

WAGNER  STEMPEL DAS WEINGUT

URSPRUNG | HANDWERK | LEIDENSCHAFT



AUTUMN LEAVES 2023



Opera in two acts

Hardly ever in recent years, has the term "opera" imposed itself to describe the grape harvest as much as this past autumn. The past few weeks really did offer everything that is required of a classical drama. An already charged exposition, a further dramatic progression, a kind of climax and turning point, then retarding elements, and fortunately no tragic ending. And all of this was very condensed into two acts – exactly five weeks in real time. En bloc acts – without a break.

Even at the risk of slipping into a redundant loop of description, it must be emphasised once again at this point that in retrospect the "easy years" seem to be over? The challenges are seemingly increasing. **Every vintage shows new, extreme eruptions and progressions.** In 2021, it was the downy mildew as a result of the persistently warm and humid weather in the summer, which pushed organic farming to its absolute limits and led to severe losses in some areas. The year before that, an unprecedented dry period in July and August seriously tested the vitality of the vineyards. And 2023? Well, let's try to trace it back chronologically...



An "unadorned" photo from the 2023 vintage, a Portugieser from the Siefersheim district. The weather situation was so bad that many vineyards "collapsed". Acid rot was the direct result. This vineyard was practically lost and was no longer harvested by our colleague. Not everyone was so consequential in 2023.

As in many previous years, this winter was extremely mild. We did not have any prolonged periods of frost, and even had a surprising amount of precipitation in the first three months. In April, the weather was initially rainy and rather cool for that time of year. This resulted in comparatively late budding here, in Siefersheim, from the 20th of April onwards. The amount of rain that had fallen up until this point was a real blessing for the vegetation. Over 150 litres in the first four months. That was significantly more than in previous years.

The change into May brought early summer weather, dry and very warm, and the growth of the vines and vegetation in its entirety was in highspeed mode. Vineyards, meadows, bushes, and trees – **all plants were bursting with vitality and vigour** and the according manual work in the vineyards had to be carried out at a breakneck speed. June was very hot with a virtually ideal situation for flowering from the middle to the end of the month. Merely 8 litres of rainfall

during the entire month evoked memories of 2022, when a phase of dryness and drought set in at the end of June and presented us with a challenging task.

In this instance, however, we were extremely lucky. Eventually, a steady rainfall brought well over 30 litres of water and provided complete relief in this respect. The grapes continued to grow rapidly and the general condition of the vineyards was excellent. **In recent year, we had rarely seen the entire district this green and lively during the summer months.**

It was already clear at this point that the '23 vintage could become far above average in terms of yield. Particularly, the Burgundy vines were so lush and compact that we were forced to reduce yields more than ever before. In some vineyards, literally half of the crop was cut. In retrospect, it can be said that this was probably the most decisive factor for the ensuing quality of the vines later-on during the harvest. All vineyards in which this **manual homework** was carried out assiduously and precisely caused the fewest problems later.



A thinned-out line of Pinot Gris during the middle of summer. It was warm and rainy at the same time. A situation that would later cause us a lot of work. The beginning of August was a kind of live-cell therapy for nature.

In August, this rainy, moody, and yet very warm weather continued. A blessing for the colours of summer. Everything continued to grow and green. But we grew increasingly worried as severe weather and heavy rainfalls developed right at the onset of berries ripening. Towards the end of the month, the region around Worms in southern Rheinhessen was hit by one of the worst hailstorms in recent decades. An inferno and a real tragedy for many colleagues there, who suffered a total loss of their grapes.

The westernmost corner of Rheinhessen around Siefersheim was spared these extremes. Yet, the amount of rain here was also significant and, at around 150 litres in two months, at a very considerable level. Compared to other regions that recorded such quantities in August alone, we again were lucky.

At the beginning of September, the weather changed abruptly. In retrospect, it is indeed conspicuous that in 2022 **the drought and dryness of the summer months was followed by a rainy, wet September while this year the exact opposite happened.** Two rain-heavy, warm, and humid months were followed by the warmest and sunniest September on record.

Another extreme, another record. On the one hand, it was marvellous and delightful because it was an autumn in shorts and T-shirts but on the other hand, it did not help to alleviate the "problematics" in the vineyards.

Many early maturing vine varieties suffered severe damage in this ripening highspeed mode. The compact Burgundy grapes were crushed, sap leaked out, and rot spread. And under such warm conditions, this was happening at a record speed. Our provisional plan to start the harvest on the 11th of September proved not viable. We had to start significantly earlier. **With the full team. A cold start at full speed.**

In the first two weeks of September, an incredible amount of effort was required to selectively pick the damaged Burgundy vines, rigorously sorting all the red wines, and pre-harvesting many other vines. Without the help of our forceful harvest team, who have become well-rehearsed over many years, we would not have been able to pull off this feat right at the start, and, as a result, we would have had to chase after an already escalating situation.

By the 24th of September, practically all vines other than the Riesling vines had been brought into the cellars. Despite all the difficulties and caprioles, we were happy with incredibly fine sparkling base wines, crispy clean and fully matured Pinot Noirs, and a good range of beautifully matured base wines for our estate wines. **Selective hand-picking was once again the key to success. Otherwise, this would not have been possible.**



Riesling in Fürfeld on the 6th of October. Completely healthy, completely ripe. As if nothing had happened at all. High must weight and crisp, fresh acidity. In years like this, these distinctively cool and stony sites are an incredible treasure.

The turning point after these dramatic first three weeks was the Riesling harvest, which was almost unaffected by the general conditions in the vineyards. **It was, to use the jargon of young people here, "concretely stable"**. The last week of September and first week of October seemed almost like a retreat, where we gradually brought the Rieslings from the HÖLLBERG and the HEERKRETZ into the cellars in a relaxed manner, without rushing or stress. Superbly matured, complex flavour profiles, good acidity, and high must weights. That was a great pleasure and makes us confident that the 2023 vintage will show, alongside a few blemishes, its true highlights.

October 6th was the last day of the harvest, and we were both happy and pleased to have ended this period **without any major losses or setbacks. Quite the opposite.** Despite all the selection work, the quantities are at a normal level and the quality is consistently good, in some cases, exceptional. Must weights ranged from 80 to a highly ripe 96 degrees with simultaneous acidity values between 7 and 10 grams. The musts tasted fresh, clear, and delicately fruity with a high extract density.

Even now, almost 6 weeks after the end of the harvest, the young wines are still at a base level. The fermentation process was textbook, and more relaxed than it has been in many years. We believe that the vitality of a year like 2023 will always be reflected in the cellars. **The good supply of nutrients to the vines due to the abundant rainfall** in summer led to very high-quality results overall. Here, in Siefersheim, on the stony barren soils, such a baseline is very noticeable. No signs of stress, no "half-starved microflora" but the same vigour and vitality in the cellars as in the vineyards.

Stylistically, the vintage will be distinctly different from its predecessor. The wines will develop more tension, more grip, and reverberation. The density and ripeness will perhaps develop similarly, but with a tighter character, more vibration, and minerality.



Friday, 6th of October - last day of the harvest. Epic atmosphere in the early morning. Rheinhessen lies in a sea of fog while the porphyry hills around Siefersheim lie in the sun.

Thus, this year we are even more confident and hopeful than in previous years. The **"homework" was done, especially during the summer**, while autumn was all about preserving and, unfortunately, sometimes salvaging. But the approach of artisanal, organic viticulture, which we have championed and upheld here for years, has led to fantastic results, especially in this dramatic year of 2023 – and we are therefore looking forward to the coming weeks and months of ageing and maturation with great optimism.

Siefersheim, 11th of November 2023

Oliver Müller & Daniel Wagner