

WINE

All bar (Blue) Nun

CHRISTOPHER COOPER, HEAD SOMMELIER AT THE SAVOY GRILL, ON HOW MUCH GERMAN WINE HAS IMPROVED SINCE THE 1970S

Q Why have German wines fallen out of favour during the past couple of decades?

A Their image took a knock after the 1960s, when Blue Nun and Black Tower were very much in vogue and the wine-drinking public started dismissing all German wine as cheap, nasty and sweet. People began to buy new and better wines when competition arrived from the New World rather than simply buying the cheapest bottle.

Q What have the Germans done to raise the profile of their wines?

A Over the past decade winemakers have started producing a bigger variety of wines in different styles, in particular some really good, well-balanced reds and drier, better-balanced Rieslings.

Q Is this improvement down to a new generation of young winemakers?

A There are a number of young winemakers, like Prinz Salm of the Rheingau, who are pulling the traditionalists into the 21st century, but the trend of the whole industry has been to move forward.

Q Does Germany have strict winemaking controls comparable to France's AOC?

A The regulations are more flexible, in that the industry has adapted them to take account of modern trends. The rules are also more lenient in less traditional wine growing regions, like Pfalz, where producers can experiment with new grape plantings, such as Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot.

Q Does Germany get enough sunshine to produce good reds?

A German reds were once written off as light and flabby due to a lack of sun, but winemakers have greatly improved vinification methods and now produce excellent, easy-drinking wines from grapes that thrive in cooler climes such as Dornfelder and Spätburgunder (Pinot Noir).

Q Are there good German dessert wines?

A There are some great ones, including the honeyed Auslese wines and the rich, concentrated Trochenbeerenauslese, which hold their own against the best Sauternes. A little of the rare Eiswein (or Icewine) is also being produced in Pfalz where grapes are left until they are overripe, shrivelled and frozen by the frosts before being picked. The resulting wine is unbelievably intense. Savoy Grill, Savoy Hotel, Strand, WC2, tel: (020) 7592 1600 ■

Words: Wendy Sweetser Photograph: Bruce Mackie



'New winemakers are pulling the traditionalists into the 21st century'

Tasting notes

> WEINGUT MEYER-NÄKEL 2004 SPATBURGUNDER S SELECTION QBA
www.thewinebarn.co.uk, £24.30

Made by one of Germany's top winemakers, this dry red is amazing for its richness and complexity. Serve with roasted and grilled meats or cheese.

> WEINGUT BALTHASAR RESS 2002 RIESLING AUSLESE
Mayfair Cellars, £24

This is clean and fresh with great depth of flavour. Well balanced with a sherbert spice finish, chill this in the fridge so it doesn't lose flavour and aroma.

> SCHLOSS VOLLRADS RHEINGAU SPÄTLESE RIESLING 2003
Liberty Wines, £16.95

Serve chilled as an aperitif or to accompany a foie gras starter. One of the few white wines that goes well with goats' and sheep's cheeses.

> DR BURKLIN-WOLF 2004 WACHENHEIMER RECHBACHEL
Laytons, £13.86

Honeyed but dry with a touch of acidity on the finish. This has mango, peach, passion fruit and fresh lemon flavours. Serve with risottos and slightly oily fish like sea bass and salmon.