

1999 Vintage Overview

Chalk up another terrific Riesling vintage. Is it possibly Mother Nature's way of getting everyone to drink Riesling? In addition, the Pinot Noir harvest in Franken and the Ahr was possibly the best ever. The 1999 harvest as opposed to 1998 went smoothly. Other than a late September, early October rain the weather was almost ideal. A number of Eisweins picked just before Christmas topped off the vintage.

Tasting the new wines started our late January trip with a very positive impression. 1999, on preliminary information, was keeping the string of now 12 very good to excellent vintages alive. There was some concern about acid levels but our fears were unjustified. Certainly the acids in the musts were slightly below average, but they were also very stable with little or no loss during fermentation. The character of the vintage is often compared to 1959. It is certainly one of the best vintages of the 90s decade.

Our first stop was in Baden to visit our two properties in the Kaiserstuhl, Salwey and Dr. Heger. Both produced superb whites and some of the best reds in the '90s. For their top wines Salwey produced Riesling Eiswein and Dr. Heger several TBAs from Scheurebe and Muskateller. At Graf Adelman in Württemberg Pinot Noir and Lemberger were the stars along with very good Rieslings.

In Franken, at Wirsching there were superb Silvaners, Rieslings and Scheurebes including a Scheurebe Eiswein of TBA must weight. Rudolf Fürst, in the village of Burgstadt, is a new addition to our portfolio. We've been watching the work of Paul Fürst for over five years and the 1999 collection convinced us to represent the estate exclusively in the U.S. The whites were polished, superbly balanced and the reds are possibly the best in the history of the estate. There are also three Eisweins from Riesling and Pinot Noir.

In the Pfalz, Pffeffingen was spared the hailstorm of June 2nd. Not so at von Buhl, where in Deidesheim and especially in Ruppertsberg the hail caused significant damage. Pffeffingen again made superb wines from Riesling and especially Scheurebe where both the BA and Eiswein were strong TBA's. Von Buhl produced over 75% Spätlese and Auslese with must weights ranging up to 225 Öchsle including BA, TBA and Eiswein.

The Middle Mosel again had a very good vintage, probably after '94 and '90 the best of the '90s with most estates making wines up to BA quality. On the Ruwer and Saar it is surely one of the great vintages of this century surpassing even the fabulous '97s in that sub-region.

In the Ahr at Meyer-Näkel, '99 is judged their best red wine vintage ever. We were successful in securing substantial quantities of these great reds. While in the Nahe, Emrich-Schönleber had the finest vintage since 1994; the line up includes stunning Spätleses, Ausleses, BAs and Eisweins from the great Monzinger Halenberg vineyard.

In the Rheingau, all things also point to a superb vintage. At Robert Weil the whole patina of selection was once again possible, from Estate Riesling to TBA. The Robert Weil Estate wines will be available up through Spätlese , and from the magnificent Kiedricher Gräfenberg vineyard, Spätlese , Auslese, BA, and Eiswein are reserved. Weil also made a Kiedricher Gräfenberg Gold Cap TBA at 243 Öchsle (will be auctioned at a future Rheingau V.D.P. auction).

Also making great Rheingau wines in 1999 was J. Wegeler Erben, who selected wines through Auslese. The Ausleses showed good ripeness and plenty of botrytis. Gunter Künstler feels that '99 is his best vintage of the '90s decade, with great Ausleses and fabulous BAs in the Hochheimer Hölle vineyard.

In Rheinhessen, Weingut Gunderloch came up with another super vintage. All levels of quality were harvested, including Eiswein and a Nackenheimer Rothenberg TBA at 248 Öchsle.

1999 is the 12th consecutive very good vintage in Germany. With superb ripeness many Estate Rieslings will not be chaptalized. This is especially true for Estate Rieslings and Kabinetts found in the Saar and Ruwer, many of which are declassified Ausleses. For the collector there will be many great Ausleses, Eisweins, BAs and TBAs to choose from.

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

| Month | 1999 / 1998 Long Term Average | | | | | |
|------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------|-------------|------------|-------------------|------------|
| | Temp in °C | Hours of Sunshine | Rain in MM | Temp in °C | Hours of Sunshine | Rain in MM |
| April | 10.9 / 10.2 | 153 / 103 | 60 / 85 | 9.3 | 149 | 51 |
| May | 16.2 / 16.3 | 192 / 213 | 16 / 37 | 13.8 | 199 | 61 |
| June | 17.2 / 18.7 | 195 / 195 | 75 / 39 | 16.8 | 202 | 68 |
| July | 20.9 / 17.8 | 247 / 147 | 69 / 57 | 18.5 | 211 | 72 |
| August | 19.0 / 19.1 | 192 / 212 | 47 / 37 | 17.7 | 183 | 76 |
| September | 18.5 / 15.3 | 173 / 103 | 50 / 84 | 14.7 | 135 | 55 |
| October | 10.7 / 10.6 | 115 / 45 | 59 / 137 | 10.0 | 87 | 57 |
| Average | 16.2 / 15.4 | 1267 / 1016 | 59.7 / 67.8 | 14.4 | 1166 | 61.4 |

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

| Month | 1999 / 1998 Long Term Average | | | | | |
|------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------|-------------|------------|-------------------|------------|
| | Temp in °C | Hours of Sunshine | Rain in MM | Temp in °C | Hours of Sunshine | Rain in MM |
| April | 10.8 / 9.8 | 187 / 156 | 35 / 101 | 10.1 | 173 | 48 |
| May | 15.9 / 16.1 | 204 / 262 | 58 / 23 | 14.3 | 208 | 50 |
| June | 17.2 / 18.5 | 228 / 228 | 55 / 44 | 17.5 | 213 | 71 |
| July | 20.8 / 18.4 | 265 / 170 | 68 / 35 | 19.2 | 234 | 59 |
| August | 19.0 / 19.4 | 236 / 276 | 38 / 17 | 18.2 | 221 | 59 |
| September | 18.3 / 14.5 | 201 / 137 | 41 / 99 | 15.2 | 168 | 51 |
| October | 10.7 / 10.4 | 150 / 83 | 23 / 139 | 10.0 | 109 | 46 |
| Average | 16.1 / 15.3 | 1471 / 1312 | 45.5 / 65.4 | 14.9 | 1326 | 54.9 |

The mild winter of 1997 / 1998 continued in 1998 / 1999 with temperatures over 1.5 C above the long-term average and 1.0 C higher than 1998. Total hours of sunshine was almost 250 hours more than in 1998. Also significant was that average temperature in September was almost 4 C above the long term average with precipitation in the critical months of September and October less than half of 1998. Weather conditions, were almost ideal with only the hailstorm in the Pfalz causing a reduced harvest at von Buhl.

Estates by Region

Mosel-Saar-Ruwer

Mönchhof

Yield was 65 hl/ha with must weights ranging from 72 up to 150 Öchsle. Very ride acids from 7.5 to 9.0 gm/l. The fruit character in the wines reminds Robert Eymael of his 1971s. They have more stuffing and power than either the '97s or '98s. The Estate Riesling is super, the Mönchhof "Astor" Kabinett is the best yet and there are excellent Spätlese s from both the Ürziger Würzgarten and Erdener Treppchen vineyards. Ausleses are plentiful in both Erdener vineyards. The Erdener Prälat produced Auslese, GKA and BA, the latter the top wine for the vintage. The wines show a broad patina of bright fruit from tropical to red berries including ripe pears and bananas.

Wegeler

Yield for the vintage was just shy of the 80 hl/ha or about 30% higher than normal. Must weights from 70 to 166 Öchsle and acids in the finished wines from 7.0 gm/l to 9.5 gm/l are very stable. Both the Bernkasteler Doctor and the Wehlener Sonnenuhr produced superb wines. All wines show bright, ripe fruit flavors, the Wehlener ripe pears with cassis, the Doctor wines focused with their wonderful minerality will need time to

unfold. Two noble sweet wines, a Wehlener Sonnenuhr BA and a Bernkasteler Doctor TBA, represent the top end of the vintage. For 1999 J. Wegeler will be adding a line of Estate wines (with a new label), which will include Estate Riesling, Estate Kabinett, and Estate Spätlese .

Joh. Jos. Prüm

Dr. Prüm likes his '99s, in fact he feels it is one of top vintages of the '90s decade. Average must weights are quite high, and even the 1999 "Dr. M. Prüm" Estate Riesling will be Kabinett or Spätlese must weight. There are fine Ausleses in the Wehlener Sonnenuhr, Graacher Himmelreich and especially in the Zeltinger Sonnenuhr. But it is the Wehlener Sonnenuhr that produced some of the best wines in the '90s including GKA, several BAs and a TBA. These are compact, elegant, wines with classic cassis and raspberry notes. There was also an Eiswein from the Bernkasteler Johannisbrunnchen. Yield was 65 hl/ha with acids from 7 gm/l to near 9 gm/l.

Dr. F. Weins-Prüm

Must weights from 79 to 107 Öchsle. Must acids ranged from 9.5 to 10.3 gm/l and 7.5 to 8.5 gm/l in the finished wines. The harvest yielded 30% QbA (Estate Riesling), 30% Kabinett, 35% Spätlese , and 5% Auslese. Yield was 80 hl/ha. The Estate Riesling was picked at Spätlese must weight and chaptalized to 95 Öchsle. The Erdener Prälat Auslese was declassified and cuveed with the Erdener Prälat Spätlese to make a "pumped up" Erdener Prälat Spätlese . The wines are compact with great power. They show lots of apple and pear fruit and the riper wines show raspberries, red fruit and cassis. As always the wines are true to terroir.

Schloss Lieser

Must weights ranged from 75 to 150 Öchsle with a yield of 65 hl/ha. Acids in the finished wines between 7.8 to 8.5 gm/l and sugar free extract from 23 to 30 gm/l. Even though September was warm and mild, there was little botrytis formation. Harvest started very early on October 10th, because acids were depleting quite rapidly. The fruit was healthy, ripe and the acids had a very high tartaric component. The wines are very filigree with very fine fruit. Lots of raspberries, cassis with hints of tropical fruit, very terroir driven. Similar to Thomas Haag's '97s.

Fritz Haag

Everything with the '99 vintage was quite early, starting with bud break, followed by a successful flowering, a very hot dry summer, it was looking like the vintage of the century until the rain came in mid September. After an almost 50% pre-harvest an additional three weeks brought Rieslings of full ripeness. The wines show lots of honeysuckle, red fruit, pears and apples, even tropical fruit with a rich creamy palate, laced with slate and minerals. Wilhelm Haag compares the vintage to 1964, 1966, and 1969.

Reinhold Haart

Much like other estates along the middle Mosel, the Riesling fruit at harvest was very ripe, healthy and dense. Before start of ripening Theo Haart removed lots of fruit to increase concentration for the final harvest with a final yield of only 48 hl/ha in the Piesporter sites and the Wintricher Ohligsberg. Must weights from Kabinett to BA. Fruit in the finished wines reminds of classic peach, red berries, cassis, anise, and tropical fruit. The wines are silky and creamy on the palate with good mineral drive and ripe acids. Did not taste the Wintricher wines.

Milz - Laurentiushof

The harvest yielded 65 hl/ha and must weights ranged from 75 to 160 Öchsle. Acids in the must were 8.2 to 10 gm/l and in the wine 7.8 to 9.5 gm/l showing that the acids are very stable with almost no loss during fermentation. Sugar free extracts tracked the long term average. Highlights of the vintage are Eisweins from the Trittenheimer Apotheke (150 Öchsle) and the Trittenheimer Felsenkopf (160 Öchsle). The wines again showed bright, ripe red berry fruit along with pears, peaches, and slate driven finishes. Tasted only very few wines.

Karthäuserhof

The lowest must weight was 81 Öchsle. One third of the harvest was picked from 83 to 85 Öchsle, one-third from 85 to 90 Öchsle, and one-third from 92 to 102 Öchsle. Acids are very stable and ranged from 7.5 to 9.5 gm/l in the finished wine and there was virtually no loss during fermentation. A number of top Ausleses were picked in the 120 to 132 Öchsle range, a BA was picked at 140 Öchsle, and an Eiswein harvest on December 22 topped off the vintage. Our January tasting suggests this to be one of the top collections for the vintage. Very bright, filigreed and ripe wines. Flavor patinas of peaches, raspberries, cassis, are just some of the highlights in the rainbow of the fruit patina these wines display. Very alive, vibrant wines. Possibly the best vintage under Christoph Tyrell's reign.

von Hövel

The lowest must weight was 96 Öchsle. The average must weight was the highest of the century. From Estate Riesling through Kabinett and Spätlese, all the fruit was Auslese quality. An Oberemmeler Hütte Beerenauslese tops the vintage. Yield was 52 hl/ha and the acids are very stable which seems to be a common note throughout the 1999 vintage. Quite a lot of Auslese was picked in both the Scharzhofberger and Oberemmeler Hütte vineyards. Very chewy, dense wines, with ripe pears, tropical fruit, pineapple, orange rind, cassis, rich, thick, but also elegant and rounded wine. Eberhard von Kunow compares his '99s to the great '59s.

Dr. Fischer

Yield was only 39 hl/ha. The wines break down as follows, 9% Kabinett, 75% Spätlese, and 16% Auslese. Harvest started under ideal conditions on October 11 and was complete on November 4th. Lots of botrytis required hand selection with 25 pickers.

Very fruity acids between 8.5 and 9 gm/l in the finished wines. Karin Fischer feels it is the best vintage since 1976. The wines again showed red berry fruit with hints of cassis. Even Spätlese s are showing some botrytis. Possibly the best vintage since we started visiting Dr. Fischer in 1984.

Zilliken

Again very high average must weights with lots of Auslesen over 100 Öchsle. Rain at the start of harvest did no damage but in fact helped with significant botrytis formation. Only the first day of harvest brought Spätlese and there after only Auslese and higher quality musts were harvested. Very fine fruit, botrytis and ripe, stable acids, make this one of the best vintages of the millennium. The harvest yield of 55 hl/ha brought a great vintage that is comparable to the great '49, '59 and '76 vintages. The wines, especially the Auslese show lots of tropical fruit, passion fruit, pineapple, yet they're filigreed and fine, rich, chewy with great potential for aging.

Bert Simon

With 75 hl/ha the yield was 25% above normal. Over 40% of the harvest was over 100 Öchsle. Must weights ranged from 78 to 130 Öchsle and the acids are very ripe and lie between 6.5 and 9.5 gm/l. There was lots of botrytis but very few dried out berries such that attempts for a great TBA did not succeed. Extracts are very good and the wines are rich, dense, and chewy. Bert Simon compares the vintage to 1959, 1964 and 1989. Ripe pears, tropical fruit, red berries, raspberries and spice (especially in the Serriger Würtzberg) make up the fruit patina of the wines. The wines have good structure and finish long. Some of the best wines we've ever tasted at Bert Simon. More doesn't always mean lower quality.

Rheingau

Robert Weil

The harvest yielded 69 hl/ha and ranged from 80 to 243 Öchsle (TBA Goldcap is @ 243 Öchsle). Late September rains, followed by dry weather starting in mid October. The dry weather lasted throughout the harvest and the Riesling developed great ripeness. Very good extracts with 80% tartaric in the must acids, makes for a stunning collection of wines. Botrytis came very late. The Eiswein was picked in January. Lots of bright fruit in the young wines with ripe peaches, raspberries, well integrated, filigreed with a strong mineral drive all packaged in an elegant satin like Rheingau delivery.

Franz Künstler

Almost 70 hl/ha with must weights from 80 up to 178 Öchsle (Hochheimer Hölle TBA is @ 178 Öchsle). There are also three Auslesen in the dry style from the Hochheimer Hölle, Hochheimer Kirchenstück, and the Hochheimer Stielweg. There were two BAs, both in the Hochheimer Hölle, one at 138 Öchsle and the Goldcap BA at 152 Öchsle. Gunter Künstler thinks it is the finest vintage of the '90s decade. The wines show lots of

peaches, red berries, grapefruit, citrus and tropical fruit. They are layered, filigreed, and satiny with great power and balance.

J. Wegler

Yield was 59 hl/ha and must weights ranged from 70 to 176 Öchsle. There are BAs and TBAs but no Eisweins. Acids are ripe, stable and range from 7 to 9.5 gm/l in the finished wines. The '99 Geheimrat "J" Spätlese Dry is very floral, bright, peaches, round, with a rich mouth feel. The Estate Riesling and Kabinett are also floral, loaded with peaches, accented by red fruit, with good texture and length. Spätlese s and Ausleses show the additional ripeness one expects, shifting from peach to apricot fruit, red berries, tropical notes, with nuances of mango. Very fine and filigreed wines.

Pfalz

Pfeffingen

Yield fell just shy of 80 hl/ha, with must weights from the low 80's to over 200 Öchsle. A Scheurebe Eiswein picked just before Christmas is the crown jewel with over 200 Öchsle. Finished acids settled at 8 gm/l and are again quite stable. The Spätlese s are loaded with peaches, and Scheurebes offer classic leechy and grapefruit notes. There is a superb Rieslaner Auslese that was picked at 130 Öchsle and a Scheurebe BA picked at 175 Öchsle to round out the vintage. Another superb vintage at Pfeffingen with bright and pure wines. Here, again, '99 proves to be one of the best vintages of the decade.

von Buhl

The bulk of the vintage is divided between Kabinett (20%), Spätlese (35%), and Auslese (41%), with small amounts of BA, TBA, and Eiswein. Yield was only 46 hl/ha and must weights ranged from the low 80's up to a great Forster Ungeheuer TBA which was picked at 225 Öchsle. Acids ranged from 8 to 10 gm/l, very ripe and balanced. Von Buhl suffered severe damage to 25 acres of vineyards from the June 2nd hailstorm. Another terrific vintage for von Buhl with very filigreed, and bursting with intense fruit. Highlights for the vintage include the Ruppertsberger Reiterpfad "First Growth", Deidesheimer Mäushöhle Spätlese Med-Dry, Forster Jesuitengarten and Forster Kirchenstück Spätlese s, Forster Ungeheuer Ausleses, and the Forster Stift Rieslaner Auslese and of course the noble sweet wines along with Ungeheuer Eiswein. The wines are loaded with peach and tropical fruits, and many have almond notes as well

Franken

Wirsching

The 1999 harvest at Wirsching welcomed the new millennium with a picture book vintage. Must weight range and yields for the various varietals were as follows: Silvaner 75 to 129 Öchsle at 82 hl/ha, Riesling 85 to 105 Öchsle at 65 hl/ha, Scheurebe 80 to 151

Öchsle at 78 hl/ha, Müller-Thurgau 75 to 95 Öchsle at 89 hl/ha, and Pinot Blanc, Pinot Gris, and Traminer 85 to 118 Öchsle at 67 hl/ha. Top of the vintage was a Silvaner Auslese and a Scheurebe Eiswein (151 Öchsle) picked on December 21 in the Iphöfer Julius Echter Berg. Acid levels are slightly below normal, but very ripe. In January the wines showed bright flavors of green fruit, honey melons, gooseberries, grapefruit and hints of tropical fruit in the riper wines. Certainly one the top two vintages of the '90s.

Paul Fürst

A very good vintage with ideal "turbo" weather for the vines. The beautiful dry days during harvest brought in splendid, healthy grapes. Must weights ranged from 80 to 180 Öchsle with the bulk of the vintage between 95 and 105 Öchsle. Yield for all varietals combined was 78 hl/ha. The top must weights are all the result of the Eisweins, two made from Riesling, and one from Pinot Noir, that were picked shortly before Christmas. The whites are loaded with fruit and great ripeness. The Pinots (Pinot Noir and Frühburgunder) are deep in color, refined and with lots of power. Possibly the best reds in the history of the estate. The wines are all about texture and refinement. The whites come with ripe melon, pear and gooseberry fruit. The reds come with lots of cherries, plums, cocoa, black fruits including cassis - long and earthy. The Pinot Blanc, to quote Oz Clark "is the most Burgundian white wine produced in Germany."

Nahe

Emrich-Schönleber

The 1999 vintage along with 1994 is the best vintage of the '90s at Emrich-Schönleber. Yield of 74 hl/ha with must weights ranging from the low 80s to over 140 Öchsle. Must weights for two thirds of the harvest varied from 87 to 93 Öchsle. Must acids from 8.8 to 10 gm/l and in the finished wines from 8.2 to 8.7 gm/l. Acid levels are average, very ripe and stable. The wines are about crystalline purity, brightness, red fruit, raspberries, apricots, and cassis with nuances of tropical fruit. The top wines of the vintage are a Riesling Eiswein picked on December 22, along with two BAs (one Pinot Gris and one Riesling).

Rheinhessen

Gunderloch

Yield was 55 hl/ha and must weights from 83 to 248 Öchsle resulting in another great vintage at Gunderloch. The acids are very stable and ripe, and settled around 7.5 to 8.0 gm/l in the finished wines. Harvest start, after almost ideal weather for the vintage, was October 12 and lasted with some interruptions until December 12. 400 liters of Riesling Eiswein was picked in the Niersteiner Oelberg at 164 Öchsle on December 21 and the top of the vintage was another fabulous TBA from the Nackenheimer Rothenberg with a

must weight of 248 Öchsle (the highest must weight we encountered for the 1999 vintage). The wines are dense, concentrated with lots of peach fruit and the classic Nackenheimer Rothenberg mineral drive. The riper wines show fruit of apricots, tropical fruit, and darker notes of figs, honey, butterscotch, and ripe apricot concentrate.

Baden

Salwey

The average yield for all varietals was 65 hl/ha. Must weights varied from 80 to 111 Öchsle. Top of the the vintage is a Riesling Eiswein picked in the Kirchberg just before Christmas. Extracts were high and acidity levels from 5.5 (mostly for the reds) to 10.0 gm/l (Riesling). Very good red wine and white wine vintage. The wines are bright and show good liveliness, with especially good wines from Pinot Blanc and Pinot Gris. They show lots of terroir with lemons, pears, bananas, maintaining great texture and terroir purity. The Pinot Noirs here are still a project in development, but are starting to show real promise.

Dr. Heger & Weinhaus Heger

At Dr. Heger yields were 70 hl/ha, at Fischer slightly higher and at Weinhaus Heger almost 90 hl/ha. Must weights at Dr. Heger ranged from 83 Öchsle (Müller-Thurgau) up to 169 Öchsle for a Muskateller TBA and 171 Öchsle for a Scheurebe TBA for the top wines of the vintage. The "gros" for Pinot Blanc and Pinot Gris was from 96 to 103 Öchsle and 100 to 105 Öchsle respectively. Acid levels were average but with good ripeness. At Weinhaus Heger must weights to 107 Öchsle (Pinot Gris) with above average acids and sugar free extracts. At all three estates the wines were very typical of the varietals tasted. Especially good were the Silvaners and the Pinot varietals white and red. Pinot Noir here tastes more and more like French Burgundy. Some of the Fischer wines grown on the heavier soils from the Nimburg-Bottinger Steingrube also showed great potential.

Württemberg

Graf Adelmann

The paradox of good and plenty probably has meaning in 1999, much as it did at this estate in 1983 and 1989. The top wines of the vintage are the Pinots, Lemberger and Riesling, the latter bringing no musts under 83 Öchsle. Top of the vintage is Clevner (Frühburgunder or Pinot Madelaine) harvested with healthy fruit at 107 Öchsle (over 25 brix), Samrot (Pinot Meunier) and Pinot Noir at 100 Öchsle (23.6 Brix), Riesling at 100 Öchsle and a Pinot Gris at 103 Öchsle. The whites show good ripeness and elegance - lots of pear, gooseberry, fruit with a kick of lemon lime. The reds are dense, full and very long on the palate with smoke, blackberries, cassis and coffee bean in the Pinot

Meunier, cherries in the Pinot Noir lots of pepper and bacon in the Lemberger.

Ahr

Meyer-Näkel

1999 is probably the best red wine vintage ever for the Meyer-Näkel estate. Great Dornfelder which tastes of blackberry pie, spice, cinnamon, a thick dense, darkly colored red. The Frühburgunder (Pinot Madelaine) shows lots of dark cherries, cassis, a very dense and compact wine. The Pinot Noirs are even more concentrated and compact with Selection "S" showing cherries, raspberries, cassis, chocolate with lots of spice, great texture and a long tannic finish. These are amazing reds and we feel fortunate to have reserved almost 200 cases.