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## In Germany, a Highway Threatens the Mosel Wine Region

By *ERIC ASIMOV*

Despite the chill pouring in through the open window next to my desk, spring is here. For me, that means thoughts turn to riesling, German riesling in particular.

In a few weeks I will post our wine panel report on the 2008 Mosel kabinetts, a rare and marvelous vintage for these lovely, delicate wines. By all rights nature's annual season of rebirth ought to inspire feelings of optimism and excitement. This year, however, thoughts of spring and the Mosel are bringing sadness instead, because of a ungainly highway project that would put a four-lane, mile-long bridge right through some of the finest and most historic vineyards of the Mosel.

It's not just a proposal, either. Work on the highway has already begun, and several protests over the last couple of years have not deterred the supporters of the project, including Angela Merkel, the German chancellor. Another protest, led by the British wine writer Hugh Johnson, is planned for Berlin on April 11.

Last fall, at a [demonstration](#) in the Mosel, Mr. Johnson called the bridge a "highway on stilts," and portrayed the project as suicidal for the Mosel region. Jancis Robinson has also written in [opposition to the bridge](#).

The project dates back to the Cold War era, when it was thought that a speedier highway connection between American military bases at Hahn and Bitburg was necessary in case of nuclear war. Now, the idea seems to be that the bridge, which will offer a quicker connection from western Germany to Holland and Belgium, will help turn the Frankfurt-Hahn airport into a regional cargo hub. For a more in-depth report on the project, see [Mike Steinberger's report in Slate](#) last fall.

So far, German politicians have rejected [objections](#) to the highway project. In a recent [column](#) in Decanter magazine, Mr. Johnson likened the project to building a highway right through the most cherished vineyards of Burgundy.

One would imagine the French authorities would recognize the centuries of irreplaceable history and tradition represented by those vineyards, not to mention the singular wines that emerge from those vineyards, which bring such credit (and tourist dollars) to France. Why are the German authorities so blind?

In monetary terms, the value of the Mosel probably does not rival the value of the Côte d'Or. The Mosel vineyards are among the most unusual and singular in the world. Nowhere else has riesling been made in the delicate, fragile style achieved in the Mosel. Could it be that German politicians simply don't understand the broader cultural value of what they are threatening?

Doubtless, the economic benefits of the project are important to the politicians. Yet the cultural and spiritual value of the Mosel is important, too. Is there anybody in New York City who does not regret the loss of [the original Pennsylvania Station](#), or who is not happy that Grand Central Terminal was preserved? Here is an opportunity not to make a big mistake in the Mosel.

Martin Specht for The New York Times An ungainly highway project will put a four-lane, mile-long bridge right through some of the finest and most historic vineyards of the Mosel wine region in Germany, as pictured here.

