

# WINE News

*Watch on the Rhine—and the Mosel, too!—for great values in wine.*



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## German Wines Are Sparkling

By Eric Story

Germany has the renown of being one of the best, if not the best, Riesling-producing countries in the world—a title of which it is more than deserving, by the way. But with that comes the overshadowing of many other varietals that its winemakers also do so well, like Pinot Noir. Did you know that Germany is actually the third largest producer of Pinot Noir in the world? It's true! Pinot Noir was originally brought to Germany's winegrowing regions from Burgundy back in the fourteenth century. But it has been almost completely obscured by the unbelievable Riesling wines made there. We have also seen a growing

presence of German rosé in the wine world—which I love, love, love! By no means are we going to ignore the brilliance of Riesling in this newsletter—quite the contrary. But do keep a lookout for a number of “other” German selections that are super good and fun. You may even spot a Pinot Noir, but made as a white wine, which is super cool. And we have put a great deal of focus on the drier side of German Riesling for this issue. It is the preferred style of most native Germans and is quickly becoming a favorite selection among some of the top sommeliers around the country.

### 2015 Leitz Pinot Noir Rosé Rheingau (\$15.99)

A bright, energetic style of rosé that shows wonderful fruit textures and flavors that seem to carry on and on. Lots of strawberry, spicy rhubarb and elegant flower petals abound throughout. This is such an amazing value for the high quality this wine displays. As I've been drinking the 2014 until just recently, I suspect that this will also be drinking unbelievably well right up to and through the next vintage—good stuff!



### 2014 Leitz Spätburgunder Weissherbst Sekt Rheingau (\$26.99)

Brought to you by the emerging legend that is Johannes Leitz, this sparkling Pinot Noir carries a lot of the same qualities of the still rosé, but brought up to a new level. Fresh cranberry, white flowers and textural summer red fruits all over the nose and palate here. With a perfectly matched bubble, subdued but present minerality and lasting finish, this wine could just change the way you look at other sparkling rosés.



### Latitude 50 N Sekt Trocken Rosé Rheingau (\$15.99)

This is an extraordinarily unique blend of Portugieser, Dornfelder and Pinot Noir. It has a bright, fragrant nose and a super creamy mousse, with pretty strawberry fruit flavors accented by a hint of lemon zest and a dry, refreshing finish. It is great on its own, but has the body to complement a variety of foods, making it an excellent and versatile choice for entertaining. Try it with grilled pork sausages!



## Pfalz: The Sunny Side of German Wine

By Olivia Ragni

Alsace, the quaint little French wine region that runs along the border with Germany, to which tourists flock for its adorable villages with windy cobblestone roads, vineyards everywhere, and dry, crisp white wines, has a *doppelgänger*. Though many people visit Alsace, it seems that its German counterpart is consistently overlooked. The Vosges Mountains that protect Alsace continue across the border into Germany and become known as the Haardt Mountains. Vineyards also continue across the border, and into the Pfalz region of Germany. While the Pfalz is little known here in the US, it is actually the second-largest wine producing region in Germany. Pfalz can be thought of as an extension of Alsace, running along the same mountain range, with a climate that bears a stark resemblance, being one of the sunniest, driest and warmest regions in Germany.

While evidence of winemaking dates back as far as 550 BCE, the region fell on tough times in the late 1900s. It has since made a resurgence, especially in the last decade. The number of winemakers and viticulturists have been on the rise, with close to 4,000 winemaking operations in the region today. Pfalz could be called the Echo Park of German wine regions: cool, hip, and up-and-coming, with young, motivated winemakers experimenting with a variety of techniques and grapes working alongside seasoned pros. And if you're struggling to drink German wine because you think it's all sweet, then this is the region for you: in the Pfalz, the majority of wine is fermented dry, another similarity to its French neighbor.

The Pfalz is a region of experimentation and excitement, and von Winning has certainly drummed up a lot of enthusiasm for their unconventional techniques. From using Burgundian viticultural practices to fermenting whites in French barrels, winemaker Stephan Attman's philosophy is a bit unconventional for Germany. But his minimalist approach and respect for the vines and cellar show in his wines. **2014 von Winning "Winnings" Riesling Pfalz (\$16.99)** is an off-dry wine created exclusively for importer Terry Theise. It is fermented partly in stainless steel and partly in large oak barrels. There is a flinty minerality with flavors of tropical fruit like pineapple and coconut cut by piquant acidity and a saline finish. Von Winning also makes a beautiful Grosses Gewächs (the German "Grand Cru" designation for dry wine) Riesling, **2014 von Winning Kalkofen Riesling Grosses Gewächs Pfalz (\$66.99)**. The grapes are sourced from the limestone and marl-ridden soils of the Kalkofen vineyard, which provide for a decidedly terroir-driven wine. With initial aromas of matchstick, beeswax, and white tea, this complex Riesling just continues to unravel with air. Its structure and acidity



suggest this wine will age with grace while showing exquisitely in its youth with notes of Meyer lemon, nectarine, chalk and exotic spices. 92 points RP.

Young vigneron Markus Spindler is the eleventh generation of Heinrich Spindler, and was lucky enough to have inherited some of the most prized vines in the Forst region of the Pfalz. He continues his family's legacy of sustainable farming and creates wines with nuance and precision. The **2014 Heinrich Spindler Riesling Trocken Pfalz (\$18.99)** shows aromas of almond blossom and quince, and flavors of apricot, wet stones and salt water complemented by mouthwatering acidity and a long, dry finish. This the perfect wine to refresh your palate on a hot summer day, accompanied by some sushi. The **2014 Heinrich Spindler Pechstein Riesling Trocken Grosse Lage Pfalz (\$41.99)** is a single-vineyard wine named after the igneous rock basalt subsoil that dominates the vineyard. Fermented entirely in stainless steel, the Pechstein is elegant and concentrated, with aromas of smoke, chalk and red fruits like tart cherry plums. The waxy texture of the wine captivates your palate and wraps it in flavors of white peach, white cherry and a finish of white flowers.



Like Alsace, Pfalz has been both German and French at times, creating some overlap in vineyard holdings along the border. For this reason, some Pfalz producers' vineyards are in Alsace. Becker Family Estates is in the southernmost point of Pfalz along the border with Alsace, and actually 70% of their vineyards are in Alsace. The Becker family is a seasoned veteran in the Pfalz, and Markus Spindler actually apprenticed here before he took over his family's estate. While Riesling is still queen here in the Pfalz, the climate allows for 40% of the wine produced in the region to be red. Fritz Becker makes some of the most incredible Pinot Noir in the Pfalz. The **2012 Friedrich Becker Estate Pinot Noir Pfalz (\$18.99)** is Becker's entry-level Pinot and an absolute steal for under \$20. Notes of rhubarb, cracked black pepper and cherry burst from the glass. Earthy flavors of tobacco and dusty, savory meat accompanied by strawberry and bright, crunchy cherry dance on the palate. An exquisite, affordable Pinot from one of the legendary wineries of Pfalz, with versatility that allows for endless food pairings.



# Mo' Mosel, Please

By Andrew Whiteley

**Terroir is all about unique vineyard sites, and as a grape-growing region, the Mosel is all about unique sites.** The northerly continental climate means that without a special set of geographical circumstances, grapes would struggle to ripen at all.

Fortunately for wine lovers everywhere, the Mosel possesses just the right combination of geological factors to coax every bit of ripeness out of the Riesling vines that adorn the river valley. Absurdly steep slopes with a southern aspect contribute in important ways. The steep incline means more grapes are exposed to direct sun throughout the day, compared to a flatland vineyard. In addition, the river below reflects a great deal of heat back up toward the vineyard. And finally, the ever-important slate soils help retain heat throughout the night, keeping the grapes just warm enough to ripen, but cool enough to keep their bright acidity. To appreciate the wonderful effects this terroir has on such expressive grapes, one need only open a bottle.

## 2014 Selbach-Oster Pinot Blanc Mosel (\$17.99)

Selbach-Oster knocks their Pinot Blanc straight out of the park. Right off the bat, a beautiful yeasty, leesy bread note jumps out of the glass. It's complemented by a lovely lanolin-like minerality and the pretty floral and citrus combination of an overripe lime, the kind that turns yellow if you leave them on the tree for too long. Dry and full-bodied, the wine is rich on the palate yet light on its feet. It is fresh, but not crisp. It begs for good company and a summer evening spent outside just as the cool night sets in. A must-try for any Pinot Blanc lover.



## 2013 Selbach-Oster Riesling Kabinett Mosel (\$20.99)

It's hard to miss the wonderful, delicate perfume of this Kabinett. It conjures images of branches laden with blooming jasmine, lilies in full flower and cascading wisteria. Nectarines and white peaches play off the floral notes and the definite mineral quality of dusty stone after a hard rain. The wine is certainly off-dry but is still very mouthwatering, full of tangy acid. The finish is long and defined. It leaves the impression of a freshly baked lemon tart. 90 points *W&S*.

**2015 Peter Lauer Barrel X Riesling Mosel (\$18.99)** Dry or off-dry? Sometimes it can be difficult to tell. The Barrel X from Peter Lauer tastes pretty close to dry. It's refreshing, crisp and focused, but there is also a weight and concentration that belie the touch of sugar underneath it all. The aromatics are largely citrus based. Tart lemon,

lime and a little grapefruit make the wine decidedly zesty. There is also a little extra ripeness of pineapple and, of course, the slate minerality of the Mosel. The wine is very much alive. There is no effervescence, but it has a spectacular zip to it that gets you right on the tip of your tongue. A superb value!

## 2015 Mönchhof Estate Riesling Mosel (\$15.99)

This is easy-drinking Riesling at its best. It's not endlessly complex, but there is plenty of substance. Cool and bright aromatic tones of wet stone, frozen lemonade, and lime zest are the first indications of greatness waiting in the glass before you. There is a wisp of herbal character—green grass and black tea. Ripe honeydew melon shows off the kiss of sweetness in this slightly off-dry estate beauty. There is enough acid to go around and to keep your second and third glass feeling fun and lively. This is my favorite style of Riesling for food pairing, as the possibilities with fresh summertime fare are essentially endless.



## 2015 Mönchhof Ürziger Würzgarten Riesling Spätlese Mosel (\$30.99)

The richness and density of a great Spätlese is a special thing indeed. Coming from one of the most famous vineyards in the Mosel, this wine from Mönchhof is no exception. The nose offers golden and bruised apples, floral honeysuckle and a touch of petrol or rubber that is so often a hallmark of great Riesling. The bouquet continues to unfold and begins to offer an apple pie-like set of baking spices as well. Cinnamon and nutmeg notes hint at how the famous "Spice Garden" vineyard got its name. The palate is dense and weighty with glycerol, but the high acid keeps it far from cloyingly sweet. If you're new to the world of sweet-yet-serious Riesling, this is the place to start. It's from a great producer, a world-famous vineyard, an excellent vintage, and the price is remarkably low.





Johannes Leitz in the vineyard.

## Twenty Miles As the Crow Flies: Nicely Priced Rheingau

By Mahon Mcgrath

In the Rheingau, chances are you're going to be talking about Riesling, to which nearly 80% of its vineyards are dedicated, the largest percentage of any wine region within Germany. The remainder is mostly Pinot Noir. The wines made from either variety planted in the region's best sites can be truly exquisite—but we're going to save all that for another time. Instead, let's pretend that, like the "cut-price" protagonist in the Kinks' song "Low Budget," it's not possible at this particular juncture to simply skim the cream off the top.

I've been waiting for a compelling argument for Pinot Noir masquerading as a still, dry white wine. Heretofore, I must confess to have been somewhat baffled by the penchant for them in Germany. The results seemed so desultory next to the glories of their Riesling and Pinot Blanc, or even Sylvaner. What were they after? Consider the veil of my bemusement lifted. The **2014 Von Oetinger Blanc de Noir (\$20.99)** is a fully formed, characterful white. With a nose of petrichor and smoke, there are echoes of the Rheingau's premier wines here, but once tasted, the difference is dramatic. Texturally, it is broad and unctuous and marked by a heavy, musky, floral perfume, but with enough acidity to keep it sprightly, making for an interesting, distinctive and delicious white.

And now, time for a sparkling wine that tastes absolutely nothing whatsoever like Champagne: **2014 Leitz "Dragonstone" Riesling Sekt Rheingau (\$23.99)**. The Rudesheimer Drachenstein site will be familiar to many of our customers, as Leitz's still, off-dry bottling from it is one of our best-selling German Rieslings. While not bone-dry, this effervescent version has only enough sweetness to bring out a light touch of fruit, with mineral notions and ginger spice in counterpoint. The salient bit for me, more than the passing resemblance it bears to its sibling cuvée, is that it captures a sense of playfulness many Sekts lack. Not doing its best to be proper and serious minded, it winds up landing squarely on f-u-n.

The **2014 Spreitzer Riesling Trocken Rheingau (\$14.99)** is a perfect example of the excellent, dry, affordably priced, everyday white wines Germany is not synonymous with—unfortunate, since these represent a growing slice of the country's vinous landscape. Pretty, smiling and yet purposeful, the Spreitzer opens with honey, petrol, rocks, then throws in a bouquet of flowers, too. The palate has golden apple and white peach shadings over a citric core—summery gauze wrapped 'round a lime popsicle—but you get more of a teasing glimmer of luscious fruit than the full-on orchard idyll you might find in a Spätlese. 90 points *WS*.

Which brings us to **Leitz's 2015 Rudesheimer Riesling Trocken Rheingau (\$18.99)**. This ratchets things up a notch, but vertically, not horizontally. It is like a dingbat of a hand, with the finger pointed towards the winery's Grand Cru sites. If it isn't as profound, it nevertheless anticipates those wines' texture and structure in its firmness and self-possession. While it plays its cards close to its chest, it is not harshly austere, nor domineeringly powerful, letting slyly slip honeycomb, freesia, orange peel, gravel, ginger and hard cheese rind. Even pineapple? Well, not really, and yet this one intimates more than it will ever say—and who doesn't love a good mystery?



If bold declarations are more your line, the **2013 Schloss Vollrads Riesling Kabinett Rheingau (\$24.99)** has got you covered. This rich, powerful, sweet style of Kabinett ain't no airy Mosel affair, and fairly oozes with quince, mango, apricot, candied lemon peel and slate. If there is any defect, it is simply the wines' own compulsive gulpability. If, like me, you're hard-pressed to find a reason why you should exercise restraint with a low-alcohol wine like this, then perhaps the lesson is simply to have a second one on hand and chilled. 92 points *WE*.

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