

Ômina Romana

Bringing an ancient region to life



Anton F. Börner and his daughter Katharina

When a German-Italian family went on holiday in Italy, the last thing they expected was to find themselves buying a vineyard. But not only did the Börners buy land – they committed to bringing an ancient Roman region back to glory.

When Anton F. Börner put his hands into the soil of Lazio, he said to his wife that it was a pity people in the area didn't make premium wine – the soil seemed perfect for top quality wine grapes. At the time he was more interested in looking for a house, so it was a throw-away remark. But a man who overheard him immediately offered him 55 ha of vineyard land.

"I said 'yes, why not?'" recalls Börner.

That was in 2004. Ten years later, his wine business is thriving. His daughter

Katharina Börner is CEO of the company, while his wife Anna Maria Börner is an investor, making Ômina Romana a true family business. Best of all, when Ômina Romana's wine were launched into the world, they picked up gold medals almost immediately. And yet, prior to this venture, none of the Börners had any wine industry experience.

"It has happened the way things happen in life," says Börner. "We've always been connoisseurs of wine, but I'm not a professional."

What the Börners did have, however, was

business expertise. Not only was Börner an entrepreneur and manufacturer, he was (and remains) the president of the BGA, the Federation of Wholesalers, Foreign Trade. The first thing he did was go to Germany's University of Geisenheim, internationally renowned for its wine school, and ask their experts to do due diligence on the area. "The result was, I discovered this is an area where you can produce top quality wine," he says. "I started in 2004."

The next thing that happened was neighbours came and offered land, so the available area grew to 80 ha "all rectangular, in one area".

Today, Ômina Romana has a winery and its own production line, and uses the services of oenologist Claudio Gori and agronomist Paula Pacheco. Situated in the Alban Hills, it's in the region of Lazio, close to Velletri and just under 40 km southeast of Rome.



“The location is in the community of Velletri, an ancient city,” says Börner. “The emperor Augustus was born in this city.” This, he explains, is where wine was born in the West. “Vines were taken from here by Roman soldiers, to France and Germany. So we are in the nucleus of the western European wine area.”

The wine trade collapsed after the fall of the Roman Empire, and grape growing was abandoned until the end of the nineteenth century, when Lazio established a reputation for poor quality, high-yielding white varieties like Trebbiano Toscano. Yet the Romans were right to value Lazio, because the region was once volcanic, and the soils are fertile lava and potassium-rich tufa. Sea breezes wafting in from the Tyrrhenian Sea in the west moderate the warmer climate. The Börner family

believe that it’s time to return the region to glory.

“We asked ourselves what kind of grapes we needed to cultivate,” says Mr Börner. “We went back to Geisenheim and did more due diligence and now we do 70% red grapes, chosen to be optimized for the soil and the climate.”

Planting by hand started in 2007, and the vineyards are now growing 65% international grape varieties, including the Bordeaux varieties of Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet France and Merlot, along with Petit Menseng and Tannat. Indigenous varieties include the white Bellone and red Cesanese; altogether there are eleven red and seven white varieties being grown on the property. Ten hectares of the property is also devoted to olive groves and the production of high quality olive oil. “We are

completely independent,” says Börner. “We have a team of 31 local people and they’re all very keen.”

The team pay meticulous attention to the soil, grapes and vinification. “We are working in cooperation not just with Geisenheim, but with the Universities of Florence and Parma.”

This is reflected in the winery’s motto: *Mens et Manus*, or ‘mind and hand’. The result is high quality wines, both single varietals and cuvées named for Roman gods, such as the Diana Nemorensis I, a blend of Cabernet Franc, Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon. Already, Ômina Romana wines are appearing in fine restaurants in Germany, Austria, Italy and Switzerland – proof that hard work and diligence, when combined with the right terroir, pay off.

It sounds like the Börner family had a dream run, from finding the right patch of ground to working with the right people. Except that they’ve had their fair share of issues, too.

“The thing that I was really surprised about was Italian bureaucracy – it is impossible to understand!” says Börner, groaning as he recalls the red tape he had to wade through to make his dream happen.

But happen it did, and Ômina Romana wines are now heading to the major markets of the world, the phoenix on the label a symbol of Lazio’s rejuvenation.

INFO



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