

1998 Vintage Overview

Every year we anxiously follow the progress of the harvest, staying in close touch with our estates to get a feel for the vintage. Much to our despair, '98 brought with it the most miserable weather in memory. Understandably, when the time finally came to taste the '98 vintage, we traveled to Germany with a certain amount of trepidation.

Fortunately, we discovered early on that another very good vintage was at hand. At the Estate Riesling (QbA), Kabinett, Spätlese levels we found striking similarities to the '97 vintage. However, '98 has better acid structure, balanced by higher extracts. The acids are quite ripe and the wines, again, show lush, forward fruit.

In the Rheingau, Robert Weil and Franz Künstler made exceptional wines in '98. At Weil there was little Spätlese fruit in the Gräfenberg, and the small amount harvested will be not be offered to the trade. A recurrent theme for '98 is that Eiswein was produced almost everywhere including at Weil and Künstler. Weil again produced all wines through TBA, Künstler produced three spectacular Ausleses, including BA and Eiswein, but no TBA.

In Franken, the wines at Wirsching are very good, with some superb dry Spätlese s and again the ubiquitous Eiswein. Our Baden producers had an excellent vintage; Salwey produced a Pinot Gris TBA. Dr. Heger probably has the finest noble sweet wine collection in Germany, including Riesling, Pinot Noir Vin Gris, Muskateller and Scheurebe TBAs. No Eiswein was produced. The harvest was completed before the cold snap in late November.

In the Pfalz, must weights ranged mostly from Estate Riesling through BA with some isolated TBAs and many Eisweins. Pfeffingen offers Estate Riesling through TBA, including a Scheurebe Eiswein. Bassermann-Jordan showed us several impressive wines, including some fantastic Ausleses. At von Buhl, a remarkable 85% of the wines harvested were Spätlese through Auslese quality. Our Nahe producers also made very good wines, topping off the vintage with several Eisweins. A short visit to Meyer-Näkel in the Ahr region, showed that his red wines are very fine again.

Next we moved to the Mosel-Saar-Ruwer estates. With the exception of Mönchhof, Schloss Lieser and Fritz Haag, all estates produced several Eisweins. The Middle Mosel was much more successful in '98 than the Saar and Ruwer. We tasted several Middle Mosel wines where the must weights reached 130 Öchsle (the Eisweins of course much higher), whereas on the Saar (Bert Simon being the exception) must weights were no higher than the mid 80s (i.e. mostly a QbA, Kabinett vintage). However, on the Saar and Ruwer the vintage was saved by perhaps the finest collection of Eisweins in 1998. The Eisweins at von Hövel and Zilliken are phenomenal.

Our '98 vintage tour ended in Rheinhessen with Weingut Gunderloch. We feel this is one of the finest collections in '98. All wines tasted, from the Estate Riesling to the TBA, are knock outs.

In summary, 1998 is another very good year and it marks the 11th consecutive very good - great vintage for our estates. Even with the horrible weather conditions, Mother Nature somehow provided us a wonderful collection of superb wines. 1998 will delight customers with very good Estate Rieslings (QbAs), excellent Kabinetts and Spätlese s, along with a smattering of very special Mosel, Pfalz, Rheinhessen and Rheingau Ausleses. The collection of high quality Eisweins, is simply icing on the cake.

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

Month	1998 / 1997			Long Term Average		
	Temp in °C	Hours of Sunshine	Rain in MM	Temp in °C	Hours of Sunshine	Rain in MM
April	10.2 / 8.9	103 / 190	85 / 21	9.3	149	51
May	16.3 / 14.6	213 / 221	37 / 61	13.8	199	51
June	18.7 / 17.1	195 / 167	39 / 127	16.8	202	68
July	17.8 / 18.6	147 / 206	57 / 44	18.5	211	72
August	19.1 / 21.7	212 / 239	37 / 31	17.7	183	76
September	15.3 / 15.5	103 / 187	84 / 46	14.7	135	55
October	10.6 / 10.1	45 / 116	137 / 68	10.0	87	57
Average	15.4 / 15.2	1016 / 1326	67.8 / 56.9	14.4	1166	61.4

Table 2 - Middle Haart weather data for the months April to October:

Month	1998 / 1997			Long Term Average		
	Temp in °C	Hours of Sunshine	Rain in MM	Temp in °C	Hours of Sunshine	Rain in MM
April	9.8 / 9.4	156 / 241	101 / 25	10.1	188	48
May	16.1 / 15.0	262 / 272	23 / 36	14.3	228	50
June	18.5 / 17.3	228 / 191	44 / 90	17.5	211	71
July	18.4 / 18.8	170 / 243	35 / 83	19.2	230	59
August	19.4 / 21.5	276 / 274	17 / 13	18.2	217	59
September	14.5 / 15.8	137 / 276	99 / 7	15.2	179	51
October	10.4 / 10.6	83 / 155	139 / 45	10.0	117	46
Average	15.3 / 15.5	1312 / 1652	65.4 / 42.7	14.9	1370	54.9

The winter of 1997 / 1998 was much milder than the previous year. Bud break was a few days ahead of the long-term average, and this year there was no frost. Flowering was ideal and occurred early with no losses to coulure. At this time vegetation was a good week ahead of normal and hopes for a harvest of very good quality and quantity started to rise. July was again warm but lacked sunshine. August followed with record heat, which resulted in significant heat damage to the fruit. Wilhelm Haag of Fritz Haag and other growers, especially on the Middle Mosel, lost 10-15% of their crops due to this heat. By the end of August some vineyards showed signs of dry damage, but even in the beginning of September most vineyards were in great condition and full of promise. Then came the rains!

Rainy Septembers are nothing new, but in recent vintages a golden October has always saved the day. Things began to look very bleak when the rains continued well into November. If that wasn't enough, Mother Nature added high winds to the mix, which knocked a lot of fruit off the vines. Thomas Haag of Schloss Lieser mentioned that he had never picked so much fruit off the ground. Overall, the winds did not cause significant damage, in fact they were a blessing in disguise, helping to keep the fruit dry. So with all these seemingly insurmountable obstacles during harvest how can the wines be so good?

There are several factors that help explain the very good quality of the '98 vintage. First, the extremely long hang-time between flowering and harvest. It helped the fruit develop great ripeness (similar to '97), superb aromatics, and a broad patina of flavors found in so many of the wines. Second, even with all the rain, throughout the harvest, the 1998 vintage had the highest average temperature on record for the Middle-Mosel. Last, the rains during the harvest brought higher extracts which along with very ripe wines, also brought wines with great depth of flavor.

The Middle-Mosel, and the regions outside the Mosel, seemed to fare best in '98. On the Saar and Ruwer the cold snap between November 20 and November 23 brought spectacular Eisweins and put a better spin on a vintage that otherwise brought only QbA and Kabinett . In other regions the Riesling wines ranged from very good to outstanding.

Table 3 - Phenological data for Riesling in the Middle Mosel:

Vintage (Riesling)	1996	1997	1998	Long Term Average
Bud Break	4/29	5/1	4/30	5/2
Flowering	7/1	6/16	6/14	6/25
Start of Ripening	9/3	9/1	8/29	9/7
Start of Harvest	10/21	10/20	10/19	10/21

Table 4 - Phenological data for Riesling in the Middle Haart:

Vintage (Riesling)	1996	1997	1998	Long Term Average
Bud Break	4/26	4/15	4/25	4/26
Flowering	6/21	6/11	6/9	6/19
Start of Ripening	8/28	8/25	8/16	8/23
Start of Harvest	10/11	10/13	10/12	10/16

Our early assessment suggests that the streak of 11 good vintages is in tact. Some estates, especially Gunderloch, had a great vintage; and there are superb Scheurebes at Pfeffingen in the Pfalz. In the Rheingau, we tasted some great Ausleses at Franz Künstler and Robert Weil. Last, let's not forget the many great Eisweins and the great collection of noble sweet wines at Dr. Heger.

Estates by Region

Mosel-Saar-Ruwer

Schloss Lieser

Yield was 45 hl / ha. Must weights range from 78 to 110 Öchsle, with wines from QbA to Auslese ** (GKA). Acidity was 8.5 gm/l for most wines, with little variance. Thomas Haag likens the '98s to the wines from '97. The early pickings brought bright, pure Rieslings with fruit of white peaches and pears. In the later, riper pickings, there are hints of pear, grapefruit with tropical nuances.

Mönchhof

Yield was 50 hl / ha. Must weights range from 80 to 90+ Öchsle. Available wines will primarily be Estate Riesling, Kabinett and Spätlese from the Örziger Würzgarten and Erdener Prälat vineyards. Robert Eymael comments that the fruit character of the '98 vintage is quite similar to that of the '97s. 1998 was unable to produce the high-end wines that came with the 1997 vintage. However, the acidity is higher than in '97. A small amount of Erdener Prälat Auslese, picked at 100+ Öchsle will also be available. This Erdener Prälat Auslese is from the best portion of the Prälat vineyard previously owned by the Christoffel-Berres estate, but now under long term lease to the Mönchhof.

Wegeler

Yield was 60 hl/ha yield. Must weights range from 70 to 135 Öchsle. The estate tried to make a BA, but Mother Nature wouldn't cooperate. Acidity ranging from 8 to 9 gm/l for Estate Riesling to Auslese. Norbert Breit, cellar master at Wegeler, feels the vintage doesn't really compare to any past vintage. In his opinion it is totally unique. Extracts here are normal. Most of the harvest at Wegeler falls into the Estate Riesling (QbA), Kabinett, and Spätlese categories. A small amount of Bernkasteler Doctor Auslese and a Bernkasteler Lay Eiswein round out the vintage.

Joh. Jos. Prüm

Another good year at Joh. Jos. Prüm. Yield was 50 hl/ha. Must weights starting at 78 Öchsle. Top wine is a BA that will likely be declassified to a LGKA and offered at the Trier auction. Eiswein at both BA and TBA must weight was harvested over a three day long cold snap. The Ausleses reveal tropical fruit with hints of cassis, and a wonderful creamy texture on the palate. Dr. Manfred Prüm is quite pleased with the harvest. He thinks it is still too early to say, but at this stage he feels the vintage is similar to '97.

Dr. F. Weins-Prüm

60 hl / ha yield. Must weights ranged from 72 to 148 Öchsle. 230 liters of Eiswein, picked at 148 Öchsle, was harvested in the Bernkasteler Johannisbrunnchen. Bert Selbach feels the vintage is a combination of '92 and '97. The extracts are higher than in

'97 lending the wines more depth. The Wehlener Sonnenuhr and Graacher Domprobst vineyards produced excellent wines. Focused fruit of ripe pears, grapefruit with good concentration and length.

Fritz Haag

Yield was 68 hl /ha. Must weights ranging from 75 to 110 Öchsle, resulting in wines ranging from Estate Riesling to Auslese. A small quantity of LGKA may be offered at the Trier auction (120 –130 Öchsle). Per Wilhelm Haag, the level and type of acidity is similar to that in the '97 vintage. Extracts are higher than '97, and acidity is more or less the same. In our opinion, the wines taste very much like the '97 wines. They show white peaches and ripe grapefruit notes in the Estate Riesling and Kabinett wines. From Spätlese up there are nuances of tropical fruit reminding of mango and papayas.

Reinhold Haart

70 hl/ha yield. Must weights range from 70 to 140 Öchsle resulting in wines from Estate Riesling (QbA) to Auslese. Top must weight is, again, an Eiswein. Theo Haart likes his '98s better than his '97s. Acidity in the finished wines varied from 8.5 to 9.5 gm/l. Theo believes the vintage to be similar to 1983. We tasted vibrant wines with classic Piesporter Goldtröpfchen peaches fruit, and also ripe grapefruit, along with notes of violets in some wines.

Milz - Laurentiushof

Here yield averaged 45 hl/ha in the Trittenheimer Felsenkopf, Leiterchen, and Apotheke. Starting with the '98 vintage the Estate wanted to further reduce yields by tying only a single bow on each vine. Must weights ranging from 70 to 180 Öchsle (QbA to Eiswein). '98 offers mostly Estate Riesling, Kabinett and Spätlese wines, and then nothing until the smallest Eiswein at 140 Öchsle. There are three Eisweins, two in the Trittenheimer Apotheke vineyard at 140 and 175 Öchsle, the third in the Trittenheimer Felsenkopf at 180 Öchsle. Acidity is higher than in '97, ranging from 8.5 to 12 gm/l. Sugar-free extracts are extremely high, approximately 28gm/l for the Kabinett wines and 30 to 31gm/l Spätlese . No wines were available to taste.

Karthäuserhof

Yield was 70 hl/ha. Must weights for Estate Riesling to Spätlese level wines range from 67 to 84 Öchsle. Top wines are two Eisweins, one with 170 Öchsle, and a second with 160 Öchsle. Extracts are normal. Acidity ranging from 8 to 9.5 gm/l. Christoph Tyrell compares '98 to '96, but with lower acid levels. Tartaric acidity is, again, quite high - in excess of 75%. Wines are typically vibrant, strong minerals with grapefruit, pears and red currents on the palate.

von Hövel

Yield was 55 hl/ha. Must weights ranging from 65 to 77 Öchsle for the Estate Riesling and Kabinett wines. The von Hövel "Balduin von Hövel" Estate Riesling was chaptalized up to 85 Öchsle. 150 liters of Eiswein at 205 Öchsle is surely one of the highest must weights of the vintage. There are other Eisweins made in the 180 Öchsle range. Acidity

in the wines range from 9 to 10 gm/l, with higher than normal levels of tartaric. The wines taste of ripe pears and grapefruits, quite similar to the '97s. However, unlike 1997 it was not possible to produce the great Spätlese s and Ausleses.

Dr. Fischer

Yield here was 49 hl/ha. Hennes spoke of great weather early on. However, once the rain started, it just wouldn't stop. Öchsle levels dropped 10 points. Turning a QbA to Auslese vintage into a QbA to Kabinett vintage in a matter of weeks. There were several Eisweins with must weights up to 160 Öchsle. QbA musts were 68 to 71 Öchsle. Kabinetts averaged approximately 75 Öchsle. There is also a Spätlese that will not be offered to the trade. Hennes thinks the type of acidity in '98 is similar to '97, giving the wines their fruit forward character. The wines have more acidity and did not achieve the alcohol levels of the '97s. Steely wines with bright grapefruit and apple / pear flavors.

Zilliken

Yield was 50 hl/ha. Must weights range from 72 to 80 Öchsle. Along with everywhere else on the Saar, the wet October and November pretty much limited the vintage to QbA and Kabinett wines. From November 20th to 23rd a significant quantity of Eiswein was made with must weights reaching 175 Öchsle. For the Trier auction 600 liters of Spätlese and Auslese were produced using Eiswein harvesting techniques. The wines have unusually high extracts and very ripe acids. The wines tasted show apples and pears with nuances of slate.

Bert Simon

Yield was 80 hl/ha. Must weights ranging from 70 to 107 Öchsle. At least half of the harvest was Spätlese quality, much of which will be declassified to Kabinett. A single Auslese picked at 107 Öchsle was blended with equal amounts of "Eiswein Auslese" with the same must weight. Two Eisweins were picked at 135 and 150 Öchsle respectively. The 150 Öchsle Eiswein will probably be offered at the Trier auction. Bert Simon feels the '98 vintage is a mix of the '97 and '92 vintage. Acids in the finished wines range from 7.5 to 8.5 gm/l. The young wines remind of pears, grapefruit with bright, open flavors.

Rheingau

Robert Weil

Yield 51 hl/ha. Must weights ranging 75 to 190 Öchsle from QbA to TBA. Weil feels the wines are very similar in ripeness to the '97s, but the extract levels in '98 are up to 30% higher, which is especially noticeable in the QbA and Kabinett wines. The highest must weight of 190 Öchsle will be offered in several years as a Goldcapsule TBA at the Rheingau auction. Good quantities of Eiswein at 148 Öchsle were produced between November 20th and November 23rd. There will be no Kiedricher Gräfenberg Spätlese. Young wines are impressive. Good depth, bright flavors of pears, peaches and at the higher must weights going to cassis and tropical fruit. The dry wines – gooseberries.

Franz Künstler

65 hl/ha. Must weights range from 89 to 145 Öchsle. Three very special Ausleses in the Hölle and Domdechaneu, including a Hoölle GKA, were produced. The Domdechaneu and Hölle GKA both at 130 Öchsle. The Ausleses except for the Hölle (80%) are 100% botrytised. A BA, also Hölle, was picked at 145 Öchsle. Two Eisweins were picked, one in the Hölle at 142 Öchsle, and one in the Hochheimer Reichstal at 150 Öchsle. At this early stage Gunter thinks that the '98 vintage is a cross between '96 and '97. With the ripe fruit of '97, and acidity of '96. Extracts and acids are high. Young wines are ripe with melons and pears and in the later pickings tropical fruit along with ripe grapefruits. Both Stielweg Spätlese Dry and Auslese Dry were produced.

Pfalz

Pfeffingen

Vintage yielded 63 hl/ha. Must weights ranging from 85 Öchsle to 185 Öchsle (Scheurebe Eiswein). Doris and her son, Jan, both were amazed at the quality of the vintage considering the difficult weather conditions during the harvest. They feel the wines are much like '97, with extracts about 10% higher. Quality ranging from Estate Riesling to TBA (Ortega at 162 Öchsle). There is a superb Scheurebe BA picked at 140 Öchsle with 10.5 gm/l acid. Acid levels from 9 to 10.5 gm/l for the "normal" wines. Young wines taste of ripe white peaches and grapefruit. Clean bright wines with good depth of flavor.

Bassermann-Jordan

55 hl/ha yield. Must weights range from 83 Öchsle to 162 Öchsle. Several superb Ausleses in the Forster Ungeheuer, Forster Jesuitengarten and in the Deidesheimer Hohenmorgen were made. An Eiswein at 162 Öchsle also comes from the Deidesheimer Hohenmorgen. No TBA was produced but there was a BA with 155 Öchsle from the Ruppertsberger Reiterpfad. Must acids ranged from 8.5 to 10.5 gm/l at picking and lost about one gm/l in the finished wines. Uli Mell, the cellar master at Bassermann-Jordan, thinks the vintage is a cross between '96 and '97. The wines have the higher acids of '96, and the ripe fruit character of the '97s. Young wines taste of white peaches, grapefruit and in later pickings lots of apricots.

von Buhl

Yield was only 45hl/ha. Must weights range from 80 to 177 Öchsle. Because of the small harvest the Estate Riesling was made from grapes purchased from growers under contract to von Buhl (it is a super Riesling). Over 85% of the grapes picked were of Spätlese and Auslese quality. The Forster Ungeheuer vineyard brought a BA with 150 Öchsle, an Eiswein with 150 Öchsle and a TBA at 177 Öchsle! Because of the dry spell in July and August extracts were lower; high pH values softened the higher than normal

acids, which ranged from 8 to 10 gm/l in the musts and 1 gm/l less in the finished wine. Some superb dry styled wines were made especially in the Kieselberg, Ungeheuer and Reiterpfad. The noble sweet wines are superb and the Eiswein is great. There is also a super Gewürztraminer Spätlese from the Ruppertsberger Reiterpfad. Lots of white peaches and ripe grapefruit in these young Rieslings.

Franken

Wirsching

The '98 vintage yielded about 60hl/ha. Must weights ranging from 75 Öchsle (for Müller-Thurgau) to 165 Öchsle (for Iphöfer Julius Echter Berg Riesling Eiswein). Here, again, the extracts were approximately 20 – 30% higher than average, which explains the amazing terroir and depth of flavor in the wines. Superb Silvaner, Scheurebe and Rieslings were made with a great Scheurebe Spätlese at 105 Öchsle. The wines have great purity and reflect their vineyard heritage. The Iphöfer Kalb Traminer is, again, amazing.

Nahe

Schlossgut Diel

Harvested yield 59 hl/ha with must weights ranging from 72 to 174 Öchsle. In the primary vineyards the yields were 48 hl/ha on the Burgberg (very healthy, thick skinned, ripe grapes with very little juice, Eiswein at 174 Öchsle), 59 hl/ha in the Pitttermannchen (very ripe with some botrytis for an Auslese at 105 Öchsle) and 53 hl/ha in the Goldloch (very ripe, small, healthy berries mostly 87 to 91 Öchsle, plus an Eiswein at 136 Öchsle). Additional Eiswein was picked in the Dorsheimer Klosterpfad in early December and late January between 110 and 120 Öchsle. Tasted extensively. The wines are dense, concentrated with ripe pears, white peaches, and grapefruit on the palate. Armin feels they're up to the great '93s at Schlossgut Diel.

Emrich-Schönleber

Yield was 73 hl / ha. Must weights range 75 to 95 Öchsle. Three Eisweins were made all in the Monzinger Halenberg. Must weights for Eiswein ranged from 130 to 146 Öchsle. Acidity in the finished wines ranging from 8.5 and 9.5 gm/l. Werner Schönleber feels the '98s have the fruit character of the '97s and the acid levels of the '96s. Extracts are higher than in '97. Young wines show great purity and brightness. A great Monzinger Halenberg Spätlese – ripe, fine, honeyed peaches with hints of tropical fruit, minerals, compact, great length.

Rheinhessen

Gunderloch

Yield was 46 hl/ha (about 15% below normal). Must acids ranging from 8.5 to 10 gm/l up through Auslese, and Fritz Hasselbach said those wines will lose approximately 1 gm/l during fermentation. Acids are ripe, and as in '97 contain a large percentage of tartaric. The lowest must weight harvested was 85 Öchsle, which will be chaptalized for the Estate Riesling Dry. Kabinetts were picked between 88 and 92 Öchsle. Spätlese s were picked at 104 Öchsle, and Ausleses at 112 Öchsle. There is a GKA at 144 Öchsle, a BA at 168 Öchsle, and a TBA at 210 Öchsle – all from the Nackenheimer Rothenberg. An Eiswein (172 Öchsle) was made in the Niersteiner Oelberg. This is a truly wonderful collection of Rieslings from the Rheinfrost. Bright fruit flavors, apricots, tropical fruit, and the always present Rothenberg mineral nuance.

Baden

Salwey

Harvest yielded about 70 hl/ha, (less for Pinot Noir and somewhat more for white varieties). Must weights ranging from 80 to 163 Öchsle. The highest must weight is a Ruländer BA / TBA from the Oberrotweiler Eichberg. Extracts, as well as acid levels are higher than in '97. Some superb Pinot Gris and Pinot Blanc from the Eichberg (old vines) and Kirchberg respectively. The Pinot Noirs are improving every year. We will be offering an Estate Pinot Gris and an Estate Vin Gris made from Pinot Noir. A very good vintage which Wolf Salwey compares to his '93s.

Dr. Heger & Weinhaus Heger

Harvest yielded about 60 hl/ha. Five passes through the vineyards resulted in four TBAs. A Scheurebe at 253 Öchsle, Muskateller at 245 Öchsle, a Pinot Noir Vin Gris at 210 Öchsle and a Riesling TBA at 176 Öchsle. There were also four BAs and over 20 different Ausleses. The quantity of Riesling Ausleses is amazing, over 10,000 liters with must weights over 105 Öchsle. Both, the Weinhaus Heger Pinot Blanc and Pinot Gris are of great quality. The Dr. Heger Ihringer Winklerberg Pinot Gris and Pinot Blanc Spätlese s and Ausleses are rich, dense, complex wines. Yield for the Pinot Noir crop was below normal, but one of great quality. The old Husele vineyard (50-year-old vines) produced a very complex Pinot Noir, rich with cherries and chocolate on the palate.

Württemberg

Graf Adelman

Harvest yielded 60 hl/ha for white varieties and 75 hl/ha for red varieties. Must weights for Silvaner reached only 75 Öchsle, Riesling and Pinot Gris up to 95 Öchsle. For Lemberger, must weights topped out at 85 Öchsle, and Pinot Noir at 101 Öchsle. Acids are ripe and ranged from 10 gm/l to 11 gm/l in the must and 8.5 to 9 gm/l in the finished wine. pH values and extracts were above normal. Graf Michael feels the '98s are not quite up to the '97 wines. The whites taste of pears, melons and gooseberries. The Lemberger is dense, peppery, spicy with dark cherries and cassis.

Ahr

Meyer-Näkel

Due to frost damage Meyer-Näkel wines were extremely limited in '97, and no wines were available in the American market. In 1998, Meyer-Näkel does have wine but it is extremely limited. Yield was about 46 hl/ha with must weights ranging from 83 Öchsle to 110 Öchsle. We tasted the '98 Dornfelder and it is better than the 1996, fresh picked, ripe black cherries. The '98 is bigger more and complex than the '96. The Dornfelder harvest averaged 80 Öchsle. Extracts were higher than average. Acidity was normal. Werner Näkel feels the vintage compares to '93.