



Written by
Michael Schmidt
11 Mar 2015

Goodbye and hello from the Rheingau's Hans Lang



Do wine and cheese go together? Well, apparently not, but more about this later. On 25 January I was privileged to attend a small and intimate function announced as a 'homage to Hans Lang', at which we celebrated the 65th birthday of Johann Maximilian (Hans for short) Lang, a grower who has played an influential role in the fortunes of the Rheingau region over the last 40 years. The guest list included such luminaries as Armin Diel, vice-president of the VDP, and Wilhelm Weil, president of the VDP Rheingau, and, according to popular German wine blog Weinreporter, also brought together for the first time the German correspondents of the three international trail-blazing wine media Weinwisser (Switzerland), The Wine Advocate (US) and JancisRobinson.com (GB).

But this was far more auspicious an occasion than just a birthday party, as not only did it pay

tribute to Hans Lang and his work, it also signalled the final act of handover of the estate to its new owners Urban Kaufmann and Eva Raps (pictured), formerly chief executive of the VDP. The actual sale had already taken place in 2013, but to make the transition as smooth and effective as possible it had been agreed to retain the services of the former owner as consultant winemaker for a period of three further years.

In 1983, together with such renowned estates as Breuer, Wegeler and Weil, Hans Lang was one of the founder members of the Association of [Charta](#) Estates, an organisation with the declared aim of furthering the classic Rheingau Riesling, improving the quality of Rheingau wines and making them distinguishable from the wines of other regions. In 1992 they introduced the designation of Erstes Gewächs with specifically stringent requirements for their top dry wines. In 2013, for all Charta members who were also members of the VDP, their Erstes Gewächs designation was incorporated into the title of Grosses Gewächs as used by the classification of the VDP on a federal basis for its top category of dry wines. (Are you still there? - JR)

The estate has 20 ha of vineyards in the communes of Hattenheim and Hassel, the most famous of them probably the Hattenheimer Wisselbrunnen, and it was from this site that we tasted the Riesling Erste Gewächse from 1994 to 2013. However, in recent years, one or two spectacular tasting events with vintages from the Assmannshäuser Höllenberg going back as far as 1920 have made enthusiasts aware that the Rheingau is also capable of producing a mean Spätburgunder, and a line-up of 22 reds from 1978 to 2012 revealed that Hans Lang has always had a weak spot for this variety. According to Mario Scheuermann, arguably the doyen of German wine writers and one of the first to establish himself when this profession emerged in the 1970s, Lang was one of the earliest of the country's red wine producers to make the transition from the traditional (insipid) style of Spätburgunder to the Burgundian mode. This also explains his membership of the Deutsches Barrique-Forum, an association of growers dedicated to the maturation of their finest reds in small oak barrels. Once again Hans Lang was one of the founder members of this group over 20 years ago and was thus able to benefit from a regular exchange of experiences with the likes of Paul Fürst, Bernhard Huber and the Knipser brothers.

Last but not least the estate is also a member of Ecovin, Germany's largest organisation of growers working their vineyards according to the principles of organic viticulture. For once Hans Lang was not one of the founder members of 1985, but is the acceptance of improved environmental standards and practices not even more admirable when you could easily rest on the laurels of an already well-established business?

This business was sold because Hans and Gabi Lang's daughter had chosen to pursue a career outside the wine world. The new owner, Swiss entrepreneur Urban Kaufmann, made the total switch from being a very successful producer of Appenzell cheese to becoming a rookie in the business of making his own wine, but he can count on the help of a person with great experience and unrivalled contacts in the German wine world. His partner in crime being Eva Raps, former chief executive of the VDP. I could write something here about a whirlwind romance and the powers of wine as an aphrodisiac, but as a person whose sensitivity does not reach further than his palate, I shall comment only on the wines. Despite his unbridled enthusiasm for the subject, Urban is far too astute a businessman to throw himself blue-eyed into a competitive wine industry. He therefore spent considerable time in the cellar and vineyards at the estate of Bachtobel in the Swiss canton of Thurgau before deciding to take the plunge. Having tasted cask samples of the 2014 Riesling and Spätburgunder, I have great confidence in the future of the Hans Lang estate.

We tasted 13 Riesling Erste Gewächse from 1993 to 2013 and 22 Spätburgunders from 1978 to

2012. Here are the notes for the wines I selected as my favourites.

WHITES

- Hans Lang, Hattenheimer Wisselbrunnen Riesling Erstes Gewächs 1994 Rheingau Pale straw. Nose still fresh with gentle green fruit. Almost oily on the palate, and although the fruit has mostly dried out, the rich texture and a pronounced acidity have worked well as a team to preserve a fresh character. (MS) Drink up
16
- Hans Lang, Hattenheimer Wisselbrunnen Riesling Erstes Gewächs 1997 Rheingau Pale-medium gold. Slightly waxy, apple peel but also with a gentle fummy aroma. Excellent harmony of creamy texture and crisp acidity, complemented by a gentle minerally notion and a tasteful tad of residual sugar on the finish. (MS) Drink 1999-2017
17
- Hans Lang, Hattenheimer Wisselbrunnen Riesling Erstes Gewächs 2002 Rheingau Medium gold with pale green rim. Fairly reticent on the nose with a faint stone dust mineral component. Fine grapefruit flavour includes gently bitter edge of pith and peel. With well-integrated acidity and a smidgeon of residual sugar this sits nicely in the off-dry category of Riesling, a perception that is accentuated by the generous mouthfeel. A little mineral touch on the finish adds interest. (MS) Drink 2004-2018
17.5
- Hans Lang, Hattenheimer Wisselbrunnen Riesling Erstes Gewächs 2005 Rheingau Pale bright green. A gentle flowery fragrance and animated citrus fruit aromas team up for an attractive pairing. Although in keeping with the vintage, the acidity is moderate, still fresh with sprightly citrus fruit. Some wines of this vintage may have turned out quite broad and even flabby, but the grapes of the Wisselbrunnen were picked early enough to circumnavigate this trap of late picking. Very harmonious and still at its peak. (MS) Drink 2007-2020
17.5
- Hans Lang, Hattenheimer Wisselbrunnen Riesling Grosses Gewächs 2012 Rheingau Pale bright green. Floral fragrance with overtones of ripe citrus fruit. 2012 was a generous vintage, but at Hans Lang they managed to retain more than a modicum of acidity to provide a perfect balance to the ripe grapefruit and orange flavour. Juicy, fresh and with a gentle nutty tang this will give pleasure for years to come. (MS) Drink 2015-2025
17.5
- Hans Lang, Hattenheimer Wisselbrunnen Riesling Grosses Gewächs 2013 Rheingau With 10 g/l RS the 2013 Wisselbrunnen did not make the cut of Grosses Gewächs, but with the pronounced acidity of the vintage that little extra sweetness sure comes in handy for a perfect balance. Vibrant, racy and crisp, this may be quite different from its predecessors, but it is also delightfully delicious. Nice combination of fresh green and citrus fruit adds to the lively character. (MS) Drink 2015-2028
17

REDS

- Hans Lang, Assmannshäuser Höllenberg Spätburgunder trocken 1991 Rheingau Pale tile red with salmon pink rim. An earthy fragrance reflects the passing of the years. On the palate a firm acidity has provided the backbone for successful ageing. The texture is still quite velvety and although the fruit has dried out, a mature vegetal expression exhibits an element of

complexity. Drink up

16

- Hans Lang, Hattenheimer Barrique Spätburgunder trocken 1992 RheingauThe 1992 stands up extremely well, having spent over twenty years in bottle and still shows plenty of fruit on the nose with some delightful cassis aromas. The palate only consolidates this youthful appearance, as it combines a fruity flavour of cherries and blackcurrants with a vibrant acidity. The mention of barrique on the label did make me feel a little apprehensive, as the early 90s were still a learning period for the German pioneers of oak, but in this case the wood has been extremely well handled. (MS) Drink 1995-2018

17.5

- Hans Lang, Hattenheimer Barrique Spätburgunder trocken 1993 RheingauA completely different animal from the 1992. The tile red colour with tinned strawberry hue indicates maturity, and the nose certainly reflects the passing of time with aromas of stock cubes and farmyard. In my early days of Pinot Noir, farmyard tended to be a compliment, and when the fragrance is combined with a palate that still exhibits autumnal fruit, but also features some earthy and vegetal notions, you have a Spätburgunder that dazzles with idiosyncrasy. A solid structure still holds things together for now, but any remaining bottles should be drunk.

(MS)Drink up

17

- Hans Lang, Johann Maximilian Spätburgunder trocken 1997 RheingauEighteen years and fruity and no, you're not on the wrong website! A delightful fragrance of raspberries and strawberries delights the olfactory senses, and a quite crisp acidity preserves a wonderfully youthful character on the palate. There is some oak and it has been well handled to provide a firm backbone. (MS) Drink 1999-2020

17.5

- Hans Lang, Johann Maximilian Spätburgunder trocken 2000 Rheingau2000 was a difficult vintage and producers had to be selective as a warm and humid autumn caused plenty of rot. A tile red hue with orange rim indicates maturity, but cherries and marzipan on the nose raise the spirits. On the palate there is plenty of cassis, and the structure of acidity and tannins is still very much intact. Some vintages are written off too soon. (MS) Drink 2002-2017

17

- Hans Lang, Johann Maximilian Spätburgunder trocken 2007 RheingauRaspberry hue with pink rim. Soft berry fruit delights the nose, but on the palate the fruit is even more pronounced with an aromatic expression of cassis. A subtle peppery nuance may be attributed to the tasteful employment of wood. A firm backbone of tannins reins in the opulence of this generous vintage. (MS) Drink 2010-2022

17

- Hans Lang, Johann Maximilian Spätburgunder trocken 2008 Rheingaul admit that I have become slightly obsessed with the 2008 vintage, not only as far as dry Riesling goes, but also with Spätburgunder. The Johann Maximilian does not disappoint with its super juicy cherry and raspberry fruit. At the same time it exhibits a rock solid backbone of firm tannins and generous acidity which bodes well for longevity. Although there are still some edges, the balance is good enough to drink this now. (MS)Drink 2011-2024

17.5

- Hans Lang, Johann Maximilian Spätburgunder trocken 2011 RheingauBy rights the 2011 should still be closed, and the components of fruit, oak and acidity might be expected to be in competition with each other at this stage, rather than in harmony. It is true that the fruit shows a juicy exuberance, but barrique notes and acidity both exhibit an admirable restraint. I expect that the 2011 may soon enter a more awkward phase, but for now it just makes for sheer early drinking delight. (MS) Drink 2015-2025

17.5

- Hans Lang, Johann Maximilian Spätburgunder trocken 2012 Rheingau Obviously still very raw, but a seductive aroma of cherry eau-de-vie promises future delights. The winemaker should also be complimented on his handling of oak, as the slightly smoky and roasted notions never try to dominate the fruit. A juicy acidity completes the set of trumps, although the individual ingredients still need time to merge. (MS) Drink 2016-2025

17

Further reading

Suggest an article by pasting the URL