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AUTUMN LEAVES 2022



Turnaround

Siefersheim. Friday, October 21, 2022. A wet and rainy day, overcast, gray. Harvest came to an end exactly 10 days ago, and with each passing day, we gain a better understanding and assessment of a growing year that seemed to thwart all comparisons, analogies, and prior experiences.

Had you looked out across the landscape with us here along the 50th degree of latitude back in late August, you'd have seen the impact of two hot, mid-summery months with virtually no precipitation. Perhaps you would have recalled the words of German astronaut Alexander Gerst from late summer 2018. The geophysicist added a somewhat depressing commentary to his photos from the ISS: "Was able to take my first images from Central Europe and Germany by day, after several weeks of night fly-overs. Shocking sight. Everything was desiccated and brown where it should have been green."

From a viticultural perspective, we – and many of our colleagues – still believed even in early September that the vintage would run like some version of 2018, yet another in a series of warmer vintages ending in an autumn of shorts and t-shirts. We were all flat out wrong. To quote the brilliant author Wilhelm Busch: "First it comes different. Second, than you'd expect."



A photograph from September 6, 2022 pays powerful witness to the 'crazy weather patterns' of 2022. In the foreground stand the meadows, dried out from the hot summer. In the background, a localized downpour up in the Rheinhessen hills. A person could sit in sunshine in Siefersheim, even as just a few kilometers away things felt closer to Noah's flood.

The year began notably mild, with little 'real winter' in either January or February. Quite the contrary. There was plentiful sunshine for that time of year, and very moderate temperatures. The early stages of spring arrived in mid-March, with numerous days averaging above 10 degrees Celsius and abundant hours of sun. Even a brief intermezzo in early April did little to slow growth in the vineyards, **leading logically to an early bud break in mid-April.**

May continued this trend seamlessly. Our various tasks in the vineyard were accompanied by lovely early summer weather, and things continued in this vein well into June. By the middle of the month, the first parcels on the HÖLLBERG had started flowering, and it was clear that it was very likely to be an 'early year'.

A few hefty downpours late in the month recalled unpleasant memories of the year before, when the weather more or less ‘flipped’ at precisely this point in the calendar and the enduring wet weather of summer posed serious problems for us. But for this year, the rainfall was actually just one last ‘watering’ before the driest high summer since weather records have been kept.

What followed was **two full months without a drop of rain**, and over 600 hours of sunshine in total. Mediterranean conditions. Not even one single ‘real storm’ was observed. When wet and warm weather did arrive, it passed by overnight, at times with a bit of thunder and lightning. But without rain showers or any cooling of note. By early August it was clear that many vine stands in drought-susceptible spots would need irrigation. Young vines, re-planted vines – they all needed water to avoid damage or a serious loss in vitality.

Which goes straight to the core of our primary focus as winegrowers: **cultivating and preserving vital vines on living soils in special sites, so as to ultimately harvest healthy, high-quality grapes**. It may sound like a simple matter, but under these circumstances also an extremely challenging one.



A parcel of Weißburgunder on the upper Horn in late September. Completely vital, healthy, and intact. Everything is once again green and radiant, as if it hadn't just lived through the hottest and driest period in recorded weather history.

The limiters for these intentions were, in 2022, water and sun. From a viticultural standpoint, we pulled pretty much every lever at our disposal in late summer: Starting in winter, we laid out a sufficient supply of straw, humus, and mulch in the vineyards. In addition, a majority of the vineyards did not feature complete green cover and we kept the weeds down. The canopy was kept shorter, with a minimum of defoliation and exposure of the grapes. Despite the positive signs, yields were significantly reduced and the vines were clearly relieved by an extensive ‘green harvest’ in mid-summer. All in all, we employed an entire bundle of measures to maintain the vitality of the vineyards as much as possible despite the conditions.

In early September, we were raring and ready for the harvest to begin. The hottest of weather was past and spirits were high as we kicked off the various pre-harvests for the sekt base wine and rosé. The Spätburgunders were also looking good and were harvested in outstanding quality during that first week. Fully ripe, highly aromatic, and healthy. An outstanding start.

And then came the rain. We'd spent over two months waiting for it. And now, where the precipitation was essentially no longer needed, it started raining hard. And refused to stop. The weather conditions did a full about-face, turning cold, wet, and volatile — unbelievable. By mid-month Siefersheim had registered over 60 liters of precipitation, although this was relatively mild compared with some other districts and winegrowing regions. With no improvement in sight.

In layman's terms, the plentiful rainfall turned an 'easy autumn' into a 'complicated affair'. The 'classic dance' was now much more of a 'acrobatic tightrope act'. Two factors ultimately helped us immensely. The first was our broad portfolio of grape varieties. The Silvaner and Pinot family proved especially robust against the rain. In particular, those vineyards which had undergone yield reduction were harvested in virtually ideal quality, with high must weights and full physiological ripeness. Riesling was a bit of a problem child, although here too the ripening process continued, albeit slower and with only minor increases in must weight.



Highly ripe Riesling grapes, harvested at just the right moment, on October 10 in Fürfeld. It was quite a tightrope walk in those last October days, but the decision to draw out the harvest so long ended up truly paying off.

On the one hand, the various microclimates in our Siefersheimer sites offered a certain level of insurance for our decision to play for time. The vineyards on the high plateau on the upper Horn, at nearly 270 meters in elevation, remained remarkably stable and healthy despite the plentiful water. The HÖLLBERG with its early ripening required much more attention. The HEERKRETZ, by contrast, still looked plenty intact and vital even in early October, as if nothing wild had transpired. **This setup allows for 'successive harvest' even in the toughest of years.** Admittedly, if everything goes wonky all at once, it is pretty much impossible to achieve top results. There are too many fires to put out. But this wasn't the case in 2022 in Siefersheim.

Just the opposite. We waited, cautiously and mindfully, until a window for the main Riesling harvest opened in early October. Sunny days returned and brought the rest of the process to **a wonderful conclusion, and a conciliatory end to the autumn on October 10 on the Eichelberg in Fürfeld.** Nothing came easy for us in 2022, but the results are highly promising. Quantities were average, at yields that were neither especially good nor especially poor. Certainly much smaller than in 2018.

From a quality standpoint, it was a very good year on the whole, and we saw fantastic highlights. Our red wine harvest delivered fruit of nearly unparalleled quality, and our top Silvaner and Pinot family grapes were also of outstanding quality. Must weights between 88 and 96 degrees and acidity between 6 and 8 grams, i.e. virtually perfect from an analytical standpoint. The Rieslings that we harvested in October from the VDP.GROSSE LAGE were absolutely physiologically ripe and highly aromatic. Acid values between 7 and 9 grams are outstanding for this warm year, even if must weights between 84 and 92 degrees served as major reminders that the year had been anything but normal.

Where will this vintage bring us stylistically? What kind of wines will 2022 ultimately deliver? Questions that are tough to answer in any year. **All the more so in 2022, since no one alive has ever seen these particular weather patterns and these effects on the vines at our latitude.** It's simply never happened before. During summer, it was 'Serengeti' conditions, during the harvest more like 'Bengali monsoons'.



Twilight in the VDP.GROSSE LAGE HEERKRETZ. Epic atmosphere to bring autumn to a close.

Based on the harvested fruit, the 22s will certainly not turn out like a typical hot vintage. The enormous concentration and depth of the 2018s have not been seen this year. And the yields are significantly lower as well. The musts and young wines are highly aromatic and expressive. We expect a vintage that is thoroughly juicy and fleshy, yet nevertheless allow for wines of astounding freshness and elegance. Perhaps not quite as taut, vibrant, and elegant as the year prior, but also with a greater range of aromatics and complexity, with moderate body, fine, riper acid structure, and a long finish. Wines that, in a positive sense, are a bit more approachable and easy-going than a year ago. We look forward to seeing how things progress, to months of aging, and to a highly promising unveiling of the 22s in the year to come.

Daniel Wagner & Oliver Müller

Siefersheim, October 21, 2022