

TOP 100 WINES OF GERMANY 2022

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Gunter and Monika Kunstler's concentrated and charismatic dry rieslings have taken them to the very top of the German winemaking scene.

Our German Wine of the Year for 2022, the Künstler Riesling Rheingau Hölle GG 2021, says so much about the radical transformation German wine has undergone during recent years and about what makes high-end offerings from the country such a great choice today.

First, it's the latest in a long series of concentrated and well-structured dry rieslings from the Holle site of Hochheim that winemaker Gunter Kunstler began producing with the 1988 vintage.

"Back then I visited the wine regions of California and was very impressed by the dry white wines they were making from fully ripe grapes," he explained about the beginnings of his contemporary wine style. "I felt that if we could also get the grapes fully ripe and keep them free of noble rot we could also do that."

The result was wines that attracted my and James Suckling's attention more than 30 years ago. The rapid critical recognition set Kunstler firmly on the winemaking path that he has pursued ever since, and as the Germans say, practice makes you a

master. The 2021 Holle GG is one of his greatest dry rieslings to date and a true masterpiece.

At first these new substantial dry wines looked pretty radical, but as the 1990s progressed the trend away from light-bodied wines with obvious unfermented grape sweetness toward serious dry wines took hold in Germany. Together with the achievements of winemakers like Kunstler, that laid the foundations for the German wines of the 21st century.

This year's Top 100 Germany showcases the fruits of this transformation and celebrates the way most high-end German white wines remain excellent value for money. The contrast to the often astronomical prices for the white wines of Burgundy could hardly be more extreme. In Germany, the Holle GG 2021 typically costs just under 40 euros, but there are a bunch of places around Planet Wine where it won't cost you much more than that. Yet it is a world-class dry white!

The No. 2 wine, the intense yet delicate Dönnhoff Riesling Nahe Niederhäuser Hermannshöhle Spätlese 2021, proves that Germany's shift of emphasis from sweet to dry doesn't mean the nation's leading winemakers have all dropped the style of frankly off-dry but very elegant rieslings for which the nation has long been famous. "We are very lucky that climate change has made it possible to produce impressive dry wines every year," winemaker Cornelius Donnhoff observed, "but by carefully selecting the right grapes we can also still make exciting traditional style riesling Spatlese."

COOL VINTAGE

The 2021 vintage that dominates this year's Top 100 Germany was much cooler than the preceding three vintages, leading to generally higher natural acidity levels in the grapes. That made 2021 very well suited to producing off-dry riesling Spatlese and the lighter riesling Kabinett category. Scan down the list to find a slew of examples of them.

Yes, the perfect dry Keller Riesling Rheinhessen Brunnenhäuschen Abts E GG 2021 has a higher rating – a perfect 100 – than this year's Nos. 1 and 2, but we ranked it as our No. 25 German wine because you'd have to pay almost 10 times the price of our German Wine of the Year for a bottle.

In position 3 is another new classic German dry riesling, the Wittmann Riesling Rheinhessen Morstein GG 2021, made by Philipp Wittmann. This rich and elegant giant is an example of how the star of the Rheinhessen region has climbed higher and higher since the last turn of the century.

Many wine lovers and somms still imagine that all good German rieslings grow on steep slopes with slate soil, like the vineyards of the Mosel Valley. However, the

Morstein site looks much more like Burgundy. With its shallow clay soil over limestone bedrock, the Morstein is also geologically closer to Burgundy than the Mosel. The textural complexity of this wine and its enormously layered finish could well remind you of Burgundy. Today, German wine defies simplistic definitions.

A much less well known example of how Rheinhessen became the dream factory of dry German wines takes position No. 4, the flamboyant and expressive Thörle Riesling Rheinhessen Hölle Trocken 2021. In recent years, the dry rieslings from brothers Johannes and Christoph Thorle stood in the shadows of their amazing spatburgunder reds, but 2021 gave their dry rieslings a stunning brilliance.

Late-released wines occupy the next two places. At No. 5, the Schlossgut Diel Riesling Nahe Burgberg GG 2020 has almost ideal balance with a super-long, wet-stone finish. That makes it a stunning example of how this vintage wasn't only about fruity charm and immediate drinking appeal. It is the most impressive achievement to date of winemaker Caroline Diel.

The Heymann-Löwenstein Riesling Mosel Uhlen Roth Lay GG 2020, at No. 6, is the work of another woman winemaker, Sarah Lowenstein. With its incredible spice aromas and enormous concentration her wine is atypical for the Mosel, thanks to this unique terraced terroir situated just outside the town of Wittingen that it magnificently expresses.

Eva Fricke, originally from Bremen and Oldenberg in beer-drinking northern Germany, was one of the first outsiders to establish her own winery in the Rheingau back in 2006. The Eva Fricke Riesling Rheingau Schlossberg 2021, at No. 7, has incredible floral delicacy and crystalline purity. With this much energy it should age for decades.

The Emrich-Schönleber Riesling Nahe Halenberg GG 2021 at No. 8 is a staggeringly mineral dry riesling which proves that concentrated and compact wines were possible in 2021 if vineyard management was spot on and the producer waited for the fine weather at the end of October and in early November.

The Schäfer-Fröhlich Riesling Nahe Felseneck GG 2021 at No. 9 is a radically flinty expression of the Nahe region from a vineyard site that was unknown until winemaker Tim Frohlich started crafting powerful and driving masterpieces from it. Still very youthful, the flint and grapefruit character will become more refined with further aging.

And the No. 10 Gut Hermannsberg Riesling Nahe Kupfergrube GG Reserve 2017 was matured in this winery's historic cellar for five years before release. Extreme late releases of this kind are a new trend in Germany and this shows why that makes sense for dry rieslings from the very top sites. Enormously structured, but deep rather than domineering, it is packed with smoky minerality.

Scan down the list and you will find a bunch of very different wines to these, including a handful of stunning spatburgunder reds that can take on the best in the world. Here prices are generally higher than for German whites, but the word is that prices for the best whites will move up next year. We recommend you grab the opportunity for bargains while it is still there.

– *Stuart Pigott, Senior Editor*

7 EVA FRICKE RIESLING RHEINGAU SCHLOSSBERG 2021

Country	Germany	Score
Region	Rheingau	98
Vintage	2021	

Incredibly fine white-peach and mirabelle nose with very delicate jasmine and lemon-blossom aromas. Super-vibrant, compact and precise, with tons of lemon-zest freshness. Totally crystalline finish, with so much energy and wet-stone minerality it takes your breath away. Decades of aging potential ahead of it. From organically grown grapes. Vegan. Drink or hold.

82 EVA FRICKE PINOT NOIR RHEINGAU BRUT NATURE ROSÉ 2019

Country	Germany	Score
Region	Rheingau	95
Vintage	2019	

A German rose sparkling masterpiece! Totally charming nose of wild strawberry and summer flowers. Very filigree and delicate, with wonderful elegance and precision of flavor that pulls you back for more, in spite of the bone-dry finish. Vegan. Drink now.