

Dry German Riesling Grosses Gewächs

From the top-rated vineyards in Germany, these wines are vaunted as the pinnacle of quality – and the focus is shifting from power to finesse, says Anne Krebiehl MW

THIS PANEL TASTING encompassed the whole of Germany – 13 wine-growing regions covering 4° of latitude (from 47.5°N in Baden to 51.5°N in Saale-Unstrut), and every imaginable kind of soil. However, rather than look at all levels of Riesling, it focused in on Grosses Gewächs ('great growth'), the top category of the VDP's private classification. So the wines came only from VDP member-estates, but covered the breadth of German dry Riesling: only the tiny Hessische Bergstrasse and Mittelrhein were missing, as were the easterly outposts of Sachsen and Saale-Unstrut. But certainly the heartlands of German Riesling were well represented.

Grosses Gewächs wines are made from clearly delimited single vineyards that have been classified as Grosse Lage ('grand cru'), and are produced to stringent regulations. All GGs are trocken (dry), which in Germany means no more than 9g/l of residual sugar. Only three of the 95 wines tasted touched this mark, while a further seven were in the vicinity – but they had the acidity to provide the balance. I must emphasise that at these levels sugar acts as flavour-enhancer rather than sweetener, as is amply demonstrated in brut sparkling wines, which likewise come with high acidity and easily accommodate six or even eight grams of dosage while being perfectly dry. All this is to say: if you are looking for dry Riesling, the GGs are your go-to category. Most of these wines were around the 5g/l mark and below, with higher acidities than your average white.

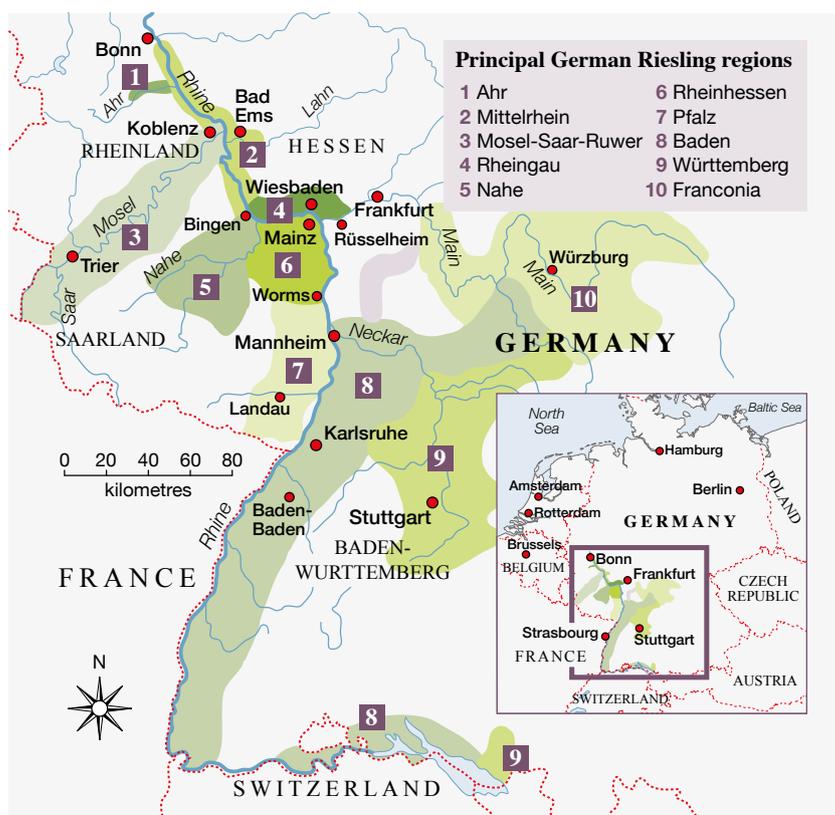
Delicate balance

When GG wines were first made in the early 2000s, it was still thought that an estate's top wines had to show their mettle. The mindset has since shifted from power back towards elegance, with delicate alcohols of 12.5% and below for almost half the wines here. The Germans have discovered what makes their wines truly German: a cool finesse and depth. When the 2016 white GGs were first released last August, the regions that stood out were the Nahe, Rheinhessen and the Pfalz: the Nahe for its uncompromising drive for purity and expression; Rheinhessen for embracing its inherent diversity, from Roter Hang via Wonnegau to its far west, close to the Nahe; and Pfalz for its exemplary restraint and nuance.

German Riesling: the facts (2016)

Total Riesling 23,700ha (of a total 102,493ha under vine)
Riesling plantings by region Pfalz 5,850ha; Mosel 5,395ha; Rheinhessen 4,536ha; Rheingau 2,495ha; Württemberg 2,113ha; Nahe 1,202ha; Baden 1,069ha; Franken 343ha.

Riesling is Germany's most planted grape variety, the 23,700ha planted representing 49% of the world's



Map: Maggie Nelson

Germany: know your vintages

2016 A difficult year: a humid spring and summer affected yields rather than quality, but a long, dry and warm autumn saved the day, allowing great aromatic development. Subtle Rieslings for the long run.

2015 A dry, warm year with a 'gloriously sunny' September gave rounded, sunny, ripe Rieslings. Hailed as a great vintage.

2014 Challenging year with some rain, but stringent selection delivered racy, taut wines.

2013 Tiny vintage, difficult year, selection was everything.

2012 Ripe, balanced, long-lived.

2011 Great in the Mosel, very good in other regions.

Riesling plantings. While 23% of Germany's vineyards are planted to Riesling, the variety accounts for 55% of VDP estate vineyards. According to the VDP, its members are responsible for 12% of Germany's Riesling vineyards and 5% of the world's. The VDP has just 3% of the total German harvest, but this accounts for 7.5% of the total turnover. Grosses Gewächs represents just 5% of production.

Source: Deutscher Wein Statistik 2017/18 and www.vdp.de

Born in Germany and resident in London, Anne Krebiehl MW is a widely published wine writer, consultant and educator, and a DWWA judge ➤

The results

A consistently high-scoring tasting, showcasing the finesse and ageability of dry German Riesling. Our experts tell Tina Gellie why wine lovers need to try them

OUR TRIO OF expert judges were impressed at the quality of wines on show in this tasting, encouraging wine lovers to stock up their cellars.

German Riesling has 'finally come of age', said Sebastian Thomas: 'Five years ago I don't think anyone would have considered doing a Grosses Gewächs tasting, because even as recently as that Riesling wasn't really mainstream. But the GG category has been very successful in a short space of time, and that's very exciting.'

Anne Krebiehl MW was pleased that producers had toned down the wines' power. 'In 2002, when GG was first presented as an official category, winemakers thought, "If this is my top wine, then bigger is better". The GG wines almost got lost in a power play. But German Riesling is powerful not by brawn, but by acidity, ageability and finesse. I'm so happy producers have stopped chasing that misguided idea.'

In terms of regions, quality was very consistent. 'I've never seen so many wines scoring 90 points or more,' said Thomas. 'Of course there were some poorer examples, but there wasn't a single region we thought was underperforming – even those we don't know well.'

In the latter camp was Württemberg, which was 'a real discovery' for Gearoid Devaney MS. 'It was a really solid showing,' he said. 'They probably weren't troubling the higher scores, but the wines were good, in a richer, spicier style.'

There was unanimous agreement that Rheinhessen was the most exciting region, offering a broad range of styles with real energy. 'Lots of balance, elegance and purity,' said Devaney, 'and when I think of Riesling, purity is always the key word.' Close behind was Nahe, whose wines Devaney found had 'good acidity, lovely fruit expression and excellent tension – "wine for grown-ups" was what I wrote in my notes'.

'The GG category has been very successful in a short space of time, and that's very exciting' Sebastian Thomas

Pfalz divided the judges somewhat, with Thomas enjoying them more than Krebiehl and Devaney, who found the toasty oak a bit dominant in a few examples.

Rheingau was criticised for being a bit uneven in fruit weight and oak, as well having 'unsuitable oxidative or natural winemaking elements'. 'We should have seen more from these historic vineyards,' bemoaned Krebiehl.

Meanwhile, Mosel was deemed 'a work in progress'. Thomas explained: 'The wines are good, but the winemakers are still coming to terms with the fact that residual sugar is not what is wanted in this dry GG style. But they'll get there.'

Regardless of the region, the big selling point with these wines was their incredible capacity to age, said Thomas, particularly the 'luscious, perfumed' 2016s and 'powerful, rounder' 2015s. 'Some of the great dry wines of Germany have matured very well, so these GGs have enormous capacity to last – 15, 20, 30 years no problem.'

But drinking them earlier was fine too, assured Devaney. 'It's subjective, but for my palate, I think the sweet spot would be 10 to 12 years from the vintage. Of course they will age beautifully for far longer, but if you pull a cork on one, you're not going to be upset!'

Our experts urged those unfamiliar with or unsure about dry German Riesling to give them a try. 'The producers have really stepped up to the plate,' said Thomas. 'They're making wines that easily hold their own with the best dry whites in the world, and you can really taste that here.'

The scores

95 wines tasted

Exceptional

1

Outstanding

6

Highly Recommended

68

Recommended

16

Commended

3

Fair

0

Poor

1

Faulty

0

Entry criteria: producers and UK agents were invited to submit their latest-release dry Grosses Gewächs VDP Rieslings. One wine per producer was permitted.

The judges

Gearoid Devaney MS



Devaney is a director of independent merchant Flint Wines. A Master Sommelier since 2009, he was UK Sommelier of the Year 2008. He was head sommelier at London's Capital Hotel when it

had two Michelin stars with Eric Chavot, and he helped open Tom Aikens' one-star Michelin restaurant, where his wine list won awards with the AA and Wine Spectator.

Anne Krebiehl MW



Krebiehl is a freelance wine writer and lecturer. She is the contributing editor for Austria, Alsace and England for Wine Enthusiast and publishes in other trade and consumer

titles including Decanter. She is a judge in the DWWA and other international wine competitions, and has helped to harvest and make wine in Germany, Italy and New Zealand.

Sebastian Thomas



Thomas came late to wine, beginning his career in book publishing. His first wine job was selling to New York restaurants, then on his return to the UK he worked for Laytons, where he fell

head over heels for Burgundy. Lured by Howard Ripley's fabulous range of Burgundy domaines, he joined him in 2000, introducing a portfolio of his other love, German wines.

Highly Recommended (continued) 90–94pts



Markgraf von Baden, Durbacher Schlossberg K Klingelberger, Baden Ortenau 2016
91 GD 89 AK 94 ST 91

N/A UK www.markgraf-von-baden.de

Taut, lean and zesty in its tangerine and lemon peel expression. Green apple notes are driven by spiky acids. Weighty but balanced, with a juicy mineral finish. **Drink** 2018–2030 **Alc** 13%



Maximin Grünhaus, Abtsberg, Mosel 2016 91 GD 92 AK 91 ST 91

£30.20 **Howard Ripley**

Lush stone fruits are laced with fresh limes, apple skin and ripe, almost tropical fruit. Generous and full but refreshing, thanks to the acidity. There's a pleasing mineral hit on the ripe, lemon oil finish. **Drink** 2018–2028 **Alc** 12%



Schloss Lieser Thomas Haag, Niederberg Helden, Mosel 2015
91 GD 90 AK 92 ST 91

POA **Justerini & Brooks**

Aromas of fresh white flowers, limes, green apples and a touch of passion fruit. Very pure, lean, racy and angular, with a citrus mid-palate and a pleasing minerality on the long finish. Clean-cut style. **Drink** 2018–2027 **Alc** 12.5%



Schloss Vollrads, Schlossberg, Rheingau 2016 91 GD 90 AK 94 ST 90

£29.40 **Carruthers & Kent, Exel, Liberty, Nickolls & Perks**

A lifted, lemony nose leads into an open palate that's vibrant, concentrated and brimming with citrus fruit, green apple, pear and white flowers. It's tangy, racy and textured, with a mineral edge. **Drink** 2018–2027 **Alc** 13.5%



Siegrist, Sonnenberg, Pfalz 2016
91 GD 90 AK 94 ST 90

POA **Amathus**

An uncompromising wine, streamlined and austere yet ripe and bone dry. A taut, textured mid-palate has pure lemon, lime and green apple, plus a smooth, underpinning minerality. This needs time. **Drink** 2020–2030 **Alc** 12.5%



Von Othegraven, Altenberg, Mosel 2016 91 GD 90 AK 92 ST 90

POA **The Winery**

A tropical nose of mango, passion fruit and minerals. It's quite extracted and textured on the palate, showing tangy citrus fruits, zestiness and a slender virtue, the phenolics keeping it going until the powerful finish. **Drink** 2018–2029 **Alc** 12.5%



Wegeler, Berg Schlossberg, Rheingau 2016 91 GD 89 AK 92 ST 91

N/A UK www.wegeler.com

The medicinal, herbal nose is lifted by notes of Cox apple and peach. It's textural and balanced in the mouth, with upfront fruit and a citric backbone. An easy style of Riesling. **Drink** 2019–2029 **Alc** 13%



Weltner, Hoheleite, Franken 2015 91 GD 92 AK 90 ST 90

N/A UK www.weltnerwein.de

Ripe fruit and spice aromas are joined by a chalky line and a hint of dandelion. The viscous palate has very ripe fruit and plenty of texture. Smooth and long. **Drink** 2018–2026 **Alc** 14%



Wöhrwag, Untertürkheimer Herzogenberg, Württemberg 2016 91 GD 90 AK 91 ST 91

N/A UK www.woehrwag.de

A rich and spicy style, with ripe stone fruits and fresh, juicy acidity – it's all at full volume here. Vivid and full, but balanced, with nice length. **Drink** 2018–2027 **Alc** 13%



Diel, Goldloch, Nahe 2016
90 GD 90 AK 92 ST 89

N/A UK www.diel.eu

A touch of bruised apple freshness on the honeyed nose. There's some reductive funkiness throughout but this is rather joyful, with gorgeous apple freshness, length and texture. **Drink** 2019–2030 **Alc** 12.5%



Dr Loosen, Erdener Prälat Alte Reben, Mosel 2015
90 GD 89 AK 92 ST 89

£75.35 **ABS Wine Agencies**

Perfumed and aromatic, showing citrus zest and citrus blossom on the nose. The palate has a kind of herbal, grassy tinge, alongside sweet peach and tangerine flavours. Slender and layered. **Drink** 2018–2027 **Alc** 13%



Graf von Bentzel Sturmfeder, Schozacher Roter Berg, Württemberg 2016
90 GD 90 AK 90 ST 89

N/A UK www.sturmfeder.de

An elegant, perfumed nose of rich stone fruits leads into a plump, rich palate – maybe a little warm – with a lot of weight to the fruit, and a long finish. **Drink** 2018–2026 **Alc** 14% ➤