

The Society's 'Germany Walkaround' tasting.

If you know anything about Germany as a wine region, you'll probably know it's famous for being the undisputed home of riesling, where it's often referred to as the 'king of grapes'. It certainly lives up to its name: riesling's racy acidity and fresh purity of fruit is expressed perfectly when grown in vineyards close to the major rivers and tributaries that weave through Germany's wine-producing areas. But although riesling is certainly 'king' in Germany, the production of German red wine is also on the rise, with spätburgunder (Germany's name for pinot noir) fast becoming a must-try wine for Burgundy fans.

Wines are numbered on tables around the room. Where applicable they are grouped by producer, and the rest are grouped by grape variety.

Enjoy your tasting.

The Society's sweetness code:

White wines from bone dry [1] to lusciously sweet [9]

○ = white wine

● = red wine

S = screwcap closure

The 2017 Vintage

A vintage of surprises with its fair share of challenges, 2017 is a year of great quality, but low quantities.

A spring which more resembled summer encouraged budbreak as early as the first half of April, three to four weeks ahead of normal. However growers know better than to celebrate too soon, being especially wary of spring frosts – these are particularly common throughout May during the Saints' Days of Mamertus, Pancras, Servatius, Boniface and Sophia, collectively known as the Ice Saints.

In 2017 this unseasonably warm weather was quickly followed by unusually heavy and widespread frosts in late April, which led to relatively large crop losses at many estates with yields down around 18% on 2016.

On the plus side, the early loss of part of the crop enabled the vines to put all their energy into the remaining fruit, leading to an increased concentration of extract and sugar, the latter well balanced by sound acidity.

After this short and icy interlude, warm and dry weather returned and would last throughout May, June and early July to bring about a rapid development of grapes, way ahead of schedule.

Rain in August and September, particularly up in the Mosel, often helped to alleviate previously dry conditions, plumping up the small, intense concentrated berries. Nights were reported to be cool throughout the season so the grapes had no difficulty maintaining acidity. However localised heavy rain and isolated hail storms caused some problems meaning that a stringent selection process was required in the vineyards to stop the spread of rot, exacerbated by the warm, humid conditions.

The supreme quality of the dry wines is evident on tasting, but at the other end of the spectrum, the Indian-summer conditions in late September/early October also favoured the production of fabulous noble sweet wines up to Trockenbeerenauslese level. Enjoy!

Weingut Reichsgraf von Kesselstatt

Mona Loch

The von Kesselstatt estate, dating back to 1349, owns the finest spectrum of sites in the Mosel, Saar and Ruwer Valleys. In 1978 the Reh family acquired the estate from the *Reichsgrafen* (imperial counts) of Kesselstatt. Annagret Reh-Gartner, a great and true friend of the Society who died in October 2016, was at the helm of the business, supported by her husband Gerhard.

The 36 hectares of estate-owned vineyards are planted exclusively with riesling on steep, stony soils where the warmth is maintained in the marginal German climate. Leading vineyard holdings include Scharzhofberger in the Saar, Kaseler Nies'chen in the Ruwer and Josephshöfer and Piesporter Goldtröpfchen in the Mosel. These are wines characterised by clean, ripe fruit, impressive balance of acidity and minimal intervention in the winemaking process. Fittingly, the wines are fermented with natural yeasts, adding to their individuality and fragrance, and are kept on the lees for extended ageing.

1. ○ [1] **RK Riesling Dry, Von Kesselstatt 2017**

Impeccable dry riesling from the Mosel, ripe tasting, round and delicate. This could be enjoyed on its own or with a stir-fry. Drink now to 2021. 12% S

ref **GE11391** **£10.50 bottle** **£126 dozen**

Together with its two small tributaries, the Saar and the Ruwer, the Mosel comprises one geographical entity as it meanders nearly 150 miles north-east towards the Rhine. Along the serpentine route of the Mosel, the river banks rise so sharply that the vineyards carpeting these slopes are among the steepest in the world, with some planted at an astounding 70 degree gradient. On these precipitous inclines, nearly all labour must be done by hand. That includes tying each vine to its own eight-foot wooden stake, and carrying up the slate soil that has washed down with the winter rains. Although each of the three rivers' vineyard areas produce a wine with its own distinctive personality, they share a family resemblance. These are the best low-alcohol wines in the world, with an extraordinary amount of fruit, character and elegance for such low alcohol.

2. ○ [3] **The Society's Saar Riesling 2017**

A fresh appetising riesling from Germany's outstanding 2017 vintage. This comes predominantly from von Kesselstatt's holdings in the villages of Nierdermennig, Oberemmel and Wiltingen. The result is a ripe-tasting and long-flavoured wine which we're proud to put our name to. Drink now to 2024. 10.5% S

ref **GE12351** **£10.50 bottle** **£126 dozen**

3. ○ [3] **Niedermenniger Riesling Kabinett, von Kesselstatt 2017**

An attractive, citrusy textbook Saar riesling from the excellent, steep and south-facing Herrenberg vineyard in the village of Niedermennig, the Saar river's next loop up from Scharzhofberg. Drink now to 2026. 9% S

ref **GE12361** **£11.50 bottle** **£138 dozen**

Traditionally quality wines in Germany have been labelled *Qualitätswein* and *Prädikatswein* although this system is now used more for sweeter wines. Here quality is dependent on two factors: the ripeness/quality of the grapes and regional specificity. The Prädikatswein classification is based on the ripeness of the grapes when they are harvested – the sweeter the grape, the higher the potential alcohol and/or sweetness in the wine. **Kabinett** is the lightest style of riesling, made from grapes that have a sweetness level of 67-82 Oechsle (148–188 g/l sugar). Kabinett wines range in style from dry to off-dry. **Spätlese** means ‘late harvest’. These grapes have a sweetness level of 76-90 Oechsle (172–209 g/l sugar). Spätlese wines are rich and usually sweeter than Kabinett. **Auslese** means ‘select harvest’, and the grapes are picked at 83-110 Oechsle (191–260 g/l sugar) where the grapes are hand-selected and are often affected by noble rot. **Beerenauslese** means ‘berry select harvest’. These wines are rare because the grapes are raisined and affected by noble rot. They are picked at 110-128 Oechsle (260+ g/l sugar). **Trockenbeerenauslese** means ‘dry berry select harvest’. The rarest wine of the group this is made from raisined, late-harvested grapes picked at 150-154 Oechsle.

4. ○ [4] Kaseler Nies’chen Riesling Kabinett, von Kesselstatt 2017

Bewitchingly gorgeous riesling from a famous and very steep vineyard that overlooks the diminutive Ruwer River. Racy, peachy citrus fruit. Drink now to 2024. 8.5%

ref **GE11751** **£14.95** bottle **£179** dozen

In the small town of Kasel, just south of where the Ruwer River meets up with the Mosel, the 14.2 hectare ‘Nies’chen’ vineyard is widely considered to be the top site in the valley. It rises at a dizzyingly steep grade (up to 70%) with soils of Devonian blue slate turning out finely etched, ethereally aromatic rieslings.

Weissburgunder

Germany’s name for pinot blanc, weissburgunder, is an ancient variety that thrives in fertile or chalky soils and ripens fairly late. Wines made from weissburgunder tend to have a less pronounced bouquet than those made from grauburgunder (pinot gris – from which it mutated) but they do have fresher acidity.

Most plantings are in Baden and the Pfalz, but it is also a traditional variety in the Saale-Unstrut and Sachsen regions and today weissburgunder accounts for 5% of total grapes grown in Germany. The various styles of weissburgunder range from crisp and dry to heavy and rich with high alcohol levels and an ability to age.

The drier styles of weissburgunder are extremely popular with food.

5. ○ [2] Weissburgunder, Weingut Jülg 2017

A deliciously fruity, dry pinot blanc in a fresh and direct style. Perfect as an aperitif or with food. Though a German wine, the grapes are all grown across the border in Alsace thanks to a delightful post-war anomaly when the Franco-German border was redrawn!

Drink now to 2022. 12% S

ref **GE11821** **£10.95** bottle **£131** dozen

6. ○ [2] Jechtinger Weissburgunder Trocken, Bercher 2017

This is a lovely example of German weissburgunder: fruity, dry and refreshing, yet with plenty of ‘grip’ on the palate to make it a fine choice for food. Quiche or an onion tart spring to mind. Drink now to 2022. 13% S

ref **GE11661** **£12.50** bottle **£150** dozen

The most basic element of food and wine pairing is the understanding of the balance between the weight of the food and the weight (or body) of the wine. Coming from a top vintage such as 2017 the weissburgunder above has the creamy texture and flavour profile, and also the weight and acidity to cut through the creamy richness of the quiche or onion tart.

7. ○ [1] Weissburgunder, Unterturkheimer Gips, Aldinger 2016

A dry and refreshingly fruity German take on pinot blanc. This comes from the Neckar Valley, close to Stuttgart, and is well worth trying. Drink this year and next. 12.5% S

ref **GE10341** **£15.50** bottle **£186** dozen

8. ○ [1] Weissburgunder Toni Jost 2017

Toni Jost has achieved legendary status for his finely etched wines. This pinot blanc comes from the Rhine Valley, close to innumerable castles and the famous Lorelei cliff. Refreshing, clean and fruity, to savour on its own or with cold meats. Drink now to 2023. 13%

ref **GE11651** **£12.50** bottle **£150** dozen

This family estate is run by Peter Jost, who took over from his father Toni in 1975. Peter and his daughter Cecilia currently own 15 hectares of vines, which include most of the outstanding Hahn vineyard on the banks of the Rhine, with its steep slopes of dark slate soil. Here the vines are protected from the wind by the surrounding hills and the river reflects and intensifies the sun’s rays.

Riesling

One of the most ancient German grape varieties, high-quality riesling is generally low in alcohol and high in acidity and extract – there is rarely any shortage of flavour and aroma. Riesling is an excellent medium for communicating the variations of terroir, be it limestone, granite or marl soils, coupled with the altitude and expositions of the sites. It is because of this that it is very difficult to generalise about the variety’s aromas and character; the wines can range from floral and fruity to mineral and spicy, bone dry to intensely sweet, though most German riesling is dry. Riesling can also make some of the longest-lived wines in the world.

9. ○ [2] The Society’s Ruppertsberg 2017

A lovely, round, fresh and fruity white made from silvaner and riesling. Delicious with or without food. Drink over the next 12 months. 12.5% S

ref **GE11371** **£6.95** bottle **£83** dozen

Germany’s most popular vine variety in the early 20th century, today silvaner is only the fifth most planted variety, being a long way behind the two most planted white wine grapes, riesling and müller thurgau, and the red varieties spätburgunder and dornfelder. At its best silvaner tends to produce dry rather than fruity styles of wine with good minerality, a certain raciness as well as lots of body.

10. ○ [1] Wachenheimer Riesling, Bürklin-Wolf 2017

The village of Wachenheim lies on volcanic soils and always makes wines that are full-flavoured and spicy. Whistle-clean, refreshing riesling. Drink now to 2025. 12.5% **S**
ref **GE11671** **£14.95 bottle** **£179 dozen**

11. ○ [1] Kreuznacher Kahlenberg Riesling Dry, Dönnhoff 2015

From one of Germany's top producers and a vineyard that is not especially steep but is well sited and well suited to make very fine dry riesling. This delicious 2015 has mellow flavours of plum, apple blossom and citrus. Drink now to 2027. 12.5% **S**
ref **GE9761** **£22.50 bottle** **£270 dozen**

The 2015 vintage has been hailed as an outstanding vintage. Country-wide there was a welcome absence of the usual vine afflictions of poor flowering, frost, hail, mildew or rot. After an exceptionally hot and dry summer the vines were 'saved' by rain, which was necessary to ripen the grapes, in August. This perfectly suited late-ripening varieties like riesling which benefitted from the sunny weather at the beginning of October. The long, dry summer meant that quantities were lower than usual, and the grapes tend to have higher sugar levels, which translates to higher alcohol in those wines fermented dry.

12. ○ [3] Ruppertsberger Hoheburg Riesling Kabinett 2017

Great-value off-dry, full-flavoured German riesling from the heart of the Pfalz. Gentle with a touch of honey and a twist of lime. Drink this year and next. 10.5% **S**
ref **GE11501** **£7.50 bottle** **£90 dozen**

The Pfalz's relatively dry, warm climate is caused by the low-lying Haardt Mountains, which run along the region's western edge, forming a natural barrier against cold winds and rain blowing in from the west. The wines are predominantly made from riesling, in a style markedly richer and riper than that found almost anywhere else in Germany and can range in style from spiced apple, baked pear and pineapple (in warmer years) to preserved lemon and green apple in cooler vintages.

13. ○ [3] Johannisberg V Riesling Kabinett, Johannishof 2017

A Rheingau with a delicate flavour of limes and crab apple. 'V' stands for the Vogelsang vineyard whose wines have lightness and charm and are accessible early. Lovely balance in the ripe 2017 vintage. Drink now to 2023. 8.5% **S**
ref **GE11721** **£12.95 bottle** **£155 dozen**

When the Rhine hit the Taunus mountains it turned west, creating many sunny south-facing slopes on the north bank, now the great vineyards of the Rheingau. Early on, its medieval ecclesiastical and aristocratic wine-growers were associated with the riesling grape and, in the 18th century, were credited for recognising the value of harvesting the crop at various stages of ripeness from which the German quality system evolved. Queen Victoria's enthusiasm for Hochheim's wines contributed to their popularity in England, where they, and ultimately Rhine wines in general, were referred to as Hock. Wines from the Rheingau can be extraordinary, both full-bodied and racy, invigorating, and long lived. Most are now dry.

14. ○ [3] Maximiner Gröhhauser Herrenberg Kabinet 2017

A delicate, filigree, featherlight gem of a wine from one of Germany's top producers. Simply bewitching. Drink now to 2028. 7.5%

ref **GE11961** **£18.50 bottle** **£222 dozen**

15. ○ [4] Traiser Rotenfels Riesling Kabinett, Crusius 2017

Richly perfumed German riesling, piquant, spicy and full-bodied from an outstanding producer in the Nahe. These wines always take a while to be at their best, but this will be worth the wait! Drink now to 2028. 9.5%

ref **GE11901** **£16.00 bottle** **£192 dozen**

The Nahe region is named after the river that traverses the valleys of the forested Hunsrück Hills as it flows toward Bingen on the Rhine. Although the Nahe is one of the smaller German wine regions, it has an extraordinary range of soil types and it is for this reason the region is able to produce quite diverse wines from relatively few grape varieties. The steeper sites of volcanic or weathered stone and those with red, clayish slate seem predestined for elegant, piquant rieslings of great finesse and a light spiciness.

16. ○ [5] Wehlener Sonnenuhr Spätlese, JJPrüm 2012

Floral, racy, with sensuous fullness and elegance, this is a wine just at the beginning of a potentially long life. It shows already the superb quality of one of the Mosel's greatest vineyards made by a family with an amazing record of great wines. Drink now to 2030. 8.5%

ref **GE8221** **£28.00 bottle** **£336 dozen**

Riesling is king in the Mosel with all 14.5 hectares of the Prüm's steeply sloping land planted with this most noble variety. The heart of the estate is the famous Sonnenuhr vineyard perched over the river opposite the village of Wehlen, one of Germany's great sites, producing riesling of breathtaking quality. Indeed the wines of Prüm are synonymous with this great vineyard. Neighbouring Graacher Himmelreich and Bernkasteler Lay are two other notable vineyards where JJ Prüm has large stakes.

17. ○ [6] Saarburger Rausch Riesling Auslese #7 2003 Zilliken

Recently shipped from Zilliken's cellars in Saarburg, this is a gorgeous, mature Auslese with peach, apricot and strawberry fruit flavours to the fore. Still very fresh. Drink now to 2027. 8.5%

ref **GE11861** **£39.00 bottle** **£468 dozen**

18. ○ [7] Lieser Niederberg Helden Riesling Auslese Goldcap Schloss Lieser 2015

High-level Auslese of great purity and delicacy with the intense flavours of very ripe riesling. This is a nectar to be savoured over many years. Drink now to 2035. 7.5%

ref **GE9521** **£39.00 bottle** **£468 dozen**

A golden capsule or foil on the bottle is only given to certain bottlings which the winemaker has marked out as being particularly special. It usually refers to a Prädikatswein that is sweeter, having higher levels of ripeness, or which is more intense than usual, and which is both more expensive and much rarer than their normal counterparts.

19. ○ [9] Dr Loosen Riesling Estate Eiswein 2016

Ernie Loosen bottled his stunning German Eiswein into quarter-size bottles making it a perfect pudding wine for two. Riesling was picked in a frozen state in November with the first really cold night of the year. Drink this year and next. 7% S

ref **GE11582** **£32.00** 187ml bottle **£372** dozen

Very low stock

The ultimate late-harvest wine, eiswein can only be produced when temperatures drop low enough to freeze the grapes on the vine (around -7° C). The sugars in the fruit, unlike water, do not freeze and as the grapes do not tend to have been affected by botrytis the resulting nectar is very intense, with pure varietal fruit characteristics and the wines range in sweetness from around 160–220 g/L residual sugar.

Scheurebe

Pronounced ‘shoy ray beh’ is one of Germany’s most successful crossings (silvaner x riesling). Primarily planted in Rheinland-Pfalz in Rheinhessen, the Pfalz and the Nahe, Scheurebe’s bracing, often lemon-sherbet acidity make it suited to the production of all styles of wine, from dry and off-dry through to the noble sweet styles of beerenauslese and trockenbeerenauslese. With its distinctive notes of blackcurrant, peach and grapefruit, and occasional flavours of passionfruit, mango and lychee, scheurebe is often compared to sauvignon blanc.

20. ○ [1] Haardt Scheurebe, Müller-Catoir 2017

The flavour of this scheurebe is actually halfway between sauvignon blanc and viognier: very dry but intensely fragrant. What’s more, the 2017 vintage offered the perfect conditions for its full expression and richness. Drink now to 2021. 13%

ref **GE11681** **£14.95** bottle **£179** dozen

Pinot Noir

Pinot noir is early ripening so only cooler regions have a long enough growing season to produce interesting wines. In its youth, wines made from pinot have cherry and raspberry fruit and perhaps savoury, dried herb notes. As it ages, pinot takes on truffle and earthy forest floor complexity. Pinot noir can be precocious both on the vine and as a wine, with only the best demanding long ageing, the majority being relatively soft, fruity and easy to drink.

21. ● Spätburgunder, Markgräflerland, Martin Wassmer 2016

A finely grained pinot noir from Baden in southern Germany. This has sweet, ripe bitter cherry and cherry pip flavours and great length. A true bargain for pinot lovers.

Drink now to 2024. 13.5%

ref **GE12331** **£14.50** bottle **£174** dozen

Baden is the southernmost of Germany’s wine regions. It is primarily a long, slim strip of vineyards nestled between the hills of the Black Forest and the Rhine River, extending some 240 miles from north to south. Comprised of nine districts, Baden has many soil types and grape varieties. Nearly half of the vineyards are planted with ‘burgunder’ (pinot) varieties.

22. • Spätburgunder, Marienglas Unterturkheimer Gips 2014

A full-flavoured, barrel-aged pinot noir from a top vineyard in Württemberg, Germany. This would go well with a venison stew. Drink now to 2027. 12.5%

ref **GE11321** **£35.00** *bottle* **£420** *dozen*

Spätburgunder undergoes a pre-fermentation maceration before natural yeasts begin the fermentation in barriques for Grosses Gewachs wines. This additional level of classification called VDP (‘Verband deutscher Prädikatsweingüter’) is based on where the wines are grown – a regional designation similar to Burgundy. ‘Grosses Gewachs’ meaning ‘great growth’ indicates the highest quality regional designation that is typically associated with a single vineyard or small grape growing area.

Trollinger

Trollinger is a red grape variety originating in the wine regions of South Tyrol and Trentino. Today trollinger is the fourth most planted variety in Germany and is almost exclusively cultivated on the steep, warm vineyards in Württemberg. Late ripening, trollinger gives fragrant and fruity light-bodied wines with soft acidity, forest-fruit flavours and a subtle smoke character.

23. • Trollinger, Fellbacher Alte Reben Aldinger 2016

This comes from old vines and was aged in barrel for a few months. The result is a pale and plummy German red with a touch of strawberry fruit, oak and spice. Drink this year and next. 13%

ref **GE11611** **£16.00** *bottle* **£192** *dozen*

Württemberg is situated to the east of the Rhine and Baden, between the Tauber Valley and the foothills of the Swabian Jura. The vineyards of Württemberg are located primarily along the valleys of the Neckar River and its tributaries, the Enz and the Rems, north and east of Stuttgart. With more than half of its vineyards planted with red grape varieties, Württemberg ranks as Germany’s premier red wine region with spätburgunder accounting for 10.3% of the vineyard area in the region.

Kunstler

Gunter Künstler

Gunther Künstler had big shoes to fill when he took over from his father Franz in 1992. Franz, whose family had owned vineyards in Moravia, Czechoslovakia for three centuries before expropriation and exile at the end of the Second World War, was an influential winemaker and one of Germany’s best of the post-war period. After more than a decade as winemaker at the famous Domdechant Werner estate he established his own vineyards and winery in 1965, the latter in the famous town of Hochheim-am-Main, where he proceeded to accumulate small parcels of vines on excellent sites, and very quickly established a superb reputation for the quality of his wines. Fortunately Gunther has been more than capable of meeting the challenge and many would argue that Künstler is the top estate in Hochheim. From their seven hectares of vineyards at eight sites around Hochheim they produce exhilarating dry and sweet wines from riesling, and have recently acquired four parcels further along the river at Rudesheim.

24. ○ [2] Riesling Trocken, Künstler 2017

This is full-flavoured, spicy and dry, with lots of character. Very much a food wine to be savoured with pork or Asian dishes. Drink now to 2024. 12.5% S

ref **GE11691** **£39.00** *bottle* **£468** *dozen*

25. ○ [2] Hochheimer Stielweg Riesling Alte Reben Trocken, Künstler 2017

This riesling comes from 50 year-old vines and it has steely, intense flavours of ripe yellow plum and spice. Elegant and full-bodied with good potential for ageing. Drink now to 2030. 12%

ref **GE11711** **£20.50** *bottle* **£246** *dozen*

26. ● Assmannshäuser Spätburgunder, Künstler 2015

For 500 years pinot noir has been dominant in this corner of the Rheingau where sheltered steep slopes have given ideal protection to Burgundy's grape variety. This has depth of flavour and the richness of a great vintage. It will keep well and develop greater complexity. Drink now to 2025. 13%

ref **GE11841** **£22.00** *bottle* **£264** *dozen*

27. ○ [9] Hochheimer Hölle, Riesling Trockenbeerenauslese, Künstler 2015

This is a wonderfully concentrated and complex dessert riesling with flavours of pineapple, crystallised citrus peel and angelica. Outstanding. Drink now to 2032. 6.5%

ref **GE11222** **£159.00** *half bottle* **£1908** *dozen*

Trockenbeerenauslesen is a very sweet dessert wine made from individually selected, shriveled grapes that have the highest sugar levels of all quality German wines, with flavours concentrated further by noble rot. In the right conditions noble rot, the fungus *Botrytis Cinerea*, feeds on the acids and water in the grapes, dehydrating them and thereby increasing the sugar concentration. The resulting wines tend to have luscious apricot and nectarine flavours with intense sweetness balanced by marked acidity. Trockenbeerenauslesen wines rank among the greatest sweet wines in the world.