

VINTAGE 2017: UNIQUE  
A VINTAGE  
TO MAKE YOU SMILE,  
AND TO MAKE YOU CRY



WEINTRADITION SEIT 1789

KELLER

FLÖRSHEIM-DALSHEIM

*Keller  
Weintradition seit 1789*

## Dear Wine Friends

There is nothing I like more after a long day in the vineyard than to draw off and taste a few cask samples of the latest vintage. Your head is clear, your senses heightened, and with every step down into the cellar there is a growing anticipation of a delicious sip.

After 10-12 samples, each one putting me into a better mood, I fill a glass with wonderfully cloudy 2017 Limestone Kabinett, cut a slice of Julia's home-made and still warm sourdough in the kitchen and sit at the counter, letting all the highs and the lows of the 2017 vintage run through my mind.

### Sleepless nights and a constant fight with the powers of Nature

As is well known, a winegrower grows as he or she gains experience and after a 2016 that was far from easy, 2017 challenged us even further.

On one hand I can sleep more peacefully when I know that our vines have everything they need and the bunches are lapping up the sunshine. When they lack nothing and have nothing in excess.

On the other hand, I am more than ready to do without sleep when I am in a constant struggle with Nature instead of working in harmony with her, if the result is even greater wines. We will happily invest more hours in the vineyard to achieve the best quality in the bottle.

The filigree 2016s have, as we expected, developed brilliantly. For the first time in 12 years a dry Riesling – our 2016 Pettenthal GG – was awarded a magic 100 out of 100 from Wein-Plus's senior taster Sam Hofschuster: *'This wine, I have to say, is in another dimension. It doesn't get any better than this!'*. When you have a wine such as this in your glass, *'assessment and judgement are silenced'*, wrote Markus Vahlefeld in this column in the Huffington Post. How right he was. Great wines set our emotions free (especially when the bottle is shared with good friends). And emotions mean more to us than perfect scores.



*Working with complete concentration.*





## Quality rather than quantity: 2017 has great potential

The fascinating 2017 vintage is also one of a kind. The smallest volume here in our winery since the excellent 1971. In many parcels, the Riesling yield barely exceeded 20 hl/ha. For the Pinot Noir, in some instances it was even less.

We are obviously sad because we already know that we don't have enough wine in our cellar to satisfy our customers. But from a quality perspective, the 2017 vintage makes us happy and proud.

2017 has many of the hallmarks of the first-class 2001 and 2004 vintages: the ripeness and out and out nobility of 2001, together with the elegance and extract of 2004. Dear wine friends, if you happen to have bottles from these vintages in your cellar, they have developed into lucky charms and provide a foretaste of what we can expect from the 2017s ten years from now. A year with great potential.

## The greatest challenges: erratic weather and hailstorms

After a frosty spring, the 2017 growing season picked up the pace and the young green shoots appeared three weeks too early. We only just escaped greater frost damage in April, with temperatures of  $-3.5^{\circ}\text{C}$  ( $26^{\circ}\text{F}$ ). Other regions were more unlucky and many vinegrowers and fruit farmers lost 50–100% of their crop at this early stage. Our vines had to digest the shock of this early frost – as did we.

The vegetation seemed to fall into a winter sleep for several weeks until mid May when summer-like temperatures clearly accelerated the growth of the canopy. June was much too dry and our vines must have felt like nomads in the desert again. Rainfall in the first six months of the year didn't even reach half the long-term average.

Fortunately the longed-for rain came at the end of July and a cool, damp August allowed the vines and us to breathe a sigh of relief. Growth and ripening proceeded slowly. The water reserves that are so important for the vine had been replenished and everything pointed to a quiet and relaxed final ripening phase. The small bunches hung picture-perfect on the vine.

*2017 produced little – but  
it will be particularly good!*





*Small, loose-berried bunches  
with thick skins. The best quality.*

*... make just a difference*

Towards evening on 25 August a heavy hailstorm in Gundersheim und Westhofen dashed in a trice all hopes of a generous harvest.

I was standing at that moment with my son Felix under the roof overhang. Felix looked as white as a sheet. The hailstones hammered on the roof and we had to look on helpless as our year's work was brought to nothing in just a few minutes. At least that's how it seemed at the time. When the sun reappeared there was no time to mope. We had to go on. So we jumped into the VW minibus and checked, vineyard by vineyard, the damage the storm had done.

Fortunately the losses in Dalsheim were less than we feared. In Westhofen, however, Morstein, ABTS E and parts of Kirchenspiel had been badly hit. Had it rained after the hail, we would have lost the majority of our crop. We were very lucky that it remained dry. The god of the weather seemed to want to make good and sent us a wonderful Indian summer. The pleasantly warm, dry days and cool nights dried out the berries that had been hit and allowed the aromas in the healthy berries to explode.

The small crop still on the vine developed slowly and benefited from night-time temperatures of around 0 °C/32 °F. The fruit in the berries grew finer, the acidity transpired very slowly. Sorting the berries in the ensuing harvest took a huge amount of effort. In some instances we had to inspect every single berry individually on the vine. Only the best made it into the little baskets in which we carried home the harvest in the evenings. And when, at the end of a long day's picking with 25 helpers, only 800-1,000 litres flowed from the press instead of 4,000-5,000 litres, it was hard to see the positive side. My father Klaus, on the other hand, stood by the press beaming and said, 'A lot and good seldom go hand in hand. The bunches look fantastic!' And of course he was right. After 52 harvests he's pretty much unflappable.

It took a lot of patience and willingness to take risks to produce excellent quality in 2017. Those who hurried to rescue what could be rescued generally ended up with green, unripe characteristics and a lack of balance in the cask.

To be perfectly honest, even I am a little surprised by how good the vintage is. And that's exactly what we winegrowers love: after 30 or 50 harvests we continue to learn so much and are surprised time and time again. Particularly influential for quality in this vintage were the low yields. But still, many more dominoes had to fall into place for us to turn a good vintage into a very good or even a great one.

## The vine as a marathon runner

Dear wine friends, think of the vine as a marathon runner and the 120–130 days between flowering and harvest as the 42.195 km (26 mile) stretch that it has to overcome.

After flowering the inflorescences develop very slowly to fully formed bunches. During that process, the vine must be nourished, ie it needs a microbially healthy soil and rain to enable it to take up trace elements from the ground. Just like a marathon runner grabbing water and fruit from the refreshment station. If runners miss the station, they can soon run into problems. They become dehydrated, get an acid build-up in their muscles and their stress levels increase. It's very similar for the vine. The riper the bunches become, the more vital it is that they have the right amount of nutrients. If it was far too dry from January to June (the desert nomads), Nature came to our rescue with redemptive water (in July and August there was more than 200 mm/8 in of rain). The soil had an adequate supply of water and they and we could breathe a sigh of relief.

Until, that is, the hail came – just before the berries started to soften, or at around the 35 kilometre mark, to stay with the marathon metaphor.

*Our marathon runner in the vineyard: Pinot the Labrador.  
Seen here with a cow's horn in his mouth.*

What would happen if we could take the weight bands off the runner? Precisely! He or she, freed from the burden, would race towards the goal. So must our vines have felt at the end of August when the hail severely reduced the crop load. They raced off and were able to lay down all the more aroma and flavour compounds in the healthy berries.

This will only work perfectly when the weather is ideal, ie when the ground is not too wet and the temperatures not too high. Both conditions were met in 2017:

The rainfall in September and October was about 40% less than the long-term average and already in the second half of September there were some nights when the temperature was close to zero. These were ideal conditions for the slow ripening of a small crop, ideal for the slow development of aromas and ideal for keeping the acidity in the berries.

In addition, we had to invest more working hours in the vineyard than ever before. Never before have we so painstakingly sorted the berries on the vine. Fortunately all this hard work can be tasted in the glass.

On the whole, in a vintage in Germany that demanded both sensitivity and strength from the winegrower, there will be wines that are not as good as those of previous vintages. At the top end, however, the best 2017 wines have benefited from the tiny yields to produce depth of flavour, expressiveness and complexity in the wines. And not just in the dry wines.





At long last, Trockenbeerenauslese again!  
And superb quality in the Pinot Noir.

Sadly not having been able to harvest Trockenbeerenauslesen in 2016, in 2017 we have beguiling masterpieces with the perfect level of botrytis influence and bright acid structure.

In addition, we have wonderfully vivacious Auslesen, and Spätlese and Kabinett wines (from Scheurebe and Riesling) that dance on your tongue – the sort of wines which make you long for early summer weather.

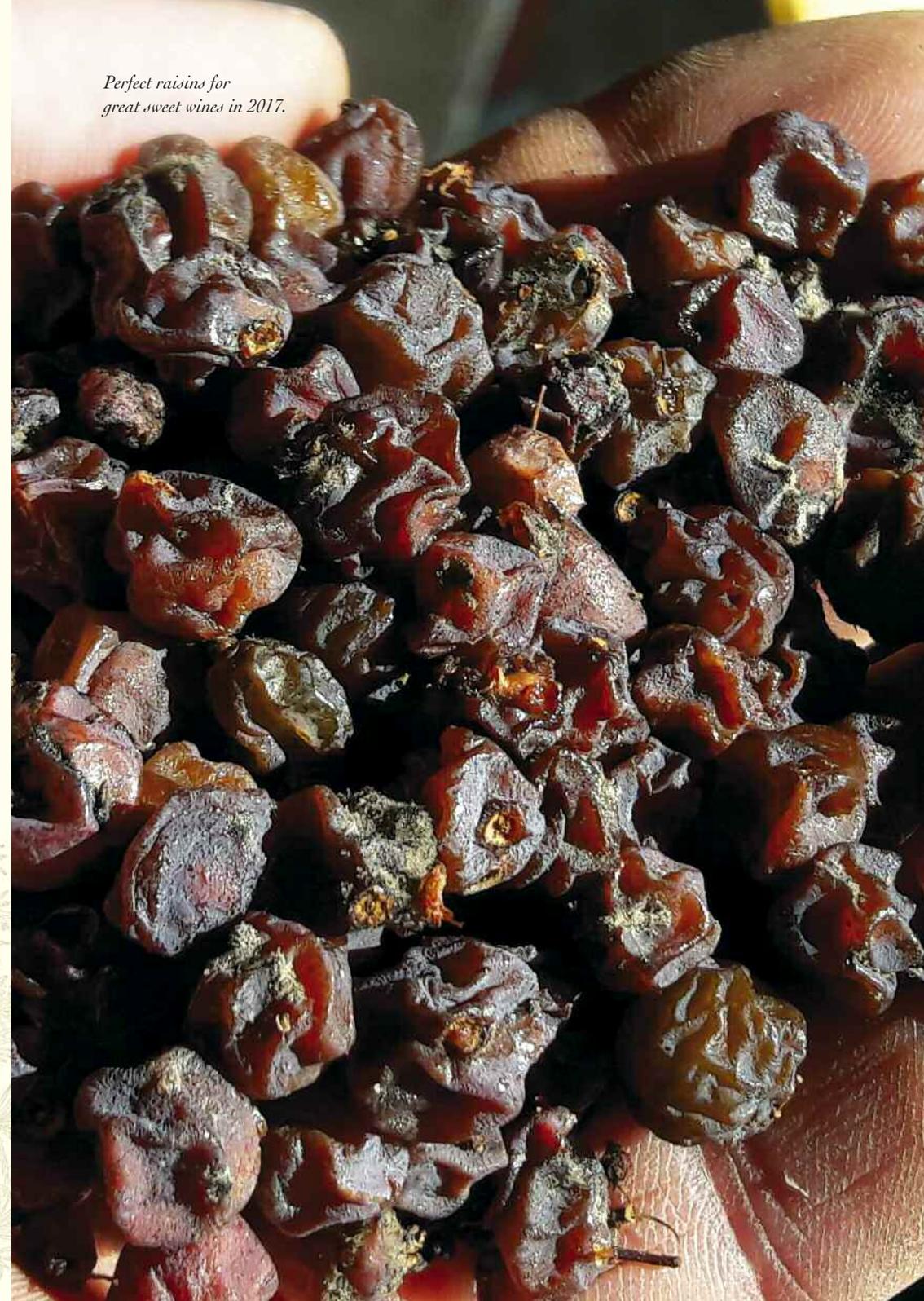
Radiant Pinot Noir – red-berried fruit, deep crimson colour, superb quality – not unlike the young 2010s in terms of fruit character and style.

Both the bewitching Scheurebe and the spicy Silvaner entice us with their fine minerality – they are the best ambassadors of Rheinhessen's joie de vivre. The Feuervogel is smoky, earthy, rich and complex. Nature's generous gift.

Our Pinot Blancs are perfectly balanced: the finest of fruit from their limestone soils with silky depth and plenty of extract.

The dedication and passion of our harvesters were once again impressive and will be remembered with every sip of the new vintage; the Rieslings in particular – from the Von der Fels to the Grosse Gewächse and the G-Max – that were harvested as late as 10 October, are like drops of happiness in the glass. These racy and sometimes boisterous young wines full of energy and herbal spice make our hearts beat faster. 'Like liquid four-leaf clover', suggested my wife Julia enthusiastically when she tasted from the Riesling and Rieslaner casks in December. She's dead right! The best casks from 2017 have the potential to become liquid legends.

*Perfect raisins for  
great sweet wines in 2017.*





Great wine is teamwork:

A heartfelt thank you to our co-workers and friends who have supported us throughout the year. Working with you makes us very happy, you are the soul of our business and without you even the best that Nature can bring would not result in such wines. This year my father deserves the highest praise for being able in his own particular way to see the best in a vintage such as 2017 with a dispiritingly small crop. His positive attitude quickly infected the whole team.

Warmest regards from Dalsheim,  
*the Keller family*



*A great team!*

*A big thank you!*

