

HOW TO READ A GERMAN WINE LABEL

September 25, 2014 Stacy Sandler Off posts

(It doesn't have to be so complicated)

Let's break our German wine labels down into two categories; the first we will call QbA (Qualitätswein) and the second one we'll call QmP (Qualitätswein mit Prädikat).

QbA

QbAs must be produced only from allowed grape varieties grown in one of the 13 wine-growing regions of Germany. This region will always be printed on the label. There are several other rules, but for now this is the important part.

The diagram shows a wine label for 'Hexamer 2009er Riesling' with the following components and annotations:

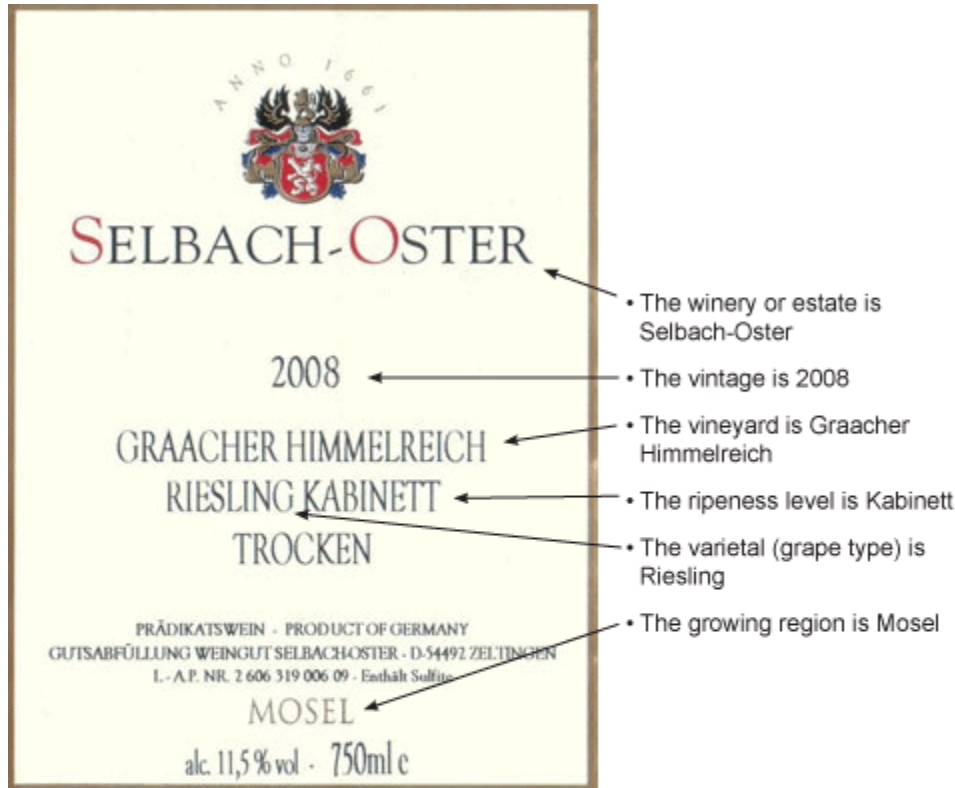
- NAHE**: The growing region is Nahe.
- Hexamer**: The winery or estate is Hexamer.
- 2009er**: The vintage is 2009.
- *Quarzit***: The name "Quarzit" refers to the quartz laden soils the vines are grown in. Some wines are given names like this, but most are not.
- RIESLING**: The varietal (grape type) is Riesling.
- MEDDESSHEIMER RHEINGRAFENBERG**: The vineyard is Meddersheimer Rheingrafenberg.
- QbA**: This wine is a QbA.
- Deutscher Qualitätswein Gutsabfüllung • A.P.-Nr. 7 745 028 004 10**: The government approval (or AP) number covers many pieces of information, including the village in which the wine was tasted, where the estate is located, the grower's identification number, and the year the wine was presented for approval. This is all very geeky stuff and not as important as the other items, but now you know what these numbers are all about.
- Alc. 9.5% by vol.**, **750 ml**, **WEINGUT HEXAMER • D-55566 MEDDESSHEIM**: Additional label information including alcohol content, volume, and producer details.

QmP

A wine classified as a QmP is at the top level of the German classification system and will have extra information about the wine printed on the label. The

ripeness level, printed clearly on QmP wine labels is the most complicated part to understand, but also one of the most important.

Your enjoyment level of German wine will reach new heights when you fully understand the differences between ripeness and sweetness.



More about the ripeness level:

Think of ripeness in terms of weight.

When you bite into a crisp apple, you get a snappy, almost crunchy and light sensation as you chew. Now imagine biting into a

This wine is a QmP. How do we know this? See where it says Kabinett? We didn't see anything like that on the other label, did we? This is the ripeness level and says a lot about the wine in the bottle.

You also see the word Trocken. Trocken means dry and in this case, it refers to the sweetness of the wine. Sometimes you will see this term and other times you might see halbtrocken, which means half dry.

This Selbach-Oster is a light bodied, dry Riesling from the Mosel region.

Read on for more details about this and other QmP wines.

very, very ripe peach and the juicy, goey, syrupy mess that virtually melts as you slurp. Both are delicious and both have complex flavors, fruitiness and acidity. But there is a difference in the perceived heaviness or body. Just like the two fruit examples mentioned, the final weight of the wine is directly effected by the ripeness level of the grapes at the time of harvest.

Below are the terms describing each level of ripeness and the corresponding "weight" of the wine.

- Kabinett – the first level of ripeness, these grapes produce the lightest of the QmP wines.
- Spätlese – later harvest, medium level of ripeness, makes a medium weight wine.
- Auslese – specially selected, usually later harvest, makes medium / heavy weight wines.
- Beerenauslese – or “BA” – a wine made from individually selected berries, makes a heavy bodied wine.
- Trockenbeerenauslese – or “TBA” – made from individually selected dried (very ripe, almost raisin-like) berries, makes a very heavy bodied wine.
- Eiswein – wine made with grapes which were harvested while frozen. Eiswein must be at least as heavy as Beerenauslese and can be more concentrated than a Trockenbeerenauslese.

There are several grape varieties that are grown in Germany and made into wine, but by far the most popular grape is Riesling.

For those of you who think that all Rieslings are sweet, you are in for a big surprise because they are not.

This is undoubtedly the biggest misconception about Riesling.

So, how do you tell if the wine is dry or sweet? One of the best ways is to take note of the alcohol level. The lower the alcohol percentage (7-8%), the sweeter the wine. This is because the bulk of the sugar in the fermenting fruit has not been converted to alcohol. Longer fermentation times allow the sugars to convert to higher levels of alcohol (11-13%). This is why it is possible to have a very dry late harvest Riesling (can you say yum?)

 educational
