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Best Wines from Germany

1. **2014 Keller Morstein Spätburgunder GG Felix:** Keller's Morstein is one of the icon wines that demonstrates the top quality of German Spätburgunder—aka Pinot Noir. Surprisingly, it comes from old Sylvaner vines that had been grafted with the best Pinot material from...top secret...Burgundy. "Age matters," says Klaus Peter Keller, whose Pinot is suddenly from vines that are as old as the reviewer. The yield is also very low at 15 hectoliters per hectare!
2. **2015 Emrich-Schönleber Monzinger Auf der Ley Riesling GG (Nahe):** From a small vineyard above the famous Halenberg, this world-class Riesling is bottled only in magnums and sold at the annual auction in Bad Kreuznach. At the Wine Advocate BYOB party in New York earlier this year, wine geeks were blown away by the 2008 A de L predecessor, but the 2015 seems even better. It is surely Schönleber's most mineral and tension-filled wine that combines richness and intensity with purity and minerals, and its power is so incredible—like only the greatest wines on earth and this is surely one of them.
3. **2015 Hermann Dönnhoff Niederhäuser Hermannshöhle Riesling Trockenbeerenauslese Freitag (Nahe):** Two TBAs from the Hermannshöhle have been basket-pressed in 2015, one on a Thursday, the other 24 hours later. The plan was to assemble both parts, but in the end—and due to an even more radical selecting of single berries for the second pressing—their character was too different, so they were kept separately. The Freitag is even more concentrated, but the flinty flavors and the piquancy of the Hermannshöhle still shines through. It is the quintessence of what was possible in 2015 in the Hermannshöhle and beyond this, it will be a perfect TBA for decades.

Best Wines from Austria

There are still so many 2015s to taste, so readers must forgive me in that I only mention three wines that I liked a lot this year. So this is not a comprehensive Best of Austria, but easily could be, given the quality level.

1. **2015 Prager Grüner Veltliner Smaragd Achleiten Stockkultur (Wachau):** This wine comes from a vineyard planted in 1938 and is therefore made from small, thick-skinned berries that give a very intense, concentrated and lovely GV. It shows great elegance, finesse and complexity.
2. **2008 Tement Sauvignon Blanc Zieregg IZ (Südsteiermark):** This wine is eight years old but still bloody young. Austria's Sauvignon Blancs deserve all your interest and Manfred and Armin Tement's IZ—with 15% Chardonnay and Pinot Blanc, aged for 42 months on the lees—is the most convincing one. This Sauvignon Blanc is ready to challenge the finest Pessac-Léognans.
3. **2013 Moric Blaufränkisch Lutzmannsburg Alte Reben (Burgenland):** One of the finest Blaufränkisch on earth comes from a plateau with up to 110-year-old vines and shows an outrageous purity, finesse and freshness. It also has mind-blowing complexity on the nose. This is an extremely stimulating Blaufränkisch that seems ethereal like a perfume and possesses versatility like a dream. Blaufränkisch surrealism!



2015 Marie-Thérèse Chappaz Valais Grain Ermitage

Président Troillet

Best Wines from Switzerland

1. **2015 Marie-Thérèse Chappaz Valais Grain Ermitage Président Troillet:** This is a great biodynamic Marsanne from Fully in the Valais! From really old vineyards on gneiss and granite soil, and aged for 18 months in oak, this noble Ermitage combines a ripe tropical fruit with the spicy/flinty flavors of crystalline rocks, wild herbs and flowers. Full-bodied, rich and highly elegant, the wine is lifted by delicate acidity and structured by beautiful bitters. This is an impressively complex and persistent Swiss Marsanne whose alcohol weight comes over the palate with subtle power, finesse and elegance.
2. **2013 Christophe Abbet Valais Humagne Rouge:** This is a beautifully aromatic, silky, fresh and finessed red from the indigenous Humagne Rouge grape. It is delicate and gastronomic, very authentic and lovely to drink. Not a great wine, but one of the greatest surprises of this year, thanks to Olivier Scola who served me this wine in his Ze Bistro, Aix-en-Provence, in November 2016.
3. **2013 Christian Zündel Ticino Merlot Sass:** This is a very individual Merlot of great purity, grip and tension from the Ticino! Grown on gneiss soils, Zündel's 2013 Sass combines spicy cherry flavors with a concentrated, immensely fresh and firmly structured fruit. This is pure, very elegant and finessed Merlot that is provided with persistent tannins, as well as a long and promising finish!



Bruno Paillard and Dom Pérignon
Best Wines from Champagne

1. **2012 Roses de Jeanne Presle Blanc de Noirs Pinot Noir Millésime:** It is not easy to name my favorite Champagne from one of the top producers from the Aube. Almost everything from Cédric Bouchard is great fizz, but the 2012 Presle Blanc de Noirs Millésime is perhaps one of the finest. Full-bodied and rich, this is a firmly structured Blanc de Noirs with a long and refreshing finish.
2. **2003 Bruno Paillard NPU Nec Plus Ultra:** Based on 50/50 Pinot Noir and Chardonnay exclusively from grand cru villages, and produced only in great vintages, Paillard's 2003 NPU Nec Plus Ultra is only the fifth edition since 1990. No less than ten years have to pass by until the wine is disgorged as Extra Brut, and then kept in the cellar for at least another year. The yellow/golden-colored prestige cuvée is very intense, rich and complex, but also shows lots of energy, tension and finesse. A fascinating, atypical 2003.
3. **1998 Dom Pérignon P2:** The 1998 Dom Pérignon P2 (the second of three plénitudes, formerly known as the first Oenothèque) displays beautiful iodine flavors, along with lemon and orange aromas on the clear and mineral nose. Highly elegant and finesse-full, this silky textured assemblage of Chardonnay and Pinot Noir has a very distinguished and stimulating finish that is full of mineral tension and complexity.



2011 Domaine du Collier Saumur Blanc La

Charpentrie

Best Wines from Loire Valley

1. **2015 Domaine Huet Vouvray Le Mont Demi-Sec:** Le Mont is my favorite lieu-dit of Domaine Huet and due to problematic weather conditions, this food-friendly, demi-sec style has become rare in recent years. The 2015 Le Mont Demi-Sec is a great, thought-provoking Vouvray: deep, rich, dense and powerful. This is highly complex and persistent, yet refreshing and transparent, with juicy fruit and lots of energy.
2. **2014 Gérard Boulay Sancerre Clos de Beaujeu:** My favorite Sancerre this year was Boulay's 2014 Sancerre Clos de Beaujeu. It is highly complex and reveals tremendous energy, along with great finesse and elegance. A very stimulating and digestible Sancerre with grip and lots of salt.
3. **2011 Domaine du Collier Saumur Blanc La Charpentrie:** This is not the current vintage, but the 2011 Saumur La Charpentrie tastes marvellous today. Intense and concentrated on the deep, ripe and complex nose, this is a full-bodied and powerful but vital, highly elegant and finessed Chenin. It has an enormous concentration of (tropical) fruits and chalky flavors. A great Chenin Blanc that Jura wine freaks will love.



2012 Émile Balland Coteaux du Giennois Le

Grand Chemin (Loire Valley, France)

Best Value Wines of the Year

1. **2015 Markus Molitor Riesling Graacher Domprobst Kabinett White Capsule (Mosel/Germany):** This is Molitor's first Domprobst (from ungrafted vines) Riesling on the rocks! Deep, ripe, intense and smoky on the nose, this is an expressive, perfectly ripe, gorgeously lush and stimulating Domprobst. This is a grand cru par excellence that comes along with just 10.5% alcohol.
2. **2015 Rosi Schuster Aus den Dörfern (Burgenland/Austria):** This is a spectacular white wine made from 80% Grüner Veltliner and diverse varieties from gneiss and chalky soils. A medium-weighted wine of great purity, tension and finesse that finishes with a lingering salinity. (\$19-22 USD)
3. **2012 Émile Balland Coteaux du Giennois Le Grand Chemin (Loire Valley, France):** This wine was served blind during a dinner in the Villa Made top restaurant in Cassis, France, in November 2016. I admit, I didn't think it was a Sauvignon Blanc—it could have been Riesling. Its bouquet was very delicate and pure, with floral and white fruit aromas intermixed with stony flavors. Light, fresh and elegant on the palate, with finesse, a filigreed structure and a salty finish, I had no problem emptying my glass before I really analyzed the wine.



2002 Vega-Sicilia Ribera del Duero Único (Spain) and 2006 Domaine de Terrebrune Bandol Terroir du Trias (France)

Best Wine Drinking Experiences from Around the World

1. **2006 Domaine de Terrebrune Bandol Terroir du Trias (France):** Based on Mouvèdre (85%), Grenache and Cinsault from calcareous marl and rocks, and aged in barriques for 18 months, this is the most Burgundian Mediterranean red wine I had in 2016. It shows intense aromas of black fruits, licorice and underwood flavors, with great elegance and freshness, as well as serious but fine tannins. This classic wine went perfectly with the veal tenderloin served with porcini during an unforgettable dinner in La Villa Madie, Cassis (France), in November 2016.
2. **2002 Vega-Sicilia Ribera del Duero Único (Spain):** I had this wine during a private dinner with friends in Singapore in October and it was simply beautiful in its clear, ripe and perfectly balanced aromatics. The 2002 Único has great elegance, finesse and intensity, and is perfect to enjoy today. The fruit and the tannins were perfectly ripe and although we had a 100-pointer Brunello on the table (much younger though)—as well as several other great wines—this was the wine of the night for most of us.
3. **1875 D'Oliveira Madeira Malvasia (Portugal):** A fascinating Madeira! This Madeira is very clear, deep, intense and complex on the nose, with nutty and balsamic chestnut and pepper flavors. With very elegant, smoky (toast, speck) and slightly leathery characteristics on the palate, this is very vinous, intense and finessed. A great wine with a very delicate acidity. Endlessly long and gorgeous! (Presented by Paul Day at Schloss Gobelsburg, Austria, June 2016)



Best Lunch of the Year

AM – Alexandre Mazzia, Marseille

Many people say this is the most creative and inspired restaurant in Marseille. I will not check to see if this is true, because whenever I am back in Marseille, this one-starred restaurant of Alexandre Mazzia will always be my first choice. The cuisine d'auteur is outstandingly creative, precise and of great finesse, and the simple chic of the interior is the perfect stage in which to focus on the menu. The single dishes (often based on fish or seafood, during summer combined with herbs and flowers) are presented in a very individual, fanciful way. I have rarely had such intense emotions during a lunch. The wine list is not impressively comprehensive, but focuses on highly individual, often organic or biodynamic French wines. The several grower Champagnes (from stars like Agrapart, Bérêche, Boulard, Coessens, De Sousa, Dehous, Doquet, Giraud, Hostomme, Lassaigne, etc.) are spectacular. Just follow the sommelier and you will be in heaven. (Address: 9 rue François Rocca, 13008 Marseille | www.alexandremazzia.com)

Best Vertical/Retrospective Tasting of the Year

Kracher Weinlaubenhof, Illmitz, Burgenland/Austria

It was a day or two before Christmas 2015 when Gerhard and Yvonne Kracher and I met up in my favorite restaurant near Hamburg (Fischerklause am Lütjensee). Gerhard took over the direction of the family estate after the early death of his father, sweet wine legend Alois (Luis) Kracher in 2007. We tasted more than 50 sweet and noble sweet wines from the so-called Seewinkel around Illmitz and Apetlon, Lake Neusiedl, where botrytis cinerea is superstar. The highlight of the tasting was the range of Trockenbeerenauslesen (TBAs) that had been produced between 2006 (Luis' last vintage) and 2013. In fact, not a single vintage of Gerhard Kracher was reviewed in The Wine Advocate. The time to change that was overdue and what better way to apologize than a retrospective tasting of Gerhard's oeuvre. His wines shined as bright as those of his super-star dad. In the end, I rated three of Gerhards wines 97 or 97+ points. And believe it or not, my favorite TBAs (2008 TBA No 8, 2008 TBA No 12, 2006 TBA No 10) were all made from barrel-fermented Chardonnay—except for one, the 2010 Welschriesling TBA No 11. In a few weeks we meet up to taste his 2014 TBAs... More details about the tasting will be published in the forthcoming issue at the end of April.



Best 'Get-a-Life Outside of Wine' Things of the Year

Osenbach Camping, Alsace: I have been in hotels too often this year and I started hating them. So I decided to spend my days in Alsace in a blockhouse camping in Osenbach, Haut-Rhin. There is no vineyard in Osenbach, no wine, and in the flat there was even no wine glass, no corkscrew, no internet and no telephone network. There was virtually nothing except a bed, an empty fridge and a lot of wood—but no table. It was perfect to relax (on my bed) and no winegrower would have found me here to pick me up or bring me wine. The moon was full and the stars bright. I did one of my most beautiful 'balades' of the year (French for 'longish walk'), picked tasteful plums from the trees and had some serious talks with horses in the rain, before I finished the day with a beautiful 2007 Pfingstberg Grand Cru poured into a milk glass. I am not sure if I will come back, though. At least Osenbach was a successful once-in-a-lifetime experience.

Joshua Redman & Brad Mehldau: The Nearness of You: There are hundreds if not thousands of interpretations of this 76-year-old pop classic written by Hoagy Carmichael, but this is not just the slowest and longest (16:49 minutes!)—and most intimate version—it is also the most beautiful one. A live duet between longtime friends, a dialogue of Brad Mehldau's piano and Joshua Redman's caressing tenor saxophone, this is the most beautiful sound next to silence. Although "Nearness" is not an ECM, but a Nonesuch recording that had been released in September 2016.

Jheronimus Bosch in the Museo del Prado, Madrid: This is my highlight in arts of the year. This summer the Museo des Prado presented a "once in a lifetime" exhibition that marked the fifth centenary of the death of Jheronimus Bosch, representing the greatest number of Bosch's works ever to be assembled. I bought my ticket in advance on the website of the museum, catalogue included, and flew to Madrid. At the entrance, however, they didn't let me in. My ticket—I can't blame anybody but myself—was for the Prado Collection. No chance. Instead of Bosch, I met up with Titian, El Greco, Rubens, van Dyck, Velázquez, Goya and many, many other great European painters represented in this world-famous collection. Well, it wasn't Bosch and it wasn't a "once in a lifetime" experience, but I will probably go back one day.