



GUNDERLOCH

Rheinhessen, Germany

One hundred and thirty years after its founding, the story at Gunderloch, one of the Rheinhessen's most revered estates, is evolving. The changes happening here are cause for real excitement, and all of them are springing from the restless mind of Johannes Hasselbach, the master and commander of the estate since 2016. He is taking Gunderloch in a new direction, and the resulting wines are achieving levels of grace, balance, and natural energy they have never seen before.

Gunderloch is a thriving estate of approximately twenty-five hectares of vines in some of the top vineyards of the "Roter Hang" ("red slope") area in the Rheinhessen appellation. In Nackenheim they own the dominant portion of the grand cru Rothenberg (sixty-five percent of the estate's holdings) which is planted completely to Riesling. Their GG from here is the flagship of the estate; their noble sweets from the site are legendary. The other part of their production comes from five kilometers down the road in Nierstein, where they work steep parcels of vineyards whose names resound to the ears of German wine lovers: Niersteiner Pettenthal and Niersteiner Hipping, which both provide GG wines for them. The average yield is held to forty-five hectoliters per hectare, among the lowest in Germany, resulting in wines of high extraction and great quality. Minimum ripeness for the various quality levels is significantly above the requirements of the German wine law. The wines are never de-acidified and in high acid vintages bottling is often delayed to allow the wines to harmonize and soften. The cellar work is accomplished with a minimum amount of handling and has traditionally been reductive in style—although that is now changing as Johannes pursues his explorations in winemaking. After much experimentation and rethinking of received wisdoms, Johannes is making significant changes at Gunderloch. To wit:

- Less handling of the wines and less "winemaking" overall in favor of hard work in the vineyards. This can be called his guiding philosophy.
- The previously all-reductive cellar is now seeing more barrels, longer maturations, and more skin contact on the wines. This is having a profound impact on the house style.
- Spontaneous fermentations are now the norm; all the estate wines are fermented with native yeasts. Johannes is also doing groundbreaking work starting his fermentations in the vineyards before bringing the wines into the cellar. His experimental wine called VIRGO is entirely fermented by vineyard yeast started outside during harvest.
- The estate has been practicing organic for five years. Johannes is currently considering certification. He has also become one of the "young guns" leading the charge for studying and promoting chemical-free viticulture at the VDP.
- The wines at Gunderloch have all been VEGAN since the 2017 vintage.
- The wines are getting drier, more focused, and less baroque. Lowering his alcohol levels on the dry wines is a priority for him--and a challenge, given the warming climate and placement of his vineyards. His residual sugars across the board are starting to skew lower as well, which of course reflects the general trend in German winemaking.

In sum, Johannes is actively directing his steps forward at Gunderloch, not passively staying with past practices or assumptions. He feels that with changes to the ecology and culture around him, this is not only a good idea but crucial to the success of his family's estate.

Meanwhile, the Rieslings here, particularly those from the Rothenberg, remain among the finest and most important in the Rheinhessen and in Germany. Taste them and it is obvious why: these are rich, elegant wines full of yellow fruits, great structure and fine acidity for long aging. But it is their newfound balance and the intrinsic energy within them--a direct reflection of their winemaker's youth, vitality and new ideas--that we find so compelling.



Fritz's Riesling 2020 12/750ml

A feinherb or "off-dry" style (around 20-25g/l RS depending on the vintage) named in honor of Johannes' father, world-renowned winemaker Fritz Hasselbach at the Gunderloch winery. This grows in a very small and special part of Rheinhessen called the Roter Hang meaning the "red hill". Located between the village of Nackenheim and the village of Nierstein 20 kilometers south of the city of Mainz, the characteristic name of this area is ascribable to its vivid red slate soil. The vineyards are very close to the river Rhein on steep slopes facing south-east. The combination of those four factors—the red slate soil, the closeness to the river, great sun exposure and the steepness of the vineyards—are the perfect combination to produce Fritz's Riesling, one of best value wines in our book.

Technical Specifications

Product Type: White Wine

Varietal: Riesling

Farming Type: Sustainable