



# DÖNNHOFF

*Robert Parker*  
WINE ADVOCATE

## ROBERT PARKER | DEUTSCHLAND | JAHRGANG 2020

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*"2020 is now the third vintage in a row with an extremely warm and dry summer," Cornelius Dönnhoff sums up his latest vintage, which is his best to date and contains numerous highlights, not least among the Chardonnay/Pinot group, which has never been better and has certainly made the biggest leap forward. While there was no extreme heat in 2020 as there was in 2019, both spring and summer were consistently warm, leading to early budbreak and early flowering. The rapid development was then slowed by persistent drought and heat during the summer. "Soil-water balance was certainly an issue, but we already had practice through 2019 and 2018," Dönnhoff says. Canopy management was therefore of critical importance. In addition, "vast amounts of straw and compost" were spread to help retain water through the summer. "Those who were able to get their vineyards through this period well should have a bombshell vintage in the bottle as well as in the cellar," says Dönnhoff. Only young vines under five years old had problems with drought stress. Overall, however, Dönnhoff was amazed to see that the vineyards were still green when the trees were already getting brown leaves. To be better prepared for such conditions in the future, Dönnhoff installed irrigation systems in many locations last year. In plots with old and older vines, however, they were not used. Only the young vines received water between the end of June and the beginning of August to get them through the drought in good health. So far, the water has come from various wells, but it is tedious or "a logistical challenge" to get it in place with a tanker truck and hose. "The future certainly has to be different." Rain storage tanks up in the mountains, for instance, could be a solution. Plans for that already exist, Dönnhoff says. "Young fields in particular are highly vulnerable to prolonged drought. Today, these need much more time than in the past to bear stably. Instead of three years, it's better to be patient for five years today—at least." Another challenge of the 2020 vintage was another early harvest, as the days in September are still very warm. This requires them to start picking just after sunrise, as well as speedy processing of the crop. A powerful team in the vineyard and cellar for rapid processing was certainly one of the basic requirements for a high-class vintage. Above all, it was important to ensure that the must weights did not "go through the roof," especially with the Pinot varieties. For this reason, Dönnhoff visited his vineyards almost daily in the fall to collect samples and determine the physiological ripeness and must weight. The harvest then began on September 15 with the Pinot varieties, but the grapes for sparkling wine were harvested as early as September 4 (Pinot Noir in the Roxheimer Höllenpfad). The Riesling harvest began on September 17, and the end of the harvest was celebrated on October 19 in the Brücke, with the grapes for Auslese wines. Ice wine was then harvested on November 30. The Grosses Gewächs Rieslings (GG) were harvested early because the grapes in the best sites simply ripen earlier. The Hermannshöhle excels as always, but the Brücke is of exceptional quality also, as is the Dellchen. A highlight of the collection is the 2020 Spätlese from the Hermannshöhle, which has a fantastic price-pleasure ratio. The Beerenauslese from the Hermannshöhle, which I didn't taste, is to be released next year. All in all, another terrific vintage for Helmut and Cornelius Dönnhoff.*

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**Oberhäuser BRÜCKE**  
**Riesling Eiswein 2020**

Picked on November 30, the 2020 Oberhäuser Brücke Riesling Eiswein offers a concentrated yet fresh bouquet of very fine raisins, candied citrus fruit and crushed stones. Round and filigreed on the palate, this is a concentrated, sweet, piquant and crystalline ice wine with a fascinating, refined and concentrated, almost endless, in any case highly finessed and salty finish. Due to its clarity, finesse and elegance, the concentration and sweetness of the wine is really floating. Very long and intense. A gorgeous Brücke again.

**Points: 99**

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**Niederhäuser HERMANNSHÖHLE**  
**Riesling Auslese 2020**

The 2020 Niederhäuser Hermannshöhle Riesling Auslese is another beauty of the domain that has probably bottled one of the finest vintages in history with the 2020s. The nose is pure, fresh and concentrated, with ripe fruit and very fine raisin and citric aromas that are intertwined with sugared grapefruit and crushed slate notes. Mouth-filling, round and delicate on the palate, this is a rich and concentrated yet filigreed and seemingly fragile Auslese that reveals a firm and sustainable mineral structure on the finish that stays on the palate for minutes. Another fantastic, persistently crystalline and salty Auslese from the Hermannshöhle. 8% alcohol.

**Points: 98**

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**Niederhäuser HERMANNSHÖHLE**  
**Grosses Gewächs Riesling trocken 2020**

The Niederhäuser 2020 Hermannshöhle Riesling GG opens with a pure and fascinating mix of melting or crushed slate and ripe, concentrated white fruits. Vital and fresh on the palate, this is a racy, piquant and tensioned, almost irritatingly nervous but terroir-driven Riesling with stimulating salinity and a crystalline, very pure and challenging structure. 13% alcohol.

**Points: 97**

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**Niederhäuser HERMANNSHÖHLE**  
**Riesling Spätlese 2020**

The 2020 Niederhäuser Hermannshöhle Riesling Spätlese is magic. Pure, refined and aristocratic on the flinty, slate-dominated and slightly herbal nose that is populated by crushed stones and tiny mint leaves, while the bright fruit is perfectly interwoven with terroir-driven flavors. Racy, juicy-piquant and intense on the palate, this is a noble, highly elegant and complex Hermannshöhle with a long, intense and complex yet again very refined and floating finish. A genius of a Spätlese where everything is perfectly interwoven to an unspeakable beauty. "What is it that is so beautiful? That is the magic!," says Helmuth Dönnhoff, describing his philosophy of beauty. 8.5% alcohol.

**Points: 97**

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**Oberhäuser BRÜCKE**  
**Riesling Auslese 2020**

The 2020 Oberhäuser Brücke Riesling Auslese is super clear, precise and coolish on the concentrated but highly refined and flinty/stony nose. Round and refined on the palate, this Auslese has a highly refined raisin tone intertwined with crunchy slate aromas. The wine comes across as a very complex and juicy but always highly finessed Auslese with eternal beauty. Almost zero botrytis, but the most perfect berries of the vintage made it into this adorable Auslese. 8% alcohol.

**Points: 97**

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**Oberhäuser BRÜCKE**  
**Grosses Gewächs Riesling trocken 2020**

The Oberhäuser 2020 Brücke Riesling GG is clear, ripe and intense on the nose, with wet stone and earthy aromas. Crystalline, intense and salty on the palate, this is a piquant Riesling with a lot of structure and length. Impressive like never before as a GG. 13% alcohol.

**Points: 96**

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**Norheimer DELLCHEN**  
**Grosses Gewächs Riesling trocken 2020**

From slate and porphyry soils, the Norheim 2020 Dellchen Riesling GG is clear, pure, fresh and flinty on the nose that reveals a ripe and concentrated seed-fruit aroma. Full-bodied, intense and salty on the palate, this is a pure, rich, elegant and powerful but refined Dellchen with a long, intense and sustainable finish. A great wine that just needs some years to shine in full brightness. 13% alcohol.

**Points: 96**

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**Oberhäuser BRÜCKE**  
**Riesling Spätlese 2020**

The 2020 Oberhäuser Brücke Riesling Spätlese is super clear, refined and fresh on the rather coolish but fruit-intense and elegant, slightly flinty nose. Salty-piquant and highly stimulating on the palate, this is a gorgeous, very elegant and juicy Riesling with a crystalline, laser-sharp acidity that is highly refined as well and carries this Spätlese to a long and intense finish. 8.5% alcohol.

**Points: 96**

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**Schlossböckelheimer FELSENBURG**  
**Grosses Gewächs Riesling trocken 2020**

The 2020 Felsenberg GG is deep, intense and complex on the pure and elegant, well-defined and slightly flinty nose. Pure, intense and juicy on the palate, this is a crystalline, refined and salty Felsenberg with great terroir expression and length, even though the wine is still puristic or even ascetic in the finish. Not as charmingly fruity as Crusius's interpretation but with the same length and tension. 13% alcohol.

**Points: 95**

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**Norheimer KIRSCHHECK**  
**Riesling Spätlese 2020**

The 2020 Norheimer Kirschheck Riesling Spätlese is clear, pure and intense on the nose like a fine Italian perfume on wet, crushed stones. Lush and round on the palate, this is a dense yet very delicate and dangerously juicy and stimulating mineral Spätlese that is irresistible. Impossible to spit out. This long and salty Spätlese is singing. 8.5% alcohol.

**Points: 95**

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**Chardonnay -S-**  
**trocken 2020**

Made for the first time and entirely sourced from vines about 50 years old that were picked after a green harvest in Bad Kreuznach's St Martin, the 2020 Chardonnay -S- was aged on the full lees (with discreet bâtonnage) in a single stück barrel until the bottling in June. The wine opens with an intensely aromatic but fine and elegant bouquet with finely flinty lemon but also pastry notes of iron-rich crushed stones. Crystalline, pure and juicy on the palate, this is a salty-piquant, enormously vital and bright, buoyant Chardonnay of remarkable class and style. This is where Chardonnay is kissed by Riesling. A fabulous firstling full of energy and mineral drive.

**Points: 94**

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**Roxheimer HÖLLENPFAD IM MÜHLENBERG  
Grosses Gewächs Riesling trocken 2020**

From 40+-year-old vines on weathered sandstone soils, the 2020 Höllenspfad Im Mühlenberg GG opens with a clear, fresh and elegant bouquet of ripe, bright fruits. Full-bodied, intense and mineral on the palate, this is a pure fresh, straight and fruity yet also complex and sustainable Riesling with a long and tensioned, clear and polishing finish with lingering salinity. The 2020 has a lot of expression but is still youthful and will gain complexity, finesse and elegance as it ages in the bottle. 13% alcohol.

**Points: 94**

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**Niederhäuser KLAMM  
Riesling Kabinett 2020**

The 2020 Niederhäuser Kamm Riesling Kabinett is from volcanic soils and opens with a clear, pure and refined, coolish, spicy and stony bouquet with tropical fruit aromas (passion fruit) and crystalline, flinty tones. Round and lush on the palate, this is a crystalline, linear, intense and refreshing spicy Kabinett with a highly stimulating and juicy finish. A gorgeous Kabinett indeed. 9% alcohol.

**Points: 94**

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**Roxheimer HÖLLENPFAD  
Riesling trocken 2020**

From an open, south-facing vineyard on red sandstone, the 2020 Roxheimer Höllenspfad Riesling trocken is pure but ripe and intense on the nose that reveals ripe and stewed apple aromas with a fine phenolic spiciness and reductive richness. Juicy-piquant and salty-crystalline on the palate, this is an intense yet very elegant and still slightly astringent dry Riesling with fine tannic grip and good tension. 12.5% alcohol.

**Points: 94**

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**Schlossböckelheimer  
Riesling trocken 2020**

From younger vines from the Felsenberg, the 2020 Schlossböckelheimer Riesling trocken offers an intense and aromatic, fruity yet fascinating pure terroir bouquet of wet stones, mocha, hazelnuts and herbs intertwined with ripe apricot and mirabelle aromas. Full-bodied, juicy-piquant and salty on the palate, this is a pure, refined and filigreed yet substantial dry Riesling with an enormously long and juicy finish. This is an impressive new entry into the Dönnhoff portfolio, and it is clearly a Felsenberg. 12% alcohol.

**Points: 94**

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**Weißburgunder -S-  
trocken 2020**

Macerated for six to 12 hours and vinified in newer 1,200-liter barrels, the 2020 Weissburgunder –S– opens with a clear and complex, Burgundian bouquet that reveals intense and ripe fruit along with very fine oak and yeasty notes as well as spicy ones. Fermented with more lees than the standard Pinot Blanc, the S is pure, fresh and salty on the palate, very intense and elegant and with good tension and complexity on the finish. The 2020 is round and gastronomic and the finest I have tasted here. It will benefit from bottle aging (natural cork instead of screw cap).

**Points: 94**

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**Kreuznacher KRÖTENPFUHL  
Grosses Gewächs Riesling trocken 2020**

The Kreuznach 2020 Krötenpfuhl GG is from gravel-quartzite soils and opens with clear, fresh, ripe and elegant fruit on the nose. Round and juicy on the palate, this is a full-bodied, lush Riesling with fine phenolic grip on the salty-piquant finish. The 2020 is a long and substantial Riesling with ripe fruit expression and terroir-driven vitality. 13% alcohol.

**Points: 93+**

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**Grauburgunder -S-  
trocken 2020**

Picked about five to seven days later than the standard and entirely from Bad Kreuznach's Hinkelstein single vineyard, the 2020 Grauburgunder –S– opens very clear and fresh on the nose, with clear, ripe and refined white fruit. Pure, fresh and piquant on the palate, this is a full-bodied, dense yet vital and very elegant Pinot Gris with fine tannin grip and lingering salinity. 13.5% alcohol.

**Points: 93**

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**Kreuznacher KAHLENBERG  
Riesling trocken 2020**

The 2020 Kreuznacher Kahlenberg Riesling trocken is from a steep vineyard on loess-loam soils with gravel and quartzite. Pure and fresh yet also fruity on the nose, with dusty lemon and wet earth and stone aromas, this is a medium-bodied, round and piquant dry Riesling with juicy fruit, fine grip, fine tannins and grapefruit bitters on the finish. 12.5% alcohol.

**Points: 93**

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**Kreuznacher KRÖTENPFUHL  
Riesling Kabinett 2020**

The 2020 Kreuznacher Krötenpfuhl Riesling Kabinett is bright and finely stony on the clear and elegant nose with its ripe, almost tropical fruit notes. Lush and round on the palate, this is a mouth-filling Kabinett with delicate acidity and a stimulatingly salty finish and very good length. A wine to keep. 9% alcohol.

**Points: 93**

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**Oberhäuser LEISTENBERG  
Riesling Kabinett 2020**

Dönnhoff's 2020 Oberhäuser Leistenberg Riesling Kabinett from a south-east facing site in the side valley of the Nahe opens with a very ripe, bright fruit aroma. The palate is round and lush as well as structured and driven by the fundamental minerality of this gorgeous Dönnhoff classic. 9% alcohol.

**Points: 93**

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**Tonschiefer  
Riesling trocken 2020**

Predominantly from the Leistenberg plus first selections of the local crus, the 2020 Riesling Tonschiefer opens enormously pure and stony as well as citric on the earthy nose that is a terrific representative for the clayish slate terroir. Complex and juicy on the palate, this is a tensioned, finely reductive yet very intense and structured dry Riesling with fine phenolic grip and an expressive finish with salty-piquant and phenolic acidity. An impressive wine. 12% alcohol.

**Points: 93**

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**Stückfass  
Weissburgunder & Chardonnay trocken 2020**

Entirely from the Roxheimer Höllenpfad's red sandstone soils, the 2020 Weissburgunder & Chardonnay Stückfass blends the grapes already on the press and was fermented less clear than the corresponding Weissburgunder & Grauburgunder. Fermented and aged in a 1,200-liter oval oak barrel until a day before bottling in May, the wine shows a clear, intense but also fresh bouquet of ripe fruit aromas intertwined with notes of wet sand and clay. Round and juicy on the palate, this is a full-bodied, tight and structured blend with finely racy and persistently salty acidity. The fruit is mouth-filling fleshy, fresh and very elegant, and the finish complex and persistently salty. Impressive wine.

**Points: 93**

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**Niederhäuser  
Riesling trocken 2020**

The 2020 Niederhäuser Riesling trocken is from younger, up to 10-year-old vines of the Hermannshöhle and opens with a chalky slate bouquet of refreshing lemon and ripe, elegant Riesling aromas. Juicy, refined and very elegant on the palate, this is a quite settled, ripe and lemon-bitter Riesling with fine tannins and a very good finish. The acidity is ripe and elegant and fully integrated and gives this flowing Riesling remarkable filigreed structure. 12% alcohol.

**Points: 92+**

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**Riesling  
feinherb 2020**

Sourced in Oberhausen and Niederhausen (so from weathered slate and volcanic stones), the Dönnhoff estate 2020 Riesling is pure and refreshingly mineral on the nose that shows clear, bright and spicy fruit with crunchy slate aromas. Virtually a classic Kabinett, this is a round, only gently sweet Riesling with clear lemon fruit, a silky texture and very elegant, ripe and piquant acidity. This is a gorgeously fruity and stimulating Riesling to start with after a long night if you don't have fresh fruit on the table. "We have to be careful that it doesn't get too good for the price range," says Helmut Dönnhoff, and he is right, because this is a Nahe classic or, as Dönnhoff puts it, "This is the light, pure optimism, a children's choir. That is joie de vivre." 10.5% alcohol.

**Points: 92**

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**Riesling  
trocken 2020**

Predominantly from the Oberhausen Kieselberg and Felsenberg, the 2020 Riesling Trocken opens with a clear, ripe, elegant and flinty bouquet of ripe Riesling fruit. Pure, linear and fresh on the palate, this is an intense and vital dry Riesling with stunning mineral expression, grip and salty length. A fabulous wine for small pockets. 11.5% alcohol.

**Points: 92**

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**Doppelstück  
Weissburgunder & Grauburgunder trocken 2020**

From the Oberhäuser Felsenberg (porphyry, melaphyre), the 2020 Weissburgunder & Grauburgunder Doppelstück is blended with the grapes that are picked and pressed together. The bouquet is beautifully aromatic, fresh and coolish on the elegant and flinty nose. Pure and salty on the palate, this is a dense, quite complex and persistently salty and mineral cuvée with a tensioned and persistent finish. Impressive!

**Points: 92**

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