

Rheinhessen

Weingut Keller (Dalsheim)

Klaus-Peter Keller has made brilliant examples of the vintage in 2008, and it may well be that the inherent elegance of the year will produce the finest group of Grosses Gewächs that he has yet made in his skyrocketing career as one of Germany's finest specialists in dry Riesling. Of course time will tell, but there is a bit less power in these bottlings than was the case in vintages such as 2005, 2006 and 2007, and this may well translate into even more complex expressions of terroir and even more refined wines at their apogees. And of course his range of Grosses Gewächs bottlings is not limited solely to Riesling, as he is also producing what are to my palate Germany's finest examples of Pinot Noir as well. I retasted the 2007 reds on this visit, which were destined to be bottled a couple of weeks after my April stopover, as well as the superb 2008 Pinots that are happily resting in barrel still. I had suggested to Klaus-Peter that at least one of the Pinot Noir bottlings would be a perfect addition to the lineup at the auctions in Bad Kreuznach, as the auction also features the top estates from Germany's traditional bastion of red wine production, the Ahr region. I hope that this September will see one of the beautiful 2007 Keller reds on display at the auction, as they are reference point wines that really show how much potential this red wine grape has in Germany in these days of climate change. I should note of course that Klaus-Peter works with classic "terres blanches" limestone-based soils in his area of the Rheinhessen. I am yet to have a great bottle of pinot noir grown on slate soils, so I hope that not too many producers run out and bud their vineyards over to pinot noir in the hopes of adapting quickly to global warming.

Klaus-Peter Keller, like so many producers in the 2008 vintage, harvested quite late this year, with many of the top Grosses Gewächs vineyards being collected between October 30th and November 2nd, and with the Hubacker actually being brought in on November 20th in 2008! Keep in mind that the Keller estate is located in the Hügelland section of the Rheinhessen, which is a decidedly warmer region than the Nahe or the middle Mosel, sharing more of its climatic conditions with the more torrid Rheinpfalz, so these late harvest dates are indicative of the late (or more classic) end of season this year, not to mention Klaus-Peter's continued approach in the vineyards to slow down grape maturity by trying to manage photosynthesis a bit through leaf pulling and other canopy management techniques. Most leaf pulling around the world is designed to maximize ripeness and give the grapes a bit of exposure to the sun, rather than to slow the photosynthetic capabilities of the plant, and in this age of global warming, it seems to me that Klaus-Peter's approach to try and slow down the "plant factory's" production line of sugar in the grapes is a most enlightened approach that is paying off very obvious dividends and should be considered by other winegrowers throughout the globe struggling with issues of overripeness due to climate change.

But not all of the success at Weingut Keller in 2008 can be attributed to the success of the team at the winery and in the vineyards, as the nearby Donnersberg Mountain also played a pivotal role in giving the Hügelland some of the best 'fin de saison' weather in all of Germany, as the mountain blocked several autumn storms that would have dumped more rain on the vineyards, if they had not been pushed to higher altitude by the mountain and dropped their rain on the western side of the Donnersberg and kept the vineyards in the Hügelland quite a bit drier than many of their counterparts in other areas of wine country. As Klaus-Peter noted, "because of the Donnersberg, some of the heavy rainfalls that came down in other regions in October and November" missed the Hügelland completely, so that "we only had 12 mm of rain for the entire month of October, where the average in the other grape growing areas was 50 mm, as the clouds lost their water crossing the Donnersberg." This fine end of the year in the Hügelland helps account for the rather dramatic noble sweet wines that Klaus-Peter has crafted in 2008, which are in general quite rare in this vintage.

And while most of the attention of the world's wine lovers is focused on the absolutely stellar dry Rieslings being made at Weingut Keller these days (soon to be followed with equal, if not greater, demand for his new releases of pinot noir that are waiting in the wings and I predict are going to really change how people think about this grape's potential in Germany), one should not overlook the dramatic quality of the Keller classic off-dry and sweet wines as well, which to my palate are getting better and better with each passing vintage. The 2008 range of sweeter wines here is superb and a stellar follow-up to the great off-dry wines made at the estate in 2007. In contrast to many cellars in 2008, Weingut Keller has produced a rather dramatic range of dessert wines this year that are likely to be ranked amongst the greatest yet of Klaus-Peter's career. And as is the case at nearby Weingut Müller-Catoir in the Rheinpfalz, Riesling is not the only white wine grape that takes center stage here, as the cuvées made from Rieslaner, Scheurebe and even old vine Sylvaner are also all exceptional in these cellars. All in all, Klaus-Peter Keller is a winegrower at the top of his game at the present time, and given his commitment to quality and detail, it is hard to imagine that as great as his wines are today, that the future is not even brighter for this great domaine down the road.

2007 Bürgel Spätburgunder Grosses Gewächs- Weingut Keller

The 2007 Bürgel Spätburgunder was destined to be bottled a few weeks after my visit, and is probably now in bottle as I write the last couple of estates up from my trip. Fifty percent of the stems were retained in 2007 for the fermentation of the Bürgel. The wine has turned out beautifully, as it offers up a complex bouquet of red and black cherries, woodsmoke, dark chocolate, orange peel, fresh herbs, soil tones and a very faint hint of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is medium-full, deep and complex, with a lovely core of fruit, moderate tannins, and a fine note of reserve on the long, modestly tannic and very classy finish. Terrific wine. 2012-2025+. **92+**.

2007 Frauenberg Spätburgunder Grosses Gewächs (German Pinot Clones)- Keller

There are two distinct bottlings of Frauenberg Spätburgunder in the Keller cellars, one made from forty year-old German pinot noir clones, and one made from young cuttings obtained in Burgundy. This is the French pinot bottling, and it too will be absolutely stellar, as it soars from the glass in a beautiful blaze of black cherries, a touch

of plum, woodsmoke, gentle meaty tones, lovely minerality, dried violets, dark chocolate, mustard seed and a hint of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is fullish, deep and very intensely flavored, with fine-grained tannins, terrific focus and mid-palate intensity, and beautiful focus on the complex, tangy and dancing finish. A really superb bottle of pinot that would probably be hard to spot in a lineup of Gevrey-Chambertin premier crus! 2015-2035. **94.**

2008 Bürgel Spätburgunder Grosses Gewächs- Weingut Keller

The 2008 Bürgel Spätburgunder was still in barrel and is nearly a year or so away from bottling, but it looks to be a very worthy follow-up to the superb 2007. The bouquet offers up a classic mélange of dark berries, black cherries, espresso, a lovely base of soil tones and woodsmoke. On the palate the wine is medium-full, long and very pure, with very fine-grained, moderate tannins, lovely focus and excellent length and grip on the complex finish. Classy juice in the making. 2015-2035. **90-93.**

2008 Frauenberg Spätburgunder Grosses Gewächs (German Pinot Clones)- Keller

The 2008 Frauenberg Spätburgunder made from the old vine, German clones of pinot noir is also showing beautiful potential on both the nose and palate. The bouquet is a fine blend of black cherries, coffee beans, dark berries, bitter chocolate, fresh herb tones and fine bass notes of chalky soil. On the palate the wine is medium-full, long and tangy, with a lovely core of fruit, moderate tannins and fine length and grip. There is also one barrel of this wine that was barrel-fermented in a three year-old Burgundy barrel and will be blended into the main cuvée, which showed a more red fruity personality, with more overt spice tones and a nice touch of coffee. The blend of the two components should be outstanding. 2014-2035. **89-91+.**

2008 Frauenberg Spätburgunder Grosses Gewächs (Selection Massale)- Keller

The Frauenberg “Selection Massale” cuvée made from cuttings obtained in Burgundy also shows great potential in 2008. The bouquet is quite beautiful, as it offers up scents of red and black cherries, plums, dark chocolate, a touch of venison, herb tones and a nice touch of clove-like spices as well. On the palate the wine is medium-full, long and tangy, with a fine core and a bit more of a citric bounce to in on the backend than the bottling made from German clones. The finish is long, modestly tannic and tangy, with excellent focus and nascent complexity. These are three very serious bottles of pinot in the making. 2015-2040. **91-93.**

2008 Westhofen Scheurebe Trocken- Weingut Keller

This is made from a parcel of forty-two year-old Scheurebe vines in the vineyard of Morstein and was fermented in old fuders. The bouquet is simply brilliant, as it offers up a complex blend of gooseberry, pink grapefruit peel, an intense base of limestone, lemongrass and just a whisper of this grape’s “cattiness”. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and very soil-driven, with racy acidity, lovely focus and mid-palate depth and great cut on the very long and precise finish. A simply stellar bottle of dry Scheurebe. 2009-2020+. **93.**

2008 Riesling Trocken- Weingut Keller

If I lived in Europe where I could just fill up the trunk of the car and drive the wines back to my cellar, this would certainly be my house white wine. This is just the basic dry Riesling at Weingut Keller, but what a beautiful wine it is in 2008. The first class bouquet offers up a lovely mix of green apples, grapefruit, stony minerality, citrus peel and incipient notes of petrol. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and very

minerally, with terrific focus and cut, a lovely core of fruit and a very long, impeccably balanced finish. For the entry level dry Riesling this is amazingly good. 2009-2025. **90.**

2008 Riesling “Von der Fels”- Weingut Keller

The 2008 Von der Fels Riesling was bottled just a week before my visit, but was still showing beautifully despite its recent *mise*. Keep in mind that only about twenty percent of the production from any of the Grand Cru vineyards here make it into the Grosses Gewächs bottlings, with a significant percentage of each cru’s production going into bottles such as the Von der Fels or the Riesling “RR”, so these are terrific Keller bottlings of dry Riesling that should not be ignored in the race to secure a handful of bottles of the Grosses Gewächs. The 2008 Von der Fels is superb, as it offers up a complex bouquet of grapefruit, lemon, petrol, orange peel and a topnote of citrus blossoms. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and very pure, with stunning focus, a rock solid core, great cut and outstanding grip on the long, poised and racy finish. High class juice and a flat out steal in this vintage. 2010-2030. **92.**

2008 Westhofen Riesling Trocken- Weingut Keller

This bottling all hails from younger vine fruit from the Morstein vineyard in 2008, and it too is a simply outstanding bottle of dry Riesling. The bouquet is brilliant, as it offers up scents of lemon, tart orange, subtle notes of grapefruit, a dramatic base of hard limestone minerality and white flowers in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, long, pure and extremely elegant, with good mid-palate depth, lovely focus and bounce and a very long finish. This is a terrific bottle also, but at this point I have to give the Von der Fels a very slight edge for its better intensity at the core. But the Morstein pedigree here can be very easily seen and appreciated. 2009-2020+. **91.**

2008 Riesling “RR” Trocken- Weingut Keller

The Riesling “RR” bottling hails from a section of red soils in the Kirchspiel vineyard, and in 2008 it was fermented solely with indigenous yeasts and settled in at an official level of Feinherb, as it finished off its fermentation with eleven grams per liter of residual sugar. Klaus-Peter saw no reason to try and push the fermentation a bit to make it officially a Trocken bottling, as the wine reached its own natural point of equilibrium and was superb with just a trace of residual sweetness. The bouquet is lovely, as it offers up scents of pink grapefruit, bee pollen, petrol, stony soil tones, orange zest and wild yeasts. On the palate the wine is medium-full, long, very pure and complex, with a fine core of fruit, great cut and focus and a very long finish that finished off quite dry. Another superb bottle. 2012-2030+. **91+.**

2008 Westhofener Kirchspiel Riesling Grosses Gewächs- Weingut Keller

The 2008 Kirchspiel Grosses Gewächs is a stellar bottle in the making, that offers up magical complexity on both the nose and palate. The superb bouquet delivers scents of grapefruit, lemon, green apple, petrol, hard limestone, wild yeasts and lime zest in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very, very pure and seamless, with a rock solid core of fruit, bright acids, superb focus and a classic shape on the very long, racy and laser-like finish. Just a superb bottle in the making. 2014-2040. **95.**

2008 Dalsheimer Hubacker Riesling Grosses Gewächs- Weingut Keller

The Hubacker vineyard seems to be the most prone of the fine grand crus that Klaus-Peter works with to produce wines with a bit more volume than finesse, and consequently, the inherent elegance of 2008 is felt most keenly in this beautiful young

wine. The bouquet is superb, as it offers up scents of blood orange, lemon oil, grapefruit, wild yeasts, petrol, a beautiful base of minerality and grapefruit zest up high. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and very long and racy, with beautiful focus, brisk acids and great cut and grip on the very long and minerally finish. This is the best young Hubacker I have tasted to date. 2015-2040. **94+**.

2008 Westhofener Morstein Riesling Grosses Gewächs- Weingut Keller

The 2008 Morstein Grosses Gewächs is a very closed and very promising bottle in the making, with the inherent elegance of the vintage very much in evidence here on both the nose and palate. The bouquet is a reticent and very complex blend of tangerine, ruby red grapefruit, blood orange, petrol, wet stone, scents of wild yeasts and a topnote of orange zest. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, very pure and laser-like in its focus, with great, racy acidity, flawless balance and stunning length and grip on the still very primary finish. There is less power here than was the case with either the 2006 or 2007 Morstein bottlings at a similar stage of development, but when all is said and done, the 2008 may well be the pick of the three because of its brilliant refinement and complexity. I would not be surprised to see this wine's score move up with bottle age, but we will have to be patient. 2014-2040. **95+**.

2008 Westhofener Abtserde Riesling Grosses Gewächs- Weingut Keller

That the German wine officials will not allow the Kellers to use the ancient name of the Abtserde because the history of this great vineyard had been lost at the time of the adoption of the 1971 wine laws is patently absurd, given the fact that throughout the Middle Ages this was by a wide margin most famous vineyard in the Rheinhessen and one of the most renowned in all of Germany. Why the officials cannot admit that the history was correct and quickly amend the laws to now include the most famous vineyard in the region is beyond me, but I suppose that beaurocrats are beaurocrats the world over and are prone to move at a rather measured pace. In any event, the 2008 Abtserde is the first vintage in this vineyard that is really beginning to show the effects of the Kellers having had a few years to really work in the vineyard as they like and the results are self-evident that the vineyard management is now beginning to pay extraordinary dividends. The brilliant bouquet is a blend of orange essence, pink grapefruit, brilliant, kaleidoscopic minerality, orange blossoms, lemon zest and incipient notes of petrol. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and extremely refined, with a rock solid core of fruit, brilliant intensity of flavor, brisk acidity and a very, very, very long, laser-like finish. Pure magic. 2016-2050. **97**.

2008 G-Max Riesling- Weingut Keller

The 2008 G-Max is another brilliant wine, and it too is a supremely elegant rendition of the vintage. The bouquet is very, very pure and utterly profound, as it soars from the glass in a blend of grapefruit, orange zest, lemon, kaleidoscopic minerality (again), white flowers, a touch of wild yeasts and a topnote of orange peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very, very refined, with a great core of fruit, snappy acids, laser-like focus and profound length and grip on the profoundly elegant and seamless finish. At this point it is hard to say that this is indeed superior to the straight Abtserde, as both wines are stunning. It will be fascinating to track both wines over the coming decades and see if the G-Max can ultimately pull away a bit from the profound Abtserde. 2016-2050. **97**.

2008 Monsheimer Silberberg Rieslaner Auslese- Weingut Keller

The old Rieslaner vines in the Silberberg vineyard have produced a superb bottle of heavily botrytized Auslese this year, but with the varietal's racy acidity providing a perfect chassis to carry the honeyed and tropical fruit with grace and snap. The bouquet is an excellent mélange of candied grapefruit, pear, honeycomb, a great base of minerality and a pungent topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and very racy, with great acids to carry the generous glaze of botrytis, beautiful focus and an absolutely endless finish. A dynamite bottle of very botrytized Auslese. 2009-2040. **93+**.

2008 Westhofener Kirchspiel Riesling Spätlese- Weingut Keller

The 2008 Kirchspiel Spätlese was still fermenting at the time of my visit in late April and had only reached seven percent alcohol. Klaus-Peter hoped that the wine would reach eight percent once the grip of the very cold winter was shaken from the cellars, but at this point it was not possible to really chronicle this wine with any degree of relative precision. Clearly this will be a lovely wine, but it is too early to handicap it now.

2008 Westhofener Morstein Riesling Auslese Goldkapsel *- Weingut Keller**

The 2008 Gold Kap Auslese *** from the Morstein came in at 125 Oechsle with eleven grams per liter of acidity- a high wire act where the bracing acidity carries the sweetness beautifully and supplies as well a great statement of minerality in the wine. The bouquet is stellar, as it offers up scents of pink grapefruit, mango, new leather, limestone minerality, honeycomb and a touch of lemongrass in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, deep and very, very minerally, with dancing acidity, beautiful focus and superb length and grip on the stunning finish. Great wine. 2009-2040+. **94+**.



Weingut Keller in Flörsheim-Dalsheim.

2008 Westhofener Morstein Scheurebe Beerenauslese- Weingut Keller

This is from the same parcel of forty-two year-old vines as the Scheurebe Trocken was made from, it was just harvested four weeks later after the botrytis had really had a chance to bite. The bouquet is flat out brilliant, as it offers up scents of honeyed tangerines, mangoes, fresh apricots, a nice grounding of minerality, pink grapefruit and incipient notes of tea leaves. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very pure, with a glorious glaze of clean botrytis, great acids and stunning length and grip on the tropical and perfectly balanced finish. Great juice. 2009-2050. **95.**

2008 Westhofener Abtserde Riesling Beerenauslese GK- Weingut Keller

The 2008 Abtserde BA Goldkapsel is a very heavily botrytized wine that delivers remarkable elegance for its nobly rotten character. The lovely bouquet offers up intense scents of baked peaches, tea leaves, apricot, guava, honey and a topnote of acacia blossoms. On the palate the wine is medium-full, long, pure and very creamy on the attack, with fine mid-palate depth, fine framing acidity and brilliant refinement on the very long, complex and dreamy finish. A lovely bottle. 2009-2020+. **94.**

2008 Westhofener Kirchspiel Riesling Trockenbeerenauslese GK- Weingut Keller

The 2008 Kirchspiel TBA is an utterly brilliant wine on both the nose and palate. The bouquet is a celestial blend of peach, apricot, honey, new leather, pineapple, mango orange zest and great minerality- yes it is pretty complex already. On the palate the wine is a deep, full-bodied, pure and very fruit-driven nectar, with really fine framing acidity to keep the wine light on its feet, stunning elegance and an endless finish of magical purity and incredible bounce for such a high wire act of tropical fruit. Needless to say, I did not spit this wine. 2009-2075. **98.**

2008 Westhofener Morstein Riesling Trockenbeerenauslese GK- Weingut Keller

The 2008 Morstein TBA is a bit more closed than the utterly extroverted Kirchspiel TBA, but also is perhaps even more elegant and pure as well. The nose soars from the glass in a very refined mélange of lemon candy, mango, orange, honey, tea leaves, utterly brilliant minerality and a topnote of citrus blossoms. On the palate the wine is fullish, very pure and laser-like in its focus, with brilliantly snappy acidity, and an endless, bountiful and utterly pure finish. This wine possesses the elegance of the 2008 vintage, the cut of the 2007 vintage and the dizzying levels of botrytis of the best wines of the 20056 vintage- a pretty convincing combination. A great, great TBA. 2009-2075. **99.**