

The vine post

Ernst Weis



Darcy Gander of Vine-works speaks to iconic vineyard planter Ernst Weis about his history in establishment of vineyards in the UK.

Ernst Weis has played a fundamental role in the establishment of many UK vineyards and his experienced team have been planting vineyards here since 2004. We first met Ernst in 2005 and have worked closely with him ever since. Ernst is one of the first faces many clients will meet at the beginning of their venture, but once their vines have been planted, they often sadly don't see him again. We caught up with Ernst to learn more.

Tell us a little bit about your family history in the wine industry

My family has been producing wine for more than 350 years. We live in the Pfalz area; the second largest wine-producing region in Germany. Located on the west side of the Rhine Valley at the foot of the Palatine mountains, we live 20km from the French border, where they call these mountains "les Vosges". Under Napoleon's rule, we became part of France and we still use a lot of French words.

How did you become involved in the UK wine industry?

In 1990 I saw an advert with a little winepress in an English country magazine. This advert was from VIGO in Devon and after several phone calls I became a regular supplier to them for vineyard equipment like wire, screw anchors, tying material, grape scissors, posts etc.

It was Alex Hill, the owner of VIGO, who asked me in 2004 whether I could help to plant 10,000 vines for his customers.

Which were the first vineyards you planted in the UK?

The first customers were Mike Roberts from Ridgeview and Andrew Weeber from Gusbourne as well as Chapel Down, Nyetimber and Hambledon.

What are the challenges/differences between planting in the UK and Germany etc?

Originally, the main difference between the UK and Germany was that all the UK vineyards were new and, due to the shape of the land, it was difficult to estimate the number of vines which would fit into the fields. In Germany, it is all replacement vines and most vineyards have a square shape which makes calculations easy. In the UK, when we had too few or too many vines, we made contact between the different wineries and often we could solve these issues.

How has the UK wine industry changed from your perspective?

The UK wine industry has made a lot of progress in a relatively short period. It is amazing to see the high-quality standard they've reached in this short time.

What type of planting machines do you use/how have these changed over the years?

In the first years, we came over to England with a laser-guided machine. The producer of these machines is the Wagner company which is local to us. After about 10 years we changed to a GPS-guided planting machine. We waited a few years until we used the GPS machine to avoid the problems of the first machines.

How has technology helped progress planting vineyards?

These GPS machines are a great advantage. It would be nearly impossible to plant such large numbers of vines in a relatively short time. The right time to plant vines is only a short period and in this time, everybody wants to have their vines planted first.

What do you think of English wine?

English sparkling wines are in the top class of sparkling wines. Still wines have improved quite a lot in the last years, but the future and the big success of English wines will be in sparkling wine.

Where do you see the UK wine industry in 10 years' time?

I hope that the high price of sparkling wines will be continued in the next years. There is a growing number of wine producers and a huge quantity of customers. However, in big harvest years the number of wineries will be too small to store and treat all the wine.

Tell us about your vineyard dog/s?

I've had dogs all my life and grew up with them. Now I have a Bavarian Mountain Blood Hound called Albert who is like my shadow. He likes boar and deer hunting and he accompanies me wherever I go.

Vine-Works would like to thank Ernst and his team for their incredible commitment and support to the UK wine industry over the last 20 years and we look forward to planting many more vineyards in 2020 and beyond!

