

Immich-Batterieberg

Interview

This interview with Gernot Kollmann took place at the Immich-Batterieberg house in February, 2013.

Tell us about Immich-Batterieberg's past and present.

Immich-Batterieberg is one of the oldest wineries in the Mosel. The earliest documents we have trace it back to the year 911. It was originally founded by a Carolingian owner that belonged to a monastery, and the base of the cellar is from the end of the 9th century (around 870). The family that gave its name to the winery took over in 1495 and owned it up until 1989.

Did the winery have a name before?

We do not know. But it was not common for wineries to have names in medieval times.

What happened after 1989?

There was another owner who went bankrupt in 2007. We took over in in beginning of 2009.

If I'm not mistaken, this owner drastically changed the style of the wines...

There was definitely a stylistic shift in the wines. The crus were being co-fermented in stainless steel, cultured yeasts were being used and the wines were in a more fruity style... We're bringing things back to the winery's roots: more wooden barrels, spontaneous fermentations, and a less reductive style.

Did this new style hurt the estate's reputation?

Honestly, there wasn't really any reputation left to speak of. We started fresh, with a completely new customer base. At the moment, not one merchant who used to buy the wines has recontacted us, and only 3 or 4 consumers from the old days still visit and buy a few bottles!

If it was a totally new start, why keep the original name of the winery?

Because the original name is so closely linked to the Batterieberg vineyard, but also because we wanted to use to classic 16th century label. In the end, the reason we are here is because the wines were so fantastic in the past. We wanted to show that we are not a new winery, but an old one!

What were you doing before Immich-Batterieberg?

Wine was a hobby for me, and I originally wanted to practice medicine. I worked in a hospital for a few years, but my hobby grew stronger and I eventually made the decision to pursue wine full time in 1991. My first internship was at Dr Loosen. I then studied oenology and marketing. When I finished my studies, I knew I had to return to the Mosel. I worked at a very large winery in Trier for 3 years, then four vintages at Weingut Van Volxem (2000 to 2003). I then left in July 2004 to start a

winery consulting business.

How did working with these other wineries affect your own viticultural and winemaking choices?

When I started with Van Volxem in 2000, there was no use of enzymes or selected yeasts. Working this way produces a style of more open and lively wines, and I would not be able to go back to cultured yeasts: today, most wines made this way bore me. There is no de-acidification in the winery, and we would never chaptalize.

What's the work like in the vines?

We are working on extremely steep terraced vineyards. No tractor or horse could ever maneuver through them, so all of the soil work has to be done by hand. This makes working organically very challenging. It's a hard fight, but I believe it is necessary. If you care about the soil, it will shine through in the bottle. There are so many types of grasses and herbs in these rocky vineyards, and I think they bring an innumerable amount of nuance to the wine. We will not stop working this way.

Let's talk about the sites you work with and the wines they produce.

We should start by explaining the *C.A.I.*, which is named after Carl August Immich. His decision to dynamite the hill and create terraces between 1841 and 1845 is what gives our winery its name (**note:** Batterieberg translates to *Battered Mountain*). We produce this with our young vines but also from the base of the Batterieberg vineyard. We also purchase fruit from really good sites of un-grafted, organically tended vines that resemble what is grown around Enkirch. So this wine is a Mosel blend, but from really good sites.

As far as the Cru wines, we produce the *Batterieberg*, *Ellergrub*, *Steffensberg*, and *Zeppwingert*. But like most wineries in the world, we don't use 100% of the grapes from each site to produce each cuvée. We only use the grapes from the best terraces and the oldest vines. For example, we use about 50% of the Batterieberg vineyard to produce the *Batterieberg* label. The rest goes partly into the *C.A.I.*, and partly into the *Escheberg* cuvée, which I would describe as the best "b selection" grapes from Batterieberg, Ellergrub and Steffensberg.

Most of the vines are older and un-grafted, right?

80% of our vines are un-grafted, and the vines are minimum 60 years old in Steffenberg and minimum 80 years old in the other Crus. It's hard to know exactly when they were planted.

So phylloxera never affected the Mosel?

It did, but special vineyards all over the Mosel have not been touched. We still aren't quite sure why, but when they are very steep and stony, the vines fare better. In such you find a lot of un-grafted vines in the Mosel.

What are the soil compositions and micro-climates you are working with?

We have 4 different sites, and clearly their commonality is slate soils. Steffensberg is on a side valley behind the village, with deeper, softer soil composed of more copper red slate. It is also the warmest vineyard we work.

Then we have Batterieberg, which is a monopole within the Zeppwingert. It has bigger stones because it's our youngest vineyard (dating back to the mid 19th century), and the rock hasn't eroded as much. The slate here is grey and very rocky, with a heavy amount of quartz.

To the right of Batterieberg, we have the parcel we vinify the Zeppwingert with. The soil is darker here, and you can certainly taste the difference in the wines.

Finally, 150m further, we have Ellergrub. I consider this our best vineyard. Here there are fine slate plates and you have the classic blue slate of the middle Mosel.

Why do you not use the Pradikat system?

We designate the *C.A.I* as a Kabinett only to show that it was not chaptalized and that we are intentionally producing a light, low alcohol wine. The maximum alcohol we want for this wine is 11.5%.

For us, it makes no sense to systematically follow this system. We want to show an expression of a vineyard, and because of our low yields we never have ripeness problems. In such, the Crus are designated as QbA, but would fall under Spatlese or Auslese. In certain vintages we produce noble sweet wines, and these will be labeled Auslese. But this is not the focus of the winery, and I am happy with every grape we harvest that isn't botrytised; we are lucky that our climate mostly avoids this.

At what point do you add sulfur to the wines?

We sulfur very late, just before bottling. We also make an effort to use the lowest amount possible. The wines spend a very long time on their lees in barrel, so it is not necessary to add any before bottling.

How do you feel about the current context of Mosel wine?

In the Mosel, I think there are two different philosophies of production. One is the more "classic" style, but it's only been classic for around 40 years. I am of course referring to the Pradikat style of sweet, fruity or noble sweet whites. I consider these to be very good an interesting interpretation of the Mosel.

On the other hand, others have decided to rediscover dryer Mosel wines, which was the norm before modern winemaking techniques like micro-filtration. For us, we wanted to go back to this style.

How does a region with such a long and rich winemaking history shift styles so drastically?

Market demand. At the end of the 60's, sweeter wines were what people wanted to drink, and this led to about 95% of Mosel wines being produced in a sweeter style. But then in the mid 80's there was a counter movement, specifically in Germany, where people only wanted bone-dry wines. Immediately, the style shifted. Today, the sweet wines have stayed popular on the export market, while the dry wines are still what people prefer to drink in Germany.

But my goal with Immich-Batterieberg is to express a vineyard, not pander to a specific market.

What do you like to drink?

There are so many wines in this world! I don't care much about grape varieties: Riesling, Chardonnay and Pinot Noir are only as interesting as the place they come from. And that does not mean they are always interesting, and should be planted everywhere! I'm interested in focused, balanced wines with natural acidity. I look for an expression of purity, and this is something you can find from all over the world.