



vom Boden

the hat knoweth things

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Germany 2015: the ripest coolest vintage



2015: the coolest ripest vintage

by Stephen Bitterolf

part 1: the ripe hype

I would say that by early November I had already gotten numerous emails about vintage 2015 from growers, friends and colleagues in Germany.

January comes along and inevitably someone on social media drops the “best-vintage-since-1971” bomb. Or maybe no one actually says it or writes it, but rather someone reports that someone else saw it posted online, somewhere, though no one can remember where. (It was probably on Snapchat.)

“...inevitably someone on social media drops the ‘best-vintage-since-1971’ bomb...probably on Snapchat.”

The first reports were pure relief. Even over email you could feel the long, deeeeeeep exhale.

After two very difficult harvests, the fall of 2015, for the most part, offered blue skies, little stress, easy picking. Growers smiled and laughed. Harvest was fun. No one really talked about the juice yet. More just: it’s over. It was really good. Let’s see.

December brought more and more emails with a sort of guarded, cautious optimism. No one wants to be the asshole who first declares greatness, but things were looking very good.

Maybe very, very good.

February offers the first truly considered statements by thoughtful growers. And they are very, very positive.

By the beginning of March, whatever the truth of the vintage, I’m becoming a little wary of the growing enthusiasm from the crowd. And here’s the reason: 2015 was a warm, maybe even hot vintage. Another one of those “warmest year ever” things. Obviously the chemistry here is complicated, but the basic formula of warm weather = more ripeness = more residual sugar and/or more alcohol should be lost on no one. In such a vintage we’d also expect a drop in acidity.

This is where I’m getting concerned. For me, and likely for you if you’re reading this, ripeness isn’t necessarily greatness.





The paradigm has flipped the **** over and especially in a place like Germany, where delicacy is the calling card, where acidity is the magic (not the other way around), a really warm vintage makes me nervous.

Let's just say it out loud so we can all get it off our chests: from the crudest of meteorological facts (read: hot, hot, hot), 2015 could be likened to 2003.

“In the Mosel, the 2015ers have all those things that made the 2001ers epic.”

However, let's not allow the comparisons between 2003 and 2015 to go any further, because 2015 IS NOTHING LIKE 2003.

So, what is 2015 like?

In the Mosel, the 2015ers have all those things that made the 2001ers epic right outta the gates. They are dense, locked and loaded with saturating, penetrating fruit. They are rich in mineral and – here's the kicker – they have a very, very serious acidity. Vollenweider specifically mentioned 2001 as the comparison most apt for him. (For those of you that have experienced his 2001ers, feel free to freak the **** out.) For others in the Mosel, the vintage feels like a more technicolor, deeper and more forceful version of 2012. In some ways, 2015 feels like a friendlier side of 2008. It's a tad weightier, more obviously plush, with more happy, gregarious, in-your-face fruit, yet the mineral and acid and rigor of 2008 are there. And if you don't know, I think 2008 was simply fabulous.

Two-thousand and fifteen may be the coolest damn vintage to have ever been born from a very ripe year. This makes little sense, but there it is.

I have no idea if this is the second coming of 1971 or what, but I was blown away.

The wines of 2015 are awesome and thrilling.

part 2: das Wetter

Aside from the warm weather and the lack of rain (granted, two very big factors, and we'll get to them), the story of 2015 seems to be more a story of moderation than anything else. Bud break wasn't really early or late, flowering was more or less normal, the harvest time was more or less normal, yields were good, at least for most growers.

As mentioned, it was a warm vintage. The grapes were ripe. But most growers said they weren't overripe. Obviously this is easy enough for them to say: I wasn't there, you weren't there (were you?). But it's also easy enough to check. Compared to 2013 and 2014 (both very lean vintages), the 2015ers clock in with maybe one degree more alcohol, not a whole lot. But the general stature, the feel of the wines, is cooler. More importantly, they don't taste overripe; the flavors of the vintage showcase plenty of yellow and green.



Kehlingen



chtum

Wincheringen



Helfant

Mosel

Palzem

Wehr

Ahn



Ehnen

Staldbredmus

Wormeldingen

Greiveldingen

Romach

Berf Heimmacher
Wollendingen

Counterintuitively, what will perhaps, in the end, define vintage 2015 more than the heat was the cold... the cool.

September and October presented the growers with unusually cool weather, especially at night. So while ripeness levels came into these months on or above target, the acidities just didn't fall as would be expected. Even given the cool nights and their ability to preserve acid, many of the growers were surprised by the strength of the acidity when tasting the grapes, and then when tasting the wines, and then getting the actual analytics. The tension of the wines, their kinetic energy, is almost shocking.

“This is a geek vintage you can serve your Grandmother... Lucky Oma.”

The dryness of 2015 was another factor which might have, in the end, helped to shape the moderate size of the vintage. It slowed the vines down a bit, keeping ripeness and therefore alcohol under control. I also heard stories of the heat and dryness keeping the berries relatively small, with thicker skins, to conserve water and protect against sun burn. Thus we have wines that don't feel hot at all; in fact the sheer impact of the top wines of 2015 has, to me, more to do with 2013 even than 2014. The best are sort of tactile and grippy like the 2013ers. The big difference is they are gripping your mouth with generous, luscious fruit, not just salt and acid.

At the right addresses, this is an acid-lovers vintage. It just has a lot of juicy fruit too.

This is a geek vintage you can serve your grandmother. I wonder if that's what they were saying after first tasting the 1971ers and 75ers?

Probably not, but it's a fun idea.

part 3: grower by grower

Note that I'm only really reviewing the Riesling-based estates that release on the more traditional schedule. Enderle & Moll, Shelter, Stefan Vetter, J.B. Becker - these growers do their own things on their own schedules. Which is how it should be.

Julian Haart

I'm tempted to write a more elaborate introduction, with some sort of crazy crescendo, but the simple truth is 2015 is a revelatory, breakthrough vintage for Julian. As good as Julian's first





four vintages were, his 2015ers are simply on another level. They are pure energy incarnate. Most people (including John Gilman who flipped for the wines) are going to give a slight tip-of-the-hat to the Prädikat wines (the Kabinetts, especially, are BONKERS), yet my sense is with time the dry wines may equal or better them. These wines will be SUPER limited, so if you are interested please email us at info@vomboden.com

Hild

This cornerstone estate of the forgotten upper Mosel shines brighter every vintage. Matthias will be releasing, in addition to his culturally important and stunning old-vine Elbling from terraced vineyards, a number of natural-yeast Elblings. Stay tuned. Beautiful vintage for Hild.

Keller

The fact that Keller's wines are awesome in an awesome vintage should surprise no one. To my palate though, the last two vintages at Keller have also been awesome. So we're sort of in a holding pattern at level "awesome." At the highest levels (the GGs, etc) I think 2015 is different stylistically, but not necessarily qualitatively. In other words, they are different (deeper, richer, more powerful) but not better. To me, the jaw-dropping thing about Keller's 2015 collection is the level of the basic wines. The estate dry wine kicks the **** out of many an estate's top wines. The "von der Fels" is epic. And Keller, having sort of mastered the dry wine thing, is more and more channeling his mother (who's from the Mosel) and turning his attention toward Kabinett-style wines and holy hell are they good. His 2015ers are likely the greatest Prädikat wines KP has ever made.

Lauer

Florian is a funny guy. While every grower is shouting from the rooftops about the greatness of vintage 2015, Florian remarks to me that for lots of growers, 2015 is so great simply because 2013 and 2014 were such disasters. It's a double-edged sword though for Lauer, because if 2013 and 2014 were not disasters at Lauer (and they were not), then it holds that 2015 is not that much better, and I think that's probably true. In other words, as I wrote with Keller before, Lauer sort of goes from strength to strength. His 2015ers remind me a lot of his 2012ers, though they are more exuberant, more perfumed. That said, Florian's fermentations take longer than most and while lots of growers are bottling and selling, Florian's wines are still bubbling away.

Seehof

Seehof presents a range that sort of mirrors the basic theme at Keller as well, which is to say that while the top wines are good, the "basic" wines punch one or two classes above their weight. The estate dry and feinherb are joyous and airy.

Stein

Keller said something to me along the lines of, "in vintage 2015 you're going to see what the winemaker likes to drink, because nearly anything was possible." For Stein, you know right away- this man values freshness and zip above all else. Ulli's 2015ers are mineral-water fresh with more stone fruit and more layers than the 2013ers and 2014ers. Absolutely gorgeous.





peter lauer
weinhaus ayler rupp . triererstrasse 49
an dorfplatz
ayl

Vollenweider

Daniel Vollenweider has compared his 2015ers to his 2001ers and that, my friends, is a very, very good thing. Along with Julian Haart, Vollenweider has shaped the raw power of this vintage into something sculptural, piercing, incisive. While the Prädikat wines are dizzying (the Kabinett, especially, deserves an Emmy, or an Oscar, or whatever) the finesse and balance of his dry wines gets better each year. For the dry wines, the 2014ers were a turning point for me.

Weiser-Künstler

The meditative and humble Konstantin Weiser and Alexandra Künstler are making magical wines unlike any other estate in Germany, period. The wines are simply brilliant and ethereal - they elude any easy classification. Stylistically, they are delicate, porcelain, mineral and herb. Even in this blockbuster vintage, Wei-Kü's wines whisper high-tones, mineral water and rock. This is likely the greatest collection they have ever made and while every wine is a "best in class," special mention has to go out to the Ellergrub Kabinett which may be one of the single greatest young Kabinetts (wines?) I've ever tasted. Certainly not in terms of raw impact (Julian Haart and Vollenweider have that), but in detail and levity and some sort of glowing, magical quality that just makes you feel, something.

part 4: photography

cover shot

From left to right, Stefan Vetter, Stefan Vetter's hat, Stephen Bitterolf and Stephen Bitterolf's hat in Vetter's cellar in Franken.

page 2

Stairway to heaven running directly up the Gaispfad vineyard, worked organically and biodynamically by Weiser-Künstler.

page 4

From left to right, Stephen Bitterolf's hat, Stephen Bitterolf, Julian Haart's hat and Julian Haart in the Goldtröpfchen.

page 6

A wall painting in the cellar of Hild in the upper Mosel, showing the names of the wine villages in this area.

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From left to right, Stephen Bitterolf's hat, Stephen Bitterolf and Konstantin Weiser not wearing any damn hat at all.

page 10

On top of Florian Lauer's Ayler Kupp with the Saar River running through the background. No hats were involved in this photo.

back cover

Dusk with Ulrich "Ulli" Stein and Ulrich "Ulli" Stein's hat in his .22-hectare vineyard called "Hölle" (hell). The vineyard is one of the oldest sites in the Mosel still producing fruit, with approximately 1,200 ungrafted vines planted in the year 1900.



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