

## **Saar**

### **Hofgut Falkenstein (Konz-Niedermennig)**

*I did not have a chance to visit to the fine estate of Erich Weber of Hofgut Falkenstein, But Herr Weber very graciously prepared samples of many of his 2014ers and sent them over to a friend's house in the area, so that I could work through them in the evening after a long day of tasting. During my trip, I was very sorry to hear that the Weber family had a fire at the property very recently (due to faulty wiring) and their lovingly restored main building had been lost completely to the flames. As I mentioned last year, when reporting on my first visit to the property, the estate was housed primarily in a beautifully rehabilitated old press-house that used to belong to the Friedrich Wilhelm Gymnasium estate, and which Eric and his wife Marita had restored themselves. It was a beautiful site and a wonderful place to visit, with the Niedermennig Herrenberg vineyard descending down from the cellar door and offering a beautiful view of this lovely back valley in Saarland. Happily, the wine cellars themselves were set in another building, dug a bit further into the hillside and below the old press house, so at least the winemaking facilities were unscathed in the fire. But, it is a very sad loss that the truly striking old press house is gone, and my sympathies go out to the Weber family. At least the quality of the 2014ers has turned out beautifully here, so that is a small consolation for the loss of their beautiful home. As last year was my first visit to the estate, I have reprinted again in this article the background information on the winery that I learned last year, for readers who may not be familiar with this up and coming, excellent Saar estate.*

*Erich Weber started Hofgut Falkenstein on his own in 1981, piecing together old vine parcels in this back section of the Saar as opportunity allowed, so that today he has 7.5 hectares of vines scattered amongst the villages of Niedermennig, Krettnach and Falkestein. These villages are actually in a valley away from the Saar River, about equidistant between Wiltingen and Oberemmel, with most of the soils of these hillside vineyards either blue or red slate, though there is a bit of Diabas (as in the Saarburger Rausch) in the Altenberg. As this is a bit off the beaten path these days (though this was a very highly-regarded section of the Saar in the nineteenth century, when German wines were more fashionable on the international market and demand was sufficient for sites such as these to be cultivated), Eric Weber was able to buy prime parcels in these largely forgotten vineyards, planted with old vines (vine age ranges from forty to eighty years of age), and seventy percent of the vineyards are on ungrafted rootstocks. One has to imagine that there are plenty of other opportunities for great terroirs such as these that are also currently forgotten and largely abandoned scattered around the back valleys in German wine country these days and if I were a young winemaker looking for a great opportunity, this is one area I would be looking at with a keen eye. The wines of Hofgut Falkenstein are wonderfully old school: everything fermented and aged in old fuders, using exclusively indigenous yeasts, with no de-acidification, no chapitalization and most of the range fermenting out to quite dry editions of Saar Riesling. The cellars are really more in line with what one expects in a small domaine in Burgundy from yesteryear, with plenty of mold on the walls, dark, damp and decidedly "low tech" in the best traditions of old school winemaking. Erich has been resistant to the recent changes in the wine*

*laws that encourage dry Rieslings to be bottled without Prädikat information on the label, as he prefers to use the old system from the 1971 wine laws and bottle his wines with both a Prädikat level (to indicate must weight) and a designation of Trocken or Feinherb. In addition to a fine array of Rieslings, the estate also produces a bit of Pinot Blanc (which I did not sample on this visit) and Pinot Noir, which does not go through malolactic fermentation and is not chapitalized, so it is rather an individual expression of this grape. I only tasted samples of Rieslings on this trip from the 2014 vintage.*

#### **2014 Niedermenniger Herrenberg Riesling Kabinett Trocken- Hofgut Falkenstein**

As I mentioned last year, the Herrenberg vineyard in Niedermennig (which cascades down from the cellar doors here) has a section of blue-grey slate and a section of red slate, and Erich Weber prefers to bottle each section on its own. He has sixty to eighty year-old vines in both sections, so the primary difference here is simply soil composition. The 2014 Kabinett Trocken sample that I received did not indicate which section of slate this hailed from (or if the two were blended this year), but offers up a lovely bouquet of lemon, grapefruit, lovely slate minerality, a bit of ocean breeze and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is mediumfull, crisp and very nicely balanced, with nice extract to buffer the acids, fine focus and grip and a long, racy and youthful finish. This has lovely backend energy, and though it is a bit closed on the attack today, it should start to drink very well indeed with a bit of bottle age. A lovely, racy middleweight. 2016-2035+. **90.**

#### **2014 Niedermenniger Sonnenberg Riesling Spätlese Trocken- Hofgut Falkenstein**

The Sonnenberg vineyard in Niedermennig is a very stony, grey slate hillside, and as the name might suggest, and I had loved this bottling in the 2013 vintage here. In 2014, the wine is a bit more shy on the nose than last year, but rock solid on the palate and clearly on its way to being an excellent wine. With a bit of coaxing, the nose offers up scents of grapefruit, lemon, a lovely base of slate minerality, citrus peel, a touch of menthol and grapefruit peel. On the palate the wine is medium-full, racy and very mineral-driven, with a rock solid core, racy acids and beautiful focus and grip on the very long and perfectly balanced finish. This is outstanding wine that needs to be tucked in the cellar for a few years to blossom and should age very gracefully indeed. 2017-2040. **92+.**

#### **2014 Krettnacher Altenenberg Riesling Spätlese Trocken- Hofgut Falkenstein**

The Altenberg vineyard in Krettnach is a mix of grey slate and a bit of Diabas, and in 2014, the Spätlese Trocken from Herr Weber is the most aromatically expressive of the Spätlesen Trocken bottlings out of the blocks, as it jumps from the glass in a mix of tangerine, lemon, complex slate minerality, gentle smokiness, a touch of menthol and a topnote of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and a bit more reserved behind its structure than the nose suggests, with a fine core, great minerality, fine focus and cut and a long, nascently complex and very classy finish. Another stellar bottle in the making, just give it a bit of bottle age. 2018-2040. **93.**

#### **2014 Niedermenniger Herrenberg Riesling Spätlese "Fuder #1" Feinherb- H. Falkenstein**

Fuder number one of the Spätlese Feinherb bottlings from the Herrenberg is really lovely, as the interplay of fruit, minerality and acidity is just perfect in this blend. The bouquet is a fine mix of green apple, pink grapefruit, spring flowers, a touch of wild

yeasts, a nice base of slate and a topnote of lime zest. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and bouncy, with a nice touch of sweetness on the attack, a lovely core and fine filigree on the long, zesty and utterly succulent finish. Unlike the Trocken bottlings in 2014, this Feinherb will be delicious from day one, but has the fine balance to also age very well. 2015-2035. **91.**

**2014 Niedermenniger Herrenberg Riesling Spätlese “Fuder Egon” Feinherb-Falkenstein**

The 2014 “Fuder Egon” Spätlese Feinherb from the Herrenberg is a bit more reserved on the nose than the Fuder #1, and perhaps a bit more refined and precisely mineral on the palate as well. The very elegant nose offers up scents of fresh lime, green apple, a lovely base of salty slate minerality, dried flowers and citrus zest. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and very minerally in personality, with a good core, a more tightly-knit structure and excellent length and grip on the refined and filigreed finish. The Fuder #1 is more juicy and generous out of the blocks, but this very refined wine is clearly its equal and may surpass it with extended bottle age. 2017-2035. **91+.**

**2014 Niedermenniger Herrenberg Riesling Spätlese “Fuder #2” Feinherb- H. Falkenstein**

The 2014 Herrenberg Fuder #2 Feinherb Spätlese is a lovely wine, with a touch less sweetness than #1 and a bit more open-knit personality on the palate than the racy Fuder Egon. The bouquet offers up a lovely and quite charming constellation of white cherry, clementine, slate, lime zest, sea salts and a topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is medium-full, juicy on the attack and very nicely balanced, with a bright and focused backend, good length and grip on and sound, zesty acids to give the wine freshness and vibrancy. This is the most filigreed of the three Feinherbs from the Herrenberg, but perhaps the depth here is not quite the match of the other two this year, though the wine is very long indeed. 2015-2035. **91.**

**2014 Krettnacher Euchariusberg Riesling Spätlese- Hofgut Falkenstein**

As I noted last year, Erich Weber has a plot of ungrafted, eighty year-old vines in the Euchariusberg vineyard in Krettnach, which is a blue-grey slate *terroir*. The 2014 Spätlese from this parcel is really lovely, wafting from the glass in a mix of white cherries, lime, complex minerality, a bit of bee pollen and white flowers. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and classically bouncy and filigreed, with excellent acids, fine focus and grip and a long, succulent and beautifully balanced. A classic example of Spätlese that is light on its feet and destined to age very well indeed. 2015-2040. **92.**

**2014 Krettnacher Euchariusberg Riesling Auslese- Hofgut Falkenstein**

The 2014 Euchariusberg Auslese is lovely, offering up a nicely reserved nose of apple, tangerine, a touch of menthol, complex, slate minerality, citrus peel and a bit of smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, pure and dancing, with a fine core, good acids and excellent length and grip on the nascently complex and racy finish. Fine juice and a lovely follow-up to the superb 2013er. 2019-2045. **93.**