

VIEW FROM THE CELLAR

By John Gilman

May – June 2019

Weingut Max Ferdinand Richter (Mülheim)

This was my first proper visit to Weingut Max Ferdinand Richter in Mülheim, as I first had occasion to taste here last May during the Mythos Mosel events. The style of the wines here is beautifully classical, with lovely underlying minerality, pure, delicate fruit tones and plenty of filigree and cut. The Richter family farms fully seventeen and a half hectares of vines in some of the finest terroirs in the Middle Mosel, including choice parcels in both the Himmelreich and Domprobst in the village of Graach, a parcel of very old vines right below the sundial in Wehlener Sonnenuhr, a lovely plot of vines in the Juffer-Sonnenuhr vineyard in Brauneberg, the monopole of the quartzite-based Elisenberg vineyard in the village of Velden (tucked back behind Brauneberg and Mülheim away from the river) and substantial holdings in the best vineyards in their home village of Mülheim. I was unaware of this previously, but apparently back in 1813, during the time of the occupation of the region by Napoleon's armies, the emperor had intended to rip up the vines in the villages of Mülheim and Velden, but one of Constantin's ancestors negotiated a cash payment from the winegrowers in the two villages to Napoleon to save the vineyards, and as a thank you, the village of Velden ceded the entire hillside vineyard of the Elisenberg to the Richters and it has remained a monopole of theirs since that day.

In 2018, Constantin, his father Dirk Richter and the picking team here were out in the vineyards on the 12th of September to start harvesting pinot noir, with the first Riesling bunches brought in on the 18th of the month. As this is a fairly big estate, I assume that we sampled a representative selection of the 2018ers here, and there are probably some very good dry bottlings also in the cellar that we did not try during my visit. Constantin did note that there were a few TBAs still bubbling away very gently down in the cellars (and one next to his desk in his office, as the fermentation was going very, very slowly and a bit warmer location was definitely merited if that wine was going to ferment enough to get over the minimum threshold alcohol level in due course! Constantin Richter commented that he was "inclined to perhaps give

some of the 2018ers just a bit longer elevage prior to bottling than is customary”, as he observed that “Manfred Prüm did this with his 2003ers and the results were very positive.” Probably about a third of the 2018ers we tasted together had been bottled just ahead of Prowein, but everything else remained in cask and was to be bottled a bit later in the spring. The range of 2018ers here that I tasted with Constantin were excellent, with lovely, zesty acids, very pure and precise fruit expressions, lovely, salty minerality and fine filigree for the lower Prädikat levels. At the level of Auslese, there was a bit of botrytis available to work with in the Himmelreich and Juffer-Sonnenuhr vineyards, so the Auslesen from the estate from these vineyards are defined by a delicate touch of really beautiful, very clean botrytis.

2018 Riesling “Classic”

The 2018 Riesling “Classic” had been bottled just before Prowein. The wine carries ten grams per liter of residual sugar and comes in at twelve percent alcohol in this vintage. It is made mostly from side valley fruit, though Constantin was quick to point out that all of the vines that go into this bottling are a minimum of forty years of age. The wine was showing very nicely at the end of March, offering up a refined bouquet of quince, apple, a lovely base of slate, dried flowers and just a hint of wild yeasts in the upper register. On the palate the wine is fullish, crisp and very nicely balanced, with a good core of fruit, lovely slate undertow and very fine length and grip on the zesty finish. This is a very high quality wine for an entry level bottling. (89 points)

2018 Graacher Himmelreich Riesling Kabinett Trocken

The 2018 Kabinett Trocken from the Himmelreich was produced from a parcel of vines that are eighty to ninety years of age, situated right up at the top of the slope. This is outstanding in 2018 and very delicately-styled and filigreed, with the wine topping out at eleven percent octane this year. This had not yet been bottled and was really lovely on both on the nose and palate, with the bouquet wafting from the glass in a mix of apple, lemon, superb minerality, a dollop of wild yeasts and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, medium-bodied and beautifully mineral, with fine intensity of flavor, bright acids, excellent focus and superb cut. Constantin Richter has been full-time back at the family estate since the 2012 vintage, and previous to this he did a few stages and cut and grip on the long and complex finish. This is first class juice! (93+ points)

2018 Max Ferdinand Richter Riesling

The Estate Riesling this year is not a Trocken, as it settled into a fine point of balance with still twenty grams of residual sugar. The wine is made from a selection of younger vines in the estate's top grand cru vineyards and is very elegant in profile in 2018, offering up 10.5 percent alcohol; it had been bottled just ahead of Prowein. The wine was still showing a touch timidly on the nose after its mise, but with a bit of coaxing showed elements of pear, slate, wild yeasts and a lovely topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine was much more on form, displaying a medium-full format, bright, zesty acids, fine focus and grip and lovely backend mineral drive on the long, balanced and classy finish. This is going to be a fine value and it is too bad it was bottled under screwcap, as it would have aged very long and gracefully. (90 points)

2018 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Kabinett Feinherb

The 2018 Kabinett Feinherb from the Wehlener Sonnenuhr had also just been bottled ahead of Prowein. This is made from a parcel of vines that are eighty to one hundred years of age and comes in at just over ten percent octane, with 7.8 grams of acidity and twenty-two grams of sugar. The wine is pure and a beautifully classical expression of this lovely terroir, offering up scents of apple, pear, vanilla bean, salty, slate minerality, spring flowers and a whisper of wild yeasts. On the palate the wine is pure, medium-full, filigreed and superbly transparent, with fine complexity and bounce, bright acids and fine focus and grip on the poised and vibrant finish. Fine juice. (93 points)

2018 "Zeppelin" QbA

The Zeppelin label bottling of QbA from Max Ferdinand Richter is very, very good in 2018. This is made from a fifty-fifty blend of estate grown and purchased fruit, with most of the cuvée raised in fuders, but a small percentage in stainless steel. This had already been bottled (and was indeed already in the US market a few weeks after my return from Germany) and was showing very well, delivering a fine bouquet of apple, pear, bee pollen, salty soil tones, spring flowers and a bit of wild yeasts. On the palate the wine is fullish, pure and nicely filigreed, with fine focus and grip, a long, bouncy finish and fine nascent complexity. This shows beautiful acidity for a 2018ers (8.2 grams this year), to go along with around thirty-five grams of residual sugar and alcohol at ten percent. A very, very well made Estate Riesling bottling and an exceptional value. (90 points)

2018 Veldenzer Elisenberger Riesling Kabinett

The 2018 Elisenberger Kabinett was still in cask and was absolutely singing at the time of my visit. Constantin Richter estimates that the wine finished up around 8.5 percent in alcohol, with close to fifty grams of residual sugar and acids at 8.8 grams. The bouquet is superb, wafting from the glass in a fine blend of gooseberry, bee pollen, a touch of red berry, salty minerality and a lovely topnote of currant leaf. On the palate the wine is pure, medium-full and nicely filigreed, with lovely intensity of flavor, superb, salty mineral drive, snappy acids and a very long, transparent and utterly classical finish. A beautiful Kabinett. (93+ points)

2018 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Kabinett

These were the first Riesling bunches picked on September 18th and the wine has turned out beautifully. The bouquet is pure and very refined, delivering a fine constellation of pear, delicious apple, vanilla bean, a touch of petrol, slate, apple blossoms and a gentle, esthery topnote of bee pollen. On the palate the wine is medium-full and very pure and delicate, with fine intensity of flavor, excellent focus and grip and a long, vibrant and transparent finish. Another really fine Kabinett. (93 points)

2018 Brauneberg Juffer Riesling Kabinett

The Juffer 2018 Kabinett was the only grand cru at this Prädikat level that was already bottled. The wine is a touch more aromatically reserved after its mise, but with a bit of coaxing shows lovely potential in its blend of pear, apple, a nice touch of mossiness, wild yeasts, salty soil tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, medium-full, complex and vibrant, with really good acids, fine focus and grip and a long, complex finish. This seems just a touch riper in style than the Wehlener Sonnenuhr Kabinett, but without losing its Prädikat sensibilities. This finished off at 8.7 percent alcohol. Good juice. (91 points)

2018 Veldenzer Elisenberger Riesling Spätlese

The grapes for the Elisenberger Spätlese were some of the last brought in to the winery in 2018, as this parcel was picked on October 23rd, which just underscores how some of these back vineyards benefited from their relatively cooler expositions in the summer of 2018. The wine is lovely, offering up a bright bouquet of strawberries, apple, lime blossoms, a fine base of salty minerality, wild yeasts and an esthery topnote of bee pollen. On the palate the wine is

pure, zesty and fullish in profile, with a pretty core, lovely mineral undertow, bright acids and fine focus and grip on the long and complex finish. (92+ points)

2018 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Spätlese

These are the oldest vines that the estate owns, planted in the nineteenth century and located directly under the sundial in the Sonnenuhr. The wine is youthful and an absolute classic in the making, offering up a nascently complex bouquet of pear, white cherries, vanilla bean, slate, wild yeasts, bee pollen and a floral topnote redolent of orange blossoms. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and soil-driven, with a good core, fine bounce and grip and a long, zesty and very classy finish. This has a beautiful kiss of fruit on the attack and impressive backend mineral drive. (94 points)

2018 Brauneberg Juffer-Sonnenuhr Riesling Spätlese

The 2018 Juffer-Sonnenuhr Spätlese is a touch riper in profile than its counterpart from Wehlen. The nose wafts from the glass in a lovely blend of pear, white cherry, bee pollen, gentle smokiness, a nice base of soil and a topnote of cress. On the palate the wine is fullish, round and nicely creamy on the attack, with a fine core, very good focus and grip and zesty acids adding brightness and bounce on the long and succulent finish. Another very tasty bottle of Spätlese. (92 points)

2018 Graacher Himmelreich Riesling Auslese

Constantin estimates that about fifteen percent of the bunches used for the Himmelreich Auslese in 2018 were affected by botrytis. The wine carries around one hundred grams of sugar this year and is superb and absolutely classical in personality, offering up a precise and vibrant bouquet of apple, pineapple salty minerality, bee pollen and a lovely topnote of citrus blossoms. On the palate the wine is fullish, pure and zesty, with a very refined profile, fine depth at the core, impressive mineral signature and a long, vibrant finish that closes with the lift of very good acidity. (93 points)

2018 Brauneberger Juffer-Sonnenuhr Riesling Auslese

The 2018 Juffer-Sonnenuhr Auslese has a bit more botrytis to it, with about thirty percent of the bunches nobly rotten this year. The wine is still quite understated in its glazing, wafting from the glass in a lovely combination of lime, tangerine, honey, citrus zest, a touch of wild

yeasts, a lovely base of soil and a topnote of bee pollen. On the palate the wine is fullish, pure and complex, with a lovely core, good backend salty mineral drive, bright acids and fine focus and grip on the long and zesty finish. This is delicious as well. (93 points)

2018 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Auslese ***

The three star Auslese from the Wehlener Sonnenuhr is absolutely stellar. This was made from a parcel of one hundred and twenty year-old vines and Constantin estimates that eighty percent of the bunches selected for this bottling were botrytized. The bouquet is gorgeous, offering up scents of white cherry, pineapple, honeycomb, citrus blossoms and a nice bass note of slate. On the palate the wine is precise, pure and fullish, with lovely creaminess on the attack, excellent focus and grip, bright acids and a long, complex and dancing finish that closes with a lovely dollop of minerality. Fine, fine juice. (94 points)

