

2006 - more vintage reports

26 Oct 2006 by JR

Harvest reports on the 2006 vintage continue to flow and here's a selection of some of the more interesting ones, from the official to the very personal.

Champagne

This report is from the Mumm/ Perrier Jouët group.

2006 has proved to be a year of weather extremes in Champagne, as elsewhere across Europe.

Summer began with an exceptionally hot and sunny June and July which enabled the vines to grow evenly, flower and set successfully. However, August was very cloudy and wet with little sunshine and by the end of the month the Champenois were afraid that the fruit would not ripen sufficiently.

However a perfect September with sunny days and fresh nights allowed a fast and regular maturity in spite of the threat of botrytis from the previous month of rain.

The harvest began officially on Sept 8 with the Chardonnays of the Sézanne, followed by the Aube region on Sept 12. The Côtes des Blancs followed with the first delivery of grapes from Avize on Sept 14, followed by the Montagnes de Reims with Bouzy on 18th and finally Maily on the 23rd. The harvest finally finished on Oct 2 when the last crop was picked in Maily.

Didier Mariotti, Cellar Master at Champagne G H Mumm, comments, "It's been a very long harvest for everybody. The sunny weather conditions in September couldn't have come at a better time and despite the extremes of the summer, the crop was good with excellent maturity and healthy grapes of a similar weight to 2005. Acidity levels averaged around 7 g/l, with 10.25% vol and pH: 3.09."

Hervé Deschamps, Cellar Master at Champagne Perrier Jouët, comments, "The weather in September produced very ripe grapes – some over 11% in volume. Although the crisp night time temperatures helped to protect the acidity it was lower than usual this year at an average of 6.9g/l. Average ripeness was 10.33% vol with pH of 3.16."

Provence

This is a very personal report from Liz Berry MW and her husband Mike who used to run La Vigneronne wine business in London (now Handfords in Old Brompton Road) and moved to the far west of Provence to found Grand Cru Wines some years ago. The weather they experienced will have been very similar to that in the Languedoc.

After the difficult 2002 and 2003 vintages in Provence – (2002 was marked by torrential rain just before the harvest, whilst 2003 was marked by intense heat) – 2004 saw the return to ideal growing conditions for our Clairette. We had good winter rainfall, and the summer of 2004 was hot, but not excessively so. The grapes reached perfect maturity, with good sugar levels and good balancing acidity. Harvesting took place at the end of September in fine weather.

The 2004 has spent eighteen months in five year old oak barriques (ex Tardieu Laurent). This is undoubtedly the vintage with which we are most pleased so far. This is the sixth vintage we have made since we put this small vineyard back into order, and we believe we have the right recipe now! The 2004 has good weight, and is creamy in character, more akin to a Roussanne/ Marsanne blend at the moment than a pure Clairette. This should age nicely over five to ten years. As the wine is unfiltered and unfinned, it may throw some harmless deposit in the bottle.

The price increase over previous vintages reflects the lower yields, about 30% less than before. In 2005 we will have about the same quality, but there will be no 2006 available for sale; the vines suffered enormously with the heat and drought in 2006, far worse than in 2003, and most of the remaining grapes were then eaten by wild boars at the end of August. We produced about 50 litres of white, rather than between 500 and 600.

2004 Moulin de Regain Blanc

£75 per case of six 75cl bottles, £145 per case of twelve 75cl bottles

£100 per case of twelve 50cl bottles

Prices inclusive of duty and VAT @ 17.5%. The wine will be available after shipment [to the UK], in late November 2006.

As for our Provence Extra Virgin Olive Oil, Moulin de Regain, we hope to make a "Primeur" olive oil this year, but at the moment the quantity is still very uncertain. As with the vines, the olive trees have suffered from the drought this year. Rain did come at last in mid September, and then last week we had torrential rain for two days, and hail. All four of our olive groves were hit by a brief hail storm over the Alpilles last Thursday night, and at the moment it is hard to say what the quantity will be. Picking will start in a couple of weeks. If you are interested in Primeur oil, let us know and we will keep you informed. (Primeur olive oil, bottled within a month of picking, is a very intense, spicy peppery oil, delicious on salads and with vegetables.)

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Tuscany

From the Chianti Classico Consorzio.

An extraordinary vintage is heralded by Italy's leading wine guides. Export sales increase 10% this year. Consorzio President Pallanti declares it "A great moment for our Sangiovese"

Harvesting began early for the 600+ Consorzio Vino Chianti Classico estates this year. Climatic conditions were near perfect for this vintage, and the expectation is that 2006 wines will be of outstanding quality as grapes achieved optimum ripeness and displayed ideal sugar levels and polyphenolic maturity. The expert vineyard management practised by the Consorzio's member producers also meant that yields were strictly limited to ensure maximum quality fruit was achieved.

The exceptional 2006 vintage forecast further supports a period of economic revival for Black Rooster estates. Not only did Chianti Classico sales rise in the domestic market, but the Black Rooster saw a significant increase in its export sales with an increase of 10% (Sept 2006) over the same period last year.

In addition to a great Sangiovese harvest, the Black Rooster also reaped an avalanche of Glasses, Stars and Clusters — the prestigious annual awards judged by Italy's leading wine guides and announced throughout the month of October.

This year, Black Rooster producers were proud to learn that the Tuscany region received the most laurels with highlights including:

Gambero Rosso: Tuscany was awarded 55 "Tre Bicchieri" (Three Glasses) awards (over Piedmont's 52) [way hay! JR]

L'Espresso: of 131 wines that received awards throughout Italy, 48 were Tuscan and the guide also declared the Chianti territory "the most honoured wine-producing area in Italy"

Duemilavini: cites the Chianti Classico denomination with great frequency

"This recognition bears testament to the hard work Chianti Classico's producers have put into the quality of their wines in recent years," Pallanti observed, "but it is also a sign of "an important renaissance for Sangiovese, in comparison with the more fashionable international varieties of recent years. We have great confidence in our Sangiovese, which finds in the diverse terroirs of Chianti Classico an ideal habitat from which it can express its uniqueness and achieve the world-class quality sought after by consumers and wine critics alike".

Pallanti views the recent success and recognition of Chianti Classico wines as "an invitation for other world-class Sangiovese wines currently playing on the Super-Tuscan team to rejoin our Chianti Classico team. I believe that if this were to happen, team Black Rooster would be unbeatable." [So get back in the fold, boys – JR]

Spain

Initial reports just received from Campo Viejo of Rioja are encouraging in terms of quality and quantity. The first grapes were brought in on Sept 12, slightly earlier than usual due to the higher than average temperatures registered in the preceding months.

The vines are healthy and the grapes have ripened well. Elena Adell, head winemaker at Juan Alcora, where Campo Viejo is produced, reports, "We are extremely pleased with the quality of the grapes that we have brought in so far. This year has been particularly challenging due to the fluctuating weather conditions and risk of disease. However, our efforts in the vineyard have paid off and the grapes were healthy and of excellent quality.

"The wines we have started to produce have great concentration and look like they will deliver some stunning wines. This year's harvest is expected to yield 282 million litres, 2.9% more than last year's yield of 274 million litres."

All in all, Campo Viejo's 2006 vintage looks set to be a great one.

Portugal

This is a rather more generic and thorough report than the Spanish one, from Wines of Portugal.

Weather conditions: During the grape growing cycle the weather was very warm and dry in end of June, July and August. After three years of low precipitations and dry weather during the harvest, 2006 will be a challenging year in most regions of Portugal. The total amount of rain was not enough to put the vintage into jeopardy. This vintage will put more in evidence the professionalism of viticulturalists in regards to good practice in the vineyard, through out the year and of oenologists who will be challenged with well matured grapes.

In the year of 2006 a small decrease of production is expected, averaging -4% versus 2005. The regions with more noticeable decrease are Bairrada followed by Estremadura, Ribatejo and Douro. Also with less production are Minho (Vinho Verde) and the islands of Azores and Madeira. In total, Portugal will produce 6.9 million hl, which is 4% less than prior year and 6% below the average of the last three harvests.

According to Vasco Coutinho from Montez Champallimaud, the region of Vinho Verde (Minho) was not so much affected by rain, so the quality of the grapes was very good overall. The grapes had a very good maturation due to sun exposure and slightly higher alcohol contents are expected in the 2006 vintage. Also the acidity levels are expected to be good. In the Douro region the latter part of the year was difficult due to the heatwaves, so skilled oenology is going to be needed in all wineries (see earlier [Douro vintage report](#)). In Bairrada, the producer Luis Pato foresees excellent white wines but good reds will be in less quantity, according to the timely treatments done in the vineyard during the year. In Estremadura, Oliveira da Silva from Casa Santos Lima says that maturation was later than usual. The whites and the reds will have a slightly less acidity than normal for the region. They will become wines with good colour and will be smoother and easier to drink. Nuno Franco from Alentejo's winery, Herdade de São Miguel, says that maturations were early for international varieties although they were regular for the Portuguese native varieties. The wines will have great quality and potential for good evolution.

Germany

Here is a charming and very personal report from the Rheinhessen.

This is my first email to you, and please allow me to introduce myself. My name is Takahiro Koyama, and I am doing a vintage job here in Rheinhessen at Weingut Keller. Klaus Peter gave me your email address and asked me to send you an email.

I am originally from Japan, went to Lincoln University at Christchurch in New Zealand, and worked at Mountford Estate at Waipara Valley as an assistant winemaker with Michael and Buffy Eaton and C P Lin. I am reading your website report, and thought you might be interested in what people in Rheinhessen are doing, especially Weingut Keller, about their Pinot Noir making and of course Riesling. After spent this summer in Tuscany doing some vineyard job, me and my friend Matthew (also a Lincoln graduate, from New Zealand), chose to work at Weingut Keller for the vintage 2006.

We started harvesting Pinot Noir from end of September, around temperature of 13 degree C, and berries are well ripened, with good ripe seeds and skins. Those grapes will be really good wine after being matured for two years in oak barrels. [I have tasted Keller's excellent 2004 Pinot and was most impressed by its complexity - JR]

After two rainshowers at the end of September, botrytis on the Riesling and Rieslaner grapes increased (but really positive botrytis that concentrates flavours) so that we needed nice dry weather in October to dry those grapes out, and as we expected, the weather in October in Rheinhessen was beautiful. We had a nice combination of warm to hot day time temperature around 20 degree C, and fairly cool nights down to 4 degree C, which is important to the development of flavours in grapes and decrease of acidity.

We picked all of Grosse Gewachs vineyards rather quickly over 7 to 8 days with average yield of about 3.5 - 4 tonnes/ hectare. Berries were small and very aromatic, with nice flavour and acidity, and now fermentation has just started, everything looks very good. When I asked Klaus Peter that which vintage was best for him in the last couple years, he said for the quantity wise, 2004 was 20% more than this year, but for quality wise, he seems very excited about 2006 vintage, especially some grapes for TBAs. The last couple days of harvest, we additionally managed to make various botrytis selection in Hubacker vineyard, and also pressed juice from the grapes harvested from Morstein vineyard got above 200 degree Oechsle- very clean, pure juice with exotic aromas, which has good acidity for TBAs about 12 - 14 g/l.

Only some small blocks of vineyard are still hanging grapes where we are waiting for the botrytis to dry out, so that harvest will be probably finished at the end of October. There is no ice wine planned this year, but it is definitely a very good botrytis year. All in all, we had luck compared to the other regions, that Dalsheim lays in the rain shadow by the mountain of Donnersberg (as shown in attached photo), therefore having less rains.

Three days ago, we harvested the last Pinot Noir at the Frauenberg vineyard, and I and my friend Matthew are plunging the wine (another photo) in the wooden fermenter. I hope the wine will ferment beautifully, and be a wonderful Pinot Noir wine from Rheinhessen (we tasted some of his Armand Rousseau with Klaus Peter on the other day, and he puts us a little bit of under the pressure to make a wine like that...).

Thank you for leading us to Rheinhessen.

Austria

From the Austrian Wine Marketing Board.

Austrian vineyards benefited from the 2006 Indian Summer. Every year the same questions arise: Too much sun for our vineyards? Or perhaps too little? Is there sufficient water and are our grapes resilient enough?

Actually, vines adapt easily if they have been planted in their preferred environment and if consideration has been given to growing conditions and soil requirements. Grapes that ripen late should therefore not be planted in cooler vineyard sites because of growth problems. Similarly, grapes that are vulnerable to diseases will not be found in humid terrain, as there is a higher risk of fungal infection. Austrian wine-growers are familiar with the terrain where grapes grow best and have further widened their knowledge in the past few years.

Our vines have survived the recent changes in climate well. After germinating relatively late this year and because of changeable weather during the bloom in June, which caused a reduced setting of the vine particularly with the Grüner Veltliner, there was a period of heat and dryness in Austrian vineyards in July. However, due to good water reserves built up during the late autumn of 2005 and to a long and snowy winter, drought has caused almost no damage. Vines have deep roots, therefore the ground water has produced strong growth in the leaves. Wine-growers were required to work carefully, particularly when exposing the growth zone of the grapes, when topping the terminal of shoots, when breaking out the side shoots, and so on. Nevertheless, isolated incidences of leaf diseases like downy mildew were registered in some areas. This year, the setting of the grapes was satisfactory, although some areas reported smaller quantities for a few grape varieties. Also, the humid August required even more careful work in the vineyards.

At the end of August, the vineyards were in excellent shape, most of them with copious foliage and healthy grapes. The period of fine weather beginning in September considerably increased the ripening process of the grapes. The forecast of a warm Indian summer promises another excellent Austrian Vintage with the expectation of a harvest of around 2.4 million hl.

Roman Pfaffl, Lower Austria: "The grape harvest yield in the Weinviertel is down by 20%, but because of the sugar level, the quality is outstanding with 100% healthy grapes!"

Hannes Hirsch, Lower Austria: "With Riesling, somehow we have a smaller yield this year. However, the quality is stunning - which can be seen by the golden yellow colour, and in the crispness and finesse! The Grüner Veltliner yield is lower - by around 30% - but the quality is very good. I'm proud of the balance of quality between the sites and varieties."

Silvia Prieler, Burgenland: "In Burgenland, we are happy about the very fine quality of the grapes - healthy and without Botrytis. Despite an average yield, the 2006 vintage is nearly perfect. Because of the sunny days, we can show very good red wines."

Gerhard Wohlmuth, Styria: "This year, Styrian Sauvignon Blanc grew wonderfully with a high level of ripeness. And it's marked by a special playfulness. The vintage this year in Styria is rather average. But because of the sunny days and the ideal weather, the quality of the 2006 vintage is certainly one to be proud of."

Fritz Wieninger, Vienna: "It is a rare and positive occurrence when the qualities of both white and red wines are equally high, and even the yield is satisfying. We would be happy to have years like this more often."

Michael Thurner, Managing Director of AWMB: "2006 could be a top vintage, just like 2005. The sunny days of late fall have enabled high physiological ripeness and good acidity structure. It surely will be a typical Austrian vintage, with 2.4 million hectoliters - a bit under the overall annual average."

Find more information and harvest reports at: http://www.winesfromaustria.com/eaktuell/idx_vintage2006.html