

SUPERYACHT LIVING & STYLE 2018

# BURGESS

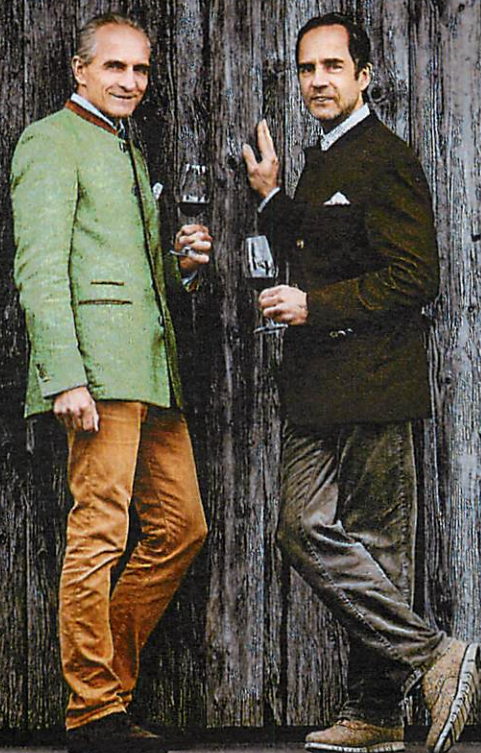
THE MAGAZINE



# Cellar's MARKET

*From their base in Bavaria, wine specialists Michael and Wulf Unger buy, sell and cellar only the best, helping yacht owners to navigate the wine market and enhance their on board collections*

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The road to Frasdorf twists and curves through manicured Bavarian countryside. Here a small farm, there a medium-sized business, around the corner an artisan's workshop — all neat, all tidy. These enterprises form the backbone of Germany's *Mittelstand* prosperity. It is an understated prosperity because the locals in the Alpine Foreland are naturally modest, especially about having the good fortune to live somewhere so spectacular.

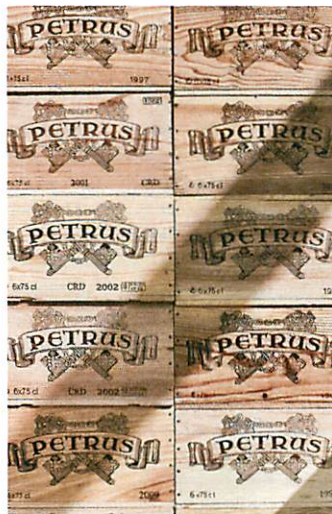
Each day, Michael Unger drives his Mercedes-Benz AMG S 63 to work through this stunning landscape, dominated by the blue, imposing presence of the Chiemgau Alps. The sophisticated black machine is one of those instantly recognisable symbols of success, yet it's a success that has been some 25 years in the making.

In 1993, Michael and his brother, Wulf, gave up promising careers as, respectively, an automotive engineer and a financial journalist, to start a wine business from a tiny office in the family home. In 2006, they moved Unger Weine KG to its own facility and headquarters in Frasdorf, within an hour's drive of Munich Airport and 30 minutes from Salzburg. As I arrive there, I feel 'headquarters' is an inappropriate description for buildings that have been designed in Bavarian farmhouse style, giving the impression of traditional comfort rather than corporate vanity.

Today, many of Unger Weine's discerning clients are superyacht owners. Not only do they rely on the brothers' services to source the best and rarest wines in the world, but they also depend on the brothers' wine expertise and state-of-the-art facilities to ensure that their wine collections age in optimum conditions. And when they need these fine wines delivered to their superyacht or their home, they know it will be transported with the utmost care, wherever they are in the world.

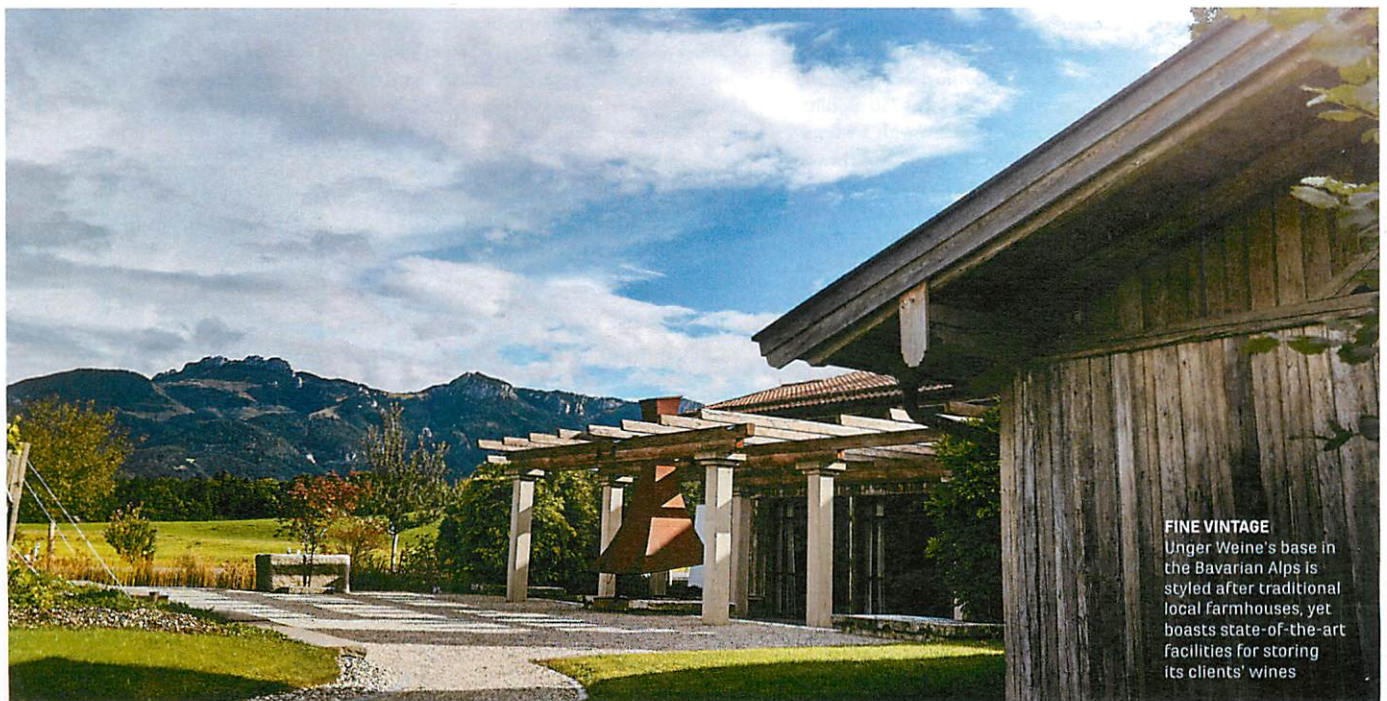
Before the talk turns to fine wine, Michael Unger takes me on a tour, stopping off in the events rooms where fine and rare wines are tasted. These can be enjoyed in a cosy corner in front of an open fire or in an imposing space adorned with life-size figures that appear to have stepped out of a Renaissance painting by Albrecht Dürer. In fact, they have been carved from elm by local sculptor Andreas Kuhnlein.

In these rooms, the brothers have invited winemakers such as Château Latour's Frédéric Engerer and Stephan Graf from Neipperg to talk about their work. As the German importer of Napa Valley's Heitz Cellar wines, Unger Weine has also hosted the largest-ever Heitz tasting, which included the first Heitz vintage from 1961. And, in 2016, they celebrated 50 years of Robert Mondavi — Napa Valley's most influential winery — with a tasting of all its vintages produced since



#### PERFECT PAIRING

Opposite: Michael Unger (left) and brother Wulf at their Alpine facility. This page: stylishly displayed wines in their tasting rooms (top); Pétrus is a recommended wine estate (left); 2001 is a good California vintage



#### FINE VINTAGE

Unger Weine's base in the Bavarian Alps is styled after traditional local farmhouses, yet boasts state-of-the-art facilities for storing its clients' wines





**CRATE EXPECTATIONS**  
 Stored wines enjoy a climate-controlled environment and bank-like security (left); a homely fire adds an inviting touch to a tasting room; a recommended California red (below)



1966. There are also the legendary Christmas tastings, when Michael and Wulf open wines that are no longer produced or offer collectors' bottles that even the wineries that made them no longer have in their own cellars, including California verticals from 1935.

For those considering buying fine wine as an investment, Michael insists that "passion comes first" and one should buy "only the wine you want to drink later". After all, you may be unlucky with an investment and become stuck with your stock. And there are factors to consider. "One of the most important, besides quality, is exclusivity," says Michael. Limited production wine is not only seen as more 'authentic' than wine produced by a big corporation, but also supports the idea, aesthetically and ethically, of small being beautiful. Yet obtaining such wine can be challenging. "It is not easy to source first-hand," says Michael. "You don't want wine that has travelled to the United States and back to Europe, then changed hands many times before it arrives in your cellar."

Michael emphasises another 'p' word: provenance. Strictly defined, provenance is a record of ownership of a work of art or an antique, used as a guide to prove its authenticity. It's also applied to wine because proof of ownership is essential in a world of fake wines and seductive frauds. One strategy is to buy wine that is still in the barrel, or *en primeur* as the 'wine futures' market is termed. "It's a fool-proof guarantee to ensure you get wines with perfect provenance," says Michael. "And it's the only way to order what you want in terms of bottle sizes because you can say to a supplier: 'I don't want a case with 12 bottles of 750 millilitres. I would love to have a case with six magnums, each one with 1.5 litres.'"

So, the golden rule is to find a supplier who can ensure that the wine cases go from the château to the *négociant* (the middle man) and safely to storage. And should you want to sell, the sole concern of auctioneers will be the provenance. "They also want to make sure the fill level and label are perfect and that the wines are still in the original case," he adds.

As well as offering advice about vintages from Bordeaux to the Napa Valley, from markets to maturity, the Unger brothers are experts in storing wine. Their pride and joy are the underground storage facilities deep beneath the Unger Weine buildings in Frasdorf, where computer-regulated humidity and temperature, optimised airflow with filtered air and bank-like security systems guarantee that their clients' wines are kept safe and well in Alpine privacy. And when their clients are relaxing on a superyacht, Unger Weine can arrange for the bottles to be safely delivered to their vessels, so that they can enjoy their fine wine collection on the water just as they do at home.

Michael says there are a few considerations to ensure maximum enjoyment of their cherished bottles when they're at sea. Sturdy red wine is resilient, but vibration isn't good for its wellbeing. He recommends keeping bottles of older red wine vintages in an upright position at sea to help deal with sediment. Unless one is sailing through a hurricane, this shouldn't be an issue as the sediment is heavier than

the liquid and will stay at the bottom of the bottle. This, he stresses, is a short-term solution only, allowing guests to enjoy rare vintages without being faced with cloudy wines or glasses full of sediment.

Champagne, white and rosé wines are popular when relaxing under blues skies on a superyacht, but they are at risk from light exposure. Since yachts don't have big wine cellars and owners tend to store wines for just a season, keeping them in a cool, dark environment over three or four months should avoid any significant deterioration. As Michael observes: "No one would keep wine for five, 10 or 20 years on a yacht."

Apart from light, vibration, humidity and temperature, the most significant challenge for on board storage is human. "You need a member of crew with the right knowledge of wine," says Michael. This requires basic training, which Unger Weine can provide. Its training covers everything from how to handle wine to when to decant and at which temperature to serve. However, he concedes that it takes time to develop such knowledge. "Wine is something that you have to experience," says Michael, "and to experience it you have to drink it."

As an evening function claims Michael and Wulf's attention, it's time to leave. Yet there is still a moment to admire Unger Weine's Alpine location with the jagged peak of the Kampenwand mountain reflecting the sublime afternoon sun. Departing the brothers' cellars, treasures and spectacular backdrop, I'm reminded of Thomas Mann's novel, *The Magic Mountain*, in which "the towering statues of snow-clad Alps, gazing down from the distance, awakened in you feelings of the sublime and holy". It certainly makes you want to raise a glass.

### THE ULTIMATE SUPERYACHT WINE LIST FOR 2018

As recommended by Michael and Wulf Unger...

- CHAMPAGNE** Krug
  - CALIFORNIAN RED** Screaming Eagle, Harlan Estate
  - BORDEAUX RED** Château Pétrus, Mouton Rothschild
  - BURGUNDY RED** Domaine Romanée-Conti
  - BURGUNDY WHITE** Bonneau du Martray, Roulot
  - ITALIAN RED** Sassicaia
  - SPANISH RED** Pingus
  - GERMAN WHITE** Keller, Donnhoff
- [ungerweine.de](http://ungerweine.de)

