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## Germany's dry dictators

See also *David Schildknecht on developments in German wine naming and shaming*.

As devoted readers may have discerned, I am probably more enthusiastic about Germany's better dry wines than most lovers of Riesling in general and German wine in particular. (See German wines – more dry wines please.) The typical traditional anglophone importer of fine German wine is vehemently opposed to these newer, drier offerings from the German wine trade. But even I have to say that things are getting absurdly out of hand in Germany.

Of *course* Germany produces some great dry wines, but these are the country's least distinctive offerings. What nowhere else in the world can produce is Germany's extraordinary range of fruity wines with varying amounts of residual sugar – as well as extraordinary ultra-sweet rarities labelled Beerenauslese, Trockenbeerenauslese and Eiswein.

But you'd hardly know it to judge from current fashions in Germany itself. Even the most traditionalist body of the most famous estates, the VDP (Verband Deutscher Prädikatsweingüter, the Association of German Prädikat Wine Estates) has now indicated that to be great, any wine of Kabinett or Spätlese ripeness *must* be dry.

Last month at their annual meeting these influential members of the German wine world finally reached an accord on their new, official wine classification based on three categories in descending order of repute:

- **Grosses Gewächs** – a great growth wine, the focal point of the regulations. 'Great growths are always super-premium, dry wines produced according to stringent, high

standards from grapes grown in top sites, handcrafted by Germany's finest wine-growers, and outfitted with a distinctive package' apparently.

- **Klassifizierte Lagenweine** – wines from a classified site bear the VDP capsule and a single-site vineyard appellation. They are guaranteed to be remarkable, '*terroir-driven*' wines, ie produced from grapes grown in single sites that clearly impart a distinctive character to their respective wines. The list of the sites that qualify as appellations of origin for these wines has been fine-tuned over many years.
- **Gutsweine** – house wines that are simply labelled with a proprietary name and/or a broad appellation of origin, such as the name of a village or region. The estate's name supposedly guarantees the wine's quality.

In their statement the VDP acknowledge that in terms of quality, the 'lusciously sweet wines of the Prädikats Auslese and above that are produced according to the same criteria are on a par with the great growths (Rheingau: first growths) however, they are neither designated nor packaged as such.'

So basically, the VDP will be putting all of its not inconsiderable muscle only behind dry wines, the sort of wines which most of that noble band of importers who wave a flag for German in the UK and US utterly abhor.

Oh dear. Watch this site for some notes on some quite stunning 2001s, of all sweetness levels.