



AUTUMN LEAVES 2016



● TIDES ●

For those who live along the coasts around the world, the periodic movement of the oceans between high and low tide is an everyday occurrence. They determine the normal rhythm and speed of movement in large sections of the maritime world, and have formed and impressed themselves upon whole landscapes over the course of millions of years.

The 2016 wine vintage year in Siefersheim confronted us with weather phenomena which, somewhat loosely formulated, could also be described as rising water followed by the **falling tide**. Imagine that almost on a daily basis we went to check on the water level. Formulating this in retrospect, this analogy appears to be almost funny, but in reality it was anything but humorous. We will describe in the following what exactly happened, and what consequences this brought with it.



The Höllberg site towards the end of October in the typical weather formation of the month. It was cool, with dark rainclouds drifting over Siefersheim repeatedly, and the „golden autumn“ could only be experienced in a few brief glimpses of sunshine.

The year began, and this is similar to what happened in 2015, with a winter that can be considered normal and fairly mild for this latitude. There were a few days of frosty temperatures in January and February, but some milder temperatures of up to 10° C. were also recorded. The month of March was already very sunny and friendly, although the temperatures remained rather cool and moderate well into April.

2016, then, was not a vintage in which to expect a record-breaking early bud-break, as was the case two years before. It was only in late April that warmer, frequently sunny weather came to the fore, and accompanied the development of shoots and bud-break of the vines on the Höllberg site. As had been the case in the previous months, precipitation remained at a normal level, at around 30 to 40 millimetres of rainfall.

In early May the weather turned much warmer, almost summery, very quickly, with the first dew days still causing some anxiety because, although the weather was warm and very pleasant, the nights were still noticeably cool. The last time we experienced frost damage was in 2011, and thankfully this **acute danger passed us by**, sparing our vineyards. In the last few days of May we experienced a fundamental change in the overall weather situation, the temperatures remained warm, but were accompanied by a rainy low-pressure system with abundant rainfall.

In total, we recorded close to 70 millimetres of rainfall in this month. The flowering of the vines came in early June, in the middle of this warm and wet period. A really unfortunate constellation. The result was a very uneven beginning and end of flowering, with in some cases significant coulure. No reason to be happy.

It was now that the capricious moods of the weather really got going. Time and again we experienced heavy rainfall in June, and the almost sub-tropical conditions, together with the high temperatures led to **enormous pressure of fungal infection**, particularly downy mildew. More than 100 millimetres of rain in less than 30 days ensured plant protection became a real challenge. Sections of the Heerkretz had to be sprayed by hand „just as in the old days“, as mechanical aids could not be used on the steep slopes. We were extremely close to experiencing dramatic losses.



Just how serious the position was in June could only be fully assessed several weeks later, when the mildew infection caused whole inflorescences to die off. There were individual vineyards that were so severely infected that significant losses had to be expected.

Fortunately, the transition to July saw the situation calm down. Dry, sunny weather brought about a turnaround that was absolutely essential. If one could have described the months of April, May and June as the rising tide, which in total produced a „**flood**“ of more than 200 millimetres of rain, the rainfall during the ensuing months of July, August and September totalled no more than 45 millimetres. Compared to the period before, this was the time of sinking levels and „**low tide**“. It is hard to imagine greater contrasts in the distribution of rainfall.

The development in the vineyards during the further progress of summer seemed to indicate there were some higher forces that were trying to make amends, bringing about a development that one would not have expected of the 2016 vintage just a few weeks earlier. The dry, summery weather lasted precisely up to the beginning of October, providing a basic ripeness and condition in the vineyards as though there had been absolutely no dramatic moments in the previous course of the season. All those fungal diseases were suddenly no longer a topic, and indeed there was no sign of botrytis anywhere. Totally intact, perfectly healthy vineyards were ready at the end of September, waiting to complete the ripening process in October.



Riesling in the Heerkretz site in mid-September. The grape bunches were split in summer, and presented themselves intact and perfectly healthy, waiting for the optimum picking time in late October, with no need for a pre-harvest or selection.

The harvest started on the 3rd of October 2016, and punctually to this beginning the weather switched from mid-summer conditions to “refrigerator mode“. This was accompanied by a dive in temperature from an average of 17 degrees Celsius in September to a rather chilly 9 degrees in October. This meant that the further development and maturation of the grapes proceeded **in slow motion**, virtually at a snail’s pace, allowing us to take our time during the manual harvest.



A young Scheurebe vineyard on a steep slope close to the Heerkretz. Conditions for ripening were perfect in October, particularly for aromatic varieties, and we were able to pick many parcels of vineyards successively at the optimum point in time.

A totally relaxed harvesting period had taken off, which did not provide us with any “golden autumn weather“, but by way of compensation we had the requisite peace and even serenity to pick one parcel of land after the other at optimum ripeness. Although the weather in October was extremely variable and even rather temperamental, but the fact that the weather remained basically cool at most

times meant that this did nothing to harm the really optimum health of the grapes. In particular, the cold nights towards the end of October, which are so decisive in determining the aromatic maturity and elegance of Riesling, were of immense importance. In analogy to the previous vintage the sugar values did not **“go through the roof”** at any stage. The cool conditions of autumn had noticeably slowed the development of sugar in the grapes. Neither Riesling nor the Pinot varieties were picked at must weights of more than 100 degrees Oechsle (around 20° Brix/Balling), in most cases the values varied between 84 and a maximum of 94 degrees. This correlated with really excellent acid values of between 7 and 11 grams per litre, a level that we know from experience allows us to produce fresh, lively wines that are not too piquant or off-putting in their youth.



The Höllberg site in the picturesque colours of sundown in early November. When the stresses and strains of the harvest period are over, and one has brought in such a wonderful result as was the case in 2016, then one can really sit back and enjoy such an evening mood.

Just 14 days after the completion of the harvest, the overwhelming emotion is one of joy that, just as in the previous vintage, we were able to achieve such a homogenous and high level of quality. Be it Scheurebe or Silvaner, Riesling or Pinot Noir – the grapes were practically all in **very good condition, in some cases even outstanding and exceptional**. And yet it comes as a real surprise that in terms of quantity, too, the vintage carries on seamlessly from the 2015 vintage. That is something we would not have dared to dream during the flowering period, and particularly not in June, with the high risk of fungal infection. Even in the late summer one could not foresee that the volumes of the 2016 vintage would show such a gratifying development.

Naturally, a first assessment of the style must necessarily be vague at this stage, but if one takes to account the taste and flavours of the musts, then one can at least venture a first, cautious forecast. We are confident that in terms of their aromas these will be very expressive, elegant wines that have benefited tremendously from the perfect ripening period and the late harvest. The conditions of the 2016 season have facilitated a style that combines a moderate, elegant and complex body structure on the one hand with a fresh, lively acidity on the other. And this vibrant tension is supported by the salty, minerally finish provided by the porphyric soil structure, which is so essentially typical for the wines from Siefersheim. **Elegant, expressive and harmonious wines**, wines that promise to be much more approachable in their youth than those of the previous vintage were.

We can but wait and see. We certainly look forward to the coming months, and towards a very promising 2016 vintage.

Daniel Wagner & Oliver Müller

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