



San Francisco Chapter German Wine Society

One Laurel Lane
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Newsletter Vol. 08-02

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Contents

- **January Tasting Report**
- **Wine Labeling Changes**
- **March 2008 Tasting Event – Wines of the Mosel-Saar-Ruwer**

January 2008 Tasting Report

We tasted an enjoyable flight of twelve wines, mostly from the Rheingau. Only the eighth largest of Germany's thirteen wine growing regions, the Rheingau is known especially for the great aging potential of outstanding Rieslings. So it was no surprise that the 1971 Erbacher Marcobrunn Beerenauslese of Langwerth von Simmern was arguably the prize of our January event. There were also six other von Simmern wines, and all were well received by the group. Pictures from the event are on the GWS website: www.gws-sf.org. We are fortunate to have two sets of more detailed tasting notes from this event. See below.

Changes in German Wine Labeling

Beginning in August 2007 the name of what had been known as the "Mosel-Saar-Ruwer" region was simplified to just "Mosel". This simplification was motivated by marketing considerations, but rumor has it that some producers along the Saar and Ruwer rivers, which flow into the Mosel near Trier, would still prefer the traditional names on their labels. Another simplifying change that also became effective last August is that the designation "Qualitätswein mit Prädikat" has been replaced by the simpler term "Prädikatswein." The Prädikaten themselves, such as Spätlese or Auslese, have not changed, and continue to describe the degree of ripeness of the grapes, measured by the natural sugar content of the grape juice at the time of harvest. Grapes with a longer ripening period absorb additional minerals from the soil and develop an increased level of natural sugar. Thus, the riper the grapes, the more aroma and flavor in the wine.

As an aside, it is worth noting that grape sugar content at harvest, or "must", does not necessarily indicate where a wine falls on the sweetness-dryness spectrum. While the quality of the fruit is determined in the vineyard, the style of the resulting wine is determined by the winemaker. Unless the label indicates Trocken or Halbtrocken, the wine has been finished in the traditional sweeter style. Fortunately, at least in my opinion, Beerenauslesen and Trockenbeerenauslesen are only made in the traditional or lieblich style.

We will report on other changes you will begin to see on German wine labels, including those introduced by the European Union, in future issues of the Newsletter.

Next Tasting Event: Wines of the Mosel-Saar-Ruwer

Next month's event will feature Riesling from the Mosel-Saar-Ruwer. The Mosel region, to use its shortened name, is Germany's fifth largest wine-growing region, but number one worldwide in terms of area devoted to Riesling. In the Saar and Ruwer valleys, and on the Mosel from Trier to Koblenz, the Riesling grape and slate soil yield incomparably delicate fragrant white wines. They are characteristically rich in acidity and flute flavors, often with a mineral undertone and sometimes a hint of natural effervescence.

A list of the wines to be tasted will appear in the next issue of the Newsletter. It is not too early to reserve your place now for what promises to be another memorable German wine tasting experience.

Date: Friday, March 28th
 Time: 7 to 9 PM
 Location: Gate House, Fort Mason Center, San Francisco
 Price: \$40 for members, \$60 for others.
 First time guests may attend at the members' price, and each member may also bring one guest at the members' price.

Checks, payable to the German Wine Society, should be sent to:

Laura Gregory
 Board Secretary
 One Laurel Lane
 Sausalito, CA 94965

Sign-up deadline: Friday, March 21st

2008 Tasting Program

Mark your calendars for all the GWS tasting events for the year.

Date	Event Theme	Venue
Fri., Mar 28	Wines of the Mosel-Saar-Ruwer	Fort Mason
Sat., May 17	Wines of the Current Vintage	Fort Mason
Sat., July 19	Wines of a Premium Producer	Restaurant TBD
Sat., Sept. 20	Rare and Unusual Wines from Members' Cellars	Fort Mason
Thu., Dec. 4	Holiday Event	Fort Mason

Best regards from your board.



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Tasting Notes

Many thanks to our members Rich Meinecke and Von Hurson, who each wrote a set of tasting notes from the January 18th event.

Tasting Notes by Rich Meinecke

1. 2000 Blue Slate Riesling QbA – Mosel (Loosen)
Slight earthy/mushroom bouquet. Balanced and smooth taste and sweetness.
2. 1999 Erbacher Marcobrunn Kabinett – Rheingau (von Simmern)
More on the dry side, curious bouquet of riesling/slate/mushroom.
3. 1998 Erbacher Marcobrunn Kabinett – Rheingau (von Simmern)
Bouquet similar as #2, more extracted and fatter, really a nice wine. This is probably the best Kabinett.
4. 2001 Rauenthaler Baiken Kabinett – Rheingau (Staatsweingut)
Dry and tight in taste. Burnt sugar in the finish. (Not as dry as the Steinberger auction kabinett from the same producer for this vintage). This wine is closed and young. Complex with medium weight and fun. Wine needs time to show its stuff.
5. 1998 Rauenthaler Baiken Kabinett – Rheingau (von Simmern)
Nice taste with good balance. Spritzy (Excess CO₂). Penetrating acid that reminds me of lemonade in the finish and bouquet.
6. 1998 Hattenheimer Nussbrunnen Kabinett – Rheingau (von Simmern)
Sweetness and more depth without a lot of fat. Good food wine.
7. 1998 Eitelbacher Karthäuserhofberg Spätlese – Ruwer (Tyrell)
Spritzy, nice, some slate and mushroom in nose. Minty taste, some slate in finish. More substance. Good acid/fruit balance. Some riesling grape and sweetness in nose.
8. 1976 Eitelbacher Karthäuserhofberger Kronenberg Spätlese – Ruwer (Tyrell)
Definite shift. Well aged with golden color. No baby fat and minimal fruit. Dry with more terroir than fruit.
9. 2000 Erbacher Marcobrunn Spätlese – Rheingau (von Simmern)
Sweeter, a lot of fruit. A little flabby, (not enough acid) crystalline sugar in finish. Reminds me of a 2003. A crowd favorite but I think the fruit and acid are not in balance.
10. 1998 Erbacher Marcobrunn Spätlese – Rheingau (von Simmern)
Slight stemy/weedy bouquet, complex. Better depth and balance than 2000 (#9). Goes very well with food. Great balance. This may be the best Spätlese.
11. 1975 Erbacher Marcobrunn Spätlese – Rheingau (von Simmern)
Bouquet of tea and apricot. A lean wine, dry. Mature style of wine with terrior and bouquet dominating.
12. 1971 Erbacher Marcobrunn Beerenauslese – Rheingau (von Simmern)
Nice, balanced, medium weight and sophisticated. Silky with great length. Fruit and acid in balance. Honey/botrytis bouquet. Mature in the sense that everything is in balance, no hard edges. A wine to be enjoyed and not worried about. Similar in style to Leitz BA wines.

Tasting Notes by Von Hurson

A LITTLE BIT OF HEAVEN

Is there no end to the pleasures that German Rieslings provide? I recently read a comment stating the obvious – that classic German Riesling is incomparable. That no other wine can offer as much finesse, purity of fruit, intensity of flavor and wonderful acidity as a fine Riesling. Personally, I know I can settle in for an evening – curled up with a bottle of Riesling – and be utterly and perfectly content. That's my little bit of heaven.

Being absolutely passionate about Riesling, there is almost nothing that will keep me away from a chance to taste as many Rieslings as I can and thanks to the German Wine Society, I have that opportunity. On Tuesday, January 18, Laura and Jim Gregory opened up their lovely home in Sausalito for a “Member's Only” tasting. They offered up some particularly excellent tidbits to eat, but the wines – oh my!

Among the twelve Rieslings available for tasting were vintages ranging from 1971 to 2001. There was a QbA from the Mosel, five Kabinetts from the Rheingau; five Spätleesen – two from the Ruwer and three from the Rheingau; and the truly incredible 'pièce de resistance' of the evening – a 1971 Erbacher Marcobrunn Beerenauslese from the Rheingau.

I wish I could go back to re-taste the wines, making notes from the perspective that I would be asked to offer these notes to an illustrious and knowledgeable group of wine aficionados. But alas, my notes were taken casually, for the German wine uninitiated – the readers of a wine column that I write. Someone else at this event, however, took notes as well, and I hope that his observations will also be noted. Different perspectives and observations on wines help all of us, while they also bring to light just how differently the same wine can be perceived by any two people. The joy is that no one is more “right” or “wrong” than the other. And that, of course, is what makes wine so wonderful.

One quick note: As most of you know, Europe puts much more weight on the expectations of specific vintages than we do since in Europe, more emphasis is placed on the vineyard and less on the cellar. When looking at vintages, if some sound disappointing, the ultimate truth remains that excellent wines can be found in any vintage depending on vineyard location, soils and micro-climates. Vintage ratings? Something about “a grain of salt” comes to mind.

Now, into the pool with my personal observations – wines listed in tasting order:

1. I found the 2000 Blue Slate Riesling QbA from the Mosel (Dr. Loosen), from a very difficult vintage, to be amazingly good. The “Riesling” nose led to a soft wine with lower acidity, but very pleasant. The finish was medium short, with lots of nice fruit. A delightful aperitif wine.
2. The 1999 Erbacher Marcobrunn Kabinett from the Rheingau (Langwerth von Simmern) had a distinctively mineral character to it – both on the nose and on the palate. A 'lighter' style in both fruit and acidity, but with a pleasant and refreshing quality. Just a hint of bitterness in the medium finish.
3. Considered a “very good” vintage, this 1998 Erbacher Marcobrunn Kabinett from the Rheingau (Langwerth von Simmern) had a typically Riesling nose of peach and petroleum. A soft wine but very well balanced with great acidity, a silky mouthfeel and a very enjoyable medium finish. Nice.

4. The 2001 vintage, in general, received high praise and high ratings. Despite all the good press however, I found this 2001 Rauenthaler Baiken Kabinett from the Rheingau (Staatsweingut) to be a little disappointing.. It had a distinct mineral / petrol nose, but this particular wine was lacking in the acidity that I feel characterizes a good Riesling.
5. One of my favorites of the tasting, this 1998 Rauenthaler Baiken Kabinett, again from the Rheingau (Langwerth von Simmern) had great Riesling aromas – pine, minerals and a hint of citrus. The wine was light and refreshing, well balanced, had good acidity and a very nice medium-long, citrus-y finish.
6. This Rheingau 1998 Hattenheimer Nussbrunnen Kabinett (Langwerth von Simmern), with stone fruit and petrol nose, seemed particularly dry, even for a Kabinett. The bracing acidity and delicate fruit made this a good food wine.
7. Another favorite of mine, this 1998 Eitelsbacher Karthäuserhofberg Spätlese from the Ruwer (Tyrell) had a classic Riesling nose – mineral, petrol and a touch of apricot. Great with food or just sipping, it was balanced, with a wonderfully refreshing crispness and medium-long citrus-y finish. Yum!
8. The 1976 vintage was listed as “very good” to “great”. This particular 1976 Eitelsbacher Karthäuserhofberger Kronenberg Spätlese, from the Ruwer (Tyrell), seemed sadly past its prime. It had very soft, slightly musky aromas, a very light texture, and its fruit and acidity had become overly subtle.
9. Though considered a less than exciting vintage, this 2000 Erbacher Marcobrunn Spätlese from the Rheingau (Langwerth von Simmern) had an almost honeyed nose and a surprisingly viscous, full mouthfeel. Though it lacked acidity, it was still an interesting and enjoyable wine.
10. This wonderful 1998 Erbacher Marcobrunn Spätlese from the Rheingau (Langwerth von Simmern) was absolutely delightful. It had the classic mineral / steely Riesling nose, with soft floral notes. Flavor-wise it was delicate, with a perfect balance of fruit and acidity and a lingering green apple finish.
11. In the Rheingau, the 1975 vintage was considered a particularly good one. This 1975 Erbacher Marcobrunn Spätlese – Rheingau (Langwerth von Simmern), like the 1976, had noticeably declined in both aromas and flavors. I would have loved to try this wine (and the 1976) 5 – 8 years ago.
12. Coming from an absolutely exceptional vintage, this 1971 Erbacher Marcobrunn Beerenauslese from the Rheingau (Langwerth von Simmern), is what makes one bow in awe before greatness. It was, quite simply, an incredible wine – rich amber in color, a nose of botrytised honey and caramel, rich and viscous mouthfeel, great acidity to create the perfect sweet / acid balance and a long finish that I wanted to never end. I wrote such things as “WOW!” and “OMG” in my notes. This is what great German wines are all about – 37 years, and a bottle of liquid joy.

In conclusion, this was a particularly special event from start to finish, and ultimately we owe it to the wonderful German wines that brought us all together. It will be interesting to see what the newer vintages bring, style-wise. Will they evolve toward the “drink now” styles that are flooding the market, or will we be tasting 2000 and later vintages 20 - 30 years from now and still smiling with pleasure and appreciation? We can only hope.