

Parker - Mosel – The 2023's und 2024's – by Stephan Reinhardt



In Germany, many commentators now feel sorry for the winegrowers on the Mosel. In a striking **misjudgment** of the region's strengths, it is often said that great dry wines cannot be produced on the Mosel and that winegrowers would do better to stick to their strengths: delicate Kabinett wines and fruit-sweet Spätlese and Auslese wines. Anything sweeter—Beerenauslese, Eiswein Trockenbeerenauslese—is no longer in demand anyway: it's too sweet, too sour and far too expensive, as critics say.

Well, the Mosel does indeed have a problem with price. At least on the steep slopes, winegrowers cannot produce wine cheaply. Many plots can only be cultivated by manual labor, even though there are now lightweight devices, ones that fly and even harvesting machines that can drive up and down the slopes of renowned top vineyards. The harvests in 2025, 2024 and also 2023 have shown that wineries **need to be efficient when it comes to harvesting** and not just with plant protection. Because everything can happen very quickly, from good ripeness to over-ripeness and rot. Where harvesting used to take two to three months in the past, today it often takes only two, three or four weeks, depending on the size of the farm and the portfolio of vineyards.

Rising labor costs in Germany—i.e., the minimum wage—as well as increased prices for energy and virtually everything else are meeting with a global market that currently has little desire to buy wine. Tariffs, fluctuating stock market prices, the continuing weakness of the dollar, the collapse of the Old World order and the climate crisis are forcing importers worldwide to enter into price negotiations and ask producers for discounts. This cannot end well in the long run. Large Moselle wineries have recently terminated leases and cultivation contracts en masse due to declining demand—much to the dismay of grape growers who, given the current absurdly low prices for grapes and bulk wine, would have to pay just to be able to produce and sell grapes or even wine. This makes no sense—and not just in the medium term.

Young successors with the undaunted courage to carry on are rare. Many winegrowers are giving up, while others are calling in the insolvency administrator—and this affects not only lesser-known businesses but also renowned wineries such as the VDP winery Dr. Wagner on the Saar. Christiane Wagner, the fifth generation since the winery was founded in 1880, has already leased out the family's vineyards, and the winery's Art Nouveau villa, including park, wine press room and vaulted cellar, is up for sale. Wagner herself now works as an enologist for the Saar winery Van Volxem. The VDP winery von Hövel in Oberemmel on the Saar has also called in the insolvency administrator. Others will follow, as we hear. The VDP winery Heymann-Löwenstein has also changed hands after Sarah Löwenstein found a new direction a few years after joining her parents' business.

So, if you want to start a winery or even just cultivate vines, these are glorious times. There is a huge supply of cheap prime land, not only on the Moselle. But no one dares to start a new business. Especially since the German media constantly preaches about the harmful effects of alcohol on human health, adopting the WHO's position in a one-sided and unreflective manner. One indication of the dramatic nature of the ongoing structural change on the Moselle is the creation of a "Flächenbörse" (land exchange) for the exchange or acquisition of vineyards by the Dienstleistungszentrum Ländlicher Raum, DLR (Moselle Rural Service Center). The aim is to preserve contiguous vineyard areas on the Moselle. According to the DLR, there are two main reasons for the need for intelligent land management: firstly, the structural change that has been underway for years is freeing up a large number of vineyards from businesses that are closing down, while it is uncertain whether younger managers will take them over. Secondly, the tense market situation and falling demand for wine will "inevitably lead to a decline in vineyard area." The aim of the initiative is to actively manage this development in order to avoid a patchwork quilt in the vineyard landscape as far as possible and, in addition, to be able to keep high-quality vineyards in cultivation in the long term.

"You won't recognize the Ürziger Würzgarten in summer," whispers a winegrower with a worried frown. Now that the "Flurbereinigung" (land consolidation) project, which has been in the works for years, seems to have largely failed, the prices for cultivation continue to rise on this phenomenal, small-parceled steep slope. The working hours here, as on other steep slopes, are two to three times longer than in other German regions, such as the Palatinate. At the same time, it is becoming increasingly difficult to find staff at all, let alone qualified staff. "Nobody wants to work in the vineyard anymore, especially not Germans," says one winegrower. Instead of Poles, more and more Romanians are coming to German vineyards, earning as much in two months as they would at home in a year, and so morale among winegrowers is rapidly declining, observes one. During the 2025 harvest, one large winery had no fewer than 12 people call in sick on a Monday morning. Other harvesting teams finished their half-completed work on the steep slope by mid-morning, regardless of the quality of the grapes. It was "too exhausting," said one producer. Even a renowned, 880-year-old winery like Karthäuserhof on the Ruwer is struggling to find apprentices. "Applicants come from all over the world, just not from Germany. And unfortunately, they neither speak German nor do they have any training or experience in viticulture," reveals director Mathieu Kaufmann. The winery, which is undergoing a complete renovation, has just built a spacious cellar in Mertesdorf, where apprentices could even play tennis, the halls are so large. Benjamin Leonberger, the cellar master, says he walks more than 12 kilometers back and forth here every day. "It saves me going to the gym."

But all this is just the backdrop against which the Mosel is trying to assert itself today. The comments reflected in the media by oh-so-clever merchants and wine experts, who advised the Mosel to abandon dry Riesling because it had no chance of competing with the Nahe, Rheinhessen and Pfalz in terms of quality, are of no help here. The reason for this was the 2024 vintage, which not only brought destructive frost, especially on the Saar and Ruwer, but also hail in some places shortly afterwards. And then, apart from August, there was constant rain, even during harvest time! At least the grapes ripened very slowly, and with appropriate cultivation (especially without fertilizer and with low yields), their harder skins protected them from rot and cherry vinegar flies. Botrytis wines are therefore rare in 2024, which does not rule out the possibility of gray rot where copper was sold out in the fall. Since the 2024 wines are lean and acidic but also more mature than the equally wet and cool 2021 vintage, deacidification was carried out in many places, while at the same time, the musts were enriched (chaptalized) where they were considered too weak for supposed top-quality wines.

However, those who appreciate clear, light and racy Rieslings will get their money's worth in 2024. In any case, the wines have more extract than the 2022s, but this year they will be challenged by the lush and rich 2025s, which are likely to be well received on the market, while the 2024s will only be rediscovered in five or six years. After all, it is not easy to produce rich wines. The art lies in producing fascinating wines with vintage typicity even in a challenging year. The Mosel in particular can shine here, as vintage differences are more significant here than in sunnier areas.

On the Saar and Ruwer, the 2024s are unlikely to age well, and yields were 80% to 90% less than the usual amount—with normal effort in the vineyard, mind you. In fact, 2024 was a vintage for Kabinett and Spätlese wines. These light, delicately sweet Rieslings are crystal clear, spicy, savory and racy. A delicate amount of natural fruit sugar makes them what conservative circles commonly refer to as "true Mosel classics." But that's what they are, especially at Maximon Grünhaus, Willi Schaefer, Dr. Hermann, Merkelbach (more convincing than the wines from Selbach, who produces them) and Villa Huesgen. Gernot Kollmann, on the other hand, shows at Immich-Batterieberg that even in 2024 it was possible to produce magnificent dry wines that have nothing to do with a Palatinate or Rhine wine—and they don't need to. The best come from vines that are not older than the Palatinate, but certainly, they're twice as old as the oldest vines on the edge of the Haardt mountain range.

Pinot Noir is not yet one of the Moselle classics. But there are increasing signs that this variety can also shine on Moselle slate. Markus Molitor has been demonstrating this for more than 20 years (he showed me his 2021 vintage in January). New to the ranks of the very best, however, is Christian Hermann from the Dr. Hermann winery. Although he has only been producing Pinot since 2020, both of his wines are already more than remarkable in terms of style and quality. Both the 2024 Mosel Pinot Noir and the 2023 Kinheimer Rosenberg R have seductive fruit, finesse and soul. Those who have discovered the wines are crazy about them.