

JJ Prüm Wehlener Sonnenuhr 1988-2011

8 Jun 2013 15:55 by Tamlyn Currin

JJ Prüm's 2012s are currently being offered in the UK (at bargain prices) so we thought now would be a good time to remind ourselves what all the fuss is about - JR

For a JJ Prüm vertical – very nearly hallowed ground, I would submit – one might expect at the very least near-reverential silence, perhaps broken by the occasional erudite observation on the cerebral brilliance of the liquid before us.

Our host at a vertical tasting organised by the [West London Wine School](#) Jimmy Smith has another idea. Dressed in a purple paisley shirt, waistcoat, burgundy trousers and loud orange bow tie, he literally fizz-crackled like a catherine wheel through two magical hours of JJ Prüm. 'The spittoons are just for show', he announced, handing me a generous glass of Kabinett ('to warm up') and directing my attention to the equally generous plates of cheeses, pâtés, bread and tarte Tatin that were dangerously near my fingers. This felt less like a wine school and more like the Mad Hatter's Tea Party.

Not that he doesn't take wines seriously. In the cuboid, gleaming-glass depths of Big Yellow Storage in Fulham, surrounded by cool, silent vaults of sleeping wine, lies the warm heart of the wine school. Jimmy Smith, Quentin Sadler and Cherie Agnew hold tastings that cover everything from WSET Level 3 to beer, fun evening tastings from £23, to eight-week courses for £115. Judging by those at the table with me, the people who come to his classes are people who love coming, who know more than just a little about wine, and who are not afraid to say what they think. Jimmy Smith is a WSET-qualified tutor and assessor who cut his teeth working for UK retailer Wine Rack and ended up as their Head of Training before starting the West London Wine School. He has taught wine to a couple of thousand people.

But it seems to me that no one is more qualified to talk about a winery than someone who has driven 400 miles to get there in an ancient (bright orange) VW camper van named Jeff, and managed to navigate those twisting Mosel hairpin bends in said orange Jeff (as evidenced by the photograph above left). What's more, that same hippy van valiantly took on all the Maseratis and Porsches in sight to beetle round the Nürburgring race course and casually crack a new world record: the slowest ever circuit time.

Cars aside, Jimmy was just as insouciant with the nuggets of wine-geeky trivia he flung around. Most of our little line-up was from the famous Wehlener Sonnenuhr vineyard in the Mosel. It was Jodocus Prüm, great uncle of Johann Josef, who built the famous sun dials in the 19th century. Although the family arrived in the area in the 12th century, it was only in 1911, when the winery was set up by Johan Joseph, that the serious business of making wine began. Sebastian took over after World War I and started to drive for a whole new level of quality in the vineyard and the cellar. Their first iconic vintage was 1949, and when – in 1974 – the TBA reached a record price at auction, the Prüm reputation was cemented as one of the greats of all time. A very high percentage of their vineyards are ungrafted, with vines 50 to 60 years old.

We did taste one wine from the Graacher Himmelreich vineyard, and along with it came a memorable story which perhaps illustrates how, no matter how hallowed the ground, teenagers and alcohol do not mix. A few years ago, during the Walpurgis night festival (May Day celebrations), some bolshie teenagers, egged on by bonfires and fireworks and a generous amount of beer, headed up to the Graacher Himmelreich vineyard and changed the H into P. For anyone who cares to look it up, this changed the heavenly meaning of Himmel into something rather less complimentary. The new name blazed away on the hillside for all to see, right through the peak of the tourist season. It took the authorities until August to fix it.

Jimmy Smith seems to have that rare and wonderful combination of masses of wine knowledge, the infectious energy and enthusiasm of a teenager, and the ability to pass that all on with humour, good pace, discipline and sensitivity. I don't think I've ever had so much fun at a tasting, and I'd go back in a heartbeat.

All wines were opened four hours before the tasting. Wines are listed in the order tasted.

DISCLAIMER: I joined the JJ Prüm fine-wine tasting as a guest of the West London Wine School. Jimmy Smith did not ask me to write about the tasting, and the views expressed here are entirely mine.

J J Prüm, Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Kabinett 2011 Mosel 17 Drink 2014-2025

2011 was a very good year. They missed out on frosts, budding was early, flowering was sunny.

Green tinge. Light and introvert with notes of lime spun sugar, almost leafy. The faintest touch of smoke. After an hour in the glass, it has a heady lily perfume. Firm, super linear, fierce and fine. Underneath the scalpel of acidity there is a delicate white-peach sweetness of fruit. Really delicate. Lovely pithy length with just the very lightest hint of earthiness on the finish. More and more floral and pretty and dimpled and charming over the length of the tasting. (TC) 9%

£18 *The Wine Society*

J J Prüm, Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Kabinett 1996 Mosel 16 Drink 2000-2012

Flowering took a long six weeks over unsettled weather so there were problems with coulure which necessitated lots of green harvesting; low yields. Finished well.

Only slightly more gold colour than the 2011. Lots of punch and wonderful evolution on the nose: beeswax, lanolin, honey, and a bit of kerosene. Scented and herbal; it reminds me of sweet fragrant herbs, like ginger mint. Delicate sweetness on the front palate, but it quickly dissipates. Pretty fierce acidity on the finish and certainly finishes bone dry. A bit more demanding than the 2011 and rigorous purity. The acidity is green and slightly hard on the finish. Fading at the edges. (TC)

£24.95 *KL Wines*

J J Prüm, Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Spätlese 2009 Mosel 17.5+ Drink 2015-2030

2009 was one of those glorious vintages. Very ripe, high levels of sugar, a warm April for budding. A cool wet June and July upset flowering a little but it was followed by a dry sunny late summer and autumn. Almost too dry.

Seriously seriously smoky nose. Gunpowder. Fiercely mineral and then light top notes of lime blossom. Hints of orange citrus and golden apple at the core of the mid palate, but it's quite firmly zipped up for the moment. Green aloe and laurel framework. Finely cut, crystalline, but tight fisted for now. (TC)

£21 *The Wine Society*

J J Prüm, Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Spätlese 1999 Mosel 18.5 Drink 2006-2026

1999 saw a 15% increase in yield. Harvest started early August, very early. The grapes had much lower acidity than usual resulting in richer styles. Lots of sweet wines produced. Manfred Prüm reckons it was the best year of the 1990s.

Touch of gold. Petillance (which is amazing considering its age!). Slaty smoky aromas over sweet passion fruit and green mango. A touch of petrol. But so very different on the palate. Lovely creamy mouthfilling lemony zest, lots of lemon peel, endless length. This is glorious. Quite sensuous, and yet crackling with energy. A crystal core of minerality. Hint of grapefruit pith on the finish. (TC)

£45 *RRP*

J J Prüm, Graacher Himmelreich Riesling Auslese 2005 Mosel 18.5 Drink 2013-2030

2005 was an exceptional year: early budding, no frost, quick and even flowering, then a varied summer. It was not that warm, a bit rainy, things looked poor and then suddenly from mid September right through October they were hit with a perfect Indian summer. Most grapes were harvested at Auslese level and above. 30% lower crops due to the cool summer.

Plenty of petillance, pale lemon gold. A gentle nose, white blossom (hawthorn), talcum powder. Minerality in its most fingertip-delicate expression. Delicate on the palate as well. Essence of white peach. Nectarines. Terribly terribly pretty. Dances with the lightest of point on the tongue. Exquisite balance. Really persistent, floral, and with a depth of flavour that takes my breath away. Every time I taste it there is something else. Stunning. (TC) 8%

£42.50 *Fine+Rare*

J J Prüm, Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Auslese 2005 Mosel 17.5 Drink 2013-2026

Smells much more of the soil than the Graacher Himmelreich Auslese 2005; firmer, chalky, cool wet stones. Leafy. On the palate it has more density and the acidity seems more pronounced – the sweetness too. Oranges, spices, deep and quite unctuous. Altogether a more demanding, powerful wine – the baritone to the Himmelreich soprano? Seems more evolved as well. A wine that commands attention. (TC)

£52.80 *Fine+Rare*

J J Prüm, Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Auslese 2003 Mosel 17 Drink 2014-2022

Very very hot. Rain came in September in just enough time to bring noble rot. One of the best vintages for sweet wines. Medium gold. Lots of tiny bubbles. All wet stones and mineral and earth and green apples and that cool damp scent of moss-covered cellar steps. Doesn't smell sweet in the slightest! Tastes unexpectedly drier than the 2005s. Great texture and chalky grip. More white stone fruit than the deep spicy citrus of the 2005. Beautifully balanced and soft, but perhaps not enormous length. Somehow not quite as exciting as the 2005s, but that's getting picky. (TC)
£38.40 Fine+Rare

J J Prüm, Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Auslese 2001 Mosel 18.5 Drink 2013-2035

Very very hot in August and then a chilly September. Just as things were looking bad, a gloriously hot October saved the day. Medium gold. Mineral dusting over delicious lime and apple and green mango fruit. Super fresh, agile, lithe, crackling with energy and acidity and verve. Lots of green apple. Racy. No waiting in the wings here. It explodes on to the stage. Dances in the limelight. Tastes like it will last forever. Wonderful! (TC)
£50 Lay & Wheeler

J J Prüm, Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Auslese 1988 Mosel 18 Drink 2010-2030

15% down on average yields but a good year for Auslese and Beerenauslese but not TBA. Deep gold, and surprisingly still a little bit of spritz. A little bit of glue and polish on the nose, and then mossy and cool and dark marmalade. Intense and layered, rich nectarine and baked-apricot fruit with ginger and a spicy sandalwood undertone. Shimmering citrus acidity. A hint of honey and beeswax, but more savoury than sweet. Long, and every second saturated with deep flavour. (TC)
£60 RRP