

# Grapevine

**This month:** Christopher Delalonde helps to make Trockenbeerenauslese in Austria



Kracher vineyards: the foggy mists that roll off Lake Neusiedl are ideal for encouraging the botrytis fungus

## A sweet adventure

We waited on the eastern shore of Lake Neusiedl for the morning sun to disperse the mist that covered the vines. It revealed a wonderful sight. The vast expanse of shallow water, fringed with reeds rich in bird life, merged with a landscape of grasslands and vineyards. And once we began to pick grapes, it felt a bit like harvesting on a beach. For 10 days last autumn, I was around Illmitz, south-east of Vienna towards the Hungarian border, helping Gerhard Kracher make wine on his family estate ([www.kracher.net](http://www.kracher.net)).

At 28, Gerhard is the third generation of Krachers to make a luscious, concentrated, powerful Trockenbeerenauslese wine. His father Alois, who died two years ago, was known as the king of Austrian sweet wine, often achieving a balance and structure to rival the world's finest. Gerhard, now assisted by Hans Thyringer as winemaker and vineyard manager, has 50 hectares in parcels near the lake, with its microclimate perfect for late-harvest wines.

Gerhard explained that the best vineyards are those closest to the water for



Deep, bright gold: the wine is labelled in 375ml bottles as single variety

two key reasons. The soil is sand up to 3m deep before the vine roots reach gravel, creating the slight water stress associated with wine of quality.

Secondly, the overnight foggy mist that rolls in off the lake is ideal for developing the botrytis fungus (noble rot).

The white grape varieties grown for sweet-wine production at the estate are Welschriesling, Chardonnay, Scheurebe, Traminer, Muskat Ottonel and Rosenmuskateller. The grapes are picked only when they are fully botrytised, shrivelled by the noble rot. In some instances this may mean each row of vines has to be picked over several times.

The Kracher estate specialises in Trockenbeerenauslese, sometimes known as TBA, which requires a minimum measure of 300g of sugar in the must (grape juice) when harvested. The Austrian metric for this is 30 KMW. Stainless-steel tanks and new oak are then used, according to grape variety, style and fruit profile.

It takes two years for the sticky juice to be transformed into wine, as such rich must ferments very slowly.

Often deep, bright gold the wine is finally labelled in 375ml bottles as single variety and described as either "Zwischen den Seen" (tank fermented) or "Nouvelle Vague" (oak fermented). It is also numbered, from one to 14, to indicate the concentration of sugar and sweetness. The 2006 and 2008 Kracher Trockenbeerenauslese show great promise and 2002 was a particularly fine vintage. (Half-bottles of 2002 vintage from £28.)