German vintages

3 Sep 2008 by Jancis Robinson

2012 saw a cool, wet summer in Germany, saved by late warmth in September and October. Yields were overall in line with long term averages, although the Mosel lost up to 25% of its crop. Quality is widely agreed to be very good indeed, and possibly the best vintage in recent memory for Spätburgunder. Dry Rieslings are excellent too, but noble sweet wines are in even smaller supply than usual.

2011 Extremely good quality, with yields back at average after two more depressed years. There is palpable excitement about these wines, with top qulaity examples across the board from trocken Riesling and Spätburgunder and record-breaking noble whites.

2010 A tricky vintage, with low sunshine and high rain. Despite this, July was extremely hot, skewing the average temperature to well above average. Yields were devastated, but Riesling quality is nonetheless promising when in expert hands.

2009 Amongst the greatest vintages, 2009 is proving very alluring at a very early stage. The growing season was dry, warm and reliable. The wines are ripe and appealing but 12% down on volume compared to 2008.

2008 A very late-ripening vintage marked by cool autumn temperatures. Acidities are therefore high, and only the best-exposed sites produced truly great wines. Very few botrytis wines were made, but there was a reasonable crop of Eiswein.

2007 Unusual vintage during which a hot April and record early flowering was followed by a very cool summer but then the grapes were ripened, after a suitably extended growing season, by a very fine autumn. A distinct shortage of Kabinett.

2006 A less than glorious summer and autumn rain bounced many growers into picking earlier than they would have liked, as rampant rot threatened. Very careful selection was needed and it is even more important than usual to stick to the top producers.

2005 Exceptional vintage combining the luscious fruit of 2003 with the minerality and structure of 2004. Quantities were low but, to compensate growers financially, noble rot took hold very rapidly in the autumn so that large quantities of Beerenauslese and TBA were made, of especial note in the Saar.

2004 Yet again autumn rescued the wines after a less than wonderful summer. Yields were relatively high but the wines have good crisp acidity and fine focus. Start drinking these around 2008.

2003 Uncomfortably hot year for the Riesling vine, and even more of an assault on varieties such as Grauburgunder and Weissburgunder with their naturally lower acid levels. But some exceptional wines were made at the top of the tree.

2002 German growers were in general much happier than their French counterparts throughout the summer but many were finally caught out by rain before harvest in October which meant that very few wines above Auslese quality resulted and the rather soft wines have aged relatively rapidly.

2001 A very great, long-term vintage with remarkable levels of both grape ripeness (thanks to a wonderful Indian summer) and acidity (thanks to a nerve-wrackingly wet but cool September). A high proportion of botrytised sweet wines were made - in fact there was such a shortage of basic QbA wine that considerable amounts were declassified to satisfy market demand.

2000 Very difficult vintage. Early optimism was finally dashed by September rains which severely compromised the health of the grapes. In many cases the earliest-picked grapes were the best because they were the least affected by rot. Early-picked Spätburgunders were relatively unscathed.

1999 Everything was going so well...until the rains which began on 20 Sep and continued throughout the harvest. Careful selection was needed and in some cases yields were too high for real quality. Acids were generally low but some delicious wines for relatively early drinking were made by the best producers.

1998 Despite a wet growing season the wines showed vibrant acidity and bright fruit. Eiswein was made in some quantity.

1997 Early, large crop of very attractive wines – generally clustered around Spätlese level of ripeness, although there are some lovely Mosel Auslesen.

1996 Attractive, lightish Mosels and southern wines with more stuffing. A very good year for Eiswein.

1995 An unusually warm summer was followed by a cold, wet late August and September so that the bulk of wine produced was rather ordinary, but the late, great Riesling showed its stuff in the Mosel after a very warm October.

1994 Horribly variable, but Riesling showed its class with superb quality from the good estates.

1993 A nerve-racking year. Rain hit the early harvests but patient growers picked grapes with welcome botrytis. Some fine wines still showing well.

1992 Not bad, particularly in the Rhine. Estates had to control yields to overcome dilution from the rains and maintain balance.

1991 Ripe, crisp, even slightly austere wines, just the stuff for Kabinetts!

1990 Europe's wonder year: a perfect autumn with plenty of late-picked sweet wines after a botrytis bonanza.

1989 A phenomenal harvest. The late-harvested Rieslings show profound complexity. Probably best in the Mosel.

1988 Overshadowed by two remarkable years, this is still an excellent vintage of elegance and fruit.

1985 Classy and stylish, these show how well Riesling ages.