

WAGNER  STEMPEL DAS WEINGUT
URSPRUNG | HANDWERK | LEIDENSCHAFT



AUTUMN LEAVES 2018



• Hours of sunshine •

Following the fall of the Berlin Wall towards the end of 1989, one could more frequently encounter a car on West German roads that hitherto only few people had actually come across: the Trabant. This East German automobile, in the current model of the time, the 601, had an engine with a cubic capacity of 0.5 litres, producing a maximum power output of 19 Kilowatts. In spite of much goodwill, the comments on this vehicle in West Germany were occasionally rather amused or even derisory. In circles of car experts in the West, the car was **never really taken seriously**, in spite of a general feeling of goodwill, various movies and a whole lot of anecdotal folklore. Indeed, generally all it took was to refer to the performance date in order to end any further discussion.



One of the countless sunrises seen in recent months in the Siefersheimer HEERKRETZ site. Practically from the middle of April, this picture-perfect weather accompanied us throughout the entire spring season, the summer as well as the entire autumn.

By analogy with this, in previous decades German viticulture was seen with some skepticism in many southern European expert circles. This comparison may appear to be rather daring, and to be sure ought to be analysed in a more differentiated way, but in terms of a superficial general impression and image, the German wine industry was also simply **not really taken seriously** there. In fact, in an expert discussion round in the 1970's, it was sufficient to simply refer to the lack of hours of sunshine to demonstrate clearly in which paradigm the German wine industry was caught up at the time.

For example, in the second edition of Hugh Johnson's „Wine Atlas“, published in 1972, an average of 1400 to 1600 hours of sunshine annually was shown for the winegrowing regions in Germany. According to the thoughts at the time, and basically still those of today, too little for the production of **serious, high quality wine**. At the current point in time, at the end of October 2018, the actual figure is now already more than **2200 hours of sunshine**. A value that would have even wine producers in Bordeaux humming contentedly. True, this is only a single indicator among a multitude of other quality criteria, but as an indicator as to where the trend is headed it has a similar function as the performance data of an automobile. Ever since the 1990's, the image of German wine in the world has undergone significant changes, and certainly the exceptional 2003 vintage made it very clear that many traditional opinions and views need to be revised. And the current vintage will certainly add a **fat exclamation mark** to this.

The past winter was extremely wet. From October last year to February 2018, our neighbouring weather station at Wöllstein recorded more than 250 mm of rain, which is a very large amount, particularly for the winter months. A factor that was to prove to be of great importance later in the year. In addition, both February and March turned out to be very winter, cold and frosty, and as a result there was no likelihood of an early budding phase, such as we had seen in the previous year, and thus also no danger of severe damage from late frosts. We were able to start into the growing phase of the year in quite a relaxed mood, and in early April were very happy to see the lovely weather that set in at this time, with warm days and lots of sunshine. In contrast with the traditional adage that April has variable weather, this month, with **more than 250 hours of sunshine and only 15 mm of rain**, proved to be the first sign of early summer.



In our view, one of the many exemplary vineyards last summer. Light, airy, high foliage. The grape zone has been partly defoliated. Cover crops between the rows of vines. All fit healthy, vital, and undamaged.

One could see nature waking up within the space of a few weeks, with new shoots appearing toward the end of April, followed by rapid and constant growth of the young shoots. What followed after this, during the months of May, June and the following summer months reads like the weather statistics from the Mediterranean region. Daily sunshine of up to 14 hours, average daily temperatures over a period of many weeks of between 19 and 22 degrees Celsius, and only a few isolated incidents of rainfall associated with just a few thundershowers. What was most impressive was the consistency of these conditions, something we are simply not used to in the temperate latitudes of Central Europe.

The flowering of the vines took place in early June, quickly and without any losses. In addition, fungal diseases posed no particular problems. The few thunderstorm formations seen passed by Siefersheim without causing any damage. In Mid-July we were looking at vineyards in a spectacular condition, so that the formulation of „**optimum conditions**“ slowly started making the rounds. The only thing that caused us to worry to some extent was the low rainfall, with its associated continued drought, a factor that led us in the middle of summer to reach an important and far-reaching decision: „green harvest“.

With a view to a virtually **ideal, picture-perfect development** in the first half of the year, with an expectation of very high yields, and combined with the situation of water supply for the vines, which became constantly more critical, we decided to reduce the number of bunches and also to cut out parts of bunches in more than half our vineyards. „Halving the bunches“, is the term we use, which sounds very unemotional, and involves throwing more than a third of our potential yield on the ground. A step which we always have to go through in cooler vintages, in order to ensure that all the grapes remaining on the vine have the opportunity to ripen optimally. In the 2018 vintage, too, this

measure proved to be instinctively the correct one, seen against the background of the conditions outlined above, and in particular to ensure the continued vitality of the vineyards. In the course of the month of August, even we could not avoid having to irrigate many of the vineyards, particularly those on stony, rocky sites such as the **VDP.GRAND CRUS HÖLLBERG and HEERKRETZ**, in order to avoid the threat of impending loss of quantity as well as quality.



The typical view of a row of vines after thinning out in summer. On the ground it looked as though we had cut off almost half the total. However, in the grape zone itself the “extensive green harvest” could hardly be noticed.

The time to start the harvest arrived already in early September. Earlier than ever before in the history of Wagner Stempel. And at the same time, what we saw looked as promising as only rarely before. Where we thought initially, under the impression of the weather conditions, which continued as at the height of summer, that we would be facing a short, quick harvest period, this actually slowed down after the initial high speed, and eventually culminated in a main picking window that lasted from the 20th of September to the 8th of October. Very much comparable with the previous vintage.

In addition, our fear that the conditions would lead to very high must weights and significantly reduced acid levels proved to be groundless as the harvest progressed. Quite the contrary. We were able to harvest **practically all our vineyards very selectively by hand, at an unhurried pace** and in some cases we actually held back, waiting for the optimum moment, delaying the picking date in some vineyards. The must weights did not “go through the roof”, and the acidity levels did not “drop into the cellar”. The warning cry of a repeat of the 2003 vintage with atypical results, which was often heard, proved to be absolutely unfounded for us in Siefersheim.

In this last phase, too, the dry, sunny weather remained faithful to us, which has led to fantastic results, particularly with the red varieties. It is only very rarely that we get to hold such deeply and homogeneously coloured Pinot grapes in our hands. The white grape varieties, such as Chardonnay and Pinot Blanc, hung on the vines, yellow and ripe, as though they had been painted by an artist. There was no need to carry out any pre-sorting procedure, no back-breaking and labour-intensive manual selection, the team was able to simply go out among the rows of vines and pick golden yellow, juicy, sweet grapes. No sign anywhere of the botrytis mould, and as a result, we refrained from producing any noble rot sweet dessert wines from the Riesling grapes.

All in all, an almost **frighteningly relaxed autumn phase**, which we really enjoyed, in spite of all the effort and work. Right up to the completion of the harvest in October, we were able to go out into the

vineyards every single day dressed in shorts and T-shirts. An image we usually associate only with reports from the South. Whereas in difficult years we would be fighting until well into October to get the grapes as ripe as possible, and would often return to the winery at night shaking from the cold and with stiff, chilled hands, this year the greatest everyday concern was to remember to pack a sun hat and an adequate supply of mineral water.

This picture of fully, optimally ripe grapes in the vineyard naturally found its seamless extension in the winery. The **taste of the musts was simply fantastic**. Fruity, yellowish, ripe and fresh. In analytic terms, they had slightly higher must weights than in the previous vintage, and concomitantly slightly reduced acid levels. But all of this was within a narrow and very acceptable range, all of it characterized by the low pH-values which are so typical for Siefersheim.

No significant deviations, whether up or down. The values measured were far removed from the must weights seen in vintages such as 2011 or 2003. Generally speaking, the ripeness varied from a fairly light-bodied 83° degrees Oechsle up to approximately 98°. Only a few batches exceeded the 100° degrees Oechsle mark. This correlated with acid values that in most cases were in the range of between 6.5 and 8.5 grammes per litre. This picture was maintained right across the spectrum of all grape varieties. Very homogenous and balanced. A real joy for us, a picture that has only been achieved so far in this **homogeneity and consistency** in very few exceptional vintages.



The typical picture of how Riesling presented itself in the 2018 vintage. Beautifully healthy grapes with a yellowish hue and absolutely no sign of rot. The grapes were loosely packed in the bunches, and not too compact. A dream!

The stylistic outlook to the future for the wines produced in Siefersheim is, in one respect, totally different from that for the 2017 vintage, which, as we had remarked repeatedly, showed very heterogeneous and differentiated quality levels. This vintage is quite different, in as far as the **grapes were so homogeneous and of consistent high quality** right across the range of variety, to an extent we have only very rarely experienced so far. The musts showed a very juicy character, yellow colour, expressive and concentrated, with a pleasant fresh acidity. What we foresee is that these wines will probably not be characterized by a racy, light-bodied style, with the attendant vibrant arc of acidity and minerality.

Naturally, the wines show this basic character to some extent each year, but what is certain to be more remarkable initially will certainly be the combination of fruitiness, concentration and a salty finish.

Whereas in cool vintages our wines tend to show a filigree character, and be rather closed shortly after bottling, we believe the 2018 wines will present themselves as being much more charming and approachable, which will tend to underline the high degree of ripeness of the fruit in this growing period. This can find particular expression particularly among the Pinot varieties, and this will, in our opinion, very probably lead to some outstanding wines down the line.

As always we are extremely interested to see what the further development brings – this much is certain: we are very happy to look forward to tasting the 2018 vintage, which is very special both in terms of quantity and quality.

Daniel Wagner & Oliver Müller

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