When the wine world discovered the friendly taste of German liebfraumilch (literally mother’s milk) during the period of the late 1960’s and 1970’s, it was generally considered a boon for German wine growers and producers. Many German wine companies turned to production of the semi-sweet white wine as a means of growth and profit. It is largely agreed that this decision was in fact, a serious blow to the quality ideals concerning German wines held at the time by worldwide wine consumers.

While the inexpensive category of liebfraumilch grew and prospered, this was not the case for the rest of the German wine industry. Sales of their higher quality predikat wines began sliding downward and have remained so for the past three decades.

Also, in 1971, the German Wine Institute (DWI) installed a new set of regulations that was intended to aid Germany’s higher quality wines. The new rules dictated that certain restrictions regarding sweetness and appellation be followed, all intended to provide information for wine consumers. Many believe that, in the long run, these new regulations actually hindered German wines in that they required too much information and therefore cluttered wine labels with semi-important information. In any event, wine sales slowly drifted downward and German wines began to be excluded from conversations concerning truly great wines.

This was unfortunate, because the greatness of German wines could always be found at the top of its production. This factor has not changed one single bit during this entire scenario. Great auslese, beerenauslese and trockenbeerenauslese wines continued to be produced that were among the finest dessert wines in the world. The immaculate eiswein sustained its limited annual production and was still considered one of the great wines of the world.

It is only recently that German wines have begun to regain their rightful place among the world’s elite wines. With the liebfraumilch explosion petered out, German producers have returned to the art of making fresh marvelous tasting wines that have suddenly bounced back in favor among the world’s wine connoisseurs.

Happily, the downfall of German wines was not limited to all German wine producing regions. Many small regions were simply excluded due to their compactness and limited production. This month’s International Series selection region, Germany’s Nahe Valley, was one such case. It made no sense for its producers to change their winemaking methods as they were simply too
German wines are produced among thirteen winegrowing regions, most focused along the Rhine river and its tributaries and just two located on the eastern side of the country. Many of the western winegrowing regions benefit from the high slopes of the Rhine River’s valley walls, which shield the vineyards from any weather extremes and help maintain a more moderate climate. Germany is the northernmost major wine-producing country in all of Europe, so the country’s climate is noticeably cooler overall. Producing everything from crisp Rieslings to fruity red blends and floral Pinot Noirs, German wines are full of charm and character, and distinct from every other European style.

Nahe Valley
Featured Wine Region

The Nahe Wine Region of Germany is one of the country’s smallest, with only around 4300 hectares (slightly over 10,600 acres) under vine. The Nahe River is a tributary of the mighty Rhine and lends its name to the charming area that has traditionally produced exceptionally fine wines. It slopes are a gentler version of both the Rhine and Mosel inclines that dominate the larger valleys. Geological disturbances over millions of years have produced the region’s turbulent geological past. During that time, the ground was constantly shaken by volcanic activity during the formation of the Nahe rift valley. In places, the soil (slate, volcanic porphyry, loess and clay soils) changes every hundred yards and each of these different geological formations subtly alters the taste of the wine. A wide variety of grapes thrive in the mild temperatures and incredibly abundant sunshine. Both red and white varietals flourish in this environment, a unique aspect for a country that produces almost 95 per cent white wines. Due to the smallness of its vineyards, the excellent wines of the Nahe are seldom exported out of Germany, but rather are consumed by German and European connoisseurs who delight in their magnificent subtlety.

Photos top to bottom, left to right:
• The Nahe River flows through the tiny Nahe Valley wine region of Germany.
• Riesling is Germany’s most celebrated wine grape.
• Vineyards flourish on the steep valley walls of the Nahe Valley.
• Map of Germany’s 13 wine regions.
• Ripening Riesling in a colorful German vineyard.
• Wine label of the Sitzius 2010 Riesling Spatlese.
• The flag of Germany.

Wine regions of Germany

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Although German wine labels may seem confusing at first glance, they actually provide a wealth of information on the wine and the quality one can expect. Although not required on the label, many German wines state their level of ripeness (refers to the sugar levels at harvest), whether the wine is dry (trocken) or off-dry (halbtrocken), and the vineyard or village name from where the grapes were grown. German wine labels also usually include the grape varietal name (such as Riesling, below), which is an anomaly in Europe where wines are typically classified by and named for their region of origin.

**Reading a German Wine Label**

- **Producer**: Sitzius
- **Vintage**: 2010
- **Varietal**: Riesling
- **Grape Ripeness**: Spatlese - literally means “late harvest” as grapes are picked later than usual, resulting in riper berries with more weight.
- **Dry Wine**: Trocken - German for dry
- **Vineyard**: Langenlonsheimer Rothenberg (the only one in the town with Erste Lage elite status)
- **Quality Classification**: Goldkapsel - German for gold capsule; used to distinguish a special selection wine

**Germany: Fun Facts!**

- Germany is Europe’s largest economy.
- There are over 300 kinds of bread in Germany.
- Germans are the second largest beer consumers in the world, after the Irish.
- There are 35 dialects of the German language.
- Munich is further north than any major U.S. city (excluding Alaska).
- German is the official language of 5 countries: Germany, Switzerland, Austria, Luxembourg and Liechtenstein. It is also spoken in Northern Italy and the French provinces of Alsace and Lorraine.
- Beer is officially considered a food in Bavaria.
- Germany is the first country to adopt Daylight Saving Time (DST) in 1916.
- The first Oktoberfest was a wedding celebration for Prince Ludwig of Bavaria.
- German is the third most commonly taught language worldwide.
- There are over 150 castles in Germany.
- Germany shares borders with Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Poland, and Switzerland.
- There are over 82 million people in Germany, making it the most densely populated country in the world.
- 70 percent of German highways have no speed limit.

Germany’s flag is a tricolor, consisting of three horizontal bands of the national colors: black, red and gold. The colors can be traced back to the Napoleonic wars, in which the soldiers wore black coats with a red braid and gold buttons. It is rumored that the colors also have symbolic meaning, yellow standing for generosity, red standing for bravery and strength, and black standing for determination.

The German flag was officially adopted in 1918 by the German National Assembly, only to be abolished in 1933, and then reintroduced in 1950 by the German Parliament. East and West Germany had identical flags until 1959, when East Germany added their Coat of Arms to the center. It remained as such until the reunification in 1990, when the original tricolor was named **Prost!**
At 57 year young, Wilhelm Sitzius is an affable German winery owner who believes his English is poorer than it actually is. He is a delightful chap who is devoted to his small winery and its production of high quality wines from the tiny Nahe Valley in Southeastern Germany. His property, and, arguably the winery, dates all the way back to 1560, when his ancestors grew grapes and raised cattle and farm animals like many other families in the area.

Wilhelm Sitzius is the 13th generation of his family to live on his estate, which today comprises some 16 hectares (approximately 22.5 acres), about an average size for a Nahe Valley Winery. Weingut Sitzius produces around 8,400 cases each year, again about average for most small producers of the area.

Both Wilhelm and his attractive wife Sonja, 55, are winemakers and their operation is a family affair. Additional fruit comes from a number of vineyards around the small villages of Oberhausen, Neiderhausen and Langenlonsheim. Some of the vineyards have been in either Wilhelm or Sonja’s families for centuries.

“The Nahe Valley is most distinct from the other wine producing areas,” Sitzius explained. “Our natural soils make us completely different. In the Mosel there is only one soil. So, too, is the Rhine – one spoil. In the Nahe there are perhaps fifty different soils due to the volcanic actions over the last 450 million years. The turbulence has produced numerous pockets of great soils that allow us to grow varietals that prosper in such environments. The end result is that we have the ability to make some marvelous wines.”

While Germany only produces five percent red wine, the Nahe produces a bit more than 20 percent, thanks to the different soil compositions. This fact has caused Wilhelm to become a modern day pirate in seeking to make his wine quality even higher.

“I have been able to travel to the likes of France, Italy, Spain and even South Africa. There, we were able to visit a number of each country’s wineries,” he added. “I always take notes and watch closely how they produce their red wines. I have really learned a lot from my travels. In Germany, it is unfortunate, but there is little red winemaking technique to learn from.”

The wines of Weingut Sitzius have been very fortunate in wine competitions, particularly for so small an operation. If business continues well for his company, Sitzius intends to continue his current expansion to around 15,000 cases. He and his wife own family vineyards and also have excellent access to other top quality grapes in his region. Sitzius has singled out North America and Asia as potential targets for his winery’s expansion.

Weingut Sitzius also operates a wonderful small restaurant on the premises, one that specializes in local cuisine and wine pairings. The facility operates eight months a year, on Friday through Sunday. A local guesthaus is located less than a hundred yards away from the winery for anyone desiring an overnight stay in a completely idyllic setting.

While Weingut Sitzius trends more forward than most of its neighbors, the reason for its success can be traced to its communal approach to farming and wine production. Wilhelm Sitzius maintains a close relationship with practically everyone in the area that is in the wine business, even his closest competitors. When problems arise, each neighbor chips in to help the other, a tradition that originated many centuries ago. When Wilhelm’s father, also named Wilhelm Sitzius, began serious winery production at Weingut Sitzius sometime following the end of World War II, he instilled in the business a spirit of cooperation that has held through modern times. In the mind of present-day owners Wilhelm and Sonja Sitzius, it is a lesson that they will never forget.

About the Winemakers

It is somewhat unique to have a husband/wife tandem serve as winemakers at a particular estate. This is the case with Weingut Sitzius, where both Wilhelm and Sonja Sitzius have degrees in winemaking. Both attended the renowned university at nearby Bad Kreuznach and received their winemaking degrees after six years of study. Both must agree on the final blends for their wines. Also, Wilhelm declared in a recent interview that his wife has an excellent palate for what they desire in their wines.
In Germany, the Spatburgunder (Pinot Noir) is to red wine what the Riesling is to white wine - the best of the best! As the name implies, it ripens late (spat) and it was brought to Germany from France’s Burgundy region (burgunder). This grape produces some of the most elegant, velvety wines in the world, and Germany’s style of the wine characteristically takes on more depth and complexity.

Sitzius’ 2008 vintage of this beautiful wine has lush berry aromas, and delicate, yet complex and long lasting flavors that linger on the finish. Aged in small oak casks, this wine has a wonderfully soft texture and soft vanilla notes that make it irresistible.

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**Sitzius 2009 Cuvee WS (Red Blend), Nahe Valley**

Sitzius’ 2009 Cuvee WS, named for owner Wilhelm Sitzius, is an outstanding Red Blend from Germany’s Nahe Valley region. Rich ruby red in color, this luscious wine has hints of currant, blackberries, and cherries with slight herbal notes. On the palate, the wine shows dark juicy fruit flavors and a very polished full body, smooth and softly textured from the aging in roasted oak barrels. Try pairing the Sitzius 2009 Cuvee WS Red Blend with roast pork loin, lamb, or roasted chicken.

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**Sitzius 2010 Riesling Spatlese (White), Nahe Valley**

Germany’s most celebrated varietal, the nobel Riesling grape produces some of Germany’s most reputable, ultra-premium wines. This prestigious bottling from Sitzius Winery sourced grapes from the town of Langenlonsheim in the Nahe Valley, and specifically, the Rothenberg Vineyard which comes with elite Erste Lage status (the only vineyard in the town with such recognition for premium terrior). As stated on the label, this 2010 Riesling is Trocken, German for DRY, with aromas of peach, pineapple, paraffin and floral notes and luscious fruit and mineral flavors. Try pairing this wine with spicy fare, lobster, scallops, and even smoked meat.

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**Sitzius 2008 Spatburgunder (Red), Nahe Valley**

In Germany, the Spatburgunder (Pinot Noir) is to red wine what the Riesling is to white wine - the best of the best! As the name implies, it ripens late (spat) and it was brought to Germany from France’s Burgundy region (burgunder). This grape produces some of the most elegant, velvety wines in the world, and Germany’s style of the wine characteristically takes on more depth and complexity. Sitzius’ 2008 vintage of this beautiful wine has lush berry aromas, and delicate, yet complex and long lasting flavors that linger on the finish. Aged in small oak casks, this wine has a wonderfully soft texture and soft vanilla notes that make it irresistible.

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