



SUMMER LEAVES 2017



Friendly Game

The „Renaissance of high-quality wines from Germany“ in as far as it pertains to Rheinhessen, has now been ongoing for more than two decades. What started out in the 1990's as the birth of the group „message in a bottle“ – the **open, free and friendly exchange** within a group of young winemakers dedicated to quality – has by now arrived in practically every corner of the Rheinhessen growing region. The fire has, as it were, been passed on and a whole generation of winemakers, together with the growing region, has undergone fundamental changes.

The free exchange of views remains a central and important element of our work and of how we see ourselves, but in 2016 **Daniel Wagner from the Wagner Stempel estate in Siefersheim** went a step further, together with the brothers **Matthias and Christian Runkel from the Bischel estate in Appenheim**.



If you allow your gaze to move from the **typical Rheinhessen landscape**, with its gently undulating hills and vineyards, to the utmost Western border of Rheinhessen and the town of Siefersheim, the frequently characteristic picture of wavy, harmonious hills is directly broken in this region. Bare outcrops of volcanic origin, stone quarries and steep cliffs above narrow valleys can be found there. A wide-ranging heather landscape with its own characteristic flora and fauna marks the borders of the growing region visibly in this landscape.

In the south of this wine-growing town you will find the **Siefersheimer HEERKRETZ**, site, which is open to the winds from the West, and is one of the highest and coolest vineyard sites in Rheinhessen. It forms a connecting point of both geology and wine styles, and differs significantly from the Wonnegau or Nierstein districts. Riesling growing on these poor and acidic **rhyolith soils**, will in cool vintages need to continue ripening into November, facilitating the production of a style of white wine that is on the one hand cool, racy and light-bodied, while on the other side the wines also show salty mineral notes, concentration and body, thus developing a wide span of vibrant characteristics.



HEERKRETZ in Siefersheim

Along an axis that runs almost exactly from north to south through the HEERKRETZ vineyard site you will find another border region of winegrowing in Rheinhessen, around 20 kilometres north of the town of Bingen. Speaking historically, the **Binger SCHARLACHBERG** site is certainly one of the most famous vineyard sites in Germany, with records dating back to the time of Charlemagne. The characteristic Rochusberg can be seen from afar, and it is on the south-west flank of this steep hill with its reddish top soil that one finds this vineyard site, the hill is bounded to the north by the Rhine and Nahe rivers, whereto the south the Rheinhessen plains open up.

This is a mighty **quarzite rock formation**, practically in a solitary position, facing perfectly south, which together with the warm conditions of the Rhine valley close by provides perfect ripening conditions for the grapes. The cold falling winds of the neighbouring medium-altitude Hunsrück mountains, as well as the exposed, high-altitude sloping site represent the cool counterpart, open to the wind, from which Riesling in particular benefits so strongly. These are conditions which each year produce wines of tremendous ripeness and concentration, combined with piquant saltiness and fresh, lively acidity.



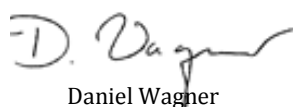
SCHARLACHBERG in Bingen

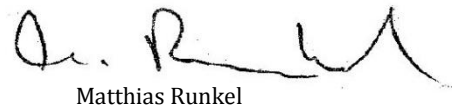
Both of these sites represent marginal and borderline regions of wine-growing in Rheinhessen. The Binger SCHARLACHBERG as a monolithic rock literally marks the „**Quarzite column of the Rüdesheim hill**“ on the other side of the Rhine. The Siefersheimer HEERKRETZ forms the „**volcanic bridgehead of Rheinhessen across the Nahe**“. Both of them in their character are distinct from the usual picture of Riesling wine from Rheinhessen one is accustomed to. Both of them are characteristic, challenging wine drinkers to take a closer look, to differentiate and question...

This was precisely the starting point of the friendly game. In the course of joint meetings, presentations and events an increasing number of questions related to the sites, their character and the vineyard work was discussed. Over time, this mutual exchange led to a discovery of the many common factors in terms of the importance of manual work, the careful processing in the cellar, and the general **respect for the vineyard** and its characteristics. Parallels became clear, ideas were developed, and the whole project matured over the course of 2016 to culminate in the decision to go further than just to exchange ideas, to take a further step. To be active together, and to start a project in partnership.

In future, the Runkel brothers will work, care for and harvest a parcel of the HEERKRETZ site, in the central and exposed part of the slope, while at the same time Daniel Wagner will proceed similarly with a portion of the upper section of the SCHARLACHBERG, which is laid out in cross-terraces. The results of this friendly exchange will then be shown at the respective single-vineyard wine presentations of each vintage in September.


Christian Runkel


Daniel Wagner


Matthias Runkel

Romana Echensperger MW

Tasting notes of the 2016 vintage.

Ripe, fresh, but not racy ...

Anybody who travelled through the German wine-growing regions in June of 2016 will clearly remember the worried faces of the winemakers. The rain came down in buckets, and even in the area around Siefersheim, which is usually in the shadow of the rainfall, there was plenty that came down. A really terrifying scenario. Daniel Wagner wrote very graphically about this situation in the 2016 autumn letter, comparing the situation with the rise and fall of the tide in coastal regions:

„Whereas one could describe the months of April, May and June as the period of the rising or incoming tide, which altogether brought down a “flood” of more than 200 millimetres of rainfall, the months that followed, July, August and September together experienced rainfall of only 45 millimetres, in a sense a falling or outgoing tide compared to the previous period. There could hardly be a greater contrast in the rainfall patterns.“

Organic wine producers such as Wagner Stempel faced a tremendous battle under these circumstances. In addition to the labour-intensive measures implemented to protect the vines, the vineyards around Siefersheim were to some extent fortunate in that the temperature was a little cooler, helping to at least slow down the progress of powdery mildew, that aggressive fungus that completely destroyed the harvest in many other vineyards. In addition, the lean porphyric soils, which are very well drained, have an advantage in such extremely wet years. In this way the vines survived this unusually humid and warm period of weather with some minor scratches, but without major losses in the grapes available for harvesting.

Following on the very wet period in early summer came a heat-wave in August, which ensured grapes could ripen as required. September, too, was warm, which, together with mild temperatures at night led to a significant reduction in the acid levels. This is how we can explain the basic character of the wines of the 2016 vintage, they are not as concentrated as the wines of the exceptional 2015 vintage, but nevertheless show ripe aromas with a rounded acid structure. In this respect, too, Daniel Wagner noted the following last year:

„Neither Riesling nor the Pinot varieties were picked at must weights higher than 100 degree, mostly they came out at a range of between 84 and a maximum of 94 degrees. This correlated well with excellent acid values of between 7 and 11 grams, which we know from experience will result in fresh, lively wines that are not excessively piquant or acidic in their youth.

The wines actually appear to be more filigree, more light-footed than those of the previous vintage, an impression that is also supported by the lower alcohol levels seen throughout the range. Ripe, fresh, but not racy – that is how one can summarize the 2016 vintage.



VDP.GUTSWEIN (Estate wine)

The estate wines appear to be lighter in body than in the previous vintage. We particularly liked the Pinot Blanc and Riesling. The latter, in particular, once again shows up a luxury problem that Wagner-Stempel has – there are simply so many good sites available that parcels of wine end up in the estate Riesling that would easily be declared as more valuable batches elsewhere.

2016 Silvaner trocken (dry)

The Silvaner grape has a reputation for being difficult to press. Where one decides to work without the aid of enzymes, as is the case here, a few hours spent on the skins is a useful instrument to open up the grapes. That creates a pleasant bitter touch on the finish, which gives the Silvaner more structure. On the nose, the wine is very restrained, with aromas of quince, grass and white almonds. A little residual sugar makes the wine juicy and round, and creates consumer appeal, the finish once again underlines the moderate fruit. A solid wine, but one which perhaps does not quite show the degree of character one is used to from Daniel Wagner.

2016 Weissburgunder trocken (Pinot Blanc dry)

Once again this year part of the must was fermented in 600 and 2400 litres barrels. However, this is not evident on the palate. The wine appears to be more firm and straightforward, which may also possibly be due to the almost imperceptible residual sugar level. The wine shows aromas of yellow fruit, apricots, white tree blossoms and almonds. On the palate there is an appealing, delicately creamy texture, supported by pleasant fresh acidity. The impression created is that of a light-bodied, fresh, precise wine. It does not have the same presence on the palate as the wine of the previous vintage, but is nevertheless appealing with its clear and very elegant style.

2016 Grauburgunder trocken (Pinot Gris dry)

The Pinot Gris is spicy with noticeable oak aromas. It was fermented partly in 1200 and 2400 litre barrels, on the nose there are notes of toast and smoked bacon, of ripe stone fruit such as apricots and peaches. A few grams of residual sugar help to underline the fruit on the palate. Together with moderate acidity, this gives the wine a rounded and fairly full-bodied entry. Some phenolic bite on the finish and moderate oak aromas lead up to a dry finale. A medium-bodied, hearty white wine with a delicately creamy texture.

2016 Scheurebe trocken (dry)

The Scheurebe variety – 100 years old in 2016 – is at home in Rheinhessen, and is currently experiencing something of a revival. The Scheurebe wine Daniel Wagner produces grows on porphyry soils, and is therefore never as perfumed as wines grown on loess soils. This wine is both playful and aromatic. On the nose there are complex aromas of blood orange, cassis, mint, orange blossom and citrus zests. The wine is fermented dry, and appears particularly firm. It comes equipped with juicy fresh acidity that holds the wine together, revealing that one of the parents of Scheurebe is Riesling. A classy wine that once again shows Daniel Wagner has a particular soft spot for this variety.




2016 Riesling trocken (dry)

Once again this year the estate Riesling provides a lot of terroir for your money. After all, many of the batches of grapes used for this wine are sourced from some of the best vineyard sites in the Siefersheim area. This year, the wine shows a fairly restrained nose with aromas of white flowers, apricots, pears and a prominent mineral impression. On the palate, the primary impression is salty, rather than fruit extract. The finish once again reveals the stone fruit aromas. In addition, there is a pleasant yeasty note. Overall, a very graceful Riesling. It certainly does not have the power and concentration of its 2015 counterpart, but it is lively with a refreshing mineral character.

2016 Sauvignon Blanc trocken (dry)

In its aroma profile, Sauvignon Blanc clearly reveals whether it came from a ripe vintage or not. This year, the taste of the wine is much more vegetal. The impression on the nose is initially restrained, with aromas of boxwood, freshly cut grass, aniseed and fennel. On the palate, these aromas are accompanied by citrus fruit such as grapefruit and mandarin. The wine is light-bodied, with juicy acidity and some phenolic bite on the finish. This Sauvignon Blanc fits in with the overall style statement of the estate. This is no loud, brash wine, trying to impress with its aromas, rather it is a Sauvignon Blanc produced by a darn good Riesling winemaker.



VDP.ORTSWEIN (Communal wines)

The VDP association in Rheinhessen has adopted the 3-stage classification model, which excludes the „VDP.Erste Lage“(Premier Cru) level. This means that the communal wine has a much greater importance than in other regions. There are many jewels to be found in this category. Particularly in the case of grape varieties such as Silvaner or Pinot Blanc you should not be put off by their classification as a communal wine. It would be a great pity if these wines, made from grape varieties not permitted for Grand Cru wines, were to be ignored, as they are well worth some attention.

In this category we must specifically point out the differences that exist between the three Riesling expressions. Whereas the „Melaphyr“ initially cold-shoulders the taster, and demands to be understood by freaks, the „Rotliegend“ is juicy with warm stone fruit aromas, a Riesling you would expect to find in a glossy brochure. Once again this year the „Porphy“ is the most complex wine in this group, the reason is that it includes many batches of grapes that could easily have been used for the Grand Cru wine.

2016 Fürfeld Riesling „Melaphyr“

Shortly after pouring, the Melaphyr comes across as being particularly cool, even cold. It initially shows restrained citrus aromas as well as an attractive reductive note that blows off, and contributes to the complexity and mineral character. With time, the nose develops aromas of grapefruit, kumquat, smoky notes and mint. The wine is vibrant and clearly contoured, with an acidity of 8 grams and a relatively low residual sugar of 2.5 grams. On the palate, the fresh acidity is enhanced by the cool menthol notes, which makes the wine at all times appear to be at least 2° C cooler than the Riesling „Rotliegendes“, although both were drawn from the same refrigerator. The wine exhibits tremendous length, and develops spicy, smoky mineral notes at the back of the palate. A taut, cool Riesling that should really appeal to wine freaks.

2016 Neu Bamberg Riesling „Rotliegend“ (red soil structure)

This Riesling is grown on the extension of the Heerkretz site, on the Neu-Bamberg side. Here the soil is characterized by red layers that also determine the taste of the wine. The „Rotliegend“ is the fiery, overtly most fruity expression among the communal Riesling wines. With its aromas of red vineyard peaches, ripe pineapple, ginger and herbaceous flowers such as chamomile and hay flowers it comes across as a textbook Riesling. In terms of taste, too, the Bamberg wine is more opulent than its colleagues, which is also a result of a few extra grams of residual sugar. On the finish you will find stone fruit aromas as well as herbaceous notes such as dried lavender and thyme. The wine has a pleasant phenolic structure, which together with the mineral impression leaves a grainy mouth-feel, once again underlining the spicy character of this wine.

2016 Siefersheim Riesling Kabinett

A Kabinett style that shows candied notes and prominent sweetness, not as light-footed as similar wines from the Mosel region, but which nevertheless presses all the right buttons one expects from a Kabinett Riesling. The wine is simply bursting with juicy aromas such as peaches, yellow plums, melon, pineapple, candied ginger and violets. In addition there is just a hint of petrol, which blends in very well with the nose. On the palate, there is an appealing, playful, lively and refreshing balance of fresh acidity, prominent sweetness and fruit extract. In addition, there are smoky and salty aromas on a long finish. A lively, playful Kabinett that weaves a cocoon of elegant sweetness like cotton candy around the ripe fruit.



2016 Siefersheim Riesling „Porphyr“

The most complex Riesling in the communal wine series is that from Siefersheim, sourced mainly from the HEERKRETZ site. The wine has a tremendous array of aromas, and is the communal wine that is most expressive and powerful on the palate. Part of the reason for this complexity lies in the excellent vineyard sites, but also in the fact that the wine is a blend of batches fermented in stainless steel tanks and 600 litre barrels, with some batches using cultured yeasts and other wild yeasts. The „Porphyr“ is always the herbaceous representative among the communal wines. Aromas of linden flowers, camomile and sage define the nose, as well as notes of yellow and exotic fruit. This year, the acid bite is much less evident. On the palate you can expect to find the mineral notes, reminiscent of sea salt, typical of the „Porphyr“.

2016 Sieferheim Silvaner

This communal wine utilizes the wines gained from older vines, which were exclusively fermented in oak barrels. In the glass, the wines unfold a complex bouquet of aromas of Williams Christ pears, quince and sage. This merges seamlessly with the elegant, tart oak aromas of the Hoesch barrels, which are reminiscent of fire wood. The wine is fermented dry, on the palate you can experience a vibrant interplay of yellow fruit, salty notes, moderate acidity and some phenolic bite. In addition, long lees contact provides a creamy texture, and fills the mid-palate. A medium-bodied white wine, very lively with a long finish.

2016 Siefersheim Weissburgunder (Pinot Blanc)

This wine is sourced from the best vineyard parcels around the Horn site, and carries genes modelled on the stylistic ideal of Burgundy. The wine is matured in new 600-litre barrels produced by the Hoesch cooperage in Rheinhessen, providing a very characteristic oak aroma to the wines, more reminiscent of the tart sweetness of fire wood than of the sweet toastiness of a French barrique. The first impression of this Pinot Blanc is that it is very restrained. The nose is aromatic with yeasty notes, yellow Gallia melon, white flowers, almonds and fresh salted butter. The power of this wine only becomes evident on the palate. While the structure is lean, the wine builds up considerable pressure on the palate. The oak provides the framework for the wine, which impresses with prominent salty minerality, creamy notes and a delicate play of aromas. Light-bodied, restrained, and at the same time with a tremendously long finish, this Pinot Blanc is the ideal partner with food. It can effortlessly accompany even the most sophisticated dishes without becoming invisible.

2015 Siefersheim Pinot Noir

The exceptional 2015 vintage with its high levels of ripeness and fresh acidity certainly also benefited the Pinot Noir. Whereas the worldwide trend in terms of Pinot Noir often tends to stress cool aromas in order to create an impression, sometimes false, of finesse, the Siefersheim wine has precisely the correct degree of ripeness to combine juicy fruit with sufficient freshness. The wine was fermented and matured in large oak casks (tonneau), the wine shows the right measure of sweet toasted notes to support the ripe fruit. The aromas of red berries, sour cherries and a hint of lovage clearly reveal the German character of this Pinot Noir. The oak is very well integrated, underlining the ripeness and a silky tannin structure. A polished Pinot Noir characterized by juicy fruit and elegance.

VDP.GROSSE LAGE (Grand Cru)

There is a lot of discussion as to whether the Grand Crus from different vineyard sites are really all that different. Frequently it is not possible to determine differences in taste. But things are different here. The three Riesling Grand Crus are different not only in terms of their aromatic expression, but also particularly in terms of their mouth-feel. In tasting a wine, the texture and structure are also always decisive. All three Grand Crus leave a different impression on the palate, and have different aroma structures. The powerful, weighty SCHARLACHBERG GG represents a clever addition to the Grand Crus produced on the HÖLLBERG and HEERKRETZ sites.

2016 HÖLLBERG Riesling GG Grand Cru

Once again this year, the HÖLLBERG is, next to the HEERKRETZ, the appealing wine, although clearly leaner than in the previous vintage, and with less strident acidity. After extensive aeration in the glass one notes particularly exotic aromas, pawpaw, guava, melon, pineapple and ginger, as well as refreshing citrus notes such as mandarin peel and lemon balm. In spite of its full body, the wine also has tremendous length, which is supported by the sea-salt minerality that is so typical for Siefersheim. In fact, the full body is composed of creaminess, fruit extract, pleasant freshness and intense aromas of exotic fruit. Once again this year the HÖLLBERG is a really juicy show Riesling, although not as powerful as in the previous vintage.

2016 HEERKRETZ Riesling GG Grand Cru

The HEERKRETZ is the Grand Cru with the firmest grip on the palate. The wine shows tremendous herbs and spices, and leaves a grainy mouth-feel carried by minerality and phenolics. A wine that comes alive particularly through its structure, and does not rely only on its smell to enchant. The first impression on the nose shows smoky aromas. After swirling the wine around for a while, and when the wine warms up slightly, one notes added aromas of menthol, eucalyptus, clear apple, apricots, wild herbs and camomile flowers. This wine, too, is a little lighter in body than in the previous vintage. On the palate one notes that, just as with the “Melaphyr” communal wine, that it is supported less by fruit extract and more by salty mineral notes and iodine. In total, it has less of an acid bite, and less oak aromas than the previous vintage wine, the HEERKRETZ is a classy Riesling that perfectly reflects both the vineyard site and the vintage.

2016 SCHARLACHBERG Riesling GG (Grand Cru)

The Scharlachberg site is a sleeping giant among the grand cru vineyard sites in Germany, which is slowly becoming more appreciated by wine producers such as Kruger Rumpf, Riffel, Bischel and more recently also Daniel Wagner. Located around 20 kilometres from Siefersheim as the crow flies, the vines here grow in a warmer microclimate, on a lean quartzite soil. The grapes here were picked 10 days earlier than in the HEERKRETZ site, yet they had the highest must weight of all the grand crus. The wines from the Scharlachberg are weighty wines, and tremendously salty. While the Riesling wines from Siefersheim are also defined by tremendous acidity, the acidity here is integrated, and woven into the wine. The spectrum of aromas differs significantly from that of the other Grand Crus. There are notes of jasmine, lilac, mint, red apple, melon and spicy slate. The wine is dry, and builds up tremendous pressure on the mid-palate. It leaves behind an almost sandy sensation, and a menthol-fresh astringency at the back of the mouth.

