

# WINE News

*Our deep selection of Europe's most interesting wines doesn't stop at the Rhine—join us as we venture across the Danube, and beyond!*



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## The Big Kid Pool

By Eric Story

**Welcome to the other world of wine.** Here are the wines you will rarely see mentioned in glossy magazines, or scoring big points with the point system herd. These are wines that may not find broad mainstream acceptance, because they aren't looking for it. These are the wines that are made out of a passion for place and a passion for the varietal, the types of wines that create deep-seated passions that last the remainder of one's life. This issue is dedicated to wines that open doors into heretofore unknown worlds, wines that create intrigue and inspire you to explore further into the "other" parts of the wine world. Without a doubt, there will be more than one producer name or varietal which you will be unable to pronounce. Don't let this hinder you. Feel confident in the fact that these are the wines that wine geeks, sommeliers and other

winemakers go for when they pull corks for fun and leisurely evenings. I can honestly say that I have never gotten excited over a social media post about a 99-point Cabernet. But a post on something like the **2012 Henry Marionnet "Les Cepage Oubliés" Gamay de Bouze (\$20.99)** from the Touraine... I just may want to check that out. Flash up something about the **1994 Schloss Schönborn Hochheim Domdechaney Riesling Spätlese Gold Kapsule (\$32.99)** and you will really have gotten my attention. And, if you just happen to be drinking a crispy little Chenin Blanc like the **2012 Cave de Saumur Saumur Blanc (\$9.99)** while grilling sausages, tell me all about it—I may even consider you to be among the smartest wine drinkers! To put all of this another way, don't restrict yourself to the conventionally popular wines and regions of Europe. Set sail.

**2006 Umatham "Frauenkirchen vom Stein" St. Laurent Burganland (\$62.99)** The oldest vineyard in the village of Frauenkirchen, "vom Stein" has light and permeable soils full of gravel and quartz. Dark red, with aromas of cherries and citrus peel and hints of savory spices and woody herbs, the palate is full of spiced cherry, dense blackberry and clove with a dense finish of silky tannins. A fantastic match for game and roasted lamb dishes.

**2011 Schmitt's Kinder Silvaner Trocken (\$19.99)** The fruit for this nifty little Silvaner is all hand-harvested from the Erste Lage (first growth) vineyard Ranersackerer Teufelskeller. Stainless steel fermentation and extend-

ed lees contact make for a wine with a good crispy edge to it, with lots of yellow fruit layers along the palate and a finish with good cut and length.

**2011 Michel Delhommeau "Symbiose" Muscadet Sèvre et Maine Sur Lie (\$14.99)** This is showing absolutely superbly! The "Symbiose" is a selection of vines which are grown in amphibolites soils. Sharp steely minerals, up front brightness with nice reach across the palate and



a good juicy length. Just a touch more density across the palate with a broader sense of texture reaching through the finish.

**2008 Skouras "Megas Oenos" Peloponnese (\$24.99)** 80% Agiorgitiko (St. George), 20% Cabernet Sauvignon. The color is very deep and intense purple. In the nose it is dense, concentrated and complicated. Shows nice and elegant. Aromas of ripe fruit such as blackberries and raspberries are coupled with a spicy characteristic, smoke and a touch of leather that all fill the nose. In the mouth it is silky but powerful, framed by delicate tannins and gentle acidity and offering flavors of ripe fruits, cloves, black pepper and just a touch of herbs. 90 points RP.

## SHINE A LIGHT ON *Chinon*

It is difficult for me to approach the generous, life-enhancing red wines of the Loire, and especially Chinon, without conjuring the robust, thirsty shade of its most famous son, François Rabelais, for his wise and benevolent presence (he died in 1553) still speaks directly to why we drink wine at all. Steeped in the vast and noble terroir of the Renaissance, he poured forth lustily ripe tales out of a bottomless flagon, advising his readers that our thirst for the juice of the grape was synonymous with our search for wisdom in this life. Of course Rabelais also cautioned them to “always look a gift horse in the mouth,” or in our case, to read the damn label before buying, “ye illustrious toppers!”

The famed wines of Charles Joguet still bear Rabelais’ image even though M. Joguet, who spent 40 vintages writing and rewriting the book on how to achieve the greatest potential out of Cabernet Franc in Chinon, sold the winery some years ago and retired to devote himself to painting. The **2009 Charles Joguet “Clos de la Dioterie” Chinon, (\$46.99)** cultivated from 80-year-old vines planted in limestone and clay on a modest, shallow slope, is a miracle of elegance, power and restraint, with lovely aromatic appeal and a caressive intermingling of ripe black fruits, forest floor, spices and complex tannins. Give it a few more years to unwind its magic before an opening date with a slow-braised pork loin and phyllo-wrapped spinach tart. 93 points *WE, WS* and *W&S*.

In striking contrast to the Dioterie, the **2011 Domaine de la Noblaie Chinon (\$16.99)** demonstrates the unabashed, truly Rabelaisian appeal of the grape when given the chance to express its fruitier, more

capricious personality. Immaculately executed in stainless steel, this buoyant Cabernet Franc was organically cultivated on limestone soils, contributing to the wonderful freshness and purity. A juicy wild berry quality permeates the harmonious palate, with enough character and spine to belie its incredible price. And the **2012 Domaine de la Noblaie Chinon Rosé (\$16.99)** harbors a virtual cornucopia of fruit within its beautiful pink complexion—perfumed flavors of strawberries, raspberries, fill in the blank berries, supported by a crisp, dry finish—ready to animate your meals throughout the year with panache, flavor and abandon.

Before I surrender this wine-dipped pen, let me mention one of the many older, larger format bottles that we carry from yet another great producer, Domaine Couly-Dutheil. The **1976 Couly Dutheil “Baronnie Madeleine” Chinon (1.5L \$114.99)** is a delicately textural, seductive wine created from several distinctive plots to, ahem, honor the birth of “not” Monsieur Rabelais, but our very own “steeped in Loire” Eric Story, the nice fellow whose nose for great wines and wonderful values remains, in a word, epic. Is that a rollicking fable or what?

— John Majeski



## CHENIN BLANC *The Wine of Kings*

Of all of the French wine growing regions, the Loire Valley produces the greatest diversity of wine styles, from still to sparkling, bone dry and mouth-puckeringly tart, to unctuous and sweet, in all hues from water white to soft salmon pink or deep purple. Of these

diverse wines, Chenin Blanc stands with kingly flourish above all in my mind, subdued and pensive, showy and flirtatious, or righteous and strong, as occasion demands. History tells us that Chenin Blanc was the wine of the kings of the Loire Valley, at Châteaux Chenonceaux, Amboise and Chambord, among others. Certainly the limestone soil from which Chenin Blanc gets its characteristic racy acidity is the same soil from which the great chateaux were constructed. In fact, there is some speculation that the name “Chenin Blanc” is derived from the Château Chenonceaux—the place where in 1496, the vine was allegedly planted by Thomas Bohier. True or not, try out these affordable expressions, which range from dry to sweet and are all under \$22. You just might make a royal New Year’s resolution to include Chenin Blanc in your diet in 2014! *Santé!*



**2011 Les Chancelières Vouvray (\$10.99)\*** Green pear, citrus, mineral and apple, with subtle notes of honeysuckle. Dry with medium-plus acidity, this inexpensive, refreshing 100% Chenin Blanc is well-balanced and bright. Fabulous with roasted chicken, grilled shrimp, or cheese and perfect for daily drinking as an alternative to Sauvignon Blanc or Chardonnay.

**2011 Sylvain Gaudron Vouvray Demi-Sec (\$14.99)** Subtle stone fruit, apple, persimmon, honey, mineral and a hint of smoke, with medium plus acidity and slightly off-dry. 100% Chenin Blanc from a family-owned property. Vibrant, balanced, and ever-so-slightly sweet, this elegant Vouvray would be fantastic paired with a spicy meal, but lovely on its own.

**2010 Pithon-Paillé “4 Vents” Coteaux du Layon (375ml \$21.99)** In 2008, the famed Loire Valley vigneron Jo Pithon, his wife Isabelle, Isabelle’s son Joseph Paillé and his wife Wendy, joined together to start Pithon-Paillé—a négociant not unlike those in the Rhône Valley or Burgundy. This botrytis-affected Chenin Blanc comes from 20- to 30-year-old vineyards in four villages at the center of the Layon Valley. Stone fruit, honey, pear, apple and quince, this vivacious, slightly earthy wine pairs beautifully with funky cheeses, spicy nibbles and just sweet desserts. What a value!

— Sarah Covey

# The Valleys are Alive with the Song of Riesling

By Mahon Mcgrath

As anyone recollecting on their school days may agree, the most capable student is not, perforce, the most popular one. So it is with Riesling, a varietal that has been much heralded by critics and connoisseurs as the greatest white varietal wine, and yet is far from being the most called for in this day and age. Does it matter? Riesling's virtues are clear, its history a long and storied one. No other grape so nakedly expresses its origins, nor does so in such a kaleidoscopic range of styles, from bone dry all the way to opulent, honeyed richness; remaining convincing, even ravishing, at all points along the way. The thing is, while you can take the grape out of Deutschland, you can't take the Deutschland out of the grape. When it is planted farther afield than Alsace and Austria, greatness proves elusive.

One of the varietal's definitive seats has long been Schloss Johannisberg in the Rheingau. With a documented history of grape growing stretching back to the ninth century, the site went all in for Riesling only as recently as the 18th century, with a palace likewise replacing the Benedictine monastery that once kept watch over the vineyards. Through all the tumult, not only did the terroir's superiority remain evident, but a number of innovations were realized, among them the recognition of the benefits of late harvesting botrytis-infected grapes. The **2011 Schloss Johannisberg "Grünlack" Riesling Spätlese (\$49.99)**, then, with its exotically perfumed yet superbly balanced character, is a thrilling taste of a story, both human and natural, with roots in antiquity. 93 points *WE*, 91 points *ST*.

With its vertiginous slate vineyards and cold climate, the ethereal Mosel Rieslings represent a different, but no less compelling, tradition. Delicacy, finesse, elegance and balance are the watchwords, and the Prüms of **Weingut J. J. Prüm** capture this perfectly in the **2012 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Spätlese (\$37.99)**. What other region and what other varietal can produce such compelling, long-lived wines, while weighing in at a whopping 8.5% alcohol? This vineyard's sundial might as well be set for years as hours. While perfectly charming in their youth, to gain the most from Riesling's seemingly weightless voluptuousness here, one needs a good store of patience. 92 points *WE*.

Then again, that isn't the only tune Riesling can whistle in Germany. The Pfalz, with its comparatively balmy clime courtesy of the protection offered by the Haardt mountain range, is not as marginal a place to grow grapes as the Rheingau or the Mosel. Indeed, in its southern most reaches it is closer to Alsace than the Rheingau. Is it surprising, then, that here Riesling can make compelling dry wine? The **2012 Ökonomierat Rebholz Riesling Trocken (\$18.99)** gives a good indication of the mineral-driven tension and verve possible. While it has not quite the richness of an Alsa-



*Riesling can even be pleasing in Rheinhessen.*

tian Riesling, nor is it a sigh in the dappled sunlight of a spring green wood, but an earthier, if lively, take.

A short step away geographically, Alsace's multifarious soil types and differing culture and philosophy, represent a big leap in terms of Riesling's character. It exists here as an historic, ancient, vine growing region with an improbably dry climate for its northern location, as well as the crucible for newer notions, such as biodynamics. For all that it is still—as every considered tradition ought to be—very much in an ongoing process of becoming, Riesling again proves to be the one supremely sensitive conduit through which to channel the maximum taste of the best parcels of earth in which it is grown.

With its broad texture, incipient tropical succulence and piney spice, the **2011 Charles Sparr Brand Riesling Grand Cru (\$24.99)** hails from a famed granitic terroir, while the **2008 Schlumberger "Saering" Riesling Grand Cru (\$23.99)**, which shows a full and ample body, is a more focused, drier, mineral and quince-driven wine from the site's sandstone ground.

Realizing yet another set of possibilities in Austria, Riesling finds magic in top sites along the Danube in Wachau and Kremstal, and close by in the Kamptal. Though a Federspiel, not a Smaragd, the **2011 Gritsch 1000 Eimerberg Riesling (\$18.99)** shows the magnificence possible in Wachau, with power and complexity yoked to a wonderfully flinty elegance, and a character that manages to suggest both savory and sweet while being thoroughly dry. The designation "1000 Eimerberg," or "1000 bucket mountain," is the vernacular name for the castle hill of slate and gneiss overlooking the town of Spitz from which this wine originates. **Weixelbaum's 2011 "Wahre Werte" Riesling (\$23.99)** from the Gaisberg hill (the famed Heiligenstein hill's "little brother"), over in the Kamptal, gives voice to the region's mica slate, with an attractive and pronounced wet stone character laced with ripe stone fruit.

If you listen closely and attentively to the way Riesling conveys the spirit of the vintage and the character of its site through its own unique personality, you will indeed find yourself enchanted by its siren song.



## GEORGIAN WINE *On My Mind*

I had the good fortune to visit the Republic of Georgia in 2013, and what an enlightening adventure it was. Georgian wines are now on the radar of many somms and retailers around the country because of the distinctive style with which they are made. Many of the wines are fermented and aged in large clay pots called *Qvevri* (Kve-vri) that are buried in the ground. Though this style may be new to us, the winemaking there is informed by centuries—nay, millennia of winemaking tradition. Some of the oldest archeological sites of winemaking are in Georgia. It is truly a place where past meets present, where organically and sustainably farmed vineyards create wines with robust flavor profiles.

One of the top advocates of the region is John Wurdeman of Pheasant's Tears. Not even Georgian, (he's from New Mexico) John expatriated, fell in love and, as all Georgian men do, began making wine. With his business partners he's created wines of flavor and complexity. The most accessible is their red from a local grape called Saperavi, which means black grape. The **2010 Pheasant's Tears Saperavi (\$16.99)** is inky and black—just like its name—with dark fruit flavors of blackberry, currants, brambles and spices. Excellent for grilled meat dishes or salty cheeses.

The whites are where things get really interesting. During fermentation, most whites are left on the skins and seeds of the grapes. After fermentation, some are pressed but many are left on the skins to age for up to six months. Hence a style of wine is created that is commonly referred to as "orange wine." The color kind of gives it away: The long maceration colors the wine a deep orange/amber hue. You won't find your classic flavors of apple, pear and lime here; these wines pack a wallop of flavor unlike anything else on the market. The **2011 Pheasant's Tears Kisi (\$19.99)** is intriguing, with notes of almond skins and a distinctly kumquat finish.

The tradition of winemaking is so strong that the church is still one of the biggest wine producers. The Alaverdi monastery has been producing wines since 1011. The grapes are all purchased from or donated by members of the congregation. The **2010 Alaverdi Monastery Cellar Rkatsiteli (\$23.99)** wine is full bodied, even tannic by a measure; 92 points *WE*. If Nebbiolo had a white wine cousin, this would be it. It has aromas of rose hips, jasmine tea, baked apples and Seville oranges. But how to serve and enjoy these wines? Surprisingly, they are very refreshing. Don't serve them too chilled. Lots of vegetables on the table, eggplant, cured fish, beet salads and of course grilled pork and chicken. They are surprisingly versatile. *Gaumarjos!* (Georgian for "cheers!")

—Keith Mabry



Paris Sigalas in his Assyrtiko vineyard with ancient terraces.

## GREEK WINES *More Than Meets the Eye*

Greek wines offer a tremendous depth of variety and intriguing flavors derived from the many different grape types grown throughout Greece. Some of the most popular Greek wines at K&L are Assyrtiko-based wines from the enchanting island of Santorini. This white grape is full bodied with high acidity, making wines with power and complexity. Assyrtiko is sometimes blended with varieties like Aidani and Athiri that add a soft freshness to the wines. The **2012 Sigalas Assyrtiko Santorini (\$20.99)** shows citrus

and mineral flavors; 90 points RP. The **2012 Sigalas "Aa" (Assyrtiko/Athiri) Santorini (\$15.99)** blend is softer and fruitier. The **2011 Hatzidakis Assyrtiko Santorini (\$15.99)** is lively and fresh; 93 points *W&S*.

Peloponnese wines are also well worth trying. Moschofilero is a pink-skinned grape that produces somewhat floral wines. The **2012 Skouras Moschofilero Péloponnèse (\$14.99)** is full bodied and rich—90 points RP and *W&S*—while the **2012 Troupis Mantinea Moschofilero (\$16.99)** is a lighter, crisper style with a hint of minerals. Both wines are white, dry and tasty.

The red wines of Greece are also something to consider next time you are shopping for a wine that will go well with a meal. Agiorgitiko is a medium-bodied wine that is a spicy and is made in many different styles. The **2011 Constantin Gofas "Mythic River" Agiorgitiko (\$14.99)** is a rich and concentrated, and while a pleasure to consume now, could also be aged. The **2010 Skouras Saint George (Agiorgitiko) Nemea (\$13.99)** is more medium-bodied and will go well with any food.

Stunning, world-class wines are made with Xinomavro, which is like a Greek Nebbiolo and produces wines with subtle aromas and a nice crisp balance. The **2006 Foundis Xinomavro Naoussa (\$16.99)** has flavors of violets and earth. The **2009 Domaine Karydas Xinomavro Naoussa (\$25.99)** is full bodied and lusty with intense flavors; 90 points RP and *W&S*. The **2012 Thymiopoulos "Young Vines" Xinomavro Naoussa (\$13.99)** is bright, lively and easy to drink.

—Jeffrey Jones

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