



## **2008 Alsace Wines : An nice result**

It may be difficult to sum up the 2008 vintage in a nutshell, but all professionals are extremely satisfied with the quality of the wines produced. Fresh and very fruit-driven, thanks to even-healthier-than-average grapes, everything comes together to qualify 2008 as a great vintage ! However, early in the season there was little cause for optimism, and it is true to say that climate conditions, and therefore the evolution of ripening, were particularly unusual. In fact, the vegetation cycle in 2008 could be compared to the classic vintages of the pre-2000 period.

Cold, unsettled weather from winter through to April provoked a major discrepancy between early- and late-ripening sectors, leading to budburst at the end of April, about 10 days later than usual. Particularly warm weather in May encouraged vegetation growth and reduced some of the delay. Flowering started around 15 June, but took about 2 weeks to complete due to damp and cool weather conditions all that month, which served to further exacerbate the differences between early- and late-ripening sectors and created some major zones of mildew. Summer was marked by warmth and intermittent showers, with a scattering of thunderstorms, very localised but sometimes violent. Luckily, temperatures never reached heat-wave levels, and so the weather conditions were ideal to preserve both aroma and acidity.

The Comité Régional d'Experts des Vins d'Alsace (CRINAO) fixed the following starting dates for the 2008 harvest :

- For AOC Crémant d'Alsace, Monday 15 September.
- For AOC Alsace and for AOC Alsace Grand Cru, Thursday 25 September.
- For Vendanges Tardives and Sélections de Grains Nobles, Thursday 9 October.

Taking into account certain variations in both maturity and sanitary state (it was important to control the vigour of the vine in 2008), the grapes from the earliest-ripening sectors were harvested as quickly as possible.

The first fortnight of September was quite damp, with particularly heavy precipitation on 13 September. Luckily the next day saw the start of a period of cool, sunny and windy weather that dried out the bunches and thus prevented any major spread of rot. Harvesting took place over an unusually long period of time, to take full advantage of optimal climatic conditions (dry and sunny weather).

Crémant d'Alsace is one of the greatest successes of this vintage, combining superb finesse with exceptional class. Gewurztraminer is equally superb in 2008. Small yields and a significantly high degree of freshness for this varietal allowed the production of wines with remarkable purity and aromatic character. Sylvaner and Pinot Blanc are both crisp and clean. Muscat wines are very grapey, but the high levels of coulure in Muscat Ottonel vineyards led to a very severe drop in production. Riesling took a very long time to ripen, but we must pay tribute to the exceptional quality of the wines produced in the Grand Cru vineyards. Pinot Noir took full advantage of the late season sunshine and the wines are deep in colour and fruity. The sanitary state of Pinot Gris varied from region to region, but contrary to 2007 the wines do not have any over-ripe character but are very fruit-driven, smoky and perfectly balanced.

Exceptional climatic conditions in October enabled numerous late-harvest wines of Vendanges Tardives and Sélections de Grains Nobles to be produced.

Everything indicates that the 2008 Alsace vintage will have great ageing potential !

As far as volumes are concerned, at 1 131 443hl overall production is down 1.8% compared to 2007 (882 668hl of AOC Alsace and AOC Alsace Grand Cru plus 248 775hl of AOC Crémant d'Alsace).

The commercial year 2008 ended with a total volume up slightly (+0.7%) compared to 2007, with sales reaching 1 130 000hl (+1.4% in France and -1.5% for exports) including 223 000hl of Crémant d'Alsace (which showed an increase of 4.8% in France and 14.3% for exports !).