

Preface

by Stephan Reinhardt

This book highlights the quality and variety of German wines as well as the art of hand-crafting them. No matter how steep their vineyards, or how capricious the grapes and the weather, the 70 wine producers profiled here—as well as the others who receive honourable mention—practise their craft with dedication, knowledge, passion, and pride in their heritage.

With a culture stretching back to the Romans and the early Middle Ages, German wine has been celebrated for centuries. By the *fin de siècle*, Rieslings from the Rhine, Mosel, and Saar were among the most sought-after and expensive wines in the world. Now, more than 100 years later, Germany's top producers are ushering in another "golden age" of German wine. They are doing so primarily with Riesling, but also increasingly with Spätburgunder (Pinot Noir), which gives world-class wines and has become the second driving force of the rapid evolution during the first decade of the 21st century. Both varieties dominate this book, but great Silvaners (Sylvaners), Weissburgunders (Pinot Blancs), and Grauburgunders (Pinot Gris) also find a place.

Although there is still "a gulf between expert and popular opinion" about German wines, as Stephan Brook wrote in *The Wines of Germany* (2003), the gap has been narrowing. The VDP—an ambitious association of some 200 of the country's leading producers—is bypassing the anti-elitist wine law of 1971, which bases wine quality on sugar levels rather than origin, grape varieties, yields, or vinification techniques, and which perpetuates the "sweet and cheap" image of German wine abroad. Recognizing that in such a cool wine country as Germany, all aspects of terroir have an exceptionally large impact on the originality, personality, and quality of the wine, the VDP has been leading a countermovement and offering a way back "from sugar to terroir." The association developed its private vineyard classification—and

categories such as Grosses/Erstes Gewächs (Great/First Growths)—to market its wines. The grand cru concept has encouraged ever-higher standards in viticulture and winemaking, and the wines themselves have become better and better.

A book on the finest wines of Germany inevitably has to be highly selective, since there are currently some 24,000 German wine producers. My selection of the 70 whom I profile in the central part of this book is a necessarily subjective, and should not be taken as an attempt to identify Germany's Top 70. I have chosen consistent producers whose personalities, philosophies, and authentic, hand-crafted wines, give an accurate impression of the exciting German wine scene today. Most of the featured names are well known, but I preferred to profile some less well known producers who are giving unrecognized sites a voice, rather than more familiar producers whose wines from famous sites do not inspire me much.

For the same reason, I could not include here all of the 13 German wine regions. Although some very good wines are also produced in Saale-Unstrut, Hessische Bergstrasse, and Mittelrhein, I could not find a producer whose wines are consistently sufficiently inspiring to merit a profile.

I have revisited all the estates portrayed in this book, at least once, between August 2010 and January 2012. So all the tasting notes are up-to-date, including those on the more mature wines: astonishing longevity is one of the most impressive qualities of German Riesling.

German wines, for all their complexity and diversity, share a distinct, indeed unique, style, which is about far more than just fruit. Fine German wine is not only deliciously drinkable, but a thing of beauty that can fill its drinkers with wonder. So, get your glasses and open your heart and mind, while I try to uncork some magic bottles on our quest to discover the finest wines of Germany.