

GERMANY / MOSEL – GLORIOUS TWINS – 2018 / 2019 RIESLINGS ARE WORTH CELLARING FOR DECADES

STEPHAN REINHARDT

30th Oct 2020 | The Wine Advocate | *Issue 251 End of October 2020*

2019 is the third excellent vintage in a row along the Mosel, and if you are generous enough, it's even the fifth extraordinary vintage since the great yet still youthful 2015 and the delicate and charming 2016. There have been great wines produced in really every existing style from dry to noble sweet. Well, the Kabinett wines are fuller and richer than we sometimes would wish for, but still irresistible. The Spätlesen and Auslesen are seductive, and the Beerenauslesen and Trockenbeerenauslesen are made to be aged for decades. In general, I tend to prefer the 2019s to the 2018s, although many 2018s have developed stunningly beautifully and brought not just impressive dry wines but some of the finest sweet wines I have tasted in many years, namely in the Bernkastel district, which is the central part of the Middle Mosel. I couldn't avoid scoring some sweet 2018 Riesling crus the full 100 points. Although botrytis was very rare and the berries were shriveled to raisins by sun and wind rather than rot, the wines show unrivaled clarity, purity, finesse and elegance. The colors are bright and brilliant rather than golden, and their precision and buoyant character is unreal. These wines will age for many decades. Molitor, Selbach-Oster, Dr. Hermann, Dr. Loosen, Max Ferdinand Richter, Fritz Haag, Thomas Haag's Schloss Lieser and certainly Beate and Matthias Knebel as well as Daniel Vollenweider and Martin Müllen are some of the sweet wine stars along the Mosel.



Müllen in Traben-Trarbach has produced incredibly piquant Beerenauslesen in 2019 yet not so in 2018, which was a great vintage for dry Rieslings in Kröv, Traben-Trarbach and Wolf. These grapes were simply too healthy for noble sweet wine, whereas in 2019, the grapes developed rapidly after the rain during the harvest, which made it impossible here and there to produce elegant and balanced dry wines. Due to the early botrytis, the 2019 BAs and TBAs can be absolutely thrilling and provided with crystalline acidity that awakens the dead. I am sure wine lovers will still be adoring all these 2019 and 2018 sweet wines in the next century. Quantities weren't small either.

However, here are some facts about the weather conditions. 2019 started warm in spring, with the budbreak taking place in mid-April. Unfortunately, spring frost on May 5th caused some significant damage in some parts of the Mosel. June was very warm, even hot toward the end, and the flowering was around mid-June. Summer was sunny and warm, sometimes even hot but not as excessive as in 2018 (though the highest temperatures that were measured in late July were a few degrees warmer than the highest temperatures in 2018). Drought stress was prevented by considerable rainfall in July, but sunburn was a much greater problem, since even wise canopy management couldn't avoid the heat radiating back up from the stony soils into the grape zone. In contrast to 2018, the temperatures dropped in mid-August and the nights alternated with warm days still in September. This rescued the acidities, which were kept on an excellent level. Since the ripening went on quickly, the harvest started pretty early, in the last part of September and went on for about four weeks. Like in 2018, all the predicates could be produced thanks to the concise acidity and the spicy fruit. The dry wines from 2019 are less powerful compared to 2018 and, thus, tend to have more thrill and tension. It's far too early, though, to judge which vintage of the glorious twins is the greater one. To be honest, 16 months ago, I still didn't expect the 2018s to be as good as they are now.

2018 started out wet and mild in January just to become sunny, bone-dry and freezing cold in February, with 23 frost days reaching more than -10 degrees Celsius, as Katharina Prüm reports. After a rather normal March, April was very warm again, resulting in budbreak during the middle of the month. May was warm and normal in its humidity, which caused a very early flowering at the end of the month—"around three weeks earlier than average," according to Prüm. Ripening continued fast in June and even sped up in July and August, which were both hot and sunny. The average temperatures in September were not that high and slowed down the ripening a bit, but the harvest started earlier than ever before—shortly after mid-September. The weather conditions during the harvest weeks were perfect. Rainfall between Bernkastel and Ürzig/Erden at the end of August and morning fogs after that caused the spread of very fine botrytis that enabled producers such as Prüm, Selbach-Oster, Molitor and Loosen to select some of their finest Prädikates of modern history. In any case, 2018 enabled the producers to select a wide range of styles from dry to noble sweet in almost all vineyards. Despite the abundant sunshine and warm temperatures during summer, the resulting wines are stunningly clear, fresh, elegant and balanced, even though they are more full-bodied than the leaner or more classy 2019s.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the excellent yields, the 2018s have been sold more slowly and even start meeting the 2019s, which were kept longer on the lees than usual. So, if you are lucky, you can still buy both vintages, which I would recommend. Alone from the theory, 2020 is not necessarily another great vintage for the Mosel except for Kabinett and lighter dry wines. But I don't want to prejudge a vintage, since Riesling goes its very own, unpredictable ways.