



Germany: Mosel's Utterly Charming 2016 Vintage – Like a Phoenix from the Morass

featuring Max Ferd. Richter
reviewed by Stephan Reinhardt

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The mood along the Mosel was close to depression in late spring 2016. Although there were no frost problems as in many other wine regions, such as in northern France and Austria, there were six weeks of continuous rainfall in May and June. This rainfall not only caused a late, uneven flowering that lasted until July but also resulted in widespread peronospora—both of which reduced the yields dramatically in many places. Producers reported losses ranging from 25% up to more than 50%. During the rainy spring, there was almost no chance to spray preventive compounds because the rain didn't stop but for a few hours. Based in Pünderich (Middle Mosel), Clemens Busch is one of the very rare organic wine producers along the Mosel River, and he told me that he had to spray “almost every day for weeks” since each plot needed protection every five or six days. Producers that were not able to protect the vines in time could easily lose large amounts of the potential crop.

However, things took a turn for the better in early July. In fact, the weather became beautiful, almost too beautiful. It was dry and sunny for weeks and also very warm at times, especially in August when the grapes exposed to the afternoon sun could have suffered from sunburn. Gernot Kollmann from Immich-Batterieberg also noticed hydric problems in several vineyards along the Mosel, but I haven't heard about this from other producers.

September was extremely warm—one of the warmest in history—and pushed the ripeness further forward but without adjusting the often-uneven ripeness levels inside a single vineyard or even on a single plant. The harvest took place under perfect conditions (cool and dry) from early October until late October and even until early November for a few notorious late

harvesters, such as Martin Müllen, Markus Molitor and Joh. Jos. Prüm. Due to the perfect autumn weather, there was almost no noble rot, and the healthy grapes were perfectly ripe with moderate sugar and acidity levels. The harvest was pretty relaxing, indeed, as I have heard many times. The producers were not forced to perform hard selections in a very short time (like in 2014 and 2013) but could select perfectly ripe grapes in several passages. Although noble sweet wines such as Beerenauslesen and Trockenbeerenauslesen are very rare, 2016 is an excellent vintage for Eiswein. The grapes were ripe and healthy when frost came pretty early, at the end of November and in early December. There was another Eiswein window in early January.

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How are the wines?

The finest Rieslings are absolutely gorgeous. 2016 is a vintage with numerous classic Mosel Rieslings: bright, clear and medium-weight, super lush and juicy, with highly attractive fruit, light to moderate alcohol and charming acidity levels. They have a coolish but sexy elegance and are already highly accessible and seductive. Although the extract levels are not as high as in previous years, the best can be cellared for many years.

What to buy from 2016?

There are countless beautiful Kabinett and Spätlese Rieslings, many of which are picture book wines for these categories. You can get a lot of great wines for reasonable prices here. I recommend the Auslesen as well, as they have rarely been so clear and finessed. Once poured into the glass, you will drink them incredibly fast!

*I also tasted some of the best dry Mosel-Saar-Ruwer Rieslings I have ever had. The combination of ripe and lush fruit, elegance and superb, charming acidity is just lovely, and I cannot resist drinking so many of these wines. Markus Molitor has most likely produced his best series in 32 years. For the very first time in the 40-year history of The Wine Advocate, a dry German Riesling scored 100 points: Markus Molitor's white capsule Bernkasteler Doctor Auslese *** whose length and complexity are absolutely fabulous! You can read more about that fantastic 100-pointer along with the other 75 Molitor wines in a separate report on [Markus Molitor's Outstanding 2016 Rieslings](#) that was published in the [Interim March 2018 Issue](#). But there are more wines to discover from other big players as well, such as Dr Loosen, Van Volxem (!) and von Othegraven (both Saar). The Rieslings from Maximin Grünhaus (Ruwer) and Hofgut Falkenstein (Saar) are just great in their unique style in 2016. Also, producers such as Clemens Busch, Martin Müllen, Immich-Batterieberg, Weiser-Künstler, Vollenweider, Joh. Jos. Prüm, Fritz Haag, Thomas Haag, Günther Steinmetz and Max Ferd. Richter (among many others) all offer a wide range of excellent Rieslings from famous vineyards.*

Any vintage I would compare with 2016?

To be honest, I don't know of any similar vintages. The 2008 vintage is a leaner classic, while 2016 is more ripe and even more charming. 2011 is warmer and even milder, and 2007 is heavier. 2002? Perhaps. 1997? This would be worth a try!

Max Ferd. Richter

Due to peronospora and hail storms even in May (in Graach and Wehlen), Max Ferdinand Richter only produced three dry Rieslings in 2016, and other than that, he focused on the fruity and off-dry style. "Compared to a 'normal vintage' such as 2015, we had a loss of 25% in 2016," says Constantin Richter. "Since there was almost no botrytis, we only picked a few predicates higher than Spätlese, the latter of which are all completely free of botrytis." In fact, I tasted no more than three Auslesen (all of which are of the finest quality) and one Beerenauslese from the Graacher Himmelreich, of which only 30 liters were produced. The highlight of another excellent 2016 MFR collection, which includes a phalanx of fabulous Kabinett and Spätlese selections (the 2016 Braunerberger Juffer-Sonnenunr Spätlese is phenomenal!), are the two Eiswein bottlings from the Mülheimer Helenenkloster. These are the first ice wines produced here since 2012, marking the 36th vintage of Eiswein here, a category that Max Ferdinand Richter had virtually established by the 1961 vintage.

2016 Brauneberger Juffer Riesling Kabinett

The 2016 Brauneberger Juffer Riesling Kabinett has a very fine, warm and flinty bouquet of soft brown slate intermixed with very fine and elegant tropical fruit aromas. On the palate this Kabinett reflects the filigreed, lush and very elegant style of the Juffer. The finish is fresh, piquant, very fine and salty—really salivating and stimulating. This is a great Kabinett to drink for at least two or three decades. **(94 points)**

2016 Brauneberger Juffer-Sonnenuhr Riesling Auslese #38

The 2016 Brauneberger Juffer-Sonnenuhr Riesling Auslese #38 was picked at 125° Oechsle and with 100% botrytis. The family downgraded the potential Beerenauslese down to an Auslese that would have deserved three stars if only there had been several selections. The wine opens with a vegetal and herbal bouquet that is not very clear and precise. However, it has gorgeous finesse and a lovely raisin flavor on the refreshing mineral palate, but the finish, again, is not crystalline and clear but is a bit covered. **(93 points)**

2016 Brauneberger Juffer-Sonnenuhr Riesling Spätlese

Picked with 10% of botrytis, the 2016 Brauneberger Juffer-Sonnenuhr Riesling Spätlese is beautifully pure, precise and fine on the nose. Silky, lush and very pleasant on the palate, this is a salty-piquant and nicely racy Spätlese of remarkable finesse and elegance. The finish is enormously salty, pure and piquant, and the sweetness of 90+ grams per liter is swallowed by the mineral freshness. This is another extraordinary Richter Spätlese from 2016. Total production: 3,100 liters. **(96 points)**

2016 Elisenberger Riesling Kabinett

From another tributary of the Mosel, the 2016 Elisenberger Riesling Kabinett is from slate soils rich in quartzite. The wine opens with clean and flinty but also ripe and concentrated fruit on the nose, intermixed with crunchy slate flavors. Lush, piquant, very salty and stunningly pure and fresh, this is a very fine, elegant and unique Mosel Riesling that has a bit of the precision and mineral character of an Eiswein. The grapes are picked seven to ten days later than the Himmelreich Kabinett, and the acidity is super clear and precise, cutting through the concentrated fruit like a laser sword. This is a very promising Kabinett, perhaps the finest of the 2016 vintage chez MFR. **(93 points)**

2016 Elisenberger Riesling Spätlese

From the Alte Elisenburg plot that is the filet of the cru, the 2016 Elisenberger Riesling Spätlese is made from 100% healthy grapes picked at 8° Oechsle. It was the second-to-last wine picked in 2016, followed only by the Helenenkloster Eiswein. Deep, ripe, clear and fresh, with perfectly ripe, healthy fruit as well as fine slate and quartzite aromas, this is a lush, piquant, very elegant and salty Spätlese with lots of mineral tension and total acidity of 8.5 grams per liter. The finish

is long, precise and intense, full of energy, precision and minerals. Great aging potential. **(95 points)**

2016 Erdener Treppchen Riesling Kabinett

From the flurbereinigt (reconstructed) part of the vineyard, 2016 Erdener Treppchen Riesling Kabinett is very clear and concentrated on the slightly flinty nose where ripe apricot aromas are displayed. Lush, light and piquant, this is an elegant, juicy and refined Kabinett bottled with 8% alcohol. The wine is well structured and finishes with good grip and mineral tension without losing its finesse. **(92 points)**

2016 Erdener Treppchen Riesling Spätlese

From the old Busslay plot in the unreconstructed (not flurbereinigt) part of the cru and picked three or four weeks after the Kabinett (according to Constantin Richter), the 2016 Erdener Treppchen Riesling Spätlese opens with an intense and concentrated bouquet that doesn't show much primary fruit aromas. Lush, piquant and elegant on the palate, this is a remarkably fine and mineral Spätlese with fine grip and stimulating salinity in the finish. The fruit is ripe, fresh, perfectly healthy and the finish stimulatingly clear, bright and salty-piquant. No botrytis at all. Bottled with roughly 70 grams of residual sugar and 7.5% alcohol. **(93 points)**

2016 Graacher Domprobst Riesling Kabinett Feinherb

From younger vines on deep and weathered slate soils, the 2016 Graacher Domprobst Riesling Kabinett Feinherb shows a coolish and smoky bouquet of dark, flat slate and yellow fleshed stone fruit aromas. Lush and round on the palate, this is a well-structured, piquant and salty Riesling with lush fruit and an elegant, salty finish. The wine has good length and complexity and corresponds with several excellent Domprobst Rieslings I tasted for this report. **(90 points)**

2016 Graacher Himmelreich Riesling Auslese

From 60- to 80-year-old vines and picked at 100° Oechsle (with 30% of botrytis), the 2016 Graacher Himmelreich Riesling Auslese has a fine and refreshing mineral bouquet of ripe, tropical Riesling notes along with smoky slate aromas. Piquant, pure and very slatey on the palate, this is a lush and refreshing Auslese with stimulating purity and salinity. There is good tension and finesse here as well—elegantly lithe and delicate. **(94 points)**

2016 Graacher Himmelreich Riesling Beerenauslese

Picked with 155° Oechsle, the 2016 Graacher Himmelreich Riesling Beerenauslese is a raisin selection of the Auslese. Still very reductive, with lots of sulfur notes on the nose (100 milligrams per liter of free SO₂) along with dried apricots aromas in the background, this is a sweet, round, piquant, beautifully dense and concentrated but fine and delicate Beerenauslese with lovely raisin flavors and remarkable acidity. Total production: 30 liters. **(95+ points)**

2016 Graacher Himmelreich Riesling Kabinett

Mainly from the former Goldwingert and Himmelreich vineyards, the 2016 Graacher Himmelreich Riesling Kabinett offers a clear, coolish and beautifully smoky aroma with crunchy slate and herbal flavors. Light, fresh, pure and piquant, this is a salty, crunchy and elegant Himmelreich with the typical fruity/mineral, highly elegant and refined character. The finish reveals a stimulating grip and persistent mineral tension. Gorgeous. **(93 points)**

2016 Mülheimer Helenenkloster Riesling Eiswein

The 2016 Mülheimer Helenenkloster Riesling Eiswein was picked on December 5th in incredibly healthy conditions, with just a bit of over-ripeness and botrytis (which is extremely rare, says Constantin Richter). The wine opens with clear, piquant, fresh and concentrated fruit on the nose. Clear and very delicate on the palate, this is a lush, highly finessed and well-balanced Eiswein with very fine and crystalline acidity, mineral grip and tension. This Eiswein is remarkably clear and lush but still finessed, precise, lean and elegant—in short, a beautiful Eiswein, the first since 2012. The corresponding two-starred Eiswein was made from 100% healthy grapes. **(96 points)**

2016 Mülheimer Helenenkloster Riesling Eiswein **

Picked on the same day as the regular Eiswein (December 5) but based on just ripe and 100% healthy berries, the 2016 Mülheimer Helenenkloster Riesling Eiswein ** is beautifully healthy and spicy on the fine yet concentrated and even slatey nose (ginger!). Round, piquant and highly elegant on the palate, this is a beautifully finessed and salty-elegant Eiswein with extremely stimulating salinity and mineral freshness. It's a fabulous Eiswein made for the next 50+ years. It's unbelievably pure and fine. A great effort. Bottled in March 2017 with 6.5% alcohol and 11 grams per liter of total acidity. **(98 points)**

2016 Mülheimer Helenenkloster Riesling Kabinett Feinherb

From a deeper, more loamy soil and with lovely clayey slate and intense fruit aromas, the 2016 Mülheimer Helenenkloster Riesling Kabinett Feinherb opens with deep and intense fruit on the nose. Full-bodied, round and mouthfillingly juicy, this is a generous, well-structured and mineral Kabinett with dark, ripe stone fruit, good tannins and an aromatic finish. It is still young but won't take many more years to gain finesse than the more crystalline Sonnenlay, which comes from a gray slate vineyard just 100 meters away. The wine is very juicy and almost lush on the palate. **(88 points)**

2016 Mülheimer Helenenkloster Riesling Spätlese

Picked with 25% of botrytis, the 2016 Mülheimer Helenenkloster Riesling Spätlese offers a coolish, precise and refreshing Riesling and grapefruit bouquet with beautiful flinty-mineral

aromas. Incredibly lush and piquant, with sappy, concentrated fruit and piquant acidity, this is a remarkably mouth-filling, round and juicy Spätlese that is almost ready to be drunk. The acidity is firm, fresh and salty, the finish absolutely delicious. This wine has a great life ahead. **(94 points)**

2016 Mülheimer Sonnenlay Riesling Alte Reben Feinherb

From a former single vineyard called Himmelsleiter and from over 70-year-old vines on blue-gray slate, the 2016 Mülheimer Sonnenlay Riesling Alte Reben Feinherb was picked in one passage and macerated for a few hours. The wine opens with a pure, fine and mineral nose that indicates clear, ripe and concentrated fruit along with deep terroir flavors. Medium-bodied, round and elegant on the palate, this is a firm and mineral Riesling from a side valley of the Mosel that gives a leaner, tighter style of Riesling. This style is not as generous and lush as the wine from Graach or Wehlen but is tensioned and provided with very good aging potential. The acidity is fine but racy-piquant and the finish stimulatingly piquant. Bottled with roughly 25 grams of residual sugar and 10% alcohol. **(92 points)**

2016 Mülheimer Sonnenlay Riesling Kabinett Feinherb

The 2016 Mülheimer Sonnenlay Riesling Kabinett Feinherb is bright and fruity on the elegant nose that shows a certain ripeness and even raisin flavor. Lush and round on the palate, with a nice phenolic grip, this is a pretty intense and aromatic Kabinett that was bottled with roughly 20 grams of residual sugar and remarkably steely acidity. Keep this wine for another 7 to 10 years. **(89 points)**

2016 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Kabinett

Richter's 2016 Riesling Wehlener Sonnenuhr Kabinett is from the lower plots of the cru (just like the feinherb version) and opens with a ripe, intense and concentrated stone fruit bouquet intermixed with slate and herbal flavors. Full-bodied (8%!), lush and round on the palate, this is a firm and nutty flavored Sonnenuhr with remarkable tannins and a slightly astringent finish. **(92 points)**

2016 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Kabinett Feinherb

Predominantly from lower plots below the sundial, the 2016 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Kabinett Feinherb opens with a delicate and fresh bouquet of ripe apricots/mirabelles intermixed with finely smoky slate aromas. Round, lush and piquant, this is a refreshingly mineral, well-structured and salty Sonnenuhr with remarkable elegance, grip and complexity in the finish. This is one of the finest 2016s MFR has produced. **(92 points)**

2016 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Spätlese

The 2016 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Spätlese is from the oldest vines (90-120 years old) and was picked with far more than 90° Oechsle but with just 10% to 15% of botrytis. Clear, intense and fruity on the nose, with a delicate but serious flintiness and mineral expression, this is a highly elegant, finessed and salty Spätlese with ripe, concentrated and lush fruit as well as exciting acidity and mineral freshness. This is full of tension but also finesse and electricity—a gorgeous but rare Spätlese of which only two fuders were produced (2,700 bottles) **(96 points)**

