



Vintage Report 2006

Global warming, change of climate, and the possibility of concomitant extreme weather circumstances are increasingly topics of discussion, not least among wine-growers, who must consider the influence of these phenomena on viticulture. In 2006, record weather conditions were recorded once again. In assessing the temperature increases during the last twenty years, one can generally say that the Rheingau has benefited from this phenomenon. In the future, despite higher temperatures, it will still be possible to produce wines with an ideal Riesling profile – finesse, mineral character, and fine acidity – particularly in the stony soils in the higher sites in the foothills of the Taunus Hills.

Budburst occurred on schedule, followed by a slightly early blossoming. Despite a light deficit in rainfall, the grapes went through the next stages of development very quickly, not least due to the weather in the month of July, during which temperatures were the highest recorded since 1885, when Geisenheim began keeping track of meteorological data. In August, the weather had its ups and downs – as in 2005 – but conditions in general enabled the grapes to ripen to perfection. In the distant past, it was quite more a challenge for growers to wait for their grapes to reach the stage of complete ripeness. Thanks to above-average temperatures during the past two decades, however, grapes have ripened earlier and earlier. Today's growers face the challenges of harvesting their crop earlier and at higher temperatures. As such, there is a shorter time frame in which to achieve the optimal quality of a selective harvest. This was the case in 2006. The challenge in 2006 was to start the selective harvest for grapes with a perfect ripeness in good time and to use the chance for a longer hang time through November. Therefore we harvested our Estate-wines by mid-October. The grapes were not only physiologically very ripe, but also very healthy, thanks to selective harvesting. We also left bunches on the vine for additional ripening well into November. During this stage of the harvest, we and our 80 pickers had sufficient time to bring in grapes of every Prädikat level, including Trockenbeerenauslese with 223° Oe, from our Grand Cru site – Kiedricher Gräfenberg – for the 18th consecutive year.

It is already clear today that general there will be a broad spectrum of qualities of vintage 2006 wines. Dealing with the general weather extremes during vegetation and the rainfall in the first half of October, in particular, left us facing an exceptional strategic challenge in harvest management. At Weingut Robert Weil, we harvested for seven weeks nonstop, often from 14 to 18 hours per day. So we could be more than satisfied with the quality of the 2006 vintage. With regard to quantity, the volume of our crop was just a little less than the long-term average, and thus, also satisfactory.

That we were able to fully take advantage of the opportunities of this vintage is also thanks to our vineyards. Their location in the Taunus foothills enables Riesling grapes to benefit from warmer temperatures. Circulation in our sites helps ensure that our small, loose clusters remain healthy – an all-important prerequisite for high-quality wines. It's too soon to baptize the new vintage, but qualitatively it will nicely complement its recent forerunners: 2003 "Baroque Vintage"; 2004 "Classic Vintage of the Highest Standing"; and 2005 "Synthesis of 2003 and 2004." For today, suffice it to say that we were equally challenged and blessed by Mother Nature in 2006.