

PRESS RELEASE

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The 2019 Alto Adige Wine Harvest: A Somewhat Turbulent yet Promising Vintage

Alto Adige's winegrowers look back on a difficult winegrowing year. In 2019, a great deal of dedication and diligence were required from everyone with the work in the vineyards. But after ideal autumn weather before the start of the harvest, Alto Adige's winegrowers and winemakers are counting on a good vintage with promising quality: with lively and fresh, sporty and dynamic wines filled with character.

The winter months of 2018-2019 were unusually warm with temperatures that at times were already spring-like. Furthermore, with the exception of a heavy snowfall in early February, the winter turned out to be very dry. After a likewise warm and dry March, it turned really wet in the months of April and May, with the latter also becoming too cool for the season. In general, the spring of 2019 was distinguished by extreme weather phenomena: the first hailstorms already occurred in April. Several cold spells brought along with them the danger of late frosts.

According to the Laimburg Research Center, the sprouting of the grapevines was neither especially delayed nor extremely early in comparison to other years. But the full blossoming was delayed in 2019 as a result of the capricious weather with temperatures that were significantly below average above all else in the month of May. This delay was also reflected in the beginning of maturation, which was ten to fourteen days later in comparison to the average of many years.

After a wet and cool spring, a hot, very summery June followed with occasional, scant precipitation. July was also typically warm but not so extremely hot. The rainfall returned to the usual level once again for this season. A heavy hailstorm on August 6 in Bolzano and vicinity put the brakes on the maturation and development of some of the vineyards there. During the very sunny days in late August and early September, though, the grapes experienced a strong boost in maturation. Moreover, during this phase, warm days and cool nights favored the formation of aromas in the grapes.

"As a result of the course of the weather throughout the year, winegrowers were faced with great challenges," explained Hansjörg Hafner, head of the Winegrowing Division at the Alto Adige Fruitgrowing and Winegrowing Consulting Center. "The timely execution of various measures for care, such as leaf removal, was especially important. For that reason, the diligence and commitment in the vineyards especially paid off this year."

Harvest Begins Two Weeks Later

In late August and early September, the harvest began in Alto Adige's vineyards in

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some of the lower-elevation valley locations as well as with the grapes for the base wines to be used for sparkling wine. The winegrowers started up the main harvest in the middle of September, around two weeks later than in the previous year.

After the hot and muggy late summer weeks, a good many winegrowers and winemakers already felt a little uneasy. “Since with some varieties, there were mild problems with rot, the conscientious work in the vineyard and above all else a well-directed selection during the harvest this year were very often decisive for the quality of the grapes,” said Hans Terzer, winemaker at the Cantina Produttori San Michele Appiano winery and also president of the Alto Adige Winemakers. “But the lovely autumn weather during the last two weeks before the harvest really lent us a helping hand,” he added with relief. Aside from the areas that were affected by hail, harvest figures were around ten to fifteen percent below those of the high yields of the previous year, but well within the multiyear average.

Good Qualities Across the Board

For Terzer, the Pinot Blanc and Sauvignon Blanc present themselves as “fabulously beautiful, crispy and fresh, with lovely acidities and less alcohol. And the Chardonnay is also showing its best side.” He is surprised by the fine grape quality with Schiava (Vernatsch) and with the Pinot Noir grapes which had sufficient time to achieve full maturity.

Franz Haas, from the estate winery of the same name in Montan, is also positively surprised by the qualities of the 2019 vintage, “as far as both white wines and red wines are concerned.” A great deal of work was necessary in the vineyards to clear away some rotten spots. But only healthy grapes arrived in the winery with ideal values: good sugar levels, higher acidities, and lower pH values. “Those are the ideal conditions that promise fresh, lively, and sporty and dynamic wines,” Haas is convinced. For him, the aromatic varieties present themselves in 2019 “not so brashly in terms of aromas, but therefore very much filled with character. The Pinot Blanc and Pinot Grigio are surprising with their depth and freshness.”

With the red wine varieties, it is very much the Pinot Noir that proves itself through harmonious maturity. Cabernet and Merlot still need some time for a first evaluation. Haas is especially satisfied with the development of the grapes in the higher areas around Aldino: “This year, the maturity there was far in advance of where it was last year, and the quality of the grapes that were harvested is right there with the best that are aging in the cellar.” He is very confident: “The 2019 vintage is one that came in later, but in terms of quality, it is certainly very interesting.”

Stefan Kapfinger, winemaker at the Meran Winery, also speaks of ideal autumn weather: “The large temperature differences between day and night substantially contributed to good grape maturation and the formation of aromas.” Kapfinger is very satisfied with the healthy grapes that the winegrowers harvested. “Even though the sugar levels are somewhat below the average from last year, we have somewhat higher acidities all around, which has a very positive effect on the freshness and liveliness of the wines.” What is especially positive and conspicuous for the winemaker from Merano are the pH values of this year’s harvest that are low by Alto Adige standards. “They contribute substantially to the stability and longevity of the

wines," Kapfinger adds. With the white varieties, what stands out for him above all are the Pinot Blanc and Chardonnay because of their interesting values, while with the red wine varieties, the first Pinot Noirs look promising, as does the Schiava. "It's looking good," he said, pleased. "We have great conditions for a promising vintage which, for the Burgraviate, is comparable to the vintage of 2016."

Fruity, Fresh, and Typical Wines

The first grape varieties that were harvested in the Isarco Valley starting on September 20 traditionally include the early maturing Müller Thurgau. But the full-blown harvest in that valley only began in October, as Hannes Baumgartner of the Strasserhof in Varna reports. The president of the Alto Adige Independent Winegrowers looks back on an exciting Isarco Valley summer and autumn. "Aside from some hail in certain areas as well as slight problems with rot, there weren't any major problems in the vineyards for Isarco Valley winegrowers. It was possible to harvest the grapes correspondingly healthy and with good quality. They guarantee fruity, fresh, typical Isarco Valley white wines for the vintage." The Veltliner and Riesling present themselves as promising, with great freshness and potential. But the Müller Thurgau and Kerner are also convincing through their discreet aromas and liveliness.

The winegrowers in the higher situated and later maturing areas in the Val Venosta are pleased with interesting qualities with the Riesling and Pinot Blanc as well as with the Pinot Noir.

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