

VINTAGE REPORT 2002 FROM GERMANY

14th November 2002

Disappointment or joy at the estates? The reply is both yes and no. We were on the brink of one of the greatest vintages since 1976, but the weather failed to play the game at the crucial stage. Nevertheless, fantastic results have been achieved, with good quantities of high-powered Kabinetts and rich Spaetlese, and smaller quantities of Auslese. The harvest will be completed this week, with no hope of weather improvement in sight. The total crop may well reach 11.5 million hectolitres, 27% more than the small 2001 harvest.

Why were hopes set so high, despite *lousy* weather conditions in Europe this year, with devastating flood damage? The local weather, the microclimate, in the main German vineyard regions was in fact ideal for the vines! More details below, but first the general pattern of weather this year:

Considerable damage was caused to low-lying, flat and unsheltered vineyards in the southern part of Rheinhessen during the winter when an arctic cold front hit Germany with 20 C (0 F). The bud-break began however on schedule mid-April, and very favourable conditions in May and June resulted in an early, and very successful flowering mid-June, compensating much of the winter damage. The flowering was concluded in absolute record time this year, almost unnoticed, a "quickie". Heavy rainfall followed early July, but summer then arrived with temperatures around 30 C (80 F). Storms with hail leashed out on 30th July, but no serious damage occurred, except in Winnigen (lower Mosel), then torrential rainfall swept through Europe continuously until 9th August. Summer warmth up to 30 C (80 F) prevailed afterwards, but although it remained dry, the rivers had reached flood levels in the East, and Eastern parts of Germany and the glorious city of Prague in the Czech republic subsided under the floods 13-25th August. The damage caused was horrific, but vineyards remained unscathed, and were thoroughly enjoying the mix of moisture and warmth! A warm and almost completely dry September followed with temperatures around 20 C (64 F) during the daytime. A severe hailstorm hit the middle Mosel 22nd September, and some damage occurred in the higher vineyards of Graach and Dhron.

The harvest 2002 commenced around 20th September in the Rhine areas with early varieties and red Dornfelder under ideal conditions. The grapes were fully ripened and 100% healthy, with some exceptions in the Pfalz region. Dry weather continued until 12th October, but then the rains came. Total rainfall in October was 50% above

average, and as a climax, hurricane "Jeanett" hit Germany 27th October, but caused no serious damage to the vines or grapes. This dashed hopes of selective hand-picking berries for BA and TBA. The berries, which were affected by noble rot, soaked up the moisture and were not able to dehydrate. The growers had to watch all the "sweet goodies" being washed away. Rain fell alternatively at night or during the daytime, until today. This was indeed a disappointment. Luckily, the grapes remained very healthy until early November, and dry days in-between have resulted in good quantities of excellent Kabinett and rich Spaetlese musts. The average Oechsle readings have generally far exceeded the normal average, and have even exceeded the great 2001 vintage -- altogether one motive for joyful winemakers!

RHEINHESSEN: The estates began with the Riesling harvest early October. **Franz Karl Schmitt** decided not to poker with dry weather, and completed picking 31st October. His Oechsle readings varied between 87 and 91 in the Rosenberg and Kranzberg sites, 89-92 in the Hipping and up to 98 for Auslese in the Pettenthal. Ideal ripe acidity levels 8.5 - 9.2 g/l were registered. Albrecht **Schneider** reports similar readings, completing the picking 6th November. He was able to harvest some Riesling Auslese at 100 Oechsle in the steepest part of the Hipping. We can expect powerful Kabinetts from the Paterberg and Findling sites at 89-90 Oechsle; Silvaner reached 90 Oechsle, Müller-Thurgau 88, and his Gewürztraminer in the Oelberg was harvested again as Spaetlese at 92 Oechsle and 7.5g/l acidity; the yield corresponding to 2 bottles per vine. The Heinrich **Seebrich** estate reports similar Riesling results, as well as some Riesling Auslese in the steepest part of their Hipping at 98 Oechsle, Gewürztraminer Spaetlese at 94 in the Oelberg, Scheurebe from 87 to 91 (Oelberg) and Kerner at 93 Oechsle. In the neighbouring village of Nackenheim, Rainer & Manfred **Binz** are excited about the results with Riesling readings 87-90 Oechsle, Chardonnay for dry Kabinett at 91 Oechsle, Pinot Gris at 97, Pinot Blanc at 88, Silvaner and Müller-Thurgau at 80, and top Bacchus Auslese at 115 Oechsle. The Dornfelder and Merlot have been chaptalized with alcohol levels over 13.5%! Lothar **Schaefer** in Mettenheim has again managed to produce Spaetburgunder (Pinot noir) Spaetlese and Auslese. The first analysis shows a high 33g/l extract content. Harald & Horst **Bretz** in Bechtolsheim completed the main harvest on 31st October (over 5 weeks of harvesting!) and are amazed at the readings, with Bacchus up to 96 Oechsle (what a Kabinett!), Riesling up to 90,

Silvaner Spätlese at 90, Chardonnay Spätlese (dry) at 100, and even some rare Dornfelder Spätlese at 92 Oechsle. We can expect powerful reds from this estate next year (Späetburgunder, Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, St.Laurent and Regent). Huxelrebe BA at 130 was selected in the Sonnenberg site and some Ortega TBA at 180 (Petersberg). Nearby in Dalsheim, the **Schales** estate also reports excellent results with Siegerrebe Spätlese at 95 Oechsle, and also powerful Spätlese from fully-ripened and healthy Chardonnay and pinot varieties.

PFALZ: Selective picking was important according to Konrad Fitz (**Fitz-Ritter**), and fine results have been achieved with Chardonnay 96-100, Riesling (Hochbenn Kabinett) at 88-90, and Riesling Spätlese in the Abstfronhof and Herrenberg (Ungstein) sites. Due to re-plantings, the Gewürztraminer crop is still very small at 97-100 Oechsle. Apart from the very limited production of dry Gewürztraminer Spätlese (Abtsfronhof), only a normal Spätlese will be released next year under the Fitz-Ritter name without vineyard designation.

NAHE: At the **Paul Anheuser** estate, the harvest was completed 11th November (4 weeks of picking). A Riesling Auslese was harvested at 100 Oechsle in the Krötenpfuhl; and Spätlese at 87-92 in both Kahlenberg and Krötenpfuhl sites. On the upper reaches of the Nahe (Schlossböckelheim), the Anheusers harvested Spätlese at 88-90 in the Felsenberg and Kabinett at 78-84 in the Königfels site. Pinot varieties have also produced good readings (pinot blanc at 77, and one pinot gris even reached Auslese level of 105). Dorothee Anheuser had to abandon her desire to berry-select BA, stating, "vintages from even years always give me some sort of problem...but 1976 was an exception."

RHEINGAU: At **Schloss Schönborn**. The main crop of Riesling is powerful Kabinett and Spätlese up to 97 Oechsle, with Hochheim sites 89-92, and in the heart of the Rheingau, their prime Pfaffenberg, Marcobrunn and Nussbrunn sites have achieved readings from 87 to 91 Oechsle. Before 2nd November they were able to berry-select a few litres of TBA in the Pfaffenberg at 192, and in the Marcobrunn at 225 Oechsle! At the **State Domain** (Kloster Eberbach), apart from Kabinett and Spätlese in their monopole Steinberger, a rare Steinberger Auslese has also been harvested (last harvested in 1989 for general release!). Klaus **Molitor** harvested from 30th September until 29th October, and his Riesling in Hattenheim showed readings of 85-95 Oechsle, in Hallgarten (Jungfer) at 90, and in Rüdesheim at 95 Oechsle for Spätlese (Berg Schlossberg). Späetburgunder red reached 91 in the Hassel and

even up to 105 in the Schützenhaus. His virgin crop of Pinot Blanc was crushed at 92 Oechsle.

MOSEL-SAAR-RUWER: Seeing that the Riesling harvest did not commence until 12th October, the rain has spoiled hopes for top Auslese, BA or TBA. Acidity levels are about 15% higher than in the Rhine region. Gerhard & Gerd Studert (**Studert-Prüm**) were able to berry-select a few litres of TBA in the Wehlener Sonnenuhr at 170 Oechsle and a top Auslese at 110 Oechsle, but their main pickings measured powerful 85-90, with a lowest reading at 80 Oechsle, finishing with 93 in the Sonnenuhr. At the **Dr.H.Thanis** estate (Müller-Burggraef), similar readings are reported for the main crop in their Brauneberg, Bernkastel, Graach and Wehlen sites. First early pickings in the Badstube were Kabinett at 76 and 83 Oechsle. Their red Dornfelder achieved 78 Oechsle (now chaptalized) and Späetburgunder from 97-104 Oechsle! Very few Riesling Auslese will be available. Stefan Bollig (**Bollig-Lehnert**) reports a yield 30% higher than 2001, but that was his smallest crop ever to be cellared. The Riesling readings are similar, between 85-95 Oechsle in Piesport, Trittenheim and Dhron sites. They harvested the Pinot Blanc at 90 Oechsle, and this has again been chaptalized. In the Saar valley, Riesling has achieved far better average readings than 2001, with good quantities of Spätlese. Karin Fischer (**Dr Fischer**) reports readings from 79 Oechsle upwards. Some individual berries were reaching 110 Oechsle, but the rain came too soon. One part of the Bockstein has yet to be harvested and she is poking for weather improvement to harvest some Auslese. A negative picking has left only healthy Riesling hanging for this purpose. Eberhard von Kunow (**von Hövel**) has harvested good quantities of Kabinett and Spätlese (80-90 Oechsle at acidity levels of ideal 9 to 10.5g/l) in his Scharzhofberger vineyard. We can look forward to great food-friendly Saar wines next year, packed with minerals.

Other wine regions in Germany, especially to the South (Baden, Württemberg) profited from harvesting before the rains came. The Hessische Bergstrasse has seen an average 83 Oechsle (Bergsträsser Winzer), which nearly equals their greatest vintages 1976 and 1993. In the Franken region, the Oechsle readings in Würzburg had already reached 80 and above by mid September.

Apart from those still *poking* for some Riesling Auslese, many of the estates have carefully prepared vineyards for Eiswein, if and when an arctic front arrives.

On re-reading the facts collected for our report, it seems that disappointed growers have not yet fully realized that the 2002 crop is in fact a great vintage! First tastings of the 2002 in cask and tank are already very impressive. Those who have already enjoyed the 2001 vintage wines, will find that the benchmark has been maintained for the 2002, and although fixed costs continue to increase for the estates, with better yields in 2002, prices for estate wines will generally remain stable.

Eiswein Harvest

December 2002

Great news from Germany amidst the *ruling* economic and political woes: The 2002 vintage Eiswein harvest has been a splendid success for the estates ! The high pressure fronts, named Zefir and Yussuf, allowed cold weather to flow into Germany from Russia on Monday, 9th December. The forecast was ideal, and preparations for the picking commenced. The temperature dropped down to 5C (24 F) on Monday, but under a clear sky, by early Tuesday the thermometer hit the all important 8C (19F) mark in the Rhine areas. The harvest commenced. Unfortunately, low cloud covered the Mosel areas on Tuesday, and protected the grapes from freezing solid, much to the dismay of the growers. A clear night sky on Wednesday did the trick and all regions reported temperatures at or below 8C (19F). During that night the berries froze hard. Magnificent results have been achieved and due to the relatively healthy state of the bunches, the estates have reported an unusual fine fruit bouquet during the pressing.

RHEINHESSEN: in Nierstein, **Franz Karl Schmitt** produced his first ever Eiswein. This traditional estate, founded in 1549, was the first estate in Rheinhessen to produce a TBA back in 1900. Franz-Karl harvested Riesling with his team at 165 Oechsle and 9C (17.5F) on Wednesday in the Oelberg site. One day before, Heinrich and Jochen **Seebrich** harvested their Riesling Eiswein in the Oelberg. Meanwhile in Bechtolsheim, Harald & Horst **Bretz** harvested Riesling on the Petersberg slope, Silvaner and Chardonnay in the Klosterberg, and Spaetburgunder (pinot noir) in the Homberg. The two days of picking produced 15 trailer loads of frozen grapes, presenting an enormous task to press. First readings were showing 160 Oechsle.

Nearby, neighbouring to Nierstein, in the Dexheimer Doktor site, the Sanders harvested Silvaner between 140-150 Oechsle. On Tuesday, Markus **Machmer** was also able to harvest Riesling and Gewuerztraminer in the Bechtheimer Rosengarten at 150 Oechsle. In Saulheim, Thomas **Weber** harvested Silvaner in the Hölle and Schlossberg sites on Tuesday at 155-170 Oechsle, and Huxelrebe on early Wednesday. The yield was lower than in past years, with the berries frozen very hard at 9 C. In Dalsheim, the **Schales** estate was able to harvest differing qualities on Tuesday and Wednesday in their Sauloch vineyard. The Riesling grapes were unusually healthy, and were picked at 140 Oe on Tuesday (-8C) and at 160 Oe and higher acidity (more concentrated) on Wednesday at 10C (16F). In November, they had intended to try and produce a Huxelrebe Auslese, but the berries remained too healthy, not going above 95 Oechsle, so they remained hanging, and have now been harvested as Eiswein at 170 Oechsle!

PFALZ: on Wednesday morning at 7am, the entire crew of **Fitz-Ritter** was in the Hochbenn vineyard with the family, harvesting Riesling at 145 Oechsle. The 15 helpers, including Amy and Jacob Fitz, were no doubt afterwards treated to Alice Fitz's famous breakfast!

NAHE: At the **Paul Anheuser** estate, 16 pickers were out in the Kreuznacher Narrenkappe at 5:30am. Their first Eiswein since the splendid 1998 vintage. Dorothee Anheuser reported that "we walked miles and miles until 8:30am". The many rows of vines had only a few bunches!

MOSEL-SAAR-RUWER: Gerhard & Gerd Studert (**Studert-Prüm**) also harvested their first Eiswein since 1998 in the Wehlener Nonnenberg at 5am on Wednesday. The team of 5 picked Riesling with 140 Oechsle at 8C (19F). At the **Dr.H.Thanisch** estate (Müller-Burggraef), 10 helpers were in the Berncasteler Doctor, picking Riesling at 130 Oechsle and 9C. Stefan & Jill Bollig (**Bollig-Lehnert**) harvested their Riesling in the Trittenheimer Altärchen on Wednesday from 5 to 8am at 135-140 Oechsle. Stefan had planned a larger area for Eiswein this year, but the 6 did not manage to complete the picking on Wednesday. The remaining berries softened Thursday morning, resulting in a top Auslese quality. In the Saar valley, Stefan and Johannes Fischer missed school Wednesday, but Eiswein is a very valid excuse! Karin Fischer (**Dr Fischer**) and her 9 helpers picked Riesling from 7-9am in The Ockfener Bockstein at 8.5C (18F) and 140 Oechsle with an ideal 12g/l must acidity. Nearby in Wiltingen, Joachim Arns from the **Vereinigte Hospitien** was picking Riesling with 9 helpers in the famous Scharzhofberger site from 6:15 to 8.30am. The berries had been affected by noble mould and had dehydrated beforehand, and now, in a frozen state have reached the monumental reading of 175 Oechsle and 13g/l acidity.

The total crop of Eiswein in Germany will be one of the largest ever, seeing that more estates and growers had taken the high risk. Frozen grapes alone are however not the only requirement. As one might imagine, it is a difficult task in the cellar to press, ferment and nurse the concentrated nectar to the sizzling heights of fine Eiswein. The 2001 Eisweins have now reached the market, and the 2002 will be released during late 2003 and into 2004.

Riesling regards,
Derek Vinnicombe

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26 years of vintage reports 1976-2002