

Press-Information

Frankfurt's Famous Apple Wine

Frankfurt's traditional apple wine has been associated with the city on the Main for over 250 years. However, its history goes back much further than that. While it is impossible to tell exactly when apple wine was invented, it is an established fact that it was a common drink as far back as the time of Charlemagne, over 1,200 years ago.

Frankfurt's apple wine (also known as ebbelwei, äbbelwoi, äppler or stöffche in the local dialect) is known to be a stimulating low-alcohol beverage, which doesn't make you tired but has a positive effect on the circulation and nervous system. Many renowned Frankfurt doctors have recommended to their patients the benefits of drinking apple wine! From a medical point of view, the beverage is said to stimulate vascular expansion, increase blood circulation around the brain and retard the ageing process.

Large-scale apple wine manufacture began in the 16th century, at a time when vine diseases were having a disastrous effect on the grapes grown at Frankfurt's numerous vineyards. However, the popularity of apple wine didn't reach its peak until the middle of the 18th century, when a change in climate meant that grapes wouldn't ripen anymore. Many publicans were forced to look for alternatives - and thus the first apple wine taverns were established. Upon obtaining official licenses, publicans were allowed to sell their own brews, a tradition which still exists today. Publicans displayed a green wreath outside their tavern to show that apple wine was served within. Many of these apple wine-making publicans gradually increased production to surpass their own requirements and, over time, huge apple wine-pressing operations like Höhl and Possmann came into existence. Today these companies are both among the market leaders with an annual production of around 25 million litres of apple wine and apple juice.

Today, Sachsenhausen is known as the stronghold of apple wine consumption in Frankfurt; however, it is also readily available in downtown and suburban restaurants.

Traditionally, apple wine is served in a blue-grey crockery jug, the so-called *Bembel*. The cider is then drunk from a slightly ribbed glass, the *Gerippte*. A true apple wine drinker drinks apple wine straight, and will only consume a *spritzer* in exceptional circumstances. A *Süßgespritzer*, in which the apple wine is mixed with lemonade, is completely unacceptable to apple wine connoisseurs. During the colder months, apple wine is also a popular hot drink, often infused with spices. During the summer, on the other hand, strawberries are often added to apple wine to create a kind of apple wine punch.

Apple wine is pressed in October, which makes for several seasonal varieties of the beverage. The freshly-pressed clouded autumnal apple juice, the *Süßer*, doesn't contain any alcohol. When barrelled, it ferments quickly and can soon be served as *Rauscher*. Many consider this beverage to be an excellent natural laxative. If the *Rauscher* remains untouched and is fermented in its barrel throughout autumn, it reaches its full strength and turns into proper apple wine. This alcoholic *Stöffche* (or "stuff") can easily go to your head! Known as *Heller*, this apple wine is served around Christmas. If it is left to ferment in the barrel even longer, it matures to be an *Alter*, or aged apple wine.

The quality of this rather aromatic drink is solely measured by taste. Many experienced apple wine-makers know to press their *Stöffche* from just the right mix of sweet and sour apple varieties. More often than not they return to traditional varieties like the *Speierling*, which is a firm, small apple that isn't suitable for eating.

Stöffche is best accompanied by a juicy rib with sauerkraut, pickled bacon or pork ribs, potatoes with herb butter, and of course *Handkäs mit Musik*, a dish which consists of aromatic cheese simmered in cider and served with onions.

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