

VINTAGE REPORT 2009 FROM GERMANY

19th November 2009

Kleiner Rhein, kleiner Herbst

As the saying goes, when the Rhine is low, the crop is low. The river became nearly a stream by early October, revealing sand-banks that had not been seen since 2003; a good omen for excellent quality, and a golden October has produced great results in the vineyards, albeit with 20-40% lower yields than normal at the estates for Riesling and Pinot varietals.

It was one of the coldest winters since 1997, with temperatures dropping to -18 C (3 F) in January, and getting dangerously close to causing wide-spread damage, but dry weather had preceded, which helped considerably. The vines were completely dry and thus hardly any freezing moisture in the wood to split and destroy the cells. March was both cold and warm with little rainfall, but April brought summer temperatures with plenty of rain, and bud-break was early on 10th April. Flowering was also early, end of May, and a good omen for ripe grapes, but the temperature dropped to 11 C (50 F) during the night of 3 June, followed by a cool and rainy period which reduced the potential yields quite considerably, as 15 C is a lowest requirement. The somewhat miserable weather continued through July, and caused an increase of disease "pressure" to the vines and a battle to keep weeds under control. Both August and September were great summer months, and the hottest day of the year being 20th August at 37 C (91 F). September clocked up the record for being the warmest for more than 100 years, boosting the global warming statistics. Even October was excellent, with 26 C (74 F) being recorded 7th October. Photosynthesis ended 14th October when temperatures dropped to -3C (27 F), but the remaining Riesling grapes had already reached physiological ripeness, with an ideal 120 days of growth from flowering.

Thanks to the great weather conditions, and helped by the small crop, the grapes reached a much higher level of ripeness than last year. Noble mould also started to spread in October, and a few great Riesling TBA's have been produced.

The total crop in Germany will be approximately 8.5 million hectoliters, 20% less than last year.

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: Picking started late September, with Riesling being harvested 2-23 October. It was a fairly quick harvest due to the dry weather and low yields, but allowed time to select bunches and berries with noble mould. Albrecht **Schneider** was able to select Riesling TBA in his Niersteiner Hipping at 168 Oechsle (the previous one was in 1989, the year the Berlin Wall fell), otherwise Riesling was harvested between 90 and 100 Oechsle with 25% less crop than last year. His Gewürztraminer in the Oelberg site ripened to 105 Oechsle for a top Spätlese, and St Laurent was high in quality, but the crop was 50% less than normal. Dornfelder produced good results, and his Pinot Noir was the highest quality since 2003, with long traditional mash fermentation, and to be matured in new barriques for release in 2011. Frank Heyden at **Dr. Heyden** also harvested a Riesling TBA at 195 Oechsle in his Sackträger vineyard, with normal pickings between 90 and 104 Oechsle. The Silvaner from his old vines was fully ripened and healthy at 94 Oechsle, and his Pinot Noir at very low yields between 103 and 111 Oechsle, highly concentrated with intense aromas and dark colour. A pre-selection was harvested beforehand at 80 Oechsle for the rosé. Both Portugieser and Dornfelder yields were good, with Pinot Gris harvested at 99-102 Oechsle and Chardonnay at 98 Oechsle. In Nackenheim, Manfred & Rainer **Binz** began harvesting their Dornfelder on 28th September at 85-90 Oechsle and Pinot Noir at 104 Oechsle, both fermented traditionally and gently on the mash, with manual plunging. The Riesling harvest commenced 2nd October at 92 Oechsle, but yields were 40% less than last year. Their final picking of fully-ripened, golden-coloured Riesling with no Botrytis in the

Rothenberg red slope at 96 Oechsle will again be destined for a great dry Spätlese.

Volker **Schäfer** was very pleased with his Pinot Noir in Mettenheim, with a larger crop than last year thanks to new vineyards now in production, and up to 105 Oechsle ripeness. Pinot Noir Spätlese and Auslese will be released 2010/2011. His crop of Dornfelder for dry and sweet reds was good, but both Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon crops were low at a high quality of 90-91 Oechsle. In his sandy Rhine valley vineyards, the Riesling yields were good at 80 Oechsle, but low yields at 90+ Oechsle on the slopes. Kanzler for his *Chancellor* cuvée was harvested at a juicy 110 Oechsle. Markus **Machmer** in the neighboring Bechtheim harvested a fine Gewürztraminer crop for Spätlese in his Stein vineyard. Franz-Josef **Düttenhöfer** was also pleased with his organic Riesling and Pinots in Dienheim, with 90-100 Oechsle ripeness, but 30% less crop than last year.

PFALZ: the **Fitz-Ritter** estate began harvesting with their Sauvignon Blanc in the Abtsfronhof site on 8th September, culminating in the picking of a Great Growth Riesling in the Kanzel vineyard on 14th October at 98 Oechsle ripeness. As in Rheinhessen, the red varieties were highly successful, concentrated flavours with dark colour. Gewürztraminer in the monopole Abtsfronhof vineyard had also reached optimum ripeness for a powerful Spätlese. The estate has made the change to organic cultivation, but it will be several years until official certification comes. Johann Fitz's green philosophy is a brave step forwards to produce *healthy* wines. More manual work has become necessary, and the estate now employs its largest team ever.

RHEINGAU Across the Rhine from Rheinhessen, a similar story repeats itself in the Rheingau with the main harvest of Riesling starting with 90 Oechsle at the Schloss **Schönborn** estate. Graf von Schönborn's winemaker, Peter Barth, was also able to press a Riesling TBA from their renowned Marcobrunn vineyard at 240 Oechsle. He was however somewhat disappointed with the results in the steepest slopes of Rüdesheim which had suffered from the lack of moisture. They completed the main harvest 16th October, with 30% less crop than last year. Klaus **Molitor** in Hattenheim also cellared around 30% less than last year. His Pinot Noir also yielded less, but at 100 Oechsle, whilst his red St.Laurent unfortunately failed completely.

MOSEL: Stefan Bollig (**Bollig-Lehnert**) completed his Riesling harvest 1st November with 40% lower crop than last year. The main harvest was however at high 90-95 Oechsle ripeness, with 50% noble mould. His highest reading reached 120 Oechsle which will result in a very powerful Auslese, if not bottled as BA. It was also his first attempt with Pinot Noir, harvested 26th October at 100 Oechsle with no Botrytis for a powerful rosé. He admits not yet having enough experience to produce a red. At the **Dr.H.Thanis** estate (Müller-Burggraef) in Bernkastel, the harvest was also completed 1st November, with 32% less crop than last year, but at much higher ripeness levels, up to powerful Auslese and even a Riesling TBA in the Doctor vineyard at 216 Oechsle. Their Pinot Noir vineyard in Lieser also reached a powerful 110 Oechsle ripeness, highly concentrated with very low yield for earliest release in 2011. Gerhard & Stephan Studert, **Studert-Prüm** in Wehlen, have reported 25% less crop than 2008, at excellently high ripeness levels between 90 and 100 Oechsle. We can expect that delicious touch of honeyed sweetness from the noble mould in the Spätlese and Auslese. A Riesling TBA was also berry-selected in the Sonnenuhr at 182 Oechsle.

Karin Fischer, **Dr Fischer** in Ockfen (Saar) started hand-picking Riesling on 12th October with her team, finishing 30th October in the Bockstein with good quantities of Spätlese up to 94 Oechsle. The grapes remained very healthy, with no widespread Botrytis as in the Mosel valley. Ideal for her mineral-driven Saar Riesling, the Steinbock, which was first introduced with the 2007 vintage. The cooler macroclimate with the higher altitude of her secluded Saar valley vineyards leads to astonishing results (if the wild boar do not eat the grapes), and her total crop is similar in size to last year. Nearby in Wiltingen, the Scharzhofberger site has produced great Kabinett and Spätlese qualities with very little Botrytis (**Vereinigte Hospitien**), and small quantities suitable for gold capsule Auslese. Their Pinot Gris in Trier was harvested at 92 Oechsle, and one of their best Pinot Noir since 2003 at more than 100 Oechsle.

NAHE: At the Paul **Anheuser** estate, Rudolf and Paul harvested their Scheurebe early October under ideal conditions. The yields for the Pinot varieties were 30-40% less than last year, but excellent quality. Hand-picking was necessary due to the uneven ripeness levels

after the delayed flowering. White Blanc de Noir has again been gently pressed from their Pinot Noir grapes for early release in 2010. Very healthy and aromatic ripe Riesling were harvested in the upper Nahe valley, especially for Kabinett in the Schlossböckelheimer Königfels, and fully ripened Riesling for Spätlese in the Kahlenberg and Auslese in the Krötenpfühl vineyards of Bad Kreuznach. Except for grapes hanging in the Narrenkappe for Eiswein, the harvest was completed on 30th October.



Flowering end of May 2009

Whilst the **FRANKEN** region has produced nearly a normal-sized crop, but higher quality than last year, other areas such as the **AHR** and **MITTELRHEIN** have suffered 30-40% losses against the previous crop, but all have cellared higher qualities.



Physiological ripeness (Riesling)

The 2009 vintage is a *mixed bag* when crop figures are concerned, but the quality will result in richer flavours than those crisp 2008 or delicious 2007 wines.

Riesling regards,
Derek Vinnicombe

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33 years of vintage reports 1976-2009



Manfred Binz (son & father) working the red mash, plunging gently by hand



The red slope between Nackenheim & Nierstein, winter & summer 2009

