

Vintage Report 2005 from Germany

14th January 2006

Markus **Machmer**'s prediction (5th January) came true today! The thermometer dropped to -9C (17F) in their Rosengarten vineyard early this morning before sunrise. They were able to harvest Riesling and Gewürztraminer grapes at 150 Oechsle (borderline "TBA"); the risk was high, the yield very low indeed, but the quality will hopefully live up to the high expectations.

5th January 2006

The weather conditions throughout November-December 2005 were not favourable for Eiswein, far too warm. However, temperatures dropped below freezing point after Christmas, and, depending on the region, it was possible to harvest small quantities of Eiswein grapes Thursday/Friday, 29/30th December 2005. By the next day it was too warm again!

Before 7am on Thursday, Jochen **Seebrich** had harvested his Riesling grapes in the Niersteiner Oelberg vineyard at 135 Oechsle and -7C (20F). On Friday in Bechtolsheim, Horst & Harald **Bretz** harvested Riesling and Spätburgunder in the Homberg, and Silvaner in their Klosterberg site. The temperature had dropped to -9C (18F), but the Oechsle readings averaged 130 degrees, somewhat lower than in previous vintages, and quantities were also much less in both Nierstein and Bechtolsheim. In Bechtheim, Markus **Machmer**'s thermometer dropped to only -4C (25F) and they were unable to harvest their Riesling and Gewürztraminer grapes. They are hoping for colder weather in the coming days (full moon on 14th January), but until then, with the protecting nets already removed, their grapes are an open invitation to the hungry birds! At the Paul **Anheuser** estate in Bad Kreuznach, they were surprised to discover that their Riesling grapes in the Narrenkappe vineyard had completely disappeared in December, not just berries (hungry birds), but whole bunches!

18th November 2005

Will anybody believe us again? Despite an unexciting Summer, as far as the weather was concerned, the 2005 vintage in Germany has recorded exceptional results, and we already see similarities to that great year 1971. The characteristics of the 2005 quality combine positive aspects of both the 2003 and 2004 crops; as ripe and rich in flavours as the 2003, with a crisper structure, in line with the 2004 vintage data.

The vines suffered no Winter damage, and warm weather in April led to an early bud-break 18th April in the Rhine regions. May & June began with cool and wet periods, but Summer temperatures rose to 32C (83F) in the second half of both months. The flowering took place under ideal conditions and was completed by 20th June in the Rhine regions and before the end of June in the Mosel regions. A good omen for the harvest prospects, with a minimum 100 days regarded as necessary to obtain the physiological berry ripeness.

July was fair, with both dry & warm and rainy & cool periods, and temperatures reaching a high of only 34C (86F) in the latter half of the month. Hail hit the Mittelrhein on 28th July, causing devastation to nearly 20% of the total acreage, but not in the Boppard area.

August was generally cooler with more moisture than average, with torrential rainfall on 12th & 14th August.

September improved immensely, and October was a glorious, almost completely dry month, with temperatures far above average, hitting record highs.

There were thus no expectations for a great vintage until early October, and late-ripening grapes, such as the Pinot and Riesling varieties, enjoyed this weather! The sugar content and ripeness of the berries increased at a brisk rate, whilst the ripe acidity levels remained higher than in 2003.

The harvest commenced mid September in the Rhine regions with the early-ripening varieties, continued with Riesling from 10th October onwards, and ended earlier than last year, on 2nd November. Yields were much lower than first anticipated, and varied from 20-35% lower than 2004 at the estates. Vineyard management was very important in 2005, with more Botrytis than 2003 or 2004 due to the damp August, but varying from none (healthy grapes) to 75+% noble mould.

Some vintners were however caught with sour rot, so careful selective picking was essential, and some areas had their crop decimated during the Summer months, e.g. yields in Hochheim went below 30hl/ha, which equates to nearly nothing, and in Dienheim.

First official estimates point to only a 10% lower total crop in Germany which would amount to around 9 million hl.

Our estimates do however reveal a 20-30% lower quantity than in 2004, depending on varietal and region, but especially at the estates which have harvested selectively.

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:

Franz Karl Schmitt in Nierstein started picking Riesling one week earlier than last year, and is delighted about the quality, with Oechsle readings between 90-105 for Riesling (21.7-25.3 Brix) and higher acidity than in 2003, but a disappointing 40% smaller crop than in 2004. His benchmark Spätlese will again be at a minimum 92 Oechsle which corresponds to an official Auslese. **Albrecht Schneider** recorded similar readings for Riesling and 100 Oechsle (24.1 Brix) for the Oelberg Gewürztraminer which might perhaps meet his Auslese standard. Riesling grapes were unfortunately without widespread Botrytis for a BA, but grapes are still unpicked today in the Oelberg vineyard (Eiswein?). **Jochen Seebrich** reports similar results for Riesling, and also hopes for Riesling Eiswein in the Oelberg. Their Gewürztraminer has achieved 96 Oechsle (23.2 Brix) for a top Spätlese, and the Pinot varieties were all harvested at near 100 Oechsle (24.1 Brix) for dry wines. Total crops at both estates were 30% less than in 2004.

Frank Heyden at **Dr. Heyden** in Oppenheim reported seeing a flock of hungry migrating starlings of 2.5 miles in length, which makes that Hitchcock film like a comedy. His Riesling grapes were mostly between 90-105 Oechsle and ranging between 40-75hl/ha yield, which averages at 30% less than 2004. Riesling at 98 Oechsle (23.6 Brix) was selectively harvested in the Herrenberg site with less than 5% Botrytis for his dry Diamant Spätlese. The Pinot Gris crop was 31% lower than 2004, despite increased acreage, whilst the Pinot Noir yields were higher at 99 Oechsle (23.9 Brix). A small quantity of borderline TBA at 150 Oechsle (36.2 Brix) which will be released as Riesling BA, was also berry-selected. **Manfred & Rainer Binz** in Nackenheim harvested Riesling at 90-100 Oechsle (21.7-24.1 Brix), but their main site only yielded 47.5 hl/ha. Their Pinot Noir yield was higher, and destined for a great red wine at 104 Oechsle. Dornfelder was picked at 85-95 Oechsle (20.5-22.9 Brix), and Merlot grapes achieved 99 Oechsle (23.9 Brix). Both Chardonnay and Pinot Gris were harvested at 100 Oechsle. Not only did the green harvesting reduce the yields, but also negative harvesting 2 days before the main harvesting; ripe & healthy bunches being essential for their dry red and whites. Scheurebe Auslese was selected at 105 Oechsle (25.3 Brix) and has now completed fermentation with residual sugars of 60g/l. **Markus Machmer** in Bechtheim harvested Gewürztraminer between 95-105 Oechsle, and higher acidity than in 2003, but yields down only 10% from 2004. His Riesling yields were 30% less than 2004, but better results were achieved for the Pinot varieties, with healthy Pinot

Noir at 109-112 Oechsle (26.3-27 Brix). First analysis already reveal good concentration of extracts at 22g/l for normal pickings. Huxelrebe BA was also selected at 140 Oechsle (33.8 Brix).

PFALZ: the **Fitz-Ritter** estate in Bad Dürkheim started harvesting with Sauvignon Blanc on 14 September, and all varietals were ripening 10 day earlier than average years. Gewürztraminer in the Abtsfronhof has again exceeded 100 Oechsle (24.1 Brix), and Chardonnay, Riesling and the Pinots achieved their benchmark qualities. Yields were also much lower than in 2004. Riesling TBA was also berry-selected (the first time since 1999).

RHEINGAU Riesling yields were 30% less than 2004 at the estates, but higher Oechsle readings, and higher acidity than in 2003. **Schloss Schönborn** started harvesting at 89 Oechsle (21.5 Brix), with average readings up to 100 Oechsle, and some selective pickings in the Pfaffenberg of 115-120 Oechsle, as well as a sensational TBA in the Marcobrunn at 248 Oechsle (59.8 Brix). Yields in Hochheim were disastrously low, and also low on the steep Rüdesheim Berg Rottland & Schlossberg slopes.

MOSEL-SAAR-RUWER: The middle Mosel areas of Piesport-Bernkastel-Wehlen have absolutely excelled expectations with normal Riesling pickings around 100 Oechsle (24.1 Brix) at the estates, and higher acidity levels than in 2003, but between 30-40% lower yields than 2004. Gerhard & Stephan Studert (**Studert-Prüm, Wehlen**) started picking earlier than usual because of increasing Botrytis. Their first readings were at 92 Oechsle (22.2 Brix) in the Klosterberg site for dry Classic, and generally between 95-110 Oechsle (22.9-26.5 Brix) in the Sonnenuhr and Graacher Himmelreich sites, with a Sonnenuhr BA as well as TBA at 185 Oechsle (44.6 Brix).

At the **Dr.H.Thanisch** estate (Müller-Burggraef), Chris Lintz, the wine-maker, completed the harvest on 2nd November, three weeks earlier than in 2004. Oechsle readings were between 90-105 (21.7-25.3 Brix), and a normal picking in the Juffer-Sonnenuhr recorded an amazing 114 Oechsle (27.5 Brix) for Auslese quality. Their flagship site, the legendary Berncasteler Doctor, also excelled with the entire range from fine Kabinett up to BA at 142 Oechsle (34.3 Brix) and TBA at a searing 220 Oechsle (53.1 Brix). Some bunches were unpicked in the hope of making Eiswein, but these now had to be picked, seeing that Botrytis was spreading and they would not have "survived" the weeks until the freeze eventually comes. The estate has nevertheless set historical records in 2003 and 2005 with 5 predicate levels in both vintages from the Doctor vineyard. Their Pinot Noir was successfully harvested at about 100 Oechsle, and will not be released until 2007.

Stefan Bollig (**Bollig-Lehnert**) started harvest-ng 11th October due to the increasing Botrytis, and the lowest reading in his Piesporter Goldtröpfchen was 93 Oechsle (22.4 Brix), whilst the main pickings were all around 100 Oechsle, but at 30-40% lower yields than in 2004. 20 pickers berry-selected a BA on 15th October. The grape sugar concentrations in Trittenheim and Dhron were "lower" with normal pickings at 86-90 Oechsle, and acidity levels generally higher than in 2003. Apart from a couple of Fuder, his entire crop meets Auslese quality by law. Depending on quality development in cask and honeyed Botrytis flavours, many Fuder will be released as delicious Kabinett and Spätlese. Value for money again!

Karin Fischer, **Dr Fischer** in Ockfen (Saar) picked her first Riesling at 73 Oechsle on 17th October, but readings soon exceeded 80 Oechsle in her Ockfener Bockstein vineyards, and by 2th November her highly-experienced team of Polish workers had again harvested more Spätlese than in 2001. In comparison, the lowest Oechsle reading in the preceding excellent 2004 vintage was 65. The ripe, golden-coloured grapes were in a very healthy state with little Botrytis, so no Auslese will be declared in 2005, but good stocks of 2003 Auslese, the estate's greatest vintage, are still available and revealing a maturing potential of 25+ years. The main part of the 2005 crop will be ideal to meet the growing demand for off-dry and dry-style, steely Saar wines. Ideal combinations with today's modern cuisine. The normal Dr Fischer wines are traditionally not overloaded with sweetness. Due to the 30% lower yields, Karin will not risk making Eiswein this year. Stocks of her splendid 2003 & 2004 Eiswein are still available. At the **Vereinigte Hospitien**, yields were also 30-40% lower than in 2004. The Piesport sites were harvested at high Oechsle readings, but the Saar vineyards had higher percentages of Botrytis. And thus a fine BA was picked in Serrig and a great TBA in their famous Scharzhofberger site. The previous TBA was in 1989.

FRANKEN: The torrential rainfall in August caused some problems and premature mould in some cases which necessitated selective picking, especially for early-ripening varieties, but the region also profited from the fine weather in September and October, which led to Oechsle readings similar to 2004, and higher acidity than in 2003, but lower yields.

BADEN: The Kaiserstuhl region also suffered & profited, necessitating selective harvesting, but the Pinot varieties were very successful and Arne **Bercher** was able to harvest fully ripened Pinot Noir, Pinot Blanc and Pinot Gris under ideal conditions at and above 100 Oechsle in Bürkheim and Jechtingen.

EISWEIN: Due to the low yields and the weather conditions with widespread Botrytis setting in, the potential Eiswein crop in Germany will be very low this vintage. The estates Seebrich and Schneider in Nierstein are hoping for Riesling Eiswein in their Oelberg vineyard; Markus Machmer in Bechtheim has prepared both Riesling and Gewürztraminer grapes in the Rosengarten site.

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