

WINE News

*Wines of Germany, Austria
and Alsace.*



MAY 22, 2017 FEATURES

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An Envious Challenge

By Ryan Woodhouse

At the end of 2016 our longtime wine buyer for Germany, Austria and Alsace, Eric Story, moved on from K&L to focus on his own wines that he produces with his wife, Ali, here in California under the **Smith Story Wine Cellars** label. Thus I got my chance to take over these countries and regions that have long intrigued and inspired me. To be honest, I was excited but somewhat intimidated. All of these places have incredible historical and cultural legacies surrounding grape growing, not to mention some of the most convoluted wine regulations, laws and associations anywhere on the planet—for example, Germany has 1,500-plus classified vineyard sites and more than 6,000 commercial producers. However, there was one thing I was 100% sure about: these places produce some of the most incredible wines on the planet and almost all of them come at staggering values when compared to other places around the globe with such pedigree.

My first few months of 2017 have been filled with tasting as much wine as possible and trying to get to grips with these new responsibilities. It has been enlightening to say the least. I have been flat-out amazed by the quality of wines I have encountered and the passion with which they have been presented to me by proprietors and distributors alike. There's nothing like a wine that's impossible to pronounce and even harder to sell to get us wine geeks fired up! Yet I think the most gratifying conclusion I have drawn so far is that these regions need not be intimidating. As I said to our staff at the first tasting I hosted: "If you wait for someone to come into the store looking for Alsatian Chasselas or an Elbling from Franken, chances are you'll be waiting a long time. However, if someone ask you for a beautiful, fresh, mineral-driven white, these wines should be at the front of your mind!" To start with, here are a few wines that I doubt you'll regret checking out:

2015 Fürst Elbling Franken (1L \$14.99)

The Elbling grape was once a staple of the German wine industry. Now the variety only accounts for 0.6% of the nation's plantings. And yet this bottle is potentially the most crushable wine of 2017—so far. It clocks in at 10% alcohol—I mean, that's practically like drinking a beer. This is just one of the most deliciously refreshing, quaffable white wines in the store, bar none...and luckily it comes in a one-liter bottle!

2015 Buchegger Gebling Grüner Veltliner

Kremstal (\$19.99) The quality of this wine continues to amaze me. It's sourced from "Gebling," which is an *Erste Lage* (First Growth) vineyard site, but not marketed as such. This fascinating, focused Grüner shows crunchy green orchard fruits, mustard greens, and some citrus and saline notes. The wine gains texture and richness with every swirl of the glass. Just stunning wine for such an economical price! **92 WE**

2014 Boxler Edelzwicker Réserve

Alsace (\$19.99) This blend of hand-harvested 60% Pinot Blanc, 30% Riesling and 10% Muscat is fermented with wild yeast in large oak foudre. This is a fantastically aromatic wine but is also packed with minerality and has a fine line of acidity that gives lovely cut and verve to the wine. I could truly drink this every night.



Weingut Bernhard Ott: “Mr. Grüner Veltliner”

By Ryan Woodhouse

Achieving and maintaining a title such as “Mr. Grüner Veltliner” is a no easy feat! This is the mantle carried by Bernhard Ott, who is considered by many of his peers to be the premier Grüner Veltliner producer in Austria. Bernhard is a fourth-generation vigneron at his family’s domain, founded in 1889. The vineyards are farmed according to certified Biodynamic (respekt-BIODYN) standards and he practices minimal cellar intervention. He believes that Biodynamic farming allows him to pick fruit earlier with less sugar (and lower potential alcohol) but still get fantastic flavor development while maintaining the expression of the soil. He also produces one of the finest expressions of Austrian Riesling I have come across.

2015 Bernhard Ott “Am Berg” Grüner Veltliner Wagram (\$19.99) The name, “At the Mountain,” reflects that even though this is the least expensive of Ott’s bottlings it is still sourced from hillside vineyards, many of them steeply terraced. What I love about this wine is that for a small price increase over any number of Grüners out there, this offers the perfect stepping stone into the real world of the grape. Fantastic concentration of flavor, great texture and long, lingering presence on the palate. A wine I could drink every night. **90 VN, 90 WE**



2013 Bernhard Ott “Der Ott” Grüner Veltliner Wagram (\$29.99) Now we’re getting serious! This bottling is essentially Bernhard’s “panoramic” snapshot of the vintage from his best sites, largely Erste Lage fruit. For example, the Rosenberg IÖTW site has some “young” vines (45 years old) that don’t make the single vineyard designate—they go into this! A soft, textured wine with yellow stone fruit and some crunchier green fruit aspects, this is mouth-filling and rich yet fine, delineated and vibrant. Inspiring minerality from the high-lime content loess. Phenomenal Grüner. **91 VN**

2015 Bernhard Ott “Feuersbrunn” Riesling Wagram (\$19.99) Austria is known for its Grüner grown on deep loess soils, but the more “bony” areas, with shallow soils and rugged bedrock, are home to some of the world’s finest Riesling. The site for this wine is the highest and most exposed on Ott’s estate. Red gravel soils impart a distinctive minerality while the cool temperatures and windy conditions produce a Riesling of piercing intensity with beautiful tension and cut. Mouthwateringly delicious! Bring on the oysters.

2015 Bernhard Ott “Rosenberg” IÖTW Grüner Veltliner Wagram (\$49.99) A truly special wine sourced exclusively from vines in excess of 60 years, this sits comfortably with the greatest white wines on the planet. **94-96 RP**

A Century Later, Alles Gut at Gut Hermansberg

By Lilia McIntosh

The history of Weingut Hermansberg might not be the oldest when compared to other German domains, nonetheless it’s a very impressive one. It all began in 1902 when the Prussian state founded the domain on steep, rugged and rocky terrain, including a former copper mine. The planting of the vineyards was difficult work. Rocks had to be blown up and masses of earth moved. In 1903 the first vines were planted. After some years of neglect in the mid-twentieth century, in 2010, the former state domain was renamed Gut Hermansberg. Through extensive investments in the vineyards and cellars, and a repositioning toward quality, Gut Hermansberg is once again one of the best Riesling producers in Germany.

2015 Gut Hermansberg Riesling Trocken Nahe (\$14.99) Dry, refreshing, harmonious and lively, this is full of juicy fruit, delicate minerality and a hint of fine herbs. Light fruit aromas of pineapple, papaya, mango and citrus can be found in this wonderful Riesling. Slim, focused and dry but not austere, it’s a great example of entry-level Riesling in the collection.



2013 Gut Hermansberg Riesling Kabinett Nahe (\$19.99) Off-dry, this complex and invigorating wine starts with fresh almond blossom aromas combined with aromas of green apple and fresh Asian pear that imparts finesse and fruitiness. Light-bodied but with good concentration, slightly sweet but never cloying, it is versatile as an aperitif, an elegant companion for spicier dishes or just a great addition to a relaxing evening in the backyard.

2012 Gut Hermansberg Kupfergrube Riesling Grosses Gewächs (\$54.99) The legendary Kupfergrube is one the best vineyards that Gut Hermansberg has access to. This intense, spicy, mineral Riesling has ripe, elegant acidity and opulent fruit aromas with distinct site typicity. Showing aromas of citrus blossom, lemongrass and grapefruit, this highly concentrated wine combines elegance with power and minerality, and has great aging potential.

2014 Gut Hermansberg Weisser Burgunder Nahe (19.99) Light, floral aromas are complemented by citrus fruits, and the finish is creamy, even slightly spicy. The grapes for this wine come mostly from the Winzenheimer Berg vineyard. The soil of this vineyard also is said to bring a lot of red fruit notes to the wine.



Post up in your hütte this summer with light, refreshing reds from Austria and Germany.

The Reds of Summer: Lighter Styles from Germany and Austria

By Sharon Kelly

Summer is still a month away, but now is the time to choose red wines to include in your warm-weather drinking repertoire. Not necessarily plush, fruit-driven reds—but fresh, lighter-bodied reds from cooler climates that pair well with fare like poultry, vegetables and salads but can also stand up to saucy barbecue ribs.

Consider the wines of Austria and Germany. From Zweigelt to Blaufränkisch, St. Laurent to Pinot Noir, each of these distinctive reds bring much to the table in terms of freshness, flavor and versatility. Recently, I attended a luncheon where the red wines of Austria were paired with a fresh market menu that included dishes such as little gem lettuces with roasted beets and fresh snap peas, beet risotto and a delectable pork loin (which I'm still thinking about). Tasting the wines on their own, they were fresh, with characteristic bright red berries, peppery aromatics and moderate tannins. Paired with the menu, the food and the wine enhanced elements in each other that came together harmoniously. A beet risotto brought out the fruit in the wine, and conversely, the wine brought out the earthy undertones of the sweet, roasted beets—in some cases, the wine was even more delicious paired with food. It was the perfect example of how combining the two can create a memorable meal. In fact, this luncheon was two months ago, and I still think about it. The wines were fresh and lively and did not weigh me down.

While I don't completely disagree with the notion that whichever wine you love is the wine you should have with your meal, there is a lot to be said about the importance of food and wine pairing, and how it can enhance your dining experience in the comfort of your home or at the hottest new restaurant in town. Served with a slight chill, these wines exhibit such freshness and flavor and prove that there is more to warm-weather drinking than white wines.

Huber "Hugo" Sparkling Rosé (\$14.99)

If there is one sparkling rosé you need to try this summer, this is the one. A blend of Zweigelt and Pinot Noir, this has plenty of juicy strawberry



and raspberry fruit with a hint of rose petals. The aromas indicate there could be some sweetness to this sparkler, but it finishes dry, and its creamy mousse is luscious. This is absolutely fun to drink and should be a staple in your wine fridge for the summer season. Enjoy with fried chicken or grilled sausage—or just have a glass after a long day at work.

2013 Borell-Diehl Pinot Noir Pfalz (\$14.99) Made with hand-harvested fruit from estate-owned sites, this is tank fermented and then aged in large, neutral French oak barrels. This is a more modern style of Pinot and there is plenty to enjoy about this fleshy red. Strawberry, cherry and mushroom aromas are followed by plenty of juicy fruit on the palate with a hint of white pepper toward the finish. This is a fuller style than some of the other German Pinot Noirs I've recently tried, but it is still quite refreshing. There is length to the finish and acidity that balances. Pairing suggestions include roasted game, grilled sausage and scallops.

2013 Rosi Schuster Blaufränkisch Burgenland (\$19.99) The warm 2013 vintage shines through with plenty of blackberries, ripe raspberries and succulent sour cherries and wet stone in the nose and on the palate. This has everything I look for in a dry red wine—fruit, minerality, fine tannin, complexity and bright acidity. Chill it slightly, let it open up a bit, and you have a perfect match for grilled burgers, lamb, hard cheese, grilled vegetables and pork. **91 WS**

2014 Becker-Landgraf Sankt Laurent Rheinhessen (\$19.99) With ample flavors of ripe raspberries and blueberry coulis, this is a juicy, lip-smacking wine with a very respectable ABV of 13%. There is a touch of black pepper on the mid-palate and energetic acidity to support all of that scrumptious fruit. Once it has time to breathe, it shows elements that are reminiscent of a domestic wine—perhaps a fine Sta. Rita Hills Syrah. Dense and elegant, here is a wine for those saucy barbecue ribs.





Importer Spotlight: The Human-Scaled Wines of Vom Boden

By Ryan Woodhouse

As a wine buyer, many of my friends and family think I have a dream job: “You get paid to drink wine all day!” But as I’m constantly reminding them, it ain’t all glory. Tasting hundreds of wines a week isn’t always fun—trust me! Among the K&L buying team, one expression that we frequently use is “kissing frogs.” This refers to the amount of frogs we have to kiss before we find a “princess.” I’ve never actually made notes on how many wines audition for a spot on our shelves versus how many actually get a placement, but I would guess one in twenty.

Once in a long while, a diligent, extremely quality-oriented supplier makes our jobs so much easier. Such has been my experience with the wines of Vom Boden. This small wine importer and distributor, founded by Stephen Bitterolf, specializes in family-grown wines predominantly from Germany. Just about every wine I have tasted has impressed me. They are distinctive but not weird. They are thought-provoking but quaffable. They are world-class but not overpriced. The Vom Boden portfolio has incredible diversity all sewn together by a common thread—Stephen himself sums up the founding concept perfectly:

“They are all human-scaled wineries. They are small. It’s impossible to overemphasize the importance to us of this ‘human scale.’ Economies of scale make economic sense, but they also seem to neutralize the detail, the personality, the very thing we are searching for in wine.”

2015 Vollenweider Wolfer Goldgrube Riesling Kabinett Mosel (\$24.99) If I had to pick one wine from our German selections right now that encapsulates what I love about Riesling, I think this would be it. From an historic vineyard of own-rooted vines that are up to 100 years old, this wine is a crystal-clear rendition of how the Riesling grape can so faithfully convey sense of place. The wine is loaded with wet slate minerals and salt, beautifully contrasted with ripe fruit, dense extract and a mellifluous texture that pervades the palate. I could geek out over this wine for hours or I could pound a bottle of it in 15 minutes...both would be immensely enjoyable.

2015 Peter Lauer “Fass 8” Ayler Kupp Riesling Kabinett Saar (\$29.99) Lauer under the guidance of Florian Lauer has become a star of the Saar! He farms ridiculously steep hillside vineyards like Ayler Kupp and jokes that “steep mountain winemakers are heroes!” The wines perfectly captures what is so special about the Saar: a fierce battle between intensity and restraint. Grey slate mineral, citrus cut, jasmine, preserved ginger and spice; lees-derived texture and phenolic weight balance the structural acidity; the dash of residual sugar caresses the sharp edges but never dulls them. Awesome wine with so much character.

Hild Elbling Sekt Flaschengärung (\$16.99) Before this wine I don’t believe I had ever heard of Elbling—now I have a serious crush on this much-maligned varietal, once the workhorse grape of Germany, now reduced to a few small plantings. However, some producers are dedicated to preserving the grape’s heritage and are making remarkable wines from it. Matthias Hild farms tiny ancient, walled terraces planted to Elbling in the village of Wincheringen. The soil here is the same vein of chalk and limestone you find in Chablis and Champagne. The cool climate and Elbling’s racy acidity make perfect sense for producing Sekt. The “Flaschengärung,” meaning bottle fermented, is dry, intensely mineral and has the acidity to use as an aperitif or with shellfish, crab or crudité.

2015 Enderle & Moll “Liaison” Pinot Noir Pfalz (\$29.99) If there’s such a thing as a “cult” German Pinot Noir producer, Enderle & Moll would be it—a true labor of love (and experimentation) from friends Sven Enderle and Florian Moll. After winemaking school and stints at other wineries, they managed to procure some of the oldest Pinot Noir vineyards in Baden, planted in the 1950s. Biodynamic farming methods are used. Winemaking is very minimalist: wild ferments, no fining, only used French oak. The “Liaison” bottling has a beautiful interplay between the softer more exotic, seductive elements of the grape but also carries plenty of savory, gamy, animal and soil-derived characters. The light touch in the cellar is evidenced by the wine’s authentic aromas, flavors and feel. Beautiful Pinot Noir.

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