

PRESS RELEASE:

A challenging year for wine brings fresh, light-bodied wines

As the grapes for the 2023 vintage are harvested, the winemakers of Alto Adige are heading for the end of a viticultural year which required them to pull out all the stops in the vineyards: first a spring that started out extremely dry and ended up rainy and chilly, followed by a wet summer with three heat waves and now a truly golden autumn. The latter is also the reason why the late-ripening red grape varieties are coming along really well. Regarding the whites, experts expect fruity, fresh, light-bodied wines.

“The **2023 viticultural year was one of extreme weather**,” says Andreas Kofler, Chairman of the Cantina Kurtatsch and President of the Alto Adige Wine Consortium. A comparatively **early budding season** in the extremely dry early months was followed by a **rainy, chilly spring** and a **wet summer**. **Heat in July and August, rain in early September**, and then the eagerly awaited **dry autumn where days were warm** and nights were cool—“We really saw every possible kind of weather this year,” summarizes Ivan Giovanett, cellarer of the Castelfeder Winery.

Lots of attention and even more work

Due to the wet weather in particular, the workload at the vineyards **increased quite substantially** for wine growers. “The rainfall quantity as such wasn’t out of the ordinary, but there was constant humidity,” says Barbara Raifer, Head of the Viticulture Research Area at the Research Centre Laimburg. The consequence was a high risk of fungal infestation. “We had to **constantly stay vigilant**; we had to stay on the ball in order to prevent damage,” says Markus Prackwieser from the Gump Hof wine estate in Völs/Fiè allo Sciliar.

He attributes the fact that Alto Adige got off lightly compared to other regions to extensive experience and the small-scale viticulture—a point of view shared by the President of the Consortium, Andreas Kofler: “A small-scale structure means that you can handle such precarious situations better, simply because you can respond faster,” explains Kofler.

He also emphasizes the importance of quality expert advice for the wine growers—even more so in a year like this, which poses so many challenges. The greatest of these challenges was the heat stress the vines were exposed to—in July especially, temperatures were often 35 degrees

Celsius and over. “While vines have an extensive root system, but even they are having a hard time getting any water from the ground after the last few months have been so dry,” says Barbara Raifer. The physiological damage sustained in some individual locations was probably caused by this heat and drought stress.

Difficult yield planning and a complicated harvest

The challenges of this viticultural year have not been limited to crop protection and irrigation, however. “Yield control was difficult this year, too, because the wet weather during the cell division phase had caused the grapes to grow quite large and the yield had to be controlled at a very early stage without actually being able to tell what the weather would be like later on,” says Thomas Scarizuola, cellarer of the Cantina Kaltern.

The harvest itself was also more complicated than usual. “Grapes are hand-picked in Alto Adige, which allows us to make a very fine selection and ensure that only the pick of the crop makes it into the cellars,” says Markus Prackwieser, and his colleague Ivan Giovanett adds: “The hard-working, diligent wine growers were really rewarded for their efforts this year.”

White wines: a cool, fresh, juicy vintage

And what can wine lovers expect with a view to the 2023 vintage? “The white varieties in particular had a slightly lower sugar content than usual, which will also lead to a lower alcohol content,” says Andreas Kofler. But lower alcohol content is exactly what the market is demanding, adds the President of the Consortium. His conclusion: “In effect, nature has provided us exactly with what we were looking for.” However, from a purely scientific perspective, the correlation is not quite clear: “The lower gradation comes as something of a surprise, but probably has to do with the three summer heat waves,” says Laimburg researcher Barbara Raifer and adds that in any case, it is imperative to learn to deal with such hot spells.

Even if the reasons for the low gradation are not quite clear, there is one thing that Andreas Kofler and his fellow winemakers agree on: the **white wines of the 2023 vintage will be fresh and crisp, fruity, and light-bodied**. According to Markus Prackwieser, we should not expect “fat, full-bodied” white wines this year but “a cool, fresh, juicy vintage; light, Alpine wines, just like the market anticipates from Alto Adige,” as Ivan Giovanett puts it emphatically.

The Chardonnay, above all, mastered the difficult conditions really well, the cellarer of the Castelfeder Winery points out; the Sauvignon, too, turned out really well, and the Pinot Blanc promises fresh, fruity wines due to the lower sugar content. And another thing: “The good

locations stand out particularly this year; they will yield very, very good wines,” says Thomas Scarizuola.

Red wines: elegant and not too brawny

The Kaltern cellarer is also optimistic with regard to the 2023 reds. The Pinot Noir, for instance, has an excellent maturity level despite the sugar content being lower than in other years. “This is going to be a **Pinot Noir** that’s truly elegant and not too brawny while **still having a clear structure**,” predicts Scarizuola. The **Schiava and Lagrein varieties**, too, benefit from the glorious weather these days—“this fall is really helping us immensely,” as Andreas Kofler puts it—promising a good vintage. The Lagrein, in particular, appears completely unperturbed by the freak weather in the spring and summer. And the Schiava is by now almost completely grown in ideal locations, which has led to very good gradation at times, says Barbara Raifer.

But even the prospect of an interesting vintage doesn’t make winemakers forget this extremely difficult year: “Whereas everything seemed to go more or less all by itself last year, this year required a lot, and I really mean a lot, of work,” says the President of the Consortium, Andreas Kofler. And he concludes: “But things are still looking good, especially when compared to other regions, because our **wine growers were always in full control of their vineyards and carried out most of their work to absolute perfection.**”

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