



AUTUMN LEAVES 2019



• Umbrella •

There are some vintages in German viticulture in which the most important utensils during the grape harvest are sun lotion, shorts and lots of mineral water. And although these few items are simply intended for everyday use, they are at least vague indicators of the general character of a harvest period on the „Siefersheim edge of the volcano“.

This year, it was without doubt rain-proof clothing, rubber boots and an umbrella that were called for most often in order to cope with the autumn weather. Below, we will describe the details of the 2019 harvest period, which stand in stark contrast to the descriptions associated with the previous vintage.



An absolutely typical view of the hilly vineyards in the Rheinhessen region during the autumn of 2019. While it looks romantic, with rainbow and contrasting clouds, the conditions provided an incredible challenge for wine producers.

As has been the case so frequently in the current decade, the year started off with extremely mild weather. The average temperature in the entire first quarter was significantly higher than the long-term average, and even the cumulative number of hours of sunshine was surprisingly high for this early part of the year. In consequence, we recorded a similarly early start to the development of shoots and buds as was the case in 2018, leading to a cautious prediction that the harvest might again be similarly early as in the previous year. On the other hand, May this year was much cooler, and much more varied than the same month of the previous year, and this resulted in the flowering of the vines being delayed to the middle or even the end of June.

Following on this, the next month brought with it a first heat wave and record temperatures, and there were significant signs of coulure in the flowering phase. By early July it had become clear that, on the one hand, one would have to plan for a relatively cool, late picking phase in late September or early October, while at the same time it also became evident that in terms of **quantity, the vintage was likely to remain below average**, which in consequence meant that we would have to tread lightly when planning our green harvest, which was to take place soon.

This assumption was confirmed in the course of the hottest, summery parts of July, with a second record heat wave within just a few weeks, and with temperatures of close to 40°C causing sunburn damage in many vineyard parcels. This resulted in a further loss in quantity available for harvesting, losses which practically could not be avoided no matter how carefully and gently we had removed the leaves from the vines.

However, apart from the damage mentioned, the vineyards survived the hottest phases of the summer surprisingly well. With regard to rainfall, too, Sieferheim was on the fortunate side this year. No drought damage, no significant stress situations, and generally speaking we were largely spared the usual challenges such as wasp attacks or hail damage. By early September, picture-perfect rows of vines were in place, awaiting the last phase of ripening, and the final development of aromas in the cool October nights. We looked forward full of optimism and anticipation to the nearing of the harvest period.



Pinot Noir grapes in the HEERKRETZ vineyard site in mid-September. A virtually picture-perfectly prepared vineyard, in our eyes. All the manual preparations had been completed, and it was now just a case of waiting for the perfect stage of ripening.

The harvest kicked off in a relaxed atmosphere in the third week in September, with preliminary picking for the base wine to be used in the production of sparkling wine, for rosé, as well as Pinot Noir. All this took place amidst an excellent mood, with great confidence at a time of beautifully sunny, warm, late summer weather. However, with the beginning of the main harvest on the 23rd of September the previously stable high-pressure weather system changed totally, this was **a radical change** into a totally inconsistent, rainy phase. It really appeared as though some higher forces had turned on a switch. After each successive rainy day we gazed almost uncomprehendingly at the weather forecast, and were disappointed time and time again. For almost three weeks, until the 11th of October, it rained each and every day. More on some days, less on others. In total, we recorded rainfall during this period of close to 70 millimetres. This was a situation we had never before experienced to this extent. It was incredible. And it was not restricted only to Siefersheim. Practically the whole federal state of Rheinland-Pfalz experienced anything but a „golden October“.

Our saving grace among the inclement conditions was the wind, which was quite strong at times, as well as the low temperatures that accompanied this period. Were it not for this, the conditions would have been even much more difficult. As it was, conditions were challenging enough.

We decided to build on our specific strong points, and on our experience from other difficult vintages, and proceeded with great concentration and absolute determination and permanence. **Hand-picking was the key** to success. Repeatedly, we had to pre-harvest individual vineyard sites, we had to select with great precision, in order to achieve an optimum result. The short distances to be covered, the rapid logistical procedures, a perfectly meshed and experienced picking team with many years of experience and, last but not least, a great deal of mental strength and perseverance were the factors that allowed us to achieve a succession of great results in this difficult vintage. Our mental motto for 2019 was a „**self-confident nevertheless**“.

In the last four days, leading up to the 14th of October, the warm, sunny, dry weather returned right at the end, and it was particularly during this small window of opportunity that we were able to bring in the grapes from many of our best vineyard parcels into the cellar. At this stage, more than 22 days of grape harvesting had already passed. Without any breaks, without time for reflection or patient waiting for the next grapes to ripen optimally, as we have had the opportunity to do in many other vintages. This really was a „forced ride“, and certainly one of the most nerve-wracking, strenuous and exhausting grape vintages in recent years.



Riesling in the Höllberg site on the second-last day of the harvest in Mid-October. It was almost incredible how well various parcels of vines had survived the bad weather. A preliminary harvest had already removed any overripe grapes and bunches, and what was left for the main harvest were beautiful, totally intact grapes.

The key catchword of many vintages in which optimum conditions were experienced is that of **homogeneity during the harvest period**. No matter which grape variety, no matter which vineyard site, generally speaking in these vintages you will find only beautifully ripe, healthy, golden yellow grapes. Internally, we refer to these as our dream years, as it appears as a gift to us when nature presents its fruits in such optimum condition. To suggest that the 2019 vintage should be mentioned as one of these years would surely be inappropriate, and would hardly reflect the facts. At the same time, it must just be reiterated at this point that, in spite of all the challenges and circumstances, the results of this year's grape harvest were by and large really good.

More heterogeneous in quality, more dependent on the conditions of the specific site, the microclimate, the age of the vines and, naturally, the extent of manual preparatory work that had gone before. Nevertheless, looking at it overall, with all the differences and nuances, one can say that it was a **very clean, high-quality result**. In 2019, all those attributes took on significance that one frequently mentions as an aside. This year, it made a huge difference whether the grapes had been completely exposed from the surrounding leaves, whether the amount of fruit produced was moderate, and whether there were only few dense concentrations of bunches. The position of the vineyard site itself, such as the steep sections of, the HEERKRETZ site, which are open to the influence of the wind, produced very different results from the areas of deep soils in the Siefersheim Horn, which are protected from the influence of the wind. It is vintages such as that of 2019 that also serve to remind us how **essential the manual preparatory work in the vineyard can be**. In the face of constantly improving machines and mechanization, hand-picking the grapes may appear at times to be a relic of previous centuries. In this year however, anybody who did not

want to make any compromises in terms of quality had no choice but to reach for the bucket and secateurs, and engage in hand-picking the grapes.

In terms of style, this will differ from that of the previous vintage, it will be more elegant and light-bodied, with a great deal of vibrancy and more salty notes on the finish. In physiological terms, in particular, the long ripening period reaching far into October, with many cold nights, has produced perfectly ripe, juicy grapes. This is something one could already feel when touching the grapes, and it carried through to the aroma profile of the fresh musts.



The heath landscape on the Siefersheim Horn on the windy, rainy days of the 2019 harvest. The view is towards the Nahe river and the Hunsrück mountains.

Riesling, in particular, benefited significantly from this long ripening period, and it was in some cases quite amazing, how intact and stable many vineyard parcels still were even in the last week of the harvest. Seen as an average across all the grape varieties, the must weights were all in a range of from 82 to 94 degrees Oechsle, and the acid levels of the musts averaged out at between 6 and 10 grammes per litre. Seen in conjunction with the typically low pH-values experienced in Siefersheim, which in this year were all below a value of 3, in particular for the Pinot Noirs, so that one could leave the must on the lees for an extended period of contact, and speaking generally the further processing in the cellar, in stark contrast to the work in the vineyard, was very relaxed and caused few problems.

Generally speaking, when compared to the 2018 vintage, we expect this vintage to be more elegant and filigree, which in terms of aromas is likely to be more complex, with a more interesting mouthfeel overall. Whereas the 2018 vintage was characterized by extreme clarity, by its surprising freshness and concentration, we believe that this time around descriptive words such as elegance and salty vibrancy are likely to be used – verbal descriptions that we also used when referring to the 2008, 2012 or the 2016 vintages.

In this tradition, the 2019 wines are likely to require some time for their development in the cellar and in the bottle, and we would be not at all surprised if it shows outstanding and uniquely characteristic development. Let's wait and see!

Daniel Wagner & Oliver Müller
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