



Mosel Fine Wines

"The Independent Review of Mosel Riesling"

By Jean Fisch and David Rayer

The 2008 Vintage Conditions

The Growing Season

As we indicated in the January Issue of our Newsletter, 2008 was a late ripening vintage, certainly by any recent standards. There are two reasons for this: parts of the summer were wetter than ideally wanted and September proved sunny but cool.

2008 was off to a very good start with a normal bud break followed by a very early flowering.

The winter proved comparatively warm although there was still some snow in parts of the area in March. April was cool, unlike 2007. The combination meant that bud break occurred around May 1 in line with long term average (April 30). May proved to be warm (with average temperatures almost double of those of April) and sunny (it was the sunniest month of all the year with over 250 hours). As a result, flowering took place earlier than expected around June 9, i.e. a solid two weeks ahead of long-term average. Flowering went on for up to two weeks in some cases, which created some issues of bunch consistency. At the end of May, parts of the Mosel were badly affected by hail storms, in particular around Wittlich and in the Cochem area. These caused severe damages and huge reduction in quantities.

A warm and humid start of the summer created localized problems with diseases but also a very early start of veraison.

The summer proved to be trickier than in recent vintages. July was warm but also rather humid. This humidity led to localized outbreaks of Oidium and Peronospora, particularly in parts of the Middle Mosel and the Terrassen Mosel (the area of the Mosel stretching from Reil down to Koblenz). However, these outbreaks were quite manageable and only affected yields. In addition, hail and storms created problems in some areas, for instance around Brauneberg. Despite these issues, June and July were also warm, which allowed for the maturation process to continue at high speed. By the end of July, the ripening of the grapes in the Middle Mosel was nearly as advanced as in the 2006 and 2007. The veraison (i.e. changing in color) started for Riesling as early as August 11, which is a good three weeks ahead of long-term average. The situation was different in the Saar and Ruwer areas, where the ripening process was slower. Although August proved to be warm, winemakers reported that it felt cooler than usual and also rather wet through regular rainfalls. By the end of August, grape maturity was maybe no longer record breaking but still well in line with that of better recent vintages (including 2005).

Rather cool months of September and October delayed the ripening process.

September proved to be rather cool with average temperatures more than a full degree below long term average. This didn't further the ripening process as much as ideally wanted. In addition, rainfall was also higher than average, which created rot pressure in some areas. This cool weather continued in early October so that the grapes had not yet reached their full physiological maturity by mid-October. It also meant that acidity levels remained comparatively high. Fortunately, a streak of good warm weather in mid-October helped to get the extra Oechsle degrees and tame the acidities. The weather at the end of October and early November kept alternating sunshine and rainfall. This allowed some further ripening but did not give the possibility for a widespread outbreak of botrytis and therefore did not generate a substantial increase in sugar levels. Some botrytis developed early in the harvest but could not develop further due to the rain. The dry weather at the end of the harvest in mid-November also allowed for some botrytis development.

The uneven growing season favored top vineyards and winemakers that controlled yields.

The rather average climatic conditions during the growing season clearly favored the better sites. Unlike in recent vintages, this difference in sugar levels was high and often exceeded 20° Oechsle (which represents the difference between a Kabinett and an Auslese) between top and average sites. It is therefore not surprising that Bert Selbach (from the Weingut Dr. F. Weins-Prüm) harvested his highest must weight in the Erdener Prälat. In addition, there were often wide differences of maturity and quality between bunches even on the same vine. One major issue was the differences in maturity within a bunch. Berries in the middle section of the grape remained often green whereas the outside berries (exposed to the sun) could ripen faster. Major Estates had to 'clean' the first berries in a pre-harvest to improve the ripening of the remaining ones.

Despite some adverse conditions, the growing season is within the average when compared to those from the past two decades.

Riesling is a northern grape and does not need nor thrive in Mediterranean sunshine and draught. The growing season was not as hot as in 2007 and 2006 but showed good balance between warmth and enough water during the spring and most of the summer. The sugar levels are on average well above those of 1998 and just lower than those of, for instance, the very good 1988 vintage. Acidity levels are comparable to those prevailing in 2004 and 1998 (some winemakers even reported levels lower than in those vintages) and certainly nowhere near the levels experienced in 1996 (this is confirmed by the measurements done by public authorities - see the graphs on the next page). In addition, the early flowering and late harvest means that hanging times are not far of those of the record 2007 vintage (up to 130 days in some cases), which contributed to the development of complex flavor profiles.

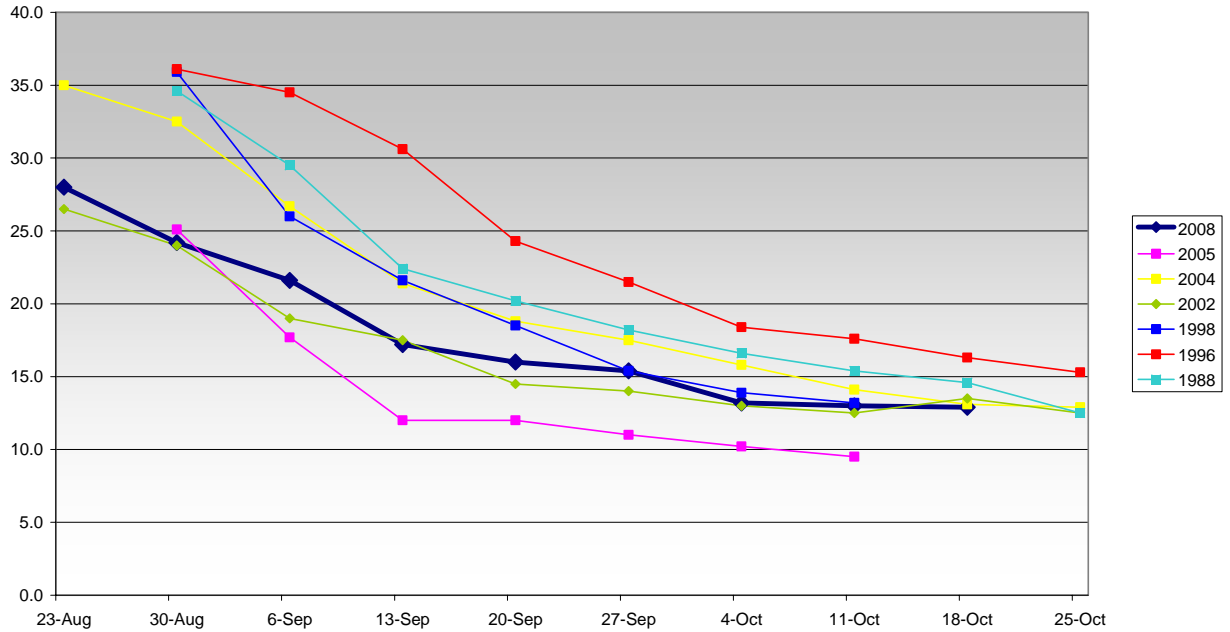


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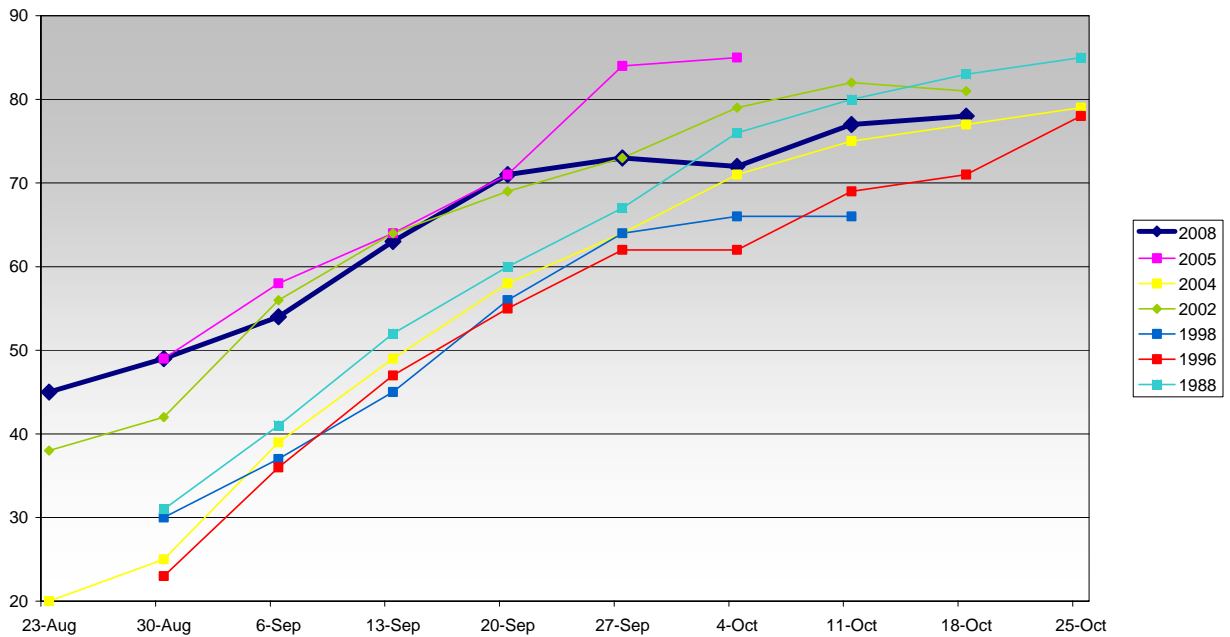
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Evolution of Total Acidity Levels (g/l) - 2008 vs recent or comparable past vintages (Bereich Trier)



Evolution of Sugar Levels (° Oechsle) - 2008 vs recent or comparable past vintages (Bereich Trier)



Source: German Ministry of Agriculture - Rheinland-Pfalz



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The aim of Mosel Fine Wines is to provide a comprehensive and independent review of Riesling wines produced in the Mosel, Saar and Ruwer region.

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