

Mosel Riesling 2016 Part 2: Longuich to Graach **by David Schildknecht**

From Longuich to Graach

I discussed the travails and eventual triumph of vintage 2016 on the Mosel in my introduction to part one of this coverage, as well as some of the mysteries that still surround it and the personalities and aging potential of the resulting wines. The wet first half of 2016 saw rainfall at or near the averages for a full year, which disturbed the flowering and in many sectors unleashed outbreaks of peronospora (a.k.a. downy mildew) that were unprecedented even in the experience of veteran growers. In late July the weather abruptly turned dry and hot and these conditions extended into a September that was warmer in Bernkastel than in any year since good record-keeping began there in 1876. By that month's end, vines with deep enough roots in all but a few especially exposed and rocky sites had managed to catch up in must weight to recent averages.

Then came another dramatic turn in the weather as clear, chilly weather set in through mid-November, permitting methodical harvesting under conditions ideal for preserving what in most instances were ample but by no means high acid levels while allowing ripe flavors and aromas to build. Estates that were most seriously afflicted by downy mildew (and a few that were strafed by hail, such as in Graach) suffered significant crop losses, but nearly every grower I visited expressed delight with his or her 2016 quality, and quite a few turned in collections to challenge those of 2015.

Due to its come-from-behind nature and to the rarity of botrytis (inhibited first by heat and drought, then by chill), 2016 is a vintage in which relatively little Auslese and even less Beerenauslese or TBA was harvested on the Mosel. But the many growers who left healthy fruit hanging in hopes of making Eiswein were rewarded by deep frosts at the end of November and again a week later, resulting in the largest haul of wines from frozen grapes in many years, some of them memorably fine. The increased interest among Mosel growers in showcasing legally dry Riesling, as well as the tendency—in my view somewhat perverse—shared by numerous German growers to favor fermentations that finish with only a few grams of residual sugar are both on conspicuous display in 2016. And fortunately, for the third year in a row, those tendencies did not come with a worrisomely high-alcohol price, since must weights remained moderate throughout the harvest.

The first part of this report covered growers headquartered along the stretch of the Mosel from Wehlen to Winningen. The Saar and Ruwer, nowadays subsumed by wine law under “Mosel,” will be covered in my next report, although outstanding Saar Rieslings from Markus Molitor and Nik Weis (St. Urbans-Hof) are reviewed as part of my coverage of the Mosel proper, since that is where those estates are based.

My tasting notes are based on visits between late July and mid-September of 2017 with 49 growers on the Middle and Lower (a.k.a. *Terrassen-*) Mosel, supplemented by subsequent stateside retasting as well as the assessment of one additional collection entirely via samples. Following usual Vinous practice, notes on wines that I have not tasted in finished form are expressed in parentheses as point ranges; and wines I rated 86 points or lower fall below the usual cutoff for publication. (I do, however, make occasional exceptions to that last practice if an 86-point wine represents a good value due to its low price, or in instances where I think I owe readers an explanation of my reservations about a wine that disappointed high expectations or that has received praise from fellow critics.) Details regarding the conventions of nomenclature and scoring followed in my reports, including an explanation of when and why I reference A.P. (official registration) numbers, can be found in the introductions to my earlier articles on 2015 and 2014 German Rieslings.

Max Ferd. Richter

The 2016 collection here confirms young Constantin Richter's comfortable assumption of his father Dirk's role directing vineyard and cellar activities at this historic 50-acre estate. And probably due in part to the fact that Richter *père* continues in his long-standing service as international ambassador and tireless salesperson for an estate that has always been associated with export, his son is able to devote an enhanced level of scrutiny to the details of viticulture and vinification. Crop size was down due to peronospora, "especially in Brauneberg, where we also got hailed on, just as we did in Graach and Wehlen," noted Richter; there are relatively few nobly sweet offerings due to paucity of botrytis; "and we also elected to bottle fewer dry wines and no Grosse Gewächse, not just because overall volume was down but because I didn't see the vintage as well-suited to them." The high vineyards of Velden, stretching perpendicular to the Mosel, were largely unscathed by peronospora and yielded normal-sized crops with higher acidity than in most of Richter's Mosel shore holdings.

Even where acidity is comparatively low within this collection, it isn't low by vintage standards, and as Richter emphasizes, it's almost entirely efficacious tartaric acid. Continuing the trend of recent years at this address, must weights for the "genuine Kabinetts" that Richters have long prided themselves on producing even when that bucked prevailing fashion, have crept down even further, this year ranging (for the sweet wines) between 77- 84 Oechsle. (Bear in mind, the impressive Kabinetts that Thomas Haag renders from some of the same vineyards are based on fruit of 90 or more degrees Oechsle!) Like so many German Riesling growers, Constantin Richter characterized his 2016 harvest – which ranged all the way from the last days of September until November 10 as "relaxed." Given the long-recognized reputation of this estate and talent of its Mülheimer Helenenkloster vineyard for Eiswein, it's not surprising that the Richters left fruit hanging in 2016. They were rewarded by the deep frost of December 5. Astute readers will notice from my notes that I perceived a surprising convergence of fruit characteristics among several high must weight, nobly sweet Richter 2016s, whether from healthy or botrytized, juicy or frozen fruit. I can't explain this. It might reflect a strong influence of certain vintage conditions, of the yeasts operative at a certain point in

Richters' cellars ... or, of course, a failure of imagination on my part!
Incidentally, there will again be two Pinot Blancs, but some lots were still fermenting at the time of my late July 2017 visit, so a final approximation to either eventual *cuvée* was impossible.

An interesting detail I'd missed in the past at this address is that, according to Constantin Richter, each fuder normally represents a unique picking, although multiple pickings in close geographical and temporal proximity frequently result in fuders that get blended together just before bottling. I also learned on this visit that Richter in 2016 planted a Gemischter Satz in Veldenz with archaic white grape varieties, in coordination with his friend Stefan Steinmetz (of Weingut Günther Steinmetz, covered as usual in this report) who has planted the adjacent parcel but with red wine varieties. Fans of the visual arts may be intrigued to learn that the conspicuously antique labels of this estate have been supplemented so as to return to an historic tradition of employing distinct labels depicting not merely some but each of their vineyards.

2016 Riesling Brauneberger Juffer-Sonnenuhr Auslese Fass 38

This reflects a picking of grapes to a significant degree desiccated without botrytis, which shows in its striking clarity and primary juiciness, not to mention in measurable acidity high by vintage standards. Quince preserves, papaya and glazed pineapple are suggested on a penetrating nose and glycerol-rich yet animatingly bright palate. The botrytis element, surprisingly, really reveals itself only on the finish, which is honeyed and hints subtly at truffle but at the same time is sensationally vibrant. A rush of fresh grapefruit and pineapple leaves the mouth tingling and refreshed. **(94 points)**

2016 Riesling Graacher Himmelreich Beerenauslese

By the time it was filtered, there were a mere 20 liters of this elixir. Pear and quince preserves are mingled with caramel and overlain with haunting scents of white truffle, stale white bread and white raisin, each a distinctive reflection of dominant botrytis. The confitured concentration of a glossy, expansive palate is enhanced by honey-like richness but also leavened by an unexpected influx of fresh pineapple and pink grapefruit that lends animation and a modicum of sheer refreshment to a superbly sustained finish. **(94 points)**

2016 Riesling Mühlheimer Helenenkloster Eiswein Fass 103**

This represents the first of two passes on the frigid morning of December 5, reflecting only the green-golden perfectly healthy bunches, and then only the heart of their subsequent pressing. At 11 grams per liter, it boasts more typically elevated Eiswein acidity than its "regular" (largely second-pass) counterpart, although its must weighed only around 10 degrees higher. Glazed pineapple, quince jelly and candied lemon peel

on the nose reemerge on an oily, glycerol-rich palate, where they are joined by peach preserves and a brightly refreshing, invigorating influx of fresh grapefruit and lemon. There is just the merest hint of the caramel that was so prominent in this wine's significantly botrytis-inflected lesser sibling, but the overall finish here is at once rich and rapier, its animating brightness enhanced by saliva-drawing salinity. **(94 points)**

2016 Riesling Wehlener Sonnenuhr Spätlese

This was sourced from the ungrafted, centenarian vines that in 2015 informed the dry Riesling labeled "Uralte Würzelechte Reben." Site-typical scents and flavors of apple and vanilla are accompanied by a hint of apricot familiar from this year's Sonnenuhr Kabinett as well as from some other vintages of Richter wines from this Einzellage. The lush fruitiness is seductively complemented by a creamy, glycerol-rich texture and inner-mouth honeysuckle and heliotrope perfume. A superbly sustained finish unexpectedly and delightfully introduces fresh lime and grapefruit that animate and refresh. **(93 points)**

2016 Riesling Veldenzer Elisenberg Spätlese

Picked at only four degrees Oechsle more than the corresponding Kabinett, but from older vines, this features scents and juicy abundance of red raspberry, white peach and grapefruit shot through with the same saliva-inducing salinity that helped make that Kabinett memorably delightful. The feel here is surprisingly firm but disarmingly and delectably delicate, leading to a refreshingly lingering finish of striking clarity and tingling brightness, its alluring purity of fruit supported by unobtrusive sweetness. **(93 points)**

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2016 Riesling Brauneberger Juffer Fass 4 Kabinett

Issuing from old vines in especially finely morcellated slate, this is the latest Richter exploration of radically low-must weight and correspondingly delicate Kabinett. Picked at just 77 Oechsle, it boasts what for the vintage, not to mention for the Richters' collection, is a remarkably high 9.8 grams of acidity. Lemon, lime and white peach on the nose translate into bracingly bright, generous juiciness on a firm, delicate palate. Subtly smoky, bitter-sweet nutty undertones and a vivid sense of crushed stone suffusion serve to balance and buffer the animating acidity – conveying a suggestion of richness that is uncanny given this wine's analysis – as do a perfectly judged 38 grams of residual sugar. The bell-clear, vibrant finish conveys penetrating persistence and complexity, not to mention eye-opening invigoration and consummate refreshment. I'll be surprised if this does not age terrifically. Richter – in common with some of his lightness-obsessed colleagues like Julian Haart and Ulli Stein – believes that old

ungrafted vines are critical to rendering a complete and complex Riesling at such low potential alcohol, but he also emphasizes the significance of site. “If I had picked my really old vines in Wehlener Sonnenuhr at 77 Oechsle,” he averred, “I would have had to do so earlier, and my impression is that the flavors would have been too green.” (“Fuder 4” is simply a nickname by which the Richters have chosen to distinguish their radically delicate non-dry Juffer Kabinett from its otherwise eponymous sibling. The primary, presentation label simply displays a large “4.”) **(93 points)**

2016 Riesling Brauneberger Juffer-Sonnenberg Spätlese

Reflecting highly concentrated but entirely healthy grapes harvested at 94 Oechsle, and a volume of just 3,000 liters from 2.5 acres in the prime Falkenberg *lieu-dit*, it’s not hard to understand why Constantin Richter presented this bottling last in his lineup of 2016 vintage Spätlesen. “If we had ‘gold capsule Spätlesen’,” he noted, “this would be one.” A headily ripe nose of Persian melon, mango and pineapple anticipates the flavors but not the degree of brightness, tang and animation exhibited on a creamy palate, a legacy of light berry desiccation having concentrated acids as well as sugars. The lingering finish is prominently sweet by estate standards but both luscious and refreshing. **(92 points)**

2016 Riesling Graacher Domprobst Alte Reben

Like last year’s eponymous wine, this is sourced from the original, core Domprobst. “We harvest this old parcel *en bloc*,” explained Richter. “The vines go back to sometime soon after World War I. We give the fruit some pre-fermentative skin contact and then let it ferment in cask as far as it wants to.” In 2015, that was to 16 grams of residual sugar, whereas in this case there are only half that many grams, so stylistically the results resemble what was last year bottled as Graacher Domprobst Auslese *trocken*. Scents of grapefruit peel, walnut and black currant set the stage for a grippingly piquant palate performance and finish that nonetheless avoid outright bitterness and boast both ample fresh fruit juiciness and mouthwatering salinity. A *cantus firmus* of wet stone accompanies this bottling from nose to tail, and 12% alcohol does not weight at all heavily on it, nor is its analytically relatively low acidity reflected in any lack of animation. (This impressive success – which represents three full *fuders*’ volume – is certainly an eloquent exception to Richter’s claim that he found 2016 less than ideally suited to dry wines from high must weight fruit.) **(92 points)**

2016 Riesling Veldenzer Elisenberg Kabinett

Scents and bright palate profusion of fresh lime, white peach and red currant put me in mind of a Ruwer Riesling. The delicate palate and consummately refreshing finish are transparent to stony underpinnings and incisive impingements of raw ginger. And here is one of those many instances where high quartzite content for whatever reason correlates with salinity, which in the present instance practically milks the salivary glands. If this libation doesn’t leave you invigorated, you might want to check with your doctor. (The newly revived antique label for this wine styles it merely as “Elisenberger,” although the official label conforms with German Wine Law in referring to “Veldenzer Elisenberg.”) **(92 points)**

2016 Riesling Mühlheimer Sonnenlay Alte Reben feinherb

Harvested at 87 Oechsle, this would have qualified by estate standards as a Spätlese. It stopped fermenting in the upper range of legal *halbtrockenheit*, which results in excellent support for apple, white peach and lime fruit without engendering any overt sense of sweetness. This is one of the many 2016s to project a positive sense of stuffing while being alcoholically delightfully light. The long finish is lusciously juicy, mouthwateringly salt-tinged and vividly underlain with wet stone. **(91 points)**

2016 Riesling Erdener Treppchen Spätlese

Orange and pineapple are tinged with sage and saffras on a site-typical nose that anticipates the zest, pungency and sap exhibited on a palate whose glycerol-richness and creaminess point toward the influence of a bit of botrytis. The lusciously lingering finish displays admirable clarity and ample primary juiciness, along with intriguingly site-typical smokiness and crushed stone suffusion. **(91 points)**

2016 Riesling Graacher Himmelreich Kabinett

Grapefruit, lemon, and blueberry on the nose anticipate the bright, luscious abundance of fruit on a firm palate that practically quivers with energy, leading to a zesty, tangy, invigorating, refreshing finish underlain by wet stone and marked by piquancy and chew of fruit skins and peels. As with other Richter Himmelreich offerings, this originates in the Goldwingert, a distinctive site high above Bernkastel. The vines picked for this Kabinett are old and ungrafted, and the fruit came in at 83 Oechsle, which is at the upper margin for that Prädikat *chez* Richter. **(91 points)**

2016 Riesling Mühlheimer Helenenkloster Eiswein

It wasn't cold enough on November 30 to harvest Eiswein in the Helenenkloster, reported Richter, but it was on December 5. It stayed so cold for so long that he was able to organize two passes on the same parcels in a single morning (as far as he knows, the first time this has happened at the estate), of which this wine represents mostly the second tranche, which included botrytized bunches. Mango and papaya preserves are lightly glazed with caramel and brown sugar and accompanied by prickly, faintly volatile notes that combine the aggressiveness of which both botrytized and frozen Riesling are capable. The midpalate here is almost custardy in richness and density yet also reflects Eiswein-typical brightness despite being low acid (at 8.5 grams) for the genre. Typical, too, is the confectionary aura of candied citrus peels and of fruits preserved in sugar. The finish here is overridingly sweet but impressively persistent. This will be amenable to serving either with or as dessert. (It's worth noting once again that on principle the Richters do not pack their rows of vines destined for Eiswein in protective plastic film, but rather leave them open to the air and covered only with loose netting to at least deter less determined avian predators.) **(91 points)**

2016 Riesling Veldenzer Elisenberg Auslese Fuder 54

"We were trying for BA," explained Constantin Richter of this bottling picked at 110 Oechsle, "but we decided the wine really exhibited more of an Auslese character." A sweaty, faintly dusty expression of botrytis on the nose is reinforced by a reductive prickle. Behind that are no less pungent scents of lemon peel and dried apricot. The palate is glycerol-rich yet tight in its severe sense of concentration (possibly also in

response to the pre-bottling SO₂); lingonberry preserves join glazed apricot and candied lemon peel. The gripping finish is stimulatingly zesty and jammy, albeit strangely short on primary juiciness or sheer refreshment. It's clearly early days for assessing this elixir – which I did in late July 2017 – and I suspect that both nose and palate will clarify with some time in bottle. That said, it's also too early to predict whether it will reward cellaring to the extent familiar from the very best Richter Auslesen. (The number 54 that appears on the presentation label simply represents a nickname that the Richters have deployed to call attention not only to the unique virtues of this once-renowned site in which they have major holdings but also to the advanced ripeness and botrytization exhibited by this bottling's mere 250 liters.) **(90 points)**

2016 Riesling Graacher Domprobst Kabinett feinherb

This bottling from 30-year-old vines in the original core Domprobst is enticingly scented with apple, grapefruit and honeysuckle. The buoyant palate is intriguingly waxy in texture and brims with bright primary juiciness. A long finish is focused, refreshing, and transparent to stony and perfumed details, its sense of sweetness subtle and supportive. This is a model of balance, and if both Richter's analytically dry and overtly sweet Kabinetts weren't so delicious and intriguing, one might be tempted to say about this *feinherb* "this is how Kabinett should taste." (And not a few German growers seem convinced that low-alcohol Kabinett has to fit a single stylistic corridor and range of residual sugar, otherwise "the consumer will be confused"... or some classificatory fetish will remain unsatisfied.) **(90 points)**

2016 Riesling Wehlener Sonnenuhr Kabinett

Scents of lime and apricot are not exactly typical for this site, but they are appealing, and they anticipate the juicy profusion that emerges on a polished, buoyant, subtly glycerol-slicked palate. This finishes with impressive cling, consummate refreshment, a fine sense of slate suffusion, and adept integration of what by prevailing Mosel standards has to be counted as exceedingly modest residual sugar. **(90 points)**

2016 Riesling Graacher Himmelreich Kabinett trocken

Originating with old vines in the Goldwingert section of Himmelreich (high above Bernkastel), this was harvested toward the upper end of the Richters' typical range of Kabinett must weights and fermented all the way down to three grams of residual sugar. Even so, it barely reached 11% alcohol. Zesty lemon and grapefruit dominate on the nose and on a brightly juicy palate. There is a sense of stuffing despite alcoholic buoyancy that one observes in many 2016s (and that isn't a function of dry extract, which is low almost across the board this vintage). Hints of huckleberry tartness and a kiss of wet stone add further invigoration and interest to a bracing and refreshingly sustained finish. What a model of its type... and thank goodness that type – Kabinett *trocken* – has recently been gaining champions among Mosel and Saar vintners despite much tut-tutting and attempts by would-be trendsetters such as the VDP to declare it oxymoronic as well as dead. **(90 points)**

2016 Riesling Mühlheimer Sonnenlay Kabinett feinherb

Scents of grapefruit, apple, fennel and tarragon lead into a buoyant, silken-textured

palate that marries abundant primary juiciness with cooling herbal infusion. Low acidity (by this collection's standards) cashes out in terms of an almost soothing finish but one that harbors considerable tangy refreshment – to which a lick of salt lends a mouthwatering urge to take the next sip. This had been in bottle for only a couple of weeks when I tasted it in late July 2017, as Richter had not been able to get around to bottling all of his Rieslings in May and June as originally intended. **(90 points)**

2016 Riesling Wehlener Sonnenuhr Kabinett feinherb

From a mix of young and old vines just beneath the Wehlen sundial, this leads with cidery apple along with pungent hints of orange peel and an earthy suggestion of rutabaga. At just 9.5% alcohol, the sappy midpalate is even more delicate than that of this bottling's two Kabinett *feinherbs* siblings, but the sense of sweetness is discreet and entirely supportive. This finishes with admirable persistence if not quite the clarity of complexity of Constantin Richter's best off-dry 2016s. But given the origin of the grapes and the high standards set in his present collection, I wonder whether I tasted the wine when it was at an awkward stage. **(89 points)**

2016 Riesling Classic

Based on fruit from Burgen, Velden, Mülheim, Erden (Herrenberg) and Graach (Himmelreich), this dry-tasting, 11.5% alcohol, nearly 30,000-bottle lot delivers snappy, invigoratingly seed-tinged fresh apple underlain by vivid wet stone. It finishes with satisfying refreshment and lift. (Now that Schlossgut Diel has ceased bottling under this still-official category, Kerpen and Richter are the sole remaining growers I visit who market a "Riesling Classic.") **(87 points)**

