

Germany Report 2013 - Vintage 2012

The overriding problem with the 2012 vintage in Germany is the lack of wine – all growers we visited reported a reduction of at least 30% on their already small yield in 2011. This can be attributed to various factors, the first of which was the cool, windy and on occasion wet weather during flowering and fruit set. This caused a marked reduction in the number of berries on a cluster, directly influencing the final yield. More positively, it did ensure that the fruit remained healthy and clean, with the looser clusters facilitating better circulation of air, reducing incidence of rot. The outcome of this is a vintage rich in fine Auslese and Spätlese level wines, although the absence of botrytis reduced or prevented growers achieving the botrytis concentration they desired for Berrenauslese and TBA.

It seems that the conditions at the beginning of the growing season dictated the overall character of the vintage. Most growers noted that March was much warmer than usual and many feared that the vines were developing too quickly. These fears were allayed when rainier and cooler, cloudy conditions arrived in April, with the open bunches surviving unscathed from such damp conditions. Temperatures did warm up in May and June but the changeable weather in July caused concern. Salvation came for many in August, September and October; warm days and cool night encouraging even ripening. Rains came but only for short periods which meant that the conditions were not favourable to the development of botrytis.

Depending on the region, the majority of growers started harvesting around mid-October. The latter half of the month saw a continuation of warm, dry days and cool nights. At the end of October there was a distinct fall in temperature with some growers noting that they harvested in temperatures of -4.5 degrees, with the wines losing their leaves due to the sudden drop in temperature. In early November heavy rain and extremely cold conditions meant that it was imperative that all the fruit was harvested in order to achieve great quality wines in 2012.

With hindsight, many of our producers observed that those who rushed to harvest earlier in October have wines that are less ripe, with more green characteristics. Those who took the risk of giving their fruit extra hang time suffered in the cold and wet conditions that came in early November. The success of the vintage was determined by the decision to pick within the two week window at the end of October. Overall, growers who know and understand their vineyards have produced wines that are clean and bright, with high levels of tartaric acid, higher residual sugar (there is much less Kabinett in this vintage than 2011) and ripe fruit.

Fiona Hayes and Katherine Dart MW

Rheingau

Eva Fricke, Kiedrich

Eva Fricke is a young woman who has firmly establishing herself as an 'up and coming' winemaker in the Rheingau. The Fricke holding is made up of 5ha, having recently purchased a parcel in Bodthental-Steinberg. Currently Eva produces one wine per vineyard and wants the *terroir* of each site to be expressed rather than the different sweetness levels being the main focus as in most German wines.

All her vines are grown on very steep slopes and range from 15 - 75 years in age which helps them produce naturally low yields of c. 35hl/ha. With her ecological approach to viticulture, it has allowed Eva to avoid reverting to conventional treatments (previously she practiced sustainable viticulture).

During the 2012 vintage, Eva observed that in May and June the average night temperatures dropped to 9 degrees, something more common in April. She also noted that this and the rainy conditions caused problems with mould and the caps of the flowers fell off, directly influencing the flowering and leading to a reduced fruit set (25% down on 2011). As a result of the damp and cold conditions in the first half of the growing season, she had to apply 12 organic treatments rather than 8 in 2011.

In terms of winemaking, in 2012 the wines are very rich in potassium and mineral content, with the tartaric acid being the highest she has ever had. The wines show incredible protein stability and a high extract and have not needed to be fined; a process that Eva only employs when necessary.

Rheingau Riesling QbA 2012 – limited availability

A blend of 3 sites, the plots are found in Kiedrich, Walluf and Rudesheim, grown on a mixture on quartz, loam and clay. This wine was bottled only 2 weeks prior to this tasting and was a little closed on the nose, but its true character came through on the palate, which was much more expressive and exhibiting stone fruit and citrus notes. Structurally very fine with a taut mid-palate and finish. Will be very good with a little more time in bottle.

Kiedrich Riesling QbA 2012 – limited availability

This is the first year this wine has been bottled as a single vineyard wine (previously it was blended into the Rheingau Riesling). Grown on sandy loess and loam with some clay, this is the least mineral soil in Eva's portfolio, giving a wine that give good concentration and a fresh spine of acidity. Orange blossom aromas continue on the palate, with riper fruit on the attack. Texturally fine, with a glossy smooth quality to the mouth feel (Eva pumped the lees back into the tank because they showed a distinct orange character, but no lees stirring was carried out).

Lorch Riesling QbA 2012 – limited availability

The soils here are dominated by slate, including a red, oxidised slate in places, aiding ripening and bringing underlying minerality to the wines. Tank sample. The nose is laced with orchard fruit, with hints of smoky, spicy complexity. The attack is upfront showing clean fruit and minerals, which assert themselves through the mid-palate and on the finish. The acidity is ripe and buffered by the minerality balancing the rounded mouth feel.

Lorchhauser Seligmacher Riesling QbA 2012 – limited availability

This vineyard has high quartzite content. Not yet bottled. White floral perfume and lime blossom notes come through on the nose and are met with salty minerals on the palate. The attack is bright and layered with sweet stone fruit. Concentrated core and energetic acidity provide a fine structure.

Lorcher Krone Riesling QbA 2012 – limited availability

The only part of Lorch that has a subsoil of chalk; the topsoil is a warm, iron-rich grey slate. This is a round and textured wine, with integrated stony minerals. There is a broad core of lemon citrus fruit supported by spiciness on the finish. Intense and serious wine, will be very good with a bit of time.

Lorcher Schlossberg Riesling QbA 2012 – limited availability

Like the Seligmacher the soils have high quartz content, being situated slightly lower down the slope, the vines are more cold air protected. Orchard fruit and blossom scents on the nose. Sweetness is subtle on the attack and there is clear freshness to the acidity and a smooth and glossy mouth feel. The characteristics on the palate are completely interwoven and the fruit intensity is expansive and very fine.

Lorcher Schlossberg Riesling Spatlese 2012 - limited availability

This is very young at the moment. There are hints of scented apricot fruit and ripe white peach on the nose and palate. Minerals are interlaced with the delicately clear acidity and attractive sweetness. This wine needs time and those with the patience to resist drinking it too soon will benefit.

Saar

Weingut Van Volxem, Wiltingen

Roman Niewodniczanski bought Van Volxem in 2000 and set about bringing the estate to its former glory. His aim is simple – he wants Van Volxem to produce some of the finest Saar Rieslings that clearly express their unique *terroir*. He is undoubtedly a perfectionist and his attention to detail is evident in all that he does. Van Volxem follow sustainable viticultural practices (at least 50% is completely organic) and there are a high number of experienced staff in the vineyard. They work only with old vines, some of which are 130 years old. Selection massale is carried out for all new plantings, calling on a library of old genetic material. All the vineyards are located on steep south facing slopes with a high percentage of stone and rock, dominated by a red, quartzite rich slate.

All harvesting is carried out by hand, with numerous passes through the vineyards. Only natural yeasts are used during fermentation and the fermentation is encouraged to take its natural course; when we visited at the end of March a large percentage of the wines were still fermenting. The improvements are continuing, with plans to move the winemaking to a new facility in the next few years and an investment in 100 newly made 2000 litre barrels.

The yield is also 30% down here and Roman attributes this to issues during flowering, but also grapes being eaten by wild boar and deer. The average yield at the estate is usually 35hl/ha, a level encouraged by careful viticulture and high density planting.

Please note: other 2012s are available, but as previously mentioned, due to the large percentage yet to complete fermentation, we have not tasted. Please let us know if you would like further information.

Saar Riesling 2012

Coming from 30 year old vines, stony, mineral and saline aromas with lime top notes are evident on the nose. Piercingly fresh spine of acidity drives the wine and brings a direct and linear structure to the palate. Long length and great balance.

Wiltinger Braunfels Riesling 2012

Structurally this wine embodies finesse, with a characteristically linear form enveloped in citrus fruit. Astonishingly juicy acidity balances perfectly with the ripe fruit. The minerals assert themselves on the finish. Persistent.

Saar Riesling Alte Reben 2012

There is more evidence of smokiness and flint here, along with enticing floral aromatics. The scented notes are met by crunchy green fruit and fine, racy acidity. This wine displays a lovely sense of purity and control. Again this will benefit from time in bottle.

Sekt Brut Riesling 2008

This is given 15 months on its lees prior to degorgement and this has really helped add an extra dimension to the wine. Do not be put off by the price, this is a fine example of Sekt that could more than hold its own alongside good quality sparklers, certainly worth buying a bottle or two. There is clear complexity, with subtle autolytic notes layered with citrus and Riesling florals. Seriously long and scented finish.

Mosel

Weingut Willi Schaefer, Graach

**** Please note volumes are extremely limited.**

This small 4 hectare estate commands a well-deserved reputation for producing consistently excellent, fine wines. The philosophy of Willi Schaefer and his son, Christoph, is simple – they aim to make their wines as gently as possible, treating the fruit, must and resultant wines with respect. They make wines that follow the nature of the vintage that Christoph describes as ‘complex but not complicated’. Christoph and his wife, Andrea, now run this family estate in Graach.

They have 2 vineyard sites situated behind the village; Domprobst and Himmelreich. Both sites are made up of Devonian blue slate, the former is deeper with a higher proportion of slate and stone and the latter is lighter in texture.

Like the other growers, they commented that March was warm and the vine growth was slowed down by the cold spell that followed. Fortunately things improved a little, but the most important factor that encouraged the ripening of the fruit was the arrival of much warmer weather in August – Christoph even recalled that there were cooler than normal periods throughout July. On average, the Schaefer harvest their vines over 4-5 weeks making numerous passes through the vineyards, however in 2012 it was completed in 2 weeks. This was due to the fact that there were several rainy days during September and October and an anticipated drop in temperature, along with rainfall predicted for the start of November.

They describe 2012 as having great ripeness, more tartaric acid and higher residual sugars than 2011, although Christoph states that some of the acidity is lost in the cellar during *elevage* as tartrates precipitate. He notes that overall the alcohol levels for 2012 are lower, which he regards as

a classic vintage attribute. However, the ripe nature of the fruit adds a different quality that is less typical, making 2012 quite unique.

Himmelreich Grosses Gewächs Riesling 2012 – limited availability

To be released in September. Citrus, touch of pineapple, mineral and linear. Steely minerality on the palate, purity and subtly concentrated. The Grosses Gewächs is well-formed this year, with good concentration and structure.

Himmelreich Riesling Kabinett #2 2012 – limited availability

Charming, layers of aromas with blossom, grapefruit and white peach. On the attack the fruit envelopes the minerals and the richness and intensity is balanced by the acidity. This is deceptively concentrated and rich for a Kabinett – this is a function of the vintage which naturally lends itself to sweeter styles.

Domprobst Riesling Kabinett #3 2012 – limited availability

Earthy top notes and flinty, linear form. The fruit is interlaced with the sweetness and acidity, buffered by the minerality. The core of the wine combines intensity and depth of flavour with an energetic tension that draws out the finish.

Himmelreich Riesling Spätlese #8 2012 – limited availability

Bright citrus aromas on the nose. The attack is more controlled and tightly wound and the fruit dominates the mid-palate with vivid, juicy acidity running through the wine and asserting itself on the finish. This wine became more perfumed and scented with time in the glass adding to its complexity.

Domprobst Riesling Spätlese #10 2012 – limited availability

This is a classic Schaefer Spätlese – very steely, citrus and focused on the nose and palate. There is a crystalline sense of precision that gives the wine an amazingly fine structure and form. Incredibly long and sophisticated. This will reward those who can let it age gracefully.

Domprobst Riesling Spätlese #5 2012 – limited availability

There is more overt power in this wine evident in the expansive attack that is supported by wonderful intensity and piercingly bright acid structure, which is completely integrated with the fruit and sweetness. Earthy notes, characteristic of Domprobst underpin the fruit on the core. This will be exceptional.

Himmelreich Riesling Auslese #4 2012 – limited availability

Apricot, orange peel, lemon and honey, hint of mint. Rich and concentrated – a classic Himmelreich Auslese in style. The intensity of the fruit is met by clarity from the acidity and the backbone of minerality. Very elegant, wonderfully balanced and long.

Domprobst Riesling Auslese #11 2012 – limited availability

Flinty citrus aromas were tight and controlled making this very precise on the nose. Tightness on the attack, with a core of knotted fruit that is bound by minerality and refreshing acidity. This sense of restraint is balanced by the glossy mouthfeel and clearly ripe fruit quality, making this quite generously fruity for a Domprobst at this stage. Juicy, tangy finish is persistent.

Himmelreich Riesling Auslese #9 2012 – limited availability

Candied orange peel, with honeyed notes create a rich, but feminine character. Hints of herbs and a precise acid structure balance this, giving the wine an extra dimension and hint at the innate concentration that belies the overt fruit. The finish is long and sweetly-scented.

Domprobst Riesling Auslese #14 2012 – limited availability

Very intense and well balanced. The aromas are reminiscent of earthy minerals and lime blossom. The attack is open and exudes pure, ripe apricot and yellow peach – incredibly concentrated, with a rich core of taut acidity and fruit, but you never move away from the minerality and precision that you come to expect from this vineyard.

Weingut Selbach-Oster, Zeltingen

Owned by Barbara and Johannes Selbach and situated in Zeltingen. The vineyards are all south facing and the Selbachs have holdings in various sites between Zeltingen and Bernkastel, including Zeltinger Himmelreich, Schlossberg and Sonnenuhr, Wehlener Sonnenuhr, Graacher Domprobst and Himmelreich and Bernkasteler Badstube.

This 21ha family estate dates back to the 1600s and still aims to produce wines that reflect their origin. They possess an amazing ability to develop in bottle, which one often comes to expect from the best growers in this region. They make wine very traditionally, placing the emphasis on work carried out in the vineyard. They ferment in 1000 litre old German oak (sourced from Franken) because it allows the wine to breathe and adds to texture and density, but some stainless steel is also used. Although not set stone, they feel that some vintages are better suited to the latter format; smooth, ripe, lower acid vintages work well in stainless steel, while more edgy, high acid vintages, like 2008, are best suited to barrel fermentation.

As expected, we were told that the yields were down by 30%. Barbara explained that, like others growers, various factors contributed to this reduction. A sunny March saw the vines develop as usual, but it was followed by a cool, frosty, windy and wet Spring – which is a common story influencing yield. However, they had difficulties with illness amongst their key workers and did not have the manpower available work the vines at certain points throughout the growing season and, therefore, this impacted on their volumes. We are lucky to have secured a small parcel of stock from the 2011 vintage, as well as an offering of the 2012.

2011s

Riesling Kabinett 2011 – 25 cases

Fresh and bright. The palate is well poised and balanced, with clear acidity and slate-inflected minerality. Citrus fruit continues through the wine onto the finish.

Zeltinger Sonnenuhr Riesling Spätlese 2011 – 9 cases

Salty, stony notes on the nose. Green apple and lemon zest are layered with gripping, mineral acidity that balances the residual sweetness perfectly. Smoothly glossy mouth feel creates a silky texture that defines the palate. Spicy finish.

Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Spätlese 2011 – 25 cases

Although the soil and exposure of this vineyard is broadly the same as the Zeltinger Sonnenuhr, the profile of this wine is more feminine and instantly attractive. However, you'll still find the same glossy texture and mineral intensity.

2012s

Zeltinger Riesling Kabinett Trocken 2012

This year, the wine is entirely made from Zeltinger Himmelreich fruit, although it is often blended with Schlossberg – this decision is based purely on the nature of the vintage. This wine possesses a steely, linear character that is evident on the nose and on the attack, forming the backbone of the wine and layering with greengage fruit and intensely crisp acidity.

Zeltinger Sonnenuhr Riesling Spätlese Trocken 2012

Restrained spice is balanced with green fruits and lemon notes. There is a sense of taut concentration that contributes to the elegance and persistence. The structure of this wine is incredibly defined and the framework formed by the acid, minerality and fruit intensity will ensure that this wine evolves into a truly sophisticated Riesling.

Zeltinger Sonnenuhr Riesling Spätlese 2012

Layers of fruity citrus and peach with a hint of pear – instantly attractive. Saline, mineral and mouthwatering palate. There is a breadth of fruit on the attack, which is supported by a rich core. This wine displays great depth, highlighted by the long and refined finish.

Pinot Blanc Trocken 2012

We were very sceptical about this wine, it is barrel fermented in a new, untoasted, 1000 litre barrel, but we have to admit that we were more than pleasantly surprised; it is really very impressive. Made from fruit grown on 3 sites – Schlossberg, Zeltinger Himmelreich and Wehlener Klosterberg . This will come in a Burgundy bottle. Pineapple, hint of grapefruit, touch of vanilla spice but very subtle with increasing complexity. Texturally delicious, minerality is well balanced by underlying richness and a delicate, but crisp acidity.

Not tasted, but these single parcel wines are limited and are notorious for being the best wines that they produce.

Zeltinger Schlossberg Schmitt 2011

Zeltinger Sonnenuhr Rotlay 2011

Zeltinger Himmelreich Andrecht 2011

Weingut Heymann-Löwenstein, Wunningen

What can we say? Some view Reinhard Löwenstein as a controversial figure, but few can deny that his wines are nothing less than superb – you just have to open your mind and embrace his alternative and holistic approach to making wine.

As you near Wunningen in the Lower Mosel, where the winery is situated, you are struck by the stark contrast between this more southerly area and the Mittel Mosel. The vineyards are found on equally steep slopes, but appear to be more extreme – they are interspersed between harsh, craggy outcrops and seem almost balanced on the unforgiving hillsides, supported by terraces and walls that, in parts, date back to the medieval period. Of the 150ha of vineyards in Wunningen, only 10ha are planted on the flat. This landscape is both wild and beautiful and it is no surprise that it is made

up of a patchwork of soil types, many of which influence the characters of Reinhard Löwenstein's wines.

The estate covers 15ha, of which Reinhard has holdings in Von Blauem, Kirchberg, Stolzenberg, Röttgen and the Uhlen crus – Roth-Lay, Laubach, Blaufüsser Lay. The winemaking philosophy at Heymann-Löwenstein aims to best express the individual *terroir* embodied by each of these sites. Indeed, Reinhard does not want to talk about sweetness, but instead places the emphasis on *terroir* and balance in the wine. As a result, the wines are usually dry to off-dry in style, a characteristic facilitated by the warmer climate and free draining soils with lower water retention. The winemaking is essentially traditional and, currently, 70% of the wine is fermented in large, old wood barrels (being filtered and racked into stainless steel). He hopes to be fermenting 100% of his wines in wood in a few years' time.

He firmly believes in working with energies that make you (and the wines) happy, with constant running water in the winery and wind pipes supplying acoustic tranquillity to the workforce and wines. The extension to the winery, that is nearing completion, will harness solar and thermal energy and provides a dramatic contrast against the 19th century property that houses the estate. Don't be put off, like Reinhard, these wines are serious, thought-provoking and intense, but they are also deceptively gentle, approachable and can be enjoyed simply for vinous pleasure. In fact, we defy anyone not to find something that suits them within his range.

Schieferterrassen Riesling 2012

The vines are found mainly in Rittersturz covering 4.5ha. The soil is mostly blue-grey to yellow-brown slate, with an average vine age of around 40 years, with a southeast-southwest exposure. Taut and focused, this is incredibly mineral and peppery, with a long fresh finish. Drinkable in the short term but will also keep.

Von Blauem Schiefer Riesling 2012

The vines are situated at the end of Laubach on iron-rich blue slate and clay with a southeast-south exposure over 1.5ha. The average vine age is 35 years. The fruit is more open, underpinned with graphite notes and juicy acidity. The mouth feel tightens to a more linear finish. The structure is sophisticated and the fruit is pure.

Kirchberg Riesling 2012

Located in Hohenrhein on reddish, sandy quartzite, ferric slate over 0.7ha with a south facing exposure. Aromas are reminiscent of wild herbs, salt and white flower blossom. The attack is precise and the mid-palate is finely-formed and very focused. Long and sleek.

Stolzenberg Riesling 2012

The vines are planted in Nellenköpfchen on grey-brown slate, sandy silt rich soil over 0.4ha with a southern exposure. Quite savoury, stone and earthy characters, with a rich mouth feel. The palate is laced with intense citrus, grapefruit notes and seaweed notes. Exceptionally persistent.

Röttgen Riesling 2012

Situated in Rittersturz on blue, yellow-brown to blue-black slate on southeast-south facing slopes, with an average vine age of 55 years. 2.9ha. The minerals err more towards flint and smoke in this wine. The palate is strong, toned and deeply concentrated, supported by fruit that is reminiscent of yellow peach and orange zest. This is a serious wine and needs time.

Uhlen Blaufüsser Lay Riesling 2012

Found in the end of Laubach on blue-grey slate with silt and clay with a southwest exposure with 1.1ha of 55 year old vines. Subtle and instantly attractive. Scented, pretty, delicately peachy florals on the nose. Defined, elegant mouth feel and excellent matter contributing to the long lasting concentration that lingers on the finish. Stunning.

Uhlen Laubach Riesling 2012

The soils are made up of grey slate which is silt, sand and fossil-rich (fossilised shells and crustaceans can clearly be seen in rock in the vineyard). Facing south-southwest the vineyard covers 2.2ha. Some smokiness meets florals and stony minerality, with a citrus backbone. Great intensity of acidity and fruit structure is somehow delicately wrought in. Saline finish with real purity and focus. A lightness of touch is particularly evident here and belies the incredible power this wine possesses.

Uhlen Roth Lay Riesling 2012

Severe and serious, more masculine and muscular in form than the previous two Uhlen, but very toned and controlled. This wine has a real strength without being overwhelming, it feels contained and intensely concentrated. Sleekly mineral and finely-wrought finish. Very long. This wine needs time.