

Luxembourg

David Furer

The Clos des Rochers and Thill estates of Bernard-Massard have been awarded ISO 14001 certification by the European Society for Certification of Management Systems.



DAVID FURER

They are the first Luxembourg estates to win certification for rationalized winegrowing and winemaking that minimizes harmful effects on the environment.

Luxembourg has healthy sales of certified organic wines from France and Germany, but only Sunnen-Hoffman has exploited the opportunity to sell home-grown organic wines, although Bernard-Massard may well follow its lead in the future. In an effort to

promote organics, Serge Fischer of the IVV has begun to circulate organic growing methods in his monthly technical briefs to growers.

In cooperation with the Ministry of Agriculture, Sunnen-Hoffman has launched a programme to bring schoolchildren aged 8–12 on educational visits to learn about organic winegrowing and production, a first for viticulture and a noble effort from this organic and biodynamic pioneer.

DAVID FURER is the author of *Wine Places* (Mitchell Beazley, 2005), a contributing editor to the *Which? Wine Guide* and *Santé* magazine, and a contributor to *Hugh Johnson's Pocket Wine Book*. He also writes for *Wine Business Monthly*, *Food Arts*, *Virtual Gourmet Newsletter*, *Harpers Wine and Spirit Weekly*, *Decanter*, *Australia's Wine Business Magazine*, and Merrick's Media travel titles. He has led wine classes and guest lectured at Chicago, Oxford, and Cambridge universities, the Professional Culinary Institute, and Volkshochschulen in Germany. David is also a consultant for generic wine-trade organizations from Spain, Germany, and France, as well as for restaurants in London. He is a Certified Wine Educator, an Advanced Sommelier, and a Certified Sherry Educator.

Vineyard improvements

Jean-Louis Modet of Vinsmoselle has joined the chorus of quality-conscious *négociants* and private winemakers criticizing the prevalence of mismatches between grape varieties and soil types in Luxembourg, where vines are often planted in sites inappropriate to the variety. He remains hopeful, however, that research and experiments undertaken by the IVV will improve the situation, provided growers implement the recommended measures.

An experiment with 'half-bunch' green pruning of rot-susceptible Pinot Gris, initiated by IVV agronomist Serge Fischer, has been applied by Guy Krier and Yves Sunnen. Fischer's own experiments with leaf-pulling Pinot Gris and Riesling vines, allowing improved air circulation, have resulted in a 20 per cent drop in yield and a 10 per cent sugar increase, with a longer hang time giving the wines better aromatic development.

Pinot stable

After a rapid five-year climb, Pinot Noir plantings have stabilized at 88 ha, or about 7 per cent of total plantings, from zero in 1984. Rivaner, better known as Müller-Thurgau, remains a value product for the all-important Belgian market. Some growers are following the lead of Germany's Rheinland-Pfalz region, by making Rivaner in drier forms.

Pricing logic

There was an odd anomaly in ex-cellar prices for Luxembourg wines in 2005. Many growers who were shy in 2004 about raising prices in the face of a short but very popular 2003 crop have been pushed by economic reality into increasing prices for the average-to-good-quality but larger 2004. The notable exception is quality leader and oenologist Abi Duhr, who has lowered prices for his 2004 wines, stating simply, "While I'm happy with my 2004 wines, they just aren't as good as some other vintages."

Grapevine

- **Luxembourg** snagged six of the 222 gold medals at the 2005 Paris Vinalies wine competition, with two going to the relatively small Kohl-Leuck estate for its Crémant and the 2003 Pinot Gris from its home vineyard of Ehnen Kelterberg. *Guide Hachette's* 2006 edition handed an impressive three Coup de Coeurs to Clos des Rochers and Schumacher-Knepper for its Rieslings and to Vinsmoselle for its Poll-Fabaire Crémant.

- **The Concours des Crémants** de France et de Luxembourg was hosted in Luxembourg in June 2005. Judges were drawn fairly from wine principals of the host country and the other participating regions: Alsace, Bordeaux, Burgundy, Die, Jura, Limoux, and Loire. The results confirmed Luxembourg's earlier fine performances with its Crémants, winning no fewer than 19 of the 72 golds awarded.

Opinion:

Crémant searches for an identity

The 15th anniversary of Crémants Poll-Fabaire, Vinsmoselle's visionary kick-start to what is now Luxembourg's best-known style of wine, took place in 2006. According to its marketing director Jean-Louis Modert, "The Poll-Fabaire line has enjoyed a growth of nearly 10 per cent, to 1.08 million bottles sold in 2004." Modert projects growth of 6–8 per cent for 2005 and 2006. His comments were echoed by Marc Gales, who projects 8 per cent growth for his Crémants in 2005, especially in the traditional export markets of Germany and Belgium. With positive figures also projected by the remaining significant Crémant player, Bernard-Massard, Luxembourg's sparkling wines are poised to become known to a greater number of export markets.

The lack of a clear identity continues to hold back the Moselle's wines. A concerted effort on the part of exporting wineries and the IVV marketing arm to create a Crémant brand awareness in the minds of drinkers in northern Europe, North America, and the emerging Asian wine markets would go a long way towards establishing Luxembourg as the 'must-have, mid-priced' bubbly.

Breaking the quality barrier

Luxembourg has a seemingly immutable Top 10 list of producers, with others hovering just beneath – most notably Krier-Welbes, Claude Bentz, Desom, and Cep d'Or. The majority of Luxembourg's wineries make delicate and correct wines, staying in the safe middle ground, but spiralling housing prices and salaries for office jobs, increased competition from the New World, and a lack of inspiration or willingness to take chances could undermine their position. A little extra effort – better vineyard management, lower yields, and less reliance on added yeasts, cold fermentation, and stainless steel – could ensure a healthy future for these wineries.

Grapevine

- **The second Fête des Vins et Crémants**, at Luxembourg City's Place Guillaume, was an improvement on the first. Higher attendance was coupled with a much more sensible floor plan. As in 2004, many foreign

visitors and residents from the USA, Canada, Russia, Italy, and elsewhere mixed with the locals and their hounds, giving hope for Luxembourg as a wine exporter beyond its neighbours' borders.

Vintage Report

Advance report on the latest harvest

2005

Spring frosts damaged some vines in the northern villages, especially late-blooming Riesling. Hail later in the season left damaged berries, again in the north around the towns of Ahn and Grevenmacher, lowering yields to as little as 40 per cent of the average. A wet July was followed by a cool and cloudy August. Except for the occasional light sprinkle, a perfect harvest began on 19 September, three weeks earlier than in 2004, due to warmer temperatures in May, June, and September. Mildew did not pose major problems, and the majority of growers used the biological method of sexual confusion against moth infestation, limiting the need for insecticides. Musty notes from the mould esca will crop up in a few wines that haven't been selected well. The cool, damp ground led to some botrytis in the Pinots Blanc and Gris. Nearly all whites are showing well, and the Pinot Noirs will be an improvement over 2004, though not quite at the level of 2003. Expect good to great Crémants. Icewines of considerable quality are expected.

Grapevine

- **The multivillage cooperative Vinsmoselle** established a drinks distribution company, Disbolux, in late 2004 under the broad remit of "the production and distribution of alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks" and other related activities. The current range and reach of its lines are tiny, but with time it may be poised to take on the diversified *négociants* such as Bernard-Massard.

- **Vinsmoselle**, ever on the move, opened a wine shop in Luxembourg City's old town in spring 2006. With an increase of 35 ha of vineyard from 830 ha in 2003, opening new sales avenues seems a rational solution to a domestic market becoming increasingly sensitive to outside competition.

- **Former restaurateur Jean-Paul Hoffmann** has joined his wife Marie Paule Mathes in running her father's winery and *négociant* business since the elder Mathes's retirement in June 2005. Great potential rests here with some of Wormeldange's best-situated Riesling vineyards, but key changes will be necessary to help this venerable winery regain its former status.

- **Management v. ownership conflict** brought the departure of the dynamic Jos Raguso from quality leader Alice Hartmann. Raguso's replacement, sommelier André Klein, has large shoes to fill. With talented German winemaker Hans-Jörg Befort remaining, the small Wormeldange estate continues to turn out some of Luxembourg's finest wines.

Updates on the previous five vintages

2004

Vintage rating: Red (Pinot Noir): 85, White: 88

Overall, a good year both for quantity and quality, comparable to the excellent 1998. IVV reported above-average health for grapes. A dry autumn with cool nights and warm days followed a fairly dry summer, ensuring a classic vintage. Bad weather during blooming caused *coulure* in many Riesling vineyards, lowering yields. Pinots were less affected, though autumn hail and late frost caused damage in scattered vineyards, mostly in the north. The grape harvest began on 4 October for Crémant base wines. Chilly nights supported retention of acidity and aromatic complexity. The high levels of malic v. tartaric acid in many whites may ensure a reasonably long life, though with an excessively sour character. Those who left Riesling on the vine to mature fully have been rewarded with great wines. Gewürztraminers are very good across the board, the best since 2001. Pinot Noirs range from average to good quality.

2003

Vintage rating: Red (Pinot Noir): 90, White: 85

As throughout the rest of Europe, a very long, hot, and dry summer made for very ripe grapes with low natural acidity, particularly for those who did not take care in the vineyard. This was the first year Luxembourg was allowed to acidify, so several inexperienced winemakers are finding disharmony in their wines. Auxerrois was completely harvested by the end of September, which allowed for some acid retention. There are a few difficult Pinot Blancs and many difficult Pinot Gris due to excessive residual sugar coupled with high alcohol, but most will offer pleasure for the near to mid-term. The relatively late-picked varieties Riesling and Pinot Noir can be excellent. They have maintained their regional character despite the intense summer heat. Rieslings often possess a bit of residual sugar, but those with enough balancing acidity should age well. There are many expressive *vendanges tardives* and *vins de paille*, and some terrific icewines from Riesling and Auxerrois for near- to mid-term consumption. This is the vintage that will put Luxembourg Pinot Noir on the map, if you can find any. With their atypically heavy fruit nose and palate, especially from those made with a large percentage of Riesling or Pinot Gris, Crémants made from this vintage are best avoided.

2002

Vintage rating: Red (Pinot Noir): 83, White: 92

Although the grapes were ripe, the high acidity levels of many 2002s meant longer fermentation periods for grapes from the more northerly, limestone-influenced soils. Since nearly all work in Luxembourg is done in steel tank, this translates to what are now very reduced wines. The best dry wines will take several years to open. Pinot Blanc, Riesling, Auxerrois, Gewürztraminer, and Chardonnay are all interesting to great, with many Pinot Blancs now beginning to open. Most Pinot Gris and Pinot Noirs rank as only okay, as they tend towards leanness. Good icewines were harvested in early January. Many fine Crémants are now available.

2001

Vintage rating: Red (Pinot Noir): 80, White: 89

Alternating hot and cold summer periods with much rain through September devastated quality hopes for early ripeners like Auxerrois. The best wines are classic, exhibiting crisp freshness and intriguing fruit; they will need years to open. Pinot Blanc and Gewürztraminer are good, as are the icewines harvested in December. Simple, but pleasant, Pinot Noirs are drinking well now. Several good to excellent Crémants were made, but most are now sold.

2000

Vintage rating: White: 75

Wines throughout the region are marked by an intense, darkish colour and high minerality. Hopes for a classic, though short, harvest were dashed when rains hammered the region for three weeks, beginning in mid-September. The result was grey rot for those who did not spray and for many who did. Most wines are showing plenty of dilution or are going over, although a few pleasant surprises can be found, especially among dry and off-dry Rieslings where growers conducted strict selections. Icewines were generally unsuccessful due to rot problems.

Grapevine

- **A cross-border Schengen appellation**, proposed by Vinsmoselle, is being considered by the IVV before being formally proposed to neighbours France and Germany. Winegrowing municipalities from all three countries would benefit, with the dominant Vinsmoselle standing to benefit most.

IVV wine controller Marc Kuhn is in favour of the proposal, although he thinks that "it is a marketing-generated idea that will have a difficult time being realized", since Luxembourg vineyards are 'A' level while its neighbours enjoy 'B'-level status. Cross-border harmonization could also prove tricky.

GREATEST WINE PRODUCERS

- 1 Mme Aly Duhr & Fils
- 2 Alice Hartmann
- 3 Gales
- 4 Clos des Rochers
- 5 Krier Frères
- 6 Mathis Bastian
- 7 Duhr Frères
- 8 A Gloden & Fils
- 9 Thill Frères
- 10 Charles Decker

FASTEST-IMPROVING PRODUCERS

- 1 Schumacher-Knepper
- 2 Sonnen-Hoffmann
- 3 A Gloden & Fils
- 4 Cep d'Or
- 5 Mesenburg-Sadler
- 6 Vinsmoselle
- 7 Häremillen
- 8 Kohll-Leuck
- 9 Krier Frères
- 10 Linden-Heinisch

NEW UP-AND-COMING PRODUCERS

- 1 Cep d'Or
- 2 Schumacher-Knepper
- 3 Krier-Welbes
- 4 Mesenburg-Sadler
- 5 Henri Ruppert
- 6 Kohll-Reuland
- 7 Häremillen
- 8 Kohll-Leuck
- 9 Paul Legill
- 10 Desom

Grapevine

• Luxembourg has some new black grape varieties. Nic Ries's Regent was launched in 2005 and Kohll-Reuland's St Laurent was premiered in 2006. Regent may be Luxembourg's answer to Germany's Dornfelder

BEST-VALUE PRODUCERS

- 1 Gales
- 2 Mme Aly Duhr & Fils
- 3 Cep d'Or
- 4 Mathis Bastian
- 5 Vinsmoselle
- 6 A Gloden & Fils
- 7 Leuck-Thull
- 8 Krier-Welbes
- 9 Kohll-Leuck
- 10 Linden-Heinisch

GREATEST-QUALITY WINES

- 1 **Riesling Domaine & Tradition 2004** Mme Aly Duhr & Fils (€7)
- 2 **Riesling Puits d'Or Vin de Glace 2004** Mme Aly Duhr & Fils (€35 per half-bottle)
- 3 **Riesling Selection 2004** A Gloden & Fils (€9)
- 4 **Riesling Domaine & Tradition 2004** Gales (€8)
- 5 **Riesling Wintrange Fels 2004** Schumacher-Knepper (€7)
- 6 **Pinot Gris Domaine & Tradition 2004** Duhr Frères (€10)
- 7 **Riesling Supreme Remerschen-Jongeberg 2004** Krier Frères (€9)
- 8 **Riesling *** Wormeldange Koepchen 2002** Alice Hartmann (€12)
- 9 **Pinot Gris Domaine & Tradition 2004** Clos des Rochers (€9)
- 10 **Pinot Noir Barrique Selection 2003** Mme Aly Duhr & Fils (€20)

as a colour enhancer, while St Laurent's character lends itself easily as a blending component to Pinot Noir. Can Merlot or Zweigelt be far behind?

BEST BARGAINS

- 1 **Gewürztraminer Ahn Hohfels 2004** Mme Aly Duhr & Fils (€5)
- 2 **Auxerrois Wintrange Fels 2004** Schumacher-Knepper (€5)
- 3 **Pinot Blanc Wintrange Fels 2001** Schumacher-Knepper (€4)
- 4 **Auxerrois Ehnen Kelterberg 2004** Kohll-Reuland (€5)
- 5 **Pinot Noir Coteaux d'Ehnen 2004** Kohll-Reuland (€8)
- 6 **Riesling Wintrange Fels 2004** Schumacher-Knepper (€7)
- 7 **Riesling Domaine & Tradition 2004** Mme Aly Duhr & Fils (€7)
- 8 **Pinot Noir Wormeldange Wainbour 2004** Mesenburg-Sadler (€8)
- 9 **Riesling Remich Primerberg 2004** Gales (€7)
- 10 **Riesling Grevenmacher Fels 2004** Mme Aly Duhr & Fils (€6)

MOST EXCITING OR UNUSUAL FINDS

- 1 **Pinot Gris Sélection Rosé 2004** Vinsmoselle (€7) *Light pink colour with a forward, dried-strawberry nose. Off-dry. First effort.*
- 2 **Crémant de Luxembourg Riesling Brut 2003** Linden-Heinisch (€9) *Low-intensity nose and very dry, balanced, medium-bodied, and surprisingly correct on the palate considering the vintage. Good length with a hint of minerality.*
- 3 **Riesling Äiswain 2002** Linden-Heinisch (€26 per half-bottle) *Jean Linden-Heinisch used no added sulphur in this relatively dark, mature, petrolly, lanolin-scented, and mineral beauty, which was harvested on 8 December. Bizarre, but drinks well.*
- 4 **Pinot Blanc Vendange Tardive Greiveldange 2004** Stronck-Pinnel (€12 per half-bottle) *Medium-sweet and medium intensity, with much vanilla from the new barrels, this*

bruiser clocks in at a whopping 16 per cent alcohol.

- 5 **Gewürztraminer Vin de Paille ** 2004** Schmit-Fohl (€40 per half-bottle) *Harvested in October but left to dry and pressed in February. Big, sweet nose of dried fruits and marmalade. Toasty, viscous, with a pleasant hint of oxidation. Warm and spicy finish.*
- 6 **Pinot Blanc Wintrange Fels 2001** Schumacher-Knepper (€4) *What a joy to find a mature wine at such a low price! Sultana, quince, and fig aromas lead to a palate of fleshy dried fruits with medium-high acidity and a pleasant finish.*
- 7 **Gris de Pinot Gris 2004** Kox (€6) *The grapes are destemmed and heated to 70°C (158°F) before being cooled for one day to 24°C (75.2°F), then pressed and fermented. Bone dry and slightly tannic with a 'partridge eye' colour.*
- 8 **Crémant de Luxembourg Hartmann Brut 2003** Alice Hartmann (€14) *In more normal vintages this ranks among the top wines in Luxembourg but, with the 2003 vintage, the barrique-enclosed malolactic fermentation and the icewine liqueur d'expédition make this an unwieldy beast of a bubbly.*
- 9 **Riesling *** Wormeldange Koepchen 2002** Alice Hartmann (€12) *I'm very surprised that one of the Top 10 wines listed in Wine Report 2005 is still available. Comparable to the best dry Rieslings from South Australia.*
- 10 **Pinot Noir Barrique Selection 2003** Mme Aly Duhr & Fils (€20) *Without question, the finest red wine ever produced in Luxembourg of quality not likely to be seen again soon. This could be (and was) mistaken blind for a top Volnay. Made from a parcel of 777C clones planted in the early 90s.*