

VINTAGE REPORT 2008 FROM GERMANY

14th November 2008

We benchmarked the 2007 harvest as *perfect*, but must find a slightly less exciting adjective for the 2008 crop, it will however be remembered as the **cool harvest**; the quality and crop quantity comparing with the 2004 vintage, but less Spitzenwein (top predicate wines). First tastings after fermentation are surprising even the winemakers: despite lower Oechsle than 2007, better than anticipated with great structure and fine aromatics.

After a cold start to the year, but without any extremely low temperatures, the vines suffered no winter damage, and warm weather arrived by 19th April. The bud-break was not until 25th April, nearly 3 weeks later than last year, but not too late. Temperatures increased rapidly to 30C (80F) in May, but accompanied by rainfall and hail damage end of May, causing very severe damage in the lower Mosel area of Cochem. The flowering was completed successfully by 10th June in the Rhine areas, and a week later along the Mosel & Saar valleys. Once again, a good omen for a potentially fine crop with a long vegetation period. August was disappointing, but the vines flourished with ample moisture, similar to 2007. Unfortunately, hail also inflicted severe damage in Lieser 3rd August. Sadly, the Dr Thanisch estate lost their crop of Pinot Noir.

September weather improved dramatically, and the harvesting of early varieties began 15th under ideal conditions. It remained dry and cool. The temperatures stayed low except for a few warm days mid October, even reaching freezing point 20th October. Harvesting of Riesling had started 13th October, and was completed by 7th November in the Mosel & Saar valleys.

In general, the grapes were healthy with fine flavours and good aromatics, having reached their physiological ripeness with 120 days from flowering. Careful selection was necessary towards the end of picking, as not only noble mould (Botrytis) had started to spread. Due to the cold weather in October, the vines dressed too early in their golden robes, and photosynthesis in the leaves ceased too soon; the Oechsle readings being 10% lower than last year's high degrees, and with crisper acidity structure. Naturally cold juice from the grapes on the vines to the fermenting vats add a positive aspect to the quality. The yields

were indeed satisfactory, and the total crop will again reach approximately 10.5 million hectolitres.

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 mid September, but the healthy grapes meant no undue rush. **Franz Karl Schmitt** in Nierstein harvested and processed his Pinot Meunier grapes (named Schwarzriesling in Germany) at 83 Oechsle in the Findling as Weissherbst (rosé) for early 2009 release. Fine Riesling Kabinett and Spätlese were harvested in the Kranzberg, Oelberg and Hipping sites with readings averaging 89 Oechsle. No Auslese or higher predicate levels will be released from the 2008 vintage. Albrecht **Schneider** harvested Riesling in the Paterberg for Kabinett, and at 92 Oechsle in the Hipping for Spätlese. Nearby vineyards in Oppenheim produced similar Oechsle readings. Frank Heyden at **Dr. Heyden** harvested his Riesling from 88, and up to 94 Oechsle in his Sackträger vineyard, with 20-30% noble mould in the final pickings. Selected Pinot Gris was harvested at 98 Oechsle, Pinot Noir at 98 Oechsle, and also at 106 Oechsle in the Kreuz. He anticipates his rosé cuvée to be even superior to the 2007, with more Pinot Noir in the final blend. Silvaner has gained in appreciation, especially from older vines with low yields, and the 2008 crop can be regarded as excellent. In Nackenheim, Manfred & Rainer **Binz** harvested Chardonnay 15th October at 90 Oechsle for their Kabinett, and a fine crop of Riesling Kabinett in their Engelsberg vineyard just before rain came 27th October. Both Pinot Noir and Gris were successfully harvested. Volker **Schäfer** harvested his Pinot Noir in Mettenheim as Spätlese at up to 100 Oechsle, but no Auslese will be released. He rates the vintage quality very positive for his pinot varieties, despite missing his own Auslese benchmark. Riesling was not reaching optimum ripeness before 15th October. Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon were picked at 90 Oechsle, and Riesling at 85 Oechsle.

Markus **Machmer** in Bechtheim harvested a fine Gewürztraminer crop for Spätlese in his Stein vineyard, and in Bechtolsheim, Horst & Harald **Bretz** were equally successful, but at somewhat lower Oechsle than last year. Due to the increasing demand for their dry wines, less attention is being devoted to BA and TBA selections, especially as stocks of former vintages are readily available.

PFALZ: the **Fitz-Ritter** estate did not complete their harvest until 4th November, finishing with Rieslaner at 160 Oechsle and some Chardonnay at TBA readings. Due to the special macroclimate in Bad Dürkheim, sugar levels were higher and acidity levels lower than elsewhere along the Rhine and Mosel. Results for their Riesling were in fact better than other Pinot varieties (the opposite to Rheinhessen), as some hail damage had occurred to those vineyards. Riesling was harvested at ideal conditions between 90 to 95 Oechsle, and Gewürztraminer at 96 Oechsle and above in the Abtsfronhof monopole site for Spätlese. The Gewürztraminer yields were however nearly 20% lower than 2007 at 52hl/ha due to strict selective picking, but a larger total acreage is now under cultivation and producing fruit. No grapes have been kept for Eiswein.

RHEINGAU Across the Rhine from Rheinhessen, a similar story repeats itself in the Rheingau with the main harvest of Riesling being picked at 80-90 Oechsle, and Pinot Noir slightly higher for normal pickings, according to Klaus **Molitor** in Hattenheim. The yields were also above average, and acidity levels at a crisp level, higher than 2007.

MOSEL-SAAR-RUWER: Stefan Bollig (**Bollig-Lehnert**) suffered no hail damage this year, and harvested his Riesling from 13th October to 6th November. The first pickings were disappointing, but the quality improved from 17th October onwards with readings between 80 to 94 Oechsle and improved acidity structure with the spreading of noble mould. No Auslese will be released, but he is taking the risk to produce Eiswein in his Altärchen vineyard. In Brauneberg, Alwin Karp (**Karp-Schreiber**) also finished picking 6th November with readings between 78 and 87 Oechsle, and one picking at 95 Oechsle in the Juffer-Sonnenuhr. At the **Dr.H.Thanisch** estate (Müller-Burggraef) in Bernkastel, the Riesling

grapes for their dry Classic and also first pickings of Berncasteler Doctor Kabinett at 84 Oechsle had been harvested by 24th October. Apart from Kabinett and Spätlese, no Auslese will be released from the 2008 vintage. The Pinot Noir had been destroyed by the hail damage in August.

Gerhard & Stephan Studert, **Studert-Prüm** in Wehlen, also completed the harvest by 3rd November, first pickings also being at QbA level until 20th October, after which readings were between 80 and 92 Oechsle for Kabinett and Spätlese in the Sonnenuhr with increasing noble mould.

Karin Fischer, **Dr Fischer** in Ockfen (Saar) started hand-picking Riesling on 13th October with her team, finishing 3rd November in the Bockstein with some Spätlese, a week earlier than in 2004. The grapes remained very healthy, with no widespread Botrytis as in the Mosel valley. Ideal for her dry mineral-driven Saar Riesling, the Steinbock, which was first introduced with the 2007 vintage. Only small quantities of Kabinett and Spätlese will be released, and no Auslese. With too many hungry wild boars roaming the Saar forest hillsides, she is also not risking to produce Eiswein. More grapes have been eaten than lost by hail damage in the Saar valley region over the past years. Severe Winters used to decimate the wild boar, but global warming has unfortunately changed this situation. The old Bockstein myth of the goat stealing the grapes might thus have to be updated. Nearby in Wiltingen, the Scharzhofberger site has produced Kabinett and some Spätlese qualities (**Vereinigte Hospitien**), and did not suffer hail damage as in 2006.

NAHE: At the Paul **Anheuser** estate, Rudolf and Paul cellared a fine crop between 80 and 95 Oechsle, whether Scheurebe in the Mönchberg, or Pinot Blanc and Riesling in their Kreuznacher and Schlossböckelheimer sites for Kabinett and Spätlese. White Blanc de Noir has again been pressed from their Pinot Noir grapes for early release in 2009.

EISWEIN: Only a few grapes are still hanging for Eiswein production at the leading estates seeing that the stems were not capable of holding much longer. Cool weather still prevails today, and Stefan Bollig is one of the winemakers taking the risk, in the hope that an Arctic depression will bring the night temperature down to -9C (17F) before the New Year starts.

Riesling regards,
Derek Vinnicombe

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32 years of vintage reports 1976-2008



Nierstein (Rhine) with the steep "grand cru" Hipping



Bernkastel in the sunshine (6th October 2008)