



Alsace Wines 2005 :
Wines full of character, a vintage to keep

The harvest in Alsace ended in December with the last "Vendanges Tardives" and we are now able to make our first appraisal of the 2005 vintage.

First of all, let us follow the course of the year. The winter was actually quite normal, with hard frosts in December and January, and a lot of snow in the mountains. However, Alsace continued to suffer from a lack of rainfall, with only 150mm between November and March. April was mild and rainy, which favoured budburst. Flowering started at the end of May, coinciding with a period of very high temperatures, approaching 30°C at times, then very warm weather from mid-June to late July encouraged the vines to develop admirably. Numerous professionals removed excess bunches, a «green harvest», in order to keep the yield under control. Although the weather during the first half of August was pleasant, the second half was more contrasted, with unseasonably low temperatures. On the other hand, this preserved very satisfactory levels of acidity. Fine, sunny weather returned at the end of August, allowing the grapes to ripen to perfect maturity, while remaining in very sound condition.

Considering the varying degree of ripeness of each grape, the Regional Committee of Experts in Alsace Wines decreed the starting dates for the 2005 harvest : 7th of September for AOC Crémant d'Alsace and 22nd of September for AOC Alsace and AOC Alsace Grand Cru.

In order to optimise overall quality and to respond to current difficult trading conditions, Alsace wine professionals decided to limit production by not applying for PLC (possibility to exceed maximum permitted yields under specific conditions) for AOC Alsace and Alsace Grand Cru, and by reducing permitted enrichment (chaptalisation) of the must to a maximum of +1.5°.

From a quality point of view, the excellent ripeness of the grapes should be noted, as well as the promising levels of acidity, principally consisting of tartaric acid. Heavy rain in early October caused some concern about the state of the harvest and hastened the picking of the more fragile bunches. Although this year's Crémants are likely to be fresh and very fruity, for Riesling the results are more contrasted depending on their origin, with some irregular patches of arrested maturity on the lighter soils, and very rapid evolution of sanitary conditions (peduncular rot). Pinot Blanc, Auxerrois, Pinot Noir, Pinot Gris and Muscat are all very well balanced and fruit-driven, while Gewurztraminer is likely to be very aromatic. The choice of the harvest date and the care taken during vinification will both be of paramount importance this year. A very fine "Indian Summer" from 6 to 20 October (low rainfall, misty mornings and sunny afternoons) encouraged the growth of noble rot (botrytis), hopefully providing ideal conditions for the production of magnificent late-harvest Vendanges Tardives and Sélections de Grains Nobles wines.

From a quantity point of view, the total production reaches 1 155 000 hl (down – 8,6% compared to 2004), made up of 274 000 hl of AOC Crémant d'Alsace and 881 000 hl of still wine (AOC Alsace and AOC Alsace Grand Cru).

Conseil Interprofessionnel des Vins d'Alsace
Colmar - January 2006