

The Wines of Germany

Written by Terry Connor

Tuesday, 05 June 2012 11:34

Records of German wine pourings go back to the 1300's. If I tried to tell the entire story of German wine, the Lowcountry Weekly would have to stay in business for the next 900 years. And so I yield to reality and will try to talk about just a few types of German wine that land in the Lowcountry. According to Franco I should start with Riesling, and with the summer months fast approaching; I agree.

If you were to go to the index of Hugh Johnson's *World Atlas of Wine* and look for Riesling, you would find that Riesling is grown just about everywhere in Creation. It is difficult to say just where this resilient grape originated, however; it probably was in Germany or some neighborhood close by. From the beginning, when the first winemaker in the area discovered that he/she could make wine from the Riesling Grape, acceptance of the wine was enormous. (Also from this starting point you can assume that the wine was on the sweet side.) The acceptance remained so for literally hundreds of years. The popularity of the wine spread; at first it was to Alsace in northern France where the wine was, and still is, considered to be one of the noblest. The warmer and drier Alsatian climate makes a distinctly different wine. It is a full bodied wine with intense fruit and dry to the palate. Down under in Australia, there is a German heritage in the Barossa Valley. In the Barossa Valley, the Eden Valley, and in the higher altitude of the Clare Valley, Rieslings are very popular.

Riesling also made its way to the Americas. California produces a unique Riesling wine that displays floral traits and peach-like aromas. Washington State considers Riesling to be its best vinifera, and there can be no doubt as to the magnificent performance of the Riesling grape in the New York State finger lakes region and in the northern Michigan regions of Old Mission and Leelanau.

Riesling offers the consumer a great deal of flexibility. It is pleasant whether it is drunk as an aperitif, as an accompaniment to food or, if you are so inclined, as a companion with dessert. In Germany a serious effort is made to produce some terrific dessert wines with special classifications called Beerenauslese – a sweet wine where MANY of the grapes have been affected by “Botrytis” (see Winespeak) – and Trockenbeerenauslese, where ALL of the grapes have been affected by “Botrytis.”

For us here in the Lowcountry, the retail stores appear to be stocking a fair amount of Riesling. The wine is an excellent choice, will not break the budget, and you just might move it into first place when considering an alternative to Chardonnay.

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Enjoying the contents of a bottle of Riesling is the easy part. However, let's go into some detail that will be very useful when shopping for that special bottle and try to determine some information that will appear on the label. German wines are classified according to the ripeness of the grape AT HARVEST. The wines fall into two major categories. They are table wine (tafelwein and Landwein) and quality wine. The quality wines are imported into the United States, and by German Wine Law are broken into two types. They are Qba (Qualitätswein bestimmter Anbaugebiete) and QmP (Qualitätswein mit Prädikat.) QmP wines are the wines that we will see the most of here in the United States and they fall into six levels of ripeness: They are

- Kabinett. Normally medium dry unless labeled TROKEN (DRY) or HALBTROCKEN (HALF DRY.)
- Spatlese. A late harvest wine normally medium sweet in style.
- Auslese. A medium to sweet wine where SOME of the grapes have been affected by Botrytis
- Beerenauslese. See above.
- Eiswein. An intensely sweet wine that is produced from grapes that have naturally frozen on the vine. Ice wines tend to have very rich and pure flavors.
- Trockenbeerenauslese. See above.

Now let's take a look at a label from a German Wine bottle.

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The information given above should make shopping for a German Wine much easier.

More next time as we move into other growing areas.

Cheers.

WINESPEAK

Botrytis Cinerea is a beneficial fungus also known as “noble rot.” It is necessary to produce many of the world’s great sweet wines, including Sauternes. In certain years, when the degree of humidity is just right, Botrytis Cinerea will attack the grapes, covering them with a grey colored mold. The mold lives by penetrating the skin of the grapes and using up the available water in the juice. This concentrates the sugar, flavor, and acid so that a complex wine of exceptional sweetness can be made. Botrytis is unique in that it produces flavors that harmonize with the flavors of particular grapes.

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