



WEINGUT BERNHART

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**'OUR WINES ARE SPECIAL.
THEY ARE GROWN IN ALSACE,
BUT BEAR OUR TRADITIONAL,
CLASSIC PALATINATE SIGNATURE'**

GERD BERNHART

On this sunny autumn day on the Alsace border, a bus is apparently still looking for a parking space. On the site, which is accessed via a roundabout, you have to spend a lot of time dodging tourists, giving the impression that there is a clearance sale going on or that someone is offering 'free wine'. For countless Palatinate fans, a visit here provides an enjoyable diversion: because we are in the open fields of south Palatinate winegrowing district Schweigen-Rechtenbach and next to one of the region's landmarks, the German Wine Gate built in 1936, which marks the start or end of the German Wine Route and was once intended to promote the previously ailing Palatinate wine industry via tourism.

We follow the sat nav to find the right entrance on the narrow main street at number 8, or Weingut Bernhart, where Willi and Wilma Bernhart bottled their first barrel of wine in 1972 and began in earnest to reorganise their agriculture and livestock farming and cultivate vines. This was in a time where various parts of wine legislation remained unclear, before reasonable politicians from Germany and France resolved a problem stemming from the fact that Alsace

had belonged to Germany at one point in its history before returning to France again. In 1900, the great-grandfather of the Bernhart family purchased vineyards in what was then German Alsace.

After the Second World War, the family (along with some of their Palatinate colleagues) saw their property confiscated. However, because no Alsace winemakers were interested in their vines, they remained in German hands. 'As a result, around two thirds of our vineyards are strictly speaking on French land, including our most valuable sites', Gerd Bernhart (born 1970) explains. Special approval enabled German wines to be made in Alsace. Explaining this is second nature to Sabine Bernhart, who has been married to Gerd since 1996 and realised early on that he was an exceptional red wine producer when he soon stepped onto the Vinum Red Wine Prize podium. At the time, he was working with his brother Uli. However, in 1997 love drew Uli to Weingut Schlumberger in southern Baden and to Markgräfler Gutedel.

Sabine is currently conducting a tasting for a group of visitors and explaining the complicated topic of German wines grown in

Picture: The 'SB' in Gerd Bernhart's licence plate naturally stands for Spätburgunder!



EXTREMELY LOW HARVEST QUANTITIES ENABLE WINES WITH A PARTICULAR PROFILE AND CHARACTER

2019 Spätburgunder Schweigener Sonnenberg Wormberg VDP Erste Lage

Sonnenberg is right on the border and allows various different grape varieties to thrive, clearly demarcated, in the Palatinate and Alsace. The Sonnenberg plot is an Erste Lage under VDP regulations, and shines with its delicate interplay of acidity and its elegance.

2021 Chardonnay Reserve Große Lage

The grapes were grown below Schweigen, with harvest yields amounting to just 20 hl/ha. The wine was fermented in new barrels. It is pleasingly light in the glass (12.7% ABV) and very elegant and finely woven.

2019 Cremant Weißburgunder Extra brut

The winery has been making its own sparkling wine using the traditional method since 1986, and the fact that it can be called Cremant using the French terminology has saved many legal discussions. One thing is certain – its sophistication and elegance can keep pace with some substantial sparkling wines, and not just in terms of price (just 13.50 euros).

Weingut Bernhart | **Owner:** Gerd Bernhart | **Winemaker:** Gerd Bernhart, Damien Wagner | **Vineyard area:** 21 hectares (13 hectares in Alsace) | **Annual production:** 140,000 bottles | **Other products:** distillates | **Cooperation:** working the vineyards of local tavern 'Alter Zollberg' (www.alterzollberg.de) | **Memberships:** VDP

French soil, requiring additional abbreviations on the labels of top VDP Große Lage and Erste Lage wines to indicate their exact origins. And on occasions like this, she never forgets to mention that like the areas on Palatinate soil, the Alsace sites are also completely organically cultivated. In the neighbouring room, visitors can see what Gerd Bernhart has been measuring himself against for countless years, namely numerous empty bottles from Burgundy, which are significantly more expensive than the best wines from the Palatinate.

He can boast various top placings at the Deutscher Rotweinpreis awards, delightedly saw the winery admitted to VDP in 2004, and has been praised in various wine guides in recent years (comments include 'strong collection', 'Burgundy from the Palatinate', and 'a silent star'). But he and his wife are most enthusiastic about securing a long-term future: their son Marius (born 2000) decided to study in Geisenheim and train with names such as Wehrheim, Julian Huber and Schönleber (Nahe), indicating that he could become a fantastic winemaker like his father.

He has also been allowed to bring some order to the not entirely transparent range with its differing origins. The Gutswein and Ortswein wines therefore offer a good overview with their vari-

ous grape varieties and 'Sommerflausen' blends in white, rosé and Spätburgunder. There is a notably definite but justified loyalty to Silvaner, which used to be a very significant grape in this region and still produces a hearty Gutswein and a crisp old-vine wine in litre bottles. Drinkers are spoiled for choice in this inexpensive field, with Riesling, Weißburgunder and a red blend (all 6.20 euros).

Various traditional varieties can be found amongst the Ortswein wines, which are all on a Lagenwein level. Particularly recommended wines include the Auxerrois grown in marl clay and the Weißburgunder (both crisp whites), as well as the Gewürztraminer, which has become a profound, aromatic wine with elegant touches. The Erste Lage and Große Lage vineyards offer top-quality wines made using excellent varieties such as Chardonnay, Riesling, Sauvignon Blanc, Weißburgunder, Spätburgunder and St. Laurent, harvested from top, clearly delimited vineyards that are not always permitted to display their exact names. Empty abbreviations such as RG, KT, EG and FG instead appear on labels in place of indications of origin such as Rädling or Kostert. However, anyone wanting to know more and perhaps even take a closer look at these vineyards can get in touch with Gerd, Marius and Sabine, who love sidestepping into the role of cross-border tour guides...



One of the frequent wine tastings, often led by the winemaker's charming wife Sabine, is just a few steps away.