



Germany, Mosel: Part 1 – The Great 2017 Vintage & First 2018s

featuring Max Ferd. Richter
reviewed by Stephan Reinhardt

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Constantin Richter describes 2017 as "a more classic, relatively cool vintage." He said, "In 2017, we got everything: frost, hail, drought in spring, rain in summer, early botrytis, but, luckily, coolish and windy nights, so the berries often shriveled under healthy conditions. However, we had to be highly selective during the harvest, and all negative botrytis was sorted out. During the dry weeks, we didn't break up the soil in order to minimize the pressure of botrytis and to keep our grapes in a positive stress situation." Richter compares the 2017 botrytis with that from 2013: "The berries were ripe and botrytis was clean after the selections....Also, 2001 is similar due to the high level of ripeness, botrytis and a concise acidity." In four to five weeks, starting with mid-September, team Richter picked only 50% of a normal harvest in 2017. Due to the rain in August and the low yields, the extracts are very high and this includes high acidity levels.

Chez Richter, 2018 also brought "normal" acidity and low pH levels of 2.8-3.2, which were "all pretty much as in 2017," said Richter. The analytically lower acidity levels taste fresh, because the tartaric acid remained stable. The yields were pretty good (nine fuder barrels instead of the allowed 12.5), but 2018 is far from overproduction here. Richter benefits a lot from a big portfolio of old vines in 2018. "There was no drought stress, the grapes were perfectly ripe and the acidity was round and ripe. We had only [a] little botrytis, but were able to select several Auslesen, BAs and TBAs, which we find really beautiful." Botrytis settled early, but the acidity was still fresh. "2017 was similar, and the 2017 sweet wines are sublime because of the early botrytis," Richter finds. 2018 was one of the earliest harvests ever at Max Ferdinand Richter, where Pinot Noir and Pinot Blanc marked the start in early September. "We harvested until end of October and were fully relaxed all the time." End of September, the Kabinett wines and the

crus were picked, "not too early but with ripe phenols." Only then did Richter pick the basic wines. In the meantime, the team went out to select the grapes for the BAs and TBAs. There is no Eiswein from 2018, although the grapes were all healthy, but in the end too ripe for Eiswein.

The wines I tasted here in spring this year are fascinating and include several highlights, of which I'd like to point out the Brauneberger Juffer Kabinett as one of the finest Rieslings of the category I tasted this year. I highly recommend trying it.

2018 Brauneberger Juffer Riesling Kabinett

The 2018 Brauneberger Juffer Riesling Kabinett is deep but bright and refined on the flinty nose that offers perfectly ripe Riesling and crunchy slate aromas with a warm iron touch. On the palate, this is a lush, refined, salty-piquant, even racy Riesling with generous fruit and a very long, salty-piquant and crystalline finish. This is a highly complex Riesling in the most delicate expression. It's one of the wines you just have to buy—there won't be any regrets, not today or in 30 years. Since this Brauneberger has slightly more sulfur compared to the Wehlener Sonnenuhr, which still hasn't been filtered and was tasted from the lees, I will retaste the wines early next year, as I am convinced a Mosel Riesling needs two winters to unmask itself. **(94-96 points)**

2018 Brauneberger Juffer-Sonnenuhr Riesling Auslese

The 2018 Brauneberger Juffer-Sonnenuhr Riesling Auslese is very fine, concentrated and beautifully clear, with blossom honey and very fine berry aromas on the nose. (The 20% to 25% of botrytis is very clear and precise, almost imperceptible.) Lush and piquant on the palate, this is a generous but highly digestible Auslese with orange, raisin and (pink) grapefruit flavors. The finish is incredibly racy-piquant, salty and highly digestible. This is still a baby, but it is highly promising. **(96-97 points)**

2018 Brauneberger Juffer-Sonnenuhr Riesling Spätlese

From 30- to 40-year-old vines, the 2018 Brauneberger Juffer-Sonnenuhr Riesling Spätlese is flinty, precise and reductive on the coolish nose, with discreet and fine (but lush!) pineapple aromas and very fine notes of crushed, smooth slate. On the palate, this is a clear, fresh, lush, highly finessed, piquant and salty Riesling with very tannins and lingering salinity and piquancy. This is a fabulous Spätlese with piquant finesse and mineral tension that seems to be familiar with that of the Scharzhofberger and the Euchariusberg. I can hardly imagine any better Spätlese from 2018. **(95-96 points)**

2018 Elisenberger Riesling Kabinett

The 2018 Elisenberger Riesling Kabinett is dense, cool, very precise and flinty-mineral on the nose, which is still reductive but exciting. Coming from a coolish side valley that was picked at

roughly 84° to 85° Oechsle at the end of September, this is a gorgeously lush and mouth-filling Riesling with the mineral piquancy of quartzite soils. There is no aggressive acidity here, there is nice tartaric acidity that makes this a seductive Kabinett you can't resist. This is a fabulous, very long and enchanting Riesling. The wine has slightly more than 50 grams of residual sugar and comes in at 8.5% alcohol. It was scheduled to be bottled a couple of days after I tasted it from the cask at the end of March 2019. **(92-94 points)**

2018 Elisenberger Riesling Spätlese

Sourced from old vines, the 2018 Elisenberger Riesling Spätlese was harvested in the third week of October as the very last "regular" wine (so 3.5 weeks after the Kabinett). It is based on completely healthy fruit and was vinified entirely in traditional fuders. Offering a deep and flinty bouquet, this is a lush, elegant, highly refined and stimulating Spätlese with a salty-piquant finish. **(94-96 points)**

2018 Graacher Himmelreich Riesling Kabinett Trocken

From 80-year-old vines in the Ur-Himmelreich picked at 85° to 86° Oechsle in the last week of September, the 2018 Graacher Himmelreich Riesling Kabinett Trocken doesn't show much right now due to its strong reduction, but the terroir character already shines through. The wine displays bright, fresh and flinty-herbal slate and citrus aromas, while the tropical fruit of the vintage seems to be reduced here and rather classic. On the palate, this is a straight, fresh, well-structured and lingeringly salty Himmelreich Kabinett with 11% alcohol. **(90-92 points)**

2018 Richter Estate Riesling

From younger parcels (30+ years old) in premier and grand crus, the 2018 Richter Estate Riesling opens with a very delicate, bright, remarkably elegant, refined and floral bouquet of iron-rich slate and perfectly ripe, concentrated Riesling fruit. Mainly sourced in the Juffer but also in the Himmelreich and Treppchen, this is a lush and generous but highly delicate and filigreed Riesling with a salty-piquant, intense and mouth-filling finish. The acidity is stunningly fresh but tartaric. This is a gorgeous Mosel Riesling, and I guess this wine has never been any better. **(91 points)**

2018 Riesling Classic

From 40- to 50-year-old vines in good yet less-famous vineyards, the 2018 Riesling Classic offers a spectacularly intense and fruity but refined and salty nose. "My grandfather would have cried had he seen that we bottled a wine like this, without vineyard designation and not as Auslese trocken," says Constantin Richter. The wine is ripe, round and dense on the palate, beautifully lush and quite persistent, with a salty-crunchy grip and, again, remarkable intensity. It's still reductive, but this will be a gorgeous wine in a couple of weeks. Bottled in early March 2019

and tasted two weeks later. The wine has stimulating grip and mineral freshness, and its sweetness of ten grams is well hidden and nothing but fruit. **(90+ points)**

2018 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Auslese ***

The first three-starred Auslese since 2005 (prior to that, it was 1993, 1983 and 1975), the 2018 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Auslese *** was picked at about 145° Oechsle. This is incredibly clear, pure, fine and fresh on the lush, concentrated, herbal and grapefruit-scented nose. On the palate, this is a generously lush, refined and salty-piquant Auslese with a tight mineral structure and lingering salinity. This is highly refined and extremely stimulating. It already drinks all too well today, but Constantin recommends cellaring it for at least 10 years. **(97+ points)**

2018 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Kabinett

Mostly from very old vines (80 to 90 years old) and vinified partly (one-third) in stainless steel, the 2018 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Kabinett offers a fine, flinty, super sensual, mind-blowing bouquet of perfectly ripe but coolish, precise and even quartzite-like aromas. On the palate, the wine is wide, pure, elegant and energetic—a powerhouse but in the most delicious and delicate way. The palate is complex, opening wide but always precise and very, very long, with great mineral grip and tension but also lush and sensual features. This is a great Mosel Riesling indeed. **(93-95 points)**

2018 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Kabinett Feinherb

The 2018 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Kabinett Feinherb is sourced partly (two-thirds) from the old, central part of the vineyard ("Im Brück") with 80- to 90-year-old vines and partly (one-third) from an upper plot with 20-year-old vines. Entirely vinified in traditional fuders, this is a bright, lush, warm and very fine Sonnenuhr with fine slate aromas intermixed with floral, flinty and perfectly ripe fruit aromas. The fruit aroma is almost endless. Lush, round and intense on the palate, the 2018 is perfectly ripe and concentrated but celebrates the finesse and mineral tension of the Sonnenuhr and finishes with lingering salinity and stimulating grip. Still reductive due to the addition of sulfur, this highly promising Sonnenuhr was bottled with 24 grams of well-packed residual sugar. **(93 points)**

2018 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Spätlese

From the two oldest plots (80-90 years old and 120 years old), the fuder-fermented 2018 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Spätlese offers great precision and aromas of tropical fruit intertwined with very fine slate on the nose. On the palate, the wine is mouth-filling and salty-piquant, with mango and slate flavors on the racy finish. This is dangerous stuff, very dangerous, yet it's also tight and tensioned. This is, for the moment, the finest and most stimulating Wehlener Sonnenuhr. Dangerous. Really dangerous. **(94-96 points)**

2017 Brauneberger Juffer Riesling Kabinett #4

From 80-year-old vines, the 2017 Brauneberger Juffer Riesling Kabinett #4 is very delicate and flinty on the nose and dense nose, with grassy, flinty, herbal and floral aromas. On the palate, this is a lush and round Riesling with a creamy texture, very fine minerals and a salty-piquant finish with crunchy slate aromas. This is a super sensual Kabinett, and it already drinks dangerously well. **(93+)**

2017 Brauneberger Juffer Riesling Kabinett Trocken

From the Hasenläufer plot, the 2017 Brauneberger Juffer Riesling Kabinett Trocken offers a delicate and complex bouquet with floral and herbal aromas and stony notes. On the palate, this is an elegant, seriously dry but round and persistent Juffer with salt, grip and refreshing, finely racy acidity. This is a beautifully pure but complex Kabinett that is still pretty reductive and needs another 5 to 10 years to open up. **(91)**

2017 Brauneberger Juffer-Sonnenuhr Riesling Auslese

Picked at 110° Oechsle and with 30% to 35% botrytis, the 2017 Brauneberger Juffer-Sonnenuhr Riesling Auslese offers dusty raisin and grapefruit aromas on the nose. Lush and concentrated on the palate, it is an elegant, mouth-filling and piquant Auslese with a creamy texture and long, salty-piquant, slatey finish. This has sound character, but it still tasted incredibly young and should be cellared for at least 10 years. Still very reductive. **(93+)**

2017 Brauneberger Juffer-Sonnenuhr Riesling GG

Designated as Grosses Gewächs for the first time instead of Spätlese trocken, the 2017 Brauneberger Juffer-Sonnenuhr Riesling GG offers a very delicate and flinty bouquet of ripe but refined fruit aromas intermixed with beautiful herbal touches and notes of crushed stones. On the palate, this is a full-bodied, elegant, lush and intense Riesling with a pretty powerful, persistently salty finish that is very long and tensioned but fine and precise. This is a lean and elegant style with complexity that comes entirely from the vineyard. This is a superb, very tight and tensioned dry Mosel Riesling that already drinks well but will improve and soften its tannins over the years in the bottle. Still young after ten months on the full lees. **(93+)**

2017 Brauneberger Juffer-Sonnenuhr Riesling Spätlese

The 2017 Brauneberger Juffer-Sonnenuhr Riesling Spätlese is super clear but intense and flinty on the nose, with notes of crushed stones and herbs. Lush and round on the sweet, ripe and piquant palate, this is an intense, powerful yet refined and persistently salty Spätlese with great tension and aging potential. A fabulous wine. **(94+)**

2017 Brauneberger Juffer-Sonnenuhr Riesling Trockenbeerenauslese

Picked at a moderate 200° Oechsle and with perfect botrytis, the 2017 Brauneberger Juffer-Sonnenuhr Riesling Trockenbeerenauslese is as precise and piquant as an Eiswein. The nose displays a very intense but fine, pure, fresh and elegant bouquet of stewed apricots, honey and syrup intertwined with white nougat. Perfectly dense, refined and vital on the palate, this is an intense and persistent TBA with flavors of black bread on the finish. It is well-structured and salty-piquant, but it needs some years to lose its baby fat. **(97+)**

2017 Elisenberger Riesling Spätlese

Picked at 89° Oechsle in the middle of October, the 2017 Elisenberger Riesling Spätlese is clear, deep and flinty on the aromatic nose, where apricot aromas intermix with flinty notes of crushed stones. Dense and lush on the palate, this is a complex, salty-piquant, beautifully tensioned and digestible Spätlese with stimulating grip and kick on the finish. Highly elegant and perfectly concentrated, this is a great Spätlese to drink over the next 30 to 40 years. **(94+)**

2017 Graacher Domprobst Riesling Alte Reben

The 2017 Graacher Domprobst Riesling Alte Reben was harvested in one passage from vines that were planted before World War II. It was kept on the full lees, without the addition of sulfur, until August and then was bottled straight from the fuder without any further racking. Coming in at 11.2% alcohol, the wine offers a deep and intense bouquet of ripe stone fruits intermixed with cold smoke or flinty notes from the Domprobst terroir. On the palate, this is a mouth-filling yet concentrated, firm and tightly woven Riesling with a serious phenolic structure (six to eight hours of maceration). This is a promising wine, but it is closed right now and needs a couple of years to open, during which time I recommend drinking the 2016 or 2018 first. **(92+)**

2017 Graacher Himmelreich Riesling Kabinett

From 70- to 80-year-old vines, the 2017 Graacher Himmelreich Riesling Kabinett is clear, bright, cool and flinty on the crystalline and reductive nose. The attack on the palate is racy-piquant, and the wine reveals lush and delicate fruit with lingering salinity and a frisky character as well as serious ambitions. The wine is slightly creamy (though not as much as the Juffer #4) yet tensioned, vital and highly stimulating, but it needs some years to soften its playful aggressions. **(92+)**

2017 Mülheimer Sonnenlay Riesling Alte Reben Feinherb

The 2017 Mülheimer Sonnenlay Riesling Alte Reben Feinherb is from the core of the cru (formerly called Himmelseiter), from 75-year-old vines that were picked roughly two weeks later than the Kabinett feinherb. It is super intense and herbal on the refined and flinty nose, with notes of curry plant intertwined with aromas of perfectly ripe mirabelle and crunchy slate. On the palate, this is an intense, dense, powerful, fleshy, lush, well-structured and persistently

salty Riesling with firm but fine tannins and crystalline acidity. This is a great and generous Riesling from grafted vines trained on single poles. Its sweetness of 20+ grams per liter is almost completely absorbed by the characteristic minerality. This 2017 will age for at least three decades. **(94+)**

2017 Mülheimer Sonnenlay Riesling Kabinett Feinherb

From lithe gray slate soil in a southwest-facing vineyard in a side valley of the Mosel, the 2017 Mülheimer Sonnenlay Riesling Kabinett Feinherb is very fine and floral on the flinty nose, with herbal (oregano and marjoram) notes and delicate ripeness. Exciting! On the palate, this is a dense, lush and intense yet delicate, fresh and mineral Riesling with a very long, piquant, intense, firmly structured and salty finish. Bottled in March 2018 and tasted a year later. This is an excellent Kabinett with 10.5% alcohol. **(93+)**

2017 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Kabinett

Entirely from the 80-year-old plot, the 2017 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Kabinett offers a clear, intense and smoky bouquet of ripe apricots, toasted paprika and stone-fruit skins. Round and lush on the palate, this is a very delicate and unapologetically delicious Kabinett with a long, lush, salty-piquant and beautifully astringent finish. It's still reductive and racy but already very, very sexy. **(93)**

2017 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Spätlese

From the very old part of the vineyard that was planted in 1890 and picked with 15% to 20% clean botrytis, the 2017 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Spätlese offers a deep, intense and concentrated yet very clear and elegant bouquet of apricot and mirabelle confiture, orange tea and crushed slate. Round, perfectly balanced and elegant on the palate, this is a very complex, long and mature Wehlener Sonnenuhr with a silky-crystalline texture and a seductive, mouth-filling and persistently salty finish. The botrytis gives texture, concentration and expression as well as a good portion of sensuality. This is where Alsace kisses the Mosel. A gorgeous wine. **(95+)**