



Mosel Fine Wines

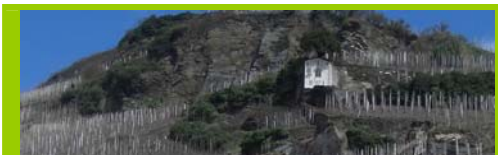
"The Independent Review of Mosel Riesling"

By Jean Fisch and David Rayer

Mosel Perspectives: Towards a Mosel vineyard classification

Extract from the Mosel Fine Wines Newsletter No 4 – February 2009

© Mosel Fine Wines. All rights reserved.
Unauthorized copying, physical or electronic distribution of this document is strictly forbidden. Quotations allowed with mention of the source.



Mosel Fine Wines

"The Independent Review of Mosel Riesling"

By Jean Fisch and David Rayer

Mosel Perspectives: Towards a Mosel vineyard classification

Vineyard classification is a hot topic today in the Mosel, also thanks to the impulse of the VDP (*Verband Deutscher Prädikats- und Qualitätsweingüter*), the private grower association. We had the opportunity to taste a large selection of wines from many decades and thought of proposing our own classification. What started as a fun *Gedankenexperiment* quickly resulted in a pretty comprehensive list, which we would like to share in this first Mosel Perspective.

History and recent developments

Vineyard classification: a French innovation of the 19th century?

Vineyard classifications are often seen as something very French. And there are good reasons for this. Both Burgundy and Bordeaux introduced such classifications in the 19th century. Most wine lovers know the Médoc classification of 1855. But also Burgundy underwent regularly such processes. For instance, in the same year (1855), Dr. Lavalley published a full classification of Burgundy vineyards into four categories: *Têtes de Cuvée*, *Premières Cuvées de Finage*, *Deuxièmes Cuvées de Finage* and *Troisième Cuvées de Finage*. Where France led the way was the remarkable decision to use and embed these classifications into the wine laws for Burgundy (Grand Cru and Premier Cru), for Bordeaux (for instance Grand Cru, Grand Cru Classé, 1er Grand Cru Classé A and B in Saint-Emilion) and more recently for Alsace.

Not at all! The Prussians were at it also in the Mosel, but for different reasons.

Vineyard quality and resulting classifications had also been an integral part of the German wine system throughout the 19th century. This is hardly surprising as there are significant differences in quality and resulting cask selling prices between vineyards. The main difference to France is that such classifications were primarily done for taxation purposes. Two classification maps were however made out of the full taxation maps: the "1868 Weinbau Karte (Steuerrat Clotten)" (focusing on the Saar, Ruwer and Middle Mosel) and the more complete "1897 Lintz Karte" (covering also the Bereich Koblenz). Both rank the different vineyards into three categories by using a color code in function of the estimated sale prices of their wines.

These Mosel classifications would still very much hold true today ... with one major exception.

The remarkable thing is most winemakers would acknowledge that these 19th century classifications of Mosel vineyards still match, broadly speaking, today's quality ranking. There is however one major exception worth pointing out: the Southern Saar area around Saarburg and Serrig. Top vineyards here often only started to be cultivated at the end of the 19th century. For example, the well-known Serriger Würzburg and Herrenberg vineyards did not come into production until 1904. It means that these vineyards are either not on the maps or did not have had yet the chance to 'make a name for themselves'. Here, the taxation maps are simply incomplete.

Unfortunately, public authorities messed around instead of promoting best vineyards.

If one forgets for a moment the particular situation of the Southern Saar: if these 19th century classifications still make sense elsewhere, why aren't they better known today? The problem is that for much of the 20th century, the German legislator was more concerned with sugar (chaptalization or not, what is a Spätlese, etc.) than with identifying better vineyards and helping customers and Estates to recognize wines of finer origin. Such a process of identifying and promoting quality vineyards was made even more difficult after the amalgamation of individual single vineyards of very different quality into larger ones (especially in the wine Law in 1971). The Scharzhofberger was extended from 9 ha to over 27 ha. The Ürziger Würzgarten, which was a small single vineyard, became a large vineyard of over 60 ha. The most extreme situation is probably that of the Ayler Kupp. This small south-facing vineyard became after 1971 a catch term for unrelated parcels spread over an area of several km²! A common complaint about the German Law of 1971 is the creation of the notion of *Grosslage*. But some of the so-called single vineyards created in 1971 were *Grosslage* by themselves: think of the Trittenheimer Altärchen, with over 200 ha of land having the right to its name, or the Pündericher Marienburg, with over 100 ha. This consolidation into larger vineyards had another draw-back: some highly regarded single (and small) vineyards were lost in the process. Who knows today that the Wehlener Lay (which is situated in the central part of the Wehlener Sonnenuhr) was a highly sought-after vineyard before 1971? The same goes for the Ürziger Kranklay or Ürziger Sonnenuhr, which were both melted into the large Ürziger Würzgarten. Diversity and quality simply suffered from this rationalization frenzy.

Despite the lack of interest by public authorities, vineyard and parcel quality differences have remained an integral part of local business practices.

Throughout the 20th century, Estates, vine growers and merchants have remained fully aware of differences in quality. This is of course reflected to this day in the differing sales price for parcels within a same vineyard. But it is also reflected in the dealings of public authorities themselves. The example of the *Flurbereinigung* process is worth pointing out, through which most Mosel vineyards have already gone or will go at some moment of their history. Inheritance laws are similar to those in France, which means that (vineyard) ownership is equally split between all heirs. This has led to a huge fragmentation of ownership over the centuries. Parcels of less than a few square meters are not rare! The *Flurbereinigung* process aims (among others) at rationalizing the vineyard ownership so that each winemaker can rely on larger parcels, which should facilitate tending, harvesting and ultimately generate better wines. In this process, each maker brings in his set of scattered parcels and gets out more coherent and larger parcels. Public authorities need to manage therefore a complex swapping process to ensure that nobody is worse off afterwards and therefore start by specifying the quality of each individual parcel from every winemaker into three quality categories: A, B and C.



Mosel Fine Wines

"The Independent Review of Mosel Riesling"

By Jean Fisch and David Rayer

It is therefore not surprising that the legislative denial of quality differences is largely bypassed by the reality on the ground.

In the 1980s, wine authors Hugh Johnson and Stuart Pigott proposed a classification of the major German vineyards inspired by the old taxation maps. At the same time, the VDP started to see the need (and no doubt financial value) to promote the best vineyards and went on to adopt a scheme based on the notion of 'Erste Lage' (first growths) for its members. The 'Erste Lage' vineyards represent in the eyes of the association the top vineyards in each region. Its current slogan 'Erste Lage, Beste Weine' underlines this willingness to achieve better recognition for these vineyards and the wines they can produce. More recently, a new trend emerged to bottle single-parcel wines, often referring to pre-1971 top vineyards. Johannes Selbach (from the Selbach-Oster Estate) bottles separately a Zeltinger Schlossberg 'Schmitt' and a Zeltinger Sonnenuhr 'Rothlay'. Ernie Loosen (Dr. Loosen) introduced a Wehlener Sonnenuhr 'Lay' (from holdings in this central part of the Sonnenuhr) and Graacher Himmelreich 'Stablay' (referring to a single-vineyard from before the Law of 1971). Roman Niewodniczanski (Van Volxem) bottles separately a Scharzhofberger P (from the Pergentsknopp parcel situated in the heart of the historical part of the Scharzhofberger vineyard) and a Wiltinger Braunfels 'Volz' (from a former single vineyard classified in the highest category on the taxation maps of the 19th century). Raimund Prüm (Weingut S.A. Prüm) also adopted this approach for one of his Ürziger Würzgarten exclusively made from grapes out of the 'Kranklay', an old vineyard that we referred to earlier on. The list of examples is long and underlines this clear trend in the Mosel to highlight and promote unique vineyards or parcels.

There is a need for a comprehensive classification and we propose one based on our experience.

It is hopefully only a matter of time before public authorities will recognize the benefits of a full Mosel classification. We believe that, as the French have realized since quite a while, it is better to have a classification than not to have one. Such a step was already taken in the Rheingau, where the notion of first growths has been defined in the wine law. It is however probably simpler said than done as divergent interests will be at play. In the meantime, we have taken upon us to propose our own classification of the Mosel vineyards based on the not unsubstantial number of wines that we had the chance to taste.

The classification approach

We classified top vineyards in three categories: Premier Cru, Grand Cru and Grand Cru Hors Classe.

We followed in our classification essentially the Burgundy principles by recognizing the outstanding quality of some vineyards as *Premier Cru* or *Grand Cru*. In addition, we wanted to highlight the "Grandest among the Grand Cru" vineyards and introduced a Grand Cru Hors Class level, much in the spirit of what Dr. Lavalley did in his classification of Burgundy vineyards with his Têtes de Cuvée ranking.

As in Burgundy, we attempt to define the intrinsic quality of a vineyard.

We believe in the notion of terroir. Each piece of vineyard and parcel has intrinsic qualities independently of the winemaker who owns it. Clearly, a winemaker can have a huge impact on the quality of the wines produced (as it is often the case in Burgundy). A *Premier Cru* wine from a top grower can be far better than one from a *Grand Cru Hors Classe* vineyard made by an average one.

Our classification is based on vineyard quality in terms of finesse, consistence and maturing capabilities.

"What makes a quality vineyard?" is of course a question to which there is no definite answer. We chose to consider three main factors:

- Finesse: is the vineyard's signature in the resulting wine one of refinement, complexity, balance and elegance?
- Consistency: is the vineyard also producing great wines in lesser vintages?
- Maturing: does the vineyard produce wines that gain from aging?

In order to assess the latter factor, we particularly relied on our experience with mature wines to ensure that the proposed ranking relies as much as possible on the vineyards' potential. The ranking proposed for some vineyards may be surprising by today's standards (e.g. Neumagener Rosengärtchen or Enkircher Batterieberg). It only means that past glories clearly showed their potential. The ranking of one vineyard may even be more surprising as it is no longer planted today: the Pellingier Jesuitengarten. This monopole of the Friedrich-Wilhelm-Gymnasium situated east of Oberemmel has however produced such stunning wines throughout the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s that it would be impossible not to include it in our list. It is clearly a vineyard waiting to be rediscovered (even if full replanting could prove to be a very costly proposition).

We had to tackle the issue of vineyards created in 1971 with huge quality differences between individual parcels.

Most vineyards show some differences in quality between parcels. One parcel may be slightly more to the south, the other slightly less steep, the third slightly higher up on the hill, etc. In general, such differences do not create major issues within a relative contained vineyard size. However, the Law of 1971 created some large vineyards in which there are huge differences between parcels, be it in terms of soil, exposure and/or slope inclination. In such instances, we ranked the vineyard at a lower level and indicate by a star (*) that parts of it are of higher quality. This concerns for instance the Erdener Treppchen, a 45 ha vineyard situated between the Lösnicher Försterlay and two of the top vineyards in the region, the Ürziger Würzgarten and Erdener Prälat. The western part of the Erdener Treppchen next to these two great vineyards is clearly of Grand Cru, even Grand Cru Hors Classe, quality with steep slopes and pure red slaty soil. Joh. Jos. Christoffel Erben's vines are for instance located here. However, the large eastern part is not of the same high quality as the soil gets deeper (with higher earth content) and the slope more gentle (allowing for more wind to come down from the hill).



Mosel Fine Wines

"The Independent Review of Mosel Riesling"

By Jean Fisch and David Rayer

Some vineyards are not on the list because only the classical part is worthy in our eyes of a Premier Cru ranking.

One may be surprised not to find back some well known vineyards on our list. The main reason is that the majority of the parcels are not worthy of a classification even though some parts of the vineyards might very well be of *Premier Cru* level. This concerns in particular the following vineyards:

- **Trittenheimer Altärchen:** This vineyard spreads today over 200 ha distributed on both sides of the river with a complete mosaic of exposure, soil and slope inclination. Only a tiny part above the river on the right bank is worthy of a Premier Cru level or even Grand Cru status. But this part only represents a drop in an ocean of lesser parcels.
- **Schodener Herrenberg:** This vineyard was also extended widely in the Law of 1971 and covers in principle over 45 ha of sometimes unrelated parcels (although not all is planted). The classical Herrenberg is however a 5 ha south-eastern facing vineyard with top grey slate and certainly of Premier Cru quality (one just needs to think of the quality of the wines coming out of the Weinhof Herrenberg Estate). Unfortunately, most other parts are of lesser quality.
- **Pündericher Marienburg:** This vineyard was also widely extended in the Law of 1971 and covers over 100 ha on both sides of the river with exposure ranging from south-west to full east. The classical part on the northern side of the River is however clearly of Premier Cru quality and it is not surprising that the up and coming Clemens Busch Estate has its vineyard holdings here. And it is also not surprising that the Estate decided to put forward the names of its parcels, such as Fahrlay or Falkenlay, in addition to that of the Marienburg vineyard.

In principle, we should have applied the above logic to the Wiltinger Braunfels too. In 1971, this prime vineyard was enlarged to include a mosaic of lesser parcels spread over different hills south of the village of Wiltingen. The classical part is however of prime quality as it is situated in the continuation to the west of the Scharzhofberg. A small parcel called Volz was specifically mentioned as of the highest quality in the taxation maps of the 19th century. This parcel belongs among others to the Weingut Van Volxem, which produces the already mentioned Braunfels Volz bottling out of it. Fortunately for the vineyard, winemaking on the lesser parts has been abandoned which means that, in practice, it is only done in the classical part. We have therefore included it in our list of Premier Cru vineyards.

The classification is one of the vineyards we know well enough and other vineyards could ultimately be added.

Our classification has as objective to be rather comprehensive. However, there are hundreds of vineyards in the Mosel and we don't claim to know all of them. In particular, we do not have the same depth of experience (in particular with old bottles) with the area between Trier and Trittenheim and the areas of the Terrassenmosel (ranging from Zell down to Winningen). In addition, a whole series of potentially quality vineyards are in sole ownership and not often seen on the market (e.g. Saarburger Stirn, Piesporter Gärtchen or Neumagener Sonnenuhr). Rather than make conjectures on the quality of such vineyards, we have decided to include in our classification only those vineyards that we know well enough. This means that other vineyards could very well be under the radar screen today and only waiting to be (re)discovered and added in due time to our classification. In particular, the following vineyards (listed in alphabetic order) could prove worthy of a Premier Cru classification at some point in time (to be confirmed):

Trier-Saar-Ruwer	Middle Mosel	Terrassenmosel
Kastel-Staadter König-Johann-Berg Saarburger Stirn Trierer Deutscherherrenköpfchen Waldracher Kurfürstenberg	Detzemer Maximiner Klosterlay Klüsserather Bruderschaft Kröver Kirchlay Kröver Letterlay Kröver Steffensberg Mehringener Blattenberg Neumagener Nusswingert Neumagener Sonnenuhr Piesporter Gärtchen Thörnicher Ritsch Veldenzer Elisenberg	Alfer Herrenberg Cochemer Herrenberg Ediger Eltzhofberg Ediger Feuerberg Ellerer Höll Klottener Brauneberg Merler Fettgarten Merler Königslay-Terrassen Merler Stefansberg Mesenicher Deuslay Neefer Frauenberg Pommerner Goldberg Pommerner Sonnenuhr Pommerner Zeisel Reiler Moullay-Hofberg Senheimer Lay St. Aldegunder Palmberg Terrassen Valwiger Herrenberg Zeller Burglay-Felsen



Mosel Fine Wines

"The Independent Review of Mosel Riesling"

By Jean Fisch and David Rayer

Our proposed Mosel vineyard classification

The vineyards in our classification are listed in alphabetic order within each category (no ranking within categories).

<i>Trier-Saar-Ruwer</i>	<i>Middle Mosel</i>	<i>Terrassenmosel</i>
<u>Grand Cru Hors Classe</u> Kanzemer Altenberg Maximin Grünhäuser Abtsberg Saarburger Rausch Scharzhofberger	Bernkasteler Doktor Brauneberger Juffer-Sonnenuhr Erdener Prälat Piesporter Goldtröpfchen Wehlener Sonnenuhr	
<u>Grand Cru</u> Eitelsbacher Karthäuserhofberg * Kanzemer Hörecker Kaseler Nies'chen Maximin Grünhäuser Herrenberg Oberemmeler Hütte Ockfener Bockstein Serriger Schloss Saarfelser Schlossberg Serriger Schloss Saarsteiner Wawerner Herrenberg Wiltinger braune Kupp Wiltinger Gottesfuss	Bernkasteler Alte Badstube Bernkasteler Graben Bernkasteler Lay Enkircher Batterieberg Graacher Domprobst Graacher Himmelreich Josephshöfer Piesporter Schubertslay Trittenheimer Leiterchen Ürziger Goldwingert Ürziger Würzgarten * Wintricher Ohligsberg Zeltinger Sonnenuhr *	Winninger Röttgen Winninger Uhlen
<u>Premier Cru</u> Avelsbacher Altenberg Ayler Kupp * Falkensteiner Hofberg Filzener Herrenberg Filzener Pulchen Kaseler Hitzlay Kaseler Kehrnagel Lorenzhöfer Felslay Maximin Grünhäuser Bruderberg Niedermenniger Herrenberg Pellingener Jesuitengarten Schodener Saarfelser Marienberg Serriger Herrenberg Serriger Würtzberg Trierer Augenscheiner Wawerner Goldberg Wiltinger Braunfels Wiltinger Hölle Wiltinger Kupp	Bernkasteler Bratenhöfchen Bernkasteler Matheisbildchen Brauneberger Juffer Brauneberger Kammer Dhroner Hofberg * Enkircher Ellergrub Enkircher Zeppwingert Erdener Treppchen * Kestener Paulinshofberg Leiwener Laurentiuslay Lieser Niederberg Helden Longuicher Maximiner Herrenberg Neumagener Rosengärtchen Piesporter Domherr Piesporter Kreuzwingert Schweicher Annaberg Trarbacher Hühnerberg Trittenheimer Apotheke * Trittenheimer Felsenkopf Wolfer Goldgrube Zeltinger Schlossberg *	Bremmer Calmont Gondorfer Gäns Hatzenporter Kirchberg Hatzenporter Stolzenberg

* = classical parts of the vineyard would qualify for ranking at a higher quality level.