



## Got *Grosses Gewächs*??

Taking the fear out of German wine classifications

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SWEbinar January 28, 2017

### Brief Introduction: Lucia Volk



- ▶ PhD in Anthropology
- ▶ Professor at San Francisco State University

- ▶ Wine Educator, MindfulVine.com
- ▶ Riesling Promoter



## Overview of today's SWEbinar

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- ▶ 1. What is the VDP?
- ▶ 2. Overview of the German Wine Classification System
- ▶ 3. The Search for Distinction
- ▶ 4. Meet some VDP Members
- ▶ 5. Pros and Cons of the VDP Classification System



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### 1. What is the VDP?

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- ▶ Verband Deutscher Prädikatsweingüter
- ▶ => Association of German Prädikat Wine Estates
- ▶ Incorporated as VDP in 1971
- ▶ Approx. 200 members, who cultivate 5% of German vineyards and produce approx. 3% of German wine
- ▶ Average vineyard size: 25.5 hectares [60+ acres]
- ▶ Average production: 156,000 bottles [13,000 cases]



## 1. What is the VDP?

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- ▶ Let us all say it:  
Verband Deutscher Prädikatsweingüter

*Fir-bant Doy-tsher Pre-dee-kahtz-wine-ghyy-tar*



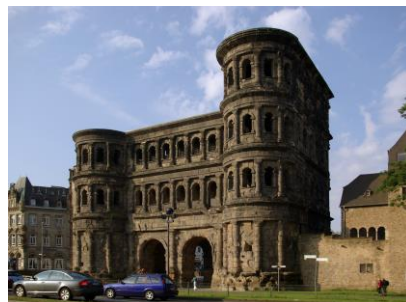
VDP. Die Prädikatsweingüter



## 1. What is the VDP?

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- The current **Verband Deutscher Prädikatsweingüter** emerged from a previous organization founded in the town of Trier on the Mosel in 1910, called the **VDNV**



## 1. What is the VDNV??

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### **Verband Deutscher Naturweinversteigerer**

=> Association of German N-Wine Auctioneers

And here is how you say it:

*Fir-bant Doy-tsher Na-tour-wine-fir-stahy-ga-rar*



## 1. What is the VDNV??

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### Association of German N-Wine Auctioneers

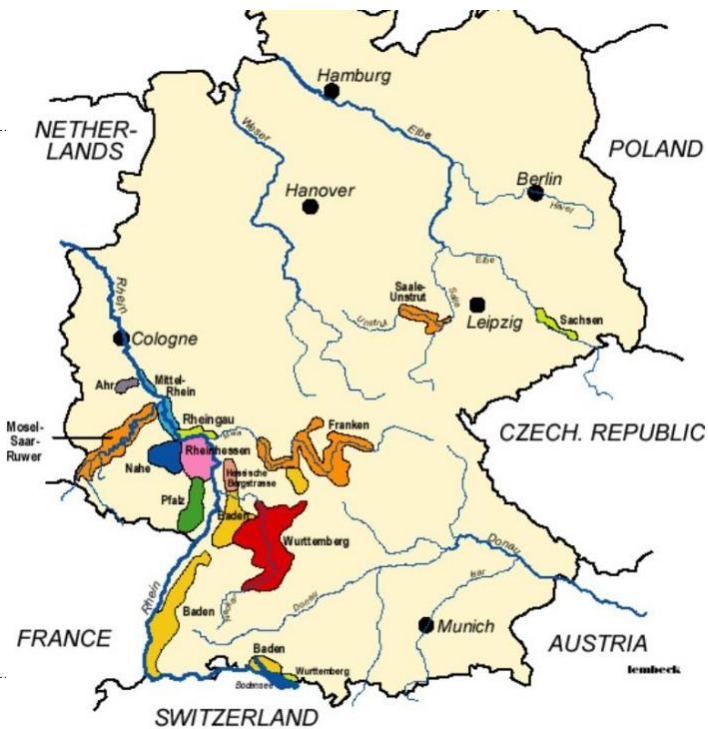
- founded 26 November 1910
- 4 regional wine associations [Rheingau, Mosel, Pfalz, Rheinhessen] started to coordinate wine auctions for unchaptalized (“Natur”) wines
- Goal: to distinguish between “pure” estate-bottled and “modified” by-the-barrel wines



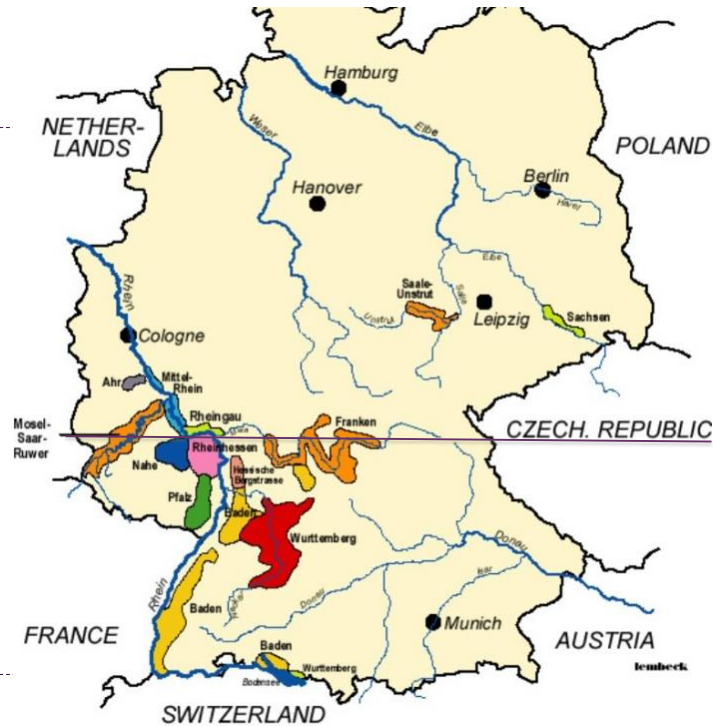
## VDNV Wine Auction, 1926 [VDP archives]



- ▶ German vineyards are among the world's coldest
- ▶ 50<sup>th</sup> parallel of latitude
- ▶ continental climate



- ▶ German vineyards are among the world's coldest
- ▶ **50<sup>th</sup> parallel**
- ▶ continental climate



## 1. How do the VDNP and VDP differ?

- ▶ Original organization wanted to protect high quality wines and distinguish them from lesser, often “doctored” wines
- ▶ VDP, in contrast, promotes high quality, site-specific wine, tied to ideas of terroir → influenced by AOC system in Burgundy

## 1. How do the VDNP and VDP differ?

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- ▶ Original organization wanted to protect high quality wines and distinguish them from lesser, often “doctored” wines
    - “Was sugar added in the winemaking process?”
  - ▶ VDP, in contrast, promotes high quality, site-specific wine, tied to ideas of terroir → influenced by AOC system in Burgundy
    - “Does this wine express the unique climate and location that produced it in the best way possible?”
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## 2. German Wine Classifications

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Struggle between Oechsle and Terroir



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## 2. German Wine Classifications

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- ▶ Up until the 1960s, German vineyards produced 40-50hl/ha due to the cold climate
- ▶ When new, earlier-ripening crossings were introduced, such as Müller-Thurgau, the yield went up to 90-100hl/ha in the 1960s
- ▶ => Liebfraumilch, Blue Nun, etc.



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## Liebfraumilch, QbA

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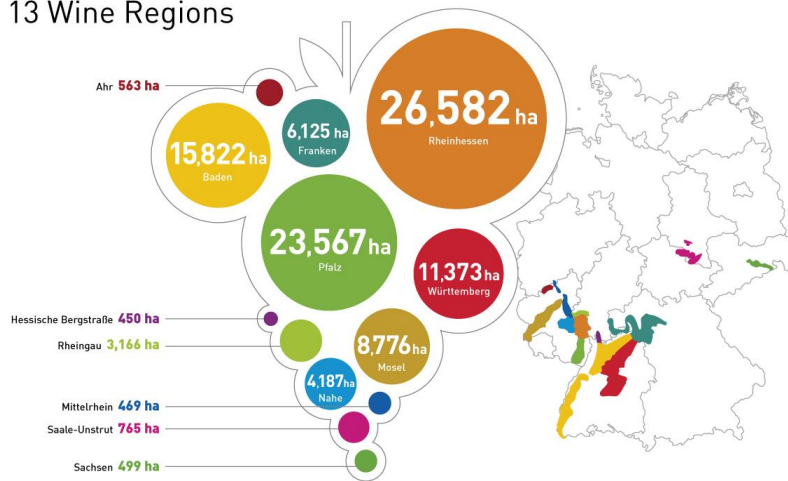






... and in case you wondered why all of these bottlings come from Rheinhessen:

### Acreage of Germany's 13 Wine Regions



Source: German Wine Institute 2014

## 2. German Wine Classifications

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- ▶ Before 1971
    - ▶ over 30,000 single vineyard sites/names existed
    - ▶ blending and chaptalization happened as the winemaker saw fit
    - ▶ most wine was consumed locally
    - ▶ consumers shopped for three kinds of wine, “dry,” “off-dry” and “Spätlese”
  - ▶ 1959 “Vintage of the Century” had spurred foreign demand for high quality German wine
- 



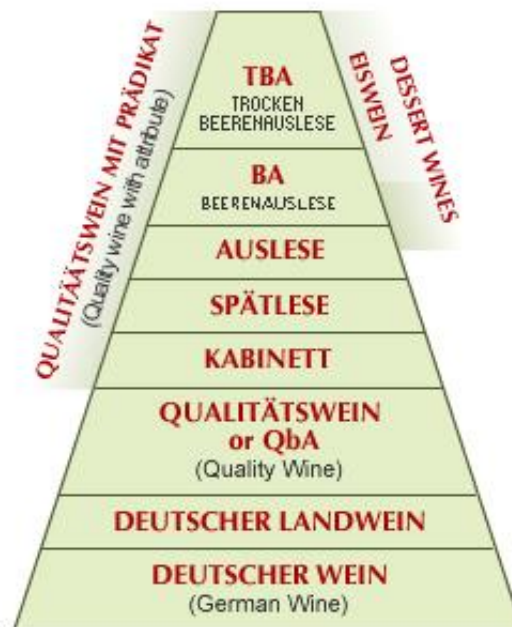
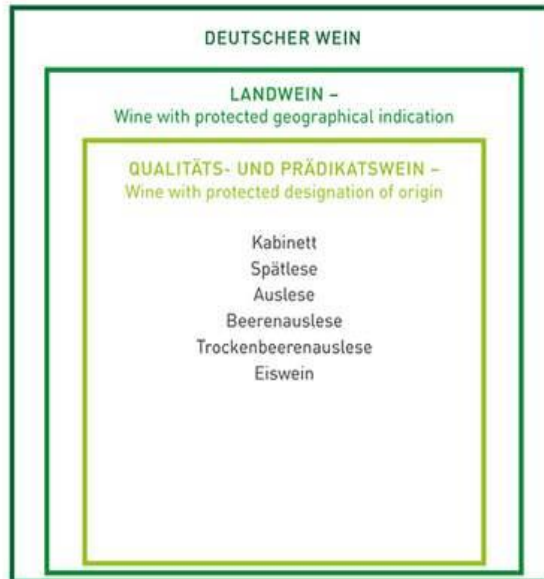
## 2. GWC: The 1971 German Wine Law

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- ▶ Designated chaptalized wine as its own category: Qualitätswein [or QbA]
  - ▶ Called all other wines: Prädikatswein [formerly *Naturwein* under VDNV rules]
  - ▶ Distinguished different levels of Prädikatswein according to Oechsle
  - ▶ Allowed wine-makers to decide if they wanted to make dry, off-dry, or sweet wine at any of the quality levels
- 



## GERMAN WINE CLASSIFICATION



All wines from table wine to Auslese can be dry, medium-dry or sweet.

## 2. GWC: Ripeness Levels

- ▶ German ripeness measure is *Oechsle* [Oe]

German wine classification	
Prädikat	Minimum must weight
	Dependent on grape variety and wine-growing region
Kabinett	67 - 82 °Oe
Spätlese	76 - 90 °Oe
Auslese	83 - 100 °Oe
Beerenauslese, Eiswein	110 - 128 °Oe
Trockenbeerenauslese	150 - 154 °Oe

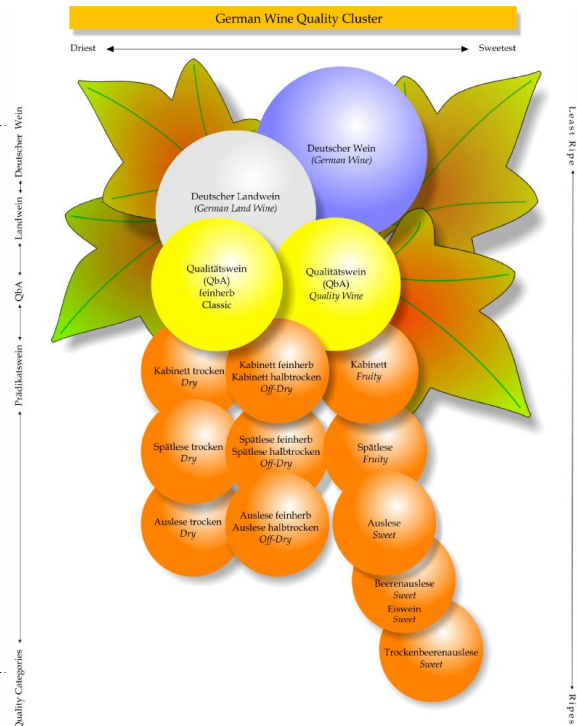
- ▶ in the US, NZ, Australia, it is Brix; the French use Baumé
- ▶ 15% alc wines require 27Brix/15Baumé/119Oechsle grapes



COMPARISON OF QUALITY CATEGORIES			
Deutscher Wein	Landwein	Qualitätswein	Prädikatswein
100% grapes from German vineyards	85% grapes from a Landwein region	100% grapes from a specified wine-growing region	
Minimum starting must weight			
44° - 50° Oechsle	47° - 55° Oechsle	55° - 72° Oechsle	70° - 154° Oechsle
enrichment permitted			not permitted
subject to food law regulations		subject to official quality control testing	
Minimum existing alcohol			
8.5% by volume		7.0% by volume	5.5% by volume (as of BA category)
Total alcohol content			
max. 15% by volume			
Possible style			
all	trocken, halbtrocken*	all	

\* also trocken (mild) and süß (sweet) in the Landwein regions Rhein, Oberrhein, Rhein-Neckar, and Neckar

- ▶ In each Prädikatswein level, you get to have three flavor profiles



## 2. GWC: 1971 German Wine Law, cont'd

- ▶ Reduced the number of Einzellagen [single vineyard sites] from approx. 30,000 to 2,500 by combining parcels to a minimum of 5 ha
- ▶ Introduced 163 Grosslagen, some of which had the same names at the Einzellagen, 40 Bereiche [district appellations], and 13 Anbaugebiete [wine regions]
- ▶ All Lagen were equivalent in status: geography over wine quality

## 2. GWC: 1971 German Wine Law, cont'd

### ► Anbauggebiete und Bereiche



### ► Nahe-> Nahetal->Burgweg->Dellchen



## 2. The 1971 German Wine Law, close up

A	B	Village	G	Einzellage	ha	asl	grad	dir	soil composition
Nahe	Nahetal	Niederhausen	Burgweg	Stollenberg	2	210-260	hängig-steil	W	grusiger Lehm + sandiger Lehm
Nahe	Nahetal	Norheim	Burgweg	Dellchen	3	180-214	steil	SSW	Lehm
Nahe	Nahetal	Norheim	Burgweg	Kafels	2	175-216	hängig-steil	SSW	Lehm-Löß
Nahe	Nahetal	Norheim	Burgweg	Kirschheck	6	140-170	hängig-steil	SO-O	Lehm + Tonschiefer + Sandstein
Nahe	Nahetal	Norheim	Burgweg	Klosterberg	13	200-216	hängig	O-S-W	kiesig-sandiger Lehm
Nahe	Nahetal	Norheim	Burgweg	Oberberg	6				
Nahe	Nahetal	Norheim	Burgweg	Onkelchen	7	160-192	hängig	SO	sandiger Lößlehm + steiniger Tonschiefer
Nahe	Nahetal	Schloßböckelheim	Burgweg	Sonnenberg	3				
Nahe	Nahetal	Schloßböckelheim	Burgweg	Felsenberg	24	130-260	steil	SW-W	steinig-sandiger Grus
Nahe	Nahetal	Oberhausen	Burgweg	Kieselberg	11	150-220	hängig-steil	SO-S	sandiger Lehm + Tonschiefer
Nahe	Nahetal	Oberhausen	Burgweg	Leistenberg	5	150-220	hängig-steil	O-SO	sandiger Lehm + Schiefer
Nahe	Nahetal	Oberhausen	Burgweg	Felsenberg	11	150-310	hängig-steil	NNO-O-SO	sandiger Lehm + Grus + Löß
Nahe	Nahetal	Schloßböckelheim	Burgweg	Heimberg	3	200-270	steil	W	steinig-sandiger Lehm
Nahe	Nahetal	Schloßböckelheim	Burgweg	In den Felsen	6	200-260	hängig-steil	SW	steinig-sandiger Grus

A=Anbaugbiet; B=Bereich; G=Grosslage; E=Einzellage; asl= meters above sea level  
grad= steepness level; dir=direction



## 2. The 1971 German Wine Law

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- ▶ Customer expected to understand that Burgweg is a Grosslage and Dellchen an Einzellage

2014er Duchrother Burgweg Bacchus  
Qualitätswein süss, Weingut Otto Porr,  
Germany

- ▶ Also expected to know that Burgweg is also a Grosslage in the Rheingau and an Einzellage in the Pfalz

**Leitz Rudesheimer Burgweg  
Riesling Tba Rheingau Rheinhessen  
Germany 2006**

**2011 Riesling trocken Burgweg**

best of riesling 2013  
Tasted on: 11.06.2013  
Produced by: Weingut Neiss, Kindenheim  
Weingut Neiss GbR, Kindenheim

*Knipser Weingut*

**2010 Spätburgunder Burgweg**

**Großes Gewächs**

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## 2. The 1971 German Wine Law, cont'd

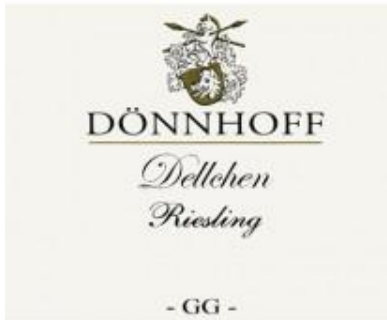
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- ▶ Who owns the Norheimer Dellchen?



## 2. The 1971 German Wine Law, cont'd

- ▶ Who owns the Norheimer Dellchen?



## 3. The Search for Distinction

Because of the confusion of Grosslage and Einzellage designations and the focus on Oechsle rather than Terroir, winemakers from premier estates decided to create the



VDP. Die Prädikatsweingüter



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### 3. The Search for Distinction

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Michael Prinz zu Salm-Salm elected president of VDP in 1991; instituted the first VDP Classification System



Between 1991 and 2010, VDP membership grew from 161 to 199, with 70 estates leaving and 108 estates joining.

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### 3. The Search for Distinction

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▶ **Step 1: 1999**

*Erstes Gewächs* [First Growth] introduced into Hessen state Wine Law by premier wine estates in the Rheingau of the **Charta Rheingau Vintner Association** (1984). In 1999, they joined the regional Rheingau VDP chapter.



Used for wines, harvested by hand, in selected sites, at max. 50 hl/ha; release allowed Sept. 1 the following year. Each wine must pass sensory evaluation exam.

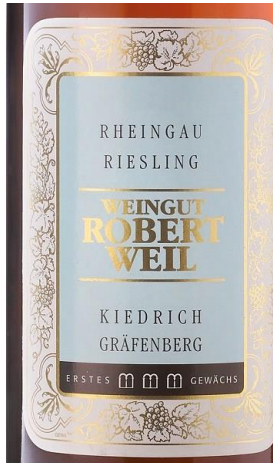
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### 3. The Search for Distinction: Step 1

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- ▶ What does a *Erstes Gewächs* look like?



### 3. The Search for Distinction

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- ▶ 1999 Erstes Gewächs introduced in the Rheingau
- ▶ **Step 2: 2001**  
First attempt at VDP Classification  
3-tier pyramid: 1) Gutswein 2) Ortswein 3) Erste Lage  
abstain from using Grosslagen altogether  
emphasis of Einzellagen for best wines  
reduced yields  
only regionally typical grapes allowed



### 3. The Search for Distinction: Step 2

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- ▶ **Gutswein:** High-quality wines that reflect regional character
  - ▶ **Ortswein:** from a select, small group of traditional vineyards that have a distinctive character
  - ▶ **Erste Lage:** Wines from the best vineyards of Germany. Dry wines are designated Grosses Gewächs and Erstes Gewächs (Rheingau). Fruity wines with natural sweetness are denoted by the traditional Prädikat.
- ▶ *For each level, varieties, maximum yield, harvest method, and minimum must weight are set. Fruit from an Erste Lage vineyard can no longer be used for Ortswein or Gutswein.*
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### 3. The Problem with Step 2

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- ▶ **Erste Lage:** Grosses Gewächs + Erstes Gewächs + wines with natural sweetness are denoted by the traditional Prädikat.
  - ▶ Confusion of placing “Grand Cru” and “Premier Cru” labels into one category
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### 3. The Search for Distinction: Step 3

- ▶ 1994 Erstes Gewächs introduced in the Rheingau
- ▶ 2001 First VDP Classification

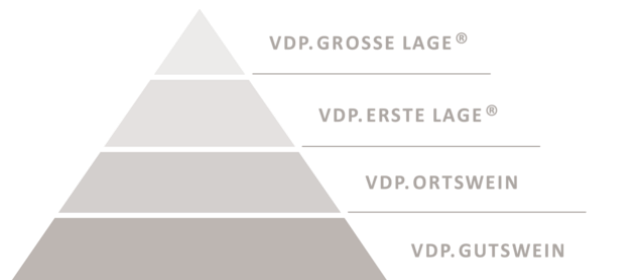
- ▶ **Step 3: 2012**

VDP 2.0 Classification

add fourth category for *Grosses Lage* added



### 3. The Search for Distinction: Step 3



Gutswein: outstanding estate wine

Ortswein: traditional, village wine [can be pre-selection for GG]

Erste Lage: very good vineyard terroir in a region

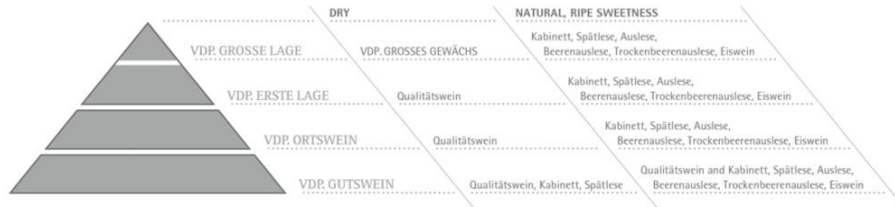
Grosse Lage: the very best terroir in a region



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### 3. The Search for Distinction: Step 3



Die neue Pyramide, gültig ab Jahrgang 2012

RS wines categorized as separate but equal on the pyramid. They continue to use the 1971 Wine Law Prädikat designation on the label.

Importantly, since VDP are **not** part of German Wine Law, the term *Grosses Gewächs* cannot be used on the label.



### 3. The Search for Distinction



### 3. VDP Members have to:

- ▶ own historically renowned vineyards, do all vineyard and cellar work on their estate
- ▶ cap yield at 75, 60 and 50 hl/ha for Ortswein, Erste Lage and Grosse Lage respectively
- ▶ use only regionally typical, VDP approved grapes
- ▶ farm in traditional, sustainable ways
- ▶ hand harvest Erste Lage and Grosse Lage wines
- ▶ use the eagle symbol on their bottle caps
- ▶ submit all their wines to VDP sensory evaluation
- ▶ undergo rigorous estate review every 5 years



### 4. Meet some of the Members

- ▶ Egon Müller, Wiltingen, Saar
- ▶ 100% Riesling, 80,000 bottles
- ▶ Founding member



Got Grosses Gewächs??



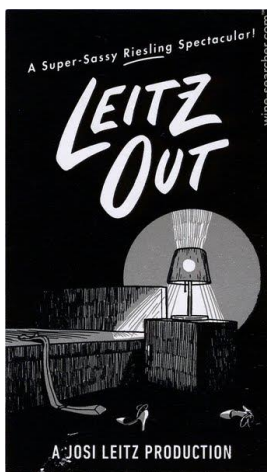
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## 4. Meet some of the Members

- ▶ Johannes Leitz, Rudesheim, Rheingau
- ▶ 99% Riesling, 380,000 bottles
- ▶ Member since 1996



## Leitz, cont'd



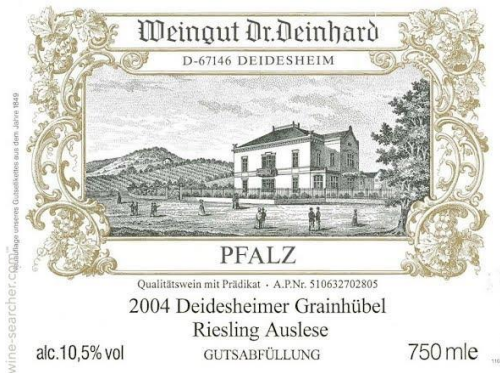
## 4. Meet some of the Members

- ▶ Von Winning, Deidesheim, Pfalz
- ▶ 85% Riesling, 380,000 bottles
- ▶ Achim and Jana Niederberger (owners)
- ▶ Stephan Attmann (manager)



## Von Winning, cont'd

- ▶ 2<sup>nd</sup> label





## 4. Meet some of the Members

- ▶ Helmut and Cornelius Dönnhoff, Oberhausen, Nahe
- ▶ 80% Riesling, 20% Pinot Gris and Blanc
- ▶ 180,000 bottles
- ▶ Members since 1991



## Dönnhoff, cont'd: Hermannshöhle



## 5. Criticism of the VDP Classification

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- ▶ why equate excellence with “dry”?
- ▶ why copy Burgundy?
- ▶ too many VDP rules -> limits who can join as well as winemaker’s options
- ▶ since GG is not an officially approved term, it is a Quality Wine, and can be chaptalized [not what the VDNV would have wanted!!]



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## So, you got *Grosses Gewächs*???

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## Sources consulted:

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- ▶ VDP website: <http://www.vdp.de/en/vdp/> and [www.vdp.de/de/vdp/](http://www.vdp.de/de/vdp/)
- ▶ German Wine Institute website: [www.germanwines.de/](http://www.germanwines.de/)
- ▶ German Wine Society of America: <http://www.germanwinesociety.org/>
- ▶ Caro Maurer, MW. Erste Lage in Germany: A classification in the course of development. MW Thesis, 2011
- ▶ Daniel Deckers. *Im Zeichen des Traubenadlers: Eine Geschichte des deutschen Weins*, 2010
- ▶ Tom Scott, “German Viticulture—The last 20 Years” <http://www.jancisrobinson.com/articles/german-viticulture-the-last-20-years>

