

## PREMIUM

# German Grosses Gewächs: Top 2021 whites and 2020 reds

Caro Maurer MW rates the new German Grosses Gewächs 2022 releases, picking her top whites and reds.



Caro Maurer MW

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2021 whites: a look back at cooler times

Sunny days were the exception in 2021, with warm and humid weather causing problems for winegrowers and promoting fungal diseases. Organic producers could only treat vines against downy mildew with copper and net sulphur, meaning they sometimes had to spray twice as often. Yet, says Frank Schönleber from Emrich-Schönleber (Nahe), he had to accept lower quantities. The subsequent harvest was precision work, with those who had already carefully pre-sorted in the vineyard being able to present brilliantly pure, classic wines, such as Schönleber's 'Auf der Ley' Riesling.

Those sites that had suffered in the previous three warm vintages triumphed in 2021. The Rote Hang between Nierstein and Nackenheim in Rheinhessen had struggled with the recent hot temperatures due to its direct proximity to the Rhine; however, examples like Kühling-Gillot's 2021 Pettenthal Riesling is showcasing delicacy and finesse. 'Full ripeness with low sugar levels and crisp acidity,' as owner Carolin Spanier described the year's harvest.

Nahe producer **Helmut Dönnhoff** is also very pleased with their 2021 Rieslings. 'In recent years, the grapes' sugar had increased faster than physiological ripeness, while this time, sugar ripening was much slower.' At Dönnhoff, the harvest lasted into November. Those able to balance the acidity in their wines with density and concentration, like brothers Oliver Haag (**Fritz Haag Winery**) and Thomas Haag (**Schloss Lieser**) in the Mosel, were the winners.

The region also produced many thin, tart examples in this vintage. Yet, the Mosel has a locational advantage for residual sugar and 2021 was an ideal year for the increasingly rare Kabinett wines – a style usually features about 8.5 percent abv and 35–50 grams of residual sugar.

In a difficult vintage like 2021, you can usually rely on familiar names. Among the Pinot Gris, the Henkenberg from **Salwey** (Baden) shone as usual. The Chardonnays from Baden winery **Huber** are always unbeatable, while Dr. Heger's Pinot Blanc 'Hinter Winklen Gras im Ofen' (Baden) counts among the best.

## 2020 reds: rethinking viticulture

In contrast to 2021, 2020 was very warm and characterised by drought. This meant rethinking vineyard work; shading the grapes instead of defoliation and rolling the greenery rather than mowing it, thus helping preserve moisture in the soil.

Rheinhessen winemaker Klaus-Peter Keller says his vineyards sometimes resembled 'a jungle', 'we let the wall of foliage grow until the canes bent over and covered the fruiting zone like a curtain.'

In vinification, whole clusters and open vat fermentation helped lower the alcohol levels slightly. Thus, his Morstein Felix Pinot Noir shows two faces: one highly concentrated and the other of dancing lightness.

Sebastian Fürst from the **Rudolf Fürst** winery in Centgrafenberg (Franconia / Franken) was equally successful. **The Rings brothers** (Palatinate / Pfalz) once again produced a convincing wine from the Saumagen site. And a discovery among the reds: Pfalz winemaker **Steffen Christmann's** Pinot Noir from top vineyard Idig proves that he can also make great Pinot Noir, not just Riesling.

## The unexpected

In Württemberg, the focus is almost always on Lemberger, but this time, **Aldinger** delivered the collection of the year. The Riesling and Pinot Blanc from the Gips Marienglas vineyard were just as impressive as the Pinot Noir and the, still reserved, Lemberger from the Lämmle.

A new name (and still a real bargain) appeared on my list of favourite GGs: the intense, modern-style Hundertgulden Riesling from **Bischel**. However, eternally beautiful classics, such as the reliable, serious,

uninhibited great wines from **Graf Neipperg** (Württemberg) and **Müller-Catoir** (Pfalz), should not be overlooked either.

The 2021 Ahr flood washed away some vintners' 2020 vintage barrels. Adeneuer was one of the few who could present a GG this year. **Stodden**, otherwise one of the front runners, had marked his GG barrels resting in the cellar with chalk. The flood erased the markings, but Alexander Stodden created the 2020 'Alexander Die Grossen' from various barrels. It is not officially a GG but is nevertheless a great wine – a rarity and a record of contemporary history.

## The results

2021 produced 'retro' Rieslings, whose fresh, striking acidity is reminiscent of the cool years of past decades. They thus have the potential to age.

The 2020 reds are hedonistic, powerful and expressive, already ripe for early consumption. Indeed, where is it written that red wines must always be made for the next generation to inherit?

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## Caro Maurer MW's top white and red picks from the Grosses Gewächs 2022 releases



### Weingut Keller, Abts E, Grosses Gewächs, Rheinhessen, Germany 2021

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Abtserde is a small parcel that was revived by Klaus-Peter Keller in 2006. At that time, he was only allowed to use the abbreviation Abts E because of production regulations, whereas today he could use the full name again, but Abts E has established itself. It's only nuances,...

Points 98

### Schäfer-Fröhlich, Bockenauer Felseneck, Grosses Gewächs, Nahe, Germany 2021

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At times, the reductive style masks the origin of Tim Fröhlich's wines. However, the Felseneck site always manages to assert itself. The soil is a mix of Rotliegend, blue Devonian slate, quartzite and Balat, very rocky and barren – and also very expressive. Above all, the usual smoky notes, alongside...

Points 98



## Wittmann, Brunnenhäuschen, Grosses Gewächs, Rheinhessen, Germany 2021

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Clay marl, limestone and terra rossa – this mix in the soil also gives the wine tension and authenticity. Philipp Wittmann works biodynamically, the wine matures in old wooden barrels in the almost 200-year-old vaulted cellar. This leaves room for a broad spectrum ...

Points 97



## Fritz Haag, Brauneberger Juffer Sonnenuhr, Grosses Gewächs, Mosel, Germany 2021

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The quintessence of Mosel Riesling that combines lightness with intensity. A leaner style than the last vintages, but with a lot of finesse and depth. Oliver Haag has given the Riesling a fine polish and a lot of substance through a long time on the lees. The aroma spectrum ranges...

Points 96



## Schloss Lieser, Niederberg Helden, Grosses Gewächs, Mosel, Germany 2021

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Niederberg Helden with its blue Devonian slate is Thomas Haag's top vineyard. He made it famous, for which it thanks him every year with great and complex wine personalities. Spontaneous fermentation in the old vaulted cellar has enabled Haag to once again use th...

Points 96



## Kühling-Gillot, Nierstein Pettenthal, Grosses Gewächs, Rheinhessen, Germany 2021

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Carolyn Kühling-Gillot's husband H. O. Spanier is responsible for the winemaking. He works with demi-pièce barrels (600 litres) and double-pièce barrels (1,200 litres). He does not provoke reduction, he only allows it to be well dosed, so that it is lost with maturity. This is also the case with the...



Points 96



## BattenfeldSpanier, Frauenberg, Grosses Gewächs, Rheinhessen, Germany 2021

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The soil of the Frauenberg consists of limestone gravel on pure lime. The effect on the wine is amazing. Stylistically, it has something Burgundian about it, something sublime. The aroma profile includes woodruff, oyster shell and citrus blossom. An animating salinity...

Points 96



## Emrich-Schönleber, Auf der Lay, Grosses Gewächs, Nahe, Germany 2021

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Just a small path separates the two sites, yet they are so different: 'Auf der Ley' lies right above the Halenberg and is therefore more exposed and cooler. The vines are over 60 years old, so the wine is naturally very concentrated and dense. At first, it seems almost shy,...

Points 96



## Dönnhoff, Hermannshöhle, Grosses Gewächs, Nahe, Germany 2021

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Cornelius Dönnhoff has no winemaking dogmas. Every year, he decides how best to bring out the wine's origin. This time, each barrel (1200 or 2400 litres) had an analogous steel tank, with the wine from the barrel going into the steel tank after racking and the wine...

Points 96



## Müller-Catoir, Bürgergarten im Breumel, Grosses Gewächs, Pfalz, Germany 2021

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The Breumel is the historic heart of the Bürgergarten site, situated high up, thus cooler than the rest, with very stony soil. Half the wine is aged in 500-litre barrels, half in steel. The result is a classic style, very elegant and fine, with candied peach fruit combined with lemongrass...

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## Schloss Johannisberg, Schloss Johannisberg, Grosses Gewächs, Germany 2020

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The castle is virtually enthroned above the 50-hectare, south-facing monopole with quartzite soil. The Grosse Gewächs matures in large oak barrels made from trees from the castle forest. The result is very classic, elegant and timeless in style. The aromas are...

Points 95



## Bischof, Hundertgulden, Grosses Gewächs, Rheinhessen, Germany 2021

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There was once a primeval sea washing over the landscape, its coral reefs turned into limestone, on which the vines of the Hundertgulden grow today and which yielded a very precise wine in 2021. Precise berry selection during harvest, a few hours of maceration before spontaneous fermentation and eight months...

Points 95





## Heymann-Löwenstein, Uhlen Blaufüsser Lay, Grosses Gewächs, Mosel, Germany 2021

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Sarah Löwenstein and her parents see themselves as interpreters of the vineyard, in this case, the Blaufüsser Lay with its blue-grey clayey slate soil. The wine fermented spontaneously in wooden barrels and benefited from long lees ageing. Thus, a creamy...

Points 94



## Van Volxem, Volz, Grosses Gewächs, Mosel, Germany, 2021

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The Volz site borders the Scharzhofberg to the west; it is more exposed, and the Devonian slate in the soil is mixed with rocks of volcanic origin. Matured in large oak barrels, made from wood from Van Volxem's own trees, which, like the vines on the Saar, grew on slate...

Points 94



## Aldinger, Gips Marienglas, Grosses Gewächs, Württemberg, Germany 2020

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Hansjörg and Matthias Aldinger have demonstrated consistently high quality across all grape varieties. Especially their Gips Marienglas site with its gypsum soil seems to be capable of everything. The Pinot Blanc was surprisingly fresh, crystal clear and taut for a...

Points 94



## Bernhard Huber, Schlossberg, Grosses Gewächs, Baden, Germany 2020

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Year after year, the Chardonnays from the Huber winery rank among the favourites. Under Julian Huber, the style has changed from power and opulence to a leaner, more elegant and fresher version. The 2020 Schlossberg still feels young, with hints of wood ageing manifesting as popcorn, but the ripe peach...

Points 97



## Salwey, Henkenberg, Grosses Gewächs, Baden, Germany, 2019

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The Kaiserstuhl at the southern reaches of German wine country, therefore warmer, is a Pinot land. The Henkenberg, with its volcanic weathered soil, obviously offered the best foundation for Pinot Gris in 2019. Ageing in large wooden barrels and used barriques...

Points 94



## Dr. Heger, Hinter Winklen Gras im Ofen, Grosses Gewächs, Baden, Germany 2020

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The wines from Lage Gras im Ofen in Winklerberg are regularly among Dr Heger's best. It is shady, with a forest above it, which also contributes to the cooling effect. The result is a Pinot Blanc without any kitsch or smarminess, just straightforwardness: the fruit manifests as freshly washed apple,...

Points 94



## Weingut Keller, Morstein Felix, Grosses Gewächs, Rheinhessen, Germany 2020

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100 percent whole-bunch fermentation, but the Kellers cut out the thick part of the stems. The effort was worth it. The wine appears multifaceted: at first ethereal and balsamic, then with dark cherry fruit mixed in. Everything is still so densely woven like a silk carpet that...

Points 97



## Bernhard Huber, Bienenberg Wildenstein, Grosses Gewächs, Baden, Germany 2020

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In its youth, Wildenstein is, as always, elusive, still hiding behind its reduction. You have to allow this to dissipate, then you discover impressive power in its very dense texture. Juniper berries appear, nuances of black cherry, black pepper spice and cocoa beans, as well as the scent of elderflowers....

Points

97



## Bernhard Huber, Schlossberg, Grosses Gewächs, Baden, Germany 2020

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This is only a snapshot of its long journey into maturation. The Schlossberg is still difficult to decipher, so impenetrable are its layers. Dark fruit (black cherry, plum) is followed by coffee, dark chocolate and liquorice, with smoke, a brew of dark flowers and an ethereal...

Points

97



## Rudolf Fürst, Hundsrück, Grosses Gewächs, Franken, Germany 2020

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Paul and Sebastian Fürst have no set recipe for their wines; it's the vintage that decides. 2020 provided plenty of leeway. First, they chilled the grapes to delay fermentation. When fermentation finally started, it was left to run its course undisturbed, with a mix of whole bunch and whole berries,...

Points

96



## Rings, Saumagen, Grosses Gewächs, Pfalz, Germany, 2020

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A high-density vineyard, planted with a massal selection that only produces small grapes, resulting in higher skin-juice ratio, leading to a highly concentrated wine. The Rings brothers only use second-use barrels for their Grosses Gewächs; you can even detect a...

Points 95



## Aldinger, Lämmle, Grosses Gewächs, Württemberg, Germany 2020

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Cold soak, whole bunch, 50 per cent new oak barrels have enabled the Aldinger brothers to produce a wine with a wow effect that almost overwhelms you with the power of its impressions. There is a lot of everything: a brew of blueberry fruit, a bouquet of mallow blossom, an...

Points 95





## A Christmann, Idig, Grosses Gewächs, Pfalz, Germany, 2020

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Although recently not quite showing its potential, the 2020 vintage proves that Christmann's top vineyard Idig really has it: it yields great Pinot Noir as well as Riesling. Everything comes together here: unobtrusive notes from a percentage of whole bunch,...

Points 95



## JJ Adeneuer, Gärkammer, Grosses Gewächs, Ahr, Germany, 2020

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A large part of the Pinot Noirs from the Gärkammer were saved by the Adeneuers from the flood on 14 July 2021. The site is super steep, with its Devonian slate soil formed into terraces. The Gärkammer, as well as all the other Grosses Gewächs, are aged exclusively in second-fill...

Points 95



## Karl Haidle, Gehrnhalde, Grosses Gewächs, Württemberg, Germany 2020

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Moritz Haidle used his instincts well in 2020. One week of cold maceration has resulted in an almost inky colour and an intense nose, while ageing in used oak barrels has ensured integration. The wine is still slightly reductive and smoky, but this is already well absorbe...

Points 95



## Dr Wehrheim, Sonnenschein, Grosses Gewächs, Pfalz, Germany 2020

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Classic in style, the focus is on elegance and timelessness. The Sonnenschein soil consists mainly of shell limestone, which ensures precision in the wine. The grapes are destemmed, cold-crushed for five days, fermented in barrel, then matured for 12 months in French and Palatinate oak barrique. The result is pure...

Points 94



## Jean Stodden, Alexander Die Grossen, Grosses Gewächs, Ahr, Germany 2020

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Not actually a Grosses Gewächs, because this may only come from a single site. However, the wine is a contemporary document of the great flood on the Ahr on 14 July 2021. Stodden's cellar was filled with water, which obliterated the chalk marks on the GG barrel...

Points 94

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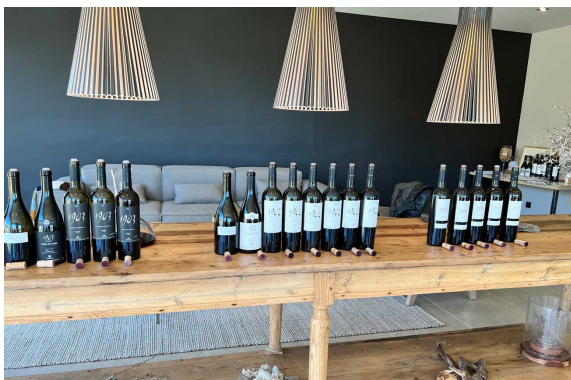
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