

Jancis Robinson, Germany's dry dictators: VDP Gew□chs proposal - the Mosel answers back

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Things happen slowly in Germany. My piece on <u>Germany's dry dictators</u>, critical of the proposal by the VDP, the top producers' association, for a new naming system that ignored wines between very dry and very sweet caused a bit of a stir back in July. In early September these proposals were presented formally at a grand dinner in Berlin where reference was apparently made to the concerns of dissenters like me.

And now the Grosser Ring, the top producers' organisation in the Mosel-Saar-Ruwer, the region famous for its naturally fruity Kabinett and Spätlese wines, has issued a statement - quite strong for wine politics - which appears below. The meat's <u>half way through</u>.

GROSSER RING VDP Mosel-Saar-Ruwer and Classification

The Grosser Ring thoroughly supports the VDP vineyard classification statute in its assertion that

'Distinguishing the top vineyard sites is an indispensable step for the cultivation of wines with unique, autonomous character that reflect their *terroir* of origin and the painstaking devotion and passion of the winegrower.'

For years, we too have acted in accordance with this belief.

Already in the mid-eighties, members of our association instituted the 'Gutsriesling' the 'Estate Riesling'. Labelling Qualitätswein with the estate name and grape variety but without vineyard designation simultaneously served to underscore the distinctive merits of the 'Prädikatswein' [wines labelled, in ascending order of natural grape ripeness, Kabinett, Spätlese, Auslese, Beerenauslese or Trockenbeerenauslese] category as well as simplify and clarify the range of wines on offer.

Today, every Grosser Ring member offers a 'Gutsriesling', thus significantly reducing the number of single vineyard designations. To the extent that the names of many mid-level vineyards no longer appear on Grosser Ring labels, the image of the 'Prädikatsweine' from top-class vineyards is correspondingly enhanced. The vineyard classification of the Grosser Ring builds on this observation, implementing the basic objectives of the VDP vineyard classification statute, but without thereby exaggerating the importance of site. We continue to believe that only the combination of top vineyards, naturally ripe grapes and the winegrower's meticulous labour and expertise can guarantee great wines._

It is with great scepticism that we observe the movement to establish 'Erstes Gewächs' ('First Growth') or 'Grosses Gewächs' as a sort of 'Super-Prädikat' above and beyond the existing qualitative designations. A new appellation only makes sense if the consumer understands and trusts it. Without this understanding and trust, a new wine designation only sows confusion and aggravation.

We continue to support the idea of natural wine or 'Prädikatswein' as it is traditionally anchored in the German Wine Law. This is the indispensable basis for the fruity (off-dry) and nobly sweet Rieslings of the Mosel, Saar and Ruwer, wines which distinguish themselves through their combination of abundant flavour and fragrance with finesse and low alcohol. The Grosser Ring is of the opinion that this notion of 'natural wine' ['Naturwein'], so rich in tradition, is by no means rusty or outmoded. It not only played a decisive role in the dazzling emergence into fashion of German Riesling at the beginning of the 20th century, but also in the Riesling Renaissance manifest world-wide today. This tradition offers us an enormous opportunity precisely at a time when natural products are increasingly in demand. For that reason too, the Grosser Ring furthers this tradition with conviction.

Thus we resolutely reject any watering down of the concept of natural wine or 'Prädikatswein'. We regard the boosting of alcohol or chaptalization of wine as a tool, but by no means as a substitute for natural ripeness, and we advocate a clear demarcation between chaptalized and un-chaptalized wines. Not just fidelity to tradition, but also full disclosure to the consumer is our objective.



Despite our high regard for dry wines, which are also very important along the Mosel, Saar and Ruwer, we consider the one-sided aggrandisement of these in the VDP statute at the expense of our renowned off-dry 'Kabinett' and 'Spätlese' to be unfortunate. The preference for one gustatory style, in disregard of regional, climatic, geological and historical differences, is unacceptable to the Grosser Ring. We find support for our position among experts and wine lovers at home and abroad. As no less an authority than Hugh Johnson put it in the very catalogue with which the VDP this month officially unveiled the 'Grosse Gewächse': 'It is the uplifting, translucent purity of a great Spätlese, Auslese or Kabinett that I love.' We do not think it was dry wines that inspired this eloquence.

However much it pleases us to witness the successes of other, above all southerly, growing regions with their dry 'Erste Gewächse' and 'Grosse Gewächse', we doubt that these successes can be transported to our region. Even within the wine-growing area Mosel-Saar-Ruwer, there is well-known variation in climate and geology, greatly influencing one¹s approach to dry wine. Hence the diverse notions of 'dry wine' operative among our members, which we neither wish, nor are able, to force into a conceptual straightjacket. We believe that consumers in no way perceive the stylistic diversity of wines crafted by members of the Grosser Ring as a stumbling block, but on the contrary as an opportunity to discover a great wine appropriate to every taste and occasion.

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