

Domaine Alice Hartmann

Wormeldange

Wormeldange, 6th December 2023

CHRONICLES 2023

What an eventful year it has been in terms of the weather! 2023 has kept us busy, culminating in a very short and intensive period of harvesting. However, we applied our usual stringent standards and are now pleased to announce that we are delighted with the quality of the wines in our cellar. Although yields have been down, we have managed to get the best out of this vintage.

One thing is for certain: each passing year is never the same as the last. While 2021 was very wet, 2022 was very dry and 2023 was like a condensed version of the two, with several clearly defined periods.

The early months were very wet, with heavy rainfall in January and March. This continued into the spring, when longer rain-free periods were completely lacking. To be honest, this didn't bother us. On the contrary, it meant that unlike 2022, the soil was not completely dry at the start of the new growth season, and nature really did need all that water.

The start of budburst in late April was neither very early nor very late. However, due to cool and damp conditions that lasted into mid-May, the vines' growth got off to a rather slow start.

These damp early months of the year forced us to adjust our schedule, and we were only able to start planting new vines in Wormeldange on 24 May due to the waterlogged soil.

The weather changed in mid-May, with the sun finally showing its face and the mercury rising steeply, much to the delight of our vines. We saw one of the hottest Junes since 1838 (in the top 6), with average temperatures of 20.5°C recorded by the weather station in Wormeldange. It was even the hottest month of the year. This initial heatwave brought maximum temperatures of 29°C.

The conditions were now ripe for growth to start in earnest. The damp soil and ample sunshine allowed the vines to take off, with the first flowers emerging on our Koepchen terraces on 10 June.

Flowering is a very important stage, as it occurs when the plants are at their most fragile. During this phase, frost, hail or heavy rainfall can have a severe impact on the entire harvest. Fortunately, everything went perfectly this year. The plants were well-nourished with sufficient sunlight to photosynthesise, which meant that flowering was very short with flowers blooming at the same time on each parcel, ensuring that the future grapes ripened nice and evenly.

Although we were clearly delighted with how this critical phase had gone, we could not entirely escape the memory of last year's drought. What if we were about to experience the same difficulties as last year? What if the vines were going to suffer from a lack of water again?

Ultimately though, all the rainfall in the first four months of the year stood the plants in good stead. We made it through to early July without any plant health issues. Then, towards the beginning of July, powdery mildew reared its head. Although this put significant strain on the crop, damage was minimised through regular monitoring and targeted interventions, whereby affected grape clusters were immediately removed.

Temperatures in July were close to average, and rainfall on 26, 27 and 29 July was extremely welcome. It came just at the right time to avoid excessive water stress. With over 80 litres per square metre over these



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three days, all fears of another drought were permanently erased, and we began to entertain thoughts of another almost perfect year like 2018. At that point, we were planning on a very early harvest, potentially starting on 4 September.

Well, we all know what they say about the best laid plans. August brought a whole month of virtually incessant rain. At this time of year, over 150 litres of rainfall per square metre is a very rare occurrence and far too much for the vines to withstand. On top of that, the few dry days of the month were extremely hot and sunny, causing sunburn among the fully south-facing vines.

This time, rain and sunshine provided ideal conditions for downy mildew. Signs of rot emerged from mid-August, particularly among our Pinot Noir vines.

With this adverse change in weather conditions, the vine stocks stopped growing right in the middle of summer. We could scarcely believe it. In the end, we decided to delay the harvest slightly, with a planned start date of 11 September.

In early September, the sun brought a smile back to our faces. We began to hope for a beneficial revival of the ripening process as we had seen in 2018.

Sadly, the 10th of the month saw a swing to the other extreme, with intense, hot sun causing further sunburn to grapes. Some berries literally dried out, causing whole clusters to wither just a day before harvesting, meaning they could not be picked.

Due to extreme daytime temperatures, the grape pickers started work among the vines at sunrise to make the most of the cool mornings. This meant they were not picking warm grapes, which avoids the risk of triggering uncontrolled fermentation before pressing has even occurred, a phenomenon that causes aromatic defects which we consider completely unacceptable.

In the first week, we picked all the Pinot Noir used for our crémants. We asked our pickers to be ruthless when it came to selecting the grapes they picked. Our red grapes suffered particularly heavy losses due to damage from the spotted wing drosophila, a lover of red dark fruit, whose bites eventually cause the grapes to rot. As a result, yields were low. However, our team ensured that all the grapes that we vinified were perfectly healthy. Our pickers thoroughly deserved our sincerest thanks!

However, based on the average ripeness of our Pinot Noirs, we decided not to produce any red wine for the 2023 vintage. These wines will be used in the blend for our rosé crémant, which will only be the better for it.

The second week of harvesting saw a change in the weather. Daytime temperatures were not quite so hot and any varieties that had not yet been picked benefited from this return to more normal conditions.

The second week was devoted to picking Chardonnay grapes for our crémants. Those growing in our best vineyards (particularly in Grevenmacher) and used for still wine were still in very good health, so we decided to let them develop a little more. When we eventually picked them on 27 and 28 September, they were perfectly ripe, which we would never have dreamed of just three weeks earlier!

In the third week of harvesting, we realised that the health of some of our vines was beginning to decline. The need to pick these grapes was therefore growing urgent, and once again, care was needed to eliminate any that were not perfect.

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In contrast, we were pleased to see that the Rieslings we had planted on steep slopes had weathered August's incessant rainfall much better. For these grapes, we had made the right call when choosing to wait a little longer. By exposing them to cool nights, which is beneficial for aroma development, and morning mists, we had finally got the weather to work in our favour. Our vines on the Ahn Palmberg, Grevenmacher Fels and Wintrange Felsberg reached ideal ripeness on 28 and 29 September, which is when we picked them. On 30 September, it was time to harvest our magnificent terraces on the Koepchen in Wormeldange. Although the quality of grapes in all these exceptional vineyards was absolutely outstanding, we were forced to pay the price of very low yields.

Our fourth week of harvesting took place in the first week of October. This was entirely devoted to picking Riesling on the Koepchen, the bedrock of our estate. Here, we had the good fortune of harvesting some magnificent grapes that promise great potential. This vintage should provide further proof that the best Rieslings, whose framework is formed by refined and elegant acidity, are not always those grown in the sunniest years.

The last grapes were pressed on 5 October, thus ending an intensive period of harvesting. We've never finished harvesting so early, making this year one we'll remember.

Although we didn't get much help from the weather, we are still very pleased with the musts we put in our vats. While it's true we had to sacrifice a large proportion of our grapes, this reflects our commitment and ensures that all our employees' hard work pays off.

