



AUTUMN LEAVES 2017



● Frost ●

To report on the wine vintage in Siefersheim is also always an attempt to draw attention to special characteristics and specific details that are unique to this particular area on the far Western border of Rheinhessen. And while an autumn report may show up parallels to other regions, and in parts may even allow one to draw general conclusions, the **exceptional 2017 vintage** must be discussed with very close reference to the various local conditions. Even in the region around Siefersheim, which is not that large, the entire development this year was too heterogeneous and varied to be discussed as a single given.

The **volcanic bridgehead of Rheinhessen** on the border with the Nahe region is not only geologically related to the neighbouring region. Climatically, too, the region around Siefersheim is the cooler corner of Rheinhessen. However, it was neither planned nor desirable that the 2017 vintage would surprise us with such cold force.



Partial view of a vine cane on 20 April in the late morning. Some of the young shoots had been frozen, and just a few centimetres further on there was no damage to be seen. This is how inhomogeneous the damage was at the foot of the slope – just as was the case a hundred metres further up. A shocking finding. Not a classic case of ground frost – rather a real snap of winter in the middle of spring, with disastrous results.

For the first time in many years, January 2017 was a real winter month, with an average temperature of 0.9° Celsius. However, as early as February, and certainly in March, we experienced a sudden end to this brief winter dream, with temperatures well above the long-term average. Take for example the 9th of March, with an average temperature of just on 11° Celsius and around 10 full hours of sunshine, heralding at an early stage that another very warm year of vegetation growth was to be expected. In fact, the entire period from the 20th of March to the end of the month paved the way for a new record, averaging more than 10 hours of sunshine per day, and continuous temperatures of above 10° Celsius. Budding of the vines took place at the beginning of April. The earliest on record for Siefersheim.

As pleasant and beneficial this exceptionally warm, sunny weather in early spring was, a severe cold front developed in Mid-April, the low point of this was achieved in the night from the 19th to the 20th of April. **Temperatures as low as minus 8° Celsius** were recorded close to Siefersheim. In this phase of budding and growth of young shoots this was a real catastrophe. Such a serious frost damaged not only

the classical areas at risk, those that were low-lying or in dips, in which cold air usually accumulates, but also affected areas well into our mid-altitude vineyard parcels in our **VDP.Grand Cru sites HÖLLBERG and HEERKRETZ**. An unbelievable disaster.



Even months later, the damage caused by this one single night of frost were evident everywhere. Although it was difficult at the time to quantify the losses, it was very clear that these would be much more than a third of the total. There were several vineyard parcels in which we expected to experience a total loss of production.

This effective new winter period in the middle of spring was followed by almost four weeks in which the vines went into a state of cold shock. It was only in Mid-May, in combination with very warm temperatures and sufficient rainfall that the vegetation in the vineyards really exploded. We recorded incredibly fast growth of the vines, as though they were trying to make up completely for lost time as quickly as possible. This extremely rapid development really tested us, and literally took us to our limits in trying to keep up with pruning and tying work. In spite of the period of cold and frost, flowering took place in Mid-June, around 10 days earlier than the long-term average, and this was seen as an indication of an early start to autumn.

As the summer progressed, we were basically very happy with the conditions of the vineyards, in spite of the challenges provided by the erratic weather, with high temperatures, severe thunderstorms and abundant rainfall. The fact that many shoots were missing meant on the other hand we were able to create canopy shapes that represented a **typical ideal** – open to the wind, light and not too thick, which turned out to be of considerable benefit with regard to other aspects of protecting the vine, and the general further development. In any case, with a view to the damage caused by the April frosts, our motto was: „Avoid any further losses.“

It is against this background that one must view the period from August to Mid-September, which was fairly cool, with more varied, very erratic weather. In particular, the 25th of August will remain as a vivid memory in the minds of many colleagues, as such a turbulent storm with extreme hail had not been experienced for decades in the southern corner of Rheinhessen, between Westhofen and Gundersheim. Luckily, Siefersheim came off lightly, with 25 millimetres of rain and a fright, but looking at things in perspective, we had been warned, and prepared for a difficult time in the autumn.

With consideration for the varied weather conditions, the warm weather that continued for the moment, and the fact that grapes were already quite ripe in many vineyards by the end of August, we

decided to start this year's harvest at quite an early point in time. A key aspect of this decision was to be able to **pick selectively**, and to make a number of pre-selections enabling us to reduce the risk of possible further losses at a later time, and reducing the risk of having to carry out an even more far-reaching negative selection. The objective was a very practical one, to remove some of the possible pressure from the logistics of the harvest period, in order, at a later time, to have sufficient time and resources available, particularly for the Riesling vineyards. In a year that was already going to be difficult in terms of quantities available, we at least wanted to ensure we achieve an absolute optimum in terms of quality.

As though some higher and mighty forces had taken over the direction, large parts of Rheinhessen were subject to another 30 millimetres of rain in early September, before the weather settled down to a stable, sunny, quite weather phase towards the end of the month. Our tactical decision to start picking part of the grapes at an early stage turned out to be well warranted. The fact that we then experienced dry and more or less ideal conditions should not detract from the fact that at this stage, many of the vineyards were already „unsteady on their feet“, like a boxer who has already had to absorb some heavy blows. The main **harvesting phase extended from 25.09 to 5.10.**, and was in a sense our middle path in Siefersheim. All the most important vineyard sites were harvested with great care and selectively in this 10-day period. Not a lot of time for romantic ideas of autumn. A very concentrated and tightly organized grape harvest represented the high point of the year's vegetation.



Here you can see clearly how important selective hand-picking was in the 2017 vintage. If you were prepared to work selectively and with great care, you were rewarded with a fantastic result – green-yellow, ripe, totally healthy grapes.

In fact, during this phase we were so concentrated and highly-wired that it was only several days later that we appreciated, how fortunate we had been, and just how **exceptional the results were in terms of quality**. Whereas in the 2014 vintage we had had to do battle with nature for every bunch of optimally ripe grapes, and in the previous vintage had been totally relaxed, allowing us to bring in the grapes without any stress, this year it was our high speed that ensured we would achieve such good results. It was not really planned that way – but fortunately our preventative, careful approach paid off in this way.

Looking purely at the analysis, it would seem that our Riesling wines are very much along the lines of the 2015 vintage. High levels of ripeness, with sugar levels of between 89 and 97 degrees Oechsle correlate well with high levels of 8 to 13 grams per litre of acidity, and pH-values of 2.9 to 3.1. It just does not get much better than this – just different. The Silvaner presents a similarly positive picture, differing only in slightly lower levels of acidity. This year, the Pinot varieties demanded the greatest amount of selection work, and these were also, at least in part, most seriously affected by the frost damage, although in the end they could also be harvested with very good results. Overall, a picture that did not provide quite as uniformly and homogeneously excellent grapes as did the 2016 vintage. And a harvest volume that remained **smaller by half than that of the previous vintage**. On the other hand, some of the results achieved with our top Riesling wines give us reason to hope for truly sensational results. This is easy to understand if you consider how small the yield has been.

If we try to gaze into the crystal ball with regard to the future style of these wines, one must stress once again that this vintage, and the wines to be expected from it, must be considered very individually. More than ever, one must avoid broad, sweeping conjectures and forecasts.



The Höllberg site, showing this year's autumn colours in Mid-October – surrounded by fog. At this stage, the harvest had long since been completed, and we were able to simply enjoy the wonderful sunny days of autumn.

The taste of the Riesling berries was simply outstanding. The analysis had already given an indication of this, and the situation at the must stage was clear, indicating a similar type of wine as that of the 2015 vintage. Fully ripe healthy yellow grapes with both a high sugar and acid content lead us to expect wines that can and hopefully will be concentrated, tremendously vibrant and expressive. It is this combination of racy acidity, full body and very salty minerality that can once again be worked out and enhanced in the 2017 vintage, making it possible to produce a truly exceptional style of wine. By comparison, the Pinot varieties will probably turn out to be a little more elegant and filigree. Not quite as powerful and concentrated as has been the case in other very warm years, a little more elegant and balanced. This should work out very much to the benefit of our Pinot Noirs. But only time will tell in which direction this development will take place.

As is so often the case, all that remains is to wait and be patient. In spite of all the losses and hardships, we look forward to what may well turn out to be a really outstanding 2017 vintage in terms of quality.

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