

The 2016 vintage at Weingut Egon Müller-Scharzhof

The 2015-2016 winter was mild again. Dry conditions that had characterized 2015 lasted until December but from January onwards every month was wetter than normal. March and April were rather cold and bud-break came late. May was warm but rainy. June, too was very wet and with day time and night time temperatures around 20°C the mildew pressure was enormous. At times it was an almost ideal environment for the fungus and the incubation-time was only one day. Still our first 3 fungicide treatments were organic but under the prevailing conditions it was impossible to always spray every vineyard at the right time and we switched to systemic treatments. In this phase we lost about 40% of our crop. Flowering started at the beginning of June and lasted until the end of the month. We were spraying our vineyards at weekly intervals and mostly prevented further damage however, our plots in Saarbürg and in the Braunfels were badly hit, the former because it is too far away to always keep an eye on things and the later because of its situation in a narrow valley with a little creek at the bottom creating a humid ambience.

In August the rain finally stopped. Until the end of September it remained sunny, hot and dry and the vegetation progressed quickly because there was ample water supply from the previous rain. During one week in September we saw an increase in sugar levels of 15° Oechsle. On October 1st, 20 mm of rain fell and after the long drought the vineyards took a drink resulting in a noticeable drop in sugar levels. Then it was cooler but dry and the sugar levels rose slowly.

We started the harvest on October 10th. Because of the drawn out flowering there had been “coulure” and berry-shatter and the clusters were loose but individual berries were fairly big and actually the size of the berries did help to offset some of the losses from mildew. The grapes were quite healthy and ripe. During the first week it was dry but the long-range weather-forecast was not for stable weather. We first picked the Saarbürg and Braunfels plots where the mildew-damage was the biggest and where we harvested less than 10 hl/ha. Then we moved on to Wiltinger braune Kupp and Scharzhofberg. The yields were better there, just under 20 hl/ha in Wiltinger braune Kupp and a little bit over 20 hl/ha in the Scharzhofberg. The difference is probably due to the proximity of the river and the higher humidity, creating an even more favourable conditions for the fungus.

During the second week we experienced a few showers but the grapes remained exceptionally healthy and it was impossible to select botrytised fruit for Auslese. On October 19th and 20th, we picked Scharzhofberger Kabinett “alte Reben” in the breiter Weinberg. Then, as the long-range weather-forecast became more stable we decided to stop and wait. Botrytis did come after some rainfall on October 24th but despite the following fine autumn weather with plenty of sunshine the grapes did not dry sufficiently for it to develop into noble-rot.

With rain looming we resumed picking on November 2nd. We had about 1 ha of Rosenberg and 4 ha of Scharzhofberg left, with the exception of the “Mallmann” plot all situated on the Eastern side of the hill. Here the yields were better reaching almost normal 30 hl/ha in the Rosenberg. With the fine weather the must-weights had increased a bit but despite our best efforts it was still not possible to reach what we consider Auslese level. The last grapes were brought in on November 4th.

Because of the complete lack of Botrytis, we took chances leaving some grapes for Eiswein, even though the harvest was small and we had to consider the possibility of losing everything seeing the string of mild winters in recent years. We were lucky however, and on November 30th the temperature dropped to -9,5° C, allowing us to pick frozen grapes. Incidentally, a 1975 Beerenauslese Eiswein was harvested on 25th November at almost the same temperature, sugar level and acidity.

Altogether, 2016 promises to be a very good vintage. Grapes were beautiful and ripe and the acidity levels seem perfectly balanced. At no time we were rushed or under pressure and we could harvest everything at the right time. It's a relatively small vintage although the distribution of the different quality levels is very different from other years because the good harvest in Rosenberg could not compensate for the losses in Saarbürg and Braunfels and therefore „Scharzhof“ will be in short supply and because of the total lack of noble-rot there will be no Auslese. On the other hand we have similar quantities of Scharzhofberger Kabinett and Spätlese as in 2015.

It is impossible to name a past comparable vintage if only for the long, self-imposed brake during the harvest. However, ripeness- and acidity-levels suggest wines of a stature similar to those from 2014, 2012 or 2004.