

My Favorite Riesling

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Riesling Superior, *Maximin Grünhäuser Abtsberg*, von Schubert, 2007, Mosel-Saar-Ruwer 85.

I've been to visit Carl von Schubert, the owner of the beautiful von Schubert-Grünhaus Estate just once *in situ*. He was rather preoccupied that day with various and sundry crises¹ (despite the bucolic veneer, this is what the wine business is generally about), so his wife showed me around. The Ruwer tributary is not the most prepossessing place in the world, but the Grünhaus Estate is absolutely magnificent, encompassing thirty four contiguous hectares of grapes (that's enormous), as well as a number of hectares of fruit trees, meadow, woods and a grand manor house. But more to the point, the Estate produces arguably the most consistently sublime Riesling year in and year out, (since the 10th Century, possibly earlier.) The Abtsberg vineyard is my favorite of their holdings, the most mineral intensive, sometimes the most reticent when young, but the longest-lived. A Maximin Grünhäuser Abtsberg Spätlese with a fair bit of age on it (12-15 years) is my desert island wine – one that I would happily drink for decades until the rescue boat arrived (or didn't).²

I don't really know what the deal is with their "Superior" bottling – this is supposedly a selection of "the best of the best." My guess is that it is some sort of marketing initiative to re-establish the company's credentials as a "top dog" estate, after the somewhat unfair maligning of a few vintages of the late '90s, early '00s by some howling jackals of the wine press. (The Estate never lost a step, at least in my book.)

Here is what is interesting: I didn't get this first-hand from Carl, and probably it is very indiscreet and irresponsible of me to be bruiting about hearsay testimony, but hey, this is a wine list and not a court of law. I have it on reasonably good authority that when he was in San Francisco not too long ago, Carl was absolutely overjoyed that he was able to finally be able to make a personnel change with the winemaker/vineyard manager, who had worked at the company for more than fifty years. Carl inherited the property from his father (and has been in charge since 1981), but apparently owing to some seemingly passive-aggressive provision of his father's will, Carl, despite being the owner of the property, could not make this crucial personnel adjustment, a state of affairs that caused him no end of grief. My point is this: Things are never what they appear to be on the exterior. To the casual observer, Carl von Schubert is a member of the vinous pantheon, an Olympian demi-god, the owner of what I believe to be the greatest wine estate in Germany, and incredibly lucky to work with the noblest white grape on the planet. In my fevered imagination, I reckon him to be the Thor, Zeus or Odin of grapes, but a divinity afflicted with a titanic case of, say, hemorrhoids.³ I am so happy that Carl now feels so much freer; no question that the wines will become ever more exciting in coming years.

¹ I've met Carl a number of other times on market visits to the U.S., where he has generally been a lot more relaxed.

² I don't know quite why we wine guys are always being asked the somewhat inane question about getting shipwrecked and what would then constitute our fantasy desert island wines.

³ I am also incredibly amazed by the fact that Carl imagines that a significant percentage of his wines (more than half) has to be made in a dry or dry-ish style, a function of the thoroughly misguided enopsychosis, that has swept through Germany in recent years. Max Grünhäuser generally has far too much acid to be particularly palatable as a dry wine. But, as a Spätlese, it is perfect or perhaps even better than perfect.