

The Wines of Germany: Part 2

Written by Terry Connor

Tuesday, 19 June 2012 07:18

Yes Virginia, there is a Santa Claus... and also a pretty good RED from Germany. It is called Spatburgunder (The German translation of Pinot Noir) and I really would like to receive a bottle of it in my Christmas stocking. That will probably not happen in the immediate future because Spatburgunder is produced and consumed almost entirely in Germany.

But wait! There is hope for us red wine lovers who are always searching for something different. Let's go back 10 years and get some background. At that time Spatburgunder was produced, according to Robert Parker, as a "grotesque and ghastly wine that tastes akin to a sweet, faded, and diluted red burgundy from incompetent producers." Mr. Parker ended his criticism there and went on to other wines. Evidently, someone got the message as improvement in quality has led to widespread demand for Spatburgunder in Germany and abroad. It is debated whether the improvement in quality is due to global warming or an infusion of new technology. I am of the opinion that it is both. Pinot Noir Grapes now peacefully coexist with Rieslings and other white species in the major grape growing areas of Ahr, Mosel, Baden, Rheingau, and Rheinhessen. Spatburgunder is the most widely planted red in Germany and accounts for approximately 12% of grapes planted. This limited planting is probably the reason why only a small quantity reaches the United States. It is in our future that we will see greater quantities available in retail stores.

John Tilson writes a newsletter called the Underground Wine Letter. In one of his recent issues he had this to say about Spatburgunder. "There is reason to believe that a wine like Spatburgunder might find better acceptance very soon. The reason is that the world is flooded with high extract, high alcohol wines. If this is so, then Spatburgunder may have a better future ahead in markets OUTSIDE of Germany. A warmer climate (Global Warming) means that the grapes ripen more fully now than in the past. This means more wines with more fruit and less greenness. This has greater appeal for most people. This change in the climate has led the best Spatburgunders to be elegant, supple, delicious, and very easy to drink. On the label they are represented by the letters G G ,which stands for Grosses Gewachs or Great Growths. This is the designation for the top level dry wines from selected sites of Germany's vineyard area."

Mr. Tilson finished his article with a review of a Spatburgunder 2007 Knipser Kirschgarten Laumersheim G G Spatburgunder Pfalz. This is a gorgeous, supple wine. It has a deep color and a lovely perfume with hints of green olive and black cherry with herbal and spice nuances. It is an outstanding example of the potential for Spatburgunder.

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Many Sparkling wines and Rose wines are also produced from Spatburgunder grapes. We may be able obtain them soon.

The Town of Assmannshausen, located in the Rheingau, is the most famous town in Germany for red wines. Professionals and amateurs alike, from around the globe, seek out this town each year for its one-day RED wine and food festival. (Too late. This year it was on June 2nd.)

So there you have it. I would not, if you are so moved, hesitate to ask your local retailer if the Spatburgunder is available. Who knows? You might get lucky.

WINESPEAK. I love stories about real-life people who fight impossible odds and succeed. My all-time favorite is about Dick Shea of Shea Vineyards, who bought a parcel of land in Dundee, Oregon. His goal was to produce world class Pinot Noir. He was advised by 100% of the people in the area that he would not succeed because the soil would not support a Pinot Noir crop. Convinced that he was right and those around him were wrong, he forged ahead. Today he is the leading producer of Pinot Noir Grapes in Dundee. Recently I found a similar story about a man named August Kessler. Kessler lives in the town of Assmannshausen. At age 26 he bought a rundown wine estate in Assmannshausen. Most people thought that August was crazy because no one was interested in the sort of red winemaking that makes high price tags obligatory. Kessler, like Shea, forged ahead anyway. He was convinced that if he could make the wine exciting enough he would succeed, and succeed he did. The 2003 vintage reinterpreted the Assmannshausen Spatburgunder tradition. Kessler was also correct about the demand from the marketplace. His Spatburgunders sell out despite the 65 euro price tag.

Next issue we start France. It should be fun.

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Cheers