

What you always wanted to know about German wine...

by Bill Fix

During our recent wine tasting event hosted by Dave and Shelly Doherty we discovered that many members of our MB Club were curious about the distinctive attributes of German wine.

An obvious question might be; what is the difference between a bottle of wine costing \$26.95 and one costing \$7.95? And of course the obvious answer is \$19.00. And while that answer may at first glance appear a little flip...it is basically accurate. However, armed with a few facts concerning German wine production you will be able to select a very good wine at an exceptionally reasonable price.

Look closely at the label on a bottle of German wine and you will find; the name of the vineyard, the year that the wine was produced, the river /rivers or region where the grapes are grown and the name of the particular variety or selection of grape used to make the wine. At the bottom of the label or perhaps on the back you should see the words, *Qualitaetswein* or *Qualitaetswein mit Pradikat*.

German wines are arguably among the finest wines produced. The original vines have existed in the German soil even before the time of the Roman Empire, establishing a wine culture dating back more than two thousand years.

The German government established a set of standards for wine production and every vineyard must meet that standard in order to sell its wine to the public. Hence the designation *Qualitaetswein*. Vineyards wishing to assure the consumer that their product exceeds the national standard make the prediction that their wines are *Qualitaetswein mit Pradikat*.

German wine differs from the wines of other countries in that it is particularly light, fruity and lively (*spritzig*). While there are over 100 varieties of grapes planted regularly, the most widely planted white wine variety is Riesling, followed by Muller-Thurgau and Silvaner. Pinot Noir (*Spatburgunder*) is the leading red grape, followed by Dornfelder and Portugieser.

So, if all German wines must meet the same minimum standard and you have two bottles of a Riesling variety for example, why is one priced at \$26.95 and the other priced at \$7.95? The simple answer is that the lower priced bottle probably comes from a very large vineyard that produces a large quantity of wine and bases its sales on volume. The higher priced wine probably comes from a small vineyard where the wine process is given greater attention and the production is very limited.

While you may occasionally come across a bottle of German wine that is labeled "*Deutscher Tafelwein*" or Table wine, most German wines sold in the US will be labeled *Qualitaetswein* or *Qualitaetswein mit Pradikat*. Either of the latter labeled wines will prove to be very satisfactory whether with food or as a stand alone beverage. *Pradikatswein* is a higher range of quality wine and usually a little pricier.

The range of selection is labeled as follows:

- *Kabinett*: Produced from the first ripe grapes.
- *Spatlese*: Fully ripe grapes, harvested late in the growing season.
- *Auslese*: Only selected berries are used.
- *Beerenauslese*: Only overripe (slightly shriveled) grapes may be used.
- *Trockenbeerenauslese*: Made from botrytis-affected grape bunches.
- *Eiswein*: Frozen grapes are pressed, the ice remains behind.
- *Sekt*: Bottle-fermented sparkling wine.

