

VINTAGE REPORT 2004 FROM GERMANY

1st December 2004

The 2004 harvest was completed on 21st November, except for those grapes remaining for Eiswein, and, nobody will believe us, but we can once again mark up a fine vintage, albeit not as great as the “best-ever” quality of the 2003 crop, but in line with both the 2001 and 2002 highly-rated qualities.

In fact, all vintage qualities in Germany have been better than average since the 1988 crop. Improved technology in the vineyards and cellars, a better understanding of the vines, careful pruning and spraying, intensified foliage management, yield restriction and global warming contribute to this achievement. Looking back in history, there had been disastrous vintages, such as 1956, according to Stephan Studert (vintage 1923 himself) and more recently, 1965, 1968 and 1980 join that miserable collection, with 1972 & 1978 following close behind.

Although this year’s summer in Germany was disappointing, the total weather picture was fine for the vines. One can however assume that the vintners would not have coped with the weather, had this happened a generation ago. The vineyards suffered no winter damage, and the bud break began successfully mid-April. Heavy rainfall followed mid-May, which restored ground reserves after the dry start to the year, but late May was too cool with temperatures down to 2C (35F) on 24th May. Weather conditions in June improved, and the flowering was completed successfully, and on time by the end of June to give a long growth & ripening period. Unsettled weather then followed in July & August, both months being too cool and too wet, which slowed down the veraison. Some serious hail damage, especially 7/8th July in the Freiburg (Markgräflerland) area of Baden occurred, which devastated 1800 hectares (4500 acres), and in theory destroyed 1 million cases of wine! Luckily, the Kaiserstuhl area (e.g. estate Bercher) remained unscathed. Serious hail damage also occurred 23rd July in Serrig (Saar), and Piesport also suffered minor hail damage.

The weather improved dramatically on 30th August, and summer temperatures up to 28C (77F) held on until 6th October. Harvesting of early varieties, such as Müller-Thurgau, commenced 23rd September. The estates delayed harvesting of Riesling, and it was thus

most unusual for both Rhine and Mosel vintners to commence picking of Riesling together on 18th October. However, the grapes were perfectly healthy, and 7 intermittent rainy days in October brought further delays, but also further ripening. Unusually warm nights and daytime temperatures up to 22C (67F) were recorded 21-24th October. During those particular days, even well-equipped estates had a hard time to keep fermentation cool. The weather remained dry and cool 31st October – 15th November, apart from snowfall (!) 10th November, and the harvesting was completed under near-ideal cool conditions. There were reports of rotting in some vineyards which necessitated selective picking, either caused by hail damage or by missing a spraying slot. Experts regard 100 days minimum from flowering to harvesting to optimize the aromas and acidity pH levels. This was easily achieved by mid-October, and the Dr Thanisch (Müller-Burggraef) estate did not even finish picking until 21st November!

The healthy state of the grapes did not lead to wide-spread Botrytis, so that no BA or TBA were selected, especially as picking was so late, and only small quantities of Riesling Auslese will be released in the Rhine regions.

The average Oechsle readings are in fact much higher than first anticipated, thanks to the weather improvement. The extremely low yields in 2003 have now been compensated, and the cellars have been filled with good quantities of fine Kabinett wines, and quantities of Spätlese similar to 2001, if not more, especially in the Saar region. At the estates, some of the weaker Kabinetts will again be down-graded and chaptalized, especially pinot noir and other red varieties, or Riesling to produce the dry-tasting Classic designation.

The total crop in Germany will be slightly higher than 2002 (10.2 million hl), and nearly 30% more than the small-sized vintage 2003.

In order to demonstrate the higher benchmark set by the estates, these are the official minimum Oechsle (Brix) 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: First pickings of Riesling on 18th October at **Franz Karl Schmitt** in Nierstein reached 85 Oechsle, and were at 90 Oechsle as high-powered Kabinett on 22nd in the Kranzberg site. Albrecht **Schneider** harvested Riesling in the Paterberg at 90 Oechsle for Kabinett, and between 96-98 Oechsle in the Hipping and Oelberg sites for Spätlese. Gewürztraminer was harvested at 100 Oechsle for Spätlese. The final Riesling pickings had 30% Botrytis, noble mould. Unfortunately, the migrating starlings also approved the quality of the grapes, and Albrecht had never before experienced such damage with more than 50% of the Rosenberg being "bird-harvested". Jochen **Seebrich** harvested the last Riesling grapes 3rd November, and Riesling reached 98 Oechsle in the Hipping and 94 in the Oelberg. Scheurebe was harvested at 90 Oechsle for Kabinett and Gewürztraminer at 94 Oechsle for Spätlese. Frank Heyden at **Dr. Heyden** in Oppenheim finished one day earlier, and Riesling had been harvested at 92-98 Oechsle, Pinot Gris at 100 Oechsle, and Pinot Noir 92-102 Oechsle. Manfred & Rainer **Binz** in Nackenheim were also pleased with their results, harvesting Dornfelder from 76 Oechsle, Pinot Noir at 100 Oechsle on 13th October. They had worked hard during the summer, green harvesting their Pinot and Riesling sites, and the efforts were rewarded. Markus **Machmer** in Bechtheim harvested Gewürztraminer at 98-103 Oechsle for Spätlese, and the yields left him smiling. Large flocks of starlings also wanted to help with harvesting, arriving punctually at 8am and 4pm.

Generally, acidity levels are around 20% higher than 2003 which will give the wines a crisper finish, ideal for Riesling, and the achieved Oechsle readings, combined with ripe fruit promise fine wines.

PFALZ: the **Fitz-Ritter** estate in Bad Dürkheim was also pleased with their results, and similar readings were achieved, with Gewürztraminer in the Abtsfronhof up to 103 Oechsle, and Chardonnay and Riesling achieving their benchmark qualities. Yields were good, and no rotting as partly experienced in 2002. Harvesting was not completed until 12th November, although Rieslaner grapes are still to be picked, and Riesling for Eiswein.

RHEINGAU The **Langwerth von Simmern** estate waited patiently for the pH values to

normalize (a low 2.9 was recorded early October), and similar Oechsle readings as in Nierstein were achieved. Both **Schloss Schönborn** and **Prinz von Hessen** also harvested Riesling at 85 Oechsle and above, reporting 95% of the crop exceeding official predicate levels.

FRANKEN: The **Juliusspital** was also able to harvest healthy, ripe grapes, with Müller-Thurgau at 75-85 Oechsle; and Silvaner and Riesling have pleasantly surprised them, achieving better results than first anticipated.

MOSEL-SAAR-RUWER: Gerhard & Stephan Studert (**Studert-Prüm, Wehlen**) finished harvesting 12th November with 80% of the crop between 80-90 Oechsle, and at normal acidity levels. Botrytis spread though the Sonnenuhr, and higher readings were achieved by selective pickings; the total crop quantity being similar to 1999, but promising more elegant wines than 2001. At the **Dr.H.Thanisch** estate (Müller-Burggraef), harvesting was not completed until 21st November, much later than elsewhere, but patience has been rewarded with some fine Spätlese in their top sites, and we are pleased to report that casks of Kabinett have been cellared from the Doctor vineyard at 86 Oechsle, apart from some Spätlese and an Auslese at 105 Oechsle. Yields of normal pickings were also higher than the previous vintage, and various Kabinett musts have been chaptalized for Classic. Their Pinot Noir was successfully harvested at 102 Oechsle. Stefan Bollig (**Bollig-Lehnert**) harvested Riesling from 75 Oechsle up to a top Fuder at 91 Oechsle, with good quantities of Kabinett quality. The acidity level was high for the first pickings, but soon normalized. It was Stefan's largest crop to be cellared in Trittenheim, but mainly due to increased acreage in Dhron. First cask tastings reveal clear & precise fruit, crisp citrus structures. Karin Fischer, **Dr Fischer** in Ockfen (Saar) picked her first Riesling at 65 Oechsle on 18th October, but readings soon exceeded 80 Oechsle in her Ockfen vineyards, and by 12th November her highly-experienced team of 15 Polish workers had harvested more Spätlese than in 2001. No Auslese will be declared in 2004, but good stocks of 2003 Auslese, the estate's greatest vintage, are still available. Despite the hail damage, the **Vereinigte Hospitien** were able to harvest Kabinett in Serrig, and up to 94

Oechsle in their Piesport vineyard. Selective picking has also resulted in some fine Spätlese in their top Scharzhofberger site.

EISWEIN: many estates have again carefully prepared and protected vineyards for the Eiswein production. We are hoping for an arctic depression later in December, -8C (19F) being the minimum required temperature to freeze the berries overnight. The following estates are also hoping for Eiswein: Seebrich, Franz-Karl Schmitt, Machmer, Bretz, Sander in Rheinhessen; Fitz-Ritter in the Pfalz; Dr.Fischer on the Saar; Dr.Thanisch & Bollig-Lehnert in the Mosel valley.

Kind regards,
Derek Vinnicombe

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WINE BROKERS • CONSULTANTS
Weinbergstrasse 62, D-55297 Nackenheim/Germany
Ph +49 6135 8269 Fax: +49 6135 8279
EMail: info@vinnicombe.de
Internet address: www.vinnicombe.de

28 years of vintage reports 1976-2004



Nierstein (22nd Oct. 2004)



The red slope between Nierstein & Nackenheim
29th Oct. 2004



Riesling flowering
20th June 2004



Ockfen (Saar)
24th Oct. 2004



Riesling ripening on slate in Ockfen,
24th Oct. 2004



Pinot Noir ready for harvesting at 100 Oechsle
Nackenheim, 13th Oct. 2004