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HONEST. AND BONE DRY.

Martin Tesch? He's mad!

As a child, Martin Tesch, now 40, discovered marine animal fossils in the grounds of his father's vineyards. Today, he is a vintner himself. And produces wines that taste of the earth that was left behind by the primordial oceans millions of years ago.

71 mm

97 mm



Germany is rich with regions that still cultivate the spirit of the Romantic. Rothenburg ob der Tauber is one of those areas, as is the Middle Rhine expanse between Bingen and Koblenz. There, the Rhine is as broad as it is strong, and castle ruins sit atop jagged cliffs on the river bank. While floating past on a ship, it's easy to imagine that Loreley's echo can still be heard.

The Moselle Valley is also part of this tableau. The Moselle is a tributary of the Rhine; timber-framed villages line the banks, while vineyards full of sweet grapes grown for syrupy wines rise up behind them. Right in the middle of this landscape of Moselle and Rhine is the Nahe River, upon whose banks grapes also grow. However, this is an area that is not all that picturesque. And the people that live here don't have much in common with the pathos of the Rhine or the cheeriness of the Moselle countryside. They are like their wines – perhaps a bit on the dry side and also somewhat wilful.

Nevertheless, or precisely because of this, the wines from the Nahe Valley may just be the wines suited to the 21st century. They have nothing to do with pomp. Pomp is passé. And the reason that this is so also has something to do with Martin Tesch. This is where Tesch was born: the son of winegrower Hartmut Tesch from Langenlonsheim. The Tesch vineyard has been in existence since 1723. Today, a drive through the valley imparts the feeling that time here is in no hurry. Langenlonsheim is not a pretty place; the long through-road and prominent savings bank are much too conspicuous. North of the Nahe lies the Hunsrueck Mountain range; to the south, the Palatinate region. Hunsrueck, Palatinate, Nahe Valley – farmland since time immemorial. Potatoes, wine. The people here feel connected to the earth, and not to some silly ideas. Dogmatic thinking like: "That's the way we've always done it" can often be heard here. At the age of 15, Martin Tesch could no longer stand it in Langenlonsheim. The Nahe Valley is a quiet valley, the Nahe River a calm river. To find some excitement here you have to look for it in unexpected places.

As a boy, Martin began to dig around in the soil. He often visited his father's vineyards, checked out the soil and began to notice that there are many different kinds of earth: copper-coloured, silver glittery and

caramel toned, loose and clumpy, types of soil that trickle through the fingers and some that stick to the hands, some that are flecked with fragments of slate, some with iron ore – and there is even volcanic soil. Each one has its own smell. And several are full of fossilised seashells, fish teeth, oyster and crab shells. Around 30 million years ago, a primeval sea stood where the savings bank in Langenlonsheim is located today. Those waters were home to sharks that left their teeth behind – and a young boy from the Nahe Valley, over a million years later, took them home with him and gave them some thought.

When one is a teenager in Langenlonsheim and is no longer interested in collecting shark teeth, there's always rock music. Kiss, Nirvana and the like. Martin Tesch loves rock. Even though he appears to be quiet and serious, there's still a certain youthful, boyish quality about him – especially when he talks about rock music. Then he comes alive. Rock music has become such a deep-seated part of Tesch that he can now easily endure the tranquillity of the Nahe Valley. It's the rare teenager who has escaped from Langenlonsheim and returned as an adult, of his own free will. Tesch did.

That was in 1996. As a university biologist who was no longer interested in conducting research. That's when his father offered him the chance to take over the vineyard. Tesch knew that his father owned several of the best Riesling vineyards on the Nahe: 40 year old vines whose roots reached deep into the earth, into loess and loam, sandstone and Muschelkalk with its shark teeth from the primordial sea. He also knew that he didn't particularly like the wines made by his father and his father's neighbours and his father's neighbour's neighbours since the 1960s. They were wines that were produced back then the way the Germans did it – and are, in part, still doing it today: all sorts of legal, industrial tricks are used to make wines that reflect the romance of the Rhine, the charm of the Moselle and, in general, the kitschy image of Germany abroad. However, these wines are no longer in favour. Wines of the old Federal Republic, which mum and dad happily sipped in their lovely sitting room. Alcohol-heavy, inebriating stuff that sent people to sleep. "Loreley wines", as Tesch calls them.

That a guy like Tesch, who enjoys hanging around with rock musicians at rock festivals, would be the one to discontinue Loreley's nectar, was foreseeable. "I was never able to identify with this 19th-century-Germany way of life", he says. Rather Bauhaus and Brecht. And since audiences know exactly what's what during a Brecht piece, Tesch similarly wanted his customers, in future, to know what they could expect from him. A Riesling from Langenlonsheim. No more, no less. So he cleared his father's vineyards, tore out most of the vines – the Gewürztraminer, the Pinot Gris – and left the Riesling, for the most part. The other vines were burned, in a bonfire with "20 metre high flames". He then made the decision to forego the use of pesticides and to harvest by hand, saddling himself with a lot of work – and a lot of trouble. Nothing remained as it was. He used black bottles instead of green ones. Had brightly coloured labels printed. And gave his neighbours something to talk about: "The Tesch boy? He's a bit mad." In the end, Tesch created a Riesling that contradicted everything that had been accepted as German Riesling to date: honest and bone dry, without blending, without residual sugar.

He named the wine "Riesling Unplugged". Which is also how it tastes: like itself. A careful taster can taste the soil. And a sensitive nose can also smell it. And although wine fans gladly chatter among themselves in an odd language, tossing around words like "minerality" and "terroir", what they are actually saying is really quite simple: wine seeks to be no more than the earth from which it comes.



The leading wine guides (Eichelmann, Pigott, Johnson and Robinson) rank **MARTIN TESCH'S** winery among Germany's best producers of dry Riesling wines. It is the first winery to receive the international Red Dot Award design prize in the Best Corporate Design category. www.weingut-tesch.de

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