, wild yeasts, a beautiful base of minerality, orange blossoms and lemongrass. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, racy and utterly suave in its sense of balance and inner harmony, with bright acids and a very long, primary and promising finish. A great wine by any measure! 2030-2070. **95.**

**2018 Hermannshöhle Riesling Grosses Gewächs – Weingut Dönnhoff**

Cornelius Dönnhoff has crafted one of the very best dry Rieslings that I tasted on this trip from the Hermannshöhle in 2018! The bouquet is deep, complex and again, so very elegant out of the blocks this year, delivering scents of pink grapefruit, tart tangerine, white flowers, a superb base of slate, lemongrass, citrus peel and just a dollop of upper register wild yeast tones. On the palate the wine is racy, focused, full-bodied and extremely mineral-driven, with a great core, laser-like focus and seamlessly balanced on the very, very long, very complex and utterly refined finish. *Chapeau!* 2033-2075+. **97.**

**2018 Brücke “Monopol” Riesling Grosses Gewächs- Weingut Dönnhoff**

I am still getting accustomed to the concept of a GG from the Brücke vineyard, but I do have to admit that the 2018 is pure magic! The bouquet really shows off the salinity to the minerality of the best, old vine bottlings from 2018, soaring from the glass in a mix of apple, pink grapefruit, just a whisper of the vineyard’s exotic fruit tones (coming through as a trace of passion fruit), gentle spice tones, lemongrass, a touch of wild yeasts and all that gorgeous salty minerality. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very complex, with impeccable balance and grip, great mineral undertow, racy structural elements and a very, very long and very classy finish. The backend precision here is off the charts! 2033-2075. **96+.**

***Classic Off-Dry and Noble Sweet Wines***

**2018 Dönnhoff Estate Riesling Feinherb (screwcap)**

The 2018 Estate Riesling Feinherb had also been bottled at the start of the week, ahead of my Thursday afternoon visit, but it was showing quite well indeed (despite having to follow-up all of those GG fireworks). This wine comes in at 10.5 percent alcohol, has acids of 8.5 grams and sports around twenty-five grams of sugar this year. The bouquet is very pretty, offering up scents of white cherries, apple, salty minerality and spring flowers. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and juicy, with very good backend mineral tug, bright acids and lovely focus and grip on the absolutely delicious finish. Another bargain! 2019-2040. **89.**

**2018 Kreuznacher Krötenpfuhl Riesling Kabinett – Weingut Dönnhoff**

The 2018 Krötenpfuhl Kabinett was still in cask and really showing beautiful potential on both the nose and palate. The bouquet is a lovely and delicate mix of apple, tart orange, salty minerality, white flowers and an esthery topnote of bee pollen. On the palate the wine is medium-full, pure and dancing, with beautiful fruit, a lovely foundation of minerality, bright acids and excellent length and grip on the vibrant finish. This has really good acids for the vintage. 2019-2050. **91+.**

**2018 Oberhäuser Leistenberg Riesling Kabinett- Weingut Dönnhoff**

The Leistenberg has the oldest vines of all the Dönnhoff parcels and they have really excelled in 2018. This beautiful Kabinett offers up a complex bouquet of white cherries, apple, salty slate, bee pollen and a lovely mix of spring flowers and fruit blossoms. On the palate the wine is medium-full, pure and filigreed, with its beautiful fruit tones stretched taught over its minerality, with bright, zesty acids and lovely lift and grip on the long and complex finish. Just beautiful. 2022-2060. **93.**

**2018 Niederhäuser Klamm Riesling Kabinett- Weingut Dönnhoff**

The new addition to the Dönnhoff family's vineyard family is really lovely this year, offering an interesting Kabinett from volcanic soils to go with the classic slate of the Leistenberg. The bouquet here is bright and complex, wafting from the glass in a mix of apple, a touch of fresh pineapple, lovely minerality, a hint of orange peel and a topnote of white lilies. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and beautifully balanced, with lovely intensity of flavor and backend bounce, excellent focus and a long, complex finish. Lovely juice. 2019-2050. **92.**

**2018 Norheimer Kirschheck Riesling Spätlese- Weingut Dönnhoff**

The 2018 Kirschheck Spätlese from Weingut Dönnhoff is another excellent example of the vintage. The wine is pure, very floral in personality and quite expressive out of the blocks, offering up scents of white cherries, pears, bee pollen, slate and a topnote of spring flowers. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish, vibrant and beautifully detailed, with racy acids, good mineral undertow and a long, refined and complex finish. 2019-2050+. **92+.**

**2018 Oberhäuser Brücke Riesling Spätlese- Weingut Dönnhoff**

Long-time fans of the two flagship Spätlesen from the Dönnhoff family are going to have a lot of fun over the coming decades debating the relative merits of these two brilliant wines from 2018! The Brücke Spätlese offers up a brilliant bouquet of apple, passion fruit, tangerine, fruit blossoms, salty slate minerality and a topnote of bee pollen. On the palate the wine is medium-full, very pure and precise, with a great core, dancing acids and a very long, complex and filigreed finish. This has bottomless depth and is extremely light on its feet. 2023-2075. **95.**

**2018 Niederhäuser Hermannshöhle Riesling Spätlese- Weingut Dönnhoff**

The 2018 Hermannshöhle Spätlese from the estate has no intention of being upstaged by the Brücke this year, as this too is a brilliant wine. The nose jumps from the glass in a complex blaze of fresh pineapple, pungent citrus zest, apple, a beautiful base of slate, wild yeasts and a topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is pure, complex, medium-full and beautifully suave on the attack, with superb mineral undertow and a laser-like and electric finish. Equally stunning juice. 2025-2075. **95.**

**2018 Oberhäuser Brücke Riesling Auslese- Weingut Dönnhoff**

For several decades, Helmut Dönnhoff has been of the opinion that an Auslese is a wine that needs botrytis and every example here has been a botrytized wine, at least to some degree. So, it is a great rarity to find not one, but two completely clean Auslesen in the family's cellars this year made from golden and shriveled berries and no noble rot. The 2018 Brücke Auslese is a beautiful wine in the making, offering up a lovely aromatic constellation of pear, white cherries, honeycomb, bee pollen, apple blossoms and a lovely foundation of salty, slate minerality. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and nascently complex, with a lovely core, great focus and grip, snappy acids and a very long, dancing and still quite youthful finish. 2030-2090. **95.**

**2018 Niederhäuser Hermannshöhle Riesling Auslese- Weingut Dönnhoff**

The purity and precision of the 2018 Hermannshöhle Auslese is the stuff that legends used to be made from. The bouquet is complex and utterly refined, offering up scents of pear, white cherries, bee pollen, a touch of orange zest, lovely salinity and a mineral bath of slate. On the palate the wine is fullish, racy and utterly seamless in its balance, with great intensity of flavor, laser-like focus and truly stunning mineral drive on the backend (particularly for Auslese), with an endless and magical finish. 2032-2090+. **98.**

**2018 Oberhäuser Brücke Riesling Beerenauslese- Weingut Dönnhoff**

The grapes for this non-botrytized BA were harvested at the beginning of November this year. The wine is utterly brilliant, offering up a pure and complex nose of white cherries, mango,

pineapple, salty minerality, apple blossoms and a topnote of honeycomb. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, bottomless and amazingly vibrant and precise, with racy acids, truly stunning minerality for a BA and great length and grip on the perfectly balanced finish. This is breathtakingly beautiful! 2019-2100. **100.**



*The look of experience- Helmut Dönnhoff with a couple of older Kabinetten after the tour de force 2018ers.*

### **Weingut Emrich-Schönleber (Monzingen)**

*I had the pleasure to taste this year with Werner Schönleber this year, as his son, Frank, was busy getting ready to start bottling the 2018ers. Weingut Emrich-Schönleber got started picking in mid-September in 2018 and Herr Schönleber reported that, like many of their colleagues, they had virtually no botrytis in any of their vineyards this year. Werner reported that they felt quite fortunate in the summer of 2018 to have two rain storms that were very localized and centered around Monzingen in July, each of which dropped around forty milliliters of water each time and helped to replenish the ground water just a bit and allow for ripening to continue unabated in the vineyards. None of the 2018ers had been bottled prior to my visit and everything was still in tank or cask and so no technical details were available. The two varietals of Pinot Blanc and Pinot Gris are pretty ripe this year, as Werner estimates that they will end up falling somewhere between 13.5 and fourteen percent octane this year, but the dry Rieslings are lower, with most in the thirteen percent range. The acids here are probably around seven grams for most of the wines, which with the lower pHs give the wines plenty of lift, but they will also*

*offer generally earlier accessibility and should really be tasty from a fairly early age. Both the Pinot Blanc and Pinot Gris this year were fermented in large, three year-old casks and this will likely be how these varietals are handled going forward at the estate. Both wines are pretty big in 2018, but fresh and fairly well-balanced and will drink well from the start, but will not be particularly long-lived. The Rieslings are even more successful, with good framing acids, really lovely purity and complexity and they will drink sooner than the more tensile 2017ers here.*

### **Dry 2018ers**

#### **2018 Weissburgunder Trocken “S”- Weingut Emrich-Schönleber**

The 2018 Weissburgunder Trocken “S” from the Schönleber family is ripe and quite pretty, offering up a bouquet of pear, tangerine, musky floral tones and a good base of soil. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and nicely succulent on the attack, with a good core, sound framing acids and good length and grip on the balanced and wide open finish. 2019-2025. **89.**

#### **2018 Grauburgunder Trocken- Weingut Emrich-Schönleber**

The 2018 Grauburgunder Trocken was not showing the same structural integrity at the time of my visit as the Pinot Blanc, though it is at least its match in terms of ripeness. The bouquet has a tropical edge to its mix of pineapple, peach, a very discreet base of soil and plenty of musky, floral overtones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and fat on the attack, with a juicy core and decent length and grip on the backend, but with a bit of early blowsiness that keeps its score down a touch. Not bad, and perhaps it will firm up a bit more after its bottling- if it does so, my score will seem conservative. 2019-2025. **87.**

#### **2018 Riesling “Lenz”- Weingut Emrich-Schönleber**

The 2018 Lenz bottling from the Schönlebers comes in around twelve percent octane, has just 6.9 grams of acidity and is on the cusp of Trocken, as Werner estimates that it is probably in the vicinity of ten grams per liter of sugar this year. The wine is very pretty on both the nose and palate, with the bouquet delivering scents of tart orange, sweet grapefruit, salty minerality, dried flowers and a topnote of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is ripe, focused and fullish, with lovely focus and balance, quite sound acids and lovely length and grip on the complex finish. This is not racy, but it is bright and bouncy and has plenty of acidity to keep its light on its feet. 2019-2030. **89.**

#### **2018 Estate Riesling Trocken- Weingut Emrich-Schönleber**

The Estate Riesling Trocken here is a touch riper than the Lenz in 2018, coming in around 12.5 percent octane and with acids that are quite similar. The wine offers up a really lovely bouquet, with a bit more precision than the Lenz this year, as it wafts from the glass in a fine blend of blood orange, grapefruit, a lovely base of minerality, lemongrass and orange peel. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, complex and very nicely balanced, with a good core, quite respectable backend mineral drive and fine focus and grip on the bouncy finish. The acids here again support the wine very nicely, but are not particularly formidable. 2019-2035. **89+.**

#### **2018 Riesling “Mineral” Trocken- Weingut Emrich-Schönleber**

The Mineral bottling from Weingut Emrich-Schönleber hails entirely from the grand cru Halenberg vineyard, with the fruit for this coming from the upper and lower thirds of the hillside, with the central section reserved for the GG. The 2018 version comes in close to 12.5 percent alcohol and sports seven grams of acid. The nose is pure and already nicely expressive, offering up scents of fresh lime, pink grapefruit, plenty of smokiness, a nice touch of botanicals, superb mineral undertow and a topnote of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and



offers up a beautiful blend of ripe, pure fruit and excellent mineral signature. The wine has a lovely core, fine acids and very good length and grip on the complex and zesty finish. Just a lovely bottle. 2019-2040+. **91.**

**2018 Frütau Riesling Trocken- Weingut Emrich-Schönleber**

The 2018 Frütau Riesling Trocken is a touch riper, coming in close to thirteen percent and also has slightly higher acids, being closer to 7.2 grams. This is lovely and will drink beautifully from release, delivering a very complex aromatic constellation of pink grapefruit, beautiful minerality, lime peel, sweet herb tones, dried flowers, gentle smokiness and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and beautifully balanced, with a fine core, excellent focus and grip, bright acids and a nice touch of closing salinity on the long and classy finish. This is really tasty. 2019-2045+. **92.**

**2018 Halgans Riesling Trocken- Weingut Emrich-Schönleber**

The 2018 Halgans Riesling Trocken is also excellent, with similar octane to the Frütau and acids perhaps just a hair lower. The bouquet is precise and very refined, wafting from the glass in a smoky blend of tart orange, grapefruit, salty slate, citrus blossoms, wild yeasts and the aforementioned smokiness. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and very well-balanced, with a very good core, lovely soil signature, bouncy acids and fine cut and grip on the long and refined finish. Good juice. 2020-2045+. **92.**

**2018 Frühlingsplätzchen Grosses Gewächs- Weingut Emrich-Schönleber**

The 2018 Frühlingsplätzchen Grosses Gewächs from the Schönlebers is an outstanding wine in the making. The youthful bouquet offers up scents of lime, tart orange, gentle herb tones, a superb base of soil tones, a nice touch of smokiness and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is pure, precise and full, with a lovely core, bright, zesty acids, excellent transparency and grip and a long seamlessly balanced and nicely cool finish. First class GG. 2023-2060. **94+.**

**2018 Halenberg Grosses Gewächs- Weingut Emrich-Schönleber**

The Halenberg GG is also outstanding in 2018. The bouquet delivers a lovely and youthful combination of lime, grapefruit, slate, orange peel, a touch of cress, wild yeasts and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and nicely reserved in personality, with a superb core of fruit, lovely transparency and cut and a long, focused and nascently complex finish. This has superb potential. 2024-2060. **94+.**

**2018 Monzinger Frühlingsplätzchen “Auf der Lay”- Weingut Emrich-Schönleber**

Werner Schönleber told me that the family first purchased the Auf der Lay section of the Frühlingsplätzchen in 1994 and the very stony, almost gravelly soil here really produces a wine quite unique from the rest of the vineyard. The 2018 version is absolutely gorgeous aromatically, soaring from the glass in a blend of pink grapefruit, fresh lime, cress and mossy overtones, citrus peel, great minerality and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, precise and full-bodied, with great elegance and detail, impeccable mineral drive and a very long, snappy and utterly refined finish. This really has striking acidity this year! 2026-2060+. **95+.**

**2015 Monzinger Halenberg Riesling “R” Weingut Emrich-Schönleber**

I had not tasted the 2015 Halenberg Riesling “R” (or Reserve) previously and was delighted to have a chance to try it during my visit this past spring. The wine is starting to really blossom now and delivers a pure and complex bouquet of grapefruit, tart orange, lovely smokiness, a fine base of slate, a touch of sea slats, candied herbs and a topnote of lime zest. On

the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and beautifully balanced, with a fine core, lovely soil signature and a very, very long, pure and classy finish. This is lovely. 2019-2050. **93+**.



*Werner Schönleber and his family fine lineup of 2018ers in the very comfortable tasting room at the estate.*

### ***Prädikat 2018ers***

#### **2018 Monzinger Riesling Kabinett- Weingut Emrich-Schönleber**

The 2018 Monzinger Kabinett is very tasty, but this is a slightly larger-framed Kabinett this year, as it is 9.5 percent alcohol and carries around forty grams of sugar. The bouquet is very, very pretty, offering up scents of lime, bee pollen, salty minerality, white flowers and a touch of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is medium-full, complex and nicely mineral in personality, with a lovely tug between pure fruit and good acidity. The finish is long, balanced and shows fine complexity and grip. Good juice, if not quite as delicate as some examples this year. 2019-2045. **90**.

#### **2018 Monzinger Halenberg Riesling Spätlese- Weingut Emrich-Schönleber**

The 2018 Halenberg Spätlese is very good this year, delivering a fine aromatic combination of peach, white cherry, plenty of salty minerality, bee pollen and a nice touch of the vineyard's gentle herb tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and zesty, with lovely depth, good backend mineral drive and impressive lift and bounce on the long and complex finish. This is excellent. 2019-2050. **92**.

### **Weingut Schäfer-Fröhlich (Bockenau)**

*Tim Fröhlich has made breathtakingly beautiful wines in 2018. As I mentioned in the introductory section on the vintage, Tim's approach to the heat and drought of 2018 was quite similar to that of Klaus-Peter Keller, Julian Haart and others who realized brilliant success in this vintage, as he approached his farming in 2018 with an eye towards slowing down the accumulation of sugars in the grapes by allowing the vegetation to grow without any hedging during the summer (hence diverting some of the plant's energy into the maintenance of the leaves, rather than directing the majority towards ripening the bunches) and picking as early as possible this year. Tim Fröhlich noted that he began picking on September 15<sup>th</sup> in 2018, which was the earliest harvest on record at the estate and the very first time that they had ever started picking before the auction in Bad Kreuznach. He was also very active leading up to the harvest picking test bunches to check on acidity levels and as a consequence, he and his team of pickers were the first out in the Felsenberg vineyard in 2018 to bring in their bunches, as his "test pressings" had shown that the acids were already under eight grams. Tim also did not use grapes from his youngest vines in any of the estate wines this year, and in general, each of his bottlings has a higher average age of vines in 2018 than in any previous vintage. The results of such a meticulous approach are utterly brilliant and the collection at Weingut Schäfer-Fröhlich is as magical as any collection to be found in Germany in this vintage.*

*In general terms, though most wines were still not bottled and final analyses were not completed, Tim Fröhlich's 2018ers are quite notable for their slightly lower levels of alcohol and higher acids for the vintage, with the Grosses Gewächs bottlings usually around 12.5 percent alcohol (rather than a full thirteen) and acids generally between eight and 8.5 grams per liter. There is a precision of minerality, a purity of fruit and a lift and cut from the excellent acidities that make these GGs amongst the very best examples to be found in all of Germany in 2018. The dry Rieslings here have great purity to the beautiful fruit tones of the vintage, but in almost every case, this plays a secondary role to the stunning mineral signatures of the wines. And overall, it is the extraordinary degree of elegance and refinement to these dry bottlings in 2018 from Tim Fröhlich that really stands out in this vintage, as 2018 as emphatically not a vintage where this type of refinement was a given at the outset and only the most talented winegrowers, perfectly attuned to the possibilities of the vintage, were able to find this path to unbridled elegance in this vintage! The 2018ers here seem likely to drink quite a bit sooner than the superb 2017ers (unless they close down dramatically after their bottling), but they are across the board impeccably balanced wines with excellent acids and they will all age very long and gracefully. Tim Fröhlich noted that his vineyard sites in Monzingen had a bit higher acids this year than those in Bockenau or Schlossböckelheim, which may have had some relation to the pair of isolated July rain showers that Werner Schönleber commented about and which were beneficial for alleviating any hydric stress in the heat of midsummer. The Kupfergrube GG was still completing its fermentation at the time of my visit, so I took no note on the wine.*

*Tim Fröhlich is in the midst of planning for a new, modern winemaking facility for the near future that will allow him even a bit more precision in his cellar work, and I am looking forward to that project's realization and what it may portend for these beautiful wines. It is still in the early planning stages and I am not sure if it will be completed in time for the 2019 harvest, but it is coming soon and will mark the start of a new chapter at this great Nahe estate. During our tasting, Tim opened up a couple of older pinot noir bottlings, one from 2014 and one from*

2017, as he has been focusing more and more energy on his red wines and wanted to show how the varietal is progressing here in the last few years. As far as the Prädikat wines from 2018 goes at Weingut Schäfer-Fröhlich, I only tasted a 2018 Spätlese Goldkapsel this year, and cannot recall now if there are more examples waiting down in the cellars that were just not ready for showing at the time of my visit on the 29<sup>th</sup> of March. I imagine that there are several others that we did not taste during my visit. However, Tim Fröhlich was generous enough to pull out two of his 2017 dessert wines that he had mentioned to me last year, which were still in the midst of their fermentations when I was last visiting, so I had the very pleasurable opportunity to round out a magical tasting with two utterly profound 2017ers.



*The first vestiges of spring were already to be seen in the welcoming entrance to Weingut Schäfer-Fröhlich.*

### **2018 Fröhlich Blanc de Noirs Trocken- Weingut Schäfer-Fröhlich**

The 2018 Estate Blanc de Noirs is a lovely bottle in this vintage, coming in between twelve and 12.5 percent octane and offering up beautiful purity and lightness of step on the palate. The bouquet is a fine blend of peach, melon, salty minerality and a touch of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is fullish, tangy and beautifully transparent, with lovely depth and grip and impressive bounce and vibrancy on the long finish. Good juice. 2019-2025. **89.**

### **2018 Fröhlich Trocken- Weingut Schäfer-Fröhlich**

As readers may recall, the Estate Trocken bottling is made from a forty-five year-old vine parcel of Müller-Thurgau planted in the volcanic soils of the grand cru Stromberg vineyard. This

wine was already analyzed and it comes in at 11.5 percent octane, with three grams of sugar in 2018. The wine is lovely, offering up a precise nose of quince, stony minerality, dried flowers and a lovely touch of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and focused, with a lovely core, excellent mineral drive and a long, zesty and complex finish. This offers up a lot of class for a very basic, entry level wine! 2019-2030. **89.**

#### **2018 Fröhlich Riesling Trocken- Weingut Schäfer-Fröhlich**

The 2018 Estate Riesling Trocken is also an excellent bargain from Tim Fröhlich this year. The wine is twelve percent in alcohol and carries an impressive 8.5 grams of acidity this year, with all of the fruit for this bottling hailing from volcanic soils. The bouquet is beautifully expressive out of the blocks, offering up scents of lemon, tart orange, wild yeasts, an excellent mineral underpinning, white flowers and citrus zest. On the palate the wine is pure, elegant and medium-full, with lovely focus and grip, outstanding cut and grip and a long, complex and dancing finish. A stunning value this year! 2019-2040+. **90+.**

#### **2018 Vulkangestein Riesling Trocken- Weingut Schäfer-Fröhlich**

Tim Fröhlich's 2018 Vulkangestein Riesling Trocken is also absolutely stellar in this vintage, with a touch more ripeness than the Estate Riesling Trocken (approximately 12.5 percent) coupled to the same purity, cut and backend lift. The wine is very mineral in personality on both the nose and palate this year, with the bouquet delivering scents of tart orange, grapefruit, wild yeasts, a very complex base of minerality, lemongrass and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is pure, medium-full, racy and complex, with a lovely touch of salinity to its backend mineral signature, excellent focus and balance and a very, very long, classy finish. Great juice. 2023-2060. **92.**

#### **2018 Schiefergestein Bockenaur Riesling Trocken- Weingut Schäfer-Fröhlich**

The 2018 Schiefergestein Bockenaur Riesling Trocken is also a stunning wine and in many vintages, this is Grosses Gewächs complexity and breed! The absolutely superb nose soars from the glass in a blaze of pink grapefruit, wild yeasts, flinty slate minerality, dried flowers and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, medium-full and very transparent and elegant in personality, with great intensity of flavor, lightness of step and stunning cut and grip on the very long, complex and precise finish. This is GG quality without the GG price tag in 2018! 2019-2050+. **92.**

#### **2018 Felsenberg Riesling Grosses Gewächs - Schäfer-Fröhlich**

By picking early in the Felsenberg, Tim Fröhlich was able to keep around 7.5 grams of acidity in his GG here this year, and he estimates that the wine will end up just about 12.5 percent octane. It is an absolutely superb bottle in the making, with the nose delivering a beautiful young constellation of tart orange, pink grapefruit, flint, smoke, lemongrass, wild yeasts, citrus peel and a delicate topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very elegant and seamless in balance, with a superb core of fruit, lovely backend mineral lift, bright acids and a very long, complex and extremely promising finish. Great juice. 2024-2065. **94+.**

#### **2018 Frühlingsplätzchen Grosses Gewächs- Weingut Schäfer-Fröhlich**

The 2018 Frühlingsplätzchen Grosses Gewächs is going to be closer to 8.5 grams per liter of acidity in this vintage, as is the Halenberg, and this gives the wine just a touch more precision and backend lift than the lovely Felsenberg this year. The bouquet is stellar, wafting from the glass in a blaze of lime, pink grapefruit, a touch of herb tones, salty minerality, citrus peel and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, laser-like and gloriously transparent,

with a superb core, zesty acids, laser-like focus and a very long, very minerally and complex finish. This is stunning young wine! 2024-2070. **95.**

**2018 Halenberg Grosses Gewächs- Weingut Schäfer-Fröhlich**

The 2018 Halenberg GG from Tim Fröhlich is also stunning, with just a bit more elegance than the Frühlingsplätzchen. The bouquet is flat out beautiful already, delivering a gorgeous constellation of pink grapefruit, a touch of quince, fresh lime, smoky overtones a beautifully refined and salty base of slate, a touch of wild yeasts and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and supremely refined in profile, with a lovely core of fruit, great mineral drive, racy acids and impeccable focus and balance on the very, very long, complex and seamless finish. Pure magic. 2024-2070. **96.**

**2018 Stromberg Riesling Grosses Gewächs- Weingut Schäfer-Fröhlich**

I have never tasted a better young example from the Stromberg than this 2018 from Tim Fröhlich! The wine is so beautifully refined and precise this year, delivering a great bouquet of tart orange, sweet grapefruit, gorgeously complex minerality, wild yeasts, citrus zest, a touch of cress and a lovely floral topnote redolent of orange blossoms. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very, very long on the backend, with beautiful mid-palate depth, great cut and grip and a very, very long, snappy and nascently complex finish. This is breathtaking. 2026-2070. **97.**

**2018 Felseneck Riesling Grosses Gewächs- Weingut Schäfer-Fröhlich**

The 2018 Felseneck GG is also utterly brilliant young wine. The inherent elegance this year in all of Tim Fröhlich's Grosses Gewächs bottlings reaches its summit with the Felseneck, with the bouquet soaring from the glass in a blend of lemon, pink grapefruit, smoky overtones, a beautiful base of very flinty slate minerality, dried flowers and a topnote of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is pure, complex and bottomless in its depth, with a full-bodied and very refined profile, a zesty girdle of acidity, laser-like focus and great cut and grip on the very, very long, electric and utterly refined finish. A transcendental expression of the 2018 vintage! 2026-2080. **99.**

***Pinot-Based Wines***

**2018 Bockenaur Weissburgunder "R" Trocken- Weingut Schäfer-Fröhlich**

We tasted the 2018 Weissburgunder "R" bottling first this year amongst the pinot blancs, and this is the finest example of this varietal that I have yet tasted from Tim Fröhlich. It was barrel-fermented entirely this year in five hundred liter casks, which range from two to five years of age. The grapes all hail from red slate sites and the wine comes in just under thirteen percent octane in 2018. It offers up a beautiful nose of yellow fruit, salty minerality, white flowers, just a whisper of vanillin oak from the older casks and an exotic topnote of sweet corn. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully mineral-driven for this grape, with excellent acids and grip and a long, complex and very well-balanced finish. This is by quite some measure the finest example of pinot blanc that I tasted from the 2018 vintage! 2023-2045+. **92+.**

**2018 Bockenaur Weissburgunder Trocken- Weingut Schäfer-Fröhlich**

The regular bottling of 2018 Pinot Blanc from Weingut Schäfer-Fröhlich was fermented and raised in a combination of sixty percent stainless steel and forty percent six to fifteen year-old casks this year. I did not write down its alcohol level, but it is probably just a touch higher than the "R" bottling above and also hails entirely from red slate vineyards. The wine offers up a pretty nose of peach, apple, white flowers and a lovely base of slate minerality. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and bouncy, with a good core, sound framing acids and very good



length and grip on the wide open finish. It is good juice, but lacks the gravitas of the above. 2019-2030. **89.**

**2018 Bockenaur Weissburgunder “S” Trocken- Weingut Schäfer-Fröhlich**

The 2018 Bockenaur Weissburgunder “S” Trocken from Tim Fröhlich is made with a fifty-fifty blend of wines fermented with cultured and natural yeasts. The wine is ripe, but nicely mineral on both the nose and palate as well. The bouquet delivers a blend of apple, pear, acacia blossoms, a fine base of salty minerality and a topnote of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full and complex, with a good core of ripe fruit, vibrant acids and very good length and grip on the nicely mineral finish. This too is quite lovely. 2019-2030. **90+.**



***Pinot Noir***

**2010 Bockenaur Spätburgunder Trocken “R”- Weingut Schäfer-Fröhlich**

The 2010 Bockenaur Spätburgunder Trocken “R” was raised in three to six year-old barrels and was fermented with fifteen percent whole clusters in this vintage. The wine is now blossoming beautifully on both the nose and palate, offering up a lovely aromatic constellation of cherries, red berries, a touch of raw cocoa, gentle meatiness, slate, a touch of oak and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is medium-full, tangy and quite soil-driven in personality, with fine complexity and grip, suave tannins and a nice touch of gentle *herbacité* adding complexity on the long finish. Good juice. 2019-2040. **91.**

**2014 Bockenaur Spätburgunder Trocken “R”- Weingut Schäfer-Fröhlich**

The 2014 Bockenaur Spätburgunder Trocken “R” from Tim Fröhlich is starting to blossom very nicely at five years of age. The wine is nicely ripe, coming in at 13.5 percent octane and offers up an excellent bouquet of red and black cherries, gamebird, lovely spice tones, a fine base of minerality, woodsmoke and a touch of orange peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish, tangy and beautifully balanced, with a good core of fruit, suave tannins and a long, focused and complex finish. This is a lovely bottle in the making, but it is still a handful of years away from hitting its apogee. 2023-2055. **91.**

**2017 Bockenaur Spätburgunder Trocken “R”- Weingut Schäfer-Fröhlich**

The 2017 vintage of pinot noir from Tim Fröhlich is also outstanding, and I think it nicely underscores how progress is being made here, as this is even a step up from the very lovely 2014 version. The wine is very refined on both the nose and palate, offering up a fine and nicely red fruity bouquet of strawberries, cherries, vinesmoke, superb minerality and plenty of Vosne-like spice elements in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish and very well-balanced, with outstanding transparency and elegance, a good core of fruit, fine-grained tannins and impeccable focus on the long, tangy and very promising finish. Lovely juice in the making. 2025-2060. **92+.**

***Feinherb*****2018 Schiefergestein Bockenaur Riesling Feinherb- Weingut Schäfer-Fröhlich**

The 2018 Schiefergestein Feinherb settled in with 13.5 grams per liter of residual sugar, so this is still a pretty dry wine. It is also excellent on both the nose and palate, offering up a refined bouquet of green orange, sweet grapefruit, lemongrass, flinty slate minerality, wild yeasts and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is fullish, complex and very zesty, with lovely mid-palate depth, superb focus and grip and a very long, very classy finish. First class juice. 2019-2045+. **92.**

**2018 Felseneck “Unterm Brunnchen” Riesling Feinherb- Weingut Schäfer-Fröhlich**

The name “Unterm Brunnchen” was used for this bottling in 2017, but Tim Fröhlich was not certain if he would use it again for the 2018 version, so keep that in mind if you see a differently named Felseneck Feinherb bottling, as there is only one of these beauties in the cellar in 2018 and it may eventually wear a slightly different label! The wine is again, absolutely breathtaking in its beauty, offering up a magical bouquet of blood orange, pink grapefruit, flinty slate minerality, plenty of smokiness, lemongrass, sea salts and a whisper of menthol in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, racy and oh, so mineral in profile, with a lovely core, great acids and grip, laser-like focus and a very, very long, perfectly balanced and extremely refined finish. Sheer brilliance! 2026-2075. **96+.**

***Noble Sweet 2018ers and 2017ers*****2018 Bockenaur Felseneck Riesling Spätlese Goldkapsel- Weingut Schäfer-Fröhlich**

The 2018 Goldkapsel Spätlese from the Felseneck vineyard was made solely with shriveled golden berries and there is not a trace of botrytis in this beautiful wine this year. The bouquet is nicely youthful at the present time and takes a bit of coaxing to offer up a gorgeous blend of pear, white cherries, wild yeasts, a lovely undertow of salty slate, white flowers and a whisper of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is very pure, medium-full and racy, with a lovely core, superb filigree and bounce and a very long, vibrant and complex finish. This just dances across the palate. 2024-2070. **93+.**

### **2017 Bockenaur Felseneck Riesling Beerenauslese GK- Weingut Schäfer-Fröhlich**

The 2017 Felseneck Goldkapsel Beerenauslese will be made available at the auction in Bad Kreuznach this year. It is a brilliant wine! The bouquet soars from the glass in a vibrant and very, pure aromatic constellation of pineapple, tangerine, bee pollen, superb minerality and a floral topnote of tropical flowers. On the palate the wine is precise, delicate and fullish in personality, with great refinement, mineral drive and raciness for BA. The finish is very, very long, perfectly balanced and already quite complex, with great focus and grip on the dancing finish. This is stunning! 2019-2100. **96.**

### **2017 Bockenaur Felseneck Riesling Trockenbeerenauslese GK- Weingut Schäfer-Fröhlich**

The 2017 Felseneck TBA Goldkapsel was made by a berry by berry selection and includes absolutely no botrytized berries in it this year. This is the greatness of shriveled, golden berries and it is one of the most beautiful young dessert wines I have ever had the pleasure to taste. The celestial bouquet delivers a constellation of mango, fresh apricot *mirabelle*, honeycomb, a lovely base of slate, orange oil and a potpourri of citrus blossoms. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, concentrated and amazingly racy and light on its feet, with snappy acids adding both precision and lift on the extremely long and complex finish. I feel as if I were looking up at Michelangelo working on the scaffolding under the dome of Sistine Chapel! 2019-2100. **100.**

## ***Rheinhessen***

### **Weingut Keller (Flörsheim-Dalsheim)**

*Klaus-Peter Keller has once again made an absolutely brilliant range of 2018ers, and though this is no surprise, it was interesting to see how the lineup was shaped by the style of the vintage here. The 2018 lineup from Weingut Keller has its full array of dry wines this year, as the vintage characteristics were very good for making top flight dry wines (and no one in Germany these days does this better than Klaus-Peter Keller), but the surprise in 2018 is that there are no Prädikat wines above Kabinett this year. As Klaus-Peter commented about the Prädikat wines, “the conditions were absolutely perfect for making great, great Kabinetten, so this is what we focused on this year.” Of course, not every estate can afford to not offer a wide array of different Prädikat level bottlings to clients, but Klaus-Peter and Julia Keller are very lucky to have a customer base that is happy to buy whatever is produced each year and allows the kind of flexibility in decision making that is based entirely on the style of the vintage, rather than on the what the market might be expecting. It is pretty rare to have this type of clientele and the Kellers are certainly grateful to them for their understanding and trust when it comes to making decisions of what bottlings will be produced in any given year. Klaus-Peter Keller noted that old vines had a distinct advantage in 2018, as they were able to withstand the drought conditions of mid-summer better than young vines, and so the maturation process was not blocked. It also helps that Weingut Keller has been mulching their vineyards for many years to protect ground water supplies and this was very useful in the heat of 2018. Klaus-Peter noted that yields were still very, very short in 2018 in their parcels in Nierstein, as the “naked rock” in vineyards like the Pettenthal just could not hold enough water down below to ripen up a large number of bunches.*

*Klaus-Peter Keller observed that “canopy management was also very important in 2018 to protect the bunches from the sun, so we did almost no training or cropping of the vines during the growing season and let them overshadow the bunches.” He noted that this made it hard at*

*harvest time, as one had to really dig around in all of the foliage to find the grapes, but it allowed for adequate protection of the grape skins and kept the fruit in pristine condition. Both Julian Haart and Tim Fröhlich did the same in their vines in 2018, with equal success. As I mentioned in the introductory section on the general vintage characteristics, Klaus-Peter and Julia Keller and their picking team generally made two passes through each vineyard this year for each separate cuvée for which they were selecting, with the first one designed to get “a bit more acidity and energy” into the blend and more structure, and the second pass a few days later to get just a touch more “creaminess to the fruit” component in every wine. It is a painstaking process, but the brilliant results here in 2018 are self-evident. As Klaus-Peter observed, “we did not use any fruit from vines that were five years of age or younger this year, choosing to sell these off, and we increased the average age of the vines used for all of our cuvées quite a bit in 2018 to make better wines this year.”*



*An impossibly steep and rocky section of the Schubertslay vineyard in Piesport.*

*Klaus-Peter now uses a small, old-fashioned basket press for almost all of his wines these days, as he feels it is so much superior to a pneumatic press that it is worth all of the additional time it takes pressing, so there are plenty of near-sleepless nights as the grapes come in, but the results in the last few years clearly speak for themselves! Klaus-Peter echoed the sentiments of several other top winegrowers I spoke with about how important it was to press gently and not go too far with the must of the 2018ers, as too much extraction caused acidity levels to fall*

*precipitously. In general, the Weingut Keller 2018ers fall about a full gram lower in acidity than the 2017ers here, but as Klaus-Peter commented, “with the very low pHs this year, it does not really seem like they are that much lower than the 2017ers.” As is always the case during my spring visit, we tasted a selection of the lineup of 2018ers and there are, of course, still a few more bottlings down in the cellar that we did not try during our tasting. One or two wines had already been bottled, but most were in preparation for their mise and still in cask or tank. In general terms, the GGs this year come in between twelve and 12.5 percent octane and are going to be brilliant examples of the vintage. The very slightly lower acidity of the 2018ers from Weingut Keller seems likely to make these beautiful wines more accessible at earlier ages than has been the case for the last few vintages here, and this is not going to be a problem for fans of this great estate, as the temptation is always to drink some of these bottlings before they are truly at their apogees of peak maturity. In 2018, less patience is going to be mandatory before the wines are into their plateaus of maturity, and for those who are curious about the new vintage and open up bottles way ahead of schedule, they are likely to be very enjoyable even while they are in climbing mode!*

*The big news leading into the 2018 growing season was that the lease on a portion of the famed Schubertslay vineyard in Piesport had passed from Julian Haart to Klaus-Peter Keller and I am happy to report that Klaus-Peter has made a lovely range of wines from this old vine and very steep vineyard. During much of the growing season, Julian Haart and his wife Nadine overlooked the farming of the parcels (as Klaus-Peter and Julia Keller did for the Haart’s new parcel in the Frauenberg vineyard), so there was not a dramatic change of course in farming of these beautiful old vines. Klaus-Peter noted that when it came time to pick the Schubertslay, everyone got up before the crack of dawn and drove over, so that “we were in the vines every morning picking by 7:30 AM and the bunches were back at the winery in Flörsheim by 11:00 AM and still cold.” There are four distinct cuvées from the Schubertslay in 2018 from the Kellers, two Kabinetten, one Auslese and one Grosses Gewächs. The grapes for these wines were picked on three different days in 2018- September 24<sup>th</sup> for the first Kabinett, October 1<sup>st</sup> for the very old vine bottling of Kabinett, on the first and eighth of October for the Auslese and October 8<sup>th</sup> also for what would become the Grosses Gewächs. They are all beautiful wines and will make everyone happy who is fortunate enough to find a few bottles, but as I mentioned in my report on Julian Haart’s wines, they have a distinct character from having been fermented in the Kellers’ cellars (with their ambient, Hügelland native yeast population) and are a bit different in personality from the wines that Julian Haart has fashioned from this parcel in the past. But, they are absolutely stunning!*

### **Pinot Noir**

*The 2017 pinot noirs from Klaus-Peter Keller are all going to be in very short supply, due to the frost damage of this previous vintage. The three Grosses Gewächs bottlings, combined, produced only sixteen barrels of wine in 2017. A correct size harvest normally produces twenty-eight casks of these three wines! None of the 2017 reds saw any new oak in this vintage, as they were all raised in older, used, high quality Burgundy barrels. The percentages of “whole clusters” used in 2017 varies from cuvée to cuvée, but the term “whole clusters” is not entirely accurate for how the stems are used here these days for the pinot noirs. Klaus-Peter and his vineyard team now will often pick the pinot noir berry by berry for certain sections, leaving the stems still out on the vine for a few more days to continue to ripen up, before they go back for*



*the stems that will be included in the fermentations, as this gives even more discreet and riper stem tones in the finished wines. It is a very time-consuming process, but that is why Klaus-Peter's pinot noirs are a step or two above everyone else's in Germany these days! We did not taste the Morstein pinot noir from 2017 on this trip, but rather the bottled 2016 version.*

### **2017 Bürgel Spätburgunder Grosses Gewächs- Weingut Keller**

The 2017 Bürgel pinot noir included thirty to forty percent stems in this vintage and saw all older casks for its *elevage*. The wine is beautiful, offering up a red fruity nose of cherries, red plums, lovely spice tones, a fine base of chalky soil, bitter chocolate and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish and nicely sappy at the core, with superb backend mineral drive, moderate tannins and a long, tangy and beautifully complex finish. It is pretty amazing how beautiful this wine has become, given that these are German pinot noir clones! 2030-2070. **93.**

### **2017 Frauenberg Spätburgunder Grosses Gewächs (Selection Massale)- Weingut Keller**

The 2017 Frauenberg pinot noir from Klaus-Peter Keller is another absolutely beautiful wine in the making. The bouquet is pure and beautifully sappy and expressive right out of the blocks, delivering a beautiful aromatic constellation of red and black cherries, raw cocoa, Vosne spices, gamebird, woodsmoke and just a whisper of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and rock solid at the core, with great focus and grip, ripe tannins and a long, tangy and seamlessly balanced finish. This is stunning juice in the making. 2032-2075. **95.**

### **2016 Morstein Spätburgunder Grosses Gewächs "alte Reben"- Weingut Keller**

The 2016 Morstein pinot noir had been bottled in July of 2018 and will be auctioned off in Bad Kreuznach in September of this year. It is a stunning wine in the making, offering up a very perfumed nose of cherries, plums, strawberries, cocoa powder, duck, a gorgeous base of chalky minerality, gentle smokiness, a whisper of vanillin oak and a topnote of fresh nutmeg. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, tangy and very transparent in personality, with moderate tannins, great complexity and grip and a very long, very elegant and detailed finish. This was made with eighty percent "whole clusters" in 2016. There are two casks of it in this vintage, with one having been a "two wine" barrel and the other a "three wine" barrel. Utterly brilliant. 2026-2075. **96.**

### ***Scheurebe, Silvaner and Other Off the Beaten Path Varietals***

#### **2018 Grüner Silvaner Trocken- Weingut Keller**

The 2018 Grüner Silvaner Trocken from Weingut Keller had been bottled only two weeks before my visit, but was showing beautifully. This is 11.5 percent octane this year and offers up a lovely and quite serious nose of tart orange, grapefruit, chalky minerality and a lovely, smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and beautifully balanced, with bright acids and lovely length and grip. Germany's most popular wine to pair with white asparagus is outstanding this year and a great bargain! 2019-2040. **90.**

#### **2018 Silvaner Trocken "Feuervogel" alte Reben- Weingut Keller**

The 2018 Feuervogel was made from quite short yields in this vintage, as these sixty year-old vines only produced thirty hectoliters per hectare. As always, this is a step up in complexity and elegance from the Grüner Silvaner, offering up a beautiful bouquet of tart orange, lemongrass, a nice touch of wild yeasts, chalky minerality, citrus blossoms and a discreetly smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and laser-like in its focus



this year, with a superb core of fruit, great cut and grip and a very long, very fine and minerally backend. Silvaner simply does not get any better than this! 2023-2055. **92+**.

#### **2018 Scheurebe Trocken- Weingut Keller**

The 2018 Scheurebe Trocken from Weingut Keller is a very, very elegant wine this year, as it comes in at 11.5 percent alcohol and offers up great purity and precision on both the nose and palate. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a classy blend of cassis, gooseberry, limestone minerality, citrus peel and a whisper of wild yeasts. On the palate the wine is deep, pure, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with beautiful structure and grip, bright acids and great length and grip on the complex and vibrant finish. Great juice. 2021-2045. **92**.



*Klaus-Peter Keller and Tino Siewert- Tino was the driving force behind convincing KP to take up the Schubertslay.*

#### **Riesling Trocken**

##### **2018 Riesling Trocken- Weingut Keller**

I cannot recall ever having a better, basic Riesling Trocken from Klaus-Peter, and I am sure the ramping up of the average age of vines for each bottling is the reason for this! The bouquet is flat out stunning, soaring from the glass in a complex blend of pink grapefruit, blood orange, chalky soil tones, wild yeasts, dried flowers and a topnote of orange peel. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish and again, really deep at the core, with great acidity and grip, superb focus and a very long, very classy and beautifully complex finish. This is not all that far off the quality level of the GGs fifteen years ago! It is a stunning value. 2019-2050. **91**.

##### **2018 Riesling “von der Fels” Trocken- Weingut Keller**

The 2018 von der Fels Riesling Trocken is magnificent this year and is probably the very finest bargain in the universe of dry Rieslings in all of Germany in this vintage! The wine offers

up a beautifully pure and vibrant bouquet of pink grapefruit, tart orange, chalky minerality, dried flowers, citrus peel, a dollop of wild yeasts and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, precise and impressive tensile for the vintage, with a great core, superb elegance and focus, outstanding backend mineral drive and a very long, very pure and complex finish. Great juice. 2023-2060+. **93.**

#### **2018 Hipping Riesling Grosse Gewächs- Weingut Keller**

The Hipping vineyard has about thirty to forty centimeters of topsoil before one reaches the red slate, so this was a tad less affected by the drought conditions than the “naked rock” of the Pettenthal in 2018. The Hipping GG this year is gorgeous in every way, shape and form, with the celestial bouquet offering up scents of blood orange, tangerine, lemongrass, a beautiful base of slate, smoky overtones, wild yeasts and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and laser-like, with a superb core, great mineral undertow, snappy acids and a very long, poised and simply electric finish. Sheer brilliance. 2028-2075+. **95.**

#### **2018 Pettenthal Riesling Grosse Gewächs- Weingut Keller**

The 2018 Pettenthal GG will be offered up at the auction in Bad Kreuznach this year and it will be one of the stars of the show. The very short yields here in 2018 have produced the greatest Pettenthal Grosses Gewächs bottling from Klaus-Peter Keller that I can recall tasting. The aromatic constellation here is precise and stunning, soaring from the glass in a blaze of pink grapefruit, tart orange, a very, very complex base of slate minerality, wild yeasts, citrus blossoms, lemongrass, a touch of petrol and a topnote of orange peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very, very pure on the attack, with a lovely core, stunning complexity and grip and a very, very long, snappy and perfectly balanced finish. This is breathtaking! 2030-2080. **97.**

#### **2018 Kirchspiel Riesling Grosses Gewächs- Weingut Keller**

I was frankly just a touch underwhelmed by the 2018 Kirchspiel this year (within the context of how great this wine usually is from year to year!) and put this down to just how brilliant the Pettenthal is in 2018 and the fact that the Kirchspiel had to follow it. But, then I received an email from Klaus-Peter commenting that he was not happy with how the wine had showed at our tasting either, and had decided to de-classify one cask of the Kirchspiel that he felt was just a tad too “fat” for the wine down into the von der Fels (which will make that wine even better) and I would expect that my score for this wine will ultimately prove to be a bit conservative, with the offending cask now taken out of the equation! The wine, as we saw it on March 22<sup>nd</sup>, was certainly very good, offering up a very limestone-defined bouquet of pink grapefruit, fresh pineapple, white flowers, that gorgeous base of chalky minerality, wild yeasts and lemongrass. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and a bit more of a powerful personality than is customary in most years, with a fine core, racy acids, excellent cut and grip and a long, still quite refined finish. I have to imagine that my score will be one to two points too low for the wine, now that Klaus-Peter has “fine-tuned” it with the removal of that cask! The first score in the range is how the wine showed at our tasting and the latter score where I expect it will land after the subtraction of that one offending cask. 2031-2080. **92-94+?**

#### **2018 Hubacker Riesling Grosses Gewächs- Weingut Keller**

The 2018 Hubacker was showing beautifully at our tasting and this is going to be a stellar wine. The very refined and nascently complex nose wafts from the glass in a blend of tart orange, wild yeasts, a beautiful base of yellow limestone, lemongrass, citrus zest and plenty of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and shows off great intensity of flavor without undue weight. The wine is deep at the core, focused and very precise,

with lovely mineral drive, superb focus and balance and a very, very long, very elegant finish. Great juice in the making. 2030-2080. **94+**.

**2018 Morstein Riesling Grosses Gewächs- Weingut Keller**

With the stricter selection of old vines for the GGs in 2018, the Morstein was made from an average of seventy-two year-old vines this year. This is a breathtakingly beautiful young wine and we are right back up at the Pettenthal level of breed, precision and complexity with the Morstein. The bouquet is young and stunning in its potential, delivering a blend of sweet grapefruit, tart pineapple, wild yeasts, a beautiful foundation of limestone minerality, lemongrass, dried flowers, a lovely swath of smokiness and a topnote of lime peel. On the palate the wine is pure, deep and full-bodied, with racy acids, stunning complexity and grip, laser-like focus and an extremely long, vibrant and stunning finish. Pure magic. 2033-2085+. **97**.

**2018 Abtserde Riesling Grosses Gewächs- Weingut Keller**

The 2018 Abtserde is also a brilliant, brilliant wine in the making. The stunning nose delivers a cornucopia of tart orange, pineapple, grapefruit, salty limestone minerality, lemongrass, wild yeasts and a hint of the beautifully musky floral tones to come with a bit of bottle age. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still quite primary in personality, with a stellar core, a beautiful foundation of minerality, racy acids and superb cut and grip on the very, very long, very pure and nascently complex finish. All this legend in the making needs is some time alone in the cellar to blossom properly! 2032-2080. **97+**.

**2018 G-Max Riesling- Weingut Keller**

The 2018 G-Max is another brilliant young wine. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a complex and very pure constellation of blood orange, pink grapefruit, wild yeasts, limestone minerality, orange zest, gentle smokiness and a topnote of lemongrass and dried flowers. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, racy and utterly seamless in its refinement and perfection, with a rock solid core, stunning mineral drive, ripe, buried acids, brilliant complexity and a very, very long, poised and endless finish. This is probably another perfect wine in due time, but I will give it a bit of room to grow with my stingy score this year! 2035-2085+. **99**.

***Off-Dry and Prädikat Wines***

**2018 Limestone Riesling QbA - Weingut Keller**

The Limestone Riesling QbA this year is essentially the same wine as the Riesling Trocken bottling, except this cuvée has one full gram higher acidity and finished its fermentation at twenty-one grams of sugar. The wine is superb, offering up a complex bouquet of pink grapefruit, passion fruit, pulverized limestone, apple blossoms and a delicate topnote of wild yeasts. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish, complex and beautifully balanced, with a lovely core of fruit, fine focus and grip and lovely bounce on the long, succulent and flat out delicious finish. Just a lovely wine. 2020-2045. **91**.

**2018 Limestone Riesling Kabinett - Weingut Keller**

The 2018 Limestone Riesling Kabinett was produced from selected parcels in the Kirchspiel and Abtserde vineyards this year. The wine is just beautiful, delivering a marvelous bouquet of tangerine, pink grapefruit, chalky minerality, citrus zest, apple blossoms and an esthery topnote of bee pollen. On the palate the wine is pure, delicate and medium-full, with lovely filigree and grip, great focus and balance, electric acids and a very, very long, complex and dancing finish. A glorious Kabinett! 2023-2060. **93**.

### **2018 Niersteiner Hipping Riesling Kabinett “Prince Louis”- Weingut Keller**

The Prince Louis bottling of Hipping Kabinett hails from the very steepest part of this vineyard, with eighty degree slopes and plenty of old vines. This is an utterly classical Kabinett in the making, offering up a gorgeous bouquet of orange, pineapple, a very complex base of slate, wild yeasts, citrus zest and an orchard full of fruit blossoms. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied and even more delicate and filigreed than the Limestone Kabinett, with stunning intensity of flavor, virtually no weight on the palate, great mineral and acid drive and a very, very long, complex and supremely elegant finish. This is magical Kabinett. 2026-2060+. **96.**



### ***Schubertslay***

#### **2018 Piesporter Schubertslay Riesling Kabinett- Weingut Keller**

The 2018 “regular” bottling of Schubertslay Kabinett from Klaus-Peter Keller was made from sixty year-old vines and was selected first in the vineyard, with the fruit picked on September 24<sup>th</sup>. It is a stunning wine in the making and this is likely to be the easiest of these bottlings to find in the market (and will probably find its way onto a few good wine lists in Germany as well). The bouquet is beautifully reserved and very refined, offering up scents of gooseberry, apple, petrol, wild yeasts, a touch of currant leaf, slate and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, pure and delicate in style, with great intensity of flavor, a great intertwined finish of acidity and minerality, laser-like focus and superb length and grip on the simply stunning finish. A great wine in the making. 2024-2060+. **95.**

### **2018 Piesporter Schubertslay Riesling Kabinett Alte Reben- Weingut Keller**

The old vine bottling of Schubertslay Kabinett was made from a parcel of ungrafted, one hundred and twenty year-old vines from the steepest section of the vineyard, with these grapes not ready to be collected until October 8<sup>th</sup>. The wine is more refined on both the nose and palate, from a combination of the very old vines and their being on *franc de pied*. The youthful bouquet offers up a stellar blend of gooseberry, cassis, a very complex base of slate minerality, wild yeasts, dried flowers, a very discreet touch of petrol and a beautiful topnote of citrus zest. On the palate the wine is pure, medium-bodied and laser-like in its focus, with perfect balance, snappy acids, gorgeous, nascent complexity and stunning length and grip on the filigreed and electric finish. Out of the blocks this is not a whole lot different from the above, but it is just more precise, more elegant and more seamless because of the combination of ungrafted vines and twice the age of the parcel. Brilliant juice. 2026-2070. **98.**

### **2018 Piesporter Schubertslay Riesling Auslese Alte Reben- Weingut Keller**

There are only one hundred liters of this magical Auslese, so I am not sure how Klaus-Peter and Julia Keller are going to decide to distribute it. This is made from a different section of those same one hundred and twenty year-old, ungrafted vines, which were also picked on October 8<sup>th</sup> and, according to Klaus-Peter, had “very pure and very beautiful botrytis”. It is a stunning young Auslese, delivering a gorgeous aromatic constellation of pear, pineapple, smoky overtones, a touch of honeycomb, orange blossoms, great minerality, a beautiful base of minerality and a signature topnote of currant leaf. On the palate the wine is very pure, racy and fullish in profile, with stunning mineral drive, laser-like focus and simply magical length and grip on the complex and utterly weightless finish. 2032-2100. **98.**

### **2018 Schubertslay Riesling Grosses Gewächs Alte Reben- Weingut Keller**

The grapes for the Schubertslay GG were selected on both October 1<sup>st</sup> and October 8<sup>th</sup>. This wine again hails from ungrafted, one hundred and twenty year-old vines. It will probably be auctioned off, but whether this will be in Trier or Bad Kreuznach is not yet settled. The wine is very youthful right now, but its utter brilliance is already very easy to appreciate. The nose wafts from the glass in a mix of gooseberry, pink grapefruit, lovely herbal tones, wild yeasts, a hint of petrol, currant leaf and plenty of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and supremely elegant, with electric acids, great focus and grip and a very, very long, vibrant and seamless finish. Great juice. 2031-2080+. **98.**



**DOMAINE BERTHEAU ET FILS**  
**ONE OF CHAMBOLLE-MUSIGNY'S FINEST ESTATES**



Domaine Bertheau et Fils is one of Chambolle-Musigny's most exceptional estates, but it is not generally as well-known as some of its neighbors such as Domaines Roumier, Barthod, Mugnier or Comte de Vogüé, so its wines tend to travel just a bit below the radar. This fine domaine is run today by François Bertheau, who took over the direction of the estate from his father Pierre Bertheau in the 2004 vintage. François Bertheau is the fifth generation of his family to have farmed these lovely vineyards in Chambolle, and he has continued the fine success the family domaine realized during his father Pierre's time at the helm. François first began working alongside of his father in 1984, so the two had fully two decades together prior to passing on the family winemaking baton and it is not surprising that the suave and refined style of the wines *chez* Bertheau has not changed appreciably from father to son since François Bertheau took over the full-time direction of the estate fifteen years ago. The Bertheau family has just over six hectares of vines, all located within the communal borders of Chambolle-Musigny, with a good swath of vineyard land at the *villages* level, as well as holdings in some of the village's finest premier crus, including les Noirots, les Groseilles, les Baudes, Gruenchers, Charmes and les Amoureuses and thirty-four *ares* of vines in the grand cru of Bonnes-Mares. It is a domaine that is very well-endowed with fine vineyard parcels with which to work and the wines are always



excellent examples of their respective *terroirs* and classic Chambolles in terms of their velvety palate impressions and perfumed elegance.

Monsieur Bertheau's wines are everything one looks for in the wines of Chambolle-Musigny, with plenty of aromatic complexity, refined, generally red fruity personalities and lovely, silken textures. The emphasis here is on minimal cellar intervention during the winemaking process, relying on the lovely fruit from the estate's 6.25 hectares of vines. Consequently, the Bertheau wines do not see a lot of makeup in the cellars, with the premier crus being raised in around twenty percent new wood and the Bonnes-Mares in about a third, so like most of the other very top domaines in Chambolle-Musigny, these are not particularly new oak wines. Like his father before him, François Bertheau prefers to de-stem his fruit prior to fermentation, utilizing both cement vats and stainless steel tanks for the first fermentations. Cultured yeasts are eschewed in favor of indigenous yeasts to start off fermentation, and there is very little pumping over or punch-downs during the wines time in vat, so as to extract as gently as possible and retain all the silky elegance of Chambolle. The wines are then raised in varying combinations of *foudres* or classic Burgundian barrels, with the Chambolle *villages* raised exclusively in *foudres*, while the premier crus and the one grand cru here, Bonnes-Mares are raised in smaller casks. All of the Domaine Bertheau wines are bottled unfiltered.

Of the six-plus hectares of vines farmed by the Bertheau family, they have nearly three hectares of vines scattered around various *villages* level parcels, making this the largest cuvée in the cellars and it is always an excellent and ageworthy example. As mentioned above, this is a rather unique example of Chambolle AC in one regard, as Monsieur Bertheau raises this wine entirely in older *foudres*, rather than in the traditional 228 liter Burgundy barrels, and I cannot think of another example of Chambolle-Musigny that is made in these large, older oak vessels. The lack of new oak and the *elevage* in *foudres* for the Bertheau Chambolle AC seems to allow the wine to always drink beautifully with only a few years' worth of bottle age, though it is always nicely structured at the same time and ages very gracefully. The commune of Chambolle-Musigny is blessed with several *vignerons* who take their AC bottling quite seriously, and Domaine Bertheau is another of these top estates who makes an outstanding village wine and it should most emphatically not be ignored in the search for the premier crus or the superb Bonnes-Mares from this estate. Amongst the former, there are three distinct premier cru bottlings *chez* Bertheau, with a blended "Premier Cru" cuvée made from parcels that total between them to just over one hectare in the vineyards of the four fine premier crus of les Noirots, les Groseilles, les Baudes and Gruenchers. François Bertheau prefers to ferment the fruit from all four parcels together for this cuvée, rather than doing so separately and then blending them after the fermentation. This wine is raised entirely in traditionally-size Burgundy barrels, of which twenty percent are new each year. All four of these smaller plots are about the same age of vines, which are now approaching fifty years of age, as François' father Pierre did quite a bit of replanting during the earlier years of his career. While the Premier Cru bottling *chez* Bertheau hails from a blend of four different parcels, it is always a superb example and ages very well, with a personality at maturity that is quintessentially Chambolle.

The other two premier cru bottlings from Domaine Bertheau include one of the very best examples of Chambolle "Charmes" to be found in the commune, and an excellent and very classic example of les Amoureuses. Monsieur Bertheau today farms two-thirds of a hectare of

vines in the lovely vineyard of les Charmes, again, with the vines about forty-five years of age and the vines situated on the more northerly half of this fairly large premier cru, which to my mind is the sweet spot of the vineyard. Charmes is the largest premier cru vineyard in the commune and there is quite a bit of variation from one end to the other, but the Bertheau vines are very well-situated here. Like the blended Premier Cru *cuvée*, the Charmes bottling is raised in only twenty percent new oak. It ages beautifully and is one of the best wines in the Bertheau cellars, year in and year out and probably the very best value to be found amongst François Bertheau's lineup. Though it is not quite in the same league as the domaine's les Amoureuses, at maturity it shares with that wine a silky, velvety palate impression, beautiful notes of cherries and Chambolle's inimitable beetroot character, lovely spice and floral tones and a beautiful base of limestone soil. Not all examples of Charmes are created equally in Chambolle-Musigny, as this is a very large vineyard and there are significant variations in *terroir* from one end to the other, but Domaine Bertheau's example is one of the very finest in the village and a great bottle of Chambolle! François Bertheau also owns a third of a hectare of vines in les Amoureuses, and, deservedly so, this is probably today his most famous wine. The Amoureuses *chez* Bertheau is also raised in the same twenty percent new oak as the blended Premier Cru and Charmes bottlings, so all three of the premier crus *chez* Bertheau are first and foremost, wines that reflect their underlying *terroirs* and new oak is only here in a subordinate role. François Bertheau's les Amoureuses is always an outstanding wine and one of the very best examples of this beautiful *terroir* produced in Burgundy.

Ironically, the one wine that seems to fly a bit more below the radar *chez* Bertheau is their exquisite example of Bonnes-Mares. The size of the parcel here is about the same as the family's in les Amoureuses, but the flagship Bertheau wine in the market always seems to be the les Amoureuses and the Bonnes-Mares can often be overlooked. However, it is an exceptional example of this grand cru and to my palate, clearly the finest wine that François Bertheau produces. The domaine's rows of vines, in Bonnes-Mares, which total a third of a hectare, run the entire extent of the slope, from top to bottom right in the heart of the vineyard, so it is a classic blend of both *Terres Rouges* and *Terres Blanches* soil types. Like most of the vineyard parcels owned by the family, the age of vines here is now around a half century. The wine is very much a Bertheau example, with only one third of the casks renewed each year for the wine and the inimitable soil signature of Bonnes-Mares playing a very prominent role in the wine's aromatic and flavor profile. The strong vein of *Terres Blanches* in the Bertheau rows of vines allows for the racier, limestone-infused side of Bonnes-Mares to come to the fore in François' version and this is always one of the most elegant examples of the grand cru produced in the village of Chambolle, though still always with the inner core and structural integrity that makes this one of Burgundy's longest-lived and greatest red Grand Crus.

The thread of elegance and perfumed Chambolle sensibilities that run through all of François Bertheau's wines, and those of his father Pierre before him, often allow the wines to show well fairly early on in their evolutions, but in my rather limited experience, it is really only the Chambolle *villages* that reaches its plateau of maturity in a fairly short time and my instincts are always to age the premier cru bottlings here at least a decade out from the vintage before starting to think about opening them with expectations of finding a mature wine on the other side of the cork. As I hope the notes below will attest, the Domaine Bertheau wines have the potential for very long lives in bottle and there is simply no point in rushing them, as despite their early

silkeness on the palate, they are classic wines that really need and deserve extended bottle age to reach their ultimate pinnacles. And, as the wines are so beautiful when they are truly into their apogees, it makes sense to exercise some patience and allow them all the time they need to hit their primes. For the premier crus, twenty to twenty-five years out from the vintage is really the sweet spot for the wines (witness how brilliantly the 1991 Charmes listed below is drinking today!) and the Bonnes-Mares really needs thirty years to offer up everything that lies below the surface. This is not to say that there is not immense pleasure to be found in all of the Domaine Bertheau wines before they reach their true peaks of maturity, but one needs to be careful not to confuse relative accessibility and velvety structural elements with early maturing wines, as the Bertheau wines stand the test of time beautifully.



*François Bertheau hosting guests in the cellar- the foudres for the Chambolle AC are in the background.*

As I mentioned above, Domaine Bertheau continues to enjoy a relatively low profile within the village of Chambolle, and one of the reasons for this may be that the domaine continued to sell off much of their production to *négociants* throughout much of Pierre Bertheau's career, so even as late as the latter half of the decade of the 1990s, fully forty percent was sold off in cask. I have not drunk anywhere near as many bottles from the domaine as their excellent quality merits, and this is despite having been a wine merchant and sommelier that specialized in Burgundy for several decades prior to my starting to write the newsletter full-time. It was not lack of interest in the Bertheau family's wines that kept my experience level painfully

low here, but rather that I never had the good trade connections necessary to be able to offer the Bertheau wines during my merchant days. The Burgundy market of the 1980s and 1990s here in the US was far different than it is today, and it was really an “insider’s wine” and one had to have well-established relationships with each estate’s importer to have a chance to offer the best wines of the region. Fortunately, I had very good connections with many of the top Burgundy importers of that era, and so had very good access to a wide range of the Côte d’Or’s top estates, but never managed to have that same opportunity with the wines from Domaine Bertheau. And as many wine merchants know only too well, members of the trade generally do not have enough of a personal budget to buy everything that they are already selling and wish to put in their own cellars, so shopping further afield than what is already on your own list is generally not a consideration. For that reason, the number of Domaine Bertheau bottles that have graced my own cellar through the years is negligible in comparison to the wines I have from folks like Christophe Roumier, Jacques-Frédéric Mugnier and others in the village of Chambolle, as I just had much better access to those domaines’ wines back in the day.

Consequently, despite my long-running enthusiasm for the wines from Domaine Bertheau, this report would never have been written if not for the kind offer of David and Mary Rosewater to attend a François Bertheau tasting that they studiously organized back at the end of February of this year. David and Mary are passionate collectors of Domaine Bertheau’s wines and they very generously put together much of the lineup for our tasting from their own cellar, which is probably as finely-stocked a collection of François Bertheau’s wines as I have ever seen. David was also kind enough to share a few photos for inclusion in this article from one of the couples’ visits to the domaine; I did not take any photos the last time I was in the Bertheau cellars, as it already being a dreary November evening when I arrived for my last tasting at the domaine. François Bertheau is one of several *vignerons* who I have met in Burgundy who prefer to schedule tastings at the end of the work day, so a 5:30 PM appointment has always been his preference when I have scheduled a visit, allowing him to spend the afternoon out in the vines. For many years, my visits with Jean-François Coche were also always set for that same end of the day time slot, so as not to take away time from vineyard work. But that point in the late afternoon is already pretty dark and dingy during November in Burgundy, so not an ideal time to get a good set of pictures of the visits.

The following wines are listed by their appellation, with the lovely Domaine Bertheau Chambolle *villages* coming first, followed by the blended Premier Cru cuvée, the Charmes, Amoureuses and finally, the estate’s marvelous Bonnes-Mares. It is just a nice spread of vintages of each bottling, as our tasting was limited by what we each had in our cellars and by the sheer number of wines that we could manage to work through over the course of one dinner. I should mention that we did not have good luck with our bottles of 2001 les Amoureuses and 2001 Bonnes-Mares at this dinner, as both bottles were beset by extremely high levels of volatile acidity. I had never tasted any of the Bertheau wines from the fine 2001 vintage prior to this evening, so I do not know if these were just two “off” bottles, or if there is an issue with the 2001 vintage *chez* Bertheau. I usually am fairly tolerant of volatile acidity and can still drink the wine if it is not too aggressive (and it will sometimes blow off with some extended aeration), but both of these 2001s were well above my threshold and I did not score the wines as a result. So a word of caution about the 2001 vintage from the domaine, if one happens to get lucky enough to see bottles at auction, as they may be problematic. However, other than that one vintage speed bump,

the rest of the lineup was absolutely superb and I hope the notes that follow will clearly underscore just how fine the wines are from François Bertheau, and from his father Pierre before him, and this is one domaine in Chambolle-Musigny that definitely deserves to be better recognized for the outstanding wines that they have made for many, many decades.

### ***Chambolle-Musigny AC***

#### **2012 Chambolle-Musigny- Domaine Bertheau et Fils**

The 2012 Chambolle *villages* from Monsieur Bertheau is still youthful and needs a few more years in the cellar to blossom, but it is showing lovely promise and is going to be a fine example with a bit more bottle age. The bouquet is pure and very precise, offering up scents of red plums, a touch of raw cocoa, a fine base of soil, fresh herb tones and still a touch of youthful pepperiness. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and adolescent in personality, with a superb core of sappy fruit, excellent soil signature, moderate tannins and a long, vibrant, but still fairly shut down finish. Just give this a bit more bottle age to unwind properly. 2023-2060. **89.**

#### **2009 Chambolle-Musigny- Domaine Bertheau et Fils**

François Bertheau's 2009 Chambolle AC is starting to really drink beautifully and offers up impressive elegance and purity for this more buxom-styled vintage. The perfumed bouquet offers up a red fruity blend of cherries, strawberries, a touch of beetroot, a fine base of soil, mustard seed and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and ripe in personality, but nicely transparent at the same time, with fine focus and grip and still a bit of suave tannin perking up the long and complex finish. This is a bit more plump at the core than the 2012 version, but has lovely soil signature for the vintage. It is most emphatically not one of those over the top examples of the 2009 vintage and is a lovely bottle of Chambolle-Musigny. 2019-2045+. **89.**

### ***Chambolle-Musigny "Premier Cru"***

#### **2010 Chambolle-Musigny "Premier Cru"- Domaine Bertheau et Fils**

The Domaine Bertheau 2010 Premier Cru bottlings is still a few years away from really starting to blossom, but it is showing beautiful potential and will obviously be an outstanding bottle with a bit more cellaring time. The bouquet is pure and beautifully sappy at the present time, offering up scents of red plums, cherries, raw cocoa, woodsmoke, a fine base of soil, mustard seed and a very discreet framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and just starting to stretch out a bit after its hibernation and showing signs of the promise to come, with a lovely core of fruit, moderate tannins, tangy acids and excellent focus and grip on the nascently complex finish. Just give this three or four more years in the cellar to really soften up properly and it is going to start drinking beautifully. 2022-2065. **92.**

#### **2005 Chambolle-Musigny "Premier Cru"- Domaine Bertheau et Fils**

The 2005 vintage remains the single finest young vintage of red Burgundy that I have ever tasted, but these are deep and structured wines and they are completely closed down at the present time and opening bottles now is only laudable for research purposes. The 2005 Premier Cru bottling from François Bertheau is going to be great, but not for another decade or so, as it now offers up a sappy and hibernating bouquet of red and black cherries, raw cocoa, venison, lovely soil tones, woodsmoke and a whisper of fresh herbs. On the palate the wine is deep, powerful and very pure, with a rock solid core, lovely mineral drive, ripe, seamless, but still quite firm tannins, tangy acids and lovely focus and grip on the adolescent and very reserved finish. There is greatness waiting here, but patience is a prerequisite. 2030-2075. **92+.**





### **1999 Chambolle-Musigny “Premier Cru”- Domaine Bertheau et Fils**

The 1999 vintage is just starting to really wake up from its extended period of hibernation and drink with generosity and this lovely Premier Cru bottling from Messieurs François and Pierre Bertheau is a fine case in point. The gorgeous nose jumps from the glass in a blend of cherries, beetroot, dark chocolate, *pigeon*, bonfires, a superb base of soil and a lovely, understated foundation of new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and sappy at the core, with lovely complexity and grip, quite modest tannins and superb length and focus on the long and succulent finish. This is a beautiful wine that will be even better with another handful of years in the cellar, so try to keep one’s hands off of it for at least a three or four more years and really let it get comfortable! 2023-2065. **92.**

### **1996 Chambolle-Musigny “Premier Cru”- Domaine Bertheau et Fils**

The 1996 vintage of Premier Cru from the Bertheau family is lovely and now drinking nicely in its plateau of peak maturity, though it is more black fruity in personality than the sappy and red fruity 1999 version. The wine offers up a complex aromatic constellation of black cherries, a touch of sweet dark berry, spit-roasted gamebird, mustard seed, chalky soil tones and a touch of oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and beautifully balanced, with melted tannins, bright, seamless acids and fine focus and grip on the long and classy finish. 1996 is generally a “cooler fruit-toned” vintage and this shows in the nice core of black fruit here. This is a lovely wine and really drinking with style and grace today. 2019-2050. **92.**



### *les Charmes*

#### **2009 Chambolle-Musigny “les Charmes”- Domaine Bertheau et Fils**

The 2009 vintage of Charmes from François Bertheau is really pretty and light on its feet, which is no small feat in this riper-styled vintage. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a generous and open mix of beetroot, cherries, gamebird, musky floral tones, chalky soil, chocolate and mustard seed. On the palate the wine is deep, plush on the attack and full-bodied, with a fine core, modest tannins and superb length and grip on the complex and impressively transparent (for an '09) finish. This is not my favorite recent vintage of Chambolle “Charmes” from Monsieur Bertheau, but it may well be the most impressive, given how the more powerful and ripe style of the vintage has not trumped the elegant house style here. 2019-2050. **91.**

#### **2002 Chambolle-Musigny “les Charmes”- Domaine Bertheau et Fils**

The 2002 vintage of Chambolle “Charmes” from Domaine Bertheau is starting to really drink beautifully at age seventeen, as it offers up a bright and red fruity bouquet of cherries, blood orange, beetroot, chalky minerality, woodsmoke, mustard seed, coffee and a hint of cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a lovely core of fruit, fine transparency and grip, tangy acids and a long, discreetly tannic and beautifully balanced finish. I love the backend energy of this wine today. The 2020 Charmes is now fully into its plateau of peak maturity, but has many decades of life still ahead of it, so there is emphatically no reason to rush to drink it now! 2019-2060. **93.**

#### **1991 Chambolle-Musigny “les Charmes”- Domaine Bertheau et Fils**

While the 1991 vintage in Chambolle-Musigny is widely defined by the severe hail damage and the resulting very, very short crop in the village, the vineyard of Charmes (or at least the sector where the Bertheau family has their vines) seems to have been spared, as this wine is beautifully classical in personality and shows no signs of the freakish concentration of so many other 1991 Chambolles. The bouquet is pure, wide open and perfumed, wafting from the glass in a blend of cherries, red plums, violets, cocoa powder, gamebird, mustard seed, chalky soil tones and a nice touch of heather in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and fullish, with a silky palate impression, a lovely core, great purity and grip and a very long, meltingly tannic and complex finish of impressive bounce on the backend. A beautiful bottle at its apogee, but still with decades of life ahead of it. 2019-2040. **94.**

#### **1985 Chambolle-Musigny “les Charmes”- Domaine Bertheau et Fils**

Sadly, at our tasting, the bottle of 1985 Charmes was very mildly corked. However, underneath the TCA was very obviously a beautiful example of the vintage, with lovely red fruit, plenty of autumnal soil elements and fine focus and grip. So, keep an eye out for this wine, as I am sure non-corked examples will be a steal and still loaded with life. I am usually pretty agnostic when it comes to corked bottles, as they are the luck of the draw, but this one really hurt!

### *les Amoureuses*

#### **2010 Chambolle-Musigny “les Amoureuses”- Domaine Bertheau et Fils**

François Bertheau’s 2010 Amoureuses is a magical wine in the making, and though it is still several years away from really starting to drink with generosity, it is awfully enjoyable today in its youthful exuberance. The utterly refined bouquet wafts from the glass in a complex red fruity blend of strawberries, cherries, red plums, sweet herb tones, a very complex base of chalky soil elements, gamebird, a touch of cocoa and a gentle base of new oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and utterly seamless in balance, with a lovely core of fruit, modest tannins and

a very long, vibrant and beautifully precise finish. This is a brilliant example of both this superb vintage in the Côte de Nuits and the inimitable *terroir* of les Amoureuses and it has enormous potential. Try to give it several more years in the cellar, for as good as our bottle was in February, we were only scratching the surface of the pleasure and complexity that are to come here with more time in the cellar! 2027-2080+. **95.**

**2002 Chambolle-Musigny “les Amoureuses”- Domaine Bertheau et Fils**

The 2002 vintage was one of Pierre Bertheau’s last and he did a very fine job. The ’02 Amoureuses is still a tad on the young side and a bit reticent on both the nose and palate, so my score may ultimately prove just a tad conservative, as there are still secrets to reveal here with further bottle age. The bouquet is bright and predominantly red fruity, offering up scents of cherries, beetroot, just a touch of dark berry, venison, woodsmoke, mustard seed, a fine base of soil tones and a topnote of rose petals. On the palate the wine is deep, full and still fairly primary in personality, with a good core, fine focus and grip, modest tannins and a long, tangy finish. Given how well the 2002 Charmes is drinking today, I have to assume that the Amoureuses simply needs a bit more time to properly blossom and will be more fun to drink four or five years down the road than it is today in its still slightly shut down phase. 2025-2075. **93+.**



**2001 Chambolle-Musigny “les Amoureuses”- Domaine Bertheau et Fils**

The 2001 Amoureuses is another Domaine Bertheau wine marked by excessive volatile acidity, and I do not really know how to evaluate it, as there is an excellent bottle under the VA.

The bouquet is a fine mix of red and black cherries, gamebird, chalky soil tones, woodsmoke, vanillin oak and ascetic acid. On the palate the wine is long, full and sappy at the core, with marvelous complexity, but also with that sour-tinged finish of volatile acidity sticking out and spoiling the enjoyment of the wine. As I had not drunk any 2001 wines from Domaine Bertheau previously, so I do not know if this is emblematic of the entire vintage here, or just a cask each of the Amoureuses and Bonnes-Mares, from which our bottles happened to have come from? But this particularly bottle of 2001 Amoureuses is borderline undrinkable, and I have a pretty high tolerance for VA. ???

**2000 Chambolle-Musigny “les Amoureuses”- Domaine Bertheau et Fils**

The 2000 les Amoureuses from Pierre Bertheau is surprisingly black fruity in personality, but not so surprisingly, it is absolutely beautiful and at the peak of its powers today. The complex nose wafts from the glass in a lovely blend of black cherries, dark berries, forest floor, venison, woodsmoke, beetroot and a bit of cigar ash in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a lovely core, excellent autumnal soil elements, melted tannins and a long, complex and tangy finish. This is a beautiful bottle of Amoureuses that is at its velvety peak today, but still has plenty of fine drinking ahead of it. 2019-2040+. **94.**

**1998 Chambolle-Musigny “les Amoureuses”- Domaine Bertheau et Fils**

Like so many of the 1998 red Burgundies at the present time, the '98 Amoureuses from the Bertheau family is still a bit chewy today, but it shows lovely promise for a bit further down the road. The bouquet is more open and expressive than the palate today, revealing an aromatic mix of red and black cherries, red plums, cocoa powder, bonfire, gamebird, a great base of soil, mustard seed and a topnote of heather. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still a bit structured, with a good core, lovely transparency and a long, moderately tannic finish that closes with a classic Chambolle note of beetroot. This is going to be excellent, but give the tannins at least a few more years to more fully soften, so that the inherent elegance of Amoureuses can start to come to the fore. 2024-2065+. **94.**

***Bonnes-Mares***

**2014 Bonnes-Mares- Domaine Bertheau et Fils**

The 2014 Bonnes-Mares from François Bertheau is a classic example of both this high-quality vintage and this outstanding *terroir*. The bouquet is youthfully complex and quite pure, wafting from the glass in a blend of cherries, red plums, a touch of nutskin, *pigeon*, a superb base of soil tones, woodsmoke, beetroot and a nice touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and very transparent in personality, with a fine core of fruit, ripe, suave tannins and a long, tangy and nascently complex finish that shows outstanding promise. All this beautiful wine needs is time in the cellar to properly blossom. 2031-2080+. **94+.**

**2011 Bonnes-Mares- Domaine Bertheau et Fils**

For the life of me, I cannot figure out why the 2011 red Burgundies have such a bad reputation in some circles, as all the ones I have drunk of late have been beautiful, low octane and very soil-driven wines of excellent complexity and impressive fidelity to their underlying *terroir*, and this beautiful 2011 Bonnes-Mares from François Bertheau is no exception! The complex and precise bouquet wafts from the glass in a refined blend of cherries, beetroot, a gorgeous base of chalky soil tones, gamebird, sweet herb tones (including Chambolle's signature mustard seed), a gentle base of vanillin oak and a topnote of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, elegant and transparent, with a fine core of fruit, moderate tannins and a long, complex and tangy finish. This is first class Bonnes-Mares in the making. 2022-2065. **94.**

### **2002 Bonnes-Mares- Domaine Bertheau et Fils**

I love the classic personality of the 2002 Domaine Bertheau Bonnes-Mares. The wine delivers superb depth and complexity in its aromatic constellation of black cherries, dark berries, woodsmoke, venison, dark soil tones, fresh herbs and just a hint of the heather to come with further bottle age. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with excellent depth at the core, lovely soil signature, ripe, moderate tannins, tangy acids and excellent length and grip on the still quite youthful and primary finish. This is an excellent wine, but, in proper Bonnes-Mares fashion, it is still several years away from truly blossoming. 2027-2085. **94+**.

### **2001 Bonnes-Mares- Domaine Bertheau et Fils**

Like our bottle of the 2001 Amoureuses, this bottle of 2001 Bertheau Bonnes-Mares was extremely marked by its volatile acidity and is almost impossible to drink as a result. Underneath the VA is a superb bottle, with depth of fruit, excellent complexity of soil and plenty of breed, length and grip. But, how does one get around this much VA? I hope there are good bottles out there somewhere.

### **1999 Bonnes-Mares- Domaine Bertheau et Fils**

The 1999 vintage of Bonnes-Mares from Pierre Bertheau is absolutely stunning and, while not yet really into its plateau of maturity, it is awfully easy to drink on the way up! The bouquet is beautifully deep and pure, soaring from the glass in a ripe and black fruity blend of plums, black cherries, venison, woodsmoke, mustard seed, a great base of soil, dark chocolate and heather. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, pure and rock solid at the core, with impeccable focus and balance, ripe, well-integrated tannins, tangy acids and stellar length and grip on the poised and very, very promising finish. There is a great, great wine here that is simply waiting for a bit more tannin to fall away and to fully blossom. 2027-2100. **95**.

### **1998 Bonnes-Mares- Domaine Bertheau et Fils**

Interestingly, the 1998 Bonnes-Mares *chez* Bertheau is not appreciably behind the Amoureuses in terms of its evolution, and both of these wines are not all that far away from primetime drinking. Like the domaine's Amoureuses in this vintage, the 1998 Bonnes-Mares here already is aromatically superb, offering up scents of red and black cherries, pomegranate, gamebird, bonfire, a complex base of soil tones and a gently floral topnote redolent of peonies. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a fine core, excellent transparency and grip, ripe, moderate tannins and a long, tangy and still youthful finish. This is going to be an outstanding bottle with another half dozen years or so in the cellar. 2024-2075. **93+**.

### **1990 Bonnes-Mares- Domaine Bertheau et Fils**

This is not my favorite vintage for red Burgundy in the last couple of decades, as I am like a jilted lover when it comes to the 1990s, as I vividly recall their unbridled beauty in their youth and have a hard time warming up, generally, to their more roasted personalities of *sur maturité* that have come to the fore with bottle age. However, that said, this is not the case with this beautiful bottle of 1990 Bertheau Bonnes-Mares, which seems to somehow have held onto much of its youthful purity, as it offers up a superb bouquet of red plums, cherries, a touch of beetroot, heather, venison, a lovely base of soil and a touch of orange peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and complex, with attractive, broad shoulders, a fine core, moderate, ripe tannins and excellent length and grip on the complex and classy finish. This is a ripe wine that does not stray over the line into *sur maturité* elements and is really lovely on both the nose and palate. 2019-2050. **94**.

## ANOTHER LOOK AT THE 1989 AND 1990 BORDEAUX TWIN VINTAGES HAVE TAKEN DIFFERENT PATHS WITH AGE



*A welcoming open front door at Pomerol's beautiful Château l'Evangile.*

I wrote a feature on the twin Bordeaux vintages of 1989 and 1990 back in the summer of 2012, and since that time I have been crossing paths with many of the top wines from these two years on the Gironde with quite some frequency and thought it might be interesting to do an updated article on these two years, given that seven years have passed and I have had a chance to taste a great many wines of late that were not reviewed back in 2012. As I noted back in that summer, these two top growing seasons brought to a close the most golden decade of Bordeaux wines that I have ever seen in my lifetime, and the foundation for the unbridled financial success of the classed growth Bordeaux châteaux that we have all come to accept as the norm, was really only created in the marvelous decade of the 1980s. As the very good 1981 vintage was starting to ship from the *quays* in the city of Bordeaux for parts unknown across the globe, the fortunes of the vast majority of the top châteaux was dramatically different from our contemporary landscape, as the decade of the 1970s had really only had one great vintage in 1970, another very good one in 1971 and a vintage of limited success in 1975, which was brilliant in Pomerol, very good in St. Émilion and the Graves, but far more problematic on the Left Bank. The decade of the 1970s had also been one of boom and bust for the claret market in general, brought on by the

unrealistic representation of the quality of the indifferent 1973 vintage and attendant over-pricing of the wines to a gullible market. However, once the market got a chance to really get a feel for the modest quality level of the 1973s, they rebelled from the Bordeaux market in general and brought about the biggest crash for the *Bordelais* since the great depression and the devastation of the second world war. It was not really until the decade of the 1980s dawned that the *Bordelais* started to recover a bit from the crash of the mid-1970s.

However, Mother Nature stepped in and lent a helping hand right from the start of the 1980s, as the 1981 vintage was very good (and would have been brilliant and every bit as stunning as the other top vintages of the decade if not for some poorly timed rain just before harvest which took away much of the concentration in the resulting wines), 1982 was outstanding and brought in a new generation of claret lovers into the market, and the rest of the decade unfolded with good to excellent vintages in all years but 1984 and 1987. But, to have eight good vintages out of ten was absolutely unheard of in the annals of Bordeaux's previous history and prices marched up, large crops of top quality wine sold through effortlessly and prosperity returned to Bordeaux with a vengeance by the end of the decade. In fact, the string of vintages in the 1980s was so very good that there was even a bit of market fatigue by the time that the 1989s and 1990s started to ship, for though both vintages were excellent, there had been an awful lot of claret buying by collectors and restaurants from the 1982 vintage right up through the 1986s, and the very good 1988s had sold fairly slowly and the flashy, sumptuously ripe 1989s were perhaps a tad less popular than they deserved. At this time, the reputation of the plush and beautifully ripe 1982s were still the gold standard of 1980s' claret and the 1989s were seen as just a bit more powerful and a bit less elegant than the celestial 1982s, and due to adverse currency complications at this time (coupled with significantly higher prices from the *Bordelais*), the 1989s seemed kind of expensive in relation to the first year's prices for the slightly superior 1982s. But, even full cellars and some price resistance did not slow down the vintage all that much and the 1989s reignited the claret market that had quieted down a bit with the modest 1987 vintage and then the tough and structured 1988 vintage.

When the 1990s started to find their way into the pipeline, and were confirmed as another excellent crop of sunny vintage wines, the debate began as to which vintage was going to ultimately be the superior year on the Gironde and which would be the better option for laying down in the cellar for the long haul. The two vintages were both quite different in character in their respective youths, as though both 1989 and 1990 were extremely hot summers (decidedly warmer than 1982), 1990 was also a drought vintage, with the months of July and August very, very dry, and it was only a blast of rain at the end of the month of August that replenished groundwater supplies and got the vintage across the finish line with *élan*. However, after the very, very hot summer months, the last month of the growing season in 1990, September, was quite cool, though still sunny, and this is probably what gave the young wines from 1990 such a lovely veneer of purity when they first hit the market. In contrast, the 1989 growing season was far earlier in getting started out of the blocks, with flowering and *veraison* both at least two weeks ahead of schedule and the first merlot was brought in at top estates on the Right Bank on August 31<sup>st</sup> in 1989! Though the summer of '89 was torrid, it was not a drought year, and so maturation never had a period of lagging, as had been the case in 1990, and the big question for many proprietors was how high the sugars might soar before the tannins would ripen up and they could pick their grapes. This was particularly a concern for the cabernet sauvignon



in 1989, so despite the very early flowering and picking of the merlot, many properties had to wait until well into October to pick their cabernet sauvignon, as the maturity of the tannins was lagging far behind sugar accumulation.

Given the variations between the two hot growing seasons, it is not surprising that the style of the resulting wines in 1989 and 1990 were quite different out of the blocks. The 1989s were powerful wines, with loads of very ripe fruit, firm, buried tannins and opulent personalities. There was plenty of structure underlying the plush and powerful fruit of the vintage, but some wines seemed borderline blowsy with all that puppy fat of ripe fruit and their ultimate complexity and structural integrity was not always self-evident out of the blocks. In contrast, the 1990s seemed far fresher and more classic in profile than the 1989s when they started to arrive in the market a year later, with the cooler temperatures of September allowing for more classical purity and more obvious structure in the young wines, though the heat of the midsummer could still be sensed in the fine depth of fruit in these wines. I had little doubt that the 1990 vintage of claret was going to ultimately prove to be superior to the 1989s with a couple of decades of bottle age, and the top 1990s also seemed likely to outlive their 1989 counterparts in the bottle by many decades. This remained my view of these two fine, back to back Bordeaux vintages up until a large tasting of the two vintages sponsored by Hart Davis Hart in the summer of 2012, where I had a chance to revisit a great many of the top wines of the two vintages, with many of the finest estates represented at the tasting with examples of both their 1989s and 1990s, so that one could taste the two vintages side by side at this large tasting. The results completely surprised me, as in almost every case, it was the 1989 version of a top wine that was the fresher, more pure and more classic wine of the two vintages, with the 1990s often showing more roasted fruit tones than the 1989s and seemed less deep, structurally-sophisticated and promising. I came away from the tasting completely changed in my perceptions of the relative merits of the two vintages, with my heart now fully committed to the 1989 vintage as the superior year on the Gironde.

I was very much astonished at this switch in my perception of the two vintages, and have been studiously trying to taste as many examples from both years as I could in the subsequent years since I wrote my feature on the two years back in 2012, as I wanted to see if a greater range of estates and their wines in each vintage would start to swing me back a bit towards a preference for the 1990s, but this has not been the case. This is not to say that there are not a lot of very, very good bottles of claret hailing from the 1990 vintage and this year deserves to still be ranked amongst the most successful of this outstanding decade of Bordeaux, but the wines are not quite as good as they seemed likely to turn out back in the first half of the 1990s. The drought conditions of midsummer of 1990 seems to have affected the wines a bit, with less mid-palate concentration than what is routinely found in the 1989s, and also in the 1982s, 1985s and 1986 Left Bank wines. As the puppy fat of the vintage departed from the 1990s with extended bottle age, they have come to seem just a touch soft-centered in comparison to these other top vintages of the 1980s. They also often now show a bit of a roasted character in their aromatics- at least in some of the wines- and I wonder now if they skins might have gotten a bit sunburned in the heat of July and August. In contrast, the 1989s have seemed to gain in purity and classical aromatics and flavors with extended bottle age, losing a bit of their warm vintage character that was more pronounced in their youth (and far stronger than their 1990 counterparts in the first half dozen years after they were shipped out into the market). This is clearly the more structured vintage of

the two, and in many cases, the very best 1989s are still a tad on the young side, despite now celebrating their thirtieth birthdays!

Both 1989 and 1990 have loads of very good wines, and I do not want to be misconstrued as damning the best 1990 claret with faint praise, as it is still a very, very good vintage and certainly ahead of years such as 1983 and 1988, which also have produced plenty of very good wines. But, it is also pretty clear if one dips into both vintages today with frequency and has a chance to compare and contrast a 1989 and 1990 example from the same property side by side, that 1989 has eclipsed 1990 in terms of quality and potential longevity, and thirty years on, one has to come to the conclusion that 1989 today is the superior vintage on the Gironde. The earlier vintage today has better purity of fruit, equally strong signatures of soil, superior structural integrity and the potential to both be superior at its apogee than a given wine's counterpart from the 1990 vintage and also to last longer, with many of the top 1989s destined to live easily another fifty or sixty years and probably, even longer. It is an outstanding vintage and I wonder if another decade from now, we will all generally rank 1989 as ahead of 1982, 1985 or the Left Bank wines of 1986. The 1990s cannot match the 1989s for depth at the core, can often show a bit of a roasted profile from the torrid summer, and are generally a bit more mature than their counterparts from the previous year. There are some exceptions to this generalization, but for the most part, it is an accurate portrayal of the two vintages and where they stack up in comparison to each other.

I have been accruing these notes over the last couple of years, with a few appearing in historical features on a given property, but most having been patiently waiting in my files for the quantity of notes to reach a critical mass and provide enough material for a properly deep report on the 1989 and 1990 Bordeaux vintages. The small handful of notes that have appeared in historical profiles on a given estate have been included here simply for ease of comparing those wines with their vintage counterparts, and though this will create a bit of duplication in the database, it seems logical to reprint those notes in this article, rather than refer readers to articles on properties such as Château d'Issan or Château Latour à Pomerol, to cite just a couple of examples. The notes are organized by commune, but in contrast to the report back in the summer of 2012, I have put notes on both 1990 and 1989 wines in each communal section, so that it is easier to compare the two vintages side by side. So, for example, all the 1990 Pomerols will be grouped together (and listed alphabetically), followed by all of the 1989 Pomerols that I have tasted lately, and hopefully this organization of the article will make it easier to compare and contrast the two vintages. The 1989 and 1990 vintages represented the final two glorious end-pieces of a brilliant decade of wines from Bordeaux, and we have not seen anything as consistently excellent from the region since that time. This was an era where the new affluence of the *Bordelais* had given them the capability to be a bit stricter with selection than had been the case at the start of the 1980s, but it was still a time when they were making relatively classical-styled wines and the temptation to embrace technology in the cellars was not yet as strong as it would become in later years, so the average quality of these two vintages has probably not been replicated since- at least for classically-styled wines. As the two vintages are now just arriving at (or nearing) their plateaus of peak maturity, it seems a very good time to be revisiting the last of the old school vintages on the Gironde and seeing how the wines have evolved with the passage of time. As the notes below will attest, in most cases, they both pass the test with flying colors!

## ***St. Estèphe***

### **1990 Château Montrose**

The 1990 Montrose is justly famous, but in my experience, it has only been a hair superior to the underrated 1989 here, and I have never understood the price differential in the market of the two wines. This most recent bottle of the 1990 was drunk out for the night in Napa Valley, where it showed very well indeed, offering up a deep and powerful bouquet of black cherries, sweet cassis, a touch of currant leaf, dark soil tones, cigar smoke and a fair bit of toasty new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and shows off truly exceptional depth at the core, with ripe, moderate tannins, fine focus and grip and a long, well-balanced and complex finish. There is just a touch of brett on the backend here, but it is very modest and does not detract from the very serious pleasure that this wine is beginning to deliver. 2016-2050+. **95.**



*The beautiful Château Calon-Ségur in St. Estèphe.*

### **1989 Château Calon-Ségur**

The 1989 Château Calon-Ségur is a very good example of the vintage that is now into its apogee and drinking with great style. The bouquet is a refined blend of black cherries, dark berries, Cuban cigar wrapper, dark soil tones, a touch of new leather, dried eucalyptus, gentle herb tones and cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and beautifully resolved, with a sweet core of fruit, lovely soil signature, melting tannins and lovely length and grip on the *à point* and classy finish. This is not a particularly powerful example of the 1989 vintage, but it is very elegant, complex and drinking with lovely style at age twenty-five. 2014-2035+. **92.**

### **1989 Château Cos d'Estournel**

The 1989 Château Cos d'Estournel was not showing particularly well at the time I tasted it and I wonder if it was just still in a very awkward, extended dumb phase or if this wine is never really going to come around. The nose is complex and fairly tarry in profile, offering up scents of cassis, bell pepper, a touch of salami, plenty of road tar, cigarette ash and a discreet base of toasty new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still quite four-square and linear, with low acids, a good core and some distinctly bitter backend tannins still poking out of the fruit. I find this wine totally perplexing and have no idea if it will ever right the ship. ???

### **1989 Château Montrose**

The 1989 Montrose may not be quite as deep as the 1990, but it is a purer wine of precise definition and classic proportions. The superb nose offers up a refined mélange of cassis, dark berries, cigar ash, gravelly soil tones, espresso, fresh herbs and cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and shows off excellent mid-palate depth, with ripe, beautifully-integrated tannins, tangy acids and outstanding focus and grip on the youthful, pristine and old school finish. Some may prefer the more overtly powerful style of the 1990 Montrose, but for me, though the two vintages are qualitatively equivalent, I prefer the superior transparency and more elegant profile of the 1989. The wine is certainly approachable today, but I would still give it another five or six years' worth of bottle age to really allow it to fully blossom. 2019-2070. **94.**

## ***Pauillac***

### **1990 Château Latour**

The 1990 vintage from Château Latour is a superb example of this ripe and more forward year, with the torrid growing season having put its imprimatur on the wine a bit in its slightly more forward and plush style, without ever impinging upon the classic Latour house style. The bouquet is tremendously deep and expressive, offering up scents of cassis, blackberries, tobacco, gravelly soil tones, a hint of violets, cedar and a blossoming topnote of cigar smoke. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and simply packed at the core, with superb focus and grip, lovely complexity and a very long, ripely tannic and already fairly pliable finish. This wine has plenty of structure for the long haul, but it does not possess the classic sternness of vintages of Latour from the fifties or sixties, nor of wines made in the last decade or so. That said, it is probably the finest Left Bank wine of the 1990 vintage. 2016-2060+. **96.**

### **1990 Château Mouton-Rothschild**

The 1990 Château Mouton-Rothschild has never been my favorite vintages at this property, as the wine started out life a bit over-oaked (or under-wined as Henry Mayer might have said back in the day) and it has still not completely absorbed its toasty new wood component, which today shows most prominently on its slightly green, wood tannin finish. The nose is reasonably complex, but a bit bretty as well, as it delivers scents of cassis, cigar smoke, gravel, a touch of sweaty saddle and heavily-toasted new oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and modestly concentrated at the core, with melting tannins and good length and grip, but without this property's typical complexity at more than twenty-five years of age. This is one of the poorer performances from Mouton in the decade of the 1980s and I vastly prefer the 1987 and 1988 here to the 1990. It is still not a bad wine, but a pretty modest effort from Mouton. 2017-2040+. **87.**

### **1990 Château Pichon-Lalande**

The 1990 Pichon-Lalande is a very fine example of the vintage. The deep, complex and vibrant nose delivers a classy mélange of sweet dark berries, cassis, coffee, tobacco leaf, gravelly

soil tones, cigar smoke and a finely-integrated base of new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very long, with admirable complexity, refined focus and balance, melting tannins and impressive grip on the very long and refined finish. This is a classic example of Pichon-Lalande from its glory days of the decade of the 1980s, and the 1990 here has just gotten better and better with each passing year. It is one of the most elegant examples of the vintage to be found on the Left Bank. 2016-2050. **94.**

### **1989 Château Lafite-Rothschild**

The 1989 Château Lafite-Rothschild is an outstanding example of the vintage and this is one of my favorite wines from this very, very successful decade at this great property. The bouquet is pure and nicely ripe with the vintage's generosity, wafting from the glass in a complex blend of cassis, black cherries, tobacco leaf, a beautiful base of gravelly soil, a touch of fresh herbs and a very well-done framing of toasty new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very suave on the attack, with impeccable focus and balance, a lovely core of black fruit, fine soil signature and a long, seamlessly tannic and complex finish. Just a lovely, lovely vintage of Lafite. 2016-2060. **95.**



*Château Lafite-Rothschild sitting serenely on its gentle plateau.*

### **1989 Château Latour**

The 1989 vintage of Château Latour was not considered a great year for this superb property, which was purported to have started a mini-slump after the release of the brilliant 1982 vintage at the estate. However, though I did not buy this wine on release (believing the critics of

the time and their assessment of its relative inferiority), on the couple of occasions where I have been lucky enough to drink it again in recent times, it has been clear that this wine was underrated at the outset and really is an excellent vintage of Latour. The most recent bottle was getting close to full bloom, but not quite there yet, offering up a deep and complex bouquet of cassis, sweet dark berries, cigar ash, Latour's classic gravelly, dark soil signature, cedary oak and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and plenty deep at the core, with firm, well-integrated tannins, excellent mineral drive, very good acids for the vintage and a very long, balanced and complex finish. This is getting close to really drinking well as it closes in on its thirtieth birthday, but it is an old school Latour and will still be an even better drink at age forty than it is today. 2018-2085. **95.**

#### **1989 Château Lynch Bages**

The 1989 Château Lynch Bages is starting to drink beautifully at the present time and has just about reached its apogee of peak maturity, but still has decades and decades of life ahead of it. The classic bouquet jumps from the glass in a sappy blend of sweet cassis, black cherries, new leather, cigar ash, dark soil and a touch of toasty, ever so slightly resinous new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a fine core of fruit, very good soil signature, still a bit of backend tannin to carry it on into the future and impressive focus and grip on the long and complex finish. I would opt for giving this wine just a few more years to soften up just a touch more on the backend before starting to drink it with abandon. It is a top flight vintage of Lynch. 2020-2050+. **92.**

#### **1989 Château Mouton-Rothschild**

This most recent bottle of the 1989 Château Mouton-Rothschild, was by quite some margin, the finest I have tasted, and it is hard not to be persuaded that the wine is only now really starting to come fully into its own. As I have mentioned in the past, this is from the era when Mouton used a lot of very heavily-toasted oak in its wine, but the '89 vintage provided plenty of depth of fruit to carry the generous serving of new oak and the two are beautifully synthesized today. The bouquet is deep, complex and strikingly attractive, wafting from the glass in a fine blend of cassis, black cherries, Cuban cigar wrapper, a nice touch of Mouton spices starting to emerge, the aforementioned toasty new oak and, with air, just a touch of fresh herb tones that are very, very attractive. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and still new oaky in personality, with an excellent core of fruit, melting tannins and excellent focus and grip on the very long and very classy finish. As one of the tasters around the table dubbed this wine, "the best vintage from Mouton's coffee oak period." The 1989 Mouton is a far more impressive wine today than it was ten years ago and, though I would have liked it better with less toasty oak, its future seems to be excellent. 2019-2060+. **95.**

#### **1989 Château Pichon-Baron**

The 1989 vintage remains the single greatest wine I have ever tasted from Château Pichon-Baron, and this most recent bottle was flat out spectacular! I have liked this wine very well from the moment it was released, but never imagined it would rise to the level it is currently displaying, and it was clearly one of the great, great bargains of the 1989 vintage when it first came out. The bouquet is deep, pure and very, very promising, albeit still a tad on the young side, as it delivers a refined aromatic constellation of black cherries, plums, a touch of mocha, gravelly soil tones, cigar smoke and cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with great focus and grip, moderate tannins and a long, nascently complex and impeccably balanced finish. I last drank this in the autumn of 2017 and it was still a few years



away from fully blossoming, but it is one of the purest, most precise and promising 1989s to be found in the Médoc! Great juice. 2021-2060+. **95.**

#### **1989 Château Pichon-Lalande**

This most recent bottle of the 1989 Pichon-Lalande was showing its exotic side from its high percentage of merlot in the blend, with notes of menthol and a bit of mintiness convincing me that I was tasting an example of Cheval Blanc of comparable age (as the wine was served double blind). This is a great vintage for Pichon-Lalande and the wine is just starting to reach its apogee of peak maturity, though a few more years in the cellar to allow a bit more tannin to fall away would not be remiss. The simply stunning nose delivers a gorgeous blend of sweet dark berries, cigar smoke, plenty of menthol, coffee bean, a fine base of dark soil tones, a dollop of mint and a judicious framing of cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very pure, with lovely sappiness at the core, fine focus and complexity and still a bit of backend tannin wishing for a couple more years to resolve more completely. The finish is very, very long and the wine shows a beautiful synthesis of the depth of fruit of the vintage and the classical refinement of Pichon-Lalande at its best. 2017-2050. **95.**

#### ***St. Julien***

##### **1989 Château Beychevelle**

I had not drunk a bottle of the 1989 vintage of Beychevelle in almost a decade and was very happy to find it is starting to open up beautifully and now offering a complex aromatic constellation of cassis, desiccated cherries, a touch of meatiness, gravelly soil tones, cigar ash, just a hint of chipotle pepper and a nicely discreet base of new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and quite tangy for the vintage, with fine focus and grip, a lovely core, modest tannins and a long, balanced and blossoming finish. Given how well Beychevelle ages, it is still relatively early days for the 1989 here, but the wine is now easing into its plateau of peak maturity and really starting to drink with generosity and breed. 2018-2055. **92.**

##### **1989 Château Branaire-Ducru**

The 1989 Château Branaire-Ducru is a very pretty example of the vintage, but it does not have quite the mid-palate stuffing of the top wines of this fine year (nor the excellent 1982 Branaire) and has to be placed in the very good, but not great, category. The bouquet is quite attractive, wafting from the glass in a mix of black cherries, cigar ash, chocolate, dark soil tones, a nice touch of chipotle pepper and smoky new oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and moderately complex, with respectable depth at the core, melted tannins and good balance and grip on the slightly shorter finish. This is a very drinkable and enjoyable wine today, with still a couple of decades of life ahead of it, but it is not in the top division in the commune in 1989. 2016-2035+. **89.**

#### ***Margaux***

##### **1990 Château d'Issan**

The 1990 vintage of Château d'Issan is quite emblematic of this era at the estate, as it is not as elegant an interpretation of the *terroir* here as the wine from 1995 forwards. As I have also found with the handful of wines I have tasted from the estate in the decade of the 1980s, the 1990 is a bit tarry in personality and was probably not produced from anywhere near as careful a selection as the wines from 1995 forwards. The bouquet is just a bit rustic in profile, but offers up very good complexity in its mix of cassis, bell pepper, a touch of road tar, sweet cigar wrapper, espresso, dark soil tones and a bit of charred wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-

bodied and quite broad-shouldered for d'Issan, with a good core of fruit, a fairly extracted personality, firm, slightly hard tannins and good length and grip on the complex, but rustic finish. One gets the sense that with the same *savoir-faire* here in 1990 that existed in the new millennium, this would have been special, instead of just pretty solid. It is still a bit chewy, but certainly approachable at age twenty-four, and I suspect that a bit of these tannins are always going to be part of the equation on the palate here, so it is not a bad time to be drinking this wine- though it still has plenty of years ahead of it. This is quite old-fashioned in style- particularly in comparison to the wines being produced today- but, it is not bad at all. 2014-2035+. **88.**

### **1989 Château d'Issan**

The 1989 d'Issan is a bit more elegant than the 1990, but it too is stylistically still a bit caught up in the *ancienne regime* at the estate. The wine offers up a deep and slightly roasted bouquet of black cherries, cassis, woodsmoke, cigar wrapper, a bit of walnut, lovely soil tones, incipient notes of summer truffle and tobacco leaf in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and nicely lively with sound acids. The core is deep and pure, the tannins, still a bit chewy, but better integrated than the 1990, with fine focus and good length and grip on the complex finish. Again, by today's standards, this is just a touch short of elegance, but it is a good drink and probably the best Château d'Issan of the decade of the 1980s. 2014-2035+. **90.**

### ***Moulis***

#### **1990 Château Chasse-Spleen**

As I wrote about a bit in my *En Primeur* coverage of the region several years ago, the refinement of the winemaking at Château Chasse-Spleen has ticked up notably in the last decade or so, and back in the era of the 1980s and early 1990s, there was not quite as much breed to be found in the wines from this lovely property as is the case today. However, they were still very good back in the day and this 1990 is a fine example of its vintage, offering up a lovely bouquet of roasted cassis and black cherries, cigar ash, gravelly soil tones, a touch of fresh herbs, a dollop of toasty oak and a bit of gentle tariness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite suave on the attack, with a good core, melting tannins and fine length and grip on the beautifully resolved finish. A touch more rustic than the wines from the property today, the 1990 is still very, very satisfying. 2017-2040+. **91+.**

### ***Médoc and the Haut Médoc***

#### **1989 Château Cantemerle**

I have always liked the 1989 Château Cantemerle since its very earliest days, and at age twenty-five, the wine is really starting to drink at its apogee. The bouquet is pure, complex and classy, offering up scents of cassis, cigar smoke, a bit of charred wood, dark soil tones, exotic spice overtones (curry?) and cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still shows off a bit of tannin, with fine mid-palate concentration, excellent focus and grip and a very long, complex and generous finish. This was still in the era where the Cordier team was in charge of the winemaking at Cantemerle, and the style is a bit more extracted during this epoch and the 1989 does not possess quite the same refinement as is found in the excellent 1996 version. But, this is still a very well-made wine and a strong vintage for Cantemerle. 2014-2040+. **92.**

### **1989 Château Larose-Trintaudon**

I was frankly shocked at how well the 1989 Château Larose-Trintaudon had evolved with extended bottle age, as this has never been a property that I thought of as being particularly age-worthy. But, this recent bottle was really quite good and far more complex than I could have ever hoped for, offering up a fine bouquet of cherries, tobacco leaf, a good base of soil tones, cigar smoke, a touch of fresh herbs and just a whisper of cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and impressively complex, with a perfectly respectable core of fruit, good soil signature, just a whisper of backend tannin, sound acids and good length and grip on the well-balanced finish. Who knew? 2016-2030. **88.**

### ***Graves***

#### **1990 Château Haut-Bailly**

The 1990 Haut-Bailly is an excellent example of the vintage, but at the present time the wine remains still quite closed and in need of a few more years in the cellar to really reach its zenith. The nose is already offering up a lovely nose of cassis, dark berries, Cuban cigar smoke, gravel, fresh herbs and a touch of blood orange in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and just beginning to blossom, with a lovely core of fruit, perfect focus, seamless balance, still a bit of ripe tannin to resolve and excellent length and grip on the very classy finish. 2021-2055. **92.**

#### **1990 Château La Mission Haut-Brion (served from magnum)**

The 1990 La Mission is a very top example of this vintage, and out of magnum it is just beginning to blossom. The deep, complex and classy nose offers up a very ripe blend of cassis, spit-roasted game, saddle leather, cigar ash, dark soil tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with just a touch of La Mission's youthful medicinal tones still in evidence. The wine is rock solid at the core, modestly tannic and beautifully balanced, with outstanding focus, length and grip. The 1990 vintage in general has not aged anywhere as well as I had initially anticipated, but this is one 1990 that does not disappoint. 2012-2065+. **94+.**

#### **1990 Château Pape Clément**

I still have the better part of a case of the 1990 Pape Clément in my cellar, and though I have been dipping in to check on its evolution every couple of years over the last decade, I still find this excellent wine a bit too young for primetime drinking. It is one of the most structured vintages of Pape Clément that I have tasted from this golden era at the estate, and a few more years in the cellar to allow more tannins to fall away still seems merited. The bouquet today is pure, complex and utterly classic, offering up a smoky blend of black cherries, cigar wrapper, gravelly soil tones, a bit of iron filings, a discreet touch of toasty oak, a bit of Graves medicinal overtones and hints of red fruit to come in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and beautifully soil-driven, with an excellent core, very good purity for the vintage and still a surprising bit of chewy, youthful tannin perking up the long and complex finish. It is certainly approachable today, but it seems to have gotten a bit sleepy again and closed down a bit more and I would now let it rest comfortably in the cellar for another few years before starting to look for it at its plateau of maturity. 2023-2060. **93.**

#### **1990 Château Smith-Haut-Lafitte**

While much has been made in the last decade about the new, spoofulated style at Château Smith-Haut-Lafitte, I vastly prefer the old, supremely elegant style of the wine back in this era. Sure, these wines were sometimes a little too *fluide* for the vintage, but when they hit the mark,

they really were immensely enjoyable wines to drink, as is the case with the very successful 1990 vintage here. The nose is pure and complex, wafting from the glass in an *à point* blend of black cherries, plums, cigar ash, a lovely base of soil, tobacco leaf and a nice touch of toasty new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and velvety on the attack, with a good core of fruit, melting tannins and lovely focus and grip on the long, elegant and complex finish. This is a very good wine. 2017-2040+. **90.**



### **1989 Bahans Haut-Brion**

While I have not drunk a bottle of the brilliant 1989 Château Haut-Brion since the Hart Davis Hart tasting back in 2012, their second label of Bahans Haut-Brion is simply outstanding in the 1989 vintage as well. The bouquet is deep and complex, offering up a blend of roasted cassis, charred earth, cigar ash, lovely, tobacco leaf elements and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, complex and beautifully resolved today, with a plush core of fruit, fine focus and grip, moderate tannins and a long, soil-driven and very well-balanced finish. This remains the single finest vintage of Bahans I have ever had the pleasure to taste. 2019-2050. **92+.**

### **1989 Château de Fieuzal**

I have long admired the white wines at Château de Fieuzal, but the red wines have always been a bit of a puzzle to me. The 1989 *rouge* is no exception, as this is not a particularly distinguished example of the vintage, offering up a slightly inky bouquet of black cherries, tarry tones, cigar ash and damp, muddled dark soil. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, tarry and

four-square, with quite a paucity of fruit for a 1989 claret, melted tannins and a short, simple and just passable finish. Drink up. 2017-2025+? **83.**

#### **1989 Château La Mission Haut-Brion**

The striking difference in purity between the top wines of 1989 and their counterparts in 1990 is very readily apparent in the magical 1989 La Mission Haut-Brion, which is a significant step from the very fine 1990 paired up with it at this tasting. The brilliant and vibrant nose soars from the glass in a sappy blend of black cherries, blackberries, cigar wrapper, gravelly soil tones, smoke and a touch of new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and nascently complex, with a rock solid core of sappy fruit, stunning soil inflection, ripe tannins and stunning purity on the beautifully focused and endless finish. This is one of the greatest young vintages of La Mission I have ever had the pleasure to taste. 2020-2100. **97+.**

#### **1989 Château Pape Clément**

Pape Clément made a beautiful example of the vintage in 1989, with the plushness of ripe fruit that characterized the vintage beautifully displayed across the lovely soil-driven personality of the estate in this epoch. The wine is still quite youthful, but offers up a deep and classy nose of black cherries, tobacco leaf, nutskins, gravelly soil tones, fresh herbs, a judicious touch of new oak and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, long and developing very well indeed, with lovely secondary complexity already emerging, a fine core of fruit and very good length and grip on the complex and still fairly tannic finish. This is still early days for this lovely '89. 2015-2050+. **93+.**

### ***Pomerol***

#### **1990 Château l'Evangile**

The 1990 Château l'Evangile is one of the top Pomerols of the vintage and the wine has aged beautifully and is now well into its plateau of peak drinkability. This is a remarkable wine for its purity and precision, which are not always the calling cards of the 1990 vintage on the Right Bank. The bouquet jumps from the glass in a focused blend of black cherries, black plums, roasted gamebird, chocolate, a lovely base of soil and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely plush on the attack, with a fine core, impeccable focus and balance, melting tannins and impressively bright and zesty acids on the very long and complex finish. This is a terrific vintage of l'Evangile! 2016-2050+. **94.**

#### **1990 Château Latour à Pomerol**

The 1990 Latour à Pomerol is a very strong success for this ripe and roasted vintage, and though the vintage's signature can be felt here a bit, the ripeness of the year is handled very well indeed and this wine is quite a pleasure to drink. The bouquet offers up a deep and meaty mélange of plums, black cherries, chocolate, nutskin, a bit of roasted meat, cigar ash and discreet notes of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and plump, with a good core, fine length and grip and still a bit of backend tannin perking up the fairly complex finish. This is just a touch coarse stylistically, but this is the vintage. 2016-2035+. **91.**

#### **1990 Château Trotanoy**

Château Trotanoy has produced a good, solid example of this roasted vintage, and the wine is now quite mature and is drinking very well indeed. The warm weather nose offers up scents of roasted black plums, a bit of grilled meat, espresso, cigar smoke, slightly medicinal overtones and a nice base of dark soil tones. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and rather roasted in style, with a solid core, melting tannins, and good focus and grip on the long, wide open finish. This will not make old bones and will be a relatively short-lived vintage by

Trotanoy's nearly timeless standards, but it is a good drink and one of the better 1990s out there for current consumption. 2013-2030+. **91.**

#### **1990 Vieux Château Certan**

I drank the 1990 Vieux Château Certan at a superb vertical of this property last spring, and though I liked the wine very much, my notes start out with “not as elegant as the 1995 or 1989” that flanked it in the flight. It is still a very good 1990 Pomerol, offering up a complex bouquet of roasted cassis, cigar wrapper, a touch of gamebird, a fine base of soil, a touch of nuttiness and a topnote of cigar smoke. With air a bit of red fruit emerges to join the black fruit on the nose. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very well-balanced, with a good, but not great core, very good acids for the vintage and impressive length and grip on the meltingly tannic finish. This is a very good wine, but it is a slightly rustic style of vintage for VCC. 2018-2060. **93.**



#### **1989 Château Certan de May**

The 1989 Château Certan de May is a beautiful wine that is already drinking very well, but even at age thirty, it could still do with a few more years in the cellar to allow a bit more of the remaining tannin to fall away from the finish. The bouquet is pure, complex and a classic expression of this lovely property, offering up scents of cherries, raspberries, black plums, a lovely base of dark soil tones, cigar smoke, a touch of Pomerol herbs, a discreet base of toasty oak and an incipient topnote of orange peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very long on the backend, with a touch of suave tannin still perking up the finish, excellent



focus and balance and a long, vibrant and superb finish. This is very drinkable today, but still a few years from its true peak of maturity. 2023-2060. **94.**

#### **1989 Château la Conseillante**

Early on in this wine's evolution, I was not such a big fan of the 1989 La Conseillante, as I felt it was a bit over-sized for this supremely elegant property. My points of reference when this wine was released were the utterly svelte 1985, the very good 1983, the beautiful 1982, the equally superb 1981 and the classic 1970 vintage of La Conseillante, and in comparison to those wines, the 1989 seemed a departure for a more muscular style. Nearly thirty years down the road, I have a bit more experience and can see that the 1989 La Conseillante is simply a reflection of the personality of this vintage, rather than an overt effort to change the style at the property, and the elegance that this estate is so well known for is starting to emerge very nicely in this wine. The bouquet is beautiful and still fairly youthful, with more layers to unfold with further bottle age, but offering up notes of plum, black cherries, menthol, chocolate, a fine base of gravel and a generous, but balanced serving of toasty oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and velvety, with a good core, lovey length and grip, really lovely acids for the vintage and fine focus and balance on the long, refined and complex finish. Fine, fine juice that is now into its apogee, but has decades of life still ahead of it. 2019-2060. **94+.**

#### **1989 Domaine de l'Église**

The 1989 Domaine de l'Église smells beautiful on the nose and seems to be a wine of very good potential, but on the palate, the wine is a bit over-extracted and lacking in elegance and complexity. First the good news- the bouquet jumps from the glass in a promising blend of black plums, violets, cigar ash, dark soil tones, a touch of herbs and a gentle whisper of toasty new oak. However, on the palate, the wine is nowhere near as interesting as on the nose, as it is full-bodied, a bit dense and tarry, with a good core, slightly coarse and bitter tannins and accompanied with a discordant note of acidity on the backend that seems to suggest acidulation. A very good nose is combined here with a rather muddled and dense palate, making for a less than great bottle. 2019-2050. **85.**

#### **1989 Château l'Évangile**

While the 1990 vintage of Château l'Évangile is drinking beautifully today, the 1989 seems to still be in climbing mode, and though it too is really a lovely glass of wine at the present time, I have little doubt that it will be even better with at least a few more years' worth of bottle age. The bouquet is pure, precise and beautifully inviting, wafting from the glass in a blend of black plums, black cherries, menthol, chocolate, tobacco leaf, a fine base of soil and a very well done framing of toasty new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and starting to get quite suave on the attack, with a lovely core of fruit, fine focus and grip and a long, modestly tannic and vibrant finish. While this has no real rough edges left, my gut instinct is that there is another layer of complexity still waiting to emerge and it would be rewarding to allow this layer out of its cage before really having at the bottle in earnest, despite the wine already being quite delicious today. So, give it at least a few more years of patience. 2022-2060. **94+.**

#### **1989 Château Latour à Pomerol**

In my historical feature on Latour à Pomerol a couple of years ago, I was not positive about how representative our bottle of the 1989 had been at the big vertical tasting that was the foundation of that article. So, I recently pulled a bottle out of my cellar in anticipation of this feature and was happy to find it just a bit more precise than that last bottle, just as I had surmised might be the case. This most recent example of the '89 Latour à Pomerol was outstanding,

offering up a lovely and *à point* nose of plums, black cherries, sealing wax, cigar smoke, a touch of chocolate, gentle Pomerol herb tones and a deft base of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully plush on the attack, with a fine core of fruit, excellent focus and grip, still a touch of backend tannin and a long, classy finish. This is a beautiful vintage of Latour à Pomerol. 2019-2050+. **93.**

#### **1989 Château Trotanoy**

It had been many, many years since I last tasted the 1989 Château Trotanoy, and the wine has evolved beautifully from those youthful days and the last two bottles that I have drunk have been really quite lovely. The bouquet is deep, complex and just beginning to blossom at age twenty-four, as it offers up a lovely blend of red plums, a touch of blood orange, tobacco smoke, incipient notes of Pomerol nuttiness, mocha, and a stylish base of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, deep and still fairly primary, with a velvety core of fruit, lovely focus, a fair bit of ripe tannin still to resolve, tangy acids and excellent length and grip on the complex finish. I would still give this vintage of Trotanoy at least another five or six years in the cellar to really open up (though it is certainly quite approachable already), and in reality, this wine is going to be decidedly better to drink ten or twelve years further down the road. A lovely vintage of Trotanoy that still deserves a bit of extended cellaring- it is not quite as big and plush as some '89 Pomerols, but it is a superb wine that is still climbing in quality. 2016-2060. **93+.**

#### **1989 Vieux Château Certan**

The 1989 Vieux Château Certan is one of the finest wines on the Right Bank in this landmark vintage and the wine is starting to really show beautifully, but to my palate, is deserving of at least another handful of years in the cellar before really having at it in earnest. The bouquet is beautifully developed today, wafting from the glass in a complex blend of black plums, sweet dark berries, cigar ash, tobacco leaf, gravelly soil tones, black tea, a hint of chipotle pepper, woodsmoke and a whisper of paraffin in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still climbing in quality, with a rock solid core, excellent soil signature, ripe, moderate tannins and outstanding length and grip on the complex, balanced and vibrant finish. This is a great vintage of VCC and deserves a bit more time in the cellar to further stretch its wings. 2023-2075+. **95+.**

### ***St. Émilion***

#### **1990 Château Ausone**

The 1990 vintage of Château Ausone is a stunning wine. There is a purity and soil signature front and center here that is not always evident in wines from this torrid vintage on the Gironde, and Ausone's signature elegance is now very much this wine's calling card. The beautiful bouquet wafts from the glass in a blend of red and black cherries, nutskin, cigar wrapper, chalky soil tones, a touch of blood orange and a lovely, floral topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and deep at the core, with superb transparency and grip, modest tannins and a very long, complex and vibrant finish. At age twenty-nine, the 1990 Ausone is just starting to blossom and drink with generosity and refinement, but the more exotic topnotes here have not yet fully emerged and there is even more magic to come for those who can defer gratification for another ten years! 2019-2060+. **96.**

#### **1990 Château Bélair**

The wines of Château Bélair no longer exist in their old, completely soil-driven and exotic style of yesteryear, as the new regime here after the Moueix family purchased the estate in 2006 has completely revamped and gussied up the style of the new Château Bélair-Monange and

the two wines bear absolutely no family resemblance could come from completely different corners of Bordeaux. However, back in the old days, there was something utterly unique and compelling about the wines from Château Bélair and this 1990 is a stellar example of the old school style here. The wine here is still quite youthful for a 1990 and needs some extended aeration to start to stir aromatically, but in due course offers up a very complex and pure bouquet of red and black cherries, a touch of paraffin, bonfires, lovely salinity to its limestone soil component, menthol and a touch of baking spices in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and one hundred percent soil-driven in personality, with a lovely core of fruit, ripe tannins and a long, focused and tangy finish. This is still early days for the 1990 Bélair, but it is a superb wine that is going to be a great drink in a few more years' time. 2025-275+. **93+**.

### **1990 Château Magdelaine**

The 1990 Magdelaine is a flat out brilliant bottle of wine that delivers much the same aromatic and flavor fireworks of the 1990 Figeac, albeit in a potentially more transparent and ethereal package than the Figeac. The celestial bouquet soars from the glass in a mélange of cherries, toasted nuts, menthol, tobacco leaf, beautiful herb tones, chalky soil nuances and just a whisper of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, elegant and refined, with great intensity of flavor, laser-like focus, ripe and supple tannins, and endless length on the long, complex and suave finish. While the '90 Magdelaine is already a great glass of wine, I would still try and give it at least another eight to ten years of cellaring to really let it blossom fully. Believe me, I will not be touching any of mine until a decade has passed. It is a great bottle in the making and drinking well enough right now that it is no crime to be opening it, if one has sufficient quantity in the cellar. I should note that the bottle at our March vertical was not quite up to the quality of previous incarnations, but I put this down to a less than perfect example. 2015-2060. **95**.

### **1989 Château Angélus**

I really thought I was going to like this bottle of the 1989 Château Angélus, as I remember the wine well from its youth and it seemed to hold plenty of promise in those first half dozen years after its release. But, I had not seen a bottle in nearly twenty years and so did not really know how the wine would have evolved, but expected it to show better than it did at our Right Bank '89 tasting in April. Aromatically, the wine is still quite stylish and shows much of the lovely sheen of its youth, offering up scents of black cherries, plums, cigar ash, a nice touch of soil, gentle herb tones, menthol and toasty new oak. However, on the palate the wine is nowhere near as charming as on the nose, offering very modest complexity and a rigid and slightly dry-edged finish from uncovered oak tannins. The wine is full-bodied and reasonably deep at the core, but simple and not all that well-balanced, as some of its oak tannin remains uncovered now on the backend and the wine is rather four-square and gets a bit astringent with extended aeration. This was much more enjoyable in its youth and has not stood the test of time particularly well, and at least in the context of the superb 1989 Right Bank vintage, it is decidedly a second division wine. I am not sure how well it is going to keep on into the future, as it may have reached a point where the fruit is starting to recede and the wood tannins will get more pronounced with further bottle age. 2019-2040+? **87**.



### 1989 Château Ausone

Château Ausone in the 1989 vintage is a bit of a stylistic outlier for this great property, as the conditions on the Right Bank in 1989 crafted a very powerful example of this estate. I have read elsewhere that this wine is in excess of fourteen percent alcohol, but this is not reflected on the import label. The wine is not overripe in any sense, as it offers up a deep, complex and very pure bouquet of black cherries, sweet dark berries, chocolate, licorice, gamebird, cigar smoke, just a touch of menthol, chalky soil tones, nutskin and just a whisper of incipient sealing wax appearing in the upper register with extended aeration. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, broad-shouldered and very precise, with a rock solid core of fruit, excellent transparency and impeccable focus and balance on the long, ripely tannic and powerful finish. This remains a very young wine and I have little doubt that the 1989 vintage of Ausone will effortlessly last a century in the bottle! An outstanding wine, but perhaps not my favorite style of Ausone from this golden era. 2029-2100. **94+**.

### 1989 Château Cheval Blanc

The 1989 Cheval Blanc is a beautiful example of the vintage, offering a deep, complex and utterly classic nose of dark berries, black cherries, menthol, cigar ash, gravelly soil tones, woodsmoke and a base of toasty new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very pure on the attack, with a rock solid core of sappy fruit, outstanding soil inflection, superb complexity and a very, very long, youthful and ripely tannic finish. While this wine is not particularly far away from fully blossoming and will be quite drinkable with another four or five

years of cellaring, I would be very strongly inclined to not touch a bottle for at least another decade, as I would love to see this wine in the same magical spot as the 1983 Cheval is today. 2016-2050+. **94+**.

### **1989 Château Figeac**

It is hard to believe that seven years have elapsed since I last drank a bottle of the 1989 Figeac, but time marches resolutely forward. This most recent bottle, which was served with dinner after my Château Ausone vertical in February, is drinking at its absolute apogee at age thirty and is truly a brilliant vintage for this once great château. The bouquet is pure and flat out stunning, soaring from the glass in a complex blend of plums, black cherries, salty soil tones, cigar ash, a whisper of Figeac's signature herb tones and a lovely base of toasty new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and full-bodied, with a plush core of fruit, outstanding focus and complexity, melting tannins and a very long, poised and vibrant finish. A brilliant vintage of Figeac that rivals the 1982 in this superb decade for the property. The 1989 Figeac will easily live another four decades in bottle! 2019-2065. **95**.



*The elegant and beautifully understated Château Cheval Blanc.*

### **1989 Château Magdelaine**

This particular bottle of the 1989 Magdelaine was quite closed in profile and took some rather extended aeration to start to stir. Other folks around the table commented that they had drunk more forward bottles of the 1989 in recent times, so perhaps our bottle was just a little recalcitrant, but I am going to keep my hands away from this vintage of Magdelaine for several more years and let it blossom more fully. With air, the wine is still clearly of immense potential and shows its pedigree and future greatness, offering up a fine bouquet of red and black cherries,

menthol, chalky soil tones, cigar ash, tobacco leaf and a touch of paraffin in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and rock solid at the core, with an excellent, fairly firm, but seamless structural chassis, lovely focus and grip, a touch of ripe tannin and outstanding length and grip on the utterly refined, youthful finish. This is a great, great wine in the making, but give it some more time in the cellar. 2026-2085. **95.**

**1989 Château Tertre Roteboeuf**

The 1989 Château Tertre Roteboeuf is a good, solid, four-square example of the vintage that is now into its apogee of maturity. The ripe and roasted nose offers up scents of black cherries, grilled venison, dark soil tones, fresh herbs, chocolate and toasty new oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and broad-shouldered, with a good core of fruit, melting tannins and good length and grip on the chunky, but balanced finish. There is not a lot of breed or complexity here, but this is a big and roasted wine that does deliver a fair bit of satisfaction in its more limited range and still has plenty of life ahead of it. 2016-2040. **88.**



## RECENTLY TASTED RHÔNE WINES SPRING OF 2019



*The fabled Château de Beaucastel in the heart of Châteauneuf du Pape.*

It is hard to believe that a little more than a year has passed since my last Rhône Valley report, but time waits for no one, as Mick and Keith once reminded us back in the mid-1970s (and then went on to seemingly defy this maxim for another forty-plus years, albeit, with some residual road dust still etched across their brows). In any case, the timing of this report is good, as there remains a fairly good cache of the utterly classic 2016 Rhône vintage still in the pipeline and market. As readers may recall, this was an utterly superb vintage in the northern half of the region, sandwiched between the far more ripe and buxom 2015s and the new vintage of 2017, which again is from a hot, drought summer and has generally produced more powerfully-constituted and less classically-inclined wines. The 2017 vintage in the Rhône Valley is also going to be a very short crop, in both the north and south, as flowering was problematic in this vintage and yields in many appellations are down anywhere from thirty to fifty percent from a normal crop load. The primary culprit in 2017 in this region was *coulure*, where the flowers do not set into bunches, as the weather was unsettled during the early flowering and many vineyards, particularly older ones, simply did not have a proper fruit-set in 2017. The heat and drought put some hydric stress on the vines throughout the growing season, but there was a bit of

well-timed rain to keep the vines puttering along, so the question confronting *vignerons* as harvest started to beckon was when to pick the bunches. The heat had pushed sugars up considerably by the last week of August, with potential alcohols of fifteen percent not uncommon on the hill of Hermitage for instance, but the tannins had not all kept pace with the sugars and were not necessarily ripened up enough for picking at the outset of September. So it was a dilemma.

The 2017 vintage in the Rhône Valley follows on the heels of one of my favorite recent years in the region, 2016, which is particularly successful in the northern half of this large and varied region. The southern half of the Rhône Valley had an easier time during the growing season of 2016, with seamless flowering, hot and warm conditions during the growing season not as tumultuous as in the northern half of the river valley and the wines came in full, ripe and nicely balanced. Of course, many are a bit higher in octane than I would ideally like, but that is the divergent paths my classically-trained palate and the southern Rhône have taken in this age of climate change and it is what it is. But, in general terms, the 2016 vintage is a very good one in the south. However, the more challenging growing season of 2016 in the northern Rhône ended up producing even better wines, as some of the vagaries of the spring and summer actually provided a brake on maturation and crop levels and set the table perfectly to take full advantage of one of the most beautiful Indian Summers in September that the region has seen in years. As I outlined about the northern half of the region in my last Rhône report, flowering in the spring was problematic in the north, as the flowers did not set well in unsettled spring weather and yields were destined to be low as a result. The summer was torrid and very, very dry, so hydric stress blocked maturation for much of the latter summer and August was absolutely scorching (even hotter in the north than in the south), but with the drought in full force, the grapes were not accumulating much sugars in any case due to their being shut down from a lack of water. It rained at the start of September and ended the blocked maturation out in the vines, the temperatures fell to perfect levels and the entire month was gorgeous and this short crop ripened up optimally. In short, a perfect last chapter in September changed a difficult growing season into a great, great vintage in the north.

The previous vintage of 2015 was a hot and very ripe year in both the northern and southern halves of the Rhône Valley, and prior to the age of global warming, it would have been the kind of summer that produced a great vintage. However, those days are now long gone and hot and ripe years are not necessarily what greatness is truly made of in the Rhône anymore, and though there are lots of good wines still to be found in 2015, there are also over the top and alcoholic wines as well that are hardly the stuff of legends, no matter what the deluded market and their inexperienced cheerleaders might lead you to believe. So one needs to pick and choose carefully in the over-hyped vintage of 2015, but that said, there are also lots of very, very good wines that have emerged from 2015 and I like the vintage in general terms even more than 2010 (which it resembles a bit in terms of summer conditions). The preceding years of 2014 and 2013 are also quite strong years, though I have more experience with the wines from the northern Rhône in both of these years than those from the south, and if one can still find wines from either vintage, they come highly recommended. This is particularly true of the classically-structured, refined and old school examples of Côte-Rôtie and Saint Joseph in 2013, which are truly some of my favorite wines from the entire region in the last decade or more. The 2013s are not big and powerful wines by the current standards of the Rhône Valley, but they are beautifully balanced

wines with plenty of structure and which stylistically harken back to vintages like 1985 and 1988 in the region. They are still worth keeping an eye out for in the market, as their less opulent style may have helped them be a bit overlooked by the power monger crowd.

The following report is broken down geographically, running from south to north, and grouped by appellation. Within each appellation section, the wines are listed chronologically from youngest to oldest vintage, and alphabetically by producer within each subset. I have lumped a few appellations together where it made sense, when I only had a few examples from a given AOC. Most of the notes on Châteauneuf du Pape are of older vintages in this report, as when I was soliciting samples for the article from importers, I told them to only send along Châteauneuf du Pape, Gigondas and the like if they thought that I would like the styles of the wines (and particularly the alcohol levels), so that they would not waste bottles of wines that someone else might like a lot more than I would. Not too many crossed my threshold. I also did not canvass all of the good importers of Rhône wines for this report, as when the pile of samples looked sufficient to fill up these twenty-five or so pages, I stopped soliciting samples and will do a follow-up report in an issue or two to cover more of the estates from the Rhône Valley in another installment of this coverage, rather than make this report too large for proper digestion. As the 2016s were not yet in the market from one of my favorite traditionalists in Côte-Rôtie, Domaine Gilles Barge, their release here in New York will serve as a good foundation for the next iteration of this report. I should mention, that though they are not reviewed below, Pierre Rostaing did indeed decide to bottle examples of both la Viallière and Côte Brune amongst his stable of great 2016 Côte-Rôties, and though they are in very limited quantity (and have been out in the market for a short while already), they are well worth keeping an eye out for and latching onto a few bottles, as they were absolutely magnificent out of cask when I visited the domaine and tasted the young 2016s here at the end of October of 2017 and they will be cellar treasures for those lucky enough to find a few bottles to tuck away in the cellar! I have samples coming (lucky me!) of both wines for the next report on the Rhône, but do not wait for the “in the bottle” report to buy those wines if you can find them, as they are going to be legendary!

### ***Côtes du Rhône and Other Points North and South***

#### **2017 Côtes du Rhône “Cuvée Confluence”- Vignoble de Boisseyt**

The 2017 Côtes du Rhône “Cuvée Confluence” from Vignoble de Boisseyt is a blend of syrah, grenache and mourvèdre and hails from the Ardeche, north of Valence. The vineyard here has a fault line running through it, so that about half lies on granite and the other half on limestone soils. The 2017 version comes in at fourteen percent octane and offers up an impressively complex nose of black raspberries, pepper, roasted game, bonfire, fresh thyme and a fine base of stony soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely peppery (showing its northern Rhône aspirations), with a fine core, a bit of nicely chewy tannin perking up the backend and a long, nascently complex and promising finish. This is a serious bottle of Côtes du Rhône that deserves a few years in the cellar to soften up properly and should age very nicely for fifteen years or more. Fine juice. 2021-2035+, **90**.

#### **2017 Costières de Nîmes “Galets Rouges”- Château Mourgues du Grès (François Collard)**

The 2017 Costières de Nîmes “Galets Rouges” from François Collard is composed of a blend of sixty percent syrah, thirty percent grenache and five percent of mourvèdre and marselan. The wine comes in at fourteen percent octane and offers up a ripe and complex nose of red and black raspberries, pepper, *garrigue*, roasted game, a hint of fruitcake and a good base of stony

soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and seems to carry a bit more actual octane than the label purports, with a slightly jammy attack, a good core, moderate tannins and a long, slightly hot and bitter finish. This is okay, but a bit dense stylistically- perhaps this is just the vintage? 2019-2025? **84.**

**2017 Costières de Nîmes Blanc “Galets Dorés”- Ch. Mourgues du Grès (François Collard)**

The Costières de Nîmes Blanc “Galets Dorés” from François Collard is a blend of grenache blanc, roussanne and vermentino, hailing from vineyards with a northerly exposition and hence, cooler microclimates. The 2017 Galets Dorés is nicely moderate in its ripeness, coming in at 13.5 percent octane and offers up a bright nose of pear, lemon, a touch of melon, salty soil tones and a topnote of acacia blossoms. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely balanced, with good framing acids, fine focus and grip and a long, plump and tasty finish. This is quite good. 2019-2023. **87+.**



**2016 Pic St. Loup “Classic” Rouge- Bergerie l’Hortus**

The Domaine de l’Hortus is the brainchild of Jean Orliac, who first came to this area in 1978 and started to reclaim old vineyards and clear new parcels in these limestone hills. He did this on a piecemeal basis over more than a decade, while keeping his day job as a professor of agriculture at the University of Montpellier, and did not release his first wine until the 1990 vintage. His 2016 Pic St. Loup “Classic” Rouge from Bergerie l’Hortus is produced from a *cépages* of sixty percent syrah, thirty-five percent grenache and five percent mourvèdre. These



vineyards are located in a very cool valley, with large diurnal temperature swings during the summer, and this cooler microclimate is reflected in the 2016's very civilized octane level of thirteen percent. The wine offers up a fine bouquet of cassis, pepper, *garrigue*, fine base of soil tones, chicory and a topnote of bonfire. On the palate the wine is medium-full, focused and beautifully structured, with a bit of ripe tannin, fine depth at the core and good length and grip on the complex finish. This is good juice that will be even better with a couple of years in the cellar to blossom a bit more. 2019-2030. **88.**

#### **2016 Lubéron Rouge- Château la Canorgue**

The 2016 Lubéron Rouge from Château la Canorgue is composed of a blend of sixty percent syrah, thirty percent grenache and five percent each of carignan and mourvèdre old vines. The property is owned and run by Martine and Jean-Pierre Margan, who farm their twenty-four hectares of terraced vines organically or biodynamically. Their 2016 rouge comes in at 14.5 percent octane and offers up a ripe and vibrant nose of cassis, black raspberry, pepper, roasted meats, *garrigue* and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and nicely plush on the attack, with a lovely core of fruit, good soil signature and a long, creamy and modestly tannic finish. This wine shows just the faintest whisper of heat on the backend, but by and large, carries its octane quite elegantly and is a very tasty bottle. It offers noteworthy complexity for this region and price point and is a very good value! 2019-2030. **89.**

#### **2016 Côtes du Rhône “La Grange de Piaugier”- Domaine de Piaugier**

The 2016 Côtes du Rhône “La Grange de Piaugier” is composed of a blend of primarily grenache, augmented by smaller percentages of syrah, cinsault and carignan. The wine is made from hand-harvested fruit, fermented with indigenous yeasts and aged for six months in concrete tanks prior to bottling. The 2016 version tips the scales at 14.5 percent and offers up a surprisingly precise bouquet of raspberries, *garrigue*, woodsmoke, a touch of roasted meats and a lovely base of soil. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and red fruity, with a good core, just a touch of backend tannin, lovely mineral drive and very good balance and grip on the long and spicy finish. This seems cooler than its octane and is really a lovely bottle of Côtes du Rhône. Good juice. 2019-2025+. **89.**

#### **2015 Ventoux Rouge “la Croix”- Château Unang**

Château Unang is owned by Joanna and James King, who farm just over twenty-five hectares of vines in this cooler corner of Ventoux. Their “la Croix” bottling is a reserve that they only produce in top vintages, which is made from a blend of sixty percent grenache, thirty percent syrah and ten percent cinsault. The 2015 version comes in at fourteen percent alcohol, but seems a touch cooler than this on the nose, which wafts from the glass in a mix of dark berries, woodsmoke, coffee bean, a bit of pepper, hung game and a good base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and nicely structured on the backend, with a good core, fine soil signature and a bit of ripe tannin perking up the long and quite classy finish. This is very black fruity in personality for a wine primarily composed of grenache and bespeaks of the cooler nature of this section of the Ventoux. This is a very good value and it will age quite nicely and be even better with a few years in the cellar to let the backend tannins fall away. 2019-2035. **88+.**

### ***Cairanne, Vacqueyras and Sablet (Côtes du Rhône Villages)***

#### **2016 Sablet- Domaine de Piaugier**

The 2016 Sablet from the Jean-Marc and Sophie Autran's Domaine de Piaugier is composed of a blend of grenache and syrah, with the wine raised in a combination of cement tanks and four year-old casks. This vintage comes in at 14.5 percent octane and delivers a fine, youthful bouquet of black raspberries, *garrigue*, hung game, smoke, pepper and a sound signature of soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with good mineral drive, ripe tannins and a long, nascently complex and slightly warm finish. This is good juice and carries its alcohol pretty well, but it is a tad riper than I find comfortable for splitting a bottle over dinner for two. 2019-2030+. **87.**



#### **2015 Cairanne “Cuvée Col du Débat”- Domaine les Hautes Cances**

The 2015 Cairanne “Cuvée Col du Débat” from Domaine les Hautes Cances is produced from a *cépages* of grenache, carignan, syrah and counoise. The vineyard is high up in the foothills of the Alps and benefits from good diurnal temperature swings, but these fifty year-old vines get no protection from the Mistral up this high, so yields are always very low. The 2015 version comes in at 14.5 percent octane and offers up a ripe and nicely black fruity blend of dark berries, cassis, bonfire, roasted venison, pepper, a good base of soil and lovely spice tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, ripe and quite well-balanced for its octane, with a fine core of fruit, good complexity, moderate tannins and just a whisper of backend heat on the



long finish. I would have loved this a touch lower in octane, but 2015 was a very hot summer, and the wine has handled it pretty well. The complexity here is very impressive and I cannot wait to taste the wine from a more classically-proportioned vintage! 2019-2030+. **89.**

**2015 Cairanne “Cuvée Vieilles Vignes”- Domaine les Hautes Cances**

The 2015 Cairanne “Cuvée Vieilles Vignes” from Domaine les Hautes Cances is primarily grenache, which constitutes seventy percent of the blend, with the remainder a fairly even split of syrah and mourvèdre. The grenache vines are one hundred years-old, the syrah (which is all *petit serine*) the youngest vines, having been planted in 1972 and the mourvèdre ten years older than the syrah. The wine is raised in old Burgundy casks and the 2015 comes in at 14.5 percent octane and delivers a superb nose of black raspberries, hung game, a bit of chocolate, gentle notes of *garrigue*, good soil signature and a peppery topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and well-balanced, with a superb core, impressive complexity and grip, ripe, chewy tannins and excellent backend energy on the long and classic finish. Good juice by any measure and built for the long haul! 2019-2040. **91.**

**2015 Vacqueyras “Vieilles Vignes”- Dom. de la Monardière (Martine et Christian Vache)**

Martine and Christian Vache farm twenty-two hectares of vines, primarily in Vacqueyras, but with four hectares over the border in Vaucluse. They farm organically and harvest everything by hand (rare and Vacqueyras), fermenting their wines solely with indigenous yeasts. Their old vine bottling of Vacqueyras is comprised of a blend of sixty percent grenache, twenty percent mourvèdre and ten percent carignan. The wine is raised in *demi-muids* and the 2016 tips the scales at 14.5 percent octane. The bouquet is deep and quite impressively refined, wafting from the glass in a mix of red and black raspberries, pepper, roasted game, a good base of soil, bonfire and a touch of upper register spice tones. On the palate the wine does not hide its alcohol quite as well as the nose, but is full-bodied, deep and a bit coarse and chewy, with firm, dry-edged tannins, good focus and grip and a long, primary and modestly warm finish. I love the nose here, but am not entirely persuaded the palate can emerge from this rather dense and slightly hot adolescence to really deliver serious pleasure. I would love to be proven wrong, but right now, though I love the nose, I am not a true believer. 2019-2030+? **86+?**

***Provence***

*These notes do not really belong in this article, but as I am not sure when I will get a chance to fit them into a proper feature on their respective regions, I include them here.*

**2001 Domaine de Trévallon (Aix en Provence)**

I have a long personal history with the wines of Domaine de Trévallon, as one of Boston’s greatest importers of yesteryear, Larry Bender, introduced me to these wines all the way back in the vintages of the late 1970s. I probably bought and drank three cases of the 1985 Trévallon back in the day and had a long affection for this estate’s wines, which are a fifty-fifty blend of cabernet sauvignon and syrah. So, I was very excited to have a chance to taste the 2001 vintage from this property, as I had lost track of the wines in recent years. Sadly, the 2001 was not a good vintage for this estate, as the wine is quite overripe on both the nose and palate. The bouquet offers up scents of kirsch-like black cherries, cassis, pepper, hung game and raisins. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite hot with alcohol, with a blurry palate impression, gritty tannins and a rather pedestrian finish. I hope other recent vintages are better. 2018-2025? **79.**

### **2001 Château de Pibarnon (Bandol)**

I have had a couple of bottles of this wine in the last year, as I was hoping my palate was just too fatigued to appreciate the wine the first time and a second dance with it would prove more satisfying. Unfortunately, the wine showed the same on the second go round and is really one of the more overripe and alcoholic vintages of Pibarnon to emerge from the estate in recent times. The bouquet shows a lot of its grenache character in its mix of roasted game, *garrigue*, bonfire, to go along with black fruit, tree bark and dark soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely complex, but a bit hot on the backend and seems higher than its stated fourteen percent octane on the label. The tannins are starting to fall away nicely and the wine is complex, but the excess alcohol here is a problem and the wine is really rather difficult to drink, despite its complexity. 2019-2040. **86.**

### ***Châteauneuf du Pape Blanc***

#### **2015 Châteauneuf du Pape Blanc “Vieilles Vignes”- Domaine Éric Texier**

Éric Texier is another winegrower in the region who came to this *métier* as a second career, having been a Nuclear Engineer for the French government’s nuclear power program for more than a decade before shifting gears. Éric’s Châteauneuf du Pape Blanc is a fifty-fifty blend of clairette and bouboulenc, which are barrel-fermented and raised in five and six year-old Burgundy barrels. He prefers not to use Grenache Blanc in this bottling any more, as he finds that in the age of climate change, it is hard to keep the alcohol down with that grape variety. As the Texier Châteauneuf du Pape Blanc is a wine made for cellaring, the 2015 is still a very young wine, but it shows excellent promise in its bouquet of apple, lemon, chalky minerality, spring flowers and a hint of fresh almond. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and tightly-knit, with a good core, a bright girdle of acidity and a long, still quite primary finish. Give this wine four or five years in the cellar to start to stir. 2022-2045. **91+.**

#### **2013 Châteauneuf du Pape Blanc- Château Mont-Redon**

Château Mont-Redon is the pioneering estate for the white wines of this region and today, they are the largest producer of white Châteauneuf du Pape. Their white grape varieties are planted on a section of the plateau with white, chalky soils, which are quite rare in the appellation. The wine is a one-third each blend of Grenache Blanc and Clairette, completed with a final third comprised of a mix of Roussanne, Picpoul and Bouboulenc. This is typically quite a long-lived example and the 2013 is still on the young side, but offers fine promise in its bouquet of tart pear, lemon, salty soil tones, dried flowers and a touch of wild fennel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still quite youthfully inexpressive, with a good core, fine soil signature and very good length and cut on the zesty finish. This still needs two or three years in the cellar to blossom, but it will be lovely when it is ready to drink. 2021-2040. **90+.**

### ***Châteauneuf du Pape***

#### **2016 Châteauneuf du Pape- Domaine de la Barroche (Julien Barrot)**

Julien Barrot has now taken over the direction of this estate from his father, Christian, whom he has worked alongside since 2002. Back in his father’s day, everything was sold off to *négociant*, but Julien has changed that. The family has a ton of very old vines, with some Grenache dating all the way back to the first decade of the twentieth century! The 2016 Châteauneuf du Pape from Domaine de la Barroche is composed of a blend of sixty-two percent

grenache, eighteen percent mourvèdre, thirteen percent syrah, five percent cinsault and two percent other varieties. The very oldest vines on the property are reserved for a few old vine bottlings, but the average age of vines here is still fully seventy years of age! The 2016 wine comes in at fifteen percent alcohol and offers up a surprisingly precise nose of black cherries, fruitcake, pepper, hung game, *garrigue*, a good base of soil and just a bit of chocolate. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and a bit warm on the backend, but with pretty good precision for its octane level, plenty of depth at the core, chewy tannins and a long, fairly complex finish. This is just a bit too high in alcohol to really work for my palate, but it is impressively well-balanced for fifteen percent and clearly, if this were a point lower in octane, it would be a great wine in the making. As it is, the overall impression is of a heroic effort tilting at the windmill of climate change. Though it is quite chewy today, there is plenty of lovely fruit to cover up the tannins and I would be inclined to drink it on the younger side, rather than seeing how the alcohol will play out with extended cellaring. 2019-2030+? **86** (add four points if you do not find the alcohol daunting!)



#### **2014 Châteauneuf du Pape- Château Mont-Redon**

The estate sits up on a plateau to the northwest of the village of Châteauneuf du Pape, near the boundary with the commune of Orange, and it is generally regarded as having one of the finest *terroirs* in the entire appellation; its closest neighbor is Château de Beaucastel. The final cépage each year of the Mont-Redon *rouge* varies slightly, but generally will include about seventy-five percent grenache, fifteen percent syrah, five percent mourvèdre and five percent of the remaining varieties planted at the estate. The 2014 version is a ripe wine, coming in listed at 14.5 percent alcohol, but offering good complexity and freshness for its octane. The bouquet is a

ripe blend of dark berries, a touch of fruitcake, pepper, hung game, woodsmoke and a nice base of stony soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and focused, with a good core, moderate tannins and just a whisper of backend heat poking out on the long and nascently complex finish. This will be a good example when it is ready to drink, but it needs some bottle age. 2022-2050+. **89.**

### **2008 Châteauneuf du Pape- Château Rayas**

I had high expectations for the 2008 Château Rayas, but this wine was overtly overripe and nowhere near as interesting as I anticipated. The wine is very expressive aromatically for its octane level, offering up scents of raspberries, *garrigue*, fruitcake, orange peel, sinsimilla, a touch of celery seed and a nice base of soil tones. However, on the palate this full-bodied wine is jammy, plush and fairly powerful in personality, with a good core, but without the customary precision one has come to expect with Château Rayas. The finish is long, moderately tannic and shows some overt signs of heat, with a rather chunky personality for a vintage of this iconic wine. This is passable Châteauneuf du Pape- a bit too high in alcohol and jammy for anything better- but a decidedly disappointing bottle of Château Rayas. 2019-2035+. **87.**

### **1999 Châteauneuf du Pape- Château de Beaucastel**

The 1999 vintage of Château de Beaucastel is a wine of indifferent reputation, as it falls between the very hyped (and far riper) years of 1998 and 2000, but to my palate, this is the superior wine, as it is quite classical in profile and does not have to contend with the higher alcohol levels of its two flanking vintages. The bouquet at age twenty is beautifully complex, wafting from the glass in that signature Beaucastel blend of cassis, fruitcake, pepper, bonfires, a fine base of stony soil tones, hung game, balsam bough and the very first vestiges of the *sous bois* to come with further evolution in bottle. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a fine core of fruit, excellent soil signature, still a touch of backend tannin and lovely length and grip on the well-balanced finish. This is a sleeper vintage of Beaucastel that is starting to drink very well indeed, but still has decades of life ahead of it. 2019-2050. **92.**

### **1989 Châteauneuf du Pape “Hommage à Jacques Perrin”- Château de Beaucastel (mag)**

The 1989 Hommage à Jacques Perrin was the inaugural vintage for this luxury cuvée, and to my palate, it remains still the finest example by quite some margin. None of the subsequent vintages have been able to match the depth and elegant grandeur of the 1989 Hommage bottling, and this is one of the greatest examples of Châteauneuf du Pape produced in the twentieth century! The 1989 Hommage à Jacques Perrin was a last-minute inclusion to our tasting lineup, as our host, Omar Khan, “found a stray magnum and thought it would be an interesting addition.” That is classic Omar understatement! The wine is absolutely at its apogee as it closes in on its thirtieth birthday, offering up bottomless depth and brilliant complexity on both the nose and palate. The bouquet is brilliant, delivering a very refined blend of sweet dark berries, cassis, a touch of tree bark, a complex base of soil tones, cigar smoke, a dollop of saddle leather and lovely, haunting botanicals in the upper register. On the palate the wine full-bodied, pure, complex and rock solid at the core, with great soil signature, glorious focus and grip and just a whisper of backend tannin continuing to perk up the very, very long, refined and magical finish. This is even better out of magnum than it is out of regular format! 2019-2050+. **98.**

### 1988 Châteauneuf du Pape- Château de Beaucastel

Château de Beaucastel, along with Château Rayas, was formerly one of the two greatest estates in the region, but it has changed its style in recent times and lost its way. However, back in the late 1980s, this domaine was at the absolute top of its game and their 1988 bottling is drinking stunning well at age thirty, with a complex bouquet that wafts from the glass in a complex and tertiary mix of red and dark berries, *sous bois*, roasted venison, pepper, balsam bough and a topnote of bonfires. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and perfectly balanced, with a fine core, stunning soil signature, modest tannins and a very long, very complex and stellar finish. “Exhibit A” of just how great the top wines of Châteauneuf du Pape used to be! 2019-2045. **94.**

### 1976 Châteauneuf du Pape- Château Fortia

I have great respect for the wines produced in this era at Château Fortia, and this 1976 is a good, solid bottle at its apogee. At this point in its evolution, the bouquet is more impressive than the palate, as the latter cannot quite keep pace in terms of complexity with the former, but overall, the wine is a very good example of a sturdy, but not all that remarkable vintage in Châteauneuf du Pape. The bouquet jumps from the glass in a truly beautiful blend of raspberries, red currant, pepper, grilled meats, lovely spice tones, stony soil elements, lavender and cigar smoke. Like I said, a truly beautiful and complex nose! On the palate the wine is not quite in the same league, as it is full-bodied, deep and still a bit chewy on the backend, with a four-square personality, but good length and grip on the backend. This is a very good, rather than a great bottle of Châteauneuf, but with an absolutely dynamite bouquet. 2019-2040+. **88.**



### ***Crozes-Hermitage***

#### **2017 Crozes-Hermitage- Domaines des Entrefaux (Charles et François Tardy)**

As I noted last year, the Tardy family's vines for their Crozes are all located in the terraced vineyards of Mercurol, which is the heart of this appellation. The grapes are de-stemmed and raised in a mix of one-third each of tank, *foudre* and older barrels. Their 2017 Crozes is a lovely example of the vintage, delivering a refined, sappy bouquet of sweet dark berries, a touch of chocolate, black raspberries, pepper, roasted venison, a bit of bonfire and dark soil tones. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and nicely plush on the attack, with a good core, fine focus and grip and just a bit of backend tannin perking up the ripe and complex finish. This seems just a touch better structured than the 2015 version I reported on last year and is a lovely example of its appellation and vintage. 2019-2030+. **89.**

#### **2017 Crozes-Hermitage “Esquisse”- Domaine des Hauts Châssis (Franck Faugier)**

The Crozes-Hermitage “Esquisse” from Franck Faugier is his younger vine cuvée, with the vines ranging from ten to twenty years of age. The 2017 Esquisse is a fine young example, offering up a bright and primary bouquet of black raspberries, pepper, dark soil tones, gentle meatiness tones, a bit of coffee grounds and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely plush on the attack, with a good core, a nice touch of soil, modest tannins and a long, still quite youthful finish. I really like the raw materials here and the wine is already quite tasty, but it has not yet settled in and another six months in the bottle will allow more complexity to emerge. A very good, traditional bottle of Crozes that is made for early consumption, but will keep nicely as well and is a very good value. 2019-2030+. **88+.**

#### **2017 Crozes-Hermitage- Vincent Paris Sélection**

The Crozes-Hermitage bottling from Vincent Paris is made from purchased fruit from a long-time organic farmer in the appellation, with the vines averaging thirty years of age. He de-stems the fruit for this bottling and raised it entirely in tank. The 2017 version comes in at an even thirteen percent octane and offers up a pure and classic bouquet of black raspberries, hung game, a touch of chocolate, gentle notes of pepper, woodsmoke, dark soil tones and just a touch of black olive in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and already nicely velvety on the attack, with a lovely core, good focus and grip, melting tannins and a long, complex and wide open finish. This is lovely Crozes. 2019-2035. **90.**

#### **2016 Crozes-Hermitage “Les Hauts Granits”- J. Boutin (Stéphane Vedeau)**

The Crozes-Hermitage “Les Hauts Granits” from Stéphane Vedeau hails from vines in the village of Chassis, which is a bit south of Mercurol on the east bank of the river. The vines are not particularly old, ranging from twenty-five to thirty years of age. They are destemmed prior to fermentation and the wine is raised in a combination of eighty percent tank and twenty percent cask. The 2016 version comes in at an even thirteen percent octane and offers up a youthful bouquet of black raspberries, cassis, roasted meats, dark soil tones, smoke, pepper and a bit of chocolate. On the palate the wine is plush, full-bodied, focused and wide open in personality, with a good core of fruit, a nice touch of soil, modest tannins and a long, complex and already quite delicious finish. This is good juice for drinking over the next ten to twelve years. 2019-2031+. **89.**

#### **2016 Crozes-Hermitage “Les Châssis”- Domaine des Hauts Châssis (Franck Faugier)**

The Les Châssis bottling from Monsieur Faugier is his oldest vine cuvée, with the vines that go into this wine all at least fifty years of age. The wine is raised in *demi-muids* for one year prior to bottling. The 2016 Les Châssis is a deeper and more serious example of Crozes than the



very tasty Esquisse, with the bouquet offering up a pure and nascently complex blend of cassis, black raspberries, a hint of fresh apricot, pepper, hickory smoke, a fine base of stony soil, incipient notes of venison and a touch of tapenade in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very well-balanced, with a rock solid core, fine-grained tannins, very good focus and grip and a long, nascently complex and tangy finish. This is still a puppy and deserves some time in the cellar to properly blossom, as there are layers of complexity here just waiting to emerge. Fine juice. 2021-2040+. **90+**.

### ***Hermitage***

#### **2015 Hermitage “Arena Mica”- J. Boutin (Stéphane Vedeau)**

The Hermitage “Arena Mica” from Stéphane Vedeau’s J. Boutin label (named for his mother) is made with completely destemmed fruit and aged in three hundred liter casks for twelve months prior to bottling. The 2015 Hermitage comes in listed at thirteen percent octane (very nicely measured for this hot summer!) and delivers a nascently complex bouquet of cassis, sweet dark berries, hung game, pepper, bitter chocolate, a fine base of stony soil tones, smoke, a bit of cedar and just a touch of Hermitage’s youthful medicinal tones. On the palate the wine is deep, complex and full-bodied, with a good, solid core of fruit, ripe, moderate tannins and very good length and grip on the complex finish. This is a very good bottle, but it always seems to me that destemming Hermitage takes away just a bit of its gravitas, though of course, it does make it a lot easier to enjoy in its youth! This is a very good bottle, and already quite tasty, but it is just a bit too easy-going structurally for me to place it in the top division. 2019-2050. **91**.

#### **1999 Hermitage “la Chapelle”- Paul Jaboulet Âiné**

Conventional wisdom has it that the late 1990s was a slump period at Paul Jaboulet Âiné, but there is nothing to be found in this lovely vintage of Hermitage “la Chapelle” that would validate this perception, as this is a beautiful bottle of Hermitage that exemplifies the excellence of 1999 in the northern Rhône. The bouquet is deep, complex and classic in profile, offering up a vibrant blend of cassis, black raspberries, smoked meats, dark soil tones, a hint of hay, pepper, a touch of fruitcake and a gentle topnote of cigar smoke that will become more pronounced with further bottle age. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and just starting to stir, with an excellent core of fruit, lovely mineral drive and grip, moderate tannins and excellent length and grip on the complex and classy finish. This is first rate Hermitage that is just about ready to drink at age twenty, but has decades and decades still ahead of it. 2019-2060. **92+**.

#### **1997 Hermitage- Domaine Jean-Louis Chave**

I do not know the inner workings of the domaine’s transition back in this era, but this is the last vintage of Chave Hermitage that strikes me as cut from the decidedly less extracted style of Gérard Chave, rather than the more powerful style championed by his son Jean-Louis in more recent times. I know that Jean-Louis was certainly working at the domaine at this time (and had been for several vintages prior), but, to my palate, the stylistic shift at this fine estate occurs with the 1998 vintage. Back when the 1997 Chave was released, there were already signs of a more polished and glossy style emerging here with this vintage, as the wine had a bit more new oak showing and a more refined personality out of the blocks compared to any of the earlier vintages of the 1990s here, but the wine has aged beautifully and is quite classical in profile today. The bouquet is beautifully marked with red fruit elements and quite stunning, soaring from the glass in a mix of red and black raspberries, exotic spice tones, spit-roasted meats, a superb base of soil,

pepper and a touch of cedary new oak still evident in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and perfectly balanced, with a lovely core of fruit, excellent soil signature, melting tannins and a long, complex and utterly refined finish. Fine, fine juice. 2019-2050. **94.**



*The hill of Hermitage, rising up behind the center of town in Tain.*

### **1988 Hermitage “la Chapelle”- Paul Jaboulet Âiné**

The 1988 La Chapelle from Paul Jaboulet Âiné is one of the excellent and often overlooked vintages of this outstanding Hermitage from the decade of the 1980s. This most recent bottle was outstanding and fully into its apogee of peak drinkability, wafting from the glass in a complex and classic aromatic blend of black raspberries, cassis, pepper, hot stones, black olive, grilled meats, cigar ash and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and *à point*, with a lovely core of fruit, superb focus and balance, melting tannins and excellent length and grip on the beautifully resolved finish. A classic year of La Chapelle with decades of life still ahead of it. 2019-2050. **94.**

### **1985 Hermitage “la Chapelle”- Paul Jaboulet Âiné**

I had not tasted a bottle of 1985 la Chapelle from Paul Jaboulet in more than twenty years and was very, very impressed by this recent bottle. Early on, I remember thinking that this wine was pretty and correct, but lacked sufficient mid-palate stuffing to truly be a great vintage of this

fine Hermitage bottling. However, this most recent bottle was outstanding, offering up a mature and wide open bouquet of cassis, black pepper, grilled meats, lovely spice tones, a touch of hay and a complex base of dark soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, tangy and still moderately tannic, with fine depth at the core, very good focus and grip, bright acids and a very long, complex and beautifully balanced finish. A very impressive showing! I should mention that a friend made the effort to search out this bottle in the UK market, as he had heard that there were multiple bottlings of the 1985 La Chapelle and that the one that was sent to England has proven to be the best. I do not know this to be the case, but this bottle certainly did come out of the a UK cellar and was superior to any previous example of the 1985 that I have had the pleasure to taste. 2019-2050. **95.**

### **1983 Hermitage “la Chapelle”- Paul Jaboulet Âiné**

I drank a couple of different examples of the 1983 La Chapelle from Paul Jaboulet Âiné over the last few months, and while the wines were solid, they lagged decidedly behind both the 1988 and 1985 versions. The wine is nicely complex on the nose, but defined more by dried fruit tones than one might expect from a top-ranked vintage of Hermitage, as the wine offers up scents of raised, dried red currants, hay, spiced meats, stony soil tones, pepper and a topnote of cigar smoke. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely soil-driven, with a good core, still a fair bit of backend tannin and fine length and grip on the finish. This is a complex wine, but it seems like it the fruit is already starting to dry out a bit, before the tannins fully resolve, so it may well be that this will be the best balanced moment in its evolution to drink the wine. In this era, Paul Jaboulet Âiné was purported to bottle several different iterations of La Chapelle, so perhaps there are better examples of the 1983 from different bottling times or slightly different blends? But, the last couple of bottles of the '83 I have drunk have been consistently in this style, and there was one musty example as well (though not obviously corked), that was similar in the dried fruit style of the aromatics and flavor profile, but seemed flawed in some manner. The two good bottles of this wine were not bad at all, just not in the league with the 1988 or 1985 versions. Are there truly great examples of 1983 La Chapelle out there somewhere? 2019-2040+. **91.**

### **Cornas**

#### **2016 Cornas “l'Élégance de Caillou”- Domaine Julien Pilon**

Julien Pilon makes his “l'Élégance de Caillou” bottling of Cornas from sixty year-old vines. He completely de-stems the bunches for this wine and raises it entirely in *demi-muids*, with twenty-five percent of them new oak. The 2016 version is a fine bottle in the making, offering up a complex bouquet of cassis, black olive, pepper, roasted meats, a lovely base of soil and a quite discreet framing of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and ripely tannic, with an excellent core of fruit, lovely mineral drive and grip and a long, well-balanced and nascently complex finish. This is really an excellent bottle of Cornas in the making! 2026-2065. **92+.**

#### **2016 Cornas “Patou”- Domaine Dumien Serette**

Gilbert Serette is the current proprietor of Domaine Dumien Serette, but he is now in his early sixties and his son, Nicolas has been working alongside of him for several years now. The family owns 1.5 hectares of very old vines, most of them in the fine Patou *climat*. Most of these vines were planted in the 1920s, but some are a bit older and already centenarians. The wines are partially whole cluster fermented and raised in older Burgundy barrels, ranging from two to

seven years of age, for a full two years prior to bottling. The family's 2016 Cornas "Patou" comes in at a cool and classy thirteen percent octane and offers up a very classic young nose of red and black raspberries, smoked meats, very stony soil tones, *garrigue*, a nice touch of stems, pepper and a bit of syrah's reductive medicinal overtones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and old-fashioned in the best sense of the term, with a nice touch of creaminess to the fruit on the attack, a rock solid core, excellent mineral drive, firm, chewy backend tannins and a long, very primary and quite promising finish. Stylistically, this wine reminds me strongly of some of those mid-1980s vintages from old school producers here such as Robert Michel and Alain Voge, which started out reductive and bound up in their structural elements and blossomed into absolutely beautiful examples of Cornas. Underneath its properly robust structural Cornas elements, this is a very elegant wine in the making, and twelve to fifteen years down the road, it is going to be dynamite. 2030-2075. **92.**

#### **2016 Cornas "Cuvée Henri" Vieilles Vignes- Domaine Dumien Serette**

For many years, Noël Verset used to urge his friend Gilbert Serette to make a special bottling from his oldest, hundred-plus year-old vines, and once Nicolas had joined him at the domaine, they started making two barrels of their very oldest vines, which they dubbed Cuvée Henri in honor of Nicolas' grandfather. The 2016 Cuvée Henri is also thirteen percent octane and a bit deeper colored than the Patou bottling. It offers up a nice touch of sappiness in its youthful bouquet of black raspberries, pepper, violets, stony minerality, black olive, roasted game and lovely spice tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, youthful and less shut down on the attack than the Patou. There is outstanding depth in the mid-palate here and plenty of firm, Cornas tannins firming up the backend of this young and potentially brilliant wine. Give it time enough to find its inner brilliance, which will come with long-term cellaring as sure as the sun will crawl up over the eastern horizon tomorrow. 2030-2075. **94.**

#### **2015 Cornas- Domaine Guillaume Gilles**

The 2015 Cornas from Guillaume Gilles is a lovely young wine that is full of promise. Guillaume Gilles is the protégé of the now retired Robert Michel, and has been given the lease on Monsieur Michel's fine parcel in the *lieu à dit* of les Chaillots, as well as use of the old Michel cellars. His style is very traditional, with virtually no destemming and *elevage* in old *foudres* and his 2015 is showing fine promise, with the bouquet offering up scents of cassis, pepper, a nice base of grilled meats, plenty of smokiness and a fine, fine base of stony soil elements. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and properly chewy out of the blocks, with a fine core, good focus and grip and a long, soil-driven and youthful finish. This will be very good in the fullness of time. 2025-2075. **91+.**

#### **2015 Cornas "Patou"- Domaine Dumien Serette**

One of the great things about really old vines is that they tend to mitigate extremes of climactic conditions. For this reason, the 2015 Patou from Gilbert and Nicolas Serette comes in at the same thirteen percent octane as the 2016, despite the summer of 2015 being more torrid. Like the 2016 version, this is still young and reductive and takes quite a bit of coaxing to start to show its constituent components. Eventually, the youthful bouquet offers up scents of cassis, hung game, pepper, a bit of bonfire, a nice touch of stems, stony soil elements and some medicinal overtones of young Cornas. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and quite soil-driven in personality, with a fine core of fruit, firm, serious tannins and a long, tangy and very well-balanced young finish. This will be excellent, but again, extended patience is *de rigueur*. 2030-2075. **92.**



### 2011 Cornas “Chaillot”- Domaine Franck Balthazar

Franck Balthazar only returned to the family domaine in Cornas in 2002, after having spent the first chapters of his career working as an engineer. He is the nephew of the retired Noël Verset, Cornas’ most famous *vigneron*. The domaine’s parcel in the vineyard of Chaillot is their oldest, having been planted during WWI by Franck’s grandfather. The 2011 Chaillot is a superb young Cornas in the making, offering up a lovely and already expressive nose of black raspberries, *garrigue*, grilled meats, stone soil tones and a lovely spicy topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still fairly chewy in personality, with a fine core, moderate tannins and a long, nascently complex and very promising finish. It is still fairly early days for this wine and I would leave it tucked away in the cellar for another four or five years before starting to open bottles in earnest. 2022-2060. **92.**

### 2006 Cornas “les Reynards”- Thierry Allemand

The 2006 les Reynards from Thierry Allemand is a good wine, but rather ripe in personality by his high standards. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a mix of cassis, pepper, smoked meats, a bit of chocolate, stony soil tones and a topnote of bonfire. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and powerful, with a good core, ripe, tepidly-resolved tannins and good length and grip on the rugged, but hardly precise finish. This wine is listed at 13.5 percent octane, but seems more like fourteen percent and lacks the focus and delineation one typically finds in Thierry Allemand’s wines. It is okay, but not great. 2020-2040+. **89.**

### **2004 Cornas “les Chaillots”- Thierry Allemand**

In contrast to the borderline overripe 2006 les Reynards, the 2004 les Chaillots is outstanding and quite classic in profile. The superbly complex and beginning to get elegant bouquet offers up scents of dark berries, pepper, black olive, lovely Cornas spice tones and a very fine base of stony soil. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with a fine core, lovey complexity and grip, exceptional transparency and a long, modestly tannic and very complete finish. This is a classic bottle of Allemand Cornas that is just reaching its plateau of maturity, where it will continue to blossom and delight for many decades to come. 2019-2050. **93.**

### **1999 Cornas “Sans Sufre”- Thierry Allemand**

The 1999 Cornas “Sans Sufre” from Thierry Allemand has aged far longer than I initially anticipated, but it is not quite up to the standards of the bottlings with SO<sub>2</sub>, as today it lacks a bit of lift and vibrancy on the backend of the palate. The wine still has a touch of CO<sub>2</sub> when first poured and has to be swirled a bit to blossom, but eventually offers up a fine nose of pepper, cassis, roasted game, a good base of soil and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and fairly complex, with still some chewy tannins and a long, gently rustic and well-balanced finish. This just does not have quite the bounce on the finish that one would expect from a great vintage from a great winegrower such as Monsieur Allemand, and though it is deep and complex and has survived its differing *elevage*, one can hardly say that it is superior for its lack of sulfur. 2019-2035. **90.**

### **1999 Cornas- Noël Verset**

I have been very lucky to have drunk more of the 1999 vintage of Noël Verset’s magnificent Cornas than any other wine from the appellation, so I have had a chance to watch it climb and properly stretch its wings over the last dozen years or so. Today, the wine is nicely into its plateau of peak maturity, but still with many, many decades of life ahead of it. The bouquet is deep, pure and complex, offering up a beautiful blend of cassis, black raspberries, pepper, a touch of new leather, a beautiful base of stony soil tones, woodsmoke and still a touch of Cornas’ youthful, medicinal overtones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, superbly balanced and very complex, with a great core of fruit, modest tannins, excellent focus and grip and a very long, complex and tangy finish. Though this wine has the beautiful fruit of the 1999 vintage in the northern Rhône, it remains light on its feet and extremely soil-driven in personality. A brilliant wine. 2019-2045+. **95.**

### **1989 Cornas “la Geynale”- Robert Michel**

Robert Michel is one of the fine bevy of old school traditionalists who have quietly worked the steep vineyards of Cornas for most of their adult lives. He took over from his father running the domaine in 1975 (having started working in the vines in 1964), and he has always made his wines in the old school style. Monsieur Michel, who finally retired after the 2006 vintage, is the uncle of Vincent Paris, as well as the mentor to Guillaume Gilles, two of the rising stars in the northern Rhône today. The domaine’s Cornas “la Geynale” bottling is from his oldest vines, which are planted in the vineyard of les Reynards. He fermented his wines in the traditional method with plenty of stems included, in open top fermenters and ages them in older oak *foudres*. The 1989 la Geynale is drinking beautifully today, having made the transition from the muscular side of youthful Cornas into a very elegant wine, offering up a deep and complex nose of black raspberries, grilled meats, a touch of olive, lovely spice tones, a stony base of soil



and a topnote of lavender. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and quite suave on the attack, with a good core, fine transparency and a long, gently tannic and quite complex finish. The 1989 la Geynale from Monsieur Michel is now at its apogee, but still has decades of life ahead of it. 2019-2050. **93.**

### ***Vin de Pays Syrah***

#### **2017 Syrah- Vincent Paris Sélection (Collines Rhodaniennes)**

As I mentioned last year, Vincent Paris' Sélection Syrah is produced from young vines in Crozes-Hermitage. The grapes are destemmed prior to fermentation and the wine raised in tank. The 2017 version is again nicely cool, coming in at 12.5 percent octane and is a bit youthfully reductive when first opened, but with some time in decanter offers up a lovely bouquet of sweet cassis, black raspberries, a touch of black olive, pepper, dark soil tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is fullish, complex and shows nice intensity of flavor (though not all that concentrated at the core), with loads of personality, very minimal tannins and a long, complex and very nicely balanced finish. This is a lovely follow-up to the 2016 version and an excellent value. 2019-2027. **88.**

### ***Saint Joseph Blanc***

#### **2017 Saint Joseph Blanc "les Garipelées"- Vignoble de Boisseyt**

The 2017 Saint Joseph Blanc "les Garipelées" from Vignoble de Boisseyt is a blend of sixty percent roussanne and forty percent marsanne. The wines here are now made by Pierre Jean Villa, who also has a line of bottlings under his own name now (see below). Like its red counterpart, the wine is raised in older, four hundred liter casks prior to bottling. The 2017 is a fairly ripe wine, tipping the scales at 14.5 percent alcohol and offering up a ripe and nicely musky bouquet of peach, honeydew melon, acacia blossoms, a bit of buttered nuts and a good base of stony soil tones. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and quite ripe and open, with a good core of fruit, moderate framing acids and just a hint of backend heat on the long finish. This is pretty well-balanced for its octane, but 14.5 percent white wine from Saint Joseph starts out its life swimming against a pretty brisk tide. Not bad for its ripeness, but not my personal cup of tea. 2019-2023. **86.**

#### **2017 Saint Joseph Blanc "Saut de l'Ange"- Domaine Pierre Jean Villa**

Pierre Jean Villa only started his own domaine in 2009, but he has a rich winemaking history prior to this, including *stages* at Clos de Tart and Domaine de la Vougeraie in Burgundy prior to returning to his native Rhône in 2003. From 2003 through 2008, he was the cellar master and a partner in the company, Vins de Viennes (founded by Yves Cuilleron, Pierre Gaillard and François Villard) and he now makes the wines at Vignoble de Boisseyt in addition to producing bottlings from his own domaine. His 2017 Saint Joseph Blanc is quite fine, wafting from the glass in an aromatic constellation of pear, pecan, lovely soil tones, white flowers and a touch of beeswax. On the palate the wine is ripe, fresh and full-bodied, with pretty modest acids, but good focus and grip, fine depth at the core and almost a whisper of backend tannin perking up the long finish. This is listed at 13.5 percent octane and is quite tasty today, but will want drinking on the early side, unless I am mistaken. 2019-2023? **87.**



*Some of the Saint Joseph appellation's finest, terraced vineyards, overlooking the village of Tournon.*

### ***Saint Joseph Rouge***

#### **2017 Saint Joseph “les Garipelées”- Vignoble de Boisseyt**

This wine hails from two parcels of vines in the northern end of the Saint Joseph appellation in the village of Chavanay (a bit south and across the Rhône from Condrieu). The vines were planted in the 1970s and 1980s from *selection massale* cuttings and it is raised in used, four hundred liter *demi-muids*. The 2017 les Garipelées comes in at 13.5 percent octane and delivers a lovely aromatic blend of cassis, pepper, bonfire, roasted meats, dark soil tones and a bit of black olive in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full, complex and plenty deep at the core, with good fruit on the attack, a fine core and impressive backend soil signature on the moderately tannic and well-balanced finish. This is nicely structured and will age quite nicely, so though it is quite approachable today, I would opt for letting it have a few years of bottle age to allow the tannins to fall away a bit and its secondary layers emerge. Good juice, though not as minerally in profile as Saint Joseph from the area around Tournon. 2020-2040+. **90.**

#### **2017 Saint Joseph- Jean-François Malsert**

The 2017 Saint Joseph from Jean-François Malsert is composed from both his own fruit and some production grown by friends in the appellation. He ferments it without sulfur in a combination of amphora and *demi-muid* and then raises the wine in *demi-muids*. The 2017 comes in at thirteen percent octane and offers up a forward and sappy nose of black raspberries, pepper, dark chocolate, bonfire, roasted meats and pretty spice tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-

bodied and wide open on the attack, with a good core, some firm, chewy backend tannins and good length and grip on the slightly linear finish. Monsieur Malsert is a “natural winegrower” and this wine already seems to be getting a bit flat from its modicum of SO<sub>2</sub> and should be drunk up over the near-term. I really like the raw materials here and a bit of sulfur might have given it a decidedly longer shelf life. 2019-2024? **87** (for the present, but do not drag your feet on this one.)

**2017 Saint Joseph “Préface”- Domaine Pierre Jean Villa**

The “Préface” bottling of Saint Joseph from Pierre Jean Villa is his largest cuvée, produced from two hectares of vines. The wine is fermented with indigenous yeasts, raised in a combination of older 225 liter casks and 600 liter *demi-muids* and bottled unfiltered. The 2017 version is a ripe and fairly powerful wine, offering up impressive depth on both the nose and palate and plenty of structure. The complex nose shows a bit of *sur maturité* in its combination of baked black cherries and cassis, dark chocolate, a hint of fresh apricot, hung game, pepper, smoke and a good base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite broad-shouldered, with a rock solid core of fruit, impressive backend mineral drive, ripe, chewy tannins and a long, nascently complex finish. This is very much a creature of its vintage, but it has good mineral undertow to add backend precision and grip. 2021-2045. **88+**.

**2016 Saint Joseph “Clos des Matinets”- Domaine Gilles Barge**

During my visit with Julien Barge in Ampuis in October, we did not taste the family’s Saint Joseph *rouge* bottling and I did not even know this existed until this lovely 2016 bottling showed up on my doorstep! The Clos Martinets had been abandoned in the 1960s and was only replanted when the brother and sister Martinet hired Gilles Barge in 1990 to start cultivating the wine. It has been produced since 1994 and with the vines now twenty-six years of age, it is starting to really show some lovely mid-palate depth. Julien Barge retains thirty to forty percent whole clusters for this wine. The bouquet of the 2016 is fine, youthful and classic, wafting from the glass in a mix of red and black raspberries, bonfire, roasted *pigeon*, pepper, stony minerality, a nice touch of stem spice and a topnote of coffee bean. On the palate the wine is deep, full and beautifully balanced, with a youthful profile, a fine core, excellent soil signature, moderate tannins and very good length and grip on the classic, young finish. This deserves a year or two (at least) in the cellar to really start to blossom, but if you are going to drink it on the young side, give it some extended aeration in decanter. It is an excellent Saint Joseph in the making. 2021-2045. **91**.

**2016 Saint Joseph “Parcelle de Jean”- J. Boutin (Stéphane Vedeau)**

The 2016 Saint Joseph “Parcelle de Jean” from Stéphane Vedeau hails from steep, terraced vineyards in the appellation, located just north of Cornas. The wine is primarily raised in tank, with a smaller percentage of the cuvée seeing its *elevage* done in five hundred liter casks. The 2016 version comes in at an even thirteen percent and delivers a fine, youthful and quite complex bouquet of cassis, black raspberries, black olive, smoked meats, granite, pepper and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite elegant in profile, with a good core of fruit, moderate tannins and fine focus and grip on the long finish. This tastes like it is completely destemmed, but it is good juice. 2019-2035. **90**.

**2016 Saint Joseph “les Sabots de Coppi”- Domaine d’Iserand (Jean-François Malsert)**

The 2016 Saint Joseph “les Sabots de Coppi” from Domaine d’Iserand is vinified similarly to Jean-François’ *négociant* bottling listed above, with no SO<sub>2</sub> during fermentation (a small amount is added at bottling) in a combination of amphora and *demi-muid*. This bottling is exclusively from his own vines and offers up a more complex nose of black raspberries,

woodsmoke, hung game, dark soil tones, pepper and black olive. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and far better focused and structured than the easy-going *négociant* bottling, with a solid core, good soil signature and a bit of backend tannin perking up the long and complex finish. This is quite stylish. 2019-2030. **89.**

**2016 Saint Joseph “Rue des Poissonniers XVIIIe”- Julien Pilon**

I was very impressed with the 2015 version of this wine, which was the first I had tasted from Condrieu-based Julien Pilon, and the 2016 is an excellent follow-up. Readers may recall that Monsieur Pilon raises this cuvée in a third new oak and allows the malo to take place in cask. The new release is a lovely bottle of Saint Joseph, offering up a slightly new oaky and quite precise blend of cassis, pepper, a touch of roasted meats, black olive, a good base of soil and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, suave on the attack and nicely structured on the backend, with a fine core, impressive complexity, fine-grained tannins and lovely length and grip on the poised and promising finish. This is very sophisticated winemaking and the wine is already very tasty, but it should age gracefully and I would be inclined to keep this in the cellar for at least a few years and allow its secondary layers to emerge. 2020-2040+. **91.**

**2016 Saint Joseph “Tildé”- Domaine Pierre Jean Villa**

The Tildé bottling from Pierre Jean Villa is his old vine cuvée of Saint Joseph, made from a hectare of vines in the northern end of the appellation that were planted between 1963 and 1970. These are hillside vineyards, planted at three hundred meters above sea level, and the wine is raised in a similar combination of older barrels and *demi-muids*, but with the *elevage* doubled to twenty-four months from that of the Préface bottling. The 2016 Tildé is a fine example of Saint Joseph, with the inherent elegance and mineral signature of the vintage very much in evidence here. The bouquet offers up a youthful blend of dark berries, pepper, black olive, roasted game, a touch of youthful stems, bonfires and an outstanding base of minerality. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, transparent and youthfully structured, with a good, solid core of fruit, excellent soil signature, ripe, firm tannins and fine focus and grip on the long, primary and very well-balanced finish. This needs four or five years in the cellar to properly blossom, but the constituent components here are excellent and this is going to be a very good bottle with a bit of age. 2024-2050. **91.**

**2011 Saint-Joseph- Domaine Bernard Gripa**

Domaine Gripa is one of the stars based in the small town of Mauves, with its best-known neighbors being Domaines Gonon and Chave. This is an estate based solely on the steep, granitic hillsides that were carved into terraces in Roman times and produce the finest examples of Saint-Joseph. The 2011 is an outstanding wine that is just blossoming at age seven, offering up a classic aromatic constellation of cassis, black raspberries, spiced meats, pepper, black olive and a superb base of stony soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a fine core, still a bit of backend tannin and excellent focus and grip on the long and well-balanced finish. A fine bottle that still has plenty of life ahead of it. 2019-2035. **91.**

**2007 Saint-Joseph- Domaine Pierre Gonon**

The current superstar in the appellation of Saint-Joseph is certainly Domaine Pierre Gonon, as this family domaine has assumed the mantle once worn by Raymond Trollat. Monsieur Trollat was every bit as important in the history of Saint-Joseph as Marcel Guigal or Marius Gentaz in Côte-Rôtie, and when he eventually retired, he sold his vines to the Gonon

family. 2007 is a lighter vintage in Saint-Joseph, but the Gonon bottling has blossomed beautifully and offers up a fine, elegant middleweight example of this fine *terroir*, wafting from the glass in a complex blend of sweet cassis, black olives, grilled meats, a bit of pepper, stony minerality and a topnote of smokiness. On the palate the wine is medium-full, focused and nicely sappy at the core, with superb complexity, melted tannins and a long, vibrant and beautifully balanced finish. The 2007 is not as powerful an example as vintages such as 2009 or 2010, but it is a complete wine and is drinking beautifully today. 2019-2035. **91.**

### ***Condrieu***

#### **2017 Condrieu “la Bonnette”- Domaine Rostaing**

The 2017 Condrieu “la Bonnette” from Domaine Rostaing is beautifully fragrant and precise on the nose, offering up a complex bouquet of pear, a hint of fresh pineapple, acacia blossoms, a touch of honeysuckle, coriander seed and a lovely base of salty soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and zesty, with lovely balance and delineation, bright acids and very nice length and grip on the vibrant finish. This comes in listed at 14.5 percent octane, but carries its octane beautifully, so that the wine remains quite fresh on the backend. The Rostaing is best-known for their brilliant Côte-Rôtie, but this bottle of Condrieu is no slouch! 2019-2025. **90.**



*The beautiful terraced hillsides of Côte-Rôtie, under the October morning sun.*



## ***Côte-Rôtie***

### **2017 Côte-Rôtie “la Viallière”- Domaine Champet**

The 2017 Côte-Rôtie “la Viallière” from Domaine Champet is beautifully classical in profile, coming in at a low octane of 12.5 percent (very impressive for the vintage!) and offering up a properly structured and soil-driven example of this great *terroir*. The youthful nose offers up scents of sweet cassis, spit-roasted game, complex, stony soil tones, pepper, woodsmoke, coffee, violets and a nice touch of adolescent, old school stemminess in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and tightly-knit today, with an excellent core of fruit, fine soil signature, firm, chewy tannins and a long, promising and still quite primary finish. This is not quite as perfectly ripe as the 2016 version and will be a tad less generous in its youth as a result, but in the fullness of time, this too should prove to be an excellent wine. That said, it is likely to be far less forgiving if one is tempted to open it up early “just to see how it is doing”. 2030-2075+. **92+**.

### **2016 Côte-Rôtie “la Viallière”- Domaine Champet**

The 2016 la Viallière from the Champet family is a stellar young bottle of Côte-Rôtie, but it is still a puppy and is going to need some extended time in the cellar before it really gets a sense of generosity about it. The bouquet is deep, precise and classic, offering up scents of cassis, dark berries, roasted meats, black olive, a touch of hazelnut, pepper, bonfires and a complex base of soil tones. There is still a nice touch of youthful stems on the nose as well, but this will turn to spice with bottle age. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, poised and rock solid at the core, with the 2016 vintage’s excellent sense of elegance on display (in a very primary fashion), firm, ripe and very well-integrated tannins and a long, vibrant and nascently complex finish. The balance of the vintage is very much in evidence here, so even in its youthful stage, it is not a bad drink, but this is a classic, old school Côte-Rôtie of outstanding potential, and it deserves to be left alone in a cool corner of the cellar for another dozen years or so. It will be superb when it is fully ready to drink! 2030-2085. **94**.

### **2016 Côte-Rôtie “la Porchette”- Domaine Julien Pilon**

As readers may recall, the “la Porchette” bottling of Côte-Rôtie from Julien Pilon is composed mostly of fruit from the *Côte de Blonde*, but with a small percentage included from the les Roziers vineyards that sits up above La Landonne on the slope in the *Côte de Brune*. Monsieur Pilon allows this cuvée to see thirty percent new oak during its *elevage*. The 2016 la Porchette is still a very young wine and needs some time in the decanter to blossom, as it is a bit reductive when first opened. However, once it opens up, it but blossoms nicely to offer up a complex nose of cassis, smoked meats, hazelnuts, black olive, pepper, a fine base of stony soil tones, a bit of new oak and topnote of bonfire. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very classically proportioned, in the style of this excellent vintage, with a lovely core, excellent soil inflection, suave tannins and fine length and grip on the vibrant and potentially quite velvety finish. The bit of reduction here is just very typical with young syrah and is nothing to be concerned about, as this wine will age beautifully and be a very refined example of the vintage when it is ready to drink. 2024-2065+. **92+**.

### **2016 Côte-Rôtie “Ampodium”- Domaine Rostaing**

I thought the 2016 vintage of the Ampodium bottling from the Rostaing family was exceptional when I tasted it out of cask at the domaine back in October of 2017, and has lost nothing since it was bottled. The wine is young and still a touch reductive when first poured, but with a bit of air the beautiful nose wafts from the glass in a youthfully complex blend of red and



black raspberries, hot stones, black olive, roasted game, pepper, a touch of hazelnut, a dollop of chocolate and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely nutty and peppery in flavor profile, with a lovely core of fruit, fine focus and grip, ripe, well-integrated tannins and excellent balance on the long and promising finish. The 2016 Ampodium is not going to take all that long to really start to drink well, but this wine also has the balance to age very long and gracefully. What an outstanding vintage *chez* Rostaing! 2024-2070. **92+**.

**2016 Côte-Rôtie “La Landonne”- Domaine Rostaing**

I had loved the potential of the 2016 La Landonne from Pierre Rostaing when I was the winery back in October of 2017 and had a chance to taste this infant out of cask. It has made it into bottle with all of its magnificent potential intact and this is clearly going to be one of the great reference point vintages for this iconic bottling of Côte-Rôtie. The wine is young and properly buttoned up behind its classical structural elements today, but still offers up a window into its enormous future potential. The bouquet delivers a superb and youthful blend of sweet dark berries, cassis, roasted meat, pepper, bonfire, just a hint of hazelnut and a beautifully transparent and complex base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and very well-structured, with ripe tannins, beautiful focus and grip, outstanding mid-palate depth of fruit and an extremely long, soil-driven and nascently complex finish. This is a puppy, as it should be and will need plenty of time in the cellar to fully blossom, but it will eventually be one of the greatest vintages of La Landonne from Domaine Rostaing in the last quarter century! Great wine in the making. 2030-2080. **95**.

**2016 Côte-Rôtie “Côte Blonde”- Domaine Rostaing**

The 2016 Domaine Rostaing Côte Blonde is another brilliant young wine that is every bit as impressive at this early stage out of bottle as it was in cask back in Ampuis. The wine is starting to show a bit more of its red fruity side that will come in due course, so there is some red fruit starting to augment the beautifully pure notes of black raspberry and cassis on the nose. Additional aromatics of pepper, hazelnuts, a touch of black olive, gamebird, violets and a complex base of soil tones add to the blossoming fireworks on the nose. On the palate the wine is pure, potentially velvety and nicely structured at the present time, with a gorgeous core of fruit, great transparency and grip, suave, seamless, but plenty firm tannins and great length and grip on the young and very, very promising finish. A great, great bottle of Côte-Rôtie in the making, the 2016 Côte Blonde from Pierre Rostaing simply needs some time alone in the cellar to blossom completely. 2030-2080. **95+**.

**2016 Côte-Rôtie “Carmina”- Domaine Pierre Jean Villa**

The Carmina is Pierre Jean Villa’s blended bottling of Côte-Rôtie, which is made from a half hectare parcel of old vines (planted in 1959 and 1964) and two hectares of younger vines from the northern half of the appellation. The bottling is almost entirely syrah (there are a couple of viognier vines in one of the parcels that get tossed in) and the wine is raised in a combination of older casks and *demi-muids*. In most vintages, the Carmina will include thirty percent whole clusters. The 2016 version of Carmina is an excellent young bottle of Côte-Rôtie, offering up a classic nose of red and black raspberries, pepper, stony soil tones, a bit of nuttiness, roasted meats, coffee and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully soil-driven in personality, with a fine core of fruit, ripe, well-integrated tannins and lovely focus and grip on the long, balanced and nascently complex finish. This is going to be lovely. 2026-2065. **91+**.

### 2016 Côte-Rôtie “Fongeant”- Domaine Pierre Jean Villa

Monsieur Villa farms about forty *ares* of vines planted in 1954 in the superb *climat* of Fongeant. This wine is made with anywhere from two-thirds to one hundred percent whole clusters, depending on the vintage's character, and the wine is raised almost entirely in older *demi-muids*. The 2016 Fongeant from Pierre Jean Villa is an outstanding young bottle of Côte-Rôtie in the making, offering up a pure and very promising aromatic constellation of red and black raspberries, hazelnuts, pepper, black olive, smoked meats, a complex base of stony soil tones, a youthful touch of sweet stems and a topnote of woodsmoke. On the palate the wine is deep, soil-driven and full, with an excellent core of fruit, stellar soil signature, firm, seamless tannins and outstanding grip and length on the poised, focused and nascently complex finish. This is an outstanding and very classic example of this great *terroir*! 2028-2065+. **92+**.



### 2015 Côte-Rôtie “Cuvée du Plessy”- Domaine Gilles Barge

The 2015 Cuvée du Plessy from Julien and Gilles Barge is one of the most classically-structured examples of the 2015 vintage that I have had the pleasure to taste, which places it up towards the top in this strong, but ripe vintage in Côte-Rôtie. The bouquet out of the blocks is quite black fruity in profile, offering up scents of dark berries, cassis, charred wood, espresso, roasted meats, a superb base of soil, plenty of smokiness and a bit of black olive in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and soil-driven, with excellent mid-palate depth, ripe, seamless tannins and plenty of grip on the long, nascently complex and utterly classical finish. Great juice in the making, but patience will be required. 2025-2075. **93+**.

### **2015 Côte-Rôtie “Côte Blonde”- Domaine Gilles Barge**

The 2015 Côte Blonde from Julien and Gilles Barge is a marvelous wine in the making. The bouquet is pure, complex and vibrant, wafting from the glass in a mix of black raspberries, cassis, hazelnuts, roasted gamebird, a refined base of soil, pepper and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and already velvety on the attack, with an excellent core, impressive backend mineral drive, ripe, fine-grained tannins and a very long, nascently complex and extremely promising finish. All of these Barge 2015 Côte-Rôties come in at 13.5 percent octane, which is not particularly high by the standards of this ripe vintage. This is going to be a great wine when it is ready! 2028-2085. **95.**

### **2015 Côte-Rôtie “Côte Brune”- Domaine Gilles Barge**

2015 is an outstanding year for the Barge family and their Côte Brune may well end up being one of the very finest wines of the vintage. The bouquet is deep, sappy and beautifully soil-specific, offering up smoky constellation of cassis, sweet dark berries, pepper, hung game, a touch of nuttiness, stony soil tones, a bit of dark chocolate and plenty of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is deep, ripe and full, with the lovely, plush puppy fat of the vintage quite evident on the attack, a superb core, firm, seamless tannins and a very long, soil-driven and nascently complex finish. The great puppy fat here gives the wine an air of accessibility, but from the mid-palate back, it is crystal clear that this is a long-distance runner that needs some bottle age to truly blossom. 2028-2085. **94+.**

### **2015 Côte-Rôtie “Bonnevaux”- J. Boutin (Stéphane Vedeau)**

Stéphane Vedeau de-stems his fruit for his J. Boutin bottling of Côte-Rôtie “Bonnevaux”. The wine is fermented in stainless steel tanks and raised for a year and a half in small, slightly older casks prior to bottling. His 2015 version comes in at an even thirteen percent and offers up a fine, youthful bouquet of cassis, black olive, pepper, roasted meats, dark soil tones, hazelnuts and a hint of spicy oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and nicely balanced, with a good core, ripe, buried tannins and fine length and grip on the youthful and quite promising finish. As the fruit here was de-stemmed, there is not going to be that stemmy adolescent period where it will be very difficult to approach, so this is one 2015 Côte-Rôtie that will be fairly pleasing to drink while it is evolving through its early stage of life in bottle, but the balance here is very good and this should age quite nicely as well. Good juice. 2024-2065. **91+.**

### **2015 Côte-Rôtie “la Chavaroche”- Domaine Bernard Levet**

I had pretty high hopes for the 2015 Côte-Rôtie “la Chavaroche” from Domaine Bernard Levet, but the wine did not deliver. The youthful nose is quite correct, offering up scents of cassis, pepper, hung game, damp soil tones and a nice touch of overt stoniness as well. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, tannic and extremely grumpy at the present time, with a solid core, but a real dry edge to its tannic chassis and a quite short finish. This is certainly very closed at the present time and perhaps has the stuffing to allow its tough tannins to one day soften properly, but I am not sure how it is going to get longer on the backend. A weird, somewhat sinewy showing for a 2015- perhaps hydric stress took its toll on this wine and it never got properly ripe? 2027-2055+. **87+?**

### **2005 Côte-Rôtie “Cuvée du Plessy”- Domaine Gilles Barge**

Domaine Barge is one of the most important estates in Côte-Rôtie’s last forty years, but the Barge family likes to keep things low key and they have travelled below the radar of many northern Rhône wine lovers. Gilles Barge was the first technically-trained winemaker in the entire appellation when he took over from his father in 1979, and the domaine is poised for even

greater things with son Julien now working alongside of his father. Their Cuvée du Plessy is produced from vineyards in the southern half of the appellation, known as the *Côte de Blonde*, and is typically this traditional producer's most forward example of Côte-Rôtie. The 2005, from a very torrid summer, is blossoming beautifully and offers up a classical bouquet of raspberries, pepper, roasted game, a touch of green olive, a beautiful base of soil tones and a quite smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with fine soil signature, a plush core of fruit, still a bit of backend tannin and a long, complex and blossoming finish. This is only a few years away from hitting its plateau of peak maturity, where it should continue to drink beautifully for decades to come. 2020-260+. **92+**.

#### **1998 Côte-Rôtie “Côte-Brune”- Domaine Pierre Barge**

1998 was a drought vintage in Côte-Rôtie and this wine was a touch lean and sinewy over its first fifteen years in bottle, but is starting to blossom beautifully and is really drinking nicely at age twenty. The bouquet is deep, complex and very expressive, offering up scents of raspberries, woodsmoke, pepper, a gorgeously complex base of soil, hung game, a touch of olive and a bit of nuttiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and soil-driven, with a fine core, excellent focus and grip and a long, meltingly tannic and nicely tangy finish. A fine, fine example of classic, old school Côte-Rôtie from one of the greatest vineyards in the appellation, Côte Brune. 2019-2050. **93**.



### **1991 Côte-Rôtie “les Roziers”- Domaine de Vallouit**

Domaine de Vallouit was a good, but not great producer back in its day, but the firm was purchased by Guigal in 2005 and no longer exists. Back in 1991, they owned vineyard parcels in several top sections of Hermitage, but made their Côte-Rôtie “les Roziers” in this era from purchased grapes. The vineyard is quite highly regarded, lying up on the slope above the more famous La Landonne. This is a lovely wine, though due as much to the high quality of the *terroir* and the excellence of the 1991 vintage in Côte-Rôtie, as Domaine de Vallouit was never considered one of the very top winemaking estates in the northern Rhône. The wine offers up a fully mature and very attractive bouquet of red and black raspberries, venison, gentle nuttiness, a bit of pepper and plenty of smokiness. On the palate the wine is suave, full-bodied and nicely plush on the attack, with a good core, melting tannins and fine length and grip on the very well-balanced finish. This does not have quite the complexity of the very best examples, but it is a very satisfying wine that is now in its prime window of drinkability. 2019-2035+. **90.**

### **1982 Côte-Rôtie- Domaine Joël Champet**

I had an absolutely stellar bottle of the 1980 vintage of this wine, which was a bit more robust in character than this hauntingly perfumed, middleweight 1982. This wine does not have quite the same mid-palate stuffing of a top vintage of Champet from this era, but it is an excellent and fully mature bottle of Côte-Rôtie that still has plenty of intensity of flavor and admirable complexity on both the nose and palate, despite not a ton of weight. The bouquet is vibrant and expressive, jumping from the glass in a fully mature blend of desiccated raspberries, spiced meats, cigar smoke, green olive, a great base of soil tones and a bit of new leather in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish and quite tangy, with good, but not great depth at the core, melted tannins, tangy acids and outstanding complexity on the long and fully resolved finish. This is getting towards the far side of its plateau, but still has some life ahead of it. 2019-2030+. **92.**

### **1979 Côte-Rôtie “Cuvée”- Domaine René Rostaing**

As Monsieur René Rostaing was still only a part-time *vigneron* back in 1979, he was only producing a single, blended bottling of Côte-Rôtie, which at this time was produced from his original holding of twenty-two *ares* in the vineyard of Côte Blonde, which he had inherited from his grandfather, Jean-Marie Buffens in 1971, and a similarly-sized small plot in La Landonne, which he had only received from Monsieur Buffens in 1977. So, this lovely 1979 was only the third vintage to include any fruit from La Landonne in the blend and is pretty close to a fifty-fifty mix of these two great *terroirs* and was designated by Monsieur Rostaing as “Cuvée” on the label in this vintage. Today, the 1979 Côte-Rôtie from René Rostaing is a beautiful bottle at its absolute apogee, offering up a pure and complex bouquet of smoked meats, black olive, bacon fat, stony soil tones, violets, raspberries and coffee. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and *à point*, with lovely complexity and transparency, melted tannins and excellent focus and grip on the poised and tangy finish. This still has plenty of life in it, but it has probably been at its peak already for at least a couple of decades. Just lovely, old school Côte-Rôtie. 2019-2035+. **92.**



**THE SUPERB 2017 VINTAGE  
FROM DOMAINE CLOS DE LA CHAPELLE**



As I mentioned in an email to subscribers prior to the release of this new issue, my stupidity in not reading the very fine print on my airline ticket this March and knowing that my passport now needed to be good for three months out from my planned return date (it was set to expire just short of two months after my return), I managed to fritter away ten days getting a new passport and missed my chance to make my customary second pass through the beautiful 2017 Burgundy vintage. Tasting obligations back here in New York in early April (including the magical Clos des Goisses vertical I report on in this next issue's article on Champagne and Sparkling wines) precluded me from simply going to Burgundy after Germany on this recent trip and I had to reconcile myself to the fact that I had missed my window to taste another *tranche* of the 2017 Burgundies. As I went into in extended detail in Issue 78, the 2017 vintage is far from a homogenous vintage in terms of both style and ultimate quality, but for those *vignerons* who made good decisions and had good fortune in 2017, the vintage is indeed quite extraordinary in quality and seems destined to be one of the great vintages of recent time. This was the second time in three years that I had missed my spring pass through Burgundy, as back in 2016 I had injured my knee pretty badly in late February and had to have knee surgery in early March of that year, and so missed that trip. At the time, I was quite fortunate to have Mark O'Connell, the



owner of Domaine Clos de la Chapelle in Bligny-lès-Beaune, offer to send their lineup of 2015s to my office here in New York, and when he once again heard of my spring travel difficulties, he stepped in and took a little sting out of my passport debacle by shipping over his entire lineup of stellar 2017s. So, despite missing an awful lot of good appointments in Burgundy in March, I at least had the opportunity to taste through Domaine Clos de la Chapelle's outstanding 2017s and this was really quite a nice homecoming present when I got back from my ten days in Germany.

A little has changed at Domaine Clos de la Chapelle since the 2016 vintage here, as they have moved to more spacious accommodations in the small village of Bligny-lès-Beaune and now have far more space with which to vinify and age their wines. Previously they had been located next door to Maison Champy right in the center of Beaune. I was looking forward to seeing these new (to the domaine) cellars on this spring trip, but will have to wait another year to finally do so. As readers may recall, Domaine Clos de la Chapelle is a relatively new estate in Burgundy, for Mark O'Connell only purchased the vineyards and began this chapter of the domaine in 2010. However, though the Domaine Clos de la Chapelle has only been around for just under a decade in its current guise, this is really only a new iteration for at least part of the property, as it had been previously known as Domaine Louis Boillot up until 2010 (not to be confused with the other Domaine Louis Boillot, based now in Chambolle-Musigny). The core Volnay parcels that Mark purchased in 2010 came from Domaine Boillot, including their flagship, small *monopole* vineyard of the Clos de la Chapelle, which lies just south from the Clos de la Bousse d'Or. For those who are familiar with the area, when one takes the first turn headed south from Beaune on the RN 74 towards Volnay and starts to drive up the hill, the Domaine de la Pousse d'Or sits up on the crest of the hill at the start of the village, with the vineyard of the Clos de la Bousse d'Or just below it to the right. The Clos de la Chapelle sits on your left as you drive up the hill towards the village center from the RN 74, separated from the Clos de la Bousse d'Or by the road that runs from the RN 74 up to the street from Pommard that cuts through the upper section of the vineyards in Volnay on its way to Auxey-Duresses. So, as you come to the stop sign to cross that road and start to climb up and enter the village center of Volnay, the Clos de la Chapelle is the small gem of a vineyard to your left behind the stone wall, and it is indeed a superb *terroir* that is now beginning to really be rediscovered as one of Volnay's finest, since Mark arrived in 2010.

As I noted when reviewing the domaine's 2015s two years ago, in addition to the small monopole premier cru of Clos de la Chapelle, the estate also started in 2010 with parcels of vines in the Volnay premier cru of la Carelle Sous la Chapelle and the fine Pommard premier cru vineyard of Chanlins. At the outset, this only amounted to 1.25 hectares of vines, but Mark O'Connell has added several parcels in the Côte de Beaune of well-placed, old vines whenever it has been possible, and the domaine has slowly expanded with each passing year and now totals four hectares of vines. By the time of the 2013 vintage, the domaine had significantly expanded its lineup to include a Beaune Blanc bottling from the premier cru vineyard of les Reversées, produced from a quarter hectare of twenty-five year-old chardonnay vines; a cuvée of Volnay "Taillepieds" produced from sixty-five year-old vines (and beautifully situated between the parcels of Domaine de Montille and Domaine d'Angerville); Pommard "Grands Epenots" (twenty-five year-old vines) and now, two grand cru bottlings from the hill of Corton. These are a parcel of forty-five year-old vines in Bressandes and thirty *ares* of forty-five to fifty year-old vines in Corton-Charlemagne over on the Pernand side of the hill. The 2014 vintage saw another

white wine arrive at the domaine, as a small parcel of thirteen *ares* of vines in the very high quality Pernand-Vergelesses premier cru of Sous Frétile were added, as well as a red from the Beaune premier cru of les Teurons (sixty year-old vines), and in 2015 a second Beaune premier cru in the vineyard of Champs Pimont (sixty-three *ares* of forty-five to fifty year-old vines) has rounded out the lineup.

The domaine used to have a working relationship with Maison Champy in Beaune, from its outset in 2010 until the 2016 harvest, but after the 2016 vintage, the two companies parted ways very amicably and the Domaine Clos de la Chapelle is now completely separated from Champy. As readers may recall from my review of the domaine's 2016s, when new owners purchased Maison Champy at the end of 2016, the two companies had to be separated legally from each other and the agreement was that the Corton "Rognet" parcel that the domaine had been producing for the last several years reverted back to Maison Champy as part of the "divorce agreement", with Domaine Clos de la Chapelle receiving a few more rows of vines in the Beaune premier cru of les Reversées on their side. Consequently, there is one less bottling in the domaine's lineup in 2017. The split with Maison Champy also resulted in a new Technical Director for the domaine, Coralie Allexant-Manière, who had previously spent the last five years patrolling the cellars at Domaine Méo-Camuzet. Mark O'Connell is still the head winemaker here, as he has been since the first vintage, but with Coralie overseeing the wines on a day to day basis, everything is in very good hands in the cellars. The domaine's vineyards had been farmed organically for the last several years of the Boillot's tenure, and since Monsieur O'Connell has purchased the estate, they are now all in the process of conversion to biodynamique farming. The vines in the three original parcels here were all old, with both the parcel in Carelle Sous la Chapelle and the Clos de la Chapelle over fifty-five years of age, and the plot in Chanlins in excess of eighty-five years old- a true Vieilles Vignes! As I have mentioned in the past, the reds at Domaine Clos de la Chapelle receive a short cold soak (*à la* Henri Mayer) prior to the onset of fermentation, with the amount of whole clusters varying between each cuvée and dependent on the style of each growing season, but with the flagship bottling of Volnay "Clos de la Chapelle" having always been destemmed since the 2010 vintage (Mark likes the elegance of the wine this way) and likely to continue to be so on into the future. The Volnay "Carelle Sous la Chapelle" was also destemmed completely in 2017.

For the remainder of the red wines here in the 2017 vintage, the percentage of whole clusters was a bit lower than it had been in both 2015 and 2016, for the simple reason that the fermentation tanks were full and Mark could not use quite as high a percentage of stems this year as he had previously, despite the stems being beautifully ripe. It was not that the yields here in 2017 were particularly enormous, as they averaged forty-three hectoliters per hectare for the reds and forty-five for the whites, but this was still the most generous the domaine had experienced since its new chapter was started in 2010. Consequently, the red wines that include some stems this year were typically between fifteen and twenty percent whole clusters in 2017. I asked Mark if he and his team had participated in the burning of hay bales in the vines in the spring of 2017 to ward off potential frost damage, and he noted that they had done so in each village where they had vines. He commented that "this practice was quite controversial in the villages themselves, for those who lived in the towns and were not *vignerons*, as people were quite upset about the smell of the smoke in their homes and how difficult it was to drive through the smoke in those early morning hours." He noted that the practice will probably never be repeated again, given the

ecological concerns and the inconvenience that it caused to non-*vignerons*. With the serious frost damage in many of the domaine's parcels of vines the previous year, there was certainly potential for very large yields in 2017 from the pent up energy in the vines, but Mark noted that the period of flowering was quite short in 2017 and not overly abundant, so that their yields ended up being fairly correct, rather than overly abundant. The domaine did do a bit of green harvest in 2017 in their parcel of the Beaune premier cru of Champs Pimont, but had no need to do this in any other vineyard.



The domaine prefers to keep the percentage of new oak to a low level, with the target percentages around twenty percent for the premier crus and a third to forty percent for the grand crus, and with the normal yields of 2017 (after many frost or hail-shortened crops here since 2011), it was possible to hit these target levels with the new wood. The harvest took place in 2017 in a fairly tight window, with picking starting on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of September and being completed within five days, but the malos of some of the wines had a mind of their own this year and were not particularly prompt in their completion. Consequently, some wines in the cellars had finished up their malolactic fermentations by the end of January of 2018, whereas others percolated along all the way to the end of August, with the Pommard “Grands Epenots” being the very last wine to finish up its malo. Mark likes to bottle his wines fairly early, *à la Maison Joseph Drouhin* these days, so the wines that had completed their malos earlier were bottled at their customary end of November dates, whereas those that were slower finishing up the malos were not bottled this year until the end of January of 2019. All the white wines were bottled in November of 2018.

Mark O'Connell has been making outstanding wines here since the debut vintage of 2010 and I have been a fan since those very first releases, but it seems quite clear to me that the 2017s are the finest wines yet from this young domaine. There is a precision, transparency and purity to the fruit tones in the 2017s that is a small, but significant, step up from what has come before at Domaine Clos de la Chapelle and it seems pretty clear that the 2017 vintage marks the start of a new and exciting chapter for this outstanding property. With new cellars in Bligny-lès-Beaune and the adequate space to work easily in the cellars, these 2017s seem to be a perfect reflection of what Mark seems to value most in red and white Burgundy and he is starting to really match the finished wines to his vision for all the beautiful potential that is old vines, great *terroirs* and a top flight vintage in the Côte de Beaune. His patience has been well-rewarded, as the last decade in Volnay in particular, and in much of the Côte de Beaune has been a challenge worthy of even the patience of Job, with so many hail-affected vintages and the brutally short, frosted crop of 2016, but finally the stars have aligned in 2017 and we can really see what the Domaine Clos de la Chapelle is all about. And, it is all good, very, very good!

### ***Vins Rouges***

#### **2017 Beaune “Champs Pimont”- Domaine Clos de la Chapelle**

2017 vintage of Champs Pimont from Domaine Clos de la Chapelle is really a charmer in this vintage, offering up a beautifully pure, red fruity bouquet of red plums, cherries, a touch of cocoa powder, a lovely base of soil tones, a hint of fresh herbs and a very judicious framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and more closed down than the nose suggests, with lovely focus and grip, a very good core of fruit, suave tannins and a long, tangy and complex finish. This is a really lovely bottle of Beaune premier cru, but it will need some time to properly blossom and the palate to catch up with the already beguiling generosity of the nose. 2025-2075. **91+**.

#### **2017 Beaune “Teurons”- Domaine Clos de la Chapelle**

These sixty-plus year-old vines in Teurons have turned out a beautiful bottle in 2017. Readers may recall that this has more limestone in its soils than neighboring Champs Pimont (where there is more clay) and so the wine is usually shows a bit more high-toned perfume as a result. The nose on the 2017 is excellent, wafting from the glass in a complex blend of cherries, red plums, gamebird, a beautiful base of chalky soil tones, a dollop of fresh thyme, violets, roses and a bit of cedary wood. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and beautifully transparent, with a fine core of fruit, tangy acids, fine-grained tannins and a long, soil-driven and beautifully complex finish. This is first class Beaune! 2025-2075. **92+**.

#### **2017 Volnay “en Carelle”- Domaine Clos de la Chapelle**

As I mentioned in the past, the domaine's vines in range from these fifty-five to sixty years of age in en Carelle Sous la Chapelle, and they have produced a lovely wine in the superb 2017 vintage. The bouquet is already quite complex, but still nicely youthful and reserved at the same time, offering up a constellation of black cherries, sweet dark berries, a bit of red plum, bitter chocolate, a lovely and quite complex base of dark soil tones, woodsmoke, *pigeon*, a hint of mustard seed and other fresh herb tones and a delicate framing of cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, soil-driven and very well-balanced, with a fine core of fruit, moderate, well-measured tannins and a long, tangy and complex finish. This is very Volnay and will age long and gracefully, but should start to offer up plenty of generosity starting around its tenth birthday. Impressive! 2027-2080+. **92**.

### 2017 Volnay “Clos de la Chapelle”- Domaine Clos de la Chapelle

The Clos de la Chapelle *monopole* has quickly become one of Volnay’s most elegant bottlings and the 2017 vintage is one of my absolute favorite vintages so far from Mark’s flagship *terroir*. The nose here is beautifully complex and transparent right out of the blocks, offering a very refined blend of plums, red and black cherries, raw cocoa, gamebird, a touch of fresh nutmeg, beautifully complex and understated fresh herb tones, a gorgeous base of chalky minerality, gentle smokiness and a discreet framing of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, nascently complex and absolutely defined by its soil element, with a lovely core of fruit, ripe, seamless tannins, good acids and outstanding length and grip on the youthful and very, very promising finish. I have adored this bottling since the very first vintage, but it seems to me that the 2017 has taken the level of complexity and transparency here up another level, though the wine is qualitatively still about the same as it has been since its debut vintage of 2010. It is just finer, more transparent and ultimately just a hair more pleasing to an old Burgundy hand like me this year! This will be approachable in another six or seven years, due to its exquisite balance, but I would try to not touch a bottle for at least a decade, as this wine is built a little bit along the lines of one of Frédéric Lafarge’s top Volnays and it is going to be so much better to drink at age twenty or thirty than it will be at age seven or eight! 2030-2085+. 94+.



### **2017 Volnay “Taillepieds”- Domaine Clos de la Chapelle**

The Domaine Clos de la Chapelle’s beautiful 2017 Taillepieds is an absolutely textbook example of this great *terroir*, as one might expect in a great vintage and sixty-five-plus year-old vines tucked in between d’Angerville and de Montille in the heart and soul of the vineyard. The stunning nose soars from the glass in a nascently complex blend of sweet black cherries and plums, dark chocolate, fresh nutmeg and other delicate spice tones, dark soil tones, gamebird, woodsmoke and a bit of vanillin oak. With extended aeration there is a touch of Bonnes-Mares-like heather tones as well here, which is utterly gorgeous. On the palate the wine is deep, full, focused and properly structured, with a beautiful core of fruit, great soil signature, ripe, well-integrated tannins and a long, tangy and perfectly balanced finish. Great juice. 2030-2090. **94+**.

### **2017 Pommard “Chanlins” Vieilles Vignes- Domaine Clos de la Chapelle**

The domaine’s vines here in les Chanlins are closing in on ninety years of age and they have produced a very elegant and soil-driven example of Pommard this year- albeit with all of the depth and structural integrity one expects from the very best wines from this commune. The bouquet is precise, red fruity and youthful, offering up scents of cherries, sweet quince, beautifully complex soil tones, raw cocoa, a bit of bonfire, *pigeon*, a touch of mustard seed and a very discreet foundation of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, transparent and beautifully generous at the core, with ripe, seamless tannins, excellent focus and grip, bright acids and a long, complex and very promising finish. All this beautiful wine needs is some time in the cellar to properly blossom. 2030-2085. **94**.

### **2017 Pommard “Grands Epenots”- Domaine Clos de la Chapelle**

The 2017 Grands Epenots bottling from Clos de la Chapelle is a bit more youthfully plush on the attack than the excellent Chanlins this year, but this too is a superb Pommard that is going to be make very old bones! The bouquet is more black fruity than the Chanlins, wafting from the glass in a very promising constellation of black plums, sweet dark berries, woodsmoke, bitter chocolate, gamebird, a touch of currant leaf, a great base of dark soil tones, gentle spice tones, a hint of violet and a judicious framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and shows off both excellent soil signature and mid-palate depth of fruit, with, ripe, fine-grained tannins, excellent balance and a long, nascently complex and beautifully focused finish. Great juice. 2030-2090. **94+**.

### **2015 Corton “Bressandes”- Domaine Clos de la Chapelle**

The Bressandes from Domaine Clos de la Chapelle is now the sole red Grand Cru in the estate’s lineup, as Maison Champy has received custody of the Corton “Rognet” as part of the divorce settlement. However, if the superb 2017 vintage is any indication, this is a crown that the Bressandes will have no difficulty wearing in the coming years. The bouquet is very precise and expressive, offering up a youthful blend of cherries, red currants, a touch of orange zest, spit-roasted gamebird, a beautiful base of soil tones, coriander seed, mustard seed, woodsmoke, a hint of cocoa powder, other gentle spice tones and a lovely foundation of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and impeccably balanced, with a great core of fruit, Corton’s signature transparency, ripe, buried tannins and a long, tangy and nascently complex finish. I do so love red Corton when it is made at this high level! 2032-2100. **95+**.





### ***Vins Blancs***

#### **2017 Beaune “Reversées” Blanc- Domaine Clos de la Chapelle**

The 2017 Beaune “Reversées” Blanc from Clos de la Chapelle is a beautifully precise and esthery example of the vintage, offering up the kind of early appeal that are going to make legions of fans for this wine right from release, but with the structure to also age very nicely. The bouquet is totally enticing, wafting from the glass in a lovely blend of pear, apple, bee pollen, gently musky spring flowers, chalky soil tones and a discreet base of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is crisp and full-bodied, with fine focus and grip, an excellent core, good soil signature and lovely, bouncy acids that lend lift and brightness, without standing in the way of early complexity and enjoyment. A lovely example of the vintage. 2019-2040. **90+**.

#### **2017 Pernand-Vergelesses “Sous Frétille”- Domaine Clos de la Chapelle**

The fine Sous Frétille vineyard is one of the ultimate “insider *terroirs*” in the realm of white Burgundy, as this very well-situated vineyard lies at the base of the hill of Corton and is often referred to as the “Baby Corton-Charlemagne”. The 2017 Sous Frétille from Clos de la Chapelle is a very fine expression of this lovely *terroir*, offering up a complex bouquet of delicious apple, pear, a touch of *crème patissière*, beautiful, chalky soil tones, a judicious framing of vanillin oak and a topnote of lemon blossoms. On the palate the wine is crisp, complex and full-bodied, with a lovely core, excellent mineral drive, bright acids and a long, youthful and very promising finish. This gently reductive in a very good way that augurs well for its future development. First class white Burgundy! 2019-2050. **92**.

**2017 Corton-Charlemagne- Domaine Clos de la Chapelle**

The 2017 Corton-Charlemagne from Domaine Clos de la Chapelle is an excellent wine and a classic example of this great grand cru. The youthfully complex nose wafts from the glass in a refined blend of apple, pear, a touch of iodine, limestone minerality, white flowers, a hint of fresh almond and a lovely foundation of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nascently complex, with an excellent core of fruit, lovely backend mineral drive, bright, zesty acids and outstanding focus and balance on the long and utterly classic finish. This is not an overly muscular example of Corton-Charlemagne, but rather a wine of excellent depth and intensity of flavor that will deliver a very complex and elegant interpretation of this great *terroir* in the fullness of time. A quintessential example of Pernand-side Corton Charlie! 2022-2060. **95.**