

The Rise

OF THE

Grosses Gewächs

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Germany's iconic dry 'great growths' continue to represent quality and inspire winemakers.

In Germany, where wine preferences have long been swinging dry and drier still, the market is dominated by *trocken*, or dry wines made from Riesling, Pinot Noir (known as Spätburgunder), Pinot Gris (or Grauburgunder) and more. Among the very best are dry wines classified as Grosses Gewächs, or "great growths," GG for short.

They represent standout dry expressions of exemplary single vineyards known as Grosse Lage, Germany's version of the grand cru. These are recognized for historically producing wines of distinction.

GG wines are produced in each of Germany's 13 wine regions. They must contain no more than nine grams per liter of residual sugar, adhere to strict quality and production guidelines and utilize only specific grape varieties classic to each region.

The modern-day GG classification was codified in 2002 by the Verband Deutscher Prädikatsweingüter (VDP), an exclusive organization of German winegrowers. The VDP system is distinct from the German *prädikat* that classifies wine into categories like *kabinett*, *spätlese* or *auslese*, based on the ripeness of grapes at harvest.

The VDP classification continues to evolve, and its trademarked VDP-GROSSES GEWÄCHS nomenclature extends only to members. However, winemakers in non-VDP estates throughout Germany are increasingly emulating classification systems for flagship dry wines based on vineyard designations, as well.

Read on to discover just six of Germany's top regions for GG bottlings.



Pfalz

Blessed with ample sunshine and a warm, dry Mediterranean climate, the Pfalz is a focal point for Germany's most powerful, sun-drenched GGs. While Riesling is the dominant variety here, the VDP also permits GG Spätburgunder and Weissburgunder.

The Pfalz has a long, noble history of exemplary dry winemaking. Its storied Kirchenstück vineyard is widely considered the region's greatest. It consistently produces some of the world's greatest dry white wines.

Like Rheinhessen, however, production in the Pfalz was dominated by high-volume, mass-market sweet wines in the decades after World War II. In recent decades, however, historic icons of the northern Pfalz, like the three "B's" of Geheimer Rat Dr. von Bassermann-Jordan, Dr. Bürklin-Wolf and Reichsrat von Buhl, seem to have awoken from years of listlessness.

In 1991, upon taking the reins at her family estate, Bettina Bürklin-von Guradze, owner of Dr. Bürklin-Wolf, ignited a revolution when she shifted focus to dry wines and established meticulous quality guidelines.

As early as 1994, Bürklin-von Guradze began to designate dry wines from flagship single-vineyards as grand cru, or GG, in accordance to vineyard classifications established in 1828 by the Bavarian royal property assessment. The vineyard classifications and quality pyramid that she installed were forerunners to the Pfalz VDP's own quality classification system.

Südpfalz, in the south, is where much of the region's bulk-wine production was centralized. There, pioneering producers like Ökonomierat Rebholz and Friedrich Becker not only revolutionized the production of dry, terroir-driven, single-vineyard Riesling and Spätburgunder, but they elevated Weissburgunder (also known as Pinot Blanc) to heights unseen almost anywhere in the world.

Many non-VDP producers in the Pfalz, particularly Markus Schneider and Odinstal, also produce stunning examples of dry, single-vineyard wines.



95 Ökonomierat Rebholz 2017 Im Sonnenschein Weissler Burgunder GG; \$103. The German Wine Collective.

94 Pffeffingen 2017 Weilberg Riesling GG Trocken Gold Cap; \$56. *Cellar Selection*. The German Wine Collective.

93 Von Buhl 2017 Forster Pechstein Riesling GG; \$68. The German Wine Collective.

96 Dr. Heger 2014 Vorderer Winklerberg Irlingen Spätburgunder GG; \$75. *Editors' Choice*. Schatzli Wines.

95 Franz Keller 2016 Enselberg Jechtingen Spätburgunder GG; \$60. *Cellar Selection*. Delicato Family Wines.

94 Salwey 2015 Oberrotweiler Eichberg Pinot Gris GG; \$53. The German Wine Collective.

Baden

Baden, Germany's sun-kissed southernmost wine region, boasts a remarkable diversity of GG grape varieties of Burgundian heritage. The region is most known for Spätburgunder, Weissburgunder and Grauburgunder, but it also produces GG Riesling, Chardonnay and Lemberger.

According to Fritz Keller, owner of Franz Keller, "Burgundy is the role model for our wines," both for its emphasis on fully dry Pinot wines, but also site specificity. "I want to bring the character of each vineyard into the glass," he says.

Spätburgunder is the most planted grape in Baden, and its flagship GG expressions range from muscular wines from the volcanic terraces of the Kaiserstuhl to transcendent, fruity wines from the cooler limestone slopes of the Breisgau. Oft-underrated varieties like Grauburgunder and Weissburgunder are grown with unusual reverence.

Keller's GG Schlossberg Grauburgunder, sourced from 75-year-old vines, clocks in at a dainty 12.5% alcohol by volume (abv), but it offers a complexity and ageworthiness not often found in commercially ubiquitous Pinot Grigio.

"Pop music is nice," says Keller. "It's pleasant to listen to for about two minutes, but afterwards, can be forgettable. In terms of music, this is jazz."

Fermented in oak barrels, "these are wines that age beautifully, gaining minerality with age and holding up well to richer cuisine," he says.

Baden's most ambitious GGs have been historically criticized for intense extraction and oak embellishments, but there's a clear generational shift bringing youthful vitality. As sons and daughters of Baden's old guard like Keller, Bernhard Huber and others return from studies in Burgundy and beyond, they've infused a thrilling transparency and purity into the region's flagship dry wines.