

The 2020 Vintage in Alto Adige

An Average to Good Vintage for the White Wines,
Top Qualities for Lagrein and Pinot Noir

For Alto Adige's winegrowers, 2020 had a few surprises in store. Above all else, the weather conditions around the maturing of the grapes caused the winegrowers no lack of headaches regarding the determination of the best harvest date. In spite of all of this, the Alto Adige wine industry is satisfied with the results of the 2020 harvest: a vintage for white wines that is good on average, and a very good one for Lagrein and Pinot Noir.

The Course of the Year 2020 in the Vineyard

In 2020, a great deal of dedication and diligence were required once again from Alto Adige winegrowers with their work in the vineyards. The winter months were warmer than average, especially starting from mid-February, with very mild daily high temperatures. After a cool and rainy start to the spring in March, the months of April and May were likewise warmer than average. However, a cold spell at the end of March required targeted frost protection measures in some locations.

The sprouting of the buds in 2020 was later than the ten-year average. However, the high temperatures in April and May were then favorable for the development of the vines, already resulting in a remarkably early blossoming in the early-ripening areas as early as around May 10.

The bad weather phases in May and June led to high infection pressure for fungal diseases in the vines in some vineyards. "However, the winegrowers were able to master the situation well with their considerable efforts along with the recommendations from advisory institutions," said Hansjörg Hafner, head of the winegrowing department in the Alto Adige Fruitgrowing and Winegrowing Consulting Center.

June showed a balanced temperature pattern throughout. Precipitation, sometimes in the form of heavy thunderstorms, fell mainly in the first half of the month. July was typically warm for the middle of summer with a short-lived heat wave.

The 2020 Harvest

In late summer and autumn, there were repeated periods of heavy rainfall, making the harvest something of a roll of the dice in some cases, as Hafner reported. "The harvest of healthy grapes has rarely been as dependent on a precise picking time as in 2020."

But he went on to be convinced, "The lowered target yields on the part of the Consortium of Alto Adige Wine helped to achieve the quality targets in 2020." Winegrowers and winemakers can be satisfied with the harvest. The sugar values in 2020 are on average around 1° lower on the Klosterneuburg scale than in recent years, and the total acidity values are at the average of recent years. As a result of the lower sugar levels, the alcohol levels are also somewhat lower.

"With the white wines, that is certainly not a disadvantage, as they are slightly less dense but, because of that, more accessible and fresher," Hafner added.

Among the white wines, 2020 presents itself as a good vintage on average with very nice Chardonnay and Pinot Grigio. The winemakers are very satisfied with the Pinot Noir and Lagrein. The Merlot and especially the Cabernet had to be

harvested somewhat earlier than planned because of the weather conditions – with good but not surprisingly good qualities. The 2020 Schiava (Vernatsch) comes through as somewhat leaner than in previous years.

At lower elevation locations, the 2020 harvest volumes were around five percent lower than in the previous year, and at the higher elevations, around ten percent lower. The target harvest quantities which had been set by the Consortium of Alto Adige Wine as a result of the covid-19 crisis could be met nearly everywhere.

Voices from the Individual Alto Adige Winegrowing Zones

Bassa Atesina: Very Satisfied with White Wines

Peter Zemmer, Peter Zemmer Estate Winery, Cortina

Peter Zemmer from the estate winery of the same name in Cortina looks back on a rather exciting 2020 in the Bassa Atesina. "Above all, the heavy rainfall in the second half of August put us under some pressure and we had to harvest the first Burgundy varieties from the pergola trellises starting from September 2. The positive influences of the weather in the first half of September then went on to take the pressure off during the white wine harvest, and it was possible to pick in a calm and targeted manner."

In any case, Zemmer is quite satisfied with the 2020 white wines. "The wines have a nice acidity, freshness, and finesse across the board. They are somewhat less intense, have a lower alcohol concentration and, because of that, more fruit and elegance." The Chardonnay and Pinot Grigio particularly stand out for Zemmer, with "freshness, elegance, and sleek structure." Among the red wines, the Lagrein and Pinot Noir from the higher elevation locations are particularly convincing in the Bassa Atesina. "The late-ripening Cabernet had a somewhat difficult time, as the optimal conditions were not present." In particular, the harvest quantities in the Bassa Atesina were around ten percent below the normal average.

Oltradige: Accessible White Wines, Good Qualities with Red Wines

Wolfgang Tratter, San Paolo Winery

"In comparison to recent years, the harvest in the Oltradige region began a few days earlier than the long-term average, as early as the end of August," reported Wolfgang Tratter, winemaker at the San Paolo Winery. Within a month, the grapes then had to be harvested very quickly. The decisive factors were the large amounts of precipitation at the end of August and, above all, the muggy weather in September. "The skins of the grapes suffered extremely under these conditions, and consequently nearly all of the varieties had to be harvested within the shortest period of time, even at the higher locations."

For Tratter, 2020 will be "a good vintage on average for white wines, with a tendency towards lower alcohol levels. The wines may be somewhat less dense, but that makes them very accessible."

In the case of the red wines, the San Paolo winemaker says that "good to, in some cases, very good qualities are to be expected for the varieties of Pinot Noir and Lagrein." In many cases, the Merlot and especially the Cabernet had to be harvested earlier than desired. "The qualities are also good for these varieties. For Schiava (Vernatsch), a somewhat leaner vintage is emerging than in the previous two years."

Bolzano: Top Lagrein Vintage and Appealing Santa Maddalena Stephan Filippi, Bolzano Winery

A large amount of the white wines as well as some of the red wines could be brought into the cellars starting from mid-September, before the heavy rainfalls. Stephan Filippi, winemaker at the Bolzano Winery, displayed his pleasure about the good quality. "After the autumn did not exactly show its best side, we were surprised by the harvest in a positive way. Our winegrowers reacted well to the weather conditions and were able to harvest healthy, mature grapes." Above all else with the Lagrein, Filippi expects a top vintage from 2020. "We have never had wines like this in the cellar – with dark color, elegant, with a lot of structure and ripe tannins. This will be a really great Lagrein vintage." And for the Bolzano winemaker, the 2020 Santa Maddalena is also "very fruity, quaffable, and accessible." The Pinot Noir is also showing really well, with elegant, ripe tones. The white varieties, especially those from the higher elevation locations, present themselves to Filippi as "very appealing, clear, fresh, and flavorful." Within that context, the Gewürztraminer, Chardonnay, and Sauvignon Blanc particularly stand out in a positive manner. In terms of quantities, the 2020 harvest in Bolzano is slightly above the disastrous year of 2019 that was plagued by hail, but it was still around 15 percent below the average of recent years.

Meran and the Adige Valley: A Vintage that Needs Time and Has Time Harald Schraffl, Nals Margreid Winery

Harald Schraffl, winemaker at the Nals Margreid Winery, spoke of a "positive side for the wines", and he is also trying to wrest something positive from the crisis. "At this time, everything is going a little slower, both in the vineyard as well as in the winery." For him, there was no particularly conspicuous feature in winegrowing this year. "The only striking thing is that in spite of sufficient precipitation in the Adige Valley, yields were smaller than expected and settled in at the already low harvest levels of 2019." The harvest could be carried out optimally and without stress. And after initial uncertainties about the use of contract labor from Eastern Europe to help with the harvest, the winegrowers were able to fully concentrate on their work in the vineyards. The harvest itself began around September 5 – with healthy, somewhat smaller, and very concentrated berries. Schraffl is particularly enthusiastic about the Burgundy varieties. "Chardonnay, Pinot Grigio, and Pinot Blanc present themselves as Alpine-fresh with good acidity, surprisingly lively, and with succinct tannins." Among the red wines, Lagrein, Pinot Noir, and Merlot have proven themselves. "The wines all need more time to mature in the cellar this year – and thank goodness we have it now," says Schraffl with conviction. "The 2020 vintage still seems very youthful right now, but for me it will be one that is very long lasting."

Val Venosta: An Eventful Vintage in the Val Venosta Martin Aurich, Unterortl Estate Winery, Castel Juval

For the Val Venosta, 2020 was "a very eventful year, and not just because of the pandemic," reports Martin Aurich of the Unterortl Estate Winery at Castel Juval in Castebello. Several hailstorms in various communities considerably slowed down the maturation situation with the vines at individual locations.

Correspondingly, the harvest quantities were in some places significantly lower than in a normal year.

"Acidity levels are slightly lower than we are used to in the Val Venosta due to the higher than average night temperatures in the weeks leading up to harvest," said Aurich. "Sugar levels and the natural alcohol content are within the normal range." Among the three leading Val Venosta varieties, the Pinot Noir stands out with "extremely nice quality and corresponding youthful wines." The Pinot Blanc and Riesling are convincing with their usual fruity wines. The wines present themselves as very balanced and accessible, with clear differences depending upon the location. Aurich went on to add, "In view of the somewhat unfavorable weather conditions in late summer and in the autumn, we are more than satisfied with the quality that emerged. We will be able to deal with the lower harvest volumes."

Isarco Valley: Invitingly Drinkable, Elegant White Wines Hannes Munter, Cantina Valle Isarco

Hannes Munter, winemaker of the Valle Isarco Winery, described 2020 as a "somewhat difficult year for winegrowing". The year demanded a lot of diligence and commitment from the growers in the vineyards." The main harvest began in the Valle Isarco around September 10 and then unfolded relatively quickly within a few weeks. Due to weather conditions, the harvest volumes came in 10 to 15 percent lower than normal.

For Munter, the young wines present themselves as "very fruity, with beautiful freshness and elegant texture, youthful and lively." The wines are characterized by somewhat less alcohol, but that makes them invitingly drinkable. In addition to the typical Valle Isarco varieties of Kerner and Riesling, Pinot Grigio and Pinot Blanc also present themselves with a great deal of character. Munter expects quite a lot from the Valle Isarco Veltliner, with elegant wines full of special character. "The Sylvaner has survived the weather caprices of this year particularly well, and it shows great structure and ripe aromas."

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