

# **WINES OF GERMANY SCHOLARSHIP**

## **WSET Diploma**

**Frédéric Verborg**

Candidate number: 05009229

Word Count: 889 words

## **Introduction**

Being an amateur of German wines but without any professional implication, it was a great honour to be awarded the Wines of Germany scholarship. The trip to the main winemaking regions of Germany over four days was very insightful. This trip has opened my eyes to the reality of the German wine industry. From the UK, German wines are suffering from enduring stereotypes: the wines are confusing, expensive, the industry is declining, the wines produced are not in sync with today's consumers and there is no hope outside of Riesling. The following report will take a look at these assumptions and dispel a few myths about the German wine industry.

### **MYTH: The German wine industry is dying**

A look at German wine export statistics is quite depressing. The German wine industry doesn't seem to grasp the extent of its demise. However, my visit has convinced me that the German wine industry is in the middle of a great transformation. Its strategy is to move from a quantity to a quality focus. The emergence of the VDP, a quality-minded group of producers is a testament to the energy and enthusiasm of a growing number of producers. I was surprised by the passion of a new generation of young winemakers and their pride in the quality of their work. The University of Geisenheim plays a major role in raising the quality bar. A day seminar at the University has taken us through an introduction to the Biodynamic methods and the impact of different sparkling waters on the tasting qualities of the wine.

**REALITY: FALSE.**

### **MYTH: German wines are confusing**

The German wine industry has seriously worked on this issue. There has been a continuing effort to simplify labels and make them more consumer-friendly. The emergence of commercial wines such as Devil's Rock in the UK shows an effort to market the wine in a clear and understandable manner. However, this trip has confirmed that there is a tremendous amount of confusion both about the wines and the industry's structure. Higher-quality wines are still tremendously difficult to understand to non-German speakers, with single-vineyards denomination on Grands Crus that need to be learnt individually. Also, the classification of wines by grape must potential as opposed to quality level is a difficult notion to understand for wine lovers. I was amazed to see

that within our group of sommeliers, not everyone had the same understanding of these rules. And yet, these was one of the most knowledgeable groups of people, trained to educate consumers on German wines. If they can't understand it easily, how can we expect wine amateurs to do it?

**REALITY: TRUE**

**MYTH: German wines do not correspond to today's consumers**

It is no secret that Germany is a victim of its past. During the 1970s, people were introduced to wines through dreary, but cheap, examples of sweet German wines, such as Blue Nun and Liebfraumilch. Although Germany has turned the page and is moving towards more elegant wines, we shouldn't be too quick to assume that the transformation is complete. The decline of sales of German wines in the UK is largely due to the consumer's moving away from this type of wines, but they still represent the vast majority of German wines sold. It is also surprising to see that the taste profile of these wines is not so different from the White Grenache and White Zinfandel that are placing the US as the second importing wine country in the UK. However, the long term consumption trend is towards more elegant, more drinkable wines with a better integration of oak, when at all used. The emergence of Pinot Grigio replacing the heavier, oakier Chardonnay style is leading the way for more interesting whites. German Riesling can answer this need and drive this trend further.

**REALITY: FALSE**

**MYTH: German wines are only about Riesling**

There is undoubtedly a clear focus to promote the Riesling varietal. Indeed, there is pressure from New World countries to make this varietal their own, despite the fact that a lot of Riesling comes from Germany. Wines of Germany are doing a good job in using the varietal as their USP, with a large stand at the London Wine Fair dedicated to German Rieslings. However, German wines are much more than just Riesling. During the trip, we spent a day in the vineyards of Ahr, where there is a majority of Pinot Noir (Spatburgunder) grown in the vineyards. It produces very fine reds with a great expression of the terroir. The annual volume is limited and very little is

exported, as the wines are mainly consumed in Germany. Because of the limited demand, they also command a high price.

**REALITY: FALSE**

### **Conclusion**

Personally, this trip has given me the opportunity to confront some preconceived ideas on the German wine industry. I was aware that the quality of the wines is very high, but my biggest surprise was to witness the energy and embracement for change running through the whole industry. I believe that Germany may be the most forward-thinking country in the “Old World”. If they can achieve their transformation and develop a sustainable economic model focused on the premium side of the market, the future looks very rosy. *Viel Glück!*