

PETTENTHAL HIPPING ÖLBERG ORBEL TEUFELSKOPF RIESLING

W. E. FRANK WINES AT ROBERT PARKERS WINE ADVOCATE

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Still widely unknown, this is one of the stellar producers in Rheinhessen. The wines from Nierstein and Ludwigshöhe are all from the so-called Rheinfront. In 2018 (which is the currently released vintage), the wines show great expression and elegance and are stylistically more Alsatian than German due to the acceptance of malolactic fermentation and the use of oak and moderate sulfur doses. Wine is not just made in the vineyard, as so many producers tend to say, but also in the cellar (or even outside, like here) to extend the fermentation that is prolonged until the following summer and includes a cold-maceration of four weeks before fermentation. If there is anything to criticize here (except for the waste of CO₂), it would be the third-class Amorim corks (F ND); they're too short, too soft, vulnerable and, all in all, not worthy of the class of the wines.

2020 TJUKURPA GROSSES KÄNGURU

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Frank's 2020 Tjukurpa Grosses Känguru is an aromatic and elegant blend of 53% Kerner and 47% Pinot Blanc, both sourced in the Niersteiner Paterberg. Aged for 24 months in a two-year-old 225-liter Viennese oak barrique from Hösch, an older 225-liter barrique from Seguin Moreau (Kerner) and a second-hand 400-liter tonneau from Damy from Caves de Tain l'Hermitage (that was once filled with Syrah), the "big kangaroo" represents the expression of what Wolfgang Frank considers "exceptionally delicious Rheinhessen wine at a high level." The wine offers clear and elegant, aromatic and ripe fruit with delicate earthy aromas. Mouth-filling round and fruity on the palate, this is a full-bodied, elegant and charming, remarkably fine and saline-finishing white blend with intense fruit yet also the typical swing of a delicate Niersteiner. Ripe pears and apples are the leitmotivs in this cuvée, whose finish is remarkably long, structured, stimulating, saline and bitter with its citrus fruit notes. There were 1,063 bottles filled at end of October of this year with a very moderate 14 milligrams per liter of free sulfur. 13.6% measured alcohol. Screw-cap closure. Tasted in December 2022.

Tjukurpa is the original term for "dreamtime" in the Central Australian Aboriginal dialect Pitjantjatjara. With Tjukurpa, W.E. Frank deals with different grape varieties. Since these do not deliver the same quality every year, the grape variety composition of the "big kangaroo" should vary from year to year. "However, the experience with the 2016 vintage showed that we really like the cuvée consisting mainly of Kerner, which always reminds us a little of high-quality California Chardonnay, and we want to use Kerner as the basis of this in every year," says Frank. "Furthermore, when making the cuvée for the 2020 vintage, we found that a Weissburgunder [Pinot Blanc] component goes very well with the Grosses Känguru. It highlights the impression of high-quality Californian Chardonnay even more clearly," he finds. To me, however, this is a typical old-school Rheinhessen blend in a modern interpretation. It's a lovely wine for now and the coming four or five years.

2018 TEUFELSKOPF ERSTE LAGE RIESLING

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From loess, limestone and sandy loam soils at the southern tip of the so called Rheinfront and picked in the last quarter of September, the Ludwigshöher Riesling 2018 Teufelskopf Erste Lage offers a clear, bright and delicate bouquet with rather chalky notes intertwined with ripe and intense yellow fruit aromas. Round, mouth-filling and intense on the palate, this is a full-bodied, refined and elegant Riesling with playful acidity and mouth-tickling salinity on the aromatic and finely bitter, persistent finish. More filigreed-structured than the Rieslings from the red slope in Nierstein and Nackenheim and thus with lots of charm and serious ambitions, this is an excellent single-vineyard premier cru from Rheinhessen. 3,419 bottles were filled in December 2019. 13% stated alcohol. Natural cork stopper. Tasted in December 2022.

Frank's parcel in Teufelskopf has a size of 7,050 square meters, the average slope is 21.2%, and it was planted in 1976 with two different, unfortunately unknown clones, which Frank describes as "excellent." The "north block" parcel, facing downstream toward Nierstein, has a size of 2,427 square meters with 18 rows. The "south block" is the parcel facing upstream to Worms with 37 rows and has a size of 4,623 square meters. "The wines from the north block are always riper, softer and higher in must weight than those from the south block," Frank says, adding that even the must weights from the south block tend to be higher than those from his Nierstein sites. In 2018, the must weight in the north block was 98.5° Oechsle compared to 92.7° Oechsle in the south block, and acidity was four grams per liter in the north block and 5.8 grams per liter in the south block. It fermented about two-thirds in oak (300 to 600 liter, with two barrels that were used for Syrah in the Northern Rhône before) and one-third in stainless steel for up to seven months.

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GRAND CRU RHEINHESSEN DEUTSCHLAND

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2018 ORBEL GROSSE LAGE RIESLING

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Picked as early as September 24 and 25, the white-golden colored Niersteiner Riesling 2018 Orbel Grosse Lage is a pretty Burgundian-styled wine from the red slope along the Rhine. This remarkable Riesling opens with a clear, deep, intense and elegant bouquet of perfectly ripe fruit and very delicate earthy and flinty tones, all of which are perfectly interwoven with very fine oak and toast but also sur lie aromas. This is really complex and pretty exciting in its subtle intensity and complexity! Elegant and refined on the palate, this is a full-bodied, dense, saline and elegant Orbel with remarkable purity, finesse and balance for this exceptional vintage and the overall richness of this stunning Orbel Riesling. The wine is tight, fresh and vital, with fine tannin grip and acidity on the very good, lively finish, and it already drinks beautifully, especially with food. Picked at 90.4° Oechsle on September 24–25, it is almost entirely aged in oak barrels between 225 and 600 liters for up to seven months. 3,107 bottles were filled in December 2019. 13.2% stated alcohol. Natural cork stopper. Tasted in December 2022.

This wine is made up of four contiguous parcels with a total size of 3.395 square meters, with an average slope of 14.8% and planted in 1990 (clone: unknown). In 2016, missing vines were replanted with the Mosel clone Weis 1 from the Weis nursery in Leiwen (Mosel). The total of 27 rows of vines are located in the lowest Gewann of the Orbel, which is one of the coolest of the sites due to the night drafts.

2018 ÖLBERG GROSSE LAGE RIESLING

89+?

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The Niersteiner Riesling 2018 Ölberg Grosse Lage is clear, pure and intensely fruity in the elegant and aromatic nose that intermingles ripe stone fruit aromas with notes of crushed stones. On the palate, this is a vivacious classic with a stunningly coolish expression. The wine is leaner than the per se cooler Orbel and, accordingly, is less rich and full-bodied, which is also due to vibrantly fresh (yet fine) acidity. Aged in 300- and 600-liter oak barrels for eight and nine months, respectively, this is a refreshing and savory Riesling classic from a red slope. The 2018 is tight and crisp but maybe less complex compared to the other Nierstein grands crus. It's a lean and coolish dry Riesling with grip and tension yet less hedonistic features. There's something joyless and overly ascetic about this Ölberg, whose very citrusy and astringent finish is quite demanding and phenolic and currently offers little pleasure. I wonder if it's the cork? Unfortunately, I did not have a second bottle at hand. 1,341 bottles were filled in December this year. 12.7% stated alcohol. Natural cork stopper. Tasted in December 2022.

In the Ölberg, Frank works two parcels oriented south-southeast: the 1,711-square-meter steep slope and the 1,652-square-meter core parcel in the Gewann below. The cadastral name of the two parcels is "Im oberen Auflangen." The average slope of the steep slope is 39.2% and that of the core plot is 20.6%. The steep slope was replanted in 2016, the other in 2010. Of the total of 11 rows in the steep slope, 9.5 rows were planted with Pinot Noir, the remaining 1.5 rows with Riesling (Mosel clone Weis 1).

2018 HIPPING GROSSE LAGE RIESLING

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The Niersteiner Riesling 2018 Hipping Grosse Lage is warm and intense on the generous but also elegant and detailed nose that pairs flinty notes with fully ripe fruit aromas and also some herbal notes; it's austere rather than juicy-fruity. On the palate, this is a full-bodied, mouth-filling, refined, pure and refreshing, mineral yet also finely juicy Riesling with elegant and concentrated fruit expression and a long, saline and sustainably structured finish carried by vital acidity and fine tannin structure. Frank's 2018 Hipping combines the heat of the site and the vintage with the finesse and coolish mineral drive and structure of the soil. Aged for seven to eight months in 110- to 600-liter barrels, this is a great dry Hipping, even though it is still young and opening only slowly. In the warm, east-facing Hipping, the grapes from two parcels come to the fore: the 1,422-square-meter steep slope "Obere Kehr," with 33-year-old vines, and the 1,564-square-meter core piece "Untere Kehr," which is below in the Gewann and has 34-year-old vines. The average slope of the steep slope is 56.1%, and the core piece is 17.1%. There were 2,780 bottles filled in December 2019 with 13.3% measured alcohol and 4.4 grams per liter of residual sugar. Natural cork stopper. Tasted in December 2022.

2018 PETTENTHAL GROSSE LAGE RIESLING

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The Niersteiner Riesling 2018 Pettenthal Grosse Lage offers a clear, deep and intense bouquet of ripe and concentrated fruits intermingled with flinty and even some iodine notes. On the palate, this is a dense, rich yet elegant, detailed and silky-textured, certainly full-bodied Pettenthal with intense and concentrated yet elegant fruit, great substance and crystalline, mineral acidity that holds everything in vibration. The 2018 is enormously rich and powerful yet comparatively moderate in alcohol. The finish still bears some future surprises. 3,419 bottles were filled in December 2019. 12.9% measured alcohol. Natural cork stopper. Tasted in December 2022.

The wine is based on the grapes from two plots. The steep slope of 2,237 square meters was picked on October 2, one day before the core plot of 1,587 square meters in the Gewann below. The cadastral name of the two east-facing plots is Floss. The average slope of the steep slope is 40.4% and that of the core plot is 23.8%. The vines were planted in 1981. The wine was vinified in oak barrels of 225 to 600 liters for five to eight months.

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