

Weingut Rudolf Fürst

Paul Fürst became responsible for the family business in Bürgstadt after the early death of his father, Rudolf, in 1975. It was a mixed agriculture then, with only 3.7 acres (1.5ha) of vines. But Fürst, still only 20 but trained at Schloss Johannisberg in the Rheingau, decided to focus only on wine and started buying parcels in Centgrafenberg, which has always been planted mainly with Pinot Noir and Riesling. The parcels are handkerchief-sized due to *Realteilung*, the process of buying, swapping, and tweaking the boundaries, in which he has been engaged for more than three decades. Now with 44 acres (18ha), the project is still not finished even today. In 2004, Paul and his wife Monika bought another 3.7 acres in the spectacularly steep and terraced Klingenberg Schlossberg, farther up the Main River, whose Spätburgunders were famous right through to the 19th century.

The Fürst Pinots, already excellent for 15 years, have become even more elegant, being both finer and purer. In all Germany, there are not many that can compete on quality or style

Since 2007, son Sebastian (born in 1980) has also been involved in the family business. He served part of his apprenticeship at Domaine Marc Kreydenweiss in Alsace and learned a lot about Pinot Noir and the finest wines of Burgundy from his friend Olivier Leriche at Domaine de l'Arlet in Nuits-St-George, where Sebastian worked for six months. Since the 2008 vintage, the young father has been responsible for the family's red-wine production, while young grandpa Paul has focused on the white wines. They discuss all the key decisions together, however, and Paul is very happy that his son "has always shown much more interest in meticulous artisanal wine production than in exaggerated modern winemaking and marketing."

With Sebastian vinifying the reds, the Fürst Pinots, which had already been excellent for 15 years or so, have become even more elegant, being both finer and purer. From the 2009 vintage, the Fürsts have presented their finest Pinots ever, with three world-class Grosses Gewächs leading an impressive range: Schlossberg Spätburgunder GG, Centgrafenberg Spätburgunder GG, and Centgrafenberg Hunsrück Spätburgunder GG. As fine as the other wines of the estate are—not only the Centgrafenberg Riesling GG, the barrel-fermented Centgrafenberg Weissburgunder R, and the Volkacher Karthäuser Chardonnay, but also the other Klingenberg and Bürgstadter Pinots—I have to focus here on the three Pinot grands crus. In all of Germany, there are not many Pinots that can compete on quality or style. Last but not least, I should stress that even their Frühburgunder (Pinot Madeleine) is worth at least ten years of bottle age.

Along with all the other Fürst wines, the Spätburgunders are grown in red Buntsandstein, the oldest soils of the Lower German Triassic. The topsoils are loamy, sandy, and well structured, with little stones. This warm and well-draining soil has been ideally suited to the capricious red variety that is Pinot Noir for hundreds of years. The lower layers of clay and decomposed sandstone have a good capacity to store water, so that even in extremely dry and hot vintages such as 2003, there are no problems with drought, at least for older vines.

The climate in the Miltenberg basin, between the Spessart and Odenwald mountain ranges, is mild, though the Schlossberg Pinots in Klingenberg ripen some ten days earlier than those in Centgrafenberg in Bürgstadt. This is mainly because of the 2.5 miles (4km) of dry red sandstone walls per hectare that have, for centuries, terraced the steep Schlossberg vineyard, also reflecting light and warmth to the grapes and vines.

Right: Paul Fürst and his son Sebastian against a wall of the red sandstone whose soils contribute so much to their wines





The Fürsts bought two different parcels in Schlossberg and, in 2005, replanted two-thirds of the area with new Burgundian Pinot clones, whereas the older vines—presumably Freiburg clones—were planted in 1985. Both new clones—Fin and Très Fin—are grafted on rootstock 16149 and yield much less than clones such as 777, 828, 667, 115, or 112, Paul reports. “The maximum is 30hl/ha,” whereas the older clones, which the Fürsts started to plant in Centgrafenberg in the early 1990s, can easily yield 80hl/ha if the crop is not reduced. “The Fin and Très Fin Pinots are smaller, as are the berries, which are looser as well and have thicker skins,” says Paul.

The planting density in the south-facing Schlossberg is quite high, at 10,000 vines/ha. (It is 5,000–7,500 vines/ha in Centgrafenberg.) All the Schlossberg vines are single-cane pruned 20in (50cm) from the ground (*Flachbogen*), with six to eight buds per cane during the ripening period. (In Centgrafenberg, it is 20in for the Dijon clones and 28in [70cm] for the German clones.) Intense canopy management is practiced throughout the vegetative period on both sites, but shoots are trimmed as late as possible.

Green harvesting is not necessary in Schlossberg, but it is in Centgrafenberg, with its slightly deeper loam and clay soils and higher-yielding clones. In some years, as much as half the fruit has been dropped. This proportion will gradually reduce, though—partly because since 2005, new plantings in the 7.5-acre (3ha) Hunsrück parcel have been with Fin and Très Fin (1.2 acres [0.5ha] so far), and partly because the German clones (mainly the small-berry Ritter 21-90, planted in 1983) are lower-yielding as the vines age.

The Fürsts plow their soil and produce their own compost over a three-year period. Every second row of the vineyard has a cover crop but is mulched several times to protect the soil from

evaporation and erosion. Depending on the weather conditions, the other row is also allowed to become green toward fall but is mowed if the plants (clover, rapeseed, vetches) get too close to the grapes.

Paul and Sebastian believe that Pinot has to suffer a little bit to give its best and should not be overnourished. Thus, they like the leaves to be lime green rather than dark green in summer, and they prefer them to turn color early in fall. “We get more distinguished and sophisticated wines, with more finesse and purity and less fat, if the vines are given fewer nutrients,” Paul explains.

Aiming for healthy and fully ripe, but also firm and freshly structured, berries, and the finest Pinot flavors, the Fürsts never completely deleaf. “We always keep a small canopy to protect the grapes from too intense sunlight, whereas air circulation

Sebastian wants to keep the seeds in the berries as long as possible, preferring the tannins of the stems to those of the seeds. The grands crus are made with a high proportion of whole bunches

is still possible,” says Paul, who prefers to pick the Pinot with 93–100° Oechsle. “We definitely tend more toward 95° than 102° Oechsle,” adds Sebastian. To get the wines to 13% ABV, the Fürsts have had to chaptalize their musts “three or four times over the past ten years.”

The harvest is done manually and selectively. If necessary, the grapes are selected again on a sorting table but are not crushed. Sebastian wants to keep the seeds in the berries as long as possible, preferring the tannins of the stems to those of the seeds. Thus, the three crus, Schlossberg, Centgrafenberg, and Hunsrück, are always made with a high proportion of whole bunches, the rest being very gently destemmed. “The warmer the year and the older the vines, the riper the stems and the more whole

Left: The steep Schlossberg grand cru, where the sandstone terraces help ripen the wines by reflecting heat and light

berries we use,” Sebastian explains. In hot years such as 2003, the portion of stems retained in the Hunsrück was 100 percent; in 2009, at least 90 percent. In normal years, Hunsrück is made with 70–80 percent of stems, Schlossberg with 50–60 percent, and Centgrafenberg with 30–40 percent. “We use the stems not to have more tannins but to have finer tannins,” Sebastian says.

The firm, spicy, darkly fruity Hunsrück is from the oldest vines (mostly German clones planted in 1983) and the ripest stems, whereas the fine and elegant Centgrafenberg comes mostly from younger French vines and has a more red-fruit character. In Schlossberg, only the stems of the older German vines are used, whereas the Fin Pinots are destemmed.

I am always amazed by how well the Fürst wines—whether red or white—age, becoming even finer, rounder, and more generous over the years

After a cold maceration of five to seven days in open wooden vats (with the whole bunches on the bottom and the destemmed grapes on top, but only a little bit of carbon dioxide), fermentation starts inside the grapes, using the grape’s own enzymes, and then, thanks to warming of the vats overnight, proceeds normally using the yeasts from the skins of the grapes. As soon as the fermentation starts (with temperatures up to 95°F [35°C]), *pigeage* and *remontage* are performed. Fermentation finishes nearly completely after five to seven days, but the young wine is not pressed until shortly before the cap sinks, after another four to six days. Then the vat is drained, the juice separated, the skins basket pressed, and the seeds and yeasts thrown away. Finally, the press juice is added to the free-run juice and settled for 12–24 hours in stainless-steel tanks, before the wine is racked into 100 percent new French barriques

(from François Frères, Rousseau, Seguin Moreau, and Damy) for 17–18 months. Malolactic fermentation is preferable in spring but also possible in winter.

Because the wines should be bottled without clarification or filtration (most barrels do not need either), they are racked very carefully through the bungholes rather than the tap holes, so that only about 8 fl oz (25cl) remain with the lees. This part is clarified and blended with the other red wines, which have been produced like the crus, though the grapes have been destemmed completely and the wines mature in barrel (partly new or used, depending on quality) for a shorter period. All of the red wines are bottled unfiltered.

The whites are vinified in a fairly reductive style, the better to preserve their fresh fruit, as well as their acidity and minerality, over several years. Whenever I am at this beautiful estate (the cellar has been completely rebuilt recently), the family offers mature whites and reds from their treasury for dinner. I am always amazed by how well the Fürst wines—whether red or white—age, becoming even finer, rounder, and more generous over the years. But the Fürsts never use a decanter, even for their younger wines. “We prefer to open the bottle and drink the wine promptly. It has to be present from the first moment on,” Paul insists. “But it develops in the glass if you don’t pour too little...”

FINEST WINES

2009 Schlossberg Spätburgunder GG ★ [V]

Fermented with at least 60% of the stems, this fragrant, alluring Pinot Noir from the Klingenberg Buntsandstein terraces is lavish, succulent, and sweet but also very elegant and silken in its texture. The tannin is ripe, mellow, and refined, as is the whole structure of this beautifully balanced feminine Pinot, produced both from older German clones and younger Burgundian clones such as Fin and Très Fin. If you did not know that this persistent, red-berry-redolent, very vibrant Pinot was from Klingenberg, you would imagine it to be a top-flight Volnay or Vosne-Romanée.

2009 Centgrafenberg Spätburgunder GG ★

This Pinot is from predominantly traditional Dijon clones planted in the early 1990s. It is picked at least ten days later than the warmer Schlossberg. Fermented with 30% or more of the stems, it is deep and striking on the nose, displaying refined but red-berry aromas. On the palate, it is fresh and firm but also elegant, silky, and succulent, showing plenty of finesse, as well as a ripe yet meaty and spicy tannin structure.

2009 Hunsrück Spätburgunder GG ★

The Hunsrück Pinot is from a parcel on the south-facing Centgrafenberg hillside, separately vinified from 2003 onward. Here, the Fürsts cultivate their oldest vines: German Ritter clones that were planted in 1983 and ripen a few days earlier than the neighboring Centgrafenberg parcel. Because there is always good ripeness of the stems, this distinctive grand cru is fermented with up to 100% of the stems (90% in 2009). The Hunsrück is the most powerful and structured wine of the trio. This 2009 is already very deep and spicy on the nose, showing more dark than red fruits. On the palate, it is intriguing: fresh, very firm, and very vibrant, if still a little astringent at this early stage. But there is a silky texture, too, and the potential for it to soften gracefully over 10–15 years or more. If the Schlossberg might remind you of Volnay, this might make you think of Pommard. But beware: it’s completely different from either.

Centgrafenberg Frühburgunder R ★

Frühburgunder (Pinot Madeleine) is a very rare, earlier-ripening kind of Pinot Noir that may originate from the area around Bürgstadt, where it has been cultivated for a very long time. Paul Fürst was one of the pioneers of this variety, which resembles Pinot Noir as both vine and wine but is more fruity and upfront. “The art of making Frühburgunder is to avoid a jammy wine with too much gloss and opulence, and instead to reflect its terroir,” says Paul. The 2009 ★ is deep, dark, fresh, and wild on the nose, then very intense, powerful, and succulent on the palate. The tannin is fine and as mellow as it is meaty, the acidity refreshing and refined, and the cassis aromas lingering. The 2001 ★ demonstrates how well Frühburgunder can age. Very elegant on the nose, displaying the finest, freshest dark-fruit aromas like cassis; it shows a silky elegance and finesse on the palate. The texture is supple and sweet, but the wine is still mineral and vibrant.



Above: Perfectly healthy bunches of ripe Pinot Noir, carefully hand-harvested into small cases to protect the fragile skins

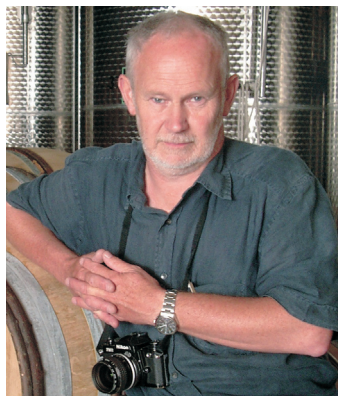
Weingut Rudolf Fürst

Area under vine: 48 acres (19.6ha)
Important varieties: 60% Pinot Noir/
Frühburgunder, 15% Riesling, 12.5% Pinot
Blanc/Chardonnay, 5% Silvaner
Average production: 120,000 bottles
Best vineyards: Klingenberg Schlossberg;
Bürgstadt Centgrafenberg, Centgrafenberg
Hunsrück; Volkach Karthäuser
Hohenlindenweg 46,
63927 Bürgstadt am Main
Tel: +49 9371 8642
www.weingut-rudolf-fuerst.de

ABOUT THE AUTHOR AND PHOTOGRAPHER



STEPHAN REINHARDT has been writing about German wine for more than ten years. He was editor of the monthly German/Swiss review *Weinwisser* and contributes regularly to *The World of Fine Wine*, *Fine, Süddeutsche Zeitung*, and his own website, stephanreinhardt.de



JON WYAND is a professional photographer who has specialized in wine for more than 30 years. Best known for his photographs of Burgundy, he has since expanded his coverage into most of the major wine regions. His work appears frequently in *The World of Fine Wine* magazine.

Main cover photograph by Jon Wyand

ABBREVIATIONS USED IN MAIN TEXT AND NOTES

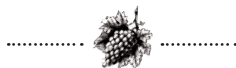
ABV	alcohol by volume	QbA	Qualitätswein bestimmter Anbaugebiete
BA	Beerenauslese	GmP	Qualitätswein mit Prädikat
GG	Grosses Gewächs	RS	residual sugar
GK	gold capsule	TBA	Trockenbeerenauslese
g/l	grams of residual sugar per litre of wine	VDP	Verband Deutscher Prädikatsweingüter
ha	hectare (= 2.471 acres)		
LGK	long gold capsule		

SYMBOLS USED IN MAIN TEXT AND NOTES

★	One of the author's favourite wines or the finest in its range	[V]	A wine that is particularly good value in its class
---	--	-----	---



This book highlights the quality and variety of German wines. With a culture stretching back to the Middle Ages, they have been celebrated for centuries; and by the fin de siècle, Rieslings from the Rhine, Mosel, and Saar were among the most sought-after and expensive wines in the world. Now, more than 100 years later, Germany's top producers are ushering in another "golden age" of German wine. While the wines differ from region to region and from site to site, many share a distinct—indeed, unique—style that is about far more than fruit. Fine German wine is not only deliciously drinkable but is a thing of beauty that can fill drinkers with wonder. This was often the case 100–120 years ago but was much less true after the two world wars. Especially during the 1950s, '60s, and '70s, Germany produced cheap, sweet wines that still affect the current image of German wine abroad. This lamentable development was encouraged by the 1971 German Wine Law, which based the new wine quality categories on sugar levels. Terroir became irrelevant. Since the late 1980s, however, the VDP—an association of some 200 of the country's top wine growers—has been leading a countermovement and offering a way back "from sugar to terroir". Above all, German Rieslings, whether dry, off-dry, or sweet, are eminently respectable again in the world of fine wine. Some of the finest and rarest German Rieslings fetch astronomic prices of up to €6,000 (£4,900) per bottle at annual auctions. But thanks to climate change, as well as to better viticulture and winemaking, German Spätburgunders (Pinot Noirs) and other wines can also now achieve world-class status. The time has come to adapt the false, lacklustre image of German wine to the far more exciting reality.



The Finest Wines of Germany is part of a major series of illustrated guides created by the editorial team at *The World of Fine Wine* magazine, working with leading authorities who give unrivalled treatment of a classic region's producers, vineyards, and vintages. Adopting the definition proposed by Hugh Johnson, these innovative studies focus on "the wines most worth talking about", giving space to those themes of greatest interest to the growing number of serious wine lovers by telling more of the story under the vines and behind the wines—not only what they taste like but why they taste that way and how they reflect the particular places, people, and times that made them.



THE FINEST WINES OF
GERMANY

STEPHAN
REINHARDT

Aurum



THE FINEST WINES OF
GERMANY
A Regional Guide to the Best Producers and Their Wines

STEPHAN REINHARDT
Foreword by Hugh Johnson | Photography by Jon Wyand

GERMAN VINTAGES 2011-1990	
YEAR	STAR RATING
2011	★★★★★
2010	★★★★★
2009	★★★★★
2008	★★★★★
2007	★★★★★
2006	★★★★★
2005	★★★★★
2004	★★★★★
2003	★★★★★
2002	★★★★★
2001	★★★★★
2000	★★★★★
1999	★★★★★
1998	★★★★★
1997	★★★★★
1996	★★★★★
1995	★★★★★
1994	★★★★★
1993	★★★★★
1992	★★★★★
1991	★★★★★
1990	★★★★★

Note: It is difficult to rate the vintages of a whole country like Germany, with its 13 wine regions stretching from Baden in the southwest to Saxony in the northeast. It is also tricky to suggest a single rating for dry white wines (from early-ripening Müller-Thurgau, to late-ripening Riesling), noble sweet wines (mostly Riesling, but also Scheurebe, Rieslaner, Gelber Musketeller, and Gewürztraminer), and red wines (mostly Pinot Noir, but also Lemberger, Cabernet Sauvignon, and Syrah). Vintages such as 2010, 2006, and 2003 resulted in many mediocre wines but also in some quite superb wines (the potential of which is indicated by the bracketed stars above). More than in any summary of vintages, you should trust in top producers and in your own palate. If you favour wines with acidity, elegance, and finesse (in red wines, as well as in white), vintages like 2008, 2006, 2004, and 2001 will be perfect. If you prefer richer, riper wines, years such as 2009, 2007, 2005, and 2003 will be more to your taste. If you are not quite sure, 2011 will be a great vintage with which to start discovering Germany's finest wines. Because it is nearly impossible to buy mature vintages of dry red or white wines in Germany, recommendations of outstanding older vintages can be restricted to acknowledged greats of the past century and to more recent top years for noble sweet wines. *Acknowledged greats:* 1976, 1975, 1971, 1959, 1949, 1921, 1911 *Noble sweet wines:* 2010, 2009, 2007, 2005, 2003, 2001, 1999, 1997, 1994, 1993, 1990