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Terra Nera®
Tuscany
The Rising Star
of Super Tuscans

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Marke In 1996 a computer scientist and software engineer from Mittenwald, Germany, had a dream. Christian Sprenger's dream was to find a unique terroir in former Roman and Etruscan wine country, and produce red wine of the highest quality. Today the self-made man is the proud owner of the Terra Nera® winery in southern Tuscany, near Grosseto in the heart of the Maremma Region. Here he produces the award-winning Andraemo, Auronera and Scorpis wines. And he's planning to build top quality cellars into this picturesque, high plateau overlooking the Tyrrhenian Sea. Terra Nera® will soon be as well-known as the Super Tuscans Sassicaia and Ornellaia.

Italy's national holiday, the Festa della Repubblica, falls on a Friday this year. If you get the chance, plan a giro (tour) there over the long weekend with your friends or family. I didn't have that on my radar. The traffic jam on the Autostrada del Sole southwards stretches from Bologna via Florence to Siena, but that doesn't dampen my spirits as I drive towards



CHRISTIAN SPRENGER
with his daughter Veronica



Grosseto in southern Tuscany. As soon as the traffic comes to a standstill, young people in a party mood roll down their windows, turn up the music and talk to anyone. “Just make your own olive ascolane – large,

green, breaded, and deep-fried olives stuffed with meat and anchovies. When you make it, yourself it tastes completely different compared to what you buy in a store.” I take this as an instruction.

**“I feel that the gift
of finding Terra Nera® is so
precious that my mission has
become this lifelong project.”**

Christian Sprenger, Terra Nera®

Once you arrive in the Maremma, finding a hotel room is notoriously difficult. Booking in advance would have been a good idea. But in the Marina di Grosseto the lively receptionist at the Beach and Park Hotel Ricci manages to get me the last available room. And at a reasonable price, despite the Festa della Repubblica. Thank you, I'll be returning. At last, I drive along the Strada Provinciale 159 towards Scansano and find Christian Sprenger at the Chessa Coocon bar in Le Rovete. He's had to wait for several hours, but he takes this in his stride and we start with an Aperol Spritz in the afternoon sun. A toast to Italy, of course.

Dreaming of his own vineyard

Sprenger is a down-to-earth guy who embraces challenges with open arms. He grew up in Mittenwald, Germany, studied computer science in Munich and specialized as a freelancer in mobile communications from 1989. “The sector proved to have good prospects. That's why I set up my own company in 1999. With a staff of around 60, I worked all over the world for regular clients like China Mobile, Verizon, Nokia, RIM/Blackberry and Samsung.” Meanwhile, the entrepreneur had a weakness for antiquity dating back to his childhood. He's a keen expert on Etruscan and Roman culture, travelling to Italy year after year to visit excavations and museums.

“As well as the early royal Etruscan cities, I was fascinated by ancient Rome as the centre of an empire – with its Forum Romanum, Colosseum and Circus Maximus,” reveals Sprenger. The bon vivant often picnicked on



TERRA NERA® Once a stone desert of black slate, the terroir was transformed into a winery, with an unobstructed view of the sea.



the Palatine Hill with an Italian panino and a bottle of fine red, lost in thought. Commercial success and admiration for the Italian way of life fuelled Christian Sprenger's dream of producing top-quality red wine in his own vineyard. "It was my deepest wish to be involved in something lasting and valuable", recalls Sprenger, who was never really fulfilled by the lucrative but superficial business of endless software releases. Full of adventure, the Bavarian started travelling through Italy in 1996 with



THE FORD was built by the aspiring winemaker at his own expense. The Maiano rivulet marks the border between two municipalities.



BLACK SLATE A very special, almost black red wine is created on the geologically unique plateau of Terra Nera® "Island" in the Maremma.

his caravan, looking for a suitable property.

Terra Nera® in the Maremma

It was like finding a needle in a haystack. "I looked at wineries from Lake Garda to Veneto to Marche, Tuscany and Umbria. But I didn't see anything that excited me", says Sprenger, who insisted on finding a natural, unspoilt environment with the potential for high quality wine: "The more I saw, the more I realized what I didn't want." Sprenger began to broaden his geographical scope in order to find what he was looking for. He

swapped his caravan for a plane, travelled to many countries, and moved from continent to continent. But intuitively he was always drawn back to the area around Rome. It was there that he secretly hoped to find what he had longed for over so many years: overlooking the sea, a historic vineyard set in peaceful, unspoilt countryside, with grapes capable of making wine history. "The decisive clue came from an old Italian professor. He poured me an almost black, red wine that could only be produced on the geologically unique black slate of the Terra Nera® 'island' in the Maremma. I knew with the first sip. I had arrived. I had

arrived at the taste experience I had been seeking for so long", enthuses Sprenger.

Another happy moment came when Sprenger saw Terra Nera® for the first time. Partly covered in dense woodland, this hilly landscape unfolded before his eyes. "I had a great deal of respect for the job that awaited me here." In 2001 he acquired the first 48 hectares of Terra Nera®, on the central hill of which sits the old farmhouse Sant' Eufemia. Over the years, Sprenger has acquired the entire Terra Nera® 'island' of around 100 hectares with a great deal of empathy and understanding for the concerns of the local farmers, as



well as with his sensitive negotiating skills. “I feel that the gift of finding Terra Nera® is so precious that my mission has become this lifelong project.”

Foundation laid for Cult Winery

It is almost 5pm and we leave Le Rovete and the Strada Provinciale. On a narrow road we follow the discreet river Maiano to a ford. “In a flash flood the water here can be several metres high and sweep away everything in its path”, warns Sprenger. When he bought Terra Nera®, there was neither a bridge nor a ford. “No-one was interested in

crossing the river. Besides, it marks the border between two municipalities and the mayors didn’t feel responsible”, says Sprenger with a smile. With a lot of patience, the budding winemaker eventually received the permission of both municipali-

“With its terroir, its unobstructed view of the sea and its unspoilt nature, Terra Nera® is one of a kind.”

Christian Sprenger, Terra Nera®

ties to build the ford at his own expense. But he still had to obtain the approval of the water management office in Florence. “Again, it took me months”, says Sprenger, turning his 4x4 into the cypress-lined private road to Terra Nera®.

Island of black slate in the Maremma

“This unique island of black slate was a stony desert with a few wild plants. But the local elders were well aware that this was once the site of excellent wine production”, explains Sprenger, who has planted cypress trees throughout the vineyard and dug



TERRA NERA®
on TV:
www.TerraNera.wine/zdf-beitrag



ANDRAEMO

vintages: 2019, 2021
grapes: Syrah
 Cabernet
 Sangiovese
 (second selection)

alcohol: 14,5 % vol.
 extract: 30 g/l
 acid: 5,3 g/l
 rest sugar: <1,0 g/l
 soil: black slate
 allergic: sulphites
 store: wooden barrel
 closure: natural cork
 taste: dry



The **ANDRAEMO** convinces through its skilfully coordinated grape variety led by the fresh Syrah and excelled with Cabernet Sauvignon and Sangiovese. Maturing in wooden barrels provide for the harmonic balance.

Amarena-cherries, the smell of camp fires, spicy herbs and fine leather go through the nose. The same continues at the palate – smoky cherries a touch of spicy herbs and cocoa tannins do the rest to make this wine appear to make it nearly float over the palate.

AURONERA modern

vintages: 2018, 2019
grapes: 80 % Cabernet
 10 % Sangiovese
 10 % Syrah

alcohol: 15 % vol. (2018);
 14,5 % vol. (2019)
 extract: 36,3 g/l (2018);
 33,0 g/l (2019)
 acid: 5,3 g/l (2018);
 5,4 g/l (2019)
 rest sugar: <1,0 g/l
 soil: black slate
 allergic: sulphite
 store: wooden barrel
 closure: natural cork
 taste: dry



The **AURONERA modern**, led by Basic Cabernet, added Sangiovese and Syrah, deep complex and long-lasting body, dancing sensitively and fragile on the tongue with a natural and long-lasting nature firework of flavours in nose and mouth.

WINE OF THE YEAR

AURONERA 2019

Süddeutsche Zeitung: Experts of the SZ gave our Wine the title SZ Redwine of the year 2022. In the intensive smell you find dark cherries, Cassis, camp fire blaze and stylish leather. The impression on the palate is amazing.

The cherry-berry fruits mixed with fine smoky tones and basic chocolate notes. Silky tannins and cool herb note make this wine exceptional.

93

AURONERA 2018

According to Falstaff 7/2021: Peppermint and blackberry, sage, thyme. Alcohol is present in the mouth and is however put back by tense extract of ripe but fresh fruit. The tannin remains neutral despite of its fire and volume. It is compatible with taste and mild, smooth ingredients.

WINE OF THE YEAR

**Süddeutsche
Zeitung**

93



94+



93+



AURONERA classic



SCORPUS

vintages:	2013, 2016, 2019, 2020
grapes:	100 % Sangiovese
alcohol:	14,5 % vol.; 15 % vol. (2020)
extract:	31,8 g/l (2013); 32,0 g/l (2016); 31,0 g/l (2019); 33,2 g/l (2020)
acid:	4,8 g/l (2013); 4,7 g/l (2016); 5,5 g/l (2019); 5,2 g/l (2020)
rest sugar:	<1,0 g/l
soil:	black slate
allergic:	sulphite
store:	wooden barrel
closure:	natural cork
taste:	dry



SCORPUS — GOLDMEDAL BERLIN

Toscana pure. Full **SCORPUS** is a convincing pure Sangiovese for every fan of the art of Italian wines. A very expressive wine with cherry and herb notes ideally suited to strong food.

The Berlin wine trophy awards SCORPUS with the Gold medal.

92

SCORPUS 2016

According to Falstaff 2/2021: Dark chocolate, cinnamon and cloves in the smell. Smooth and soft in the palate with a fine dose of tannin mature acid, a Sangiovese in a Sunday suit rather full and with power than original wildness.

HISTORY

Flavius Scopus, renowned as Rome's most celebrated charioteer during the 1st century, left an indelible mark on the annals of history. With an impressive tally of over 2000 victories in the Circus Maximus, Rome's iconic chariot racing arena, he enthralled crowds numbering up to 250,000 spectators. Scopus thus earned his place as one of the foremost charioteers in Roman history. The persona and saga of Scopus inspired Christian Sprenger, who honoured his legacy by naming his finest wine after him. Andraemo, Flavius Scopus's cherished steed, stood as a symbol of their remarkable partnership. Tragically, Scopus met his untimely demise at the age of 27 around 95 AD within the very arena where he had triumphed countless times, the Circus Maximus.



92

2021 Gold medal



two 100-metre-deep springs. It took heavy machinery and three years to turn the black slate plateau into arable land and surround it with natural stone walls. "People thought I was crazy. But after tough negotiations with the Italian electricity company, ENEL, I paid for 1.8 kilometres of high-voltage line to be laid underground across the length of Terra Nera[®]", says Sprenger, who never compromises on quality or aesthetics and for whom his winery is a work of art. Following the installation of an underground irrigation system in 2006, 28 hectares of vineyards were replanted. "The Maremma's strong environmental protection, new vineyard laws and stricter authorization procedures would make such a complex undertaking impossible today", says Sprenger, emphasizing the uniqueness of the vineyard: "With its terroir, its unobstructed view of the sea and its unspoilt nature, Terra Nera[®] is one of a kind".

Excellent Reds – Scopus, Auronera and Andraemo

The Terra Nera[®] wines produced since 2009 have confirmed its uniqueness. Scopus, Auronera and Andraemo surprise the experts and receive top ratings: Terra Nera[®] is named Wine of the Year 2022 by the *Sueddeutsche Zeitung*. It wins the gold medal at the Berlin Wine Trophy with Scopus and receives 94+, 93+, 93 and 92 points from Falstaff. In January 2022, the company also switched to organic viticulture. "As we have never really had optimal conditions in the harvesting process or during vinification, these successes show the potential of the Terra Nera[®] grapes", says Sprenger during a relaxed tour through the extensive vineyards. The grapes are a visual re-

flection of their homeland. They are smaller and darker than other grapes. They have a smokier flavour and are highly digestible thanks to their high polyphenol content. Sprenger adds: "Terra Nera® red wines are

"This unique island of black slate was a stony desert with a few wild plants. But the local elders were well aware that this was once the site of excellent wine production."

Christian Sprenger, Terra Nera®

characterized by a deep, complex, and persistent body that dances subtly, delicately on the tongue, while aromas are ignited in the nose and on the palate. These sensations linger a long time in the memory."

Outlook for a 2025 project – Super Tuscan style wines

As the sun slowly sets over the Tyrrhenian Sea, we sit down at a small table in front of the Sant' Eufemia farmhouse to sample the fine wines. Our view over the open countryside is spectacular. "The ancient Via Clodia was a Roman road built between the 3rd and 2nd centuries BC. It, in turn was largely built on Etruscan roads. Coming from Vetulonium, Rusellae, it passed through our Terra Nera® vineyard on its way to Saturnia, Veii and Roma. Remains of the old





SPONTANEOUS PICKNICK IN THE EVENING SUN

accompanied by a barrel tasting of the 2022 vintage (left).

road can still be found here today,” says Sprenger.

We want to eat in one of the nearby trattorias, but they’re all booked and today they’re not making any pasta to go because it’s the Day of the Republic, il Giorno della Repubblica. But we’re in luck: Sprenger’s daughter Veronica brings us home-made Terra Nera® wild venison ragout, fresh cheese, olives, and typical, unsalted white Tuscan bread from the valley.

In Castiglione della Pescaia, in front of the sea, the lights go on and the rising full moon replaces the setting sun in the starlit sky. There is complete silence. Only the distant barking of farm dogs, the rutting of deer and the chirping of cicadas can be heard. “This terroir has the potential to produce a wine in the style of super-Tuscans like Sassicaia or Ornellaia”, says

Christian Sprenger. Cellars will soon be built into the black slate of Terra Nera®. Construction is scheduled to begin in 2025 and conversations have already started with star architect Marco Casamonti. “With the most modern cellar technology, the shorter distances to cover during the harvest, and optimal storage conditions in the black slate, we’ll be able to significantly increase our quality level once again”, says Sprenger. There are also plans for “agritourismo” that will offer a blend of gastronomy and accommodation and will integrate harmoniously into Terra Nera®. In a nutshell, this is Sprenger’s vision: a life-long fan of antiquity is creating a temple for the senses in the style of an Etruscan place of worship.

Terra Nera® will soon be a place where wine and brand

history are written. Christian Sprenger gives me some rarities as a farewell gift. With a big smile he invites me to come back soon to see him in the Maremma; but maybe not during the Festa della Repubblica.

by Friedrich M. Kirn



LOOKING FORWARD TO SEEING YOU AGAIN SOON IN THE MAREMMA

Friedrich M. Kirn, *marke41*, and Christian Sprenger, Terra Nera®.

TERRA NERA[®]

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