

# Wine.



James Halliday



## 2007 GREEN FISH RIESLING KABINETT

This comes from the lowest rung of the totem pole (tafelwein), but you might not guess that. It has white flower blossom aromas which don't prepare you for the piercing impact on the mouth of the succession of lime juice, acid and mineral flavours, all presented to bait the hook to perfection. Screwcap; 9.5% alc  
Rating: 90 points  
Price: \$26



## 2007 SELBACH-OSTER ZELTINGER SCHLOSSBERG RIESLING KABINETT

This moves into the heartland of QMP Mosel Kabinett; pale straw-green, it has fragrant apple and lime blossom aromas, the superfine, elegant palate enlivened by a touch of CO<sub>2</sub>, moving through citrus and a hint of nectarine. Screwcap; 8.5% alc  
Rating: 94  
Price: \$47



## 2007 SELBACH-OSTER RIESLING SPATLESE

A qualitätswein made from several of the estate vineyards; very intense, it has layers of ripe citrus/lime fruit running through its long palate and well into its lingering aftertaste. Totally delicious: there is life beyond Kabinett, after all. Screwcap; 8.5% alc  
Rating: 94  
Price: \$48

The Selbach family has been growing riesling in Germany's middle Mosel area since 1661, which entitles them to rub shoulders with luminary neighbours such as JJ Prum, Dr Loosen (a johnny-come-lately, indeed), Dr Thanisch, Max Ferd Richter and Joh Jos Christoffel. The Selbachs came from the town of Urzig, the Oster family from across the river at Zeltingen.

The union of the families has resulted in a stellar holding of 20 hectares in the celebrated locales of Bernkasteler Badstube, Graacher Himmelreich, Zeltinger Sonnenuhr, Zeltinger Himmelreich, Zeltinger Schlossberg and Wehlener Sonnenuhr.

The vertiginous slopes of the vineyards' dark, stony slate fragments are not only treacherous for those who work there, but also for the grapevine pest phylloxera, which needs soil, preferably with some clay, to thrive. It is not widely recognised that the upper slopes (in particular) are devoid of soil in the usual sense, so the vines have never been attacked by phylloxera; they are on their own roots, and most are very old.

UK wine writer Jancis Robinson advances the argument that riesling (and I quote from her inestimable *Oxford Companion to Wine*) "could claim to be the finest white grape variety in the world on the basis of the longevity of its wines and their ability to transmit the characteristics of a vineyard without losing riesling's own inimitable style". Not only do I (respectfully) agree with Robinson, but would add that the purest riesling wines come from the Mosel region. **THE VERY BEST RIESLINGS ARE MADE WITH MINIMAL INTERVENTION: THE ONLY REAL DECISION IS WHEN TO STOP THE FERMENTATION, THUS DETERMINING THE LEVEL OF RESIDUAL SUGAR.**

Here it is impossible to walk past the basic German labelling laws (never mind the detailed ones). Virtually all the best wines are Qualitätswein, the greatest Qualitätswein mit Prädikat (QMP). The former will have the name of the region, but not necessarily the village, specified, and may be chaptalised – sweetened before fermentation, to ensure a higher alcohol content – with *sussreserve*.

The latter may not be chaptalised, and their Prädikat level is determined by the amount of sugar in the grapes when harvested, there being no specification about the amount left as residual. There are six levels: kabinett, spatlese, auslese, beerenauslese and trockenbeerenauslese, and off to one side, eiswein.

Enough for one day. I now go one step further and suggest that the kabinetts of the Mosel were designed in heaven. They have a glorious balance between fruit sweetness (it really is that) and natural acidity. They are wines to be drunk lustily and without any feelings of binge-guilt, since their alcohol level is usually around eight per cent. ●