

WAGNER STEMPEL DAS WEINGUT



URSPRUNG | HANDWERK | LEIDENSCHAFT



AUTUMN LEAVES 2020



• West Winds •

Perhaps we should start by reviewing an entirely fundamental aspect of the central European climate. This will not only set the stage for the rest of our retrospective on the 2020 wine year, but will also provide a bit of contextual framework.



A weather pattern known as an inversion settled over us in late September 2020, bringing not only spectacular sunrises, but also rapid switches between very cool and moist morning hours and warm, sunny days. For this year's Rieslings, that meant a final spurt of ripening.

The city of Mainz, capital of our federal state, lies exactly on the 50th degree of latitude. The Rheinhessen countryside around it — including Siefersheim on the extreme western frontier of the growing region — sits a few seconds below that demarcation. If, as an intellectual exercise, you look at the same spot for the southern hemisphere, you'll appreciate just how **extraordinary the situation is for Germany's winegrowers**, and for the central European climate in general. Because the mirror-image location in the southern hemisphere is actually far past the Cape of Good Hope, or even Tasmania. The sole land mass in range is the southern tip of the Americas at Cape Horn. It's a place known for its rough, barren, almost inhospitable climate, and not just by sailors.

Mainz, by contrast, is known in specialist climatic literature as a moderate cool zone. This means that there are at least four warm months with average temperatures above 10° C and that even during the coldest month of winter, averages temperatures remain above freezing. It features a highly characteristic **dominant west wind flow** that provides relatively evenly distributed precipitation in all seasons. And that is our rough framework for typical climates in the middle latitudes: moderate, mild and rainy throughout the year. 2020 once again proved an exception to the rule. Understanding where it deviated from the norm, and what impact that had on viticulture in Siefersheim, is where we'll now focus.

The year began like so many others from the past decade: notably mild. It's not even all that possible to talk about a "real winter" any more. By mid-March, we'd already had a high number of pleasant days with temperatures above 10 °C, not to mention plentiful hours of sunshine. Nature awoke, with April observing a new weather record. 316 hours of sunshine and just 9 liters of precipitation were recorded for the month. A month known for being capricious and changeable had instead become a preview of summer.

The **lack of any west wind** and a high pressure weather system that camped out for weeks delivered a springtime in “summer mode” more than anything else.

Bud break in mid-April, roughly 10 days ahead of the long-standing historical average, was the logical consequence. The early summer weather continued through May, with a textbook growth period accompanying our work in the vineyard. Only once blossoming had already begun in June did the weather turn changeable and even rainy, in some cases with heavy precipitation. **Flowering was thus highly inhomogeneous**, in some cases with significant coulure; depending on the site and topography, it lingered on in places until late June. As a result, a bit of juggling of numbers and potential ripening curves was required, but before summer was finished we were estimating a harvest window between mid-September and mid-October. The expectations were that it would be neither a notably “cool year” nor a particularly “warm year”.



Hand-harvest on the HEERKRETZ in early October. Even under optimal conditions, the hand harvest this past autumn was the best guarantee of perfect-quality fruit.

The first true days of high summer arrived over the course of July, to only minor amounts of precipitation. We performed our annual yield reduction measures to perfect weather, and in fact, given our impression that the hot weather would be ongoing, we undertook a somewhat more defensive canopy management than in years past. The condition and vitality of the vineyards was outstanding at this point, including with an eye toward standard fungal infestation. The vines had plenty of water and canopies were lush thanks to the strong volumes of rain from June. Things looked very healthy and promising as the middle of the year dawned.

August brought the first really hot days of summer, although Siefersheim was **fortunate in many regards** during this period. First, because its vineyards passed largely unscathed through the threat of hail, sunburn and other damage. Second, because periodic storms delivered sufficient rain to Siefersheim. By the end of the month, more than 60 liters of water per square meter had been recorded. That offered a hefty buffer for further maturation in September, and sure enough, almost as if a switch had been thrown, the start of that month brought an immediate high pressure system with plentiful sunshine and circulatory winds.

It was almost a mirror image of April, only in the second half of the year. **The west wind was nowhere** to be felt, replaced by four weeks of sun, warmth and dryness. All during the final ripening phase for the grapes. On the one hand, this represented the absolute ideal. On the other

hand, without the previous month's rain, it would have been a **hard test for the vitality of the grapes** in Siefersheim's bare and rocky soils. Yet conditions being what they were, we had the luxury of relaxing and simply observing as the grapes ripened in an almost textbook manner. No mold, no drought or lack of water, no other issues of note. The only worrying question: "How long will this weather hold, and are we going to need to break out the umbrellas and rubber boots like last year?"



Textbook Riesling grapes mid-October in HEERKRETZ. Small berries, fully healthy and almost perfectly ripe. Not every year delivers grapes this fine. But 2020 did.

The harvest started in the second week of September with partial pre-harvests for sparkling base wines and rosé, while the main harvest of the 2020 vintage launched on September 14. Roughly a week earlier as compared with the year before. The Pinot-family varieties had thoroughly enjoyed the warm and sunny weather, and as a result we brought in absolutely picture-perfect red and white grapes. In all cases fully healthy, perfectly ripened and, thanks to the dry, warm weeks before, notably small berried. If there were any frowns, it was solely on account of the low volumes for the Pinot grapes. Against a backdrop of moderate yields and perfect conditions, the Silvaner came in at a similarly outstanding quality. The last week of September in particular delivered **beautiful Silvaner grapes** for harvest at quality levels we hadn't seen in years.

The grand finale in 2020 was, as usual, reserved for Riesling, which we harvested in the first two weeks of October in remarkable quality. The weather increasingly worsened as September rolled on, with manageable volumes of rain and relatively low temperatures. No threat or reason for concern on our part, but rather conditions that pushed things toward the limits — maxed out, one might say. The goal was to harvest the grapes at not just the ideal point in terms of acid content and sugar concentration, but from a physiological standpoint as well... which meant letting the Riesling hang through the first really cold nights for a final "**burst of ripening.**" This happened during the first inversion weather pattern of early October, and on Friday, October 9 the 2020 harvest came (almost) to its conclusion. Two days earlier than the year before.

For the 2019 vintage, we had to claw and scratch through extremely difficult harvest conditions to bring in every bucket of healthy grapes, and even after almost three weeks of constant autumn labor we were still unsure how the results would ultimately fall. Compared with that, 2020 can almost be described as a dream year. **The entire collection of grapes, in all varieties, was of outstanding quality.**

Fully healthy, nearly perfectly ripe and with all parameters at their analytical sweet spots: Oechsle weights of between 86 and 96, correlating to must acidity readings of 6.5 to 9.5 g per liter — not to mention the low pH values for which Siefersheim is known. What more could a winemaker's heart desire?



Morning atmosphere mid-October in HEERKRETZ. As if the heavens wanted to give a parting bow as the harvest came to a close.

Can 2020 in Siefersheim be summed up in a short, pithy phrase? As we've already established in the many years prior, when it comes to wine and winemaking, it's easy to fall into oversimplification. Including in 2020. But the vintage here in Siefersheim does currently seem to be the "better behaved brother of 2019" — with several uncanny parallels, as well as various striking differences. As a year ago, the volumes were a bit below expectations. **The quality, however, promises to be very good or even extraordinary.** A bit riper than its predecessor and a hint less acidity, but also a shade clearer, purer and finer.

It is already becoming clear that the wines will bring tremendous tension, density and concentration, and yet the initial samples have also stood out for their incredible clarity, precision and finesse. We will perhaps end up not all too far from the character of the prior year, but significant differences can be observed from the 2018 vintage, or even 2011. Let's wait and see. A certain protocol for handling outstanding vintages has begun to harden into place, not least because we've had more and more chances to test and refine it in recent years. But there are worse things to worry about than finding the ideal formula for an outstanding harvest that's already in the cellar. We look forward to the months to come, and a truly thrilling 2020 vintage.

Daniel Wagner & Oliver Müller

Siefersheim, October 28, 2020