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**The Wines of Germany( 11)**

- Germany produces about 250 million gallons of wine -- but the Germans are not known as one of the leading wine consumers of the world – the per capita consumption is little over 7 Gallons.
- In the 1970s and into the mid 1980s Liebfraumilch-a well known white wine from Germany- had an impressive 6 million 9/liter cases to the USA. This amount dropped to 1.1 cases in 1995. The reason may be the growing importance of drier Chardonnay and the introduction of the California fruity wine- the White Zinfandel.
- The modern trend in world-wide wine consumption is gradually moving to dry red wines, but the Germans are well set in producing sweeter wines.
- German wine products span a relatively narrow range of unique wines, mostly white, created through a struggle against the elements of nature and topography. The wine growing regions of Germany are primarily located in the southwestern part of the country bordering Austria, Switzerland and France.
- The northern location and steep slopes of the best vineyards present all the hazards expected in a cool-climate viticulture – the saving grace is that the rivers near the vineyards help stabilize temperatures and the mist and fog from their water surface during the ripening season, offers some protection from the early frosts.
- In Germany 100,000 wine growers cultivate nearly 270,000 acres of vines. About 2.7 acres per grower.

- Although many other regions in the world have planted German wine vines – none has succeeded in capturing the many complexities of flavor in German white wines.
- Most other wine regions of the world are basing their wine classifications by geographic origin – but the Germans classify their wines based on the natural sweetness afforded by the grape.

### Rivers in German Wine Regions

- (a) The Rhine-the major river that touches almost all of Germany's wine regions
- (b) The Mosel-Saar-Ruwer(simply the Mosel) is the second most important river in the wine growing regions
- (c) The Main River- is a tributary to the Rhine
- (d) The Neckar River- is a tributary to the Rhine.

### The Major Grape Varieties

#### White wines

- (1)The most noble vine cultivated in Germany is the **Johannisberg Riesling** or the “**White Riesling**” or simply the “**Riesling.**” This grape variety accounts for nearly 25% of all the grape vine plantings in Germany.
- (2) The second most popular grape is the **Sylvaner**-which accounts for about 10% of all the grape vines planted in Germany.
- (3) The mutation vine-**Muller-Thurgau** is a cross of the Riesling and the Sylvaner. In some regions this grape is the dominant grape variety.
- (4) Two White Pinots are available in Germany-but rarely exported to the USA. They are: (a) **Granburgunder(Pinot Gris)** and the **Weissburgunder( Pinot Blanc)**.

## Red wine grapes

Few if any of these wines make it to the USA.

- (1) **Spatburgunder (Pinot Noir)**-more crisper and lighter than its French counterpart,. This German red is the major red wine of Germany. About 7% of the total vineyard plantings in Germany are of this variety. This is the Riesling's red counterpart. It is made from grapes with small berries and ripens late in the season.
- (2) **Dornfelder**- anew comer that yields deep-colored wines.
- (3) **Portugieser** (not from Portugal)-originally from the Danube River Valley. A light , mild and flavorful red for mild German dishes such as pork and veal.

**Wurtemberg**, a wine region east of the Rhine river, is the heartland of most red wine production. Rhinehessen, RheinPfalz and Rheingau also produce limited quantities of red wines.

## German Sparking Wine: **SEKT**

When the Tray of Versailles imposed the French requirements as to the use of the word Champagne on labels-after World War I, **Sekt** replaced the word Champagne in Germany. German Sparking wine is labeled "**Deutscher Sekt**" to indicate that his wine is made exclusively from wines made in Germany. Some Sekt wines are QbA wines.

## Wine Classifications

This classification system is based on the amount of sugar in the grape from each vintage.

- When a wine label carries the name of the vineyard as well as the name of the township, the letters **er** are added to the name of the township. Example: **Bernkasteler Doktor**. Doktor is the name of the vineyard and Bernkastel is the town name.

- **Tafelwein**- is the lowest grade of wine produced commercially in Germany. **Deutscher Tafelwein**, must be made entirely with German grapes and produced in Germany. Simple Tafelwein may be a blend of German wines and other EU wines primarily from Italy. This wine never carries the name of the vineyard on the label.
- **Deutscher Landwein**-a relatively new German wine category, which distinguishes ordinary Tafelwein, which comes from grapes grown anywhere in Germany, and denotes a little better quality from “land demarcation.” This can be seen as the equivalent of the French Vines De Pays category.
- **Qualitatswein** has two broad subcategories:
  - (a) **QbA** (quality wine from designated region), typically indicated by the simple statement: **Qualitatswein** on the label.
  - (b) **QmP** (top quality wine and it is labeled by a very important **Pradikat**=qualification).
- Both categories carry a certification number which may consist with as many as 11 digits.
- **QbA** wines must originate from one of Germany’s 13 wine regions and must be made from government approved grapes. These wines simply known as **Qualitatswein** constitute the largest category of wines made and marketed in Germany.
- **The QmP** wines may not be chaptalized and they are the finest wines of Germany.
- There are six special distinctions/categories/Pradikat which reflect the sugar content and ripeness of the grapes at the time of harvest. The listing below in descending order according to the quality of the wine:

- (a) **Kabinet** made with harvested grapes at peak ripeness, it is a light, semidry wine with little ,if any, residual sugar
- (b) **Spatlese-** “late harvest” wines made from grapes picked at least seven days after peak ripeness. The finished wine may have slight sweetness.
- (c) **Auslese-** “select harvest” wines made from grape clusters specifically selected for superior quality. These wines show light-to-moderate residual sweetness
- (d) **Beerenauslese** “selected harvest berries.” These are wines made from Aisles grapes-picked out individually. The individual berries are infected with the noble mold, are hand picked-the finished wines are sweet and expensive
- (e) **Trockenbeerenauslese-** “dry selected harvest berries. These wines are made from Beerenauslese grapes that have been dried-**trocken-** and infected with the noble mold-just like beerenauslese grapes-Very sweet and very expensive.
- (f) **Eiswein-** “Ice wine” can be made from any form of late harvest or select harvest grapes as long as they are harvested while frozen and their juice pressed out prior to thawing. The finished wines are very concentrated in bouquet, flavor and sweetness. Very rare and very expensive.
- (g) A recent addition to German wine classification is the **QbU**. It is not a higher quality grade based on sweetness or higher over all quality. This **QbU** simply states that 100% of the grapes came from the locale mentioned on the label.
- (h) Starting with the 2000 harvest there is a new German wine Classification –**Classic-**designating wines that are above average in quality. This designation appear along the QbP designation. The wines are made from the popular grape varieties such as the J.Riesling, Sylvaner and the red wine grape Spatburgunder (Pinot Noir).

- If a German wine label gives the grape variety-85% of the wine must be made from that grape
- If a German wine label shows a vintage, 85% of the grapes must have been harvested during that vintage.
- German wines tend to be 8-10% alcohol, whereas the French wines average 11-13% alcohol content by volume.
- Most German wines are bottled in the spring and early summer of each year. Most German wines do not require additional ageing –it has been discovered that the extra ageing destroys the fruit.
- Typically German wines are bottled in the tall slender bottles often referred to as “**hock.**” **Amber** colored bottles are used to bottle wine from the **Rhine regions**, **Green** colored bottles are used to bottle wine from the **Mosel region**. Sometimes we see **Blue** colored bottles used for wines from the **Nahe region**.
- There are three basic styles of wine in Germany:
  - (a) Trocken-Dry
  - (b) Halbtrocken-Medium dry
  - (c) Fruity-Semi-dry to very sweet

In Germany, the sugar in the grape comes from exposure to the sun-just like any other wine region. In good years with plenty of sun and with vineyards in the southerly slopes of the rivers, there is the right amount of sugar to produce a good wine. But in some years there is not enough sun and thus the grapes do not reach full ripeness. This results in high acidity wine and low alcohol. To compensate, some German winemakers may add sugar to the must before fermentation to increase the amount of the resultant alcohol. We know this as chaptalization. Remember that chaptalization is not permitted in the QbM wines.

## WINE REGIONS OF GERMANY

There are 13 wine growing regions in Germany, but the one listed below produce most of the wines we see in the USA.

- (1) In the Mosel River the **Mosel-Saar Ruwer** or just **Mosel** region.

(2) In the Rhine River there are-there are three wine growing regions:

(a) **Rheinhessen** (b) **Rheingau** (c) **Rhein Pfalz**

(3) **The Nahe-** is a minor district and acts as a transition between the Mosel and Rhine wines.

- **Rheingau.** Although only about 3% of the total German wine acreage is in this region-Rheingau is considered as one of the most important wine centers of Germany. The vineyards are located on a southern exposure along the Rhine River and thus are protected from the northern winds. The **Johannisberg Riesling** is the major grape variety grown here, with some Muller-Thoreau and Sylvania also found here.
- **Rheinhessen-** This region has the largest acreage of vineyards in Germany. It is a region of rolling hills and fertile valleys. About 25% of the vines are Muller-Thurgau, 14% are J. Riesling and the rest are a sprinkling of other grape varieties such as Sylvaner and others.  
**The Niersteiners** are the most easily found Rheinhessen wines in the US market. The city of Worms and Mainz are associated with this wine region and both cities have played a leading role in the historical development of the German nation.
- **Rhein Pfalz.** This region produces more wine than any other region of Germany. The grape varieties mirror the varieties found in the neighboring Rheinhessen. Some 50 miles of the Rhine River acts as the eastern border of this region with France forming the western border.

- **Mosel-Saar-Ruwer-** This is the western most wine region of Germany. The Mosel River becomes the border between the nations of Germany and Luxemburg. It 30,000 acres of vineyards is the fourth largest wine growing region of Germany. Virtually all of the wines from the Mosel are white-principally form the J. Riesling grape with a smaller percentage form the Muller-Thurgau.

The **Pieporter** wine and the **Bernkasteler** wines are found in this region.

In 1921 the first **Trockenbeerenauslese** was made in the Mosel region.

About the wine we know as the **Liebfraumilch**. The name has many legends. One legend is that the word “minch” or monks meant that the wine was a wine belonging to the monks of the **Church of the Liebfrauenkirche**- Church of the Loving Wife-May the Mother of Jesus. As words changed the **n** in the **minch** changed to **l**. Thus we have milch-which translates as “milk of the loving mother.”

With only 4000 gallons of wine produced annually-far less than the million of gallons of Liebfraumilch marketed each year-Liebfraumilch is any Qualitätswein grown first in Rheinhessen region and then in any other German wine region. It may be labeled Liebfraumilch as long as the label displays no other name to indicate a more specific region. The names of the grapes used to make the wine may not be displayed on the label.

## Riesling Rules (according to Gus)

- German Riesling is made in a wider range of styles than any other grape except the **chenin blanc** from the **Loire River**.
- German Riesling is the most site-specific grape. The combination of low alcohol level, no malolactic fermentation, and no cask ageing, results in the purest possible expression of the fruit's terroir.
- German Riesling is one of the most versatile wine partners with food. The combination of high acidity, low alcohol, and expressive fruit, create great matches with various foods – from fresh shellfish to game meats/poultry.
- Mosel wines are a bit more delicate and drier than their Rhine counterparts.
- The Wine Spectator in its October 2003 issue predicted that the Riesling will be the “Next Big White” to compete with the Chardonnay. The magazine cited the grape's world-wide acceptance as a vine to plant, it grows in a variety of climates from Alsace to Australia, it is accessible and not a mystery grape.

## What is Suss-Reserve?

A common misconception about German wines is that fermentation stops and the remaining residual sugar gives the wine its sweetness naturally. On the contrary, some wines are fermented dry. Many German winemakers hold back a certain percentage of unfermented grape juice from the same vineyards, the same varietal and the same sweetness level-classification. This is known as **Suss-Reserve**, and contains all the natural sugar and it is added back to the wine after fermentation. The finer estates do not use the Suss-Reserve method, but rely on stopping fermentation to achieve their wine style.

### **The Spatlese Rider-The First Late Harvest Wine**

The story goes that at the vineyards of the Schloss Johannisberg, the monks were not allowed to pick grapes until the Abbot of Fulda gave his permission. During the harvest in 1775, the abbot was away attending a synod. That year the grapes were ripening early and some of them had started to rot on the vine. The monks, becoming concerned, dispatched a rider to ask the Abbot's permission to pick the grapes. By the time the rider returned, the monks believed all was lost, but they went ahead with the harvest anyway. To their amazement, the wine was one of the best they had ever tasted. That was the beginning of Spatlese-style wines.

# MAJOR WINE REGIONS OF GERMANY

