

VINTAGE REPORT 2011 FROM GERMANY

1st November 2011

Apart from us having to continually shovel mountains of snow, the Winter months remained uneventful for the vines with temperatures not dropping below the dangerous -19 C (1 F). Both March and April were however far too dry with no rainfall, but sufficient warmth which resulted in a very early bud-break. Then a disaster struck on 3rd May: the temperature dropped below freezing and caused serious widespread damage. Damage that had not been experienced for 31 years. The Rheinhessen, Pfalz, Franken and Württemberg were hit hardest. Especially low-lying vineyards, or where the cold air could not flow off the slopes, damage was extreme with many acres being completely destroyed. Vines on steep slopes escaped damage when the cold air flowed, but where planning permission had allowed housing areas to be built at the foot of vineyards, cold air was blocked from flowing and caused damage, as could be seen at the foot of the Oppenheimer Kreuz slope. However, warmth soon returned and flowering was completed very early end of May under ideal conditions. The Summer months from June to August were also ideal for the vines with plenty of rainfall and warm periods of 25 to 32 C (72-83 F). Quite opposite to the extremely hot and long dry Summer in 2003. Then the 2nd disaster struck the vineyards: hail caused unprecedented damage in the Rhine valley areas 25th August and the middle Mosel on 27th August. The Mosel areas had however the advantage of a long period of dry weather from that moment on which allowed the damaged berries to dry without causing sour rot to spread. In fact, roofs and vehicles suffered more damage. The entire roof of the Studert-Prüm's house in Wehlen was destroyed, as also many others, and even more than a dozen helicopters were destroyed in nearby Müllheim.

Apart from some slight rainfall early September, the weather remained almost perfect until today. Perfect conditions for a perfect harvest. The main harvest started early September in the Rhine regions, and 4th October for Riesling in the Mosel and Saar valleys. Indeed, we can already predict one of the finest crops since the legendary 1959, 1971 or 1976 vintages. The grapes reached physiological ripeness at an early stage in 2011, and with the the dry & stable weather

conditions, there was no rush to harvest and selective picking of great wines at all quality levels was possible. Perhaps even a *Vintage of the Century* has now been cellared? Interesting comparisons are already been made to the legendary 1811, the year of the Comet, or the great 1911 vintage, let alone the 1971.

The frost and hail losses enticed some not-so-honest vintners along the Rhine to steal grapes at night during this harvest, especially easy if you have a machine harvester at your disposal. Unfortunately, none of the culprits has apparently yet been found. Knowing the amount of hard labour that those victims had invested into their vineyards, and the expectation to harvest greatest quality, it is more than frustrating.

Except for a few rows of Riesling in the Saar and Mosel valley, and the grapes left hanging for Eiswein production, the harvest has now been completed.

The total crop in Germany will be approximately 9.2 million hectolitres, 8% less than a normal crop.

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)

Rhine regions: Never before in their past 226 years had the **Fitz-Ritter** started the harvest so early in Bad Dürkheim, and Sauvignon Blanc was harvested on 31st August at 82 Oechsle (20 Brix), with Gewürztraminer harvested on 16th September in the Abtsfronhof at 99 Oechsle (24 Brix). The yields were low, but the vineyard manager, Achim Eberle, was enthralled with the quality and ripeness of the grapes. The acidity levels were slightly higher than in 2003. Riesling Kabinett was harvested at over 90 Oechsle, culminating 28th September with Great Growth quality in the Kanzel site. Rieslaner was harvested at 215 Oechsle (52 Brix), perhaps their highest recording to date.

The red varieties are even more promising than the successful Pinot Noir year 2009. Albrecht **Schneider** started harvesting Riesling 26th September in the Niersteiner Hipping, ending with a TBA at a *best-ever* 250 Oechsle (60 Brix) on 11th October, and before that in the Paterberg from 84 to 96 Oechsle (20-23 Brix). Despite the losses from frost and hail, Frank **Heyden** was still able to cellar about 15% less than an average crop in Oppenheim, finishing 6th October with a Riesling Auslese at 108 Oechsle in his Sackträger vineyard. His red varieties from Pinot Noir to Merlot at 100 Oechsle (24 Brix) also promise even finer qualities than 2009. With the frost and hail damage, no BA or TBA have been produced, and also no grapes hanging for Eiswein. Markus **Machmer** was also very pleased with his Gewürztraminer in Bechtheim, harvesting from 26th September between 100 and 105 Oechsle for their Spätlese in the Stein and Rosengarten sites, and at 20% higher acidity levels than in 2003. With the ideal dry weather, the grapes were in perfect condition, and only about 5% Botrytis. Riesling was also harvested from 95 to 110 Oechsle, and his red varieties are also even more promising than in 2009. Luckily, neither frost nor hail had caused any major damage. The Machmer estate is now in its 3rd transition year before final organic certification. Volker **Schäfer**, Mr Pinot Noir in Mettenheim, has also cellared great qualities, but did suffer some losses with the May frost damage.

In the Rheingau, selective harvesting was important after the 25th August hail damage to avoid sour rot. Klaus **Molitor** had harvested 50% of his crop by 22nd September and with Riesling reaching 86 Oechsle (21 Brix). Both Pinot Noir and Sankt Laurent are promising great qualities. A fine crop of Steinberger has been cellared by the **State Domaine** in their new cellars, and their 2011 Pinot Noir from the Assmannshäuser Höllenberg has huge potential. Tilbert Nägler (**Dr Nägler**) harvested Riesling in his Rudesheim vineyards from 21st September to 6th October and has cellared about 15% less than a normal crop, with excellent readings between 90 and 110 Oechsle, ending with a Beerenauslese at 145 Oechsle (35 Brix), and his first-ever TBA at 207 Oechsle (50 Brix).

Nahe: The **Anheusers** harvested from 16th September until 15th October. With the cooler macroclimate up-river in Schlossböckelheim

there was no rush, and great Kabinett was harvested in the Königfels at 90 Oechsle from perfectly ripe and healthy grapes. Dorothee reported the unusual need to harvest quicker in Bad Kreuznach, otherwise only TBA would have been cellared. In all her many years as vintner, she had only experienced such fine fruit in 1971. Riesling was harvested up to 110 Oechsle in the Krötenpfuhl, Gewürztraminer at 100 Oechsle in the Kauzenberg, and in line with the Rhine areas, the Pinot Noir excelled, especially for their Blanc de Noir.

Mosel: The main harvesting of Riesling started 3rd October, and most estates had finished by 25th October. Despite the hail damage 27th August, vintners are pleased with the yields. Stefan Bollig (**Bollig-Lehnert**) was able to harvest fully-ripened Riesling between 90 to 110 Oechsle, and with only up to 15% Botrytis, no Beerenauslese has been selected, and also no grapes reserved for Eiswein. Acidity levels are higher than in 2003, and with less Botrytis than in 2009, he has undoubtedly cellared one of his best crops ever. JJ Karp (**Karp-Schreiber**) in Brauneberg completed the harvest 22nd October with similar readings, albeit suffering somewhat higher losses due to the hail. A high-powered Auslese was selected in the Juffer-Sonnenuhr, as also a TBA at 220 Oechsle. Max Ferger of **Dr Thanisch** has also cellared a great crop, despite the severe hail damage. All quality levels have been harvested, from fine estate Riesling to Auslese, and berry-selecting in the Doctor vineyard during the last few days will probably be exciting news to come. The **Vereinigte Hospitien** started harvesting their white Pinots 15th September at 80 Oechsle, and were then picking Riesling in Piesport at 100 Oechsle on 4th October. The yields have been good, especially after the small previous crops, and also fine results have been achieved in their Scharzhofberger vineyard. Their Pinot Noir has been particularly successful, with *** quality now in cask.

1999 marked the previous greatest vintage at the **Dr Fischer** estate in the Saar valley, and 2011 has excelled that benchmark. A few rows of Riesling are still hanging today in the Ockfener Bockstein, but Karin Fischer is delighted with the quality so far. No damage by frost or hail, and fully-ripened, healthy Riesling grapes, with quality levels from QbA to Auslese, and *** Auslese also now

fermenting slowly. Too little noble mould to select for Beerenauslese, and no grapes being reserved for Eiswein. Whole-cluster pressing and temperature-controlled fermentation in stainless steel were introduced in 2011. As a founding member of the elite VDP 101 years ago, this estate has seen radical quality changes since 2010.

Württemberg: hit hard by the May frost, but Markus Drautz (**Drautz-Able**) escaped major losses and has cellared a fine crop of Lemberger and Trollinger.

Baden: the Ortenau area with Durbach suffered huge hail damage, but the Kaiserstuhl remained unscathed, allowing the **Berchers** to cellar a fine crop.

Ahr: definitely a *greatest* Pinot Noir year for the Ahr valley in the cellars, and Thomas **Nelles** also escaped frost and hail damage.

Franken: hit hard by the May frost, but the **Juliuspital** escaped major losses and is delighted with the quality, although stocks are still too low after the previous small vintages. Although one of the largest estates in Germany, most of their 2010 wines are already sold out.

Numerous estates are taking the risk and have selected vineyards for Eiswein later this year. Fitz-Ritter has Riesling hanging in the Hochbenn, Markus Machmer has both Riesling and Gewürztraminer in his Rosengarten vineyard, and the Bretz estate has reserved Spätburgunder and Riesling.

Without exaggeration, vintage 2011 in Germany is worthy of excitement. Reminiscent of 1971, or even better thanks to modern technology? With all the economic woes, we can now enjoy these positive news. We can expect aromatic wines with pronounced elegance and very appealing fruit flavours, balanced by a fine acidity structure and excellent maturing potential. Despite the losses which have hit some areas badly, the total quantity is also sufficient to cover market requirements, and most qualities will be available in sufficient quantities.

EISWEIN 2011

it was a long wait until the cold weather came, and only few grapes "survived" this ordeal. The temperature dropped to -7C(17F) on 17th January 2012. Markus Machmer harvested Riesling & Gewürztraminer at borderline TBA concentration in the Bechtheimer Rosengarten. 2011 vintage Eisweins, *but harvested in 2012!*

Riesling regards,
Derek Vinnicombe

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35 years of vintage reports 1976-2011



Snow, then the frost damage 4th May



but damage restricted



Karin Fischer with new vines (Ockfener Bockstein),



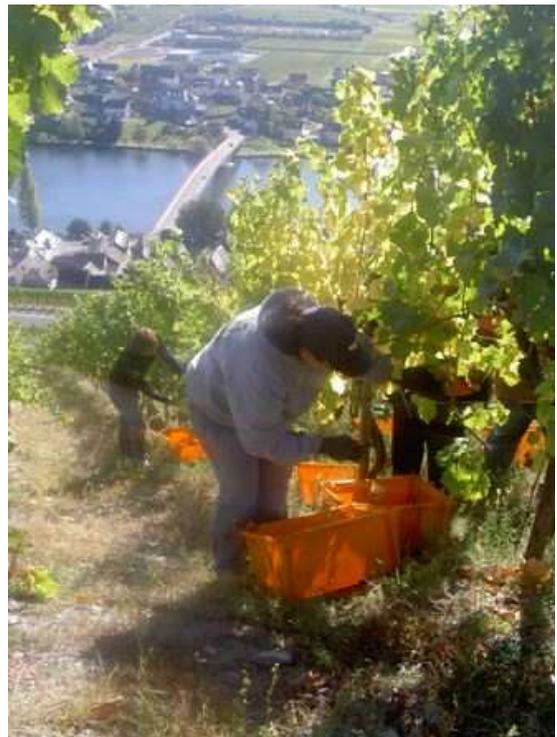
Bernkastel in the sunshine



Ripe Riesling harvested in Piesport



Picking in the Goldtröpfchen (Bollig-Lehnert)



and the upper Nahe from Schlossböckelheim



Our website www.vinnicombe.de for more about German wines, estate profiles and my former harvest reports