

1990 Vintage Overview

Great vintages in triplicate are unheard of in Germany's wine growing regions. Never in recorded history have there been three successful vintages in a row; there have been several successful vintage pairs such as 1920, 1921 and 1975, 1976 but never a series of vintages just completed. Subsequent to tasting almost 300 wines in early December, we can already say that the 1990 vintage will be better than 1989 and is the finest vintage we've ever tasted at this early stage.

The vintage began much like it did the past few years. A mild winter, followed by a warm spring started buds to sprout by the third week of April. May had very little rainfall but for June it was above normal.

Flowering was very early and complete by the middle of June in the Mosel region. Photosynthesis almost came to a complete halt because of very hot and dry weather through July and early August. This severe slowdown in the plant metabolism resulted in "natural" bunch-thinning and the eventually incredibly low yields. It also preserved the acidity in the fruit that remained on the vine. Good rains in the second half of August allowed ripening to begin by 8/20/90. The harvest started mid - October in the Mosel region and earlier in other regions. Late in the harvest brought botrytis, to allow the production of Ausleses, BA's, and some very rare TBA's. The first week in December was quite cold and on the 7th of December a number of Eisweins were produced. In general this was a harvest that brought very concentrated and ripe musts with unusually high acids into the cellars. We cannot remember a vintage with such positive characteristics: very concentrated, very ripe with very high acids! A review by grower follows:

Estates by Region

Mosel-Saar-Ruwer

MÖNCHHOF

Possibly the finest wines I've tasted at the Mönchhof. Yields much below '89. 100% predicate wines with only 10% Kabinett, 30% Spätlese and 60% Auslese. Acid levels from 9.5 gm/l to almost 11 gm/l in the finished wine. Average must weight over 90 Öchsle.

CHRISTOFFEL BERRES

Yield about 60 hl/ha with average must weight about 90 Öchsle. Very high acid levels, especially for this microclimate, and very concentrated wines. Erdener Prälat Spätlese was harvested at 98 Öchsle.

J.J. PRÜM

Yield about 45 hl/ha, average must weight over 90 Öchsle, must acids 10 to 13 gm/l. Quality is concentrated in a great number of Ausleses. There is also BA, TBA (very small quantities that may yet be declassified) and an Eiswein from the Bernkasteler Johannisbrunnchen at 140 Öchsle. Dr. Prüm already prefers the '90 vintage over both 1988 and 1989.

DR. F. WEINS-PRÜM

Yield 49 hl/ha, must weights to 104 Öchsle (GKA's), must acids 11 gm/l very high extract. Finished wines still have 9.5 gm/l to 10 gm/l acidity. Bert Selbach also prefers the 1990 vintage over 1988 and 1989.

Wwe. DR. H. THANISCH

Yield was less than 60 hl/ha, must weight from 80 Öchsle to BA quality. Must acids from 11 gm/l to 14 gm/l 45% of the wines produced are Ausleses. The finished wines have between 10 and 11 gm/l acidity. Here also 1990 is judged to be the best of the three vintages.

FRITZ HAAG

Yield below 40 hl/ha, nothing was harvested below Auslese level and with very high must acids. The wines have great depth, and great concentration. Wilhelm Haag feels that in over 25 years as cellar master this may be the best vintage the estate has produced.

MILZ LAURENTIUSHOF

Less than 60 hl/ha was harvested, with an average must weight just shy of 90 Öchsle, must acids to 15 gm/l. Very high extracted, concentrated wines. Goldcappel Ausleses in the Leiterchen and Felsenkopf. An Eiswein was harvested in the first week in December in the Apotheke vineyard. Here 1989 may be the best vintage of the three with 1990 very close behind.

KARTHÄUSERHOF

Yield less than 50 hl/ha, average must weight over 85 Öchsle with a Goldcappel Auslese at 104 Öchsle. Again the most concentrated wines of the three vintages. All the wines have very pronounced cassis fruit, very high acids in the finished wines.

PIEDMONT

Only 47 hl/ha were harvested. This is only half of the 1989 harvest. Must weights to 105 Öchsle. Finished wines have in excess of 9.0 gm/l acidity with very high proportion of tartaric. Here again 1990 is the best of the three vintages.

von HÖVEL

42 hl/ha harvested was less than half of the 1988 vintage. Must weights to TBA (Hütte). Finished acids over 10 gm/l with high proportion of tartaric. Very concentrated wines. Again 1990 best of the three vintages. New - a Balduin von Hövel Estate Riesling !

EGON MÜLLER -SCHARZHOF / LE GALLAIS

Only 38 hl/ha were harvested with great quality that surpasses the 1989s. Herr Müller likens the wines to the great 1971s, but more concentrated. Must weights to TBA including an Eiswein harvested on December 7th. As everywhere the wines have very high acidity with good proportion of tartaric.

DR. FISCHER

Great surprise - the best young wines I've ever tasted at this estate. Yield less than 60 hl/ha, with must weight to BA. Eiswein produced December 7. Over 40% Ausleses. There was significant botrytis and Herr Fischer likens the vintage to 1976. Lots of apricots and cassis in the young wines.

ZILLIKEN

The 1990 vintage yield was less than 60 hl/ha, which is somewhat below average. Quality is far above average, again the best of the three vintages. Most of the harvest is Spätlese, Auslese including a long Goldcappel Auslese and an Eiswein (harvested 12/7/90). Very concentrated wines, with fine botrytis and great acids to balance. Hanno Zilliken compares his 1990s to his 1971 wines.

SCHLOSS SAARSTEIN

Yield was 53 hl/ha, with must weights to 95 Öchsle without selection and up to 140 Öchsle with selection. Must acids to 14 gm/l. Wines have very high extract that buffer the very high acids in the finished wines. The 1990 BA surpasses the quality of the 1989 BA. Again 1990 is the best of the three vintages.

BERT SIMON

45 hl/ha was harvested with musts that had very high acidity (to 16 gm/l) and very high extract. Average must weight close to 90 Öchsle with a TBA harvested at 180 Öchsle. Again a fabulous vintage for Bert Simon which may be as good as his great 1989 vintage. A Mueller-Thurgau BA in the offering is actually a declassified TBA!

Rheingau

VON SIMMERN

Yield was only 40 hl/ha with average must weight of over 90 Öchsle. There were BAs in the Nussbrunnen and Marcobrunn and TBA's in the Sonnenberg and Nussbrunnen (186 Oechsle). Must acids from 11 to 14 gm/l with the finished wines to 10 gm/l. An interesting study was made at von Simmern to compare costs of machine harvesting to hand selection. The former costs 20 Pfennig/liter and the latter 67 Pf./l. More concentrated wines than 1989.

GEORG BREUER

Yield was 37% below the 1989s or less than 40 hl/ha. Must acids were very high. Ausleses over 105 Öchsle with a BA at 145 Öchsle and Eiswein at 135 Öchsle. Bernard Breuer feels that his 1990s will approach the legendary 1953s.

Pfalz

PFEFFINGEN

Yield was below 60 hl/ha. Riesling quality from Kabinett to Auslese, Scheurebe from Spätlese to TBA. Both the TBA and BA will be declassified to BA and GKA respectively. Very good acids in the Riesling to 10 gm/l in the finished wine. Better than 1989 and almost as good as the 1988s.

Franken

WIRSCHING

One of the top vintages in the last 20 years. The vintage is especially good for Silvaner (must weight to TBA, Riesling (must weights to Auslese), Scheurebe (must weights to TBA) and a very concentrated Traminer Auslese harvested with a yield of 17 hl/ha. Yield below normal and must weights and acids significantly above normal.

Nahe

CRUSIUS

Yield of 40 hl/ha and must weights t 102 Öchsle (Niederhaeuser Felsensteyer). Very ripe with must acids from 10 to 15 gm/l. Extract appears very high because the high acids in the new wines do not appear as high as the actual number suggest. Hans and Peter Crusius compare the vintage to 1975, but more concentrated.

SCHLOSSGUT DIEL

We were the first to taste the great 1990 vintage at Diel. Armin Diel cannot remember a vintage of this quality. Yield below 40 hl/ha with 10 gm/l acidity in the finished Riesling and over 9.5 gm/l acidity in the Pinot Blanc and Pinot Gris. In the Dorsheimer Goldloch the yield for Riesling was below 25 hl/ha. The Goldloch produced a great GKA at 110 Öchsle.

Rheinhessen

GUNDERLOCH

Here again the Hasselbachs feel that 1990 vintage surpasses 1989 and is the best vintage ever at the estate. Yield was 42 hl/ha with must acids to 14 gm/l. Must weights to 158 Öchsle (100 lit.) which was added to a great Rothenberg GKA.

Baden

SALWEY

A very small harvest that yielded only half the 1989 vintage. The young wines have great depth suggesting high extracts balanced by very good acids. The white wines will surpass the superb 1989s and the reds (Pinot Noir) will be comparable to the great 1959s.

DR. HEGER

A small harvest, but great vintage that will surpass both 1988 and 1989. Superb white wines, especially

Pinot Blanc and Pinot Gris, with a sensational Pinot Gris en barrique (Auslese quality). The 1990 Pinot Noir will probably surpass the great 1989. Tasted over 30 wines.

Württemberg

GRAF ADELMANN

Average yield was 67 hl/ha, however, that includes Müller-Thurgau etc. For Riesling, Clevener and Lemberger it was significantly lower. Graf Michael believes 1990 to be the finest vintage since 1971. Riesling Auslese and Spätlese were harvested at 110 and 98 Öchsle respectively and the Clevener at 104 and Lemberger at 98 Öchsle. The young wines showed very clean, clear fruit and very good acid structure.