

Then, as scenes of automated bottling fill the screen, a winemaker laments, “Burgundy wines ought to be all different, but science now allows us to make wines that are all the same. That’s a pity—they all used to have their own character, like human beings. Progress is pushing all of us to make the same kind of wine.” This comment, which may be accurate, does not square with what we have otherwise seen and heard in the film, leaving me to wonder, has Burgundy too been “Parkerized”?

Suddenly, the scene moves 4,000 miles westward, to Blackberry Farm, an intimate luxury hotel and resort located on a pastoral 4,200-acre estate in the Great Smoky Mountains of Tennessee. An affluent group of friends meets in the wine cellar to enjoy glasses of Burgundy, including some of the same wines that we have followed during the year, albeit samples from earlier vintages. It turns out, of course, that the evening is hosted by Martine Saunier. She introduces Thibault Morey—strange to see him well-dressed and thousands of miles away from his father’s Burgundy property. Then, it’s upstairs for dinner, presumably with one of Martine’s wines paired with each course.

At the conclusion, we are transported back to Burgundy, and amid the barren scene of old vines, cloudy skies, and cold weather, the families begin to prune their vines. They burn the dead wood in the field in the midst of the rows, just as they have been doing for hundreds of years. And, as the narrator inevitably reminds us, “there are lots of things they do in Burgundy that they have been doing for hundreds of years.” In a few months, the first signs of spring will arrive, and then it will be another year in Burgundy.

A Year in Burgundy is the first in a series of documentaries on fine wine forthcoming from director David Kennard. He has just completed *A Year in Champagne*. I will certainly watch his new film, because I expect it to be beautiful and informative, but I hope there will be less narration, and more reliance on the film’s characters and scenes, and thereby more trust in its audience. Less can, indeed, be more.

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RALF FRENZEL (ed.): *Riesling, Robert Weil*. Tre Torri, Wiesbaden, Germany, 2013, 255 pp., ISBN 978-3-941641-94-5 (English), €49.90.

This is a heavy book: it weighs almost 2 kilograms and unites two heavyweights—Riesling, arguably the best white grape variety in the world, and Weingut Robert

Weil, one of the best Riesling producers in the world. The first in a new series of books from Tre Torri, covering the most outstanding wine estates of the world, it covers the complex topic of Riesling through the example of the top German wine producer Weingut Robert Weil. Readers should not expect to be informed about the Riesling grape variety in general, as perhaps the main title, *Riesling*, suggests.

More than half of the 255 pages are mostly wonderful pictures, and some text pages also include pictures. It is not only a book with a most interesting text but also one with great pictures of wine.

Weingut Robert Weil is managed by Wilhelm Weil, who owns the winery jointly with Suntory, the Japanese beverage group. With 75 hectares—exclusively Riesling—under vine, it is one of the largest estates in Germany. The estate's dedication to Riesling has led numerous observers of the international wine world to regard Weingut Robert Weil as a worldwide symbol of German Riesling culture. A Riesling wine of the 1893 vintage, grown on the Gräfenberg site, made the estate famous. The imperial Habsburg court in Vienna purchased 800 bottles of this wine in 1900 at 16 gold marks per bottle. Weingut Robert Weil's top botrytized wines are sold today at very high prices—they are among the most expensive in the world. Although best known for its Noble-Sweet Rieslings, Weingut Weil produces mainly fully fermented, dry wines, including ultrapremium Grosses Gewächs (Grand Cru) wines.

Five authors contributed to the book, which is divided into six chapters.

Written by Editor Ralf Frenzel, Chapter 1 is the prologue, offering a portrait of Wilhelm Weil. It paints him as a winemaker who has done a lot not only for his own estate but also for the region, the famous Rheingau, and for Germany.

Chapter 2 is a very detailed and well-researched account of the history of Weingut Weil by Daniel Deckers, against the background of the Rheingau region and German wine history. Deckers discovered the world's oldest classification map, which was prepared in 1868 by Friedrich Wilhelm von Dünkelberg and classified for the first time the vineyards of the Rheingau.

Deckers describes the founding of the winery in Kiedrich by Dr. Robert Weil, who had lived and taught at the Sorbonne in Paris but was forced to leave France and return to Germany because of the Franco-Prussian War (1870–1871). He joined his brother August in Kiedrich and bought the first vineyards in 1870. In 1879, he moved into the former estate of Sir John Sutton, baronet, which remains the home of Weingut Weil. The first auction of his wines at Burg Crass in 1881 was a failure, but when the German emperor began buying the 1893 Weingut Weil Auslese, the Weil wines gained renown.

In 1988, the estate was sold to Suntory, and Wilhelm Weil was appointed managing director, retaining a minority ownership share.

Chapter 3, by Dieter Bartetzko, deals with the architectural ensemble of the Weil property. Sir John Sutton bought a tiny, dilapidated winegrower's cottage in 1869 and transformed it into a small country estate in the Tudor style, which does not have to fear comparison with the original Tudor manors in Sutton's home country of England. Thereafter, over the years, a number of new structures have been added, including the Vinothek (wine store) built with generous glass paneling that faces the courtyard, in the 1990s, and the new extension finished only recently. But the Tudor-style house built by Sutton remains the heart of the estate. The historical manor house, the ultramodern cellars and the Vinothek stand side by side in a beautiful park, reflecting the same synthesis of old and new that is in the estate's winemaking philosophy.

Chapter 4 ostensibly comprises an interview with Wilhelm Weil, centering on the question: "What makes a great Riesling?" It is not, in fact, an interview but a lecture by Weil, transcribed by Christian Goeldenboog. There are no questions, at least no explicit ones. And it is not about Riesling in general; it is about the Riesling wines produced by Weingut Weil in the Rheingau region in Germany. Wilhelm Weil is one of the vice-presidents of the Vereinigung deutscher Prädikatsweingüter (VDP), the association of about 200 elite wine producers in Germany, and the chapter also reflects the thinking of the VDP. Importantly, the VDP is in the process of radically changing the way in which German wine is classified by moving to a classification system that resembles the classification system of the Bourgogne in France, which is terroir driven.

Chapter 5, by Goeldenboog, deals with the work in the vineyard and in the cellar and is divided into four subchapters. The first subchapter, "Riesling Has Style," reads a bit like a continuation of Chapter 3 and has Wilhelm Weil talking about his winemaking approach and wines.

The following subchapter, "Rock, Soil, the Rheingau and the Ecosystem," reviews the terroir of the Rheingau in general and that of the three vineyards, where Weingut Weil owns land and grows its wines—in particular, Kiedricher Klosterberg, Kiedricher Gräfenberg, and Kiedricher Turmberg.

Weingut Weil's vineyards all belong to the group of the high-lying sites of the Rheingau: Inclination (up to 60%), exposure (southwest), and the ability of the barren stony soils to absorb heat are the factors that make for three perfect Riesling sites. These conditions, as well as ideal circulation, enable the grapes to stay on the vine for a long time, ripening well into November.

Kiedricher Gräfenberg: The soil consists of deep and medium-deep stony, fragmented phyllite partially mixed with loess and loam. At the end of the twelfth century, the site was first documented as *mons rhingravii* (lit., the hill of the Rhine counts), and, in 1258, it was named "Grevenberg." To this day, Gräfenberg is a focal point. The record prices it fetches at auction bear witness to the site's renown.

Kiedricher Klosterberg: The name Klosterberg (lit., monastery hill) derives from “Closterweg,” the old path that ran through this vineyard in Kiedrich en route between the monastery Kloster Eberbach and its mill near Eltville. The shallow to deep stony-gritty soils of the southwesterly facing site are of Devonian (colored slate) and pre-Devonian (phyllite and sericite gneiss) origin and are mixed with gravelly loess.

Kiedricher Turmberg: After the founding of Weingut Robert Weil, the Turmberg site was always considered one of the estate’s top sites, second only to Gräfenberg. The name Turmberg (lit., tower hill) derives from the surviving central tower of the former castle Burg Scharfenstein, which stands on that site. The archbishops of Mainz had the castle built on the steep crag northeast of Kiedrich in 1160. Turmberg lies on the slopes of a steep, slaty crag. Its stony-gritty soils consist primarily of phyllite mixed with small portions of loess and loam.

After passage of the wine law of 1971 and its amendment of the vineyard register, numerous traditional vineyards, like Turmberg, were incorporated into other vineyards. In 2005, the Turmberg parcel was reinstated as an individual vineyard site, measuring 3.8 ha (9.4 acres). It is owned solely by Weingut Robert Weil.

The third subchapter, “Fruit—Maturity,” talks about the 12-month vineyard cycle and dwells in particular on the issue of the optimal moment to harvest the Riesling grapes (in a northern wine region). Of course, at Weingut Weil special attention is paid to work in the vineyard. Another quality factor is the low yield, achieved by restrictive pruning, thinning out the grapes twice, carrying out a negative selection at an early stage, and a selective hand-picking process. At Weingut Weil, the harvest can be spread over a period of 8 to 10 weeks. Each row of vines can be picked over up to 17 times.

When botrytised grapes are picked, they are selected in the vineyard and immediately sorted into three different containers, depending on the degree of botrytis. The grapes are again selected berry for berry in the cellar.

The last subchapter reviews in detail the process of alcoholic fermentation, focused more on historical aspects and less on how it is done at Weingut Weil. At Weingut Weil, vinification takes place in stainless steel tanks of varying sizes (depending on the size of an individual lot) and in traditional mature oak casks (“Rheingauer Stückfass”: 1,200 liters).

Chapter 6 contains tasting notes by Caro Maurer, Master of Wine, of about 40 wines of Weingut Robert Weil, all from the Kiedricher Gräfenberg, mostly from the 1990 to 2011 vintages, ranging from ultrapremium dry Erstes Gewächs wines to luscious Noble-Sweet Trockenbeereauslese wines.

To sum up: this is a great book about Riesling. It is not a general introduction. The book tells the story of the Riesling grape through the perspective of one of the world’s top Riesling wine producers, Weingut Robert Weil from Kiedrich

in Germany. It does this with many wonderful pictures from Weingut Robert Weil and the Rheingau region, and with a number of most interesting text contributions by various German Riesling experts.

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