



DR. LOOSEN



Ernst Loosen Profile of a Winemaker

Ernst Loosen was born into a great tradition of German winemaking. The Dr. Loosen estate on the Mosel River has been in his family for over 200 years, so you'd think it only natural for him to take up the family legacy as a profession. The truth is, though, that as a youngster Ernst was more fascinated by the numerous Roman ruins in the area than by the family vineyards. So he went off to college to study archaeology.

In the mid-1980s, however, Ernst was faced with a decision. His father fell ill and was ready to turn the estate over to the next generation, but none of his brothers or sisters was old enough or interested enough to take it on. Happily, as it turns out, Ernst agreed to take on the estate and finally found his true calling among the broken slate of his family's vineyards rather than the hewn stones of an old Roman ruin.

Having made the decision, Ernst dove into winemaking with his customary fervor. He had already completed studies at Geisenheim, Germany's renowned winemaking school, and now he embarked on a self-directed review of the great wines of the world. He traveled to Austria, to Burgundy and Alsace, even to California and Australia. He went wherever great wine was being made, seeking out the best winemakers to find out what they had in common. What he discovered was that they all share a dedication to producing intense, concentrated wines that boldly proclaim their heritage. And they all ascribed to the philosophy that a great wine begins in your head — that is, you must have a clear vision of what you are striving for, before you pick a single grape.

They also have a worldly outlook that allows them to maintain respect for tradition while allowing judicious use of improved viticultural practices and modern winemaking techniques when they will improve quality. It is a philosophy that balances the old with the new. It is a way of thinking that has allowed him to move beyond the easy and familiar, the tried and not necessarily so true, to make wines that stand out as truly distinctive and world-class.



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When Ernst Loosen assumed control of the Dr. Loosen estate in 1988, he recognized a lot of potential that was going unused. His father and grandfather had both been more involved in politics than winemaking, so nothing much had been done to maintain the vineyards or update the cellar. Because his predecessors had been unwilling to invest in new vines for what was essentially a family hobby, Ernst inherited a good number of ungrafted vines that were well over 100 years old — vines perfectly suited to the low-yield, highly concentrated style he wanted to produce.

His father's neglect of the cellar also ended up working in Ernst's favor. With no high-tech equipment to tempt them, Ernst and his cellar master had no choice but to make wines in a minimalist manner, with very little handling and long, slow fermentations.

Since Ernst took over, Dr. Loosen wines have received countless awards and glowing reviews in the press. The estate has become a member of the prestigious VDP, Germany's association of top-rated wine estates, and has been named one of the 10 best estates in Germany by nearly every wine publication worldwide. Ernst was named Germany's Winemaker of the Year in the 2001 edition of Gault Millau's *Weinguide Deutschland* and Decanter magazine's Man of the Year in 2005.

Ever restless for new adventures, in 1996 Ernst took over the historic J.L. Wolf estate, in the Pfalz region of Germany. Here he produces the more full-bodied style of Rhine valley Riesling, as well as the Pinot varieties that are traditional in that area.

Looking to the New World to rejuvenate the image of Riesling, in 1999 Ernst entered into a joint venture with Chateau Ste. Michelle in Washington state. Together they produce a Washington Riesling, called Eroica, which has set a new bar for expressive, top-quality Riesling in the United States. The wine is regularly praised as the finest example of American Riesling currently being produced.

In addition to his passion for Riesling, Ernst is a lifelong Pinot Noir fanatic, a variety that he has produced in the Pfalz since 1996. After numerous visits to Oregon over the years, he found a kindred spirit in winemaker Jay Somers, founder of J. Christopher Wines. They formed a partnership in 2010, built a new J. Christopher winery and are establishing a new vineyard in the northern Willamette Valley.

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Dr. Loosen estate information

Total vineyard area: 50 acres
Annual production: 200,000 bottles



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Varieties:

Riesling, 100%

1st Growth vineyards:

Bernkasteler Lay, Erdener Prälat, Erdener Treppchen,
Graacher Himmelreich, Ürziger Würzgarten,
Wehlener Sonnenuhr