

Harvest Report 2007

*You notice the humus layers
not only in the vineyard
but in the cellar too...*

Two years after converting to a biodynamic cultivation method the impacts are unmistakably clear in this year's harvest. In addition it was a long wine year that began with the first shoots appearing early and good weather all season. There was no early frost to bother the young shoots in the spring, neither in Hungary, nor in nearby central Burgenland. And fortunately there was no hail this year either. By mid-July heat had caused initial signs of drying out, but these were restricted to only a small area and mainly noticeable in the young rows.

Early flowering in mid-May led to a very early harvest (almost a month earlier than in previous years), and so we were able to pick and harvest the first bunches on Monday, August 27.

We had a bright sunny day and this good weather held for picking the early varieties (Zweigelt, Merlot, and as an exception even part of the Syrah). The predicted rainfall (8/31 and 9/5,6) didn't really interfere with our work, and the grapes were brought to our cellar in a most healthy condition.

Following the rains, the late varieties (Blafränkisch, Cabernet Franc, and the remaining Syrah) took advantage of the summer sun well into the month of September. Through the thicker skins in combination with a soil strengthened by a humus cover, water was retained in the ground, and not conducted straight to the grapes. Imagine the humus as a sponge that stores water and nutrients and releases them at the right moment. That did not result primarily in greater yields but rather in greater quality.

Despite early harvesting, the grapes were physiologically ripe (recognizable in the maturity of the grape seeds and the maturity, that is, the color of the wood), more than 80 percent of grape seeds were already lignified. The remaining bunches (of the varieties Cabernet Franc and Cabernet Sauvignon from the

Frettner and Sperrn Steiner sites) were picked on September 25, exactly four weeks and one day after the first day of harvesting. The whole harvest team got together for a big thanksgiving celebration in the Halaszcsarda/fishing hut and in Sopron the following weekend. More than 30 people (regular staff and employees at the winery in Hungary, interns, and temporary helpers) had helped in the harvest.

The harvest is, of course, only the beginning of the long winemaking process, but we have already taken the next few steps, and spontaneous fermentation (without the use of industrial yeasts) proceeded without a hitch in the new cellar. Now the wines are slumbering in their wooden barrels, where they will remain for the next one to two years. Biological acid decomposition, which is already underway, will make the wines more rounded and harmonious.

For the first time we will also be using concrete (fermentation) vessels for the best Blafränkisch grapes – there are three main reasons for this: the concrete's mass delays fermentation and enables a well rounded fermentation process; it initially draws off heat generated during fermentation (due to its great mass) and doesn't release it until the end of fermentation. Concrete allows the wine to take up oxygen (it breathes in much the same way that wood does), which is one of the reasons why not just the family but the entire region began using concrete fermentation early on. Historically, its use is supported by its similarities to clay amphorae: tests have shown that ceramics and wine vibrate at similar frequencies. Concrete is more closely related to clay than wood or steel. The idea for concrete fermentation came on a trip to Georgia in the summer of 2006, where I rediscovered this old, time-tested fermentation method while searching for the cradle of winemaking.

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