



April 9, 2018

Overcoming adversity in the Pfalz region of Germany

The labor-intensive 2017 vintage at Villa Wolf

WACHENHEIM/WEINSTRASSE, GERMANY — As in the other wine regions of Germany, the growing season in the Pfalz (southern Rhine valley) started about two weeks earlier than normal. Unusually warm weather in March — the highest temperatures ever recorded here in the month of March — induced an early bud break at the beginning of April. This was followed, unfortunately, by two nights of hard frost in late April that destroyed many of the young shoots and stopped all vine growth for about two weeks. It also inhibited the growth of the surviving shoots, causing uneven vine and cluster development, which made our summer shoot positioning and crop management work a lot more intricate and time-consuming.



Beautifully ripe Riesling fruit hanging in Villa Wolf's monopole vineyard, Wachenheimer Belz.

Heavy rains in July and August led to the appearance of botrytis. Containing the spread of botrytis requires a lot of hand labor — leaf thinning to open the canopy and negative selection to remove affected clusters — which also added to our summer work load.

On the positive side, however, the reduced crop load allowed the vines to put more energy into ripening the smaller amount of fruit that remained. Ripening was further hastened by quite hot weather in summer, giving us grapes with superb natural sugar content and refreshingly high acidity levels.

We started the harvest on September 7 with Sauvignon Blanc, finishing on September 30 with Riesling and Pinot Noir from our older vineyards. At the beginning of harvest, the weather was actually quite cool and ripening had slowed. But temperatures rose for the last half of harvest, allowing the fruit to finish ripening fully. In the end, we harvested a small crop of excellent quality, especially from our single-vineyard sites Wachenheimer Belz, Ruppertsberger Hoheburg and Forster Pechstein.

Our first harvest of Pinot Noir from Wachenheimer Belz!

Our wholly owned Wachenheimer Belz vineyard is the only site in the area that has a significant amount of chalky limestone in the soil. Because of its unique terroir, it has always produced very distinctive Rieslings. But we thought it would also be a perfect place to grow Pinot Noir, so in 2015 we replanted a small parcel (less than an acre) with the low-yielding Freiburg clone of Spätburgunder. In 2017, we harvested our first crop from this parcel. It produced only two barriques, but it looks very good and we are eager to see how this maiden wine matures in the barrel.

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