

VINTAGE REPORT 1995 FROM GERMANY

4th October 1995

Yet another great vintage in sight? The success story since 1988, apart from the under-par 1991, seemed to be without end. Vintage 1994 reached a bench-mark which will be hard to equal, let alone beat! 1994 follows 1990 in its absolute greatness with explosive, ripe & exotically appealing fruit, but with a tremendously firm structure and massive concentration to guarantee huge potential. Indeed, many of these 1994 gems are only now beginning to reveal their greatness.

Drastic losses were suffered for the production of 1994 Eiswein, picked 4th and 5th January 1995, over 3 months after the normal harvest! It was only then that the temperature dropped below -7C (20F). Despite the minute quantities, which are economically disappointing for the vintners, first tastings are very encouraging. Those few estates with the necessary know-how have produced monumental qualities with sizzling acidity and near immortal potential.

As for the 1995 crop, the vines suffered no winter damage, and the wood had ripened well thanks to the mild November. Considerable damage was caused during the bud-break in unprotected flat vineyards on 15th April, especially in Rheinhessen, when the temperature dropped to freezing point, but by 23rd April temperatures at and above 25C (72F) accelerated the growth of the new shoots in all regions, only a few days later than the early bud-breaks in 1992-94. May was disappointingly cold and very wet, followed by a cool and rainy June. Hot and dry weather then prevailed from 23rd June through till 20th August, only interrupted by occasional thunder storms, which unfortunately also caused some hail damage, especially in Nierstein (the steepest part of the Hipping was *hit* 3 times) and vineyards near Trier. The flowering took place under ideal conditions 26-30th June, only 10 days behind the great 1994 *bench-mark*. The great 1993 vintage flowered during the first week of June, the earliest recorded since 1959, but then suffered somewhat under the drought. Not so in 1995, ample moisture being available in the soil from

the May and June drenchings, and so the prospects for a further great vintage were excellent. Six weeks of miserable weather have however now dampened this outlook.

The harvesting of early varieties commenced 20th September, but rotting has reduced the overall quantity quite considerably and necessitated rapid picking. Müller-Thurgau has been picked with up to 75 Oechsle (18.2 Brix) in Baden and around 65 Oechsle in Rheinhessen. Silvaner is now being harvested, but dry weather is desperately needed. The temperature dropped to freezing point 29th September in unprotected sites, especially on the Saar, destroying the foliage and thus ending photosynthesis at an early stage. Today has at last brought an improvement with sunshine and warmth, and a stable high-pressure *golden* October has been *promised* by the weather forecast for this coming weekend. Later ripening Scheurebe, Riesling grapes and the pinot family (Grauburgunder, Weissburgunder, Spätburgunder, Chardonnay) are still fairly healthy and ought to thus reach full ripeness, if the weather holds favourably during the coming three weeks. The 1995 vintage will fail to earn the attribute "great", but selective picking could well provide some good results. The long vegetation period, coupled with "cool climate" weather, sufficient moisture to convey the minerals from the soil, the excellent 8¼ weeks during the summer for photosynthesis and for the production of fruit aromas will surely be reflected in the final qualities.

2nd November 1995

Joy and disappointment go hand-in-hand with the 1995 harvest, following our report from 4th October. October was a truly *golden* month with 25 days of ideal weather, even excelling '94! The Mosel-Saar-Ruwer (MSR) region can claim to be the winner with later ripening Riesling. The Riesling grapes in the more Southerly Rhine areas were 2 weeks ahead in the ripening process and were badly "hit" by the dismal September, causing extensive rotting. The microclimates in the MSR valley

have also worked sheer miracles. Low cloud did in fact even shelter the Saar valley 29th September and the foliage remained green till mid October. The deep valley of the Mosel with its steeply sloping hillsides also causes a thermic during the day which can break open low clouds or clear away fog, letting the sunshine creep through, as experienced near Piesport (frequented by delta gliders!) and Wehlen (important for the time-keeping of the sundials, *Sonnenuhr*, in Wehlen, or Zeltingen & Brauneberg!).

MOSEL-SAAR-RUWER A great vintage for Riesling! First pickings of Riesling on 16th October were at 65-70 Oechsle, but then rapidly increased from 21st October onwards, the grapes being healthy! The acidity level of the musts decreased to an ideal 11 - 11.5‰, with 70% ripe tartaric acid, which will naturally reduce to about 9‰ after fermentation. Fully ripened grapes with 80-98 Oechsle being effected by noble rot. Small parts of the Scharzhofberger on the Saar and the Sonnenuhr sites of Wehlen & Zeltingen were still being harvested 31st October, but the main harvest was completed by 30th Oct. The middle Mosel between Erden upstream to Trittenheim has been most successful with more Auslese than on the Saar. Rudi Hermann was able to berry-select BA and also a TBA at 178 Oechsle. As remarked by leading producers this week, the ungrafted, low-yielding vines from classic vineyards have produced the outstanding results.

RHEINGAU Most of the growers picked early October because of the rotting, achieving only "QbA" quality and high acidity levels of 13‰. Better results, but suffering very low yields of less than half an average crop, were achieved from mid October onwards with selective picking. Schloss Schönborn has harvested Riesling from 79 up to TBA-quality of 165 Oe. The State Domaine has also been able to harvest Kabinett and Spätlese. Klaus Molitor has been able to harvest Riesling Kabinett at 82 Oechsle in the Heiligenberg site of Hattenheim, and Spätlese at 90⁰Oechsle in Rudesheim.

RHEINHESSEN The rotting forced growers to pick early, resulting in only QbA-quality for early varieties, such as Müller-Thurgau. Rotting also effected

Riesling and Scheurebe to a large extent. The frost damage of 15th April and 3 hail storms over Nierstein had taken a heavy toll. Friedrich Baumann could not find any Müller-Thurgau grapes in his Herrengarten site and it is one of his smallest crops ever of Riesling in his Sackträger site, but harvested at 92 Oe! 1995 Kabinett will be degraded Spätlese (again!). Heiner Seebrich was only able to harvest 600 litres of Scheurebe at 91 Oechsle from the Oelberg site in Nierstein, after 1900 litres last year! His Riesling varied from 82 Oechsle Kabinett up to a 102 Oechsle Auslese in the Heiligen-baum site. Klaus Wehrheim and Albrecht Schneider have also had their lowest crops since 1980. Siegerrebe and Huxelrebe have reached Auslese readings at the Bretz and Schales estates, but no significant quantities of BA or TBA were produced, not even from the Ortega varietal. All hopes now rest on the risky production of *Eiswein*, leading producers having specially selected sites (Riesling, Silvaner & Spätburgunder).

PFALZ Similar to Rheinhessen, but more successful for Riesling in the Middle Haardt.

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BADEN The harvest had to commence in September due to the rotting, Müller-Thurgau being harvested before 2nd October at 75 Oechsle in Britzingen. Late-ripening Gewürztraminer and the Burgunder varieties have been more successful.

AHR Even farther North than the Mosel, and Spätburgunder also profited from later ripening and no rotting. Lower than average yields, but high qualities. The State Domaine in Marienthal reported the longest heat wave, with temperatures above 35C, for over 50 years during August.

The total crop 1995 will be much lower than first envisaged, perhaps as low as 7.6 million hl, with many estates producing down to 1/3 of a normal crop. There will be a definite split of quality between Rhine and Mosel areas. The 1995 MSR may well be reminiscent of the great 1971 with fine fruit-acidity balance and great concentration, the Rhine areas following the 1967 or 1969.

7th November 1995

EISWEIN - ICE WINE HARVEST 1995

The arctic depression, *Grace*, took a grip on Germany 5th & 6th November, letting the temperature drop to -8C (19F) in the hills of Rheinhessen. We have never experienced such an early frosty period before, even beating that fabulous Eiswein vintage 1983, when cold weather froze the grapes 14/15th November. 1980 also brought an early November frost for Eiswein, but 1983 marked the first Eiswein under the new legislation, meaning that Eiswein had to meet at least Beerenauslese Oechsle readings (120 Oe in Rheinhessen), an almost impossible benchmark to reach unless the grapes are fully ripened and the temperature drops below the magic -7C (20F).

In 1994 the vintners had to wait till 5th January 1995 to harvest the 1994 Eiswein, as mentioned in our report 4th October, and they have now harvested their 2nd Eiswein this year! Only a handful of vintners have managed to harvest a 1995 Eiswein, seeing that the rotting had taken such a heavy toll beforehand, and in addition, the Rhine and Mosel are still fairly warm, not allowing the temperature to drop low enough within sight of the rivers.

By Monday morning, 6th November, 4.00am picking had commenced in Rheinhessen, and had to be finished before breakfast time!

Horst and Harald **Bretz** had selected 1.15 ha (2.9 acres) of Spätburgunder, Riesling & Silvaner in their Homberg and Klosterberg vineyards in Bechtolsheim. The crop is more than twice the size of their decimated 1994 Eiswein, but at slightly lower readings.

Hans-Jürgen **Roll** was able to harvest 900 litres of Silvaner from his Schlossberg vineyard in Gau-Heppenheim at nearly 130 Oechsle from 0.37 ha (0.93 acres), a "good" yield of merely 24hl/ha.

Hanspeter **Kampf** in Flonheim harvested Silvaner at 135 Oechsle and sizzling 14‰ acidity from his Bingerberg and Geisterberg sites.

The **State Domaine** in Marienthal in the Ahr valley has harvested a small quantity of Spätburgunder Eiswein at 132 Oechsle and the **State Domaine** in Heppenheim (Berg-strasse) harvested a Riesling Eiswein at 156 Oechsle and 14.2‰ acidity.

Riesling regards,
Derek Vinnicombe

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