

## 2021: Extraordinary Year for White Wines

Late harvest and beautiful weather at the crush provide fruit and elegance – good to very good red wines

*A late harvest and lovely, stable weather at the crush characterized Alto Adige's 2021 vintage. Thus the grapes could be left to ripen ideally, and thanks to the high temperature differentials between day and night, a great deal of aroma could form. The result is an extraordinary 2021 white wine vintage and without exception a good to very good vintage for the reds.*

In addition to all of the hard work in the vineyard and in the winery, the cornerstone for impressive wines is laid by the weather, and by and large it did its best for Alto Adige's winegrowers in 2021. And although the vines sprouted at a comparable point in time as in prior years, cool temperatures in the spring in any case slowed down that sprouting. "If the soil temperatures of the past twenty years are compared, this April 2021 was the coolest," explained Hansjörg Hafner, head of the winegrowing department at the Advisory Board for Fruit and Wine Cultivation.

### Late Maturation, Hardly Any Frost, and Challenging Precipitation

The cool temperatures and the resulting delay in vegetation of around ten to fourteen days turned out to be a blessing for the winegrowers. Thus there were only individual cases of frost damage, while elsewhere, such as in Central Italy or in France, there were complaints of enormous losses. It was no longer possible to make up for the delay which the vines had experienced in the spring, even though June was the third warmest this year in the Advisory Board's weather records.

What was challenging for the winegrowers, on the other hand, was the situation with precipitation in the summer. June, for instance, was very dry, and both some of the younger plantings and even the bearing ones had to be irrigated. "The missing water then showed up in July," Hafner reported – in the form of severe storms. On top of that, in the height of the summer there were several hailstorms, the most severe of which occurred July 13 when a hail front passed through the Bassa Atesina and the Valle Isarco all the way to the Val Pusteria. In the Cortaccia area, the hail caused damage of up to eighty percent.

### Lovely Weather in the Autumn Provides for Ideal Grape Quality

The winegrowers were accommodated with a continuous phase of lovely weather in the late summer and autumn which created the ideal conditions for maturation, above all else

for the white and late-maturing red varieties. “As a result of the lovely autumn, very healthy and top-quality grapes could be harvested without exception,” Hafner emphasized. In terms of quantities, on the other hand, the 2021 harvest was comparable to that of the previous year. Only in the areas of Bolzano and the Valle Isarco were the harvest quantities slightly higher, while in the Bassa Atesina they were around five percent lower because of the hailstorms. Among the grape varieties, Schiava (Vernatsch) formed the only exception for which significantly below-average harvest quantities were reported.

### Above Average Whites, Outstanding Schiava

Thanks to the very healthy harvest, good sugar levels, and fine acidities, 2021 promises to be an above average vintage for Alto Adige’s white wines. “The wines from the Chardonnay and Sauvignon Blanc varieties present themselves without exception as very lovely,” Hafner said. “The Pinot Blancs show themselves to be crisp and juicy, while the Silvaner variety is very nice.” A similar situation also holds true for Riesling and Kerner, while with the Gewürztraminer, those that are most convincing are the ones whose grapes originate from areas with a somewhat lower yield.

With the red wine varieties, Hafner draws a differentiated picture. For instance, significantly lower yields, smaller berries, and loose, very healthy bunches with good sugar levels and ideal coloration provide for Schiava wines that are developing in an outstanding direction. The Pinot Noir wines from the Bassa Atesina score a “very good”, the Merlot and Cabernet get a “good to very good”, while the Lagrein is developing as “average to good”.

### Adige Valley/Merano: Fresh, Lively White Wines, Balanced and Powerful Reds

Rudi Kofler, winemaker at the Cantina Terlano, reacts almost euphorically when asked about the 2021 vintage in the areas of the Adige Valley and Merano. “I am convinced that we have a very precious vintage in the cellar which will offer us great enjoyment and pleasure,” Kofler said. The requirements for that were provided by an ideal course of the weather: a late blossoming of the vines, and thus hardly any damage due to frost, a dry June with little pressure from fungus, and an August with prominent temperature fluctuations between day and night. “That was extremely beneficial for the fruitiness and the lively acidity of the 2021 vintage,” the winemaker from Terlano explained.

His view of the white wines is that they are proving themselves with fresh, precise notes of fruit and a lively acidity structure. “Well-structured and nevertheless elegant wines are pointing to a very good vintage,” added Kofler, who within that context emphasized above all else the Sauvignon Blanc. With the red wine varieties on the other hand, it is the somewhat early-maturing varieties of Pinot Noir and Lagrein that stand out. “Their intense

color, mature and fine tannins, and balanced yet heavy body promise a very good vintage,” Kofler concluded.

### **Bolzano Area: That Last Inch is Missing for an Extraordinary Vintage**

Christian Werth, winemaker at the Muri Gries Monastery Winery, is expecting a good but not great vintage for the classic red wine varieties in the Bolzano area. “A strong cool-down in late September is the reason why that last inch is missing for an extraordinary vintage,” Werth explained. While the late-maturing varieties of Cabernet and Merlot mostly suffered from the low (soil) temperatures, the Lagrein is showing prominent fruit and a good acidity structure. The similar situation holds true for the Schiava, to which the cool nights in autumn additionally provided an intense color.

Werth is euphoric about the situation with the white wines. Above all else the Pinot Blanc and Pinot Grigio benefited from the lower temperatures: they are sleeker and have good fruit with crisp acidity. The Gewürztraminer and Chardonnay are not entirely as full, saturated, and powerful as in other years, but because of that they are “a trace more elegant,” as Werth put it. “For the white wines, 2021 is a promising vintage,” he explained. “And on the whole, in two or three years this vintage may present itself even better than we currently believe.”

### **Oltradige: Meticulous Work for Crisp Whites and Surprising Reds**

Hail in July was a source of great expense in Oltradige. “Countless hours of work were spent removing split or smashed berries from the grape bunches,” explained Hans Terzer, winemaker at the Cantina Produttori San Michele Appiano, “But the meticulous selection of damaged grapes and a late harvest that is often associated with risk granted us very nice grape material.” It was above all else the white wines, primarily the Pinot Blanc and Sauvignon Blanc, which benefitted from the late harvest. “Basically, the wines have a somewhat lower alcohol content than last year and the acidity is somewhat higher,” Terzer said. “This contributes to the wines presenting themselves as fresh, fruity, with crisp acidity and fine aromas.”

The experienced winemaker describes the red wines of the 2021 vintage as “quite the surprise”. He explained, “The Pinot Noir is especially pleasing, characterized by a lovely fruit, freshness, and fine tannins.” And the long maturation period also did some good to the Merlot and Cabernet. “On the whole, the 2021 vintage is to be classified as good to very good,” said Terzer. “The wines are developing in the cellar to our fullest satisfaction and we will once again be dealing with a lovely vintage.”

### **Bassa Atesina: Ideal Weather Provides for Lots of Color and Aroma**

For the 2021 vintage in the Bassa Atesina, the classic laughing face and crying face apply. The crying face was brought about by the hail which caused enormous damage in and around Cortaccia. “It is for that reason that harvest quantities were lower with the Gewürztraminer,” explained Hannes Pfitscher of the Pfitscher Estate Winery in Montagna. The laughing face, on the other hand, is thanks to the generally high quality of the grapes. “We had ideal weather in the autumn and cool nights already fairly early on which were perfect for maturation,” said Pfitscher.

That made itself noticeable above all else with the red wine varieties, for instance with Pinot Noir and Lagrein. “They were very ripe physiologically, they had a great deal of color and aroma, and a lovely tannin structure,” the winemaker from Montagna explained. Pfitscher also attests to a “super fruit, good body, and nice acidity” with the Bassa Atesina white wines of the 2021 vintage. And even if the harvest volumes were down with the Gewürztraminer, he emphasizes that they are nevertheless very nice, floral, with tropical fruits and fine acidity. And with regard to the long-term development of the 2021 vintage, Pfitscher will not pass judgment yet, but “The base material was top-notch,” he said. “And for that reason, it’s really fun in the cellar.”

### Val Venosta: A Vintage for the Reds – And for Growers with Strong Nerves

A late harvest and a lovely September have also provided for a very healthy harvest in the Val Venosta. And even if the harvest quantities may have been below expectations with the white wines, with the red wines they were somewhat exceeded. “And with the quality, too, I give the reds the advantage,” explained Heinrich Pohl of the Marinushof in Castelbello. The Pinot Noir, for instance, is developing very well: “Fine fruit, very typical mild tannins, medium body.” Even a “super” can be coaxed out of Pohl for the 2021 Zweigelt. “It is full, fruity, and dark.”

Pohl rates the quality of the 2021 Val Venosta white wine vintage as “good”. The 2021 Pinot Blanc is a typical one: with medium acidity and fruit and with a high level of alcohol. He describes the 2021 vintage of the Val Venosta Riesling as “very German” – prominent acidity, notes of peaches, and a lower level of alcohol. On the whole, 2021 is a very good vintage with a significant plus with red wines. “The early varieties, such as the Burgundies and Kerner, were able to mature optimally, while the late varieties of Riesling and Zweigelt demanded strong nerves – and flawless work in the vineyard,” Pohl said.

### Valle Isarco: Late Harvest Brings Extraordinary White Wines

The harvest began in the Valle Isarco approximately one week later than the average over many years and even two weeks later than in 2020. That meant a plus for the white wines

of the Valle Isarco: “The grapes could mature so well and take advantage of the large temperature differences between day and night,” explained Celestino Lucin, winemaker of the Novacella Monastery Winery. “That is always an advantage for the aroma profile.” One drop of bitterness came from the hail in July, a phenomenon that is rare in the Valle Isarco. “The winegrowers had to invest a great deal of time and carry out a precise harvest,” said the Novacella winemaker.

But thanks to that work, Lucin expects a very good vintage for the Valle Isarco white wines: with high levels of acidity, fruit, freshness, and elegance. The winemaker even speaks of an “extraordinary vintage” with a view toward those varieties that benefit from a high level of that mineral-rich quality, first and foremost Müller Thurgau, Kerner, Riesling, and Veltliner. And for white wines such as Sylvaner or Pinot Grigio, 2021 is a very good vintage. On the whole, aficionados can look forward to especially aromatic, fruity wines. And to the factor of longevity, which Lucin indicates as “a great potential to age.”