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Wines of the World

Mosel-Saar-Ruwer Region

The valleys of the Mosel, Saar, and Ruwer rivers create a wonderful region in which to grow grapes for wine. This region has produced some of the world's top wines. In this paper, I plan to discuss the characteristics of the M-S-R region, the grapes that it is most famous for, and some of the laws that shape the wine and labels.

The Mosel-Saar-Ruwer region has numerous notable characteristics that identify and directly affect its wines. The first of these is very obviously the rivers. The Mosel, Saar, and Ruwer rivers have a dual effect on the vines of the region. Firstly, as with any bodies of water, they serve to normalize the temperatures of the surrounding areas. This creates a nice microclimate that suits the vines just right. The other feature that rivers provide is valleys and the Mosel River is a prime example. It is known for its steep, sloping valleys, which can in some places reach 70 degrees. This sloping not only creates wonderful exposure, but also provides optimum drainage. The Mosel takes this advantage and makes full use of it by winding through the countryside of Germany. The length of the river, 150 miles, is about twice the distance that the river actually covers "as the crow flies". These switchbacks create slopes that face all points of the compass, but it is the south-facing ones that the region is most proud of.

The second characteristic that contributes to the quality and nuances of the wines is the soil of the region. The Mosel river valley in particular has very slaty soil, rich in

minerals. This composition is reflected in the descriptors used for wines from this region. Soil in the rest of the region ranges from sandy and gravelly to chalky.

The final characteristic of the Mosel-Saar-Ruwer region is the weather and climate. This was mentioned earlier in reference to the neutralizing effect of the rivers. However, the rivers only form one part of the picture; they must have the right climate to begin with to properly regulate the temperature. As with much of Germany, this region is relatively cool, but the rivers warm up the surrounding valleys by as much as 9 degrees Fahrenheit by bouncing the sun's rays off of the water into the vineyards.

Germany is known for its white wines and the Mosel-Saar-Ruwer region is no different. Of the 30,000 acres under vine, a full 98% of them are white, with just a small few red. Riesling is the "king" of German grapes, so it is no surprise that it makes up the majority of all grapes grown in the M-S-R region, 54%. One of the key characteristics of Rieslings in general that is specifically displayed in this region is the ability of the grape to pick up and showcase the slaty, mineraly aspects of the soil. The Rieslings produced in this region range from dryer Kabinetts to sweet dessert wines, when the vine is attacked by rot. Another great feature of Rieslings from this region is the natural effervescence that shines through. Müller-Thurgau is the other major white grape of the region, making up approximately 21% of the vines planted. For years, it was thought to be a cross of the Riesling and Silvaner grapes, but new research has determined it to be a cross of Riesling and Gutedel. There seems to be some dislike of this grape by wine critics; Hugh Johnson was quoted saying it "should be banned from all the top vineyards." The grape with the third largest share is the Elbing, with 9%. Because of its high acidity, it is often used to make German sparkling wine, sekt. The most important

red grape of the region is the Spätburgunder, which is a Pinot Noir. Traditionally, the Spätburgunders of Germany as a whole have been lighter than ones from warmer climates. However, fuller-bodied, more tannic ones are being produced more and more by contemporary winemakers.

This region has a long history of winemaking. Wine has been cultivated here since the second century, initially by a Celtic-Teutonic race called the Treveres. They learned winemaking from the Greeks, as opposed to the usual Romans. For the majority of history, mainly Elbinger and a few red variants were growing, but since the 17th century, Riesling has been increasingly cultivated to the level it is at today.

As with most regions in Germany and the world, there are many laws that M-S-R wine producers must follow during the winemaking process. The Mosel-Saar-Ruwer region, however, does not have any special laws that it must follow in addition to the German ones. The region's producers must make sure that their wines have certain "must weights" to reach certain levels of quality. The must weight determines the potential alcohol level of the finished wine and is measured as a comparison between the specific gravity of the must and the specific gravity of water. As with all German wines, the higher quality wines (Beerenauslese, Trockenbeerenauslese) must be hand picked off the vine, something that is almost necessary anyway because of the slope of many of the vineyards in this region. The German Agricultural Society is the final word when it comes to whether a wine sees the light of day. This group blindly judges wines on whether or not they exhibit specific qualities of the region and that wine's quality level. If a wine passes that test, it is ranked on its sensory characteristics. This ranking

determines the wine's quality rating number on a five-point scale. From here, the wine can win awards if the quality rating number is high enough.

The wine label is a constant source of confusion for some people. However, in many cases, law requires this glut of information. In Germany, there is a set of items that must be present on labels. The origin of the wine is required to be specified, however, it can range from the region of origin down to the specific vineyard the grapes came from. The producer or bottler of the wine must also be specified. The quality category is a required piece of information, which is handy because there is not requirement to show the amount of residual sugar. The AP number (amtliche Pruefungsnummer) is required and gives a wealth of information about the wine including the producer, region, approval year, and the number of wines the producer has had approved. The last pieces of required data are the amount of wine and the alcohol percentage, which are commonsense sense things to be required. Vintage is an optional piece of information, as is grape variety. If present, both of these have to represent what makes up 85% of the wine.

Germany has a history steeped in winemaking and the Mosel-Saar-Ruwer region is no different. On its steep valley slopes grow some of the worlds best Riesling grapes. The rivers that define the region perfectly normalize the climate to suit the growth of grapevines. Despite the laws that growers and producers must comply with, they still manage to produce top quality wines that are known throughout the world.

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