

# Domaine Weinbach

## 2019: a rollercoaster year, with a smile at the end!

Although the year started in a rather cold and grey fashion, February and March turned out very mild, provoking an **early bud break in the beginning of April**. This left us very worried about the damages that late frost could cause. We got very close to freezing point a couple of nights but luckily only a few Muscat plants were hit.

This early start pointed towards a very precocious vintage, but the **second fortnight of April and the entire month of May witnessed a remarkably cold weather for the season**, with strong North wind and temperatures 10°C below season average. This put the vegetal cycle of the vines on hold for a few weeks and completely compensated the early start. In the end **flowering took place slowly over the month of June**, which is right about the normal calendar. This reasonably paced cycle allowed all Alsatian winegrowers to do their field work in a poised fashion, a welcome relief after the constant rush we experienced in 2018.

**Late June and late July, Alsace was hit by two dramatic heat waves**, the July one catching the vines after a few weeks with virtually no rain, which caused some grilling on certain plots. Once more the conditions had us expecting the worst for the rest of the summer, yet **August brought salvation** with several generous storms (the Kaysersberg valley received close to 100mm total rainfall over the month of August). Temperatures cooled down as well, especially at night, allowing the grapes to maintain **acidity levels that we hadn't seen for a few years** and weren't expecting as we extrapolated the heat waves of June and July.

Another surprise of 2019 was the fruit output, as after a very generous crop in 2018, everyone was expecting that the vines would compensate in 2019 and produce very little fruit. If that was true to a certain extent for Gewurztraminer plots which suffered from *filage*, other grape varieties saw a pretty **solid output, although less than in 2018**. Nevertheless, this brought us to undertake green harvests in a few plots, especially the Pinot Noirs.

Meanwhile on the strategic front, we were happy to close a deal in the middle of the summer to buy the **6 hectares of vineyards** of domaine Gérard Fuchs in Sigolsheim, with a great terroir portfolio including a **1-hectare block on the Grand Cru Furstentum as well as some plots on the Grand Crus Mambourg, Mackrain and Kaefferkopf**. Plenty of prime limestone soils to balance our granite-heavy portfolio. Not mentioning an **exceptional Pinot Noir plot** on the iron-rich limestone soils above the Clarisses monastery, right between the Altenbourg and the Grand Cru Mambourg. Those vineyards were farmed in a sustainable, moderate-yield fashion by their previous owner, and we are now converting them to Biodynamic.

We were therefore heading towards the harvest season with 6 extra hectares to pick and a brand **new press facility** to inaugurate. With 4 pneumatic presses, it allows us to further isolate single vineyard juices and focus on the maturity of every single plot rather than making logistical compromises. We also added a few more temperature controlled tanks for the fermentation of our Pinot Noir range, which now encompasses 6 very different vineyards.

**Picking started on September 17<sup>th</sup>** with our Pinot Gris from the Grand Cru Marckrain, followed by our different Pinot Blanc and Auxerrois plots, and some of our other Pinot Gris. On September 19<sup>th</sup>, we picked the plots of the recently acquired Prediger (the Preacher) block on the stilts soils of the foothills of Ammerschwihr, 6 different grape varieties that we pressed and fermented together. We moved on with our Pinot Noir plots, starting with the Schlossberg one on 21<sup>st</sup> of September, followed by the Altenbourg and our new plots on the Furstentum and Vogelgarten.

A few episodes of rain forced us to stop and resume harvest a few times but the sanitary condition of the fruits remained very sound. Most of our Gewurztraminer plots were picked over the last week of September and the first week of October, and we then started to pick our Rieslings. **Most of our Schlossberg plots were picked between October 4<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup>**, with some beautiful fruits from our old vines mid-slope, earmarked for our Cuvée Ste Catherine. From October 10<sup>th</sup> on we focused on later maturing plots of the heavy, marl soils of the Altenbourg and the Furstentum, including the recently acquired Riesling and Pinot Blanc on the Grand Cru Furstentum and Gewurztraminer of the Kaefferkopf. **The last fruits were picked on Thursday October 17<sup>th</sup>**, with the rich and bright juices of the Furstentum Gewurztraminer and Altenbourg Pinot Gris.

Our overall yield across our vineyards came in at **36 hl/ha in 2019**, with **acidity levels that remained very high** throughout the harvest period. Juices are therefore showing an amazing **freshness** and zing, yet with good backbone and structure. Sugar levels didn't skyrocket over the last weeks of the maturing season and the wines show very reasonable alcohol levels, between 13 and 13.5% for most of them.

The **climatic and emotional rollercoaster** that we went through in 2019 vintage eventually gave birth to a **very balanced vintage**, powerful and racy with a remarkable brightness. As if amidst all those ups and downs, the fruits chose to go with the middle option and the balance, joining the heat and the cold, the flush and the austerity around a common feature that we always strive for at Weinbach: **elegance**.

*Eddy Leiber-Faller, Weinbach, March 2020*