WINE ENTHUSIAST

10 GREAT GERMAN RIESLINGS, FROM SERIOUS, CONCENTRATED BOTTLES TO SUNNY CHARMERS

by Anna Lee C Iijima | March 18, 2020

The German wines that dominate the U.S. market today are a fantastic study of two very distinct vintages, 2017 and 2018. In broad strokes, both vintages are part of a succession of the good to spectacular growing seasons that have accompanied increasingly hotter climates throughout Europe.

At the same time, their differences remind us of nature's footprint on each bottle and the challenges and glories experienced by winegrowers. In movie terms, the 2017 German vintage was a thriller—a nail-biting rollercoaster of calamity, suspense and surprise. German winegrowers will remember 2017 as a succession of hair-pulling and erratic weather conditions.

An unusually warm spring jumpstarted an early growing season. Young vines were too vulnerable to withstand sudden spring frost and suffered disruptions in flowering. Yields throughout Germany were decimated, but a dry, hot midsummer encouraged small but intensely concentrated grapes. As harvest approached, however, rain and hailstorms triggered the spread of the fungus, botrytis. The resultant wines are miniscule in production and vary widely in quality.

Yet for Germany's best growers, and particularly for Riesling producers, 2017 has turned out to be a surprisingly good vintage. The best wines are intensely concentrated and a bit nervous in youth. With time, they will reveal themselves as serious wines with penetrating extract, sharpness and spice.

By contrast, the 2018 vintage is an epic romantic comedy that has instantaneous international appeal and a heart-swooning finish. This vintage was marked by a long, dry and consistently hot summer that produced powerful, ripe wines with ample fruit and structure.

They are sunny, charming wines that are approachable in their youth. And while many worried that such an intensely hot, dry vintage would yield fat, blowsy wines, they've maintained freshness and balance, too. Cheers!



August Kesseler 2017 Lorchhausen Seligmacher Riesling GG Grosse Lage (Rheingau); $110, 95 points. Wet river rocks and steel extend into rose petal, white peach and honeysuckle in this effusive, complex dry Riesling. It's full bodied yet silken and spry, elevated by tangy lime acidity and a pristine mineral edge. Lovely already but it will improve through 2030, and likely further. Vineyard Brands. **Editors' Choice.**

Dr. Loosen 2017 Ürziger Würzgarten Dry Riesling GG Alte Reben (Mosel); $54, 95 points. Hints of smoke, struck flint and spice accent this gorgeously honeyed, intensely concentrated dry Riesling. Tangerine, quince and lemon flavors are rich and reverberating, edged by thrilling lime acidity and long, earthen finish. Fantastic already but it should gain complexity through 2030 and likely longer. Loosen Bros. USA. Editors' Choice.

Dr. H. Thanisch (Erben Müller-Burggraef) 2017 Berncasteler Lay Riesling Auslese (Mosel); $40, 94 points. Exuberantly perfumed, this tropical, sun-kissed Auslese wafts from the glass with notes of pineapple, guava and mango. It's featherlight on the palate but chock-full of sweet, pristine pomelo and grapefruit flavors. A vibrant, thirst-quenching wine that's irresistible already but should deepen well through 2030. Winesellers, Ltd. Editors' Choice.

Dr. Heidemanns-Bergweiler 2018 Bernkasteler alte Badstube am Doctorberg Riesling Spätlese (Mosel); $25, 94 points. While the nose is restrained, this finely filigreed spätlese offers piercing pink-grapefruit and lemon flavors. Its juicy style is offset by a pure, crystalline minerality and spine-tingling acidity. It's delicious now, but should improve through 2035 and likely hold further. Miller Squared Inc.

S.A. Prüm 2017 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Spätlese Grosse Lage (Mosel); $35, 94 points. While the nose is smoky and demure, the palate of this concentrated spätlese offers penetrating pink grapefruit, lemon and lime. It's exuberantly forward and lip-smackingly sweet, but it maintains an elegant edge of crushed slate. The finish is long and bristling with high-toned acidity. At peak now through 2030 but will hold further still. Taub Family Selections.

Reichsgraf von Kesselstatt 2017 Piesporter Goldtröpfchen Riesling Kabinett Grosse Lage (Mosel); $27, 93 points. While the nose is initially smoky and restrained, bold darts of tropical mango, pineapple and melon flavors abound in this zippy Kabinett. It's sumptuous off-dry style is lip-smacking and delightful. Light sabers of acidity and lean mineral tones lend elegance on the finish. American B.D.

Schloss Lieser 2018 Thomas Haag Brauneberger Juffer Sonnenuhr Riesling Spätlese Grosse Lage (Mosel); $40, 93 points. The nose here requires air and a bit of time to replace smoky, earthen notes with prettier whiffs of tangerine and lime. The palate, by contrast, is exuberantly tropical, marked by piercing mango, pineapple and melon flavors balanced by a steely, spine-tingling spine. It's lovely already but will open and improve through 2030. Rudi Wiest Selections.

Weingut Stiftung St. Nikolaus-Hospital 2018 Cardinal Cusanus Stiftswein Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Auslese (Mosel); $37, 92 points. Saffron and honeycomb lend complexity to sunny pink-grapefruit and yellow-cherry flavors here. The palate reverberates with staccato hits of lime and lemon and a lingering honey finish. This is an ethereally light but satisfyingly sweet sip to enjoy now through 2030. Kysela Père et Fils.

Schloss Vollrads 2018 Estate Riesling Kabinett (Rheingau); $25, 91 points. Crisp green apple and honeycomb introduce this enticingly zippy Kabinett. The palate is delicately sweet but offset neatly by tart lime and quince flavors. The finish is steely, long and dry. It's enjoyable now but should hold well through 2028. Delicato Family Wines.

St. Urbans-Hof 2018 Nik Weis Bockstein Riesling Kabinett Grosse Lage (Mosel); $27, 91 points. Aromas of lemon candy and tangerine peel are accented by earth and dried, savory herbs in this bristling semisweet Kabinett. It's bright and citrusy on the palate, framed by zesty lime acidity and a grip of astringency on the finish. Lovely now but it should drink well through 2030. HB Wine Merchants.

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