

## VINTAGE REPORT 2003 FROM GERMANY

### 8<sup>th</sup> November 2003

A dream comes true? Word has already spread *through the grapevine* that the quality of the 2003 vintage is pointing towards a "best-ever" harvest in Germany. Apart from grapes for Eiswein production, picking ended 5th November, and we can now make first assessments. Without doubt, the 2003 vintage hits the top of the ladder, and we can compare with the greatest past vintages, such as 1976, 1971, 1959 & 1953. Better vinification understanding, more gentle production methods, low yields and the use of modern technology will in fact improve the potential of the 2003 beyond its former peers. Even Stephan Studert sr (vintage 1923 himself!) from Wehlen cannot recall such outstanding results, and he has vivid memories of 1959, 1953 and 1949! The overall picture is similar in all regions, which enhances the greatness, whereby the Rheingau has excelled with amazing quantities of Riesling TBA. The total crop in Germany will be similar in size to 2001 (9 million hl) and 1976 (8.6 million hl.).

More details below, but first, the general pattern of weather this year:

The winter months were favourable, and March was very dry with temperatures of up to 15C (56F) from 21st onwards, and a record 200 hours of sunshine. The almond trees were in full blossom by 26th, and the sap was already rising in the vines. Cold weather returned 8th April with -6C (22F), but was soon replaced by warm & sunny weather. June & July were the hottest and driest months since 50 years (similar to 1953). Hardly surprising, the flowering was concluded successfully early in June, 3 weeks ahead of a good year. Apart from some rainfall 21/22nd July and 17/18th August, the hot weather prevailed with tropical temperatures of 36-38C (90-93F). The Rhine reached its lowest-ever recorded level, vegetation was completely scorched dry, and the forests took on autumnal colours! The heat-wave ended 27th August, and was followed by the much-needed rainfall, but a fine, dry Indian summer arrived 13th September, in time for the early pickings. During the summer, German vineyards had seen more than twice their average of sunshine hours. Experts state an ideal requirement of 1300 hours of sunshine during the growth period of the vines. We exceeded this figure in August! The deeply-rooted vines suffered less from the lack of moisture, but losses occurred with sunburn on the steep, blisteringly hot slopes where the sunshine unleashed its full force. It was not possible to work in the vineyards during the afternoon hours! Despite the high temperatures, serious widespread hail damage was not reported. The harvest commenced 15th September under ideal conditions. The grapes were fully-ripened and very healthy, and, unusual

for Germany, one had to avoid harvesting during the hot afternoon hours. Red varieties, such as Dornfelder, were averaging over 80 Oechsle (Oe)! However, the early-ripening varieties did lack juice, suffering lower than average yields. Riesling profited most from the rainfall early September and also 7th October. Ideal stable & cooler weather conditions then continued throughout October. To gain optimal ripeness, a growth period for the grapes of 100 days is required. This year Riesling easily exceeded 120 days, marking yet another omen for a monumental quality.

Although regarded as the *original cool-climate vineyards*, global warming seems to have affected German viticulture. From exact climatic records over the past 100 years, 9 of the 13 warmest years have been between 1990-2003. However, we cannot assume that 2003 will be repeated again in the coming 25 years.

In order to demonstrate the higher benchmark set by the estates, and the outstanding quality of the 2003 vintage, these are the official minimum Oechsle (Brix) requirements for Riesling, which take the climatic and regional differences into consideration:

Riesling	Rhine	Rheingau	Mosel
Spätlese	85 (20.4)	85 (20.4)	80 (19.3)
Auslese	92 (22)	95 (22.6)	88 (21.1)
BA	120 (28)	125 (29.1)	110 (25.9)
TBA	150 (34.3)	150 (34.3)	150 (34.3)

**RHEINHESSEN:** The estates began with the Riesling harvest early October. **Franz Karl Schmitt** in Nierstein was the first estate ever in Rheinhessen to produce a Riesling TBA, back in 1900, and has repeated in 2003! He selected Riesling berries at 230 Oe with 8 pickers over 6 days in the Oelberg site, and also a Riesling BA at 140 Oe from the Hipping vineyard. His minimum Oe reading for Riesling was 95, with Auslese in Pettenthal between 105-115 Oe. The total crop was however 30% less than 2002, but the quality can be regarded as their best-ever recorded result. Also in Nierstein, Albrecht **Schneider** completed the picking 25th October, and reports Riesling from 90 to 108 Oe. The Paterberg Riesling *weighed-in* on 13th October at 90 Oe; a powerful Spätlese, which will be released as Kabinett! Good quantities of Riesling Spätlese and

Auslese have been produced in the Hipping, Oelberg & Orbel sites, but the very healthy state of the berries prohibited the selection of BA or TBA. The Gewürztraminer (Oelberg) was pressed at 110 Oe, almost too high as successor to the previous dry Spätlese. The total crop is about 20% less than 2002, corresponding to 2 bottles per vine. Jochen **Seebrich** reports similar Riesling results, from 88 Oe upwards, Gewürztraminer Spätlese at 104 (Oelberg), Scheurebe at 90 (Oelberg). Seeing that the grapes were so ripe, they have not planned Riesling Eiswein this year. Frank Heyden, the young winemaker at **Dr. Heyden** in Oppenheim, picked their first Riesling at 99 Oe, and all other pickings were at 100 Oe and above in the Sackträger site! A Riesling BA was selected at 140 Oe and a Riesling TBA at 240 Oe, with a total crop 30% less than 2002. Frank waited with the main pickings of Riesling until 9th October, thinking that the green foliage and September rainfall would transport more minerals into the berries. Markus **Machmer** in Bechthheim harvested his Gewürztraminer in the Stein vineyard at 105 Oe, which will be de-classified to Spätlese; Kerner was harvested at 105 Oe, and Ortega at 110 Oe. Lothar **Schäfer** in Mettenheim has managed to produce Spätlese (Pinot noir) Auslese at 111 Oe. Harald & Horst **Bretz** in Bechtolsheim completed the main harvest on 25th October and the qualities have even surpassed their successful 2002 results. Normal pickings of their red Dornfelder exceeded 90 Oe and we can expect powerful reds from this estate next year (Pinot Noir, Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, St.Laurent and Regent). 12 pickers selected Huxelrebe grapes 20-23rd October, and the resulting 170 Oe as TBA excelled all expectations. TBA has also been produced from Ortega at 170 Oe, and BA from both varieties, as well as from Siegerrebe from their vineyards surrounding the Petersberg hillside. Riesling, Silvaner and Pinot Noir grapes are now hanging to produce Eisweins. Arno **Schales** in Dalsheim also reports excellent results during the harvest 19th September - 16th October, with Siegerrebe Spätlese & Auslese up to 115 Oe, and also powerful Spätlese from fully-ripened and healthy Chardonnay and pinot varieties; Gewürztraminer Spätlese was harvested at 100-107 Oe, Scheurebe at 90, and Riesling pickings between 90-150 Oe (Spätlese, Auslese & BA), and a TBA was selected from Huxelrebe. They will also be trying to make Riesling Eiswein. The **Sander** estate in Dexheim has produced Huxelrebe BA from 2-6th October at 127 Oe from their Doktor site, but berries were too healthy to select a TBA. Silvaner grapes are again hanging for Eiswein.

**PFALZ:** the **Fitz-Ritter** estate in Bad Dürkheim has achieved outstanding results with Chardonnay at 103 Oe; Gewürztraminer grapes were harvested 1st October at 106 Oe for a

powerful Spätlese. Riesling Kabinett (Hochbenn) at 91, and Riesling Spätlese with 98 Oe (Abstfronhof) and 95 Oe (Ungsteiner Herrenberg). Riesling Auslese at 105 Oe was also produced, but no BA because of the healthy state of the berries. In fact, fully-ripened & healthy Rieslaner grapes are still hanging today, hoping for a BA later in November; and Riesling is still hanging in the Hochbenn site for Eiswein production.

**NAHE:** At the **Paul Anheuser** estate, Dorothee & Peter Anheuser have harvested their best-ever crop over the past 380 years of the estate's history with a Riesling TBA at 241 Oe in the Kreuznacher Hinkelstein site, Riesling BA being also selected at about 145 Oe. Normal pickings of Riesling were from 95 to 105 Oe in their Kreuznach sites, and on the upper reaches of the Nahe (Schlossböckelheim), the Anheusers harvested Spätlese at 95 in the Felsenberg and Kabinett at 90 in the Königfels site. Pinot varieties have also produced good readings (pinot blanc at 100 Oe). The total crop is similar in size to 2002, which however suffered losses due to windy weather conditions during that harvest.

**RHEINGAU:** At **Schloss Schönborn**, the estate looks back over 654 years in family possession of Graf von Schönborn, and the 2003 vintage has set new records! With up to 20% noble mould in best sites, it was possible to select substantial quantities of TBA from 200 Oe upwards. The highest reading was pressed at 290 Oe from the Erbacher Marcobrunn. Normal pickings 20th October were at 106 Oe in their monopole Hattenheimer Pfaffenberg site, and musts with 106 Oe in the Marcobrunn, 102 Oe in the Nussbrunnen had already been pressed. The steep slopes in Rudesheim had suffered somewhat under the drought conditions, and normal pickings from 90-98 Oe were achieved in the Berg Schlossberg, and 87-90 Oe in the Berg Rottland sites. The **Langwerth von Simmern** estate is not so old, but 539 years in family possession have resulted in considerable experience, and the vintage 2003 will rank as a *best-ever* crop. Harvesting was from 15th September until 31st October, and the 35 pickers (traditionally always the same number) achieved monumental results. The vineyards, all situated in the heart of the Rheingau, and not in Rudesheim, did also not suffer under the drought conditions. Riesling was harvested at 90 Oe and above, and, apart from Spätlese and Auslese, a BA was selected in the Erbacher Marcobrunn at 180 Oe and TBA qualities from 200 to 295 Oe in the Marcobrunn and Rauenthaler Baiken sites. Nearby to the Marcobrunn, the great Hattenheimer Mannberg has excelled with a blue capsule Spätlese quality for general release (the first since 1976!), as well as a great dry FIRST GROWTH quality for release September 2004.

Outstanding results have been recorded at other leading Rheingau estates, and at the **Prinz von Hessen** estate, Riesling TBA from the Johannisberger Klaus site has been pressed from 180 to 232 Oe. A normal picking on 8th October resulted in 93 Oe. At the **State Domain (Kloster Eberbach)**, we can expect Riesling Kabinett, Spätlese and rare Auslese from their monopole Steinberger vineyard. Klaus **Molitor** in Hattenheim was also able to select the first Riesling TBA (158 Oe) in the family's history. Normal pickings of Riesling were up to 105 Oe, and his red pinot noir up to 110 Oe.

**MOSEL-SAAR-RUWER:** Gerhard & Gerd Studert (**Studert-Prüm**) in Wehlen harvested from 6-27th October. The first pressing was at 88 Oe, but then all normal pickings were from 90 - 107 Oe. More selective picking in the Sonnenuhr has resulted in \*\* Auslese at 110-120 Oe and \*\*\* Auslese at 130 Oe. A BA was selected from the Wehlener Sonnenuhr at 140 Oe, and TBA from 160 to 230 Oe. No grapes have been left for Eiswein. The total crop is however about 20% less than 2002. At the **Dr.H.Thanisch** estate (Müller-Burggraef), similar readings are reported for the main crop in their Brauneberg, Bernkastel, Graach and Wehlen sites. In 1921, they produced that legendary Berncasteler Doctor TBA, the first estate on the Mosel to produce a TBA wine, and have also repeated in 2003 with 205 Oe! A Riesling BA has also been produced, and indeed, in their Doctor site, nothing has been picked below 90 Oe (a 2003 Doctor Kabinett will thus not be available). The pinot noir grapes were picked at readings up to 105 Oe. Stefan Bollig (**Bollig-Lehnert**) has harvested 20% less than 2002, but that vintage was 30% higher than 2001, his smallest crop ever. The Trittenheimer Altärchen and Dhroner Hofberg suffered some losses due to very unusual hail damage on 30th May, just before the flowering. Even normal pickings on 15th October in the Piesporter Goldtröpfchen were from 95-102 Oe, and except for Riesling left for Eiswein, the harvest was completed 28th October. The 2003 qualities will probably rank as best-ever at this estate, but the grapes were generally too healthy to select a BA.

Karin Fischer, **Dr Fischer** in Ockfen (Saar), harvested from 13th October - 5th November, and reports readings from 86 Oe upwards in her Ockfen and Wawern sites, and they had already picked some fine Auslese at 95 Oe in the Ockfener Bockstein by 16th October. In comparison to 2000, the highest reading was then only 82 Oe! Although the grapes were too healthy for selecting BA, the 2003 has also achieved best-ever distinction. The previous Auslese was released in 1999 at this estate. The yields are

generally very low, but the 2003 crop will be slightly larger than the successful 2002 vintage. In great vintages, the Saar wines are renowned for their fantastic, almost immortal maturing potential. Excitement is growing, that the 2003 quality will excel all expectations! Two sections of the Bockstein vineyard near to the house have been selected for Eiswein.

The **Vereinigte Hospitien** estate finished picking on 24th October, and reports similar readings. In their Scharzhofberger (Saar) site, gold capsule Auslese has also been selected, but here to, the grapes were too healthy for selecting BA or TBA, as also in their Piesporter vineyards.

All other wine regions in Germany have also experienced excellent results, albeit with lower than average yields. Due to the varying microclimates in the different German wine regions, it can rarely be seen that all regions can boast such excellent results. Vintage 2003 is one rare exception, and this is yet another indication that the new vintage will achieve historical importance!

Riesling regards,  
*Derek Vinnicombe*

© VINNICOMBE GMBH.

**WINE BROKERS • CONSULTANTS**

Weinbergstrasse 62, D-55297 Nackenheim/Germany

Ph +49 6135 8269 Fax: +49 6135 8279

E-Mail: derek@vinnicombe.de

Internet address: www.vinnicombe.de

*27 years of vintage reports 1976-2003*