

## Germany, Mosel:

### The Fabulous 2022s from Selbach-Oster and Alfred Merkelbach

By [STEPHAN REINHARDT](#) Nov 09, 2023

This small report is based on just one visit last week in the Mosel. Driving back home from Baden, I stopped for a tasting at Selbach-Oster in Ürzig to taste the domaine's 2022s. Since Johannes Selbach took over Weingut Alfred Merkelbach in 2020, I also tasted the 2022s from this iconic 1.4-hectare-domaine, in whose cellar the wines are vinified in the Merkelbach style and spirit. Two weeks before my visit, the younger brother, Rolf Merkelbach, of the former owners passed away at age 86. He is survived by his older brother, Alfred, 89. Both men had been working the vineyards for more than 60 years and still did in their 80s.



#### Selbach-Oster

“After a late, cool and wet 2021 broke the string of record-warm, record-early and record-ripe vintages of late, **2022 put the superlatives for heat and drought** back on the map,” writes Johannes Selbach in the introduction to his personal 2022 vintage report.

2022 got an early start, in March, with the entire spring being sunny and warm, Selbach reports. Early budbreak led to an early flowering in the fourth week of May. “Until June, despite the spring being warm and dry, viticulture and agriculture benefited from the plentiful rainfall during 2021 and the mild winter months of January and February 2022.” However, this changed in July and August, two months that “brought very high temperatures and almost no rain“ not only but particularly in the Moselle, which was hard hit by the drought and heat, “the latter being amplified by the rocky soils in the narrow valley, which kept temperatures high even during the night.”

While the old vineyards with deep roots fared relatively well everywhere in Europe, younger vineyards suffered, like most plants with shallow root systems. “Even grown trees showed signs of stress, and much of the forested areas that crown the Mosel slopes above the vineyards dropped their leaves in August to survive,” Selbach writes. These forests, by the way, are extremely important for the Mosel terroir, as they protect the valley from bad weather and also provide moisture and the cooling evening breezes. During the month of August, though, the landscape, with the notable exception of the vineyards, looked barren, brown, remembers Selbach. Like elsewhere in Germany, especially along the Rhine and its tributaries, the extended drought slowed down development in the vineyards and threatened the young vines. “The time we saved because of slower growth and the absence of diseases was spent on shuttling copious amounts of water, tank by tank, trailer by trailer, to our vineyards with young vines, where we installed drip irrigation to help the young vines survive.”

The old vineyards with their deep root systems fared significantly better, but even here signs of stress were obvious, which Selbach attributes to the “fact that the increasing number of drought years of the new millennium is having an impact deep down below, and the vines’ resilience is being put to the test.” When the late but more than welcome rain finally set in the second week of September, Selbach was already picking grapes. The harvest began on the sixth of September, which is early, even in the new millennium. However, the rain saved the vineyards and also “helped the quality to a large extent, but it also made the harvest very labor-intensive and nerve-racking,” underlines Selbach.

However, one of the first highlights were the Pinot Noir grapes in the early part of the 2022 harvest. The fruit was "beautiful," says Selbach. "Pinot Noir had taken the heat and drought surprisingly well. We were thrilled by the quality of the fruit," he reports. The Pinot Blanc was also promising, but the wine was still not ready to taste.

The Riesling harvest took place from September 20th to October 18th.



The harvest took longer because the remnants of a string of tropical storms and hurricanes in the Caribbean and in Florida shuffled a lot of moisture across the Atlantic, making September the wettest September in a long time. October was calmer and less wet. As a consequence, careful, selective picking was of the essence, and it made all the difference for the quality of the 2022 Rieslings," says Selbach. Despite the bad timing, the September rains saved the vintage. "Our yields were down because of the drought, but [it was] not as catastrophic as it looked in August." In fact, the 2022s are well balanced, aromatic and juicy wines with good fruit and balancing acidity, and with alcohol levels that are not over the top. "There wasn't any unripe fruit, but there wasn't very much noble rot either, though we did manage to collect enough to make a small batch of TBA."

Most of the Selbach harvest qualified as Spätlese, some as Auslese. Both predicates gave superb 2022 Rieslings. I would never have thought, though, that the dry GGs excelled that much. Selbach-Oster has produced some of the finest dry Rieslings of the vintage in the Mosel. They set a benchmark and are in great contrast to what I have tasted so far in this category from the 2022 vintage. Regarding the single-parcel bottlings of "Anrecht," "Schmitt" and "Rotlay," as explained in an earlier report, these are always done the same, old-fashioned way of "en bloc" harvest at optimum ripeness with no prior selections pulled from the parcels. That ensures that the "lesser" grapes that hang in the shade provide acidity and structure and "wholesomeness" to the wine, as Selbach puts it. "The concept here is the 'naked' terroir, without any human intervention by means of making conscious selections or blending." The grapes, due to the prime location of these individual parcels, always come in at Auslese ripeness, and because of their high ripeness, Selbach vinifies them Auslese-style.

"If we were to make them dry, we'd be dealing with between 13.5% and 14.5% alcohol, provided the natural yeast would be willing to ferment all along that way, which is doubtful," Selbach explained some years ago. So, he made them "sweet." In 2022, however, the Bömer fermented to dry and 12.5% stated alcohol and is one of the many highlights of the Zeltinger Schlossberg, only topped perhaps, or at least at this early stage, by the regular dry Grosses Gewächs. These wines are in great contrast to what I have tasted so far in this category, and I am already curious to taste the 2022s soon from Markus Molitor, Clemens Busch, Immich-Batterieberg and other top performers along the Mosel, Saar and Ruwer.