

The Grape Varieties

of the Palatinate

Zum Wohl. Die Pfalz.



High Profile Diversity in the Palatinate Vineyard

34 white and 27 red grape varieties are admissible in the Palatinate, Germany's largest contiguous wine-growing region. These include regional specialties such as St. Laurent or Muskateller, as well as international varieties such as Chardonnay and Merlot. With their individual aromas, together they provide a full range of taste experiences. The Palatinate terroir offers something for everyone and yet remains distinctive: a handful of standard varieties occupy almost two thirds of the Palatinate's vineyards. In first place, the Riesling grape; after all, the Palatinate is the largest Riesling growing area in the world. Pinot Gris, Pinot Blanc, as well as Silvaner, Rivaner, and Sauvignon Blanc, also belong to the Palatinate white wine repertoire. More than one third of the vines carry red varieties and Dornfelder, Portugieser, and Pinot Noir ride the crest of the red wine wave. There nevertheless remains room for local spe-



cialties. In that sense, the fourteen grape varieties described below also represent the many other varieties grown in the Palatinate. They all invite you to come and discover the vineyards and wine cellars of the Palatinate yourself.

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*Photography: Faber & Partner,
Uwe Rieger, Inge Weber*



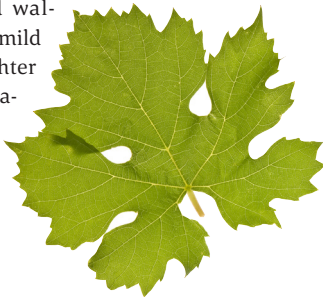
Riesling

This real heartbreaker with citrus aromas and distinctive acidity is a highly versatile allrounder that is perfectly suited for the making of sparkling wines, ice wines, and select late harvest wines (Auslese). In terms of acidity, Palatinate Rieslings are generally reserved. But the “King of White Wines” really has no reason to show off; it has traditionally had its German stronghold in villages such as Forst. Since 1995, the most precious of German white wine varieties has reigned over the vineyard statistics (almost 25%) and has bestowed wine lovers with regal tasting experiences – and the Palatinate with the title of largest Riesling growing area in the world.



Müller-Thurgau or Rivaner

This variety is one of the quiet ones. Salt of the earth, so to speak, with a highly respectable pedigree (Riesling and Madeleine Royale, a table grape variety) and an equally respectable hybridizer for a father and name giver (Professor Müller from the Thurgau region in Switzerland). In the Palatinate, Müller-Thurgau is the second most popular grape variety after Riesling and the dry, modern style is currently making a comeback under the name Rivaner. This is hardly surprising since Rivaner offers up subtle muscat and walnut aromas and, thanks to its mild acidity, goes perfectly with lighter fare such as fish. Quick to mature, Müller-Thurgau should be drunk while still young.





Grauer Burgunder (Pinot Gris)

Its name would indicate a child of the Palatinate from the illustrious Burgundy family, but Pinot Gris unfortunately has a split personality. In 1711, the merchant Johann Seeger Ruland found the wild variety, something we are reminded of in the sweet Pinot Gris wines, they are called Ruländer. Otherwise, the label will usually say “Grauburgunder”. But from a difficult background comes character, a fact that holds true for the rich, sweet styles that are perfect as aperitif or dessert wines as well as for the dry and elegant styles that go so well with, say, roast meats. That is the nature of Pinot Gris: a true quick-change artist with mild acidity and a rapidly growing fan club in the Palatinate (planted in almost 7% of the vineyards).



Weißer Burgunder (Pinot Blanc)

Here's another unassuming jack-of-all-trades in the Palatinate grape assortment. It goes well with almost all foods (primarily fish and white meats), but also makes an excellent base wine for sparkling wines. As the grandsire of a classical wine family, it evidently has many good connections – as well as an excellent international reputation. The only downside for Palatinate Pinot Blanc lovers: grown in only 5.4% of vineyards, it is not highly represented. But Pinot Blanc is on the rise and its quality is raising eyebrows.



Kerner

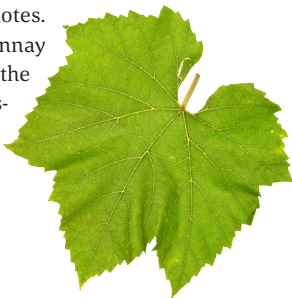


A young and self-confident rising star from the House of Riesling (hybrid of blue Trollinger and white Riesling) that takes after its father's side in terms of taste and acidity. Its fresh, full-bodied, spicy style has conquered the hearts of wine lovers and currently occupies 3.4% of Palatinate vineyards. Kerner is gaining in popularity as a respectable accompaniment to many appetizers and white meat dishes. This “boy next door” shy but pleasant wine that prefers to remain in the background would have pleased Justinus Kerner, the poet and doctor from Weinsberg who died in 1862.



Chardonnay

This true global player originated in Asia Minor, but has been spreading throughout the Palatinate. Its lineage from the best of the House of Burgundy surely opens as many cellar doors to this world traveller as does its complex character. The spectrum ranges from standard quality wines to select late harvest (Auslese), but Chardonnay also makes a good base wine for sparkling wines. In addition, it feels at home in a barrique barrel where it allows its fruit aromas (melon, grapefruit, over-ripe gooseberries) to be tamed by soft oaky notes. Although the late maturing Chardonnay is not undemanding, it covers 3% of the Palatinate wine-growing area, increasing each year.





Silvaner

In the 1950s, this grape from the east was calling the shots in the multi-cultural Palatinate vineyard. That has since changed; today, the mellow Silvaner covers 2.6% of the growing area. In any case, no one discusses its unusual origins any more. The wild vine is said to have come from the Caucasus – some even say Transylvania, (home of the vampires!) But do not fear: if you are bitten by this reserved and humble variety with its mild acidity, there are no consequences other than intense lip smacking when enjoyed with a wide range of light dishes.



Gewürztraminer

An experienced traveller such as this one could boast of his successes: what other grape can call on Plinius or the Electors of the Palatinate as crown witnesses? Who else can point to the oldest vineyard in the Palatinate, the Traminer vineyard in Rhodt? This much tradition brings obligations with it and is the reason why Gewürztraminer with its spicy punch and heady nose not only displays character as a dessert wine, but also in its dry iterations as a rich enhancer of roast meats. Gewürztraminer has never been interested in mass appeal: 1.9% of the Palatinate's vineyards are more than adequate for this representative of old nobility – appropriate even.





Sauvignon blanc

There are many connections between the Palatinate and France, so no wonder that this offspring of the French wine nobility has found a home along the German Wine Route. Its secret for success: a well-developed, heady aroma with gooseberry, paprika or green notes, paired with a beguiling lightness. Originating in the Loire valley, this youthful, lighthearted variety comes along and convinces as a delectable patio wine, or paired with fish, seafood, and pasta.

Thanks to our Mediterranean climate and a long ripening period, Sauvignon Blanc has established itself on 1.9% of the growing area and has become a Palatinate speciality.



Scheurebe

Life as a grape is easy with a pedigree like this one: Silvaner mother, Riesling father, and the offspring are welcomed in the vineyards with open arms. In the Palatinate, 1.4% are covered with Scheurebe, but the post-war boom has somewhat slowed. And yet its hybridizer, Georg Scheu, had nothing but praise for the intense Riesling bouquet and full-bodied structure. Whether Scheurebe is made into a dry wine (to accompany white meats, for example), select late harvest (Auslese), special select late harvest (Beerenauslese), or ice wine, it enchants with its peach or black current aromas and has a faithful following among wine makers and wine lovers alike. All of this can be tasted in the Palatinate.





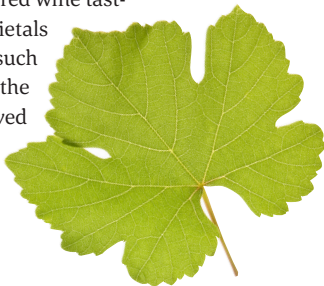
Dornfelder

If this isn't the perfect success story: a charming grape with deep red colour showed up in 1956 and from one day to the next the wine world lay at its feet. Its popularity has been on the rise since roughly 1990. The parents (Helfensteiner and Heroldrebe) are insignificant players on the wine market. Their offspring, however, originally conceived as a Teinturier grape for adding colour, is suddenly making a career of its own. In its dry version, Dornfelder is a smooth red wine that perfectly accompanies roast meats and strong cheeses. 12.5% of the Palatinate's vineyards are home to Dornfelder grapes, making this young idealist the most widely grown red grape variety in the Palatinate.



Spätburgunder (Pinot Noir)

Pinot Noir is the grand master of the red varieties in the Palatinate with hundreds of years of experience, and the best Burgundy pedigree. A wine like that does not look for instant success but rather convinces with increased barrel aging. This process mellows the wine, helps the fruit notes to unfold, and the barrique barrels add additional subtlety. Hearty roasts or game dishes have plenty to gain from being paired with Pinot Noir. The 7.1% of vineyards in the Palatinate that are planted with Pinot Noir does not sound like a lot, but at German red wine tastings, Palatinate Pinot Noir varieties consistently rank at the top – such that the international name for the variety has been officially approved since 2003.





Portugieser

This cheerful and eminently drinkable grape variety is the stuff that Palatinate wine festivals are made of: order a Portugieser rosé and enjoy! Introduced to the Palatinate in 1860, Portugieser has secured its place in the vineyard with 6% largely because young folks in particular like its uncomplicated style: neutral in taste, mild acidity, and reserved bouquet. However, do not underestimate this immigrant from the east that actually has nothing to do with Portugal: there are also more full-bodied Portugieser varietal reds that perfectly enhance game dishes, for example, with their light Burgundy style.



Regent

Seldom has a newcomer established themselves this quickly: the Regent grape was bred at Gleisweilerhof in the South Palatinate only in 1957, but it has already displaced established varieties on 2.3% of the growing area. This greenhorn, a cross between Silvaner and Müller-Thurgau with Chambourcin, has an advantage over its colleagues: it is resistant to both downy and powdery mildew, as well as highly resistant to botrytis. In addition, it shows well in a glass: Regent wine is convincing with its flavour of cherries and black currants and a deep red colour – appropriately majestic for a ruler.



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„Palatinate“ is a protected designation of origin (PDO). Typical for the Germany's second-largest wine cultivation region on the border

to Alsace is the mild climate that's perfect for ripening almonds, figs and chestnuts. Shielded by the Palatinate Forest, white grape varieties flourish along the German Wine Route, especially Riesling, Pinot blanc and Pinot gris. With almost 5,800 hectares of acreage, the Palatinate is the world's largest Riesling growing region. Insofar as the red varieties, the Dornfelder and Pinot noir variants dominate. While the determination of maturation periods and degrees, wine production methods and the sensory evaluation of the wines originating in the PDO Palatinate are all governed by EU regulations, they simultaneously remain individualised expressions of the Palatinate's wine culture.