

Domaine Alice Hartmann

Wormeldange

Wormeldange, 6th December 2021

CHRONICLES 2021

In recent years, we've grown accustomed to warm weather. However, 2021 has been a different story, with heavy rain and little sun. Still, we mustn't complain. The Luxembourg Moselle was spared the devastating events (late frosts, floods) that occasionally proved a scourge for our friends in other European wine regions, including Burgundy (where we lost all our grapes for Adigio) and the banks of the River Ahr just over the border in the German state of Rhineland-Palatinate.

Here in Luxembourg, we had a long winter with high levels of precipitation (rain and snow). It was freezing cold, with temperatures plummeting to -10°C in late January. This was followed by a mild spell in late February, which saw the mercury rising above 20°C on 24th February – an all-time first! The soil was still very damp, which actually proved beneficial. A cold spell sufficiently intense to freeze the ground (-5°C on 8th March) passed quickly. The temperature variation between night and day occasionally peaked at 25°C , and afternoons were exceptionally mild until April.

These cold nights delayed bud break, which occurred three weeks later than in recent years, with buds first emerging in early May. This delay paid off as it spared the buds the ravages of late frosts. Throughout spring, we were pounded by heavy rain and temperatures were low. It was not until mid-May that things began to warm up a little. These harsh conditions impeded the vine stocks' growth. 2021 already looked set to be a suboptimal year, and heavy rain and low temperatures in May did little to dispel the gloom.

Finally, normal weather conditions resumed in June. It was dry and warm, with regular daily temperatures of between 20 and 25°C . This was the signal for the vines to start their growth in earnest. Due to the waterlogged soil, they were able to tap the energy they needed to develop at breakneck speed. In Grevenmacher, the first flowers bloomed on 16th June. Temperatures for the next two days were 32°C in the daytime and 25°C at night, providing ideal conditions for rapid and consistent flowering. However, violent storms forecast for 18th June brought fresh anxiety. They could potentially wreak havoc and compromise future grape clusters (and, by association, the harvest) if the young flowers were damaged. In the end, the storms were fortunately very mild, with just 6 litres of rainfall. Flowering was completed without incident on the best exposed hillsides during the weekend of 19th and 20th June.

Then came a fresh mild spell, which once again placed a spanner in the works. On the less well exposed hillsides, flowering paused abruptly on 22nd June, with temperatures limited to 16°C . When the warm weather did return, it was accompanied by rain (20 litres of rainfall per day on 24th, 29th and 30th June). These conditions brought a fresh risk of mildew spreading. Nevertheless, flowering was completed around 26th June.

The weather in early July was mainly warm and damp. While mildew grew on the leaves of the house vines, it had not yet reached the parcels. This situation would not continue indefinitely ... but at least the berries were growing quickly. They needed sun and moisture to grow, and there was no shortage of either! On 13th and 14th July, approximately 100 litres of rain fell on the Moselle. Fortunately, despite this sudden downpour, no soil erosion occurred in our vineyards. The rest of the month continued in the same mediocre vein with low temperatures (between 17 and 24°C) and endless rain. Vine stock growth slowed again while mildew thrived.

The abysmal summer weather continued into August. It was now clear that the harvesting schedule would be determined primarily by grape disease progression. In the first fortnight of the month, it was mild and rained virtually every day. The weather turned warm and dry in subsequent days, peaking at 30°C during the weekend

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of 14th August. The Pinot Noir grapes finally began to change colour. Some grape clusters on the Grevenmacher Fels were even partially burned by the sun. However, this hot spell only lasted a weekend. On 16th August, the air began to cool and it rained heavily on 23rd August.

Fortunately, conditions improved prior to 9th September, and the weather was warm (up to 28°C) and dry. The vines resumed their growth and made up for some of the lost time. However, our optimism proved short-lived. Once again, things took a turn for the worse during the week of 13th September, which saw rain and high night-time temperatures. Due to the surplus of water, the grapes began to swell and some even burst. Such lesions caused rot to spread, with Pinot Noir grapes the worst affected. It was imperative for us to prepare the harvest so we'd be ready to get started quickly when the time came.

Given the grapes' state of health, we had no choice but to start on 20th September, which was earlier than planned. We had to commit to the plan, come what may, and risk losing everything. A meticulous approach to harvesting was required, with a vital sorting process implemented to discard berries punctured by wasps or spotted wing drosophila or infected with botrytis. Multiple passes became the norm.

We decided not to produce any Pinot Noir as the quality did not meet our standards. Fortunately, the mild weather continued, with the sun even showing its face occasionally. In the first three weeks, we picked grapes for our crémants. At the start of the fourth week, we exclusively harvested Chardonnay grapes from the Grevenmacher Kreitzerberg. They had benefited significantly from the fine autumn weather, providing an excellent basis for maturation in barrels. During the same week, we picked the first Riesling grapes, which will also be used to make crémant. We opted to wait a while before harvesting Riesling for our still wines.

By the end of the fifth week's harvesting, only the very last Riesling grapes were left on the vines. We decided to initially sort the grapes to discard any that failed to meet the highest standards. This uncompromising process led to us rejecting half of our grapes. The storm that struck between 20th and 22nd October did us no favours, with rain and heat rekindling rot progression. On 23rd October, the sun returned, and we were pleased to see that our Rieslings had withstood the assault well. What's more, they had even ripened well during the weekend of 23rd and 24th October. Harvesting resumed on Monday 25th October on the Wintrange Felsberg, Ahn Palmberg and Wormeldange Koepchen. The long wait paid off and the risk was worth taking, since our Rieslings were magnificent and sure to make great wines with good ageing capacity.

This has been an incredibly tough year in terms of the weather. Government weather stations reported record rainfall, with July the wettest month since records began in 1854. It was closely followed by August, which saw the second highest rainfall dating back to the same year. Given these conditions, a lot of hard work was required to harvest good grapes capable of producing great wines. The quality of the Chardonnay and Riesling grapes for the 2021 vintage therefore came as a huge relief for us!