



## DR. LOOSEN

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### A “Golden October” (again!) delivers a superb 2012 harvest

*Harvest notes from Ernst Loosen, owner of Dr. Loosen e3 Villa Wolf*

BERNKASTEL/MOSEL, GERMANY — When the 2012 growing season began, we thought the year was going to be a return to the “good old days” of the 1990s. The flowering came in mid-June — weeks later than in recent years, and much closer to historical norms. It looked like we would be on track for a typical mid-October start to the harvest.

But another lousy summer hit us, cool and rainy, bringing with it some significant vine disease issues, especially downy mildew. This meant a lot of extra work in the vines. In many of the very steep, riverside sites, we have to rely on helicopter spraying to control mildews, but that is not always very effective. It’s dangerous for the helicopter to get in close to the vines on these steep slopes, and we’ve lost several daredevil pilots who pushed the envelope a bit too far. So we had to resort to costly, labor-intensive hand spraying in our steeper parcels. But that is slow work and it’s impossible to keep up with the spread of the mildew. In recently reorganized sites, such as Wehlener Sonnenuhr, we fared better because we were able to take advantage of the new roads and reworked slopes, which allowed us to work faster with a small crawler tractor.



*Pickers harvesting in the Wehlener Sonnenuhr vineyard under the sunny, blue October sky of 2012.*

All in all, we survived the mildew problems in pretty good shape, although the overall yield in our estate vineyards was about 30 percent less than average. The quality of the fruit was outstanding, however, because the weather turned beautiful in late September and we had another Golden October. Dry, sunny weather persisted through the entire month, giving us plenty of time to harvest at our own pace. The main Mosel harvest began on Oct. 11 and ended on Nov. 15.

Another great benefit of the reorganization of the vineyards (a process called “Flurbereinigung” in German), is that the better access and larger, more-contiguous parcels, means that the harvest work is much faster and efficient. This was very helpful when it came to picking the parcels for Kabinett. With such great weather, the Kabinett grapes were ripening quickly and we wanted to catch them while they were still in our desired ripeness range of 80 to 83° Oechsle (19–20 Brix). We still want our Kabinetts to be in the classic style that is light, delicate and refreshing. That means letting the fruit hang just until fully ripe flavors develop, but picking them before they get overripe.

After the mildew attack that came with the wet summer, it was interesting that the sunny, dry weather in October kept the botrytis at bay. Only a few of our parcels required the intense harvest selection process we use to separate the healthy grapes from the botrytis-affected fruit. Overall, the grapes were surprisingly healthy. So we ended up with a fine crop of the normal wines, and only a little bit of Auslese (our first botrytis selection) and Beerenauslese (100% affected, partially shriveled grapes), but had no TBA at all. As always, we left several parcels hanging for Eiswein, and were lucky enough to get a nice freeze (–10° Celsius) on Dec. 12 and 13.

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The wines of 2012 are characterized by a stunning purity of fruit and a density of flavor that gives each wine a very clear expression of its terroir (that, after all is the whole point of doing so many individual bottlings). It is a particularly good year for Kabinett and Spätlese, which were harvested with brilliant acidity and at the ideal must weights for each Prädikat. It was also an excellent vintage for the dry wines. These were harvested as late as possible to achieve greater aromatic ripeness and to allow the acidity to come down a bit, in order to make properly balanced wines. We don't want any botrytis in our dry wines, so the scarcity of the noble rot in this vintage was very helpful. It allowed us to hang the dry wine fruit very long for maximum flavor development.

### **A picture perfect harvest in the Pfalz**

It was a fantastic year in the Pfalz region, in the Rhine valley. After some initial concerns about rain during flowering, the Pfalz enjoyed rather nice weather through most of the growing season, with perfect weather during the harvest. They had no problems at all with mildews, as in the Mosel, and were able to harvest methodically, without the need to rush, allowing them to wait for ideal ripeness with all of the varieties.

The main Pfalz harvest began on September 21, with the Pinot Gris, and finished up with the Riesling from Wachenheimer Belz and Forster Pechstein on October 25. The fruit was really beautiful and 100% healthy, so the quality of the Villa Wolf wines is excellent, with the same kind of purity as the Mosel wines and the captivating, stony aroma that is the hallmark of the weathered sandstone soils in the Mittlehaardt area of the Pfalz.



*Beautiful, perfectly healthy Riesling grapes in the Forster Pechstein vineyard at Villa Wolf.*

So we are happy to report that 2012 was another superb vintage in both the Mosel and the Pfalz. Our Mosel team worked extremely hard to protect the vines, and the payoff was a delicious range of classic wines. And the dedication and attention to detail of our team in the Pfalz made the most of the ideal conditions there. It could be one of the finest Pfalz vintages in decades.

The only near disaster we had was when, in late October, a team of pickers from the Mosel was headed down to the Pfalz to help bring in the last of the Riesling. Just a few minutes down the road, their small caravan of cars was stopped by a huge pack of wild boar. About 50 of them! Wild boar are rather stubborn, and it took some time to get them to move on, but no one was hurt — neither man nor beast — and the team made it to Forst in time to pick the Pechstein vineyard. So, while we can't confirm it, there seems to be a correlation between the quality of the vintage for wines and the abundance of the new crop of wild boar. But we can definitely confirm that Riesling and wild boar is a delicious partnership!

— *Ernst Loosen*

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