Cold enough for Eiswein

18 Dec 2009 by Julia Harding MW

In this cold snap, German wine producers are rubbing their hands with glee and not just to keep the circulation going. It's always touch and go whether the weather is going to be cold enough for long enough to allow them to pick frozen, sugar-rich grapes - generally not affected by noble rot - to make the sweet and expensive elixir known as Eiswein in Germany and Austria and as Icewine in Canada and other seasonally shivering locations. The grapes are picked frozen and pressed immediately before they have time to thaw out, resulting in must with tooth-rotting levels of sugar and eyewatering concentration of acid.

The VDP (Verband Deutscher Prädikatsweingüter), an association of many of the top German wine estates, reports that the freezing temperatures last Friday morning allowed many producers in many regions to do what they have been hoping to do during the last few weeks. They harvested early in the morning - mostly Riesling but also some Silvaner in Franken - when the temperatures were between -9 and -11 ºC (between 15 and 12 ºF). The photograph shows the temperature in the frozen berries being measured.

The following VDP estates picked on Friday morning:

Weingut Reichsgraf von Kesselstatt, Saar
Weingut Hans Wirsching, Franken
Weingut Schmitt´s Kinder, Franken
Weingut S A Prüm, Mosel
Weingut Deutzerhof Cossmann-Hehle, Ahr
Wein- und Sektgut Barth, Rheingau
Weingut Fitz-Ritter, Pfalz
Hessische Staatsweingüter Kloster Eberbach, Rheingau
Fürstlich Castell'sches Domänenamt, Franken
Weingut Pfeffingen, Pfalz
Weingut Joachim Flick, Rheingau
Weingut Langwerth von Simmern, Rheingau
Weingut Gerhard Aldinger, Württemberg
Weingut Karl Haidle, Württemberg
Graf Adelmann, Württemberg
Staatsweingut Weinsberg, Württemberg

Weingut am Stein (Franken) and Weingut Drautz-Able (Württemberg) and others plan to follow suit in the next few days.

Quantities are always tiny, so most of them had finished harvesting in time for breakfast, but given the high prices these wines fetch, they probably didn't mind getting up early and shivering among the vines.