

VIEW FROM THE CELLAR

By John Gilman

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Weingut Willi Schaefer (Graach)

Weingut Willi Schaefer is in an enviable position in the eyes of many of their neighbors, as the estate has such a loyal following for their Prädikat wines that they are practically immune from the market pressures within Germany for more dry bottlings. This has given them the flexibility in the 2015 vintage to produce almost entirely Prädikat wines, with only a few drier-styled bottlings made in small quantities to round out the range. As Christophe Schaefer noted, "with this vintage's great acidity, we thought it would be a shame not to make more sweet wines, and consequently, we have more Auslesen in the cellar this year than QbA." In fact, there are small quantities of an Estate Riesling Trocken and an Estate Riesling Feinherb in 2015, and the remainder of the Schaefer family's range is in as stunning an array of Prädikat wines as one can imagine. Willie Schaefer was another of the veteran winegrowers that I visited with on this trip that immediately made the comparison between the 1975 and 2015 vintages, and having tasted a few of his beautiful 1975ers over the years, the comparisons seem very apt. Christophe, Andrea and Willi Schaefer started picking this year on the first of October and had collected everything by nightfall on the 27th of the month. Christophe commented that "due to the dry weather in October, there was no reason to hurry and we had plenty of time to harvest each parcel selectively." As I noted in the introduction, there is no Grosses Gewächs bottling from the Himmelreich this year at Weingut Schaefer, but there are some of the most beautifully filigreed Kabinetten from the family's vineyards to get the true fireworks of 2015 rolling in earnest in the tasting room! After tasting through the range of utterly brilliant and classical Kabinetten, I was tempted to say that this is the real sweet spot here in Graach in 2015, but the wave after wave of simply stunning Spätlesen and Auslesen that follow quickly disabuse one of this notion, as this is simply a brilliant range from start to finish at Weingut Willi Schaefer this year and there is not a single wine I would not want to put into my personal collection. There are single Kabinetten from the Himmelreich and Domprobst, one Himmelreich Spätlese and fully three distinct Spätlesen from the Domprobst. At the Auslesen level, there are one each from the Himmelreich and Wehlener "Sonnenuhr" and again, three from the Domprobst. The remarkable range of Prädikat wines here in 2015 is topped off with as pure a young Beerenauslese as I have ever tasted! I have had a fortunate life, as I started drinking the wines from the Schaefer family with the 1985 vintage and my cellar has a nice pile of bottles of the family's wines, but I do have to honestly say that I have not tasted a portfolio from a vintage from the Schaefer family as utterly brilliant from top to bottom as these 2015ers. Every forty years nature seems to give something very, very special and happily, the Schaefer family has not missed the opportunity to put together a legendary collection of wines!

2015 Graacher Riesling Trocken AP #6- Weingut Willi Schaefer

The 2015 Estate Riesling Trocken is really a lovely wine and will not disappoint fans of drier wines who shop here at Weingut Schaefer. The lovely nose wafts from the glass in a blend of grapefruit, petrol, lovely slate minerality, lime peel and a topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is medium-full, pure and crisp, with a fine core of fruit, a very racy personality and excellent length and grip on the nascently complex finish. This will be accessible out of the blocks, but to my palate, a couple of years in the cellar will start to pay dividends. Really a fine basic Trocken and a terrific value! 2016-2035+. **90+**.

2015 Graacher Riesling Feinherb AP #7- Weingut Willi Schaefer

I have really liked a lot of the 2015 Feinherb bottlings that I have tasted on this trip, as the high acids of the vintage really enjoy the buffering of a bit more residual sweetness than what is allowed in Trocken bottlings. The 2015 Estate Feinherb from Christophe Schaefer is a very lovely wine, offering up a lovely aromatic constellation of tart orange, pink grapefruit, gentle smokiness, a fine base of slate and plenty of lime blossoms in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and bouncy, with a lovely core, a succulent, wide open personality and lovely cut and grip on the beautifully balanced finish. 2016-2035+. **90+**.

2015 Graacher Himmelreich Riesling Kabinett AP #2- Weingut Willi Schaefer

The 2015 Himmelreich Kabinett is a stunning young wine. The nose soars from the glass in the most vibrant and precise blend imaginable, offering up scents of lime, tangerine, beautiful slate tones, white flowers and a very discreet topnote of petrol. On the plate the wine is medium-full, suave and filigreed, with lovely mineral drive, superb focus and grip and a very long, racy and utterly classic finish. This has the dancing, ethereal beauty of Kabinett at its finest! 2021-2045+. **95.**

2015 Graacher Domprobst Riesling Kabinett AP #3- Weingut Willi Schaefer

The 2015 Domprobst Kabinett is also outstanding and is showing simply gorgeous fruit out of the blocks, which is hardly typical of the Domprobst! The bouquet is a lovely mélange of fresh orange, apple, plenty of slate, petrol, citrus zest and a distinctively smoky topnote. ON the palate the wine is deep, medium-full and far more reserved on the palate than the nose suggests (this is the Domprobst after all!), with a fine core, outstanding filigree already in evidence, snappy, perfectly integrated acids and a very long, pure and dancing finish. This too will be tremendous. 20122-2050. **94+**.

2015 Graacher Himmelreich Riesling Spätlese AP #8- Weingut Willi Schaefer

There is only a single Himmelreich Spätlese in 2015 from the Schaefer and it is a beautiful wine and one of the best Spätlesen that I tasted from the entire trip (though not even the best Schaefer Spätlese this year!) and will be worth a special search to find and put in your cellar! The superb bouquet offers up scents of lime, orange zest, kaleidoscopic minerality, a hint of licorice and a pungent topnote of citrus blossoms. On the palate the wine is pure, medium-full and poised on the edge of a knife, with a lovely core, succulent and pristine fruit on the attack, great mineral drive on the backend and a vibrant, snappy dancingly ethereal finish. Brilliant juice. 2020-2060. **96+**.

2015 Graacher Domprobst Riesling Spätlese AP #10- Weingut Willi Schaefer

The AP #10 Spätlese from the Domprobst is a beautiful wine, wafting from the glass in a vibrant blend of tangerine, a touch of pear, beautiful slate tones underneath, spring flowers and a plenty of orange zest in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, medium-full and again, marvelously filigreed out of the blocks, with a fine core, impeccable focus and balance, plenty of nascent complexity and exceptional length and grip on the mineral bath of a finish. Gorgeous wine. 2022-2060. **94+**.

2015 Graacher Domprobst Riesling Spätlese AP #5- Weingut Willi Schaefer

The Domprobst AP #5 Spätlese shows a different face of the vintage, with a bit more creaminess to the fruit tones than the previous two wines, though still no botrytis. As Christophe Schaefer observed, “this is a perfect Spätlese to lead you to the Auslesen.” The bouquet offers up a superb combination of fresh pineapple, orange, slate, a touch of petrol, gentle wild yeast nuances and a lovely topnote of orange zest. On the palate the wine is medium-full, long and a bit more tightly-knit out of the blocks than the above Spätlese, with a great core of fruit, ripe acids and superb length and grip on the focused and very, very promising finish. This will need a few more years in the cellar to fully blossom, but it will be a legend in due course. 2025-2065. **95.**

2015 Graacher Domprobst Riesling Spätlese AP #13 (Auction)- Weingut Willi Schaefer

In this amazing lineup of Spätlesen from the 2015 vintage, the Auction bottling from the Domprobst stands alone at the summit. This does not show more volume or complexity than any of these other bottlings at this level, but it is the most pure, most elegant and most hauntingly perfect of all of these marvelous Spätlesen. The bouquet is a celestial blend of pear, tangerine, lime blossoms, a marvelous base of slate minerality, a gentle touch of petrol, violets and bee pollen in the esthery upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, refined and weightless, with a great core, laser-like focus and a very, very long, filigreed and energetic finish. Life-altering beauty in a bottle! 2021-2065. **98.**

2015 Graacher Himmelreich Riesling Auslese AP #4- Weingut Willi Schaefer

The 2015 Himmelreich Auslese contains just a whisper of noble rot, as Christophe notes that “this was made almost entirely from golden berries and shriveled bunches, with just a touch of botrytis.” The beautiful bouquet offers up a stunning panoply of tangerine, fresh lime, gorgeously complex minerality, bee pollen, iris blooms, citrus blossoms and just a whisper of custard-like creaminess. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very light on its feet, with great cut and nascent complexity, a marvelous base of minerality, zesty acids and laser-like focus on the seamless and electric finish. Stunning juice. 2025-2080. **97.**

2015 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Auslese AP #17- Weingut Willi Schaefer

The 2015 vintage was the “third leaf” for this replanted parcel, and as many readers may already know, the fruit from three year-old vines is usually the finest from young vines until they reach their twentieth birthday, as in year three, they have not yet attained the vigor to produce abundantly and their energy gets channeled into a more modest quantity of bunches. The wine is stunning, offering up a pure and vibrant nose of pear, white cherry, superbly mineral slate tones, a bit of vanilla bean and a topnote of orange blossoms. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish and very filigreed, with a lovely core, ripe, brisk acids and stunning length and grip on the youthfully complex finish. Breathtaking! 2023-2080. **96.**

2015 Graacher Domprobst Riesling Auslese AP #11- Weingut Willi Schaefer

The 2015 Domprobst Auslese AP #11, which is one of three different Auslesen from this vineyard in the Schaefer cellars this year, is utterly superb. The bouquet delivers up a pure and classic blend of pear, lime, a gorgeous base of slate, a touch of fresh orange, lilacs and a gentle touch of glazing that will turn to honey in due course, but today seems a touch more creamy in personality. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and very racy, with a great core of fruit, lovely cut and grip and a very, very long, nascently complex and electric finish. Stellar juice. 2025-2075. **95+.**

2015 Graacher Domprobst Riesling Auslese AP #14- Weingut Willi Schaefer

The Domprobst Auslese #14 shows more influence of botrytis than the wine above, but this is botrytis at its most clean and pure. The nose jumps from the glass in a mélange of white cherries, a bit of yellow plum, tangerine, lovely minerality, honeycomb and a lovely floral tone redolent of violets. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and really quite defined by its exquisitely clean botrytis, with a superb core, fine focus and complexity and a very, very long, vibrant and zesty finish. Different in personality than the above, the wine is equally beautiful. 2025-2075. **96.**

2015 Graacher Domprobst Riesling Auslese (Auction)- Weingut Willi Schaefer

The 2015 Auction Auslese from the Domprobst is another clean and very precise wine, with even more botrytis influence in evidence on both the nose and palate, but with the same purity and precision of both its predecessors. The bouquet is stunning, offering up scents of white cherries, orange, pear, bee pollen, creamy undertones, lovely minerality, citrus zest and orange blossoms. On the palate the wine is very, very pure, full-bodied and dancing, with racy acids, a great core of fruit, laser-like focus and great cut and grip on the very long, very poised and nascently complex finish. Liquid poetry in a bottle. 2025-2075+. **98.**

2015 Graacher Domprobst Riesling Beerenauslese AP #16- Weingut Willi Schaefer

The 2015 Beerenauslese from the Domprobst is yet another magical wine from Christophe Schaefer. The beautiful nose offers up the vintage’s purity and precision in spades, wafting from the glass in a creamy constellation of pear, white cherries, a beautiful touch of minerality, honeycomb, orange blossoms and a really lovely, almost perfumed topnote of iris blossoms as well. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very, very refined in profile, with great depth and balance, marvelous acidity and a very long, pure and dancing finish. This is a bottomless BA that is also stunningly light on its feet and vibrant. Great juice. 2020-2080. **97.**