

VINTAGE REPORT 2006 FROM GERMANY

28th November 2006

The 2006 harvest ended 30th October, earlier than usual, and within record-breaking time. A vintage year to be remembered for its extremes, but finishing with some glorious results, although not what was expected early September, and with plenty of surprises.

The winter months persevered longer than usual, and even surprised us with 25cm of snow on 2nd March. The cold weather held the vines in a rigid grip until 12th March, but not severe enough to inflict any damage, and it was not until 17th April that temperatures started rising above 10C (48F), with the bud-break starting end of April, later than average. May was too cold and too wet, but June was splendid, enabling the flowering to be completed on schedule before the month ended; good prospects for a ripe crop. July excelled all previous records, even hotter and dryer than the great 2003, whereas the vines had sufficient moisture this year. Too much miserable moisture followed in August. The opposite extreme. September improved and hopes were sparked for a great Kabinett vintage, until torrential rainfall fell 18th (could it get any worse?). Hopes were again dampened by too much rainfall 1-3rd October, and harvesting had to take place as fast as possible. Luckily, a period of dry weather then prevailed throughout October. Careful selection and gentle processing, or negative hand-picking before harvesting by machine became essential in many vineyards. The yields thus decreased by up to 50%, but outstanding results were then within reach. Riesling had suffered under these unusual weather conditions, but strangely, Pinot Noir and Gewürztraminer grapes remained perfectly healthy, and were fully ripened! Due to slightly later ripening, Riesling in the Saar valley would have fared better with higher yields than the middle Mosel areas, had it not been for very serious hail damage on 30th September. The vineyards of Ayl, Wiltingen (with the famous Scharzhofberger site) and Oberemmel were hit hardest. Neighbouring villages such as Wawern and Ockfen remained unscathed.

Even those estates notorious for being last to cellar their crop, harvested as quickly as possible. It was a race against time. At many estates, 5 weeks harvesting had to be done in half the time. An enormous task.

As in 1969, a high percentage of Botrytis or noble mould was seen in the Rhine and middle Mosel areas. Market requirements have changed since those days, with today's high demand for dry wines, especially from the Rhine areas, which necessitate fully-ripened healthy grapes.

Vineyards were hardly in a suitable condition for waiting to risk the production of Eiswein, and extremely mild temperatures during October and November have ruined any remaining chances.

The total crop in Germany is much lower than first anticipated, and will not exceed 9 million hectolitres, being similar in size to the small 2005 crop, but with regional differences.

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: Riesling grapes soon excelled 90 Oechsle, and were picked even before Gewürztraminer. **Franz Karl Schmitt** in Nierstein harvested and processed his Pinot Meunier grapes (named Schwarzriesling in Germany) 14-16th October as Weissherbst (rose). Powerful Riesling Kabinett and Spätlese were harvested in the Kranzberg, Oelberg and Hipping sites, but not enough suitable bunches to select Beerenauslese. Albrecht **Schneider** harvested Riesling early in the Paterberg at 90 Oechsle for Kabinett, and between 94-110 Oechsle in the Hipping, Orbel and Oelberg sites, as well as a Riesling Beerenauslese in the Hipping. Both Pinot Noir and Dornfelder were successful, with the lighter Saint Laurent at 82 Oechsle. Gewürztraminer was harvested between 106 and 109 Oechsle for Spätlese. Jochen **Seebrich** was fairly satisfied with the yields, harvesting all qualities between top Kabinett and Auslese, as well as a Riesling Oelberg Beerenauslese at 129 Oechsle. Nearby vineyards in Oppenheim produced similar high Oechsle readings, and fruit which had attained its physiological ripeness. Frank Heyden at **Dr. Heyden** also harvested his Riesling before the Pinot varieties, as also Manfred & Rainer **Binz** in

Nackenheim. Healthy and fully ripened Pinot Noir (Spätburgunder) were harvested at minimum 100 Oechsle, but not high enough to meet Lothar **Schäfer's** benchmark for a Spätburgunder Auslese in Mettenheim. Markus **Machmer** in Bechtheim harvested a fine Gewürztraminer crop at above 95 Oechsle for Spätlese in his Stein vineyard.

PFALZ: the **Fitz-Ritter** estate in Bad Dürkheim harvested Pinot Blanc at 88 Oechsle and Pinot Gris at 91 Oechsle before the October rain came. Gewürztraminer in the Abtsfronhof was picked 12 October at 100 Oechsle. Selective harvesting reduced the yields of Riesling, and the Oechsle readings were already at 93 degrees in the Herrenberg site on 6 October. A Rieslaner Beerenauslese was even harvested at 180 Oechsle (!).

RHEINGAU It was one of the fastest Riesling harvests in the long Rheingau history, with yields diminishing at a drastic rate, but Oechsle readings reaching 100 degrees. With the ½-sized vintages in both 2005 and 2006, one whole Riesling crop is missing in the cellars, as remarked by Baroness Andrea, **Langwerth von Simmern**.

MOSEL-SAAR-RUWER: Although designated as one region, the Saar and Mosel valleys have again produced very different results. Stefan Bollig (**Bollig-Lehnert**) harvested his smallest, but best-ever crop. The main harvest of Riesling between 90-110 Oechsle in Trittenheim, Dhron and Piesport, and special pickings in Piesport with 108 Oechsle, as well as Beerenauslese from 120 to 135 Oechsle. Although highly delighted with these results, the empty casks in the cellar and missing Kabinett qualities pose a problem. First tastings are very promising, especially thanks to the gentle processing from vineyard to cellar. The acidity levels are higher than in 2003. A similar scenario was seen at the other middle Mosel vineyards in Brauneberg, Bernkastel, Graach, Wehlen, Zeltingen and Ürzig. At the **Dr.H.Thanisch** estate (Müller-Burggraef), harvesting was completed before the end of October, with readings starting at 83 Oechsle, but the main harvest was higher with the Juffer-Sonnenuhr in Brauneberg at 113 and the Doctor casks between 110 and 127 Oechsle. As in the Rheingau, one crop is missing after the 2005 & 2006 vintages. Gerhard & Stephan Studert, **Studert-Prüm** in Wehlen, have also cellared one of their

smallest Riesling crops in their Bernkastel, Graach & Wehlen sites, with readings also around the amazing 100 Oechsle benchmark. Karin Fischer, **Dr Fischer** in Ockfen (Saar), did not start picking until 10th October, when many in other regions had already finished, but grapes were in a prime condition, and harvesting continued until 30th October, between 75 and 95 Oechsle, with ideal crisp acidity. Some noble mould did develop mid October, and Auslese was also selected at readings up to 102 Oechsle. Previous Auslese were released at the estate only from the 1999 and 2003 vintages. Unfortunately, the hail damage destroyed a large part of the fine crop in the Scharzhofberger site of the **Vereinigte Hospitien**, but the Piesport vineyards excelled in quality.

NAHE: At the Paul **Anheuser** estate, now under the management of the sons Rudolf and Paul (the 14th generation), Pinot Blanc and Scheurebe were harvested earlier than usual. As in the neighbouring Rhine areas, harvesting of Riesling had to be quick, but the steep slopes of the upper Nahe in Schlossböckelheim have to be hand-picked. Yields were low, but compensated by high quality.

MITTELRHEIN: After the very small 2005 crop, the 2006 Riesling harvest produced higher yields at the **Lorenz** estate, and readings were well above 95 Oechsle.

AHR: A key Pinot Noir (Spätburgunder) area which escaped the September deluge, and thus highly successful with the 2006 crop, with ripeness levels in line with the great 2003 vintage, and 100 Oechsle. Exciting results for winemakers such as Thomas **Nelles** in Heimersheim.

FRANKEN: The regions to the East also escaped the torrential rainfall in September, and the **Juliusspital** was thus able to harvest a fine crop, achieving better yields than other regions, especially with Silvaner, although Riesling also developed Botrytis in October after that rainfall, and had to be harvested fast.

BADEN: Further to the South, with earlier ripening, the 18th September rain, followed by mild temperatures also necessitated one of the shortest harvests at the **Bercher** estate in the Kaiserstuhl area. Selective harvesting resulted in low yields, but also compensated with high quality.

EISWEIN: The prospects for 2006 Eiswein are near to zero, and unusually warm weather throughout November is reducing the potential even further! Most of the estates have not left any grapes hanging.

Winemakers in Germany have had a tough year, but passion & devotion, coupled with their winemaking skills and gentle processing in vineyards and cellars, are resulting in some astonishingly fine results, as already seen with first cask tastings. Riesling with fine fruit and concentrated rich flavours, a good structure with ideal acidity levels; and even richer Spätlese and Auslese qualities with honeyed Botrytis. We can also expect delicious and expressively powerful Gewürztraminer, as well as great reds.

Riesling regards,
Derek Vinnicombe

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30 years of vintage reports 1976-2006



Riesling vine in a winter grip
February 2006



Ripe Riesling (Saar)
21st Oct. 2006



Karin Fischer and her Ockfener Bockstein
12th Oct. 2006



Low cloud clearing on the Mosel
Piesport, 12th Oct. 2006



Frank Heyden and his Pinot Noir
Oppenheim, 15th Oct. 2006



Smoked trout & Pinot Gris
A fine combination