



## 2018 – A golden vintage

After the difficulties in the vineyard in 2017, when frost in spring and hail shortly before harvest stretched us to the limit, we have a vintage in the cellar that we can confidently describe as Nature's gift. Here before us we have the still lees-cloudy young wines and we are enjoying this moment of peace to taste them with the whole family. Doing so we feel like proud parents holding their newborn for the first time, eager to see how the young offspring will develop. And that includes sleepless nights! The press have shown little restraint in their judgements of the 2018 vintage. Even soon after harvest they were talking about the vintage of the century (Tagesspiegel) or even the greatest of all time (Focus) . Even sports reporter Raimund Hinko seems to have been infected with the 2018 virus and in his weekly Sport-Bild column compares the 'golden football vintage of 1995' with the outstanding 2018 vintage in Germany. Will Kimmich, Süle, Gnabry and Co. develop as well on the field as Hubacker, Kirch - spiel und AbtsE do in the bottle? Instead let's remember someone who experienced such vintages in the vineyard and out of the bottle: our great-grandfather Friedrich Keller. He was a winemaker in body and soul and came up with what seems like a very simple piece of winemaker wisdom to distinguish great vintages from good or average ones: 'Small Rhine – great wine!' My father heard him say this as a young boy. Whenever the Rhine is low in autumn because there has been little rainfall, the old vines have to fight for nourishment to achieve great things and produce small-berried, complex, highly aromatic bunches, which are the prerequisite for a vintage with outstanding ripening potential. Only old and densely planted vineyards benefit from such conditions. Only when roots are anchored deep in limestone or slate is it possible in such dry years for thrilling raw material to be transported to the berries. Since my time in Burgundy, care for and maintenance of old and densely planted vineyards has become more important to me (alongside a love for Spätburgunder that was ignited there).

1911 – 1959 – 2001 – 2018? In order to realistically appraise the 2018 vintage it is also very important to look back at 2017. As you know, 2017 made us both laugh and cry: qualitatively outstanding but the smallest vintage since 1971. However, 2018 benefited from the tiny yields of 2017. Our vines started the season rested and full of energy for the new year. But it was important to use the natural growth impetus of the vines while also balancing the yields in order to avoid thin, dilute wines and instead to end up with complex, profound and mineral wines in cask and bottle. Should great-grandfather Friedrich be proved right in his assessment 'Small Rhine – great wine', then 2018 takes its place in a series with 1911, 1959 and 2001. These were the driest years in our region in the last hundred years. These vintages ripened, indeed they ripened wonderfully, and can be counted among the greats. Weather conditions 2018: a summer of the century Winter 2017/18 saw more rain than for many years. In our hilly region, more than 250 mm of rain fell, creating an important reserve that would later be of great value to the vines. After a cold January and a cool February and March, the 2018 season gradually got going in April as the thermometer skyrocketed. We rejoiced too soon. As if from nowhere, in early June a heavy hailstorm hit – of all places – our vines in Morstein and AbtsE. Almost one-third of the bunches were hit or severed within minutes, the canopy torn to shreds. From one moment to the next the vintage in Westhofen had been turned around. The effects of this storm are still to be seen today as we prune. The entry wounds in the wood made by the hailstones are still visible and we must be extremely careful as we cut and tie down the wood otherwise the fruiting canes will break and the 2019 harvest will be lost even before the year has got underway. Luckily it was dry in the subsequent period and the damaged berries dried out. The shock was for days etched into the faces of all at the estate and we took the gut decision not to trim the canopy in some of the vineyards, to protect the vines partly from too much sunlight and heat and partly from storms. Looking constantly beyond the borders of Rheinhessen helped to understand 2018 early on and to adapt our work in the vineyard to the climatic conditions. This is precisely one of our most important tasks as wine-growers. The climate is changing and extreme summers will occur more frequently. Our job is to find ways to adapt and cope. For many years we have been working with wine-grower friends on a project north of Madrid on the high plateau of Segovia. We wanted to find out how, in extreme conditions, we could produce more elegance and finesse in the indigenous white variety Verdejo while keeping the alcohol level low. In particularly hot years, the key to success there was old vines and complete shading of the bunches. These methods are particularly well suited to southern regions with low rainfall and so it was logical to implement the same approach in our Rheinhessen vineyards in 2018's summer of the century. High stakes, everything won! 2018 continued warm and dry. The shading (like a parasol for the fruit) worked well. As a result of the dry conditions, ripening slowed down. The stomata on the underside of the leaves closed up, the vines changed gear from turbo-charge to power-saving mode, like a marathon runner who uses the slipstream to save her last reserves of energy for the final burst. Already by the end of August, the first Spätburgunder bunches smiled at us with their deeply coloured, small berries. Yet the harvest began with the fruit from a small parcel of Chardonnay on particularly chalky subsoil, which our son Felix and the team happily brought home for his first sparkling wine. Felix would like it to spend at least 60 months on the lees! So we will have to wait patiently for some time before we are seduced by the bubbles in the first Keller Sekt. We continued with the Pinot Noir. The Pinots in Morstein, Bürgel and Frauenberg were perfectly healthy, perfectly ripe. 2018 delivered everything you could wish for, from crisp, fresh rosé from old vines to complex, many-layered ruby-red single-vineyard Spätburgunders. We harvested picture-perfect grapes from the white Burgundy varieties (Weiss - burgunder and Chardonnay) and Silvaner as well. The 'little' Grüner Silvaner exudes energy and elegance, with moderate alcohol – a wine that just makes you happy. As the temperature dropped at the end of September and we had to scrape the ice from the windscreen for the first time, things really got going with the parcels for Von der Fels. This

time Von der Fels comes exclusively from old vineyards. Because of the drought, we dropped the grapes from the young wines early on and made no wine from them

The aromas became more concentrated day by day; you could see happiness and relief on our faces after the small 2017 harvest. Even those vines that had been hit by hail in Morstein and AbtsE developed extremely well in the last few months and we were absolutely delighted with the results of the harvest in the grands crus. If there is anything to complain about, then it is the very small amount of botrytisaffected berries that we were able to pick in our vineyards in 2018. The fungus Botrytis cinerea needs moisture to grow and it was simply too dry in many of our vineyards. Nature is and always will be the boss, and what she doesn't give us, we cannot harvest. Just one sip of our two 'limestone' wines shows you the high quality of feinherb wines in 2018: delicately exotic, super-fresh, lively and with a fantastic chalky minerality. Masses of pleasure with moderate alcohol. It's happiness in a glass – a ballerina dancing on your tongue. And let's not forget the Scheurebe Kabinett, with aromas of wild redcurrants and elderflower, featherlight and minerally. Similarly, the sweet wines such as the complex and exotic masterpieces that are the Rieslaner Auslese and Beeren - auslese. They are the crowning glory among the sweet wines of the 2018 vintage.

Good wine is all about teamwork. We thank everyone who has supported us. A heartfelt thank you to all our co-workers and friends who have supported us throughout the year. It gives us such pleasure to work with you. You are the soul of our business and without you even the best provisions of Nature would not be enough for wines such as these. Special praise in this vintage goes to our son Felix, who is virtually unstoppable in his youthful drive. His energy and love of wine motivates and enriches the whole team. A big thank thank you to you too, our wine friends. Close personal contact with many of you is very important to us. Many thanks for the many kind conversations, emails and letters, the home-made jam, the home-baked biscuits and hand-made chocolates, and the liquid Christmas presents. We often think about such things when we put our life and soul into the vineyard in order to get the very best into the bottle for you and for us. A great big thank you on behalf of the whole team!