



The Best Wines Struggle

Doug Reichel
Doug Reichel Wine Marketing Inc.

Walking in the vineyards on the steep banks of the Mosel River in south-western Germany, I wondered how anyone maintains or harvests.... or does anything.... on these slopes without mountain goat hoofs or ropes. And the “soil” is metres of coarse shale. Wheat is definitely not the back-up crop here. Winemaker Johannes Selbach (Selbach Riesling wines) tells us that the roots of some of the very old vines go down as much as 12 metres to get necessary nutrients – that’s a long journey to feed a grape!

For seven hundred years the Cistercian monks laboriously tended the vines and cultivated the poor, infertile, rocky soil of Burgundy, France – the very region that produces some of the world’s most valuable wines. While the terrain may vary in vineyards around the world, vintners and winemakers everywhere have long understood that if you want the absolute best qualities that any particular grape variety has to offer, then the grape vine must work. Oversized, plump, well-watered, high yielding grapes found in the supermarket are nice on the table for casual munching but useless for the wine bottle. Conversely, grapes that come from vines that have struggled for their sustenance, offer to the winemaker a richer flavour profile to work with. Obviously too much vine stress (severe drought, etc.) can retard fruit bearing and leave the vines damaged. Generally speaking, though, strain on the vine brings gain in the wine.

When I savour a glass of quality wine, I sometimes wonder about the struggle thing. I wonder if our culture’s obsession with personal comfort, convenience and affluence comes at the expense of fibred character, mature perspective, and relational depth.

Raise a glass of wine to hard won fruit.

Enjoy.

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