

VIEW FROM THE CELLAR  
*Critical and Historical Commentary of a Vinous Nature*  
By John Gilman

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*Number Eleven*

- ❖ *Weingut Klaus-Peter Keller- Germany's Answer to Clos Ste. Hune.*  
(pages 1-22)
- ❖ *Great Old Burgundies from the 20<sup>th</sup> Century- Vintages 1906 to 1980.*  
(pages 23-55)
- ❖ *The Magical Wines of Bartolo Mascarello- Piemonte Rock of Tradition.*  
(pages 56-71)
- ❖ *The 2007 German Wine Auctions- The Best 2006ers Not Showing the Same Consistency as 2005ers, But With Some Exhilarating High Water Marks .*  
(pages 72-101)
- ❖ *Road Kill Two- Twisted Wines on the Vinous Highway.* (pages 102-107 )

**Coming Attractions**

- ❖ *Domaine Gaston Huet- Vouvray's Timeless Crown Jewel.*
- ❖ *The 2006 Burgundy Vintage.*
- ❖ *The Golden Age of California Cabernet Sauvignon- Part Two.*
- ❖ *Recently Tasted Spanish Gems- More Great Old Rioja and Some Very Promising Upstarts in Galicia.*
- ❖ *Château Palmer Vertical Report- The Mouton of Margaux?*
- ❖ *Michel Lafarge's Beautiful Volnay "Clos des Chênes"- A Vertical Report.*
- ❖ *Plus Champagne Encore, More Loire Valley Magic, Château Lagrange, Marius Gentaz, Red Wines of Jean-François Coche, Vincent Dauvissat, Maison Trimbach and Wine and Food Pairings.*

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**WEINGUT KELLER  
RENAISSANCE IN THE RHEINHESSEN**



*All Keller photos courtesy of Dr. Markus Strobel.*

*Of all the major wine-producing regions in Germany, perhaps none has less luster these days than the Rheinhessen. Throughout the long dark night of commercially generic German wines that expanded unremittingly during the decades of the sixties and seventies, the Rheinhessen was best known as the home of the anonymous Liebfraumilch and an ocean of unremarkable clones that stormed the castle of Riesling plantation in the region. While several fine sites remained unscathed (many centered around the town of Nierstein), much of the Rheinhessen was given up as lost to the rather modest jug wines of the region, mostly produced from the lowly müller-thurgau or silvaner grapes. At the nadir of quality in the Rheinhessen in the late '70s and early '80s, only five percent of the region's vineyards were still planted to riesling. This is a region of mixed agriculture, with many of the area's vineyards found on much more gently rolling slopes that recall Burgundy or the Loire valley, rather than the precipitously steep slate slopes of the middle Mosel or Rheingau. The only really steep slopes in the Rheinhessen lie along the Rhine river in the short span between the towns of Nackenheim to the north and Deinheim in the south, and which includes Nierstein and Oppenheim. This has traditionally been considered the heart and soul of high quality riesling in the Rheinhessen for many generations, but things are changing.*

*Outside of the river-fronting slopes that stretch out in both directions from Nierstein, a quiet revolution is occurring in the Rheinhessen, and its architect is the dynamic, thirty-three year-old winemaker, Klaus-Peter Keller. The center of this awakening of the Rheinhessen is not the traditional red soil slopes around Nierstein that lie along the Rhine, but rather in the rolling hills on the Rheinhessen-Rheinpfalz border, in the area of the Rheinhessen known as the Hügelland, centered around the towns of Flörsheim-Dalsheim and Westhofen. Here the soils are dramatically different from those that lie along the river, with many of the best lying on outcroppings of chalky marl, which recall the Trimbach family's great Clos Ste. Hune more than they do the slate of the Mosel. Klaus-Peter, who trained abroad in South Africa and in Burgundy (at Domaines Hubert Lignier and Armand Rousseau) prior to taking his degree in oenology and viticulture in Geisenheim, has worked alongside his father in the family vineyards throughout much of his life. The estate has an unbroken history that stretches back to its formation in 1789, and remarkably, each subsequent generation of Kellers has only produced male heirs since this time. Klaus-Peter's father, Klaus Keller was a very serious vigneron during his career, who began to gain a very good reputation for his wines in the vintages of the 1980s. He had developed quite a following of clients by the time Klaus-Peter and his wife Julia Keller (who also studied at Geisenheim and did "stages" with Robert Weil in the Rheingau and Hanz Günter Schwärz at Müller-Catoir in the Rheinpfalz prior to returning to the Keller estate) were ready to take over the direction of the family winery in 2001.*

*When Klaus-Peter and his wife Julia took over the day to day direction of Weingut Keller with the 2001 vintage, the estate was better known for its traditional off-dry wines than it was for its dry rieslings. In this area of the Rheinhessen, this meant wines made from grapes such as rieslaner, scheurebe and huxelrebe were often in as high demand as were the Keller rieslings. While Klaus-Peter certainly continues to make some lovely off-dry wines from riesling and a number of the other varieties still planted in the family's sixteen hectares of vineyards (including a bit of fifty year-old rieslaner vines- more later on these), his focus was to be on the dry rieslings from his finest vineyard sites, and he hit the ground running in 2001. Initially there was certainly some concern on the part of his father Klaus Keller, as the family had nicely built up a following for their more traditional bottlings over the last decade or two, which was no small feat in the rather backwater Hügelland. However, as the outstanding quality of Klaus-Peter's dry rieslings from the family's grand cru sites was immediately evident, resistance on the part of the older generation was very minimal and the new course for Weingut Keller was established. One cannot underestimate the importance of his father's acquiescence to the stylistic change in direction for the estate, as Klaus-Peter's father had been rolling up an impressive array of awards for the last several vintages of his tenure, including universal acclaim for the estate's 1999s.*

*Of course one has to note that a switch to drier-styled wines in the German wine market of today is bound to find a sympathetic audience within the country, as a great many wine drinkers within Germany itself tend to shy away from any wines that contain residual sugar. So to Klaus-Peter's father, any further notoriety that Weingut Keller*

could gain from Klaus-Peter's dry bottlings was not bound to hurt sales within the country, as long as there remained sufficient off-dry wine to keep their traditionally-minded private clients happy. And as the reputation of Klaus-Peter's wines continues to grow, I have little doubt that long-time private customers of the estate will be quite pleased to maintain their allocations of these wines, which are becoming increasingly more difficult to source within Germany (as well as more worthy of a diligent search of the market), as the quality moves up with every passing vintage. All of this may seem quite remarkable if one associates the Dalsheim-Westhofen area of the Rheinhessen as the viticultural backwater that it has been considered for several hundred years. However, as is not surprising, it turns out that further back in history these villages in the Hügelland were considered some of the most prized in the region, and the wines from these chalky vineyards were once considered amongst the finest in all of Germany.



One has to go back to the Middle Ages to find the last time that the villages of Dalsheim, Flörsheim and Westhofen were in the vinous ascendancy. At that time the church hierarchy, then based in the nearby and important medieval city of Worms, were staunch enthusiasts of the wines from the best vineyards in these villages, including Morstein, Hubacker and Kirchspiel in which the Kellers now have parcels. There are several ancient documents that relate to the prelates in Worms insisting on wines from the top vineyards as the proper allocation for the church, and at this time their favorite vineyard in Westhofen (from which they took all of the production in each vintage) was the AbtsE (named for the monks who worked this vineyard). In the twelfth century, the

*four hectare AbtsE vineyard, which is a subplot of the larger Westhofen vineyard of Brunnenhäuschen, produced the most highly prized wine in the region, and it was reserved for the private needs of the Bishop of Worms and his most fortunate associates. However as Europe tumbled into the Dark Ages, the vinous legacy of these fine vineyards was lost, and it is only being rediscovered today thanks to the meticulous vineyard management and winemaking skills on display at Weingut Keller (not to mention Klaus-Peter's willingness to continue the necessary research which was started by his parents to discover where the great old plots lie).*

*To give some idea of just how recent this reawakening realization is of the inherent quality of the vineyards of these towns, the Kellers only purchased their parcels in the Westhofen grand cru vineyards of Kirchspiel in 1999 and their half hectare in Morstein in 2001. Klaus-Peter's father had already purchased the 2.5 hectare section of the AbtsE vineyard that the family now owns back in 1996, despite the land still being under lease for another ten years, and the family has patiently waited for the 2006, which is the first Keller vintage to be made from this illustrious piece of terroir. Back in the fourteenth century, the AbtsE was owned by the Kloster Schönau monastery, and was considered the finest vineyard in the Hügelland. However, the neighboring Kirchspiel was also ranked as one of the very finest vineyard sites at this time, as the well-known Rheingau monastery of Kloster Lorch, renowned at this time for their stunning portfolio of vineyards which included the Dellchen and Hermannshöhle in the Nahe, the beautiful Scharlachberg vineyard that lies in the village of Bingen (just across the river from the well-known Rheingau town of Rüdesheim), and the Rothenberg, the finest vineyard in the village of Nackenheim that represents the northern starting point of the plum section of the finest Rheinhessen vineyards along the Rhine. The Morstein vineyard was a cooler site at this time and not as highly regarded as the Kirchspiel and the AbtsE, though Klaus-Peter notes that historians of the region observed that "great wines could be made from the Morstein if the grapes ripened sufficiently." Klaus-Peter is quite reticent when it comes to discussing other promising terroirs in the area whose reputations have been lost in the sands of time, and his reticence must be considered confirmation that there are other great sites still out there to be discovered.*

*One of the great attributes of the Hügelland is its very close proximity to the Donnersberg Mountain that lies immediately to the west of the vineyards here and blocks most of the weather fronts that would come in from the west. Consequently, the average rainfall here is a very small percentage of what falls just a few kilometers to the west of the Donnersberg, as most clouds coming in that direction get pushed to a higher elevation by the mountain and drop their precipitation on the western flanks of the ridge. The Hügelland only receives about 500 millimeters of rainfall per year, and the average summer temperatures here these days routinely range between ninety and one hundred degrees Fahrenheit. When one walks in the Keller vineyards, one is immediately struck by the rows of their vines which are covered at their feet with a thick layer of bark mulch, which is not found in the vines of their immediate neighbors. As Klaus-Peter notes, "we are lucky that our rich soils hold moisture better here, but we also have learned, particularly since 2003, to take other measures to protect our vines." Without this mulch, the hydric stress of these vineyards, particularly at the thin, chalky summits where the*



*best terroirs lie, would prove to be too much for the Riesling to excel in this new era of global warming (though I should note that irrigation is allowed here, but Klaus-Peter will only concede to use it in an emergency for the vines).*

*But it is not only a lack of precipitation that presents challenges to Klaus-Peter and the rest of the Keller family in these fine vineyards these days. The high average temperatures during the growing season here could lead to earlier and earlier picking dates, or higher potential alcohol and lower acids in the grapes in these days of climate change. In fact, this is indeed the case just a few kilometers south in the Rheinpfalz region, and growers there are struggling with how to adapt to this new reality. Only a few decades ago, German wine-producing regions were routinely challenged to attain sufficient ripeness in their grapes to make wine that was not green and aggressively acidic, and at this time the warmest regions such as the Rheinpfalz were seen to have an advantage, at least in terms of attaining ripeness, if not in the quality of their soils. But with global warming, even the coolest German regions like the Saar are attaining excellent ripeness in at least seven vintages out of ten (probably more like nine out of ten!), and warmer regions such as the Rheinpfalz and the Hügelland section of the Rheinhessen are now faced with the challenge of not attaining overripeness or sugar levels that are too high and acidity levels that are too low to make world class wine. This is particularly true for Klaus-Peter, as his goal is to make dry Rieslings that dance across the palate with a profound base of minerality.*

*What is surprising at first when one talks of these challenges with Klaus-Peter is to discover that Weingut Keller is actually one of the latest riesling harvesters in all of the Rheinhessen, with the Grosses Gewächs sections of their vineyards often brought in the first few weeks of November! And yet these are not high alcohol and burly wines, as the potential alcohol of the dry wines is normally no more than 12.8 to 13.2 percent (which is significantly below what most top growers in the Wachau are attaining these days for their rieslings). To achieve this the Kellers take active steps to slow the vegetative cycle of the vine during the course of the growing season. First of all, they choose low-yielding clones for their new plantations, typically which have small bunches of small berries, and which usually come from cuttings of their best old vines or those of their winemaking friends. With the older vines, and the Kellers do have plenty of these, there is less need, as nature serves as an active limit on yields. However, Klaus-Peter and the rest of the Keller vineyard team take active measures to slow down the ripening process during the course of the summer, which includes pulling a couple of leafs per grape shoot on each vine at regular intervals starting in early June to slow down the plant's photosynthesis, pruning the vines to keep the grapes nicely shaded through much of the growing season (to keep the grapes from getting sunburned during their prolonged hangtime) and keeping good spacing between bunches to aid air flow and retard botrytis (and other forms of rot) forming in the Riesling bunches targeted for making dry wines. This is a viticultural methodology that should be studied and emulated in many more wine regions in the world that today are struggling in vain to produce world class wines with excessive ripeness and dizzying sugar levels.*

*In the cellars Klaus-Peter has made a few changes as well from his father's time, but the vast majority of the focus continues to be on the vineyard work. The white wines now (particularly the Rieslings) are fermented more in old oak fuder, rather than in stainless steel tanks than was the case for his father, and indigenous yeasts are relied upon whenever possible for the fermentations. The one relatively novel approach that Klaus-Peter has adopted for many of his white wines is to allow the grapes to macerate on their skins for thirty or forty hours prior to pressing them and running off the juice to fuder for fermentation. This is a bit of a risky maneuver that requires perfectly pristine fruit, and so selection in the vineyard and at the winery before the grapes go to the press is a fundamental tenet of the Keller philosophy. The basic bottlings of the white wines are fermented at slightly lower temperatures than the Grosses Gewächs, and they are bottled earlier as well. The riesling Grosses Gewächs and the G-Max bottling (Klaus-Peter's top, old vine dry riesling cuvée) are allowed to rest on their fine lees until March after the harvest, prior to being prepared for bottling, which is done with a very light filtration. Additionally, some of the cuvées are also held back in bottle an additional six months prior to being released to allow the wines to fully harmonize.*

*As alluded to above, Weingut Keller under Klaus-Peter's direction has become famous for its dry rieslings from its grand crus, or Grosses Gewächs, vineyards in the towns of Westhofen and Dalsheim. To date there are four distinct Keller vineyards that are entitled to Grosses Gewächs status for dry riesling: the Hubacker from Dalsheim, and the Kirchspiel, AbtsE and Morstein vineyards in Westhofen. However, not all of sections of these vineyards are awarded grand cru status, and consequently it is only the riesling from the top sections of these gentle slopes, with their less fertile soils, that are allowed to be bottled as Grosses Gewächs. Klaus-Peter estimates that only twenty percent of the production from the family's holdings in these four vineyards make it into the grand cru bottlings in any given vintage, with the other sections going into the non-grand cru riesling bottlings such as the "Von der Fels" bottling (which literally means, from the rocks), which is an outstanding dry bottling from the lower sections of these vineyards that lie on limestone soils, or the dry "Riesling R.R." from a section of terres rouges in the lower section of the Kirchspiel vineyard. In addition, the estate continues to make some classic, off-dry wines from some of these same vineyards, and again these are typically made from the lower sections of the slopes which are a bit more prone to botrytis. As Klaus-Peter observes, "we are happy to have botrytis in our vineyards for our off-dry wines, but for the dry rieslings my goal is for very little, or better yet, no botrytis-affected grapes to find their way into these selections."*

*The dry riesling bottlings at Weingut Keller begin with the two basic bottlings, the riesling "Von der Fels" and Riesling "R.R.", though to call them basic bottlings it to do them a gross injustice. Both of these wines are deep, complex and racy rieslings that show off a stunning base of mineral tones and will delight any lover of soil-defined wines. The riesling "R.R." is perhaps the more terroir-specific of the two wines, as it all hails from one of the grand cru vineyards, the Kirchspiel in Westhofen. The Keller family owns three hectares of vines in this lovely vineyard. The Kirchspiel has two distinct soil types, which echoes another even better known vineyard several hundred kilometers to the west, Bonnes-Mares, as one section of the Kirchspiel sits on a base of "terres blanches" and*

*the other on a soil base of “terres rouges”. Until, recently, the Keller’s section of this vineyard in the terres rouges was planted to other grape varieties, but Klaus-Peter replanted this section to Riesling in 2001, from cuttings of old vines that came from the Saar region and the village of Wiltingen. Perhaps one day the riesling from the two sections of Kirchspiel will be blended together as Christophe Roumier does with his two sections of Bonnes-Mares, but for the present time the younger vines in the terres rouges are bottled separately as Riesling “R.R.”, and in 2006 this bottling offers up a stunning value.*



*Klaus-Peter Keller (center) takes time out from the pinot noir harvest to show a little riesling.*

*The other dry “basic” bottling of riesling that I have tasted from Weingut Keller is the outstanding “Von der Fels” cuvée. In 2006 about half of the production for this lovely bottling also hailed from the Kirchspiel vineyard, but from the chalky marl soils of the terres blanches section of the vineyard. The other half of the cuvée also comes from terres blanches soils, found in the lower sections of the other various grand cru vineyards: Hubacker, AbtsE and Morstein. One of the reasons that these lower slopes of these vineyards are not entitled to Grosses Gewächs status is that the soils here are deeper and richer, with more clay mixed in with the hard limestone. However, one would never realize this fact from the profile of the “Von der Fels” bottling, which is an intensely chalky, racy and minerally wine with a fine core of fruit and outstanding structural attributes. While much of the surging demand for Klaus-Peter’s wines focuses on the Grosses Gewächs bottlings of riesling, the outstanding quality of these two regular bottlings of dry riesling demand that they not be ignored. While I have not had the pleasure to taste older examples, as Klaus-Peter observed “that we really should have*



*saved more of our wines in the cellar to follow them over time, and not just the Grosses Gewächs, but we have not yet done that,” so there is simply not any older extant bottles of the Von der Fels or R.R. kicking around at the estate to taste. But based on the 2006s, I have a hard time imagining that even these bottles will not evolve beautifully over at least a decade if cellared, though good luck keeping your hands off of them!*

*As about sixty percent of the Kellers’ vineyards are planted to riesling, there is a pretty strong possibility of wine lovers laying hold of some bottles of the two regular riesling cuvées. However, as the estate’s fame has swiftly grown amongst German wine lovers both inside and outside of the country, it is becoming more of a challenge to find bottles of the Keller Grosses Gewächs bottlings, of which there are currently four different ones for riesling (and one for pinot noir as well- more on that later). In the village of Westhofen there are three: Kirchspiel, Morstein and AbtsE, and from Dalsheim there is only the one grand cru riesling vineyard, the Hubacker. Kirchspiel is one of the two largest holdings of the Kellers, as the estate has three and a half hectares of vines in this beautifully situated vineyard. As mentioned above, Klaus Keller purchased this parcel in 1999. The soils here are very deep and comprised of hard, limestone which runs fully fifty meters down below the surface. Klaus-Peter’s parents, Klaus and Hedi Keller had begun extensive research of their vineyards prior to Klaus-Peter and Julia taking over the direction of the domaine in 2001, and as part of their quest to more fully understand the terroirs with which they worked, they drilled more than sixty thousand holes in their vineyards to plot the composition of their soils and subsoils. Consequently the family really knows their vineyards’ soil compositions, which has allowed Klaus-Peter to fine tune his approach in the last several years.*

*The Kirchspiel is a brilliant terroir, which routinely produces one of the tightest young wines in the cellar and which Klaus-Peter describes as “always a wine of pure finesse and dancing minerality.” The vines at the top of the slope that find their way into the Grosses Gewächs bottling of Kirchspiel were planted in 1964, on the hard limestone section of the vineyard, laced with quartz veins. The result is a wine that delivers lovely, “cool fruit” tones (despite the Hügelland’s high average temperatures and Klaus-Peter’s penchant for harvesting late), brilliant precision, and a base of kaleidoscopic minerality that is almost crystalline in nature. Stylistically, the Keller Kirchspiel reminds me quite strongly of Maison Trimbach’s great Riesling grand cru, the Cuvée Frédéric Émile bottling (particularly on the nose), with perhaps just a touch more German delicacy about it on the palate. The Kirchspiel routinely weighs in around thirteen percent alcohol, and yet is a wine of refined restraint and tremendous felicity to its underlying minerality.*

*The other relatively large vineyard holding from which a Grosses Gewächs bottling from Weingut Keller is made is from the town of Dalsheim, and this is the Hubacker vineyard. This was the first vineyard that the Kellers owned, and it has been in the family since the estate was started in 1789. The Hubacker is also a limestone-based terroir, but in this case it is a yellow-veined limestone (as is also found in the Burgundy vineyard of Beaune “Sur le Grèves”, which is quickly becoming famous for its brilliant affinity for white wines), and which has a more southeasterly-facing exposure than the*

*Kirchspiel. Consequently the Hubacker is the slowest ripening vineyards in the Kellers' portfolio. Klaus-Peter reports that it is not infrequent that the Hubacker is harvested two to three weeks after the Grosses Gewächs vineyards in Westhofen. The Kellers' parcel in Hubacker was planted in 1974. Like the Kirchspiel, the Hubacker is another great, structured and hauntingly balanced dry Riesling that again recalls Trimbach's Cuvée Frédéric Émile, though in this case it finds most of its similarities with that great Alsace riesling in its structural elements and its never ending persistence on the finish. It is unequivocally a great wine, which Klaus-Peter describes "as often having the most exotic flavors (of the four grand crus) with a deep mineral core."*

*The two remaining grand cru rieslings in the Keller portfolio hail again from the village of Westhofen: the Morstein and the AbtsE, (which as noted above, is really a four hectare subsection of the Brunnenhäuschen). The AbtsE is probably the greatest vineyard in the Hügelland, at least based on the ecclesiastical preferences of the bishops in Worms during the Middle Ages, but Klaus-Peter has just taken over his two and a half hectares in this vineyard, and it will take a few years of Keller-quality tending of the vines to really begin to see the true potential of the AbtsE. The soils in the AbtsE have a deep vein of iron running through the limestone, and really remind me quite a bit of the stones one finds in the vineyard of Musigny. On one side the stones will be all chalky white, and on the other they will have a distinctly orange cast to them from the iron. The vines here were planted in 1977, so they are coming into a very good age now, and will only continue to improve once they have a few years under their belt of the Keller family's careful viticulture. The soils are cooler and a bit wetter in the spring than in the nearby Morstein, and consequently flowering here is often quite difficult, which acts as a further brake on yields. The vines that Klaus-Peter has in the AbtsE are impressive, as they produce very tiny berries because of chlorosis (a vine disease that causes early yellowing of the leaves) which further slows photosynthesis during the hot summer, and translates into a very racy, minerally and discreetly complex wine. The first Keller vintage of the AbtsE, the 2006, is an outstanding wine by any measure, but I have little doubt that it will be surpassed in quality by subsequent vintages from this great vineyard.*

*Currently the top grand cru riesling amongst the four Grosses Gewächs is from the fifty year-old vines in the half a hectare parcel that the Kellers own in Morstein proper. The soils here are all a chalky marl, with Burgundy-like grey-blue clay punneled with limestone pebbles and scree. These old vines produce a very deep, powerful and structured riesling that shares more in common with the Trimbachs' Clos Ste. Hune than it does with their Cuvée Frédéric Émile, and is currently one of the two most highly sought after Keller wines in the cellar. It is always a very slow wine to unfold, and the glorious 2006 will not be released until the spring of 2008. With the old vines and yields of under thirty-five hectoliters per hectare, Klaus-Peter only produces a thousand bottles of this great wine every year, and consequently it is a rare and difficult bottle to find. But it is definitely worth a concerted search, as it often couples a bit more power and ripeness than found in the AbtsE with the seamless and impeccable balance of a very minerally-defined riesling. While Klaus-Peter's father made outstanding wines from the Morstein prior to 2001, it is really only since 2001 that this wine has really*

*jumped into the very top energy level of dry Rieslings, and there are very, very few that I can think of that possess the same great potential for longevity and continued brilliance in the bottle as current releases of the Keller Morstein. I would tend to not touch a bottle for at least six or seven years after the vintage date, and most likely, the wines will prove still to be too young at that age to really be hitting their apogees. It would not surprise me in the least to see this wine age along the lines of Clos Ste. Hune, but of course with only five vintage under Klaus-Peter's belt, it is obviously premature to be making meaningful comparisons with that legendary dry riesling, but this is clearly the league that Klaus-Peter is aiming for with his Morstein.*

*And of course, with dry rieslings chez Keller, we have not run the course yet when we account for the four Grosses Gewächs bottlings, as Klaus-Peter also makes a special, reserve cuvée of old vine riesling which he calls "G-Max". The G is named for his great grandfather, George, and Max, who is the younger of Klaus-Peter's two sons (his older son also has a special bottling named for him, Klaus-Peter's top pinot noir). The vines for the G-Max bottling are all extremely old, and from which vineyard they hail from is no longer made public. Klaus-Peter may well make it from a different parcel of old vines in each vintage, probably at the very top of one of the slopes, depending on which parcel has excelled the most in any given year, but he is no longer at liberty to say from which vineyard he has made the wine. The reason for this is the year that the G-Max was made from the oldest parcel in Morstein, Klaus-Peter (who then saw no reason to keep this information private), told all of his visitors where he had sourced the grapes from for the G-Max, only to find one of his enthusiastic Japanese fans in the Morstein vineyard soon after cutting grapes from this parcel to take home as a souvenir!*

*Needless to say the riesling G-Max is of a sufficiently exhilarating quality to make fans go to extremes, and now Klaus-Peter keeps his decision on which vineyard's oldest vines will supply the G-Max in each vintage a secret, in the hopes that he will not lose half of the potential harvest of the following year to souvenir hunters. Because it does not state which vineyard it hails from on the label, it is not entitled to Grosses Gewächs status, but this does not tend to deter any of its many enthusiasts. The G-Max is Klaus-Peter's most famous wine in Germany (and is the wine that really put the estate on the map after 2001 for their profound dry rieslings), and it is priced at levels similar to Clos Ste. Hune due to its scarcity and extremely high demand. It is indeed a hauntingly brilliant wine, but to my palate it is only a very small step up in quality from all of the other great grand cru Keller rieslings. I expect that one day a significant percentage of this particular wine will be sold off at auction, as this seems a logical venue for a wine which is so highly sought after and made in such limited quantity. I would of course be very pleased to have a handful of bottles of G-Max in my own cellar, but am very much content to have a good representation of the other four riesling Grosses Gewächs instead. For all five of these grand cru rieslings are as good as dry riesling gets, with only a couple of examples the world over that can compete with these utterly profound wines.*

*However, as stunning as the dry grand cru rieslings are at Weingut Keller, Klaus-Peter continues to make lovely off-dry and dessert bottlings as well from riesling and a*



*few other classic grape varieties. As I mentioned above, Weingut Keller was not too long ago famous for the superb quality of their off-dry rieslings, as well as their scheurebe, rieslaner, and pinot blanc. Klaus-Peter's father, Klaus Keller had a very strong following for his classic wines, and the few that I have had the pleasure to taste were indeed quite well made. However, at least with riesling, the former off-dry interpretations from Weingut Keller seemed to my palate to miss a bit of mineral drive to them, despite their lovely fruit, spice and botrytis tones. I have not had the pleasure to taste any of Klaus Keller's examples of some of these other grapes, but I have heard reports that he was most famous for his superb dessert wines made from grapes such*

*as rieslaner and exotic clones such as huxelrebe. While all of the huxelrebe has been grubbed up or grafted over, there still remains a fair bit of rieslaner planted in the Keller vineyards, and from this grape I have tasted a couple of utterly magical Keller dessert wines from recent vintages. Given the fact that Julia Keller did a stage during her early training with the grail keeper for rieslaner, Hanz-Günter Schwartz when he was at Müller-Catoir, she is a very strong advocate for keeping this grape a part of the Keller portfolio (and perhaps even expanding plantings a bit). Klaus-Peter reports that rieslaner was also his mother's favorite grape, and as these vines are now fifty years of age, they will certainly be kept around. The rieslaner grape, which was made by crossing riesling with silvaner, does very well as a late harvest dessert wine (as it maintains its acids even as sugars soar), and there is little doubt that the Kellers will continue to cultivate this very interesting grape. As Klaus-Peter notes, "my wife Julia urges me to plant more rieslaner" and "I am a big fan of it," so it is highly likely that Klaus-Peter will continue to make stunning wines from this very underrated grape. Today about six percent of the family's holdings are planted to rieslaner.*

*In fact, at this point in the evolution of Weingut Keller, the well-deserved fame of the dry rieslings seems to be casting a bit of a shadow on the very high quality of the off-dry and classically sweet wines also made at this estate. At this year's auction at Bad*

*Kreuznach, which had traditionally been the Nahe auction, but which had opened its doors for the first time in 2007 to a handful of producers from the Rheinhessen and Rheinpfalz as well, one of the main attractions amongst the newcomers was Weingut Keller. The estate had put up two wines for auction this year, one a parcel of rare magnums of the 2006 Grosses Gewächs Riesling AbtsE, and the other a 2006 Monsheimer Silberberg Rieslaner Beerenauslese Goldkapsel. While the magnums (and a few double magnums) of the superb AbtsE sold for prices in the stratosphere, the utterly profound (see tasting notes) Beerenauslese sold for a relatively low price, most likely because it was made from rieslaner, rather than riesling. But also to be factored in is that the real hard-core Keller fanatics today are focusing almost exclusively on the dry wines here, which does not take into account the superb quality of Klaus-Peter's off-dry wines as well. For this is emphatically not a domaine that specializes in solely one type of wine, and the uncompromising commitment to quality that is so evident when one tastes one of the dry rieslings is also self-evident when tasting an example of scheurebe, rieslaner or classically sweet riesling Auslesen or above.*

*I have tasted a handful of truly lovely Spätlesen, Auslesen and other higher Prädikat wines from Klaus-Peter in the last year or two, and it seems quite evident that the surge upwards in quality in the dry rieslings is echoed in every other wine wearing the Keller label as well these days. The most recent vintages of off-dry wines here has shown greater mineral definition than was the case five or six vintages ago, which I have to assume comes from the combination of lower yields in the vineyards and the use of some of the techniques discussed above to slow down photosynthesis and prolong the amount of hangtime for the grapes on the vine. For Klaus-Peter clearly practices some of the lowest yields in Germany these days for his rieslings, with the entire estate averaging about thirty-five hectoliters per hectare. These are crop levels in line with the philosophy of Egon Müller, but out of step with virtually every other top estate in Germany. It is generally held amongst most of the top riesling producers scattered across Germany that world class riesling can be made at crop levels of sixty to seventy hectoliters per hectare, and that when it comes to riesling, one may often lose more than one gains with lower yields. Given how much brilliant off-dry wine is made in Germany from yields significantly higher than Klaus-Peter's, one is led to believe that at least when it comes to classic, off-dry wines made from great slate soils, low yields may not be necessary to make brilliant wine. However, when it comes to great dry riesling, perhaps the case for lower yields is much more compelling, and one is certainly not going to argue with Klaus-Peter's magical examples.*

*While Weingut Keller is now the focal point for profound dry riesling in Germany, there is another current stirring here that may one day turn out to be at least as important for the estate as riesling, and that is the astonishing quality of pinot noir that Klaus-Peter is beginning to fashion from his vineyards. As alluded to above, one of the Keller Grosses Gewächs is for pinot noir, and this is the Bürgel vineyard in the village of Dalsheim. The Bürgel is a perfectly situated vineyard for pinot noir, with its sheltered, direct southerly exposure and its Kimmeridgian limestone soils beautifully suited to the production of Burgundian-inspired pinot. As Klaus-Peter trained with Hubert and Romain Lignier and Eric Rousseau, it is clear that he has high ambitions for his*



*Hügelland Spätburgunder as well. In fact, Klaus-Peter is a passionate Burgundy fan, traveling as often as his schedule will allow to the Côte d'Or to visit growers and taste the wines that he loves. Not surprisingly, I first had the pleasure of making his acquaintance at a Burgundy tasting in the city of Saarbrücken, at the vertical tasting of Véronique Drouhin's Vosne-Romanée "Petits Monts" which I reported on a few issues back. And one taste of his very impressive pinots clearly demonstrates that he is moving very quickly up the learning curve with pinot noir here in the Hügelland, and that the potential here for great, not just interesting, pinot noir is enormous.*

*Presently there are two bottlings of pinot noir made by Klaus-Peter Keller. The first is the aforementioned Grosses Gewächs from the Bürgel vineyard in Dalsheim. Klaus-Peter labels this wine as Cuvée Felix in honor of his older son, and it is a very lovely bottle that most blind tasters would have a hard time not placing in Burgundy. There are eight to ten barrels currently made of the Bürgel "Cuvée Felix", which is made from thirty-five year-old German pinot clones. While Klaus-Peter will not come out and say it directly, it is fairly easy to see that as good as this wine is today, he feels that the German clones simply do not possess quite the same potential for quality as top clones from Burgundy, and he has now planted another vineyard with a small selection of Burgundian clones. These are in the vineyard of Frauenberg (also in Dalsheim), and these eight year-old vines hold excellent potential once they have gotten a bit older. I do not know if the Hügelland has always possessed such obvious potential for pinot noir, which just lay hidden in the ocean of Liebfraumilch, or if climate change is now making this region of the Rheinhessen seemingly perfect for the cultivation of this finicky grape. Whatever the cause, it is indisputable once one has tasted Klaus-Peter's examples of Spätburgunder that these will soon be, if they are not now, the most exciting and potentially profound pinot noirs to be found in Germany. However, he notes that "pinot noir is only a hobby production" for me, as we have planted "only a little more than one hectare- I will not expand in size, but in quality."*

*The only caveat I would mention in regards to Weingut Keller's pinots today is that, like so many Spätburgunders in Germany, the wines carry too much new oak at the present time for my personal taste. It is not that the wines are unbalanced (which unfortunately cannot be said of many of the most well-known producers of red in Germany today), but they carry significantly more new oak than is flattering for the wines, and which tends to obscure a bit the underlying soil tones. The 2005ers that I tasted while visiting the estate were most impressive, with outstanding purity and a mid-core density that I seldom find in Spätburgunder, but also with a more than generous coating of spicy new oak. When we discussed this with Klaus-Peter, he noted that the two pinots in 2005 saw forty percent and fifty percent new oak respectively (four out of ten barrels were new for the Bürgel "Cuvée Felix" and one of the two barrels of the Frauenberg was new), and he is planning to cut this back dramatically with his 2007s. In fact, as he took time out from harvesting his Pinot Noir to host my visit to the estate in Flörsheim-Dalsheim in the latter half of September, pronouncing himself very excited about the potential quality of the red grapes in 2007, he noted that he had purchased one year-old barrels from a well-known producer in Burgundy in which to raise his pinot noirs, and that there would be no new oak used in this year. As Klaus-Peter observed, "in*

2006 it was just not possible to give the pinot noir our full attention, as everything had to be harvested at the same time, and as much as I love pinot noir, I have to remember that we are a riesling domaine first and foremost.” But he continued, “this year the riesling still has time to go on the vine, and so we can bring in the pinot and concentrate on this while we wait for the riesling, and I have high hopes for the 2007 reds.”

Like so many red wine producers in Germany, I feel that experiments with one, two and three year-old barrels will pay impressive dividends for Klaus-Peter’s Spätburgunders, which are already as fine as any I have ever tasted from the country. I suspect that he will be very pleased with how his red wines respond to the one year-old barrels he will use for the 2007 vintage, and these will be wines to be on the lookout for early on after their release. There is a depth, dimension and breed to his pinot noir already that I have never come across in Germany, and coupled with the base of chalky soil on which his vines are planted, there is a similarity here to very good red Burgundy that is extremely rare and exciting. I dearly hope that Klaus-Peter will plant more pinot noir as the years go by, as it seems very clear that the limestone bones of the Hügelland have an affinity for pinot that may only be surpassed in the Côte d’Or. And it is equally clear that Klaus-Peter Keller did not waste his time during his staves at Domaines Lignier and Rousseau, as there is a sure-handedness to the red winemaking at this estate that is readily evident and extremely rare in Germany. As is the case in Burgundy with many of the top producers, Klaus-Peter regularly crop thins his pinot once the berries on the bunches have reached the size of small peas. He routinely will cut down fifty percent of his bunches to allow the best endowed grapes the finest possibility of attaining perfect ripeness. He also practices leaf pulling for the pinot as well, to again slow photosynthesis and allow for better physiological ripeness without allowing sugars to soar out of the range of making world class wine. Much like the AbtsE riesling, the Keller pinot noirs are starting from a very high level and are clearly bound to move up further in quality as things are further fine-tuned.

In short, Weingut Keller and its inspired head, Klaus-Peter Keller, are amongst the very finest estates in all of Germany. Here in the Hügelland, Klaus-Peter is already widely recognized for producing the finest dry rieslings in the country, and which to my palate offer up a combination of purity, intensity and transparency that finds little rival the world over outside of Maison Trimbach in Ribeauvillé. I find that the Keller Grosses Gewächs rieslings are consistently “cooler” in fruit tone, more minerally and lighter on their feet than the finest that I have tasted from the best producers in Austria in the last several vintages, while delivering the same fine structural elements for potential long-term cellaring. As each passing year has seemingly gotten warmer than the last, I hope that some of Klaus-Peter’s techniques for retarding photosynthesis and slowing the ripening process will be adopted in regions such as the Wachau, which to my palate have been suffering a bit from global warming in the last decade’s worth of vintages, and producing bigger, headier wines that cannot carry their serious alcohol levels without a struggle. I know that there are many dry riesling enthusiasts that do not share my reservations with the best examples from Austria (and I do not profess myself to have anywhere near the same breadth of experience with these wines as I do with many other

regions), but for me the Austrian riesling from a recent vintage that does not show a bit of heat on the finish is a very rare sighting these days.

The following wines have all been tasted in the last twelve months. I have included the notes on the 2006 Grosses Gewächs reported on as barrel samples in the April issue here as well, as I tasted them at the estate again in September, and the grand crus are now complete and finished wines. As the notes below will attest, I only wish I had more notes on Klaus-Peter Keller's wines, as he is making some stunningly beautiful wines from his home base in Flörsheim-Dalsheim. As I hope I have emphasized above, while dry rieslings are the estate's current claim to fame, there is not one wine that I have tasted that bears the Keller label here that is not indeed world class, and I hope that many of the current Keller enthusiasts will not ignore the beautiful wines made from scheurebe, rieslaner and other grapes as well, not to mention the stunning pinot noirs, in their search for these remarkable rieslings. However, as brilliant as the whole Keller range remains, this is first and foremost a riesling estate. As Klaus-Peter observes,

*“For me the best riesling is not supposed to be a monster riesling. The word high quality in combination with riesling is for me precision, finesse and minerality. When the glass is finished I must be eager to drink the next one- only then do I know that the wine is good.”*



## ***Dry Riesling***

### **2006 Riesling “Von der Fels”- Weingut Keller**

This is one of Klaus-Peter’s basic bottlings of riesling, but there is hardly anything “basic” about this beautifully balanced, complex and soil-driven gem. The chalky bouquet is deep and compelling, as it offers up a lovely mélange of yellow fruit, tangerine, bee pollen, lemon zest and hard limestone. On the palate the wine is medium-full, deep and racy, with a superb core of fruit, lovely acids, and a very long, complex and soil-driven finish. In 2006 the Von der Fels bottlings is 12.5% in alcohol, and delivers a lovely blend of cooler fruit tones and terrific chalky soil tones. Very high class juice and a steal. 2007-2017+? **91.**

### **2006 Riesling “R.R.”- Weingut Keller**

The “R.R.” bottling is a selection from the Kirchspiel vineyard that is planted on red soils, similar to the *terres rouges* to be found in Bonnes-Mares. The remainder of the vineyard of Kirchspiel is yellow limestone. This is the warmest section of the vineyard, and the grapes here always get the ripest of all of the Keller holdings. These are the youngest vines in the Keller portfolio, as they were only planted five years ago from cuttings that came from the Saar village of Wiltingen. The wine in 2006 is simply lovely, despite its young vine origin, as it offers up a classy bouquet of sweet grapefruit, quince, petrol, a nice base of soil and a gentle touch of the lees. On the palate the wine is fullish, long and complex, with fine mid-palate depth, bright acids, great cut and a long, racy finish. I love the precision and focus of this wine, and this is simply the entry level from Klaus-Peter. 2010-2025+. **90.**

### **2006 Dalsheimer Hubacker Riesling “Grosses Gewächs”- Weingut Keller**

The 2006 Hubacker is a brilliant bottle of wine in the making, but it will need a few years of cellaring to really allow its secondary layers to emerge and the wine’s tight-knit structure to fully blossom. The nose is deep, beautiful, and currently marked by its wild yeast tones, as it jumps from the glass in a blaze of apple, grapefruit, petrol and deep and complex base of stony minerality. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, very deep and very pure, with great focus and cut, superb structural integrity, and flawless balance on the long, stony finish. The nose here is so suave and polished that the very youthful and bracing palate impression comes as quite a surprise after the utterly captivating nose. Great juice in the making, this weighs in at an even thirteen percent alcohol. 2012-2025+. **93.**

### **2006 Westhofener Kirchspiel Riesling “Grosses Gewächs”- Weingut Keller**

I am continually amazed by the very strong family resemblance between the Kirchspiel from Klaus-Peter Keller and the Cuvée Frédéric Émile from the Trimbach brothers, and this is most certainly true of the 2006 Kirchspiel. The bouquet is deep and youthful, as it delivers a fine blend of grapefruit, tangerine, strong notes of petrol and a beautifully complex base of white stone minerality. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and flawlessly focused, with aristocratic balance on the palate, a rock solid core of fruit, fabulously integrated acids, and a very, very long, complex and transparent finish. Just a scintillating glass of riesling. 2012-2030+. **94.**

### **2006 Westhofener AbtsE Riesling “Grosses Gewächs”- Weingut Keller**

The 2006 AbtsE is significantly more closed on both the nose and palate than either of the previous two wines, but offers stunning potential for complexity if given sufficient time in the cellar. The youthfully complex bouquet offers up notes of lemon,

grapefruit, delicate notes of petrol, a bit of tangerine, and with air, Chablis-like notes of hay, all layered over a kaleidoscopic base of chalky minerality. On the palate the wine is deep, full and decidedly backwards, with a rock solid core, brisk acids, and stunning length and grip on the primary and palate-staining finish. Structurally, this is more solid than liquid, but it is such an impeccably balanced young riesling that it comes across as quite suave and polished. Great wine in the making. 2014-2030+. **94+**.

**2006 Westhofener Morstein Riesling “Grosses Gewächs”- Weingut Keller**

The 2006 Morstein looks to have turned out even better than I initially thought from my tasting of the wine in March, and it is clearly one of the wines of the vintage in Germany in 2006. The brilliant, bottomless bouquet offers up a mélange of grapefruit, tangerine, an exotic hint of lychee nut, citrus peel, incipient notes of petrol and a stunning base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, pure, powerful and utterly seamless, as it sizzles across the palate with laser-like focus, impeccable balance and plenty of firm acidity completely buried within the structure of the wine on the very, very long, rapier-like finish. This wine is so deep at the core as to defy the senses, and the wine almost coats the palate with minerality as it lingers long after the wine is swallowed (no spitting required here). I admit that I pleaded for a few bottles of this great young wine (unsuccessfully), as it is sold out at the winery. Make sure to do your own pleading soon, as you do not want to miss the magical 2006 Morstein! Magnificent potential. 2016-2030+. **96+**.

**2006 Riesling “G-Max”- Weingut Keller**

As Klaus-Peter was opening the 2006 G-Max and we were finishing up the Morstein in our glasses, I really thought that there would be no way that the G-Max could hold its own with the Morstein. How wrong I was! As Klaus-Peter is a relatively young man at thirty-three years of age, it is entirely likely that he has decades ahead of him to continue to refine his art, which is rather exciting. What he will do in 2007 to top these monumental 2006s remains to be seen, but needless to say, if you are in line to get a few bottles of the 2006 G-Max, congratulations on your foresight. This is an utterly profound young wine, that soars from the glass in a brilliant mélange of grapefruit, oranges, petrol, orange oil and a very, very complex grounding of chalky and stony minerality. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and full-bodied, with flawless focus and balance, utterly seamless acid integration, incredible mid-palate density, and profound length and grip on a soil-driven finish that simply dances across the palate. I know that this is a woefully young cuvée that to date does not have a long history of aging behind it, and so superlatives are not yet historically based. But that said, if this wine fulfills all of the early promise that it shows today, it will only have Clos Ste. Hune for company at the very pinnacle of dry riesling! 2016-2035+. **98**.

**2005 Westhofener Kirchspiel Riesling “Grosses Gewächs”- Weingut Keller**

The 2005 vintage for Klaus-Peter produced much more powerfully built wines than was the case with the classic 2006s, and these wines will no doubt take several more years of bottle age to show their customary minerality and lightness of step. My good friend Dr. Markus Strobel, who was kind enough to open these two 2005 Grosses Gewächs bottlings for me after our visit to the property, observed that they would be much easier to read if they had been open for twenty-four hours, as they are presently a bit bound up in their structural elements. However, with a bit of air it is still fairly easy to



see the quality to come, as the Kirchspiel offers up a rich and generous mélange of sweet grapefruit, a touch of pear, orange oil, petrol and understated notes of wet stone. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, deep and almost opulent on the attack (though decidedly not fat), with plenty of acidity, great mid-palate density, and excellent focus and grip on the long, very primary finish. 2015-2035. **93.**

**2005 Westhofener Morstein Riesling “Grosses Gewächs”- Weingut Keller**

The 2005 Morstein shares the same opulent impression in its youth as is displayed by the Kirchspiel, and it too will take several years in the cellar to begin to show its customary race and cut. The bouquet is deep and beautiful, as it offers up notes of tangerine, petrol, bee pollen, delicate notes of lychee, rose petals and stony minerality. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, deep and precise, with beautiful focus and cut, a big layer of puppy fat fruit, a rock solid core, and excellent length and grip on the snappy and soil-driven finish. As Dr. Strobel noted, there remains in his 2005s all of the structure and minerality that Klaus-Peter’s wines are famous for, it is just presently a bit buried behind the waves of youthful fruit. But the cut and raciness are clearly here in this wine, it simply needs some cellaring time to allow the buxom fruit of 2005 youthfulness to subside a bit. 2015-2035. **94.**



*The AbtsE vineyard’s gentle slope recalls Burgundy, more than the steep slate of Nierstein.*

### **2004 Westhofener Kirchspiel Riesling “Grosses Gewächs”- Weingut Keller**

I have a bit of a soft spot for the 2004 Kirchspiel, as it was harvested on my birthday in November of that year, and it offers up outstanding potential. The bouquet is deep and much more classically etched in its minerality than the extravagant 2005, as it offers up notes of pulverized stone, tangerine, orange oils, petrol, sweet grapefruit, a bracing base of minerality and, with air, and exotic note of vinesmoke. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, racy and still very backward, with a great core of fruit, a firm girdle of acidity, and excellent focus on the racy, long, wet stony finish that cuts across the palate like a blade of minerality. A stellar wine. 2012-2030+. **93+**.

### **2004 Westhofener Morstein Riesling “Grosses Gewächs”- Weingut Keller**

The 2004 Morstein was the first wine I ever tasted from Klaus-Peter Keller, and I was immediately struck by the combination of deep and complex fruit tones and a literal bath of stony minerality. If I had acted on my knowledge of this wine at the first, I might have a much healthier pile of Keller wines in my cellar today, but I was slow on the uptake (not for the first time, I might add). The 2004 Morstein is a stellar bottle, that offers up and deep and almost exotic bouquet of peach, grapefruit, wet stones, notes of its wild yeasts, petrol, caraway seed and an almost flinty topnote. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, deep, very pure and soil-driven, with a great girdle of racy acidity, impeccable focus and balance and a long, snappy and mineral finish. Perhaps the note of exotica on the nose is a result of a bit more ripeness, as the 2004 Morstein weighs in at 13.5% alcohol, which is just a touch higher than what Klaus-Peter finds ideal. Great juice- what was I waiting for? 2012-2030+. **94**.

### **2002 Westhofener Morstein Riesling “Grosses Gewächs”- Weingut Keller**

2002 was just the second vintage that Klaus-Peter was in charge of the family winery, and it is quite clear that he hit the ground running. I had expected that I might note a bit of a stylistic swing between the 2002 Morstein and the 2006s and 2005s, assuming that perhaps it had taken Klaus-Peter a bit of time to fine tune things. However, this does not seem to be the case, as the 2002 Morstein is very true to the style of the wine today, and is absolutely stellar. The beautiful nose offers up a blend of wild yeast tones, sweet oranges, citrus oils, a bit of fresh peach and a great base of chalky minerality. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, deep and stunningly pure, with a still very youthful profile (and even a bit of gas still), great cut and focus, and a very, long, very transparent and mineral finish. Perhaps the 2006 Morstein offers up a touch more finesse and refinement in comparison to this 2002, but the difference is miniscule, and this '02 Morstein is a beautiful bottle of riesling that is still on its way up. 2012-2030+. **94**.

### **1996 Rudesheimer Berg Roseneck Riesling Spätlese Trocken- Weingut Keller**

This oddity in the Keller cellars was actually the first wine that Klaus-Peter made on his own, as he was still a student at Geisenheim when he made this bottling. The wine was harvested at the end of November with an alcohol of eleven percent. It is actually quite tasty, though not really in the same league as the dry rieslings that he is making today. The complex nose offers a classic Rheingauer blend of lemon, wheat, notes of petrol, a fine base of soil and a bit of straw in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, crisp and complex, with lovely focus and balance, and a long, classy finish. Stylistically, this is cut much more from the cloth of a typical riesling trocken,

rather than the fuller-bodied and more minerally-defined style that Klaus-Peter makes today in the Hügelland. It is drinking at its apogee at age eleven, but clearly has plenty of life still in it. 2007-2020. **88.**

### ***Off-Dry and Classically Sweet Riesling***

#### **2006 Westhofener Kirchspiel Riesling Spätlese Goldkapsel- Weingut Keller**

This is a very pretty and peachy bottle of Spätlese, that offers up a complex nose of white peach, apple, spring flowers, a touch of bee pollen and a delicate base of soil. On the palate the wine is fullish and quite broad on the attack, with a lovely glaze of botrytis, and good length and grip on the long, fruit-driven finish. Interestingly, this Spätlese misses the same minerally drive on the backend that is found in every one of Klaus-Peter's dry rieslings. But a lovely wine. 2007-2020. **89+.**

#### **2004 Westhofener Morstein Riesling Auslese \*\*\*- Weingut Keller**

The 2004 three starred Auslese from Weingut Keller is in reality a lovely little BA, as it offers up a pretty, heavily botrytized aromatic blend of peach, mango, honey, a nice touch of lavender, and a modicum of the Morstein's normally blazing minerality. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, honeyed and quite crisp with supporting acidity, with a cornucopia of botrytized tropical fruit tones, and excellent length and grip on the fruit-driven and creamy finish. This is so heavily laden with botrytis that, even though the rot is all clean and the wine is quite precise, the tropical fruit volume is so high that it is hard for the minerality to be heard (no small feat in the Morstein). This is a lovely bottle by any stretch of the imagination, but I have to give the slight nod to the wine below because of its slightly more pronounced minerality that comes through the botrytis. 2006-2020. **92.**

#### **2002 Dalsheimer Hubacker Riesling Auslese \*\*\*- Weingut Keller**

In terms of sugar and botrytis levels, Klaus-Peter's non-dry rieslings often remind me quite a bit of Helmut Dönnhoff's wines, in that if he is going to call it an Auslese, it is going to be a botrytized wine, and if he adds stars, then it is going to be a very heavily botrytized wine. This is certainly the case with this lovely, Beerenauslese-level three starred Auslese from the Hubacker in 2002, which soars from the glass in a beautiful mélange of apple pie, orange zest, honey, pineapple, orange blossoms and delicate minerality. On the palate the wine is medium-full, round and creamy on the attack, with outstanding focus, impeccable balance, snappy acids, and excellent length and grip on the complex and very clean finish. Extremely classy juice. 2007-2020+. **93+.**

### ***Other White Wine Varietals***

#### **2006 Monsheimer Silberberg Rieslaner Beerenauslese Goldkapsel- Weingut Keller**

Klaus-Peter Keller's rieslaner BA Goldkapsel that was sold at the auction this year in Bad Kreuznach was one of the most spectacular dessert wines that I tasted at any of the auctions this year. The bouquet on the wine is deep, perfumed and stunning, as it wafts from the glass in a mélange of apple, ripe peach, honeycomb, minerals and apple blossoms. Aromatically, this is one of the most refined and elegant expressions of rieslaner that I have ever had the pleasure to savor. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and utterly loaded up with the cleanest expression of botrytis imaginable, with a great underpinning of minerality, and absolutely stunning acidity on the backend giving the wine a laser-like precision and cut on the endless finish. Just a monumental bottle of

wine, which towered over a number of 2005 riesling TBAs that were shown at Trier a few days before and fetched dizzying price levels. 2007-2040. **96+**.

**2002 Westhofener Morstein Scheurebe Auslese- Weingut Keller**

The Keller scheurebe vines lie in the Morstein vineyard and were a healthy thirty-five years of age in 2002; they have produced a very lovely bottle of Auslese in this vintage. Unfortunately the Kellers do not produce much scheurebe, so there were only a thousand bottles of this lovely Auslese produced in 2002. Klaus-Peter notes that the domaine continues to have a very strong following for their scheurebe bottlings to this day, and this remains the wine that sells out first at the winery each year (presumably excepting the G-Max). The nose on the 2002 is lovely and classic, as it offers up very fresh notes of sweet, pink grapefruit, black currant, stony minerality and a gentle touch of blossoming petrol. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, sweet and creamy with botrytis on the attack, with lovely framing acids, fine focus and balance and very good length on the finish. This is a lovely bottle of scheurebe, but it has a hard act to follow after all of these laser-like grand cru rieslings. 2007-2015. **90**.

**2002 Westhofener Morstein Scheurebe Trockenbeereauslese- Weingut Keller**

I have for a long time been of the impression that grapes such as scheurebe and rieslaner are at their best in a dessert wine category, as the rather exotic flavor and aromatic profiles of these grapes (at least to a die-hard riesling fan) seem at their best with a proper dose of clean botrytis, while the relatively less refined palate impressions of these grapes *vis à vis* riesling is less noticeable as a high wire act. I may be wrong in this impression, but certainly this stunning scheurebe TBA from Klaus-Peter is not going to dissuade me of my perceptions, as the wine is flat out stunning. The deep and heavily botrytized nose simply dances out of the glass in a unrepentant blaze of oranges, apricots, honey, exotic spices, rosewater, a touch of new leather and hints of the tea leaves to come with further bottle age. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, racy and opulent at the same time, with beautiful focus and a profound lightness of step for a wine this high up in the *Oeschle* scales, with snappy acids and a stunning long finish. This is a hauntingly refined and elegant interpretation of scheurebe TBA. 2007-2025+. **96**.

***Red Wine Varietals***

**2006 Dalsheimer Bürgel Spätburgunder “Cuvée Felix”- Weingut Keller**

The 2005 Bürgel Grosses Gewächs is a lovely bottle of pinot that offers up a serious Burgundian mélange of aromatics and flavors, and which is just a tad marked by its new oak component for my personal tastes. But this is a deep, complex and very classy red that dances around ninety-nine percent of all the German pinot noirs that I have tasted in the past, and is a most exciting bottle. The superb bouquet offers up notes of red and black cherries, chocolate, a bit of graphite, and a framing of spicy, cedary wood. On the palate the wine is medium-full, pure and impressively deep at the core, with fine acids, excellent focus and nascent complexity, and a long, moderately tannic finish. A bit of the tannin is wood tannin here, but the wine clearly has the stuffing to absorb its wood component without difficulty. A very, very impressive Spätburgunder. I cannot emphasize how excited I will be to taste the 2007 version of this if Klaus-Peter reigns in the new oak even further! 2010-2020+? **90+**.



### **2006 Dalsheimer Frauenberg Spätburgunder- Weingut Keller**

While the Bürgel is the vineyard that is rated as a grand cru for pinot noir, the lovely named vineyard of Frauenberg (the ladies' mountain) shows equally fine potential. In fact, it is possible that the Burgundian clones here may one day outpace the German pinot clones in the Bürgel once they are a bit older. The name of the vineyard goes back to pre-motorized days, when this was considered within a comfortable walking distance of a woman from the center of Dalsheim, so that the ladies could assist in the vines and still get home in good time to prepare the evening meal! As noted above, the vines here are only eight years-old, but they have already produced a pretty serious glass of pinot in 2005. Again, to my palate the new oak is a bit intrusive, but the nose is lovely in its mix of plums, blueberries, dark chocolate, smoke, herbs and spicy oak. On the palate the wine is fullish, deep and nicely focused, with a fine core of fruit, and a bit of uncovered, spicy wood tannins poking through on the long, complex and classy finish. If this wine can successfully integrate its wood component, then it will be excellent. These two Keller Spätburgunders are really the brave new frontier of pinot noir in Germany, and should be tasted by every pinot lover the world over, just to get an idea of the shape of things to come. 2010-2020+? **90**.



*The 2007 grand cru Bürgel from Weingut Keller resting comfortably in one year-old Burgundy barrels.*