



2010 Max Ferd. Richter Muhlheimer Helenenkloster Riesling Eiswein

A Riesling Sweet White Dessert wine from Helenenkloster, Mulheim, Middle Mosel, Mosel Saar Ruwer, Germany

Review by David Schildknecht
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 Rating: 92
 Drink -
 Cost: \$135

Given the long association of this frozen genre with the Richter estate, it comes as less surprise than it would elsewhere that there is a 2010 Muhlheimer Helenenkloster Riesling Eiswein. Like its immediate sibling, this was picked December 3 and then sorted on tables in the press house because conditions were so cold that there was no risk of the berries thawing while that keen-eyed, frigid-fingered work was performed. Quince and apricot preserves are shot through with fresh lemon on a viscous, quite creamy yet simultaneously sharp palate, for an impression that shares much with that of a Tokaji Esszencia. Almost tooth-jarring acidity goes hand in hand with surprising lushness of texture; a honeyed overlay; and a focused sense of pit fruit and citrus tinged with cinnamon and crushed stone. The finish here positively reverberates as well as refreshes, and if it sends a chill up your spine, surely that's all in the spirit of the genre! I would not be surprised to see this perform gloriously for 15-25 years, but as with most the genre I would keep careful tabs on its evolution so as to avoid disappointment. By analysis this represents an amazing near 16 grams of acidity; 290 grams or residual sugar; and just 7% alcohol. "The last time I had acid levels as high as in 2010," reports Dirk Richter, "was in 1980, and I don't need to tell you that vintage was a disaster even by then-prevailing standards. What's more, that was the last time I had de-acidified. Even in challenging years like 1981, patience at harvest and the right upbringing of the young wines – maceration, later bottling, encouraging tartrate precipitation, etc. – sufficed to deal with high acids. In many cases this year, we double-salt de-acidified twice, in must and then again in wine – after having done nothing for thirty years; I couldn't believe it was happening! But it was the only way to remove a sufficient share of the malic. The finished wines are still plenty high in acidity, but I did not want to repeat my experience from 1990, in which I bottled wines with as much 11 grams acid. The second year, they started to taste sour, and that never left them even as their textures eventually creamed-up. I think that two years from now many de-acidified wines will start fatiguing whereas our best will be coming into their own." In 2010, needless to say, the grapes were essentially ripe – indeed all met the admittedly weak legal minimum for Auslese – but as Richter notes "I had to keep revisiting parcels again and again taking just what had properly ripened because the condition of bunches was so heterogeneous." Precautionary levels of sulfur combined with the naturally low pH levels of 2010 material are, he speculates, the reason why he ended up having to yeast most of his musts this year to achieve satisfactory fermentation. Richter reports having managed to pick-out 20 and 30 liters respectively of B.A. and T.B.A. but at such pathetically small levels he felt it made more sense to blend them back selectively into the vintage's Auslesen. "I'm laying everything on the table," he noted with his usual candor when we began tasting, "some are quite good, some are meager, but I'll let you judge for yourself." Importer: Langdon-Shiverick Cleveland, OH; tel. (216) 861-6800

