

## 1996 Vintage Overview

For our estates 1996 turned into another very good vintage, something which seemed unlikely in early September. Even at the start of October conditions looked grim, especially in the Mosel region. However by late October the vintage had made up enough ground, and '96 began to look promising.

In the Mosel valley most growers did not begin their harvest until late October, and they finished the harvest in late November. Riesling fruit was very healthy and fleshy. Acid and extract levels were high and there was little or no botrytis. "Noble" sweet wines were difficult to achieve, very few estates succeeded in making BA and TBA.

As in the past few years the Middle Mosel did very well. On the Saar the vintage consists primarily of Estate Rieslings (QbA), Kabinetts and some Spätlese. In the Rheingau Robert Weil and Franz again made fantastic wines. The Gunderloch estate in Rheinhessen just gets better every year and '96 is no exception. Both Robert Weil and Gunderloch produced great dessert wines. 1996 is also very good vintage in the Pfalz, Württemberg, Baden (Kaiserstuhl) and Ahr. Franconia had an average vintage.

In the coming year Cellars will be also be adding more estates to its portfolio. New additions in '97 will include two Pfalz estates, von Buhl and the Basserman-Jordan estate. In the Rheinhessen region we will be adding the Balbach estate (recently purchased by Gunderloch).

"With the 92 vintage Weingut Robert Weil has risen to the top of the Rheingau elite. Capital invested by Suntory and the skill and dedication of Wilhelm Weil will make this a difficult combination to beat."

When we wrote those words in 1992 it was because Mr. Weil demonstrated a unique commitment to excellence. Wilhelm didn't just want to make Riesling, he wanted to make world class wine. We are proud to say that Wilhelm Weil has indeed risen to the top, and is the 1997 Gault-Millau Wine Maker of the Year. This prestigious honor is shared by only the greatest names in German wine. Past recipients include Wilhelm Haag of Weingut Fritz Haag, and Dr. Manfred Prüm of Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm.

These are the great Rheingau Rieslings that you have so often read about, but have so rarely encountered. They are expensive, and customers are always asking why a Weil Spätlese costs more than a Spätlese from Joh. Jos. Prüm. This price difference is actually quite easy to explain, Weil HEAVILY declassifies. A Weil Kiedricher Gräfenberg Spätlese is often a bigger wine than most GKA's from the Mosel. Suddenly what was an overpriced Spätlese becomes a great value.

We congratulate Mr. Wilhelm Weil, and wish him many years of continued success. Cellars International is proud to represent Weingut Robert Weil exclusively in the United States.

Table 1: Middle Mosel weather data for the months April to October.

| Month            | 1996 / 1995 |                   |            | Long Term Average |                   |            |
|------------------|-------------|-------------------|------------|-------------------|-------------------|------------|
|                  | Temp in °C  | Hours of Sunshine | Rain in MM | Temp in °C        | Hours of Sunshine | Rain in MM |
| <b>April</b>     | 10.9 / 10.5 | 217 / 128         | 7 / 65     | 9.3               | 149               | 51         |
| <b>May</b>       | 12.6 / 14.6 | 126 / 212         | 73 / 42    | 13.8              | 199               | 61         |
| <b>June</b>      | 17.8 / 16.4 | 211 / 164         | 30 / 22    | 16.8              | 202               | 68         |
| <b>July</b>      | 18.0 / 22.4 | 225 / 254         | 45 / 63    | 18.5              | 211               | 72         |
| <b>August</b>    | 18.9 / 19.9 | 191 / 226         | 60 / 72    | 17.7              | 183               | 76         |
| <b>September</b> | 13.2 / 14.1 | 125 / 84          | 26 / 74    | 14.7              | 135               | 55         |
| <b>October</b>   | 9.0 / 13.5  | 79 / 94           | 64 / 23    | 10.0              | 87                | 57         |
| <b>Average</b>   | 14.3 / 15.9 | 168 / 167         | 44 / 52    | 14.4              | 167               | 63         |

Since this incredible streak of good vintages began back in 1988, 1996 has been by far the most difficult. January, February, March, May, and September all had below normal temperatures. Between April and September there was a rainfall deficit of 37%, with similar shortfalls prevailing between October '95 and April '96. Budding occurred quite early because of a very mild April. April had 46% more sunshine than the long-term average for the month. Progress of the vines was hampered by flowering which occurred a week beyond normal. Continued sparse rainfall and extreme temperature fluctuations resulted in significant coulure dashing hopes for a plentiful harvest. Matters in the Middle Mosel got worse when several hail storms did serious damage, especially in the small town of Zeltingen.

By the end of summer the vintage had fallen three weeks behind the 1993 vintage. With the late start of harvest and the vines not carrying a lot of fruit, the sugar levels rose rapidly. By the end of harvest must weights in the Middle Mosel compared favorably with those of the '95 vintage. Acid, extract, and pH levels are significantly higher in '96 than in recent years. Some Eiswein was harvested around Christmas time.

Our barrel tastings in January showed the high acidity levels in these wines. They are nicely integrated with ripe, forward fruit. The wines will require high sugar levels to balance and therefore will have very low actual alcohol levels.

Table 2 : Phenological data for Riesling on the Middle Mosel

| <b>Vintage (Riesling)</b> | <b>1975</b> | <b>1990</b> | <b>1994</b> | <b>1996</b> | <b>Long Term Average</b> |
|---------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|--------------------------|
| <b>Bud Break</b>          | 5/2         | 4/24        | 4/27        | 4 / 29      | 5/2                      |
| <b>Flowering</b>          | 6/26        | 6/15        | 6/21        | 7 / 1       | 6/25                     |
| <b>Start of Ripening</b>  | 8/29        | 8/20        | 8/22        | 9 / 3       | 9/7                      |
| <b>Start of Harvest</b>   | 10/15       | 10/15       | 10/10       | 10 / 21     | 10/21                    |

## **Estates by Region**

### **Mosel-Saar-Ruwer**

#### **Schloss Lieser**

Another very good vintage, and a low yield of 30 hl/ha. Must weights ranged from 78 to 153 Öchsle. Acids are very, very high in the finished wines, they range from 10 to 11 gm/l. There was very little botrytis but Thomas Haag did manage to select a Niederberg Helden BA. Clean, pure, vibrant, balanced Rieslings. Very similar to '95.

#### **Mönchhof**

Even better than the '94 and '95 vintages. Very meager harvest, only 40 hl/ha. Must weights ranged from 77 to 130 Öchsle. Acidity in the finished wines ranged from 9.4 to 10.3 gm/l. Extracts and pH values were high. The wines at this early stage show great purity with a lively pear and exotic fruit character. An Ürziger Würzgarten LGKA (130 Öchsle) is the jewel of Robert's work in '96.

#### **Joh. Jos. Prüm**

Dr. Manfred Prüm calls the vintage "surprisingly good." Yield at Joh. Jos. Prüm is below 50 hl/ha, with must weights starting at 65 Öchsle, and reaching a peak of 170 Öchsle. The 170 Öchsle mark was hit by an Eiswein harvested in the Bernkasteler Johannisbrunnchen. Acids again are high, along with sugar free extracts. Tasted Graacher and Wehlener wines through Gold Cap (GKA). More apparent botrytis here, especially in the Wehlener Auslese, than at other Mosel estates. Vintage compares favorably to 1993, but without the top end dessert wines.

### **Dr. F. Weins-Prüm**

Very good vintage. Harvest yielded 56 hl/ha. Must weights ranged from 74 to 106 Öchsle. Very high acids that are nicely meshed with the fruit (10 - 11 gm/l in the finished wines). The Wehlener Sonnenuhr Spätlese is to die for, a classic Wehlener Sonnenuhr, elegant and fine with good length. Vintage compares favorably to '85, but is riper and rounder.

### **Dr. Loosen**

Erni Loosen feels that '96 is better than the great '94 vintage (better top end). Very low yield of 46 hl/ha. In January the wines still had 10 - 12 gm/l acid. Must weights ranged from 70 to 180 Öchsle, with an Erdener Treppchen BA and an Ürziger Wuürzgarten TBA rounding out the vintage. The pH and extract values are very high. The wines show very good concentration, while remaining very fine and elegant.

### **Wwe. Dr. H. Thanisch**

Very good vintage. Probably the best wines since the new cellar master took over in 1993. Harvested 58 hl/ha, with must weights from 70 to 140 Öchsle. Acids in the must ranged from 11 - 13 gm/l, and 9.5 - 11 gm/l in the finished wines. Extracts and pH levels are high. Top wines, as always, are from the Bernkasteler Doctor vineyard. The other Bernkasteler properties also produced concentrated, bright wines. Vintage is similar to '93.

### **Fritz Haag**

Another very good vintage. Wilhelm Haag thinks '96 is a cross between '85 and '88. Harvest yielded 60 hl/ha, with must weights ranging from 70 - 130 Öchsle. Acid in the finished wines ranged from 9.5 - 11 gm/l. The top wine seems to be a LGKA from the Brauneberger Juffer Sonnenuhr. Prädikat wines start at 80 Öchsle, while grapes that were harvested below 80 Öchsle will be bottled as Estate Riesling (QbA). Look for the usual bright, pure, fine wines from the Brauneberg vineyards.

### **Reinhold Haart**

Very good vintage, with a meager harvest of only 40 hl/ha. Must weights ranged from 77 to 100 Öchsle. There was a very small amount of Piesporter Goldtröpfchen BA picked at 160 Öchsle. Breakdown for the vintage was 40% Kabinett, 40% Spätlese, 20 % Auslese. Acids, extracts, and pH values are all high. Wines taste of ripe peaches, very concentrated, bright and balanced.

### **Milz-Laurentiushof**

Very good vintage with a yield of 54 hl/ha. Yield in the Trittenheimer Leiterchen and Felsenkopf was only 30 hl/ha. Must weights ranged from 70 - 100+ Öchsle. Top wine for the vintage was a Trittenheimer Felsenkopf BA harvested at 137 Öchsle. Extracts for Kabinetts are up to 33 gm/l and 40 gm/l for Auslese. High pH values with good, ripe acids. Markus compares the wines to his '90's.

### **Karthäuserhof**

Another above average year, with yields at 55 hl/ha. Must weights ranged from 70 to 95 Öchsle. There was also an Eiswein which was pressed at 170 Öchsle. The Estate Riesling, Kabinett and Spätlese are all impressive examples of Ruwer Riesling. Both the acids and extracts are high. The wines have explosive fruit with the typical nervy and minerally Karthäuserhof character. The vintage compares to '92, but with higher acidity.

### **Piedmont**

Wines of very good quality. Must weights reached 100 Öchsle, with a meager yield of 31.5 hl/ha. High acids, pH values, and sugar free extracts. The vegetation period was very dry, flowering was normal and ripening was very late. Wines are similar to 1979 vintage, did not taste.

### **von Hövel**

Average vintage. Yield was 55 hl/ha, and must weights reached 80+ Öchsle. High acids and high extracts. The 1996 "Balduin von Hövel" Estate Riesling (QbA) has good weight and depth with delicious apples and pear fruit, it's a "sappy" Riesling. Very compact wines, much like the '95 vintage. Almost all of the Spätlese was declassified to the Kabinett Prädikat.

### **Dr. Fischer**

Average vintage with 80% QbA and 20% Kabinett. Yield was 35 hl/ha, with must weights up to 76 Öchsle. Both the QbA and Kabinett are ripe with bright apple fruit. The vintage compares favorably with '85 and '86.

### **Zilliken**

Above average quality, with an overall yield of 55 hl/ha. Must weights ranged from 77 - 85 Öchsle. 300 liters of Saarburger Rausch Auslese was harvested at 100+ Öchsle. Hanno also brought in a very small quantity of Eiswein. Acids in the finished wines are very high. Good '96 Estate Riesling (QbA) with several good wines from the great Saarburger Rausch vineyard. Classic Saar wines, with apples and pears and a strong mineral and slate nuance. Racy and bright Rieslings, which compare to '85 and '91.

### **Schloss Saarstein**

Above average quality with an overall yield of only 40 hl/ha. Must weights ranged from 70 - 93 Öchsle, with a tediously selected Auslese (to be sold at auction) harvested at 106 Öchsle. Because of the high acids the wines need significant residual sugar to balance. The high extracts nicely buffer the high acids. Christian Ebert is quite happy with the results of the '96 vintage.

### **Bert Simon**

A good to very good vintage. The harvest yield was 50 hl/ha. Must weights ranged from 75 - 105 Öchsle. The highest must weight was found in the Serriger Würtzberg, an Auslese to be offered at the '97 auction in Trier. Extracts and pH value are above normal. The Würtzberg wines have a honeyed, apple, pear fruit and are very fine. The vintage compares favorably to '94 and '95

## **Rheingau**

### **Robert Weil**

A very good vintage, with several great wines. 53 hl/ha yield at harvest, with must weights from 70 - 199 Öchsle. Must acids from 10 - 18 gm/l, and 8.5 - 17 gm/l in the finished wines. Very high extracts take care of the extremely high acids. The Kiedricher Gräfenberg Auslese has almost 11 gm/l of acid, and is nicely balanced with a big mouthful of apricots and peaches. The Kiedricher Graäfenberg TBA has 15 gm/l acid, and the Eiswein 17 gm/l. The vintage has similarities to both '94 and '95

### **Franz Künstler / Aschrott**

Gunter Künstler made the '96 wines at both Weingut Franz Künstler, and from his recently acquired Aschrott estate. Riesling was harvested at 67 hl/ha, and Pinot Noir was harvested at 30 hl/ha. Must weights ranged from 80 - 181 Öchsle. The wines taste very representative of their respective vineyards. The Kirchenstück produced more filigreed, finer wines, while the Hölle and Domdechaney produced more powerful and chewy wines. Acids in the musts ranged from 11 - 14.5 gm/l and in the finished wines 9 - 11.5 gm/l. Very high extracts. Eiswein was harvested in the Hölle, Kirchenstück, and Reichstal. A BA was harvested in the Hölle. The Pinot Noir from the Reichstal shows great promise. Compares the vintage to '93, but with higher acidity.

## **Pfalz**

### **Pfeffingen**

Very good vintage with only small amounts of botrytis. Yield was 68 hl/ha with must weights for Riesling from 86 - 105 Öchsle and for Scheurebe from 86 - 145 Öchsle. Must acids were 10 - 14 gm/l and 9 - 10 gm/l in the finished wines. Estate Riesling (QbA) was picked at 86 Öchsle, (not chaptalized). The '96 wines are very fine, pure and balanced. We were quite impressed with the work of the new cellar master. The vintage reminds us of '95, only finer and purer.

### **Bassermann-Jordan**

With the new wine maker Ulrich Mell, we are expecting great things from this estate. He was in charge of the '96 vintage, and feels the vintage is very good. Yield was 47 hl/ha and the must weights ranged from 70 - 200 Öchsle. Acids in the finished wines ranged from 9 - 11 gm/l, all nicely buffered by extracts 3 - 4 gm/l higher than normal. A significant amount of Eiswein was produced, ranging from 154 - 200 Öchsle.

### **Reichesrat von Buhl**

Good to very good vintage, and yet another new winemaker, Frank John. Mr. John's talents should help this estate realize its fantastic potential, especially with great vineyard holdings in Forst, Deidesheim, and Ruppertsberg. The vintage yield was 59 hl/ha with must weights from 78 - 140 Öchsle. Acids in the finished wines range from 8 - 13 gm/l with lots of tartaric. There is a superb Auslese in the Ungehener vineyard and Scheurebe BA from the Ruppertsberger Reiterspfad. The sheer amount of high end dessert wines harvested at this estate in '96 is staggering - 1,200 liters of Eiswein ranging from 160-170 Öchsle, and 300 liters of TBA at 200+ Öchsle. The vintage is comparable to 1988.

### **Franken**

#### **Wirsching**

An average vintage with very low yields. The Silvaner grapes brought 42 hl/ha, Riesling 46 hl/ha, Scheurebe 41 hl/ha and Müller-Thurgau 50 hl/ha. Must weights ranged from about 75 to 100+ Öchsle. Acids are very, very high along with higher than normal extracts. The Silvaner (10+ gm/l acidity) did not taste sharp because the acids were so nicely integrated. The vintage is similar to '95.

### **Nahe**

#### **Schlossgut Diel**

Very good to excellent vintage. Only 49 hl/ha yield. Must weights from 70 - 220 Öchsle. There is also a Goldloch BA (TBA quality). Acid structure is solid, with good ripeness and 9 - 9.5 gm/l acid in the finished wines. Very good Kabinett and Spätlese wines with possibly the best Eiswein ever made at the estate. Racy clear Rieslings that impact the palate. Similar to the '94 and '95 vintages.

#### **Emrich-Schönleber**

Good to very good vintage. Yield of 67 hl/ha. Must weights ranged from 70 - 95 Öchsle. Must acids from 10.5 - 13.5 gm/l and 8.5 - 9.5 gm/l in the finished wines. Extracts are also very high. There is 400 liters of Eiswein with a must weight of over 160 Öchsle. The wines are fine, a satin like feel on the palate, showing peaches and citrus notes. Werner feels '96 is a very high quality vintage, but can not compare it to any recent vintages.

## **Rheinhessen**

### **Gunderloch**

Very good to outstanding vintage. Miserly yield of 35 hl/ha. Must weights run from 84 to 254 Öchsle. Must acids range from 11 - 14 gm/l and 9 - 10 gm/l in the bottle. Good acidity with high extracts. The wines are very clean and pure. The TBA shows incredible concentration and purity. The '96 vintage rivals the great '94's which put Gunderloch on the map. The harvest produced Estate Riesling through TBA, providing us with some of the best wines to ever come from the small town of Nackenheim.

### **Balbach**

We were particularly impressed by the Balbach estate. Recently purchased by Gunderloch, it clearly shows what a difference a talented winemaker like Fritz Hasselbach can make. Previous vintages were at best average. The '96 vintage marks a new beginning for Balbach. The wines offer similar clarity and terroir as the Gunderloch wines, but without the same concentration. With the tremendous popularity of the Gunderloch wines, we cannot wait for people to try the "new and improved" Balbach wines.

## **Baden**

### **Salwey**

Good to very good vintage for both red and white varieties. For whites yield was 47 hl/ha and 35 hl/ha for the better reds. Must weights for whites ranged from 80 - 108 Öchsle, and up to 97 Öchsle for reds. Acids and extracts are very high. There is Riesling Eiswein in the Kirchberg, which was harvested at 175 Öchsle. Wolf compares the vintage to '93, and thinks it better than the '90 vintage.

### **Dr. Heger / Weinhaus Heger**

For Dr. Heger both reds and whites are outstanding. For the Weinhaus Heger estate '96 is also an excellent vintage. At Dr. Heger yield for whites was 50 hl/ha and for reds 30 hl/ha. White wine must weights ranged from 84 - 210 Öchsle, while reds peaked at 102 Öchsle. Both acids and extracts are very high. This may be the finest vintage ever for Joachim Heger. There were three BA's made, one from Scheurebe, one from Pinot Blanc, and one from Riesling. TBA's were also made, one from Scheurebe, and one from Muskateller. The Pinot varieties are concentrated, powerful wines balanced by ripe acids. The Weinhaus Heger wines are also very bright, sappy, spicy wines with melons and nutty nuances with a razor balance.



## **Württemberg**

### **Graf Adelmann**

For whites an average vintage, but a very good vintage for reds. Yield for whites was 55 hl/ha and for reds 35 hl/ha. Must weights for whites ranged from 72 to 107 Öchsle. Reds were slightly lower, 82 - 92 Öchsle. Acids are average with extracts quite high. The reds are all superb, especially the spicy and compact Lemberger with its dark berry fruit. The estate is also celebrating its 700 year (yes 700) anniversary in 1997. We plan on bringing in the better reds in very limited quantities. Reds are similar to '89, while the whites are similar to the '87 vintages.

### **Dautel**

This is the new "Top Gun" estate in the Württemberg region of Germany. The '96 vintage here was very good for both reds and whites. Yield for whites was 55 hl/ha, and 40 hl/ha for reds. Must weights ranged up to 90+ Öchsle with very high acids and extracts. There is also a small lot of Eiswein which was harvested at 190+ Öchsle. Lemberger, Schwarzriesling, and Pinot Noir show a wonderful dark berry fruit, with good concentration. The vintage here is almost up to par with the excellent '93's

## **Ahr**

### **Meyer-Näkel**

Very good vintage. Yield for Pinot Noir was 25 hl/ha, while the other varietals yielded about 32 hl/ha. Pinot reached a peak must weight of 105 Öchsle, while most Riesling peaked at 75 Öchsle. Acid and extracts are quite high. Pinots have a spicy deep cherry fruit, with wonderful concentration. There was one Riesling Eiswein which was harvested in very small quantities at 180 Öchsle. The vintage compares to '94.