

Germany, Pfalz: Weingut Koehler-Ruprecht –

Why the Kallstadter Saumagen is One of Germany’s Iconic Rieslings

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- 20th Aug 2020 | [The Wine Advocate](#) | [August 2020 Week 3](#)

Before we turn our attention to even more magnificent 2019s in early fall, as well as to some latecomers and red wines from 2018, I would like to draw your exclusive attention to a winery whose wines will not be named when it comes to the so called Grosses Gewächs or GG wines of the Verband der Prädikatsweingüter (VDP), although they would undoubtedly deserve to be called grand crus. Although Weingut Koehler-Ruprecht in Kallstadt, Palatinate, has always been an ornament to the VDP, which launched the so-called wines from VDP Grosse Lagen a good 20 years ago, the winery has not been a member of the VDP for several years. Koehler-Ruprecht continues to remain faithful to the traditional Prädikat wine system, while the VDP markets its top dry wines as QbA (quality wine from specific growing regions).



Domink Sona, Franzi Schmitt and Uli Meyer at Weingut Koehler-Ruprecht (Photo by Sven Paustian)

Although the members of the VDP also continue to produce Prädikat wines, these are exclusively sweet (or, in a few regions, feinherb or halbtrocken, i.e., off-dry). The fact that the VDP abandoned the idea of its founding fathers, who in 1910 joined together to form the Verband Deutscher Naturweinversteigerer (Association of German Natural Wine Auctioneers), of all things for its best dry wines, in order not to be at a disadvantage compared to French grand crus, for example, soured the traditionalists in the association. At that time “natural” meant that the wine was not chaptalized. Until the late 1980s, even in the very best vintages, the grapes in Germany did not even come close to reaching the sugar ripeness of today. It was therefore common practice to fortify the musts with sugar in order to give the wines more body and fullness, which they did not have by nature. The founding fathers of the VDP, the Natural Wine Auctioneers, on the other hand, wanted to emphasize the naturalness of their wines. Their quality or style was not to be determined by the volume of alcohol but by the natural expression of the characteristics of the individual vineyard and the vintage in the wine. The quality of the respective *terroir* and the renunciation of any kind of manipulation on the part of the winegrower thus decided on the quality or class of a wine and not the "sun out of the bag." The classification of the wines as well as the individual sites was done by the auction hammer, so to speak.



Uli Meyer, Franzi Schmitt and Domink Sona at Weingut Koehler-Ruprecht (Photo by Sven Paustian)

When the VDP made the old *terroir* principle the basis of its current site classification, it did not want to do without certain interventions "in favor of the wine quality" and "fair" competition with the neighbors. Grosse Gewächse or wines from VDP Grosse Lagen are therefore sold as

quality wine (QbA), since for Prädikatswein, which is actually a higher level in the German wine law, interventions such as Trockenzuckerung of the must (adding sugar) are not permitted. Although today this method is predominantly used for red wines for stylistic rather than quality reasons, acidification to correct the pH level and to stabilize the wine is allowed and is widely used today. However, all of this and many other methods permitted by law are taboo at Koehler-Ruprecht, and that is why some of Germany's best Rieslings have never been circulated as GG, but as dry (trocken) Prädikat wines to this day. The withdrawal from the VDP was the consequence, while neither the philosophy nor the wine quality at Koehler-Ruprecht has changed. Depending on the vintage, several Rieslings continue to be selected from the famous Kallstadter Saumagen, from Kabinett to Auslese and in some years even to Beerenauslese. Read the tasting notes in this report for more about the current and upcoming Rieslings from this famous limestone cru and more wines that deserve your attention. A vertical of the Saumagen is also on the horizon, but I thought it's a good idea to update you earlier with the wines that are for sale today.