Vintage 2023

Stephan Reinhardt
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Christian Hermann said that he didn't always want to be portrayed as an outstanding sweet wine producer when he presented his current collection to me in mid-January, which included 35 wines. Among them were four amazing Pinot Noirs and 31 Rieslings, and among those six fruity sweet Kabinetts, four Spätlesen, 10 (!) Auslesen, one Eiswein (!) and believe it or not four (!!!!) Trockenbeerenauslesen (TBA). And not only that: the TBA quartet weighs in at 400 RP. And now, the 400-point Hermann doesn't want to be referred to as sweet wine expert? Christian Hermann will probably remain one and, after the publication of this report, probably for life. His Pinot Noirs, which are possibly among the most elegant, most sophisticated and juiciest in the Mosel, at least, and, to be honest, should not be missing from any cellar as long as prices are still so moderate, will not change that either. Even the dry grand crus won't save Hermann from going down in the annals of German wine as a sweet wine guru: there are only three GGs from 2023.

If the laws of the market also apply to the Mosel (and not only to the Scharzhof on the Saar), the current wine prices of Dr Hermann will no longer be sustainable. And because the wine estate has just become the youngest VDP (Association of German Prädikat Wine Estates) member, the price development is likely to go through the roof despite the general reluctance to buy, starting with the Wine Paris event in February but also the latest: the ProWein in Düsseldorf. Those who already own these wines can consider themselves lucky, as can those who still find one or the other. But anyone who has had them by the glass will have to realize that hardly any price is too high. At most, perhaps, for what Christian Hermann and Manfred Prüm call "Trinkauslese," In other words, light, delicate Auslese Rieslings without any botrytis that you simply drink very quickly and of which Christian Hermann produced no less than 14,000 bottles in 2023. Of course, the TBAs are a rarity here. You have to work hard for 100 points, and four 100 RPs even more so, because they don't just fall into your harvest basket. Nature rarely provides the raisins for these wines, and yet they have been sorted and weighed a few times. The quantity is correspondingly small, but the quality is correspondingly inimitable. Noble sweet wines of such precision, raciness and brightness are absolutely rare, even in Germany. This quartet is truly legendary, and we all should be grateful that we can buy them bottle by bottle and not in a wooden case named The Ultra-Limited 400 Parker Points TBA Quartet.

Germany, Mosel: Dr. Hermann's Four 100 Pointers and Other 2023 Rieslings from Joh. Jos. Prüm, Dr. Loosen, Immich-Batterieberg and More

By STEPHAN REINHARDT Jan 30, 2025

Despite—or perhaps because of—the major challenges posed by the weather, especially the very rainy August and hot September, the 2023 Mosel wines are of astounding, even beguiling quality. Botrytis developed quickly. Dr. Hermann, on the Mosel River, is a new member winery in the Association of German Prädikat Wine Estates (VDP). Prior to receiving this honor, Christian Hermann harvested the first Trockenbeerenauslese (TBA) of his sensational 400-point quartet on September 20, 2023 in the Wehlener Sonnenuhr. "The harvest required countless selections and was very time-consuming both in the vineyard and in the cellar," says Hermann, who, like every good vintner, first carried out a negative selection and cut everything on the ground that could not be used. Although this increased production costs considerably (by at least 30% for Hermann), it paid off. The best Rieslings of this report are of captivating clarity, precision, finesse and elegance with ripe, juicy acidity.

Maintaining this in hot September was the great art, especially for the sweet Prädikat wines, which contain no botrytis at either Hermann or Joh. Jos. Prüm. Not every Auslese does either, which gives us a whole series of ready-to-drink, irresistible Auslese wines of captivating brilliance. The cool easterly wind also helped to preserve the acidity, as did the foliage protecting the grapes from the sun. This allowed the berries for the Auslese and TBAs to slowly dry out, especially as it stopped raining and stayed dry. In the last Mosel report, I pointed out the special quality of the grapes and berries, especially for the Prädikat wines, particularly at the Lenhardt winery in Mehring, which had been less well-known until then and had produced sensational 2023s. To his own surprise, Christian Hermann even sorted three different types from Auslese to Lange Goldkapsel, which itself is actually a negative sorting of the TBA. However, the must weights in 2023 were very high in some cases, even without botrytis, which makes the wines appear generous but not opulent or even heavy or alcoholic.

"I may never experience a vintage like 2023 again," says Hermann, who still raves about the ripe and healthy, golden-yellow grapes, where even the botrytis grapes were only about 15% affected by the fungus. Hermann, who harvested an ice wine in January, has simply done everything right in this vintage and underlines his mastery with two excellent Pinot Noirs from the 2022 vintage. The wines from this producer have never been finer, fresher, more precise and more elegant. He is actually already an old hand with quite a few laurels, but with this collection, he is the rising star of the year on the Mosel.

The making of a 100-point Trockenbeerenauslese: (Top left) Picture-book Riesling raisins dried by the east wind in the Wehlener Sonnenuhr on September 20, 2023; (Top right) Sorting out grain per grain the finest dried berries (Trockenbeeren) for TBA in the winery; (Bottom left) Several-times sorted "caviar" raisins on the press; (Bottom right) Sweet, thick and oily must with about 30 grams per liter of acidity running into the stainless steel vessel. Only 32 liters with a must weight of 210° Oechsle ran from the basket press as a result from the strictest selections of 1.5 hectares. It took the yeasts nine months to ferment this elixir into an unforgettable TBA.

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