



Ahr

Introduction

The signature of the Ahr is written in Pinot Noir on steep stone terraces.

The Ahrtal, or Ahr Valley, is one of Germany's most compact and northerly wine regions. Paradoxically, it is also the country's largest contiguous red wine-producing region. Approximately 80% of its 529 ha/1,307ac are planted to black grape varieties. Spätburgunder predominates. It is expressed as increasingly finessed, *terroir*-driven reds and the regionally popular **Blanc de Noir**, a still white wine. A third hallmark of the Ahr is the rare, early ripening Pinot mutation, Frühburgunder.

Part-time growers who supply a trio of robust co-operatives (**Winzer-genossenschaften**), as well as a relatively small number of estate bottlers, farm patchworks of small parcels on steep slate and sandstone terraces in a surprisingly Mediterranean-like macroclimate. Given the Ahr's monastic heritage, small-scale structure, focus on Pinot Noir and warming climate, it is little wonder that many see parallels with Burgundy.

"Ahr" comes from the Celtic word *Aha*, for water. The Ahr River, as a tributary, is one of many mothers of the Rhine. But the Ahr's energy and unpredictability are those of an unruly offspring, hence its nickname, "wild daughter of the Rhine." The Ahr River rises from springs high in the Eifel Mountains, then bends and bucks its way east before settling into a calmer course on its way to join the Rhine just south of Bonn. Along its 86 km/53 mi are villages and walled towns rich in history and character, cloisters and half-timbered houses. Above them, rise vertiginous, vine-covered slopes.

Because Spätburgunder is a primary focus, and has been for generations, growers here are keenly attuned to the match of variety and site. The Ahr's compact size and limited number of VDP-classified grand crus (**Grosse Lagen**) and premier crus (**Erste Lagen**) make it an excellent starting point for learning to identify signature villages, sites, producers and styles.

Viticultural History

The Ahr Valley was a northern outpost of the Roman Empire. However, there is no direct evidence of grape growing there during Roman times. Instead, documentation points to the proliferation of wine culture starting in the 8th century CE, under Charlemagne. As the Holy Roman Emperor's influence spread, so did viticulture.

Monks developed vineyards wherever they found suitable terrain and access to rivers for transport and trade. By 893, monastic records indicated the presence of large vineyards. The names of many of the Ahr Valley's choicest sites, such as Pfarrwingert (priest's parcel), Herrenberg (lord's slope), and Mönchberg (monk's slope) testify to church influence.



Kloster Mariental. Source: DWI

"Of all the wine regions in Germany, this is surely the most mysterious." — Stephen Brook, *The Wines of Germany*.

There is a mystic quality to the Ahr's untamed, romantic landscape. Despite the valley's proximity to the Rhine and the important ecclesiastical city of Köln, it was long isolated due to lack of transportation and poverty. Then as now, the rocky canyon could be made impassable by flooding or storms. There is wild beauty. But it is a beauty haunted by hardship.

Bleichert (or **Ahrbleichert**) was a term meaning "bleached" or "bleached wine of the Ahr" used as early as the 17th century for the typically pale red wines of the region. The faint pigmentation was likely the result of short macerations. This style became a regional signature, mirrored in today's Blanc de Noir, a white wine made from pigmented grapes. It is unclear which grape varieties were originally used to produce it.

The first clear documentation of Spätburgunder in the Ahr dates to 1788. Much as some historians would like to tie its presence back to Burgundy, this is unproven. Still, a French connection was reinforced when Napoléon occupied the Ahr in 1794. Under his rule, the Ahr's monastic tradition of viticulture was cut off at the roots. Secularization shifted ownership to individuals. The practice of *Realteilung* created a legacy of parcels that shrunk each time they were divided and handed down from generation to generation.

Napoléon's reign over the Ahr was short. By 1815, the valley was in Prussia's increasingly powerful grip. Initially, Prussia protected Ahr growers with beneficial tariffs. But in 1834, Prussia joined the *Deutscher Zollverein*, or German Customs Union, whose aim was to create a common economy for the German Confederation. The elimination of trade barriers within the Union exposed Ahr growers to fierce competition. These producers could easily undercut the Ahr's wine prices, which reflected the costly labor involved in tending steep sites.

By the mid-1800s, Ahr growers faced an existential choice: unite and organize or sell and emigrate. Many chose the latter, prompting an exodus to the Americas. But among those who stayed, a revolutionary idea took hold: communal ownership, or co-operatives. This idea came from Friedrich Wilhelm Raiffeisen, a German civil servant and politician sympathetic to the plight of farmers. Inspired by his model, growers in the village of

Mayschoss formed a co-operative in 1868. Over the years, 30 such co-operatives sprang up along the Ahr. Although that number has since consolidated to three, co-operatives remain a hallmark of Ahr wine culture.



Winzergenossenschaft Mayschoss Altenahr founders label. Source: Valerie Kathawala

The roughly 400-member **Winzergenossenschaft Mayschoss-Altenahr** is the world's oldest continually operating winegrower co-operative. Grower-members are its lifeblood today as they were at its founding in 1868. Many of these are **Hobbywinzer** (part-time growers). Roughly 50% of the Ahr's vineyards are cultivated as a hobby or side business. The cooperative's sprawling winery, set at a hairpin bend in the Ahr, suffered severe damage in the 2021 flood. Overcoming many operational limitations, the co-op is back to turning out roughly 1.4 million bottles a year across a range of grape varieties and wine styles. Its Blanc de Noir, Frühburgunder and Spätburgunder are attractive entry points to Ahr wines. The co-operative pays its members a premium for grapes from terraced sites but does not offer an incentive for organic farming.

But the late 1800s had more setbacks in store: First, wine fashion shifted to the light Rieslings of the Mosel and Saar, which the Ahr could not supply. Then came phylloxera. Many Ahr vineyards

were hastily ripped up in hopes of preventing its spread. Some were never replanted. Many growers took other jobs.

To help stabilize the region, a school of viticulture and pomology was established in 1899. A teaching farm followed. But the damage had been done. By 1928, the Ahr's total vineyard area had been cut in half.

	1820	1867	1903	1928	1955	2015	2024
Total (ha)	879	908	1,032	550	735	560	531

Source: Statistisches Landesamt Rheinland-Pfalz

Difficult conditions persisted through and after both world wars. In the 1950s, the region's tiny, dispersed parcels were subjected to *Flurbereinigung* (vineyard reorganization). As a result, 440 ha/1,087 ac of vineyards were modernized, replanted and made more accessible. Among the most significant changes was the conversion of many vineyards from single stake to wire trellising. This provided a more efficient way of planting, pruning and harvesting.



Source: Ahrtal-Tourismus Bad Neuenahr-Ahrweiler e.V., Photo by: Max Harrus

After World War II, the Ahr Valley became a popular destination for day-trippers and tourists. Its proximity to Bonn (West Germany's capital) and other prosperous German cities, as well as its accessibility to thirsty travelers from Belgium and the Netherlands, were boons. As a result, producers have traditionally been strongly oriented to ex-cellar sales. As in any region with a strong direct-to-consumer trade, this was a double-edged sword: steady demand gives little incentive to improve

quality. Well into the 1980s, the Ahr was known for thin and/or off-dry Spätburgunder plumped up by chaptalization, best enjoyed on a cheerful winery patio.

Yet there were growers who sensed the Ahr's far greater potential. Werner Näkel of Weingut Meyer-Näkel in Dernau was one. Näkel brought vineyards such as Dernauer Pfarrwingert and Ahrweiler Silberberg to national and international acclaim. His cellar work focused on long *élevage* in *barrique*. This gave unprecedented depth, structure and aging potential to his Spätburgunder. It also coincided with climate change. Growing conditions were already tipping in favor of greater ripeness.



Werner Näkel. Source: Weingut Meyer Näkel / Photo by: David Weimann

Ahr producers began to experiment with cellar techniques that amplified the body and power of their reds. In the 1990s, when the global market was rewarding red wines of high extraction, oak influence and alcohol, Ahr producers leaned in. Now the pendulum is swinging back. Producers are refining their ideas of what the Ahr can do best: wines of elegance, finesse and restraint born of a northern latitude, steep terrain and handwork coupled with a strong sense of local connection and pride.

Location and Climate

On the night of July 14, 2021, a flood ravaged the Ahr Valley. The river rose so fast, people were caught in their homes, cars and workplaces. More than 130 people were swept to their deaths. Homes and businesses, including dozens of wineries and some 60 ha/148 ac of low-lying vineyards, were washed out. Equipment was smashed. At many estates, entire vintages were lost or damaged.

Total damages have been estimated at some 40 billion euros, making the Ahr flood the most expensive natural disaster in German history. Flagship producers such as Weingut Meyer-Näkel, Weingut Bertram-Baltes, and Winzer-genossenschaft Mayschoss-Altenahr suffered colossal damage right alongside their lesser known colleagues. Years later, the destruction still staggers. The idyllic valley will need years to fully recover.

The flood hit just weeks before harvest, leaving growers to bring in grapes and make wine without access to roads, electricity, running water or standard equipment. Yet most made wine that year, of remarkable quality. Incredibly, through it all, the Ahr producers' resolve to rebuild has not wavered.



Mayschoss Terraces with flood destruction (January 2024). Source: Valerie Kathawala



Flood-affected wine bottle. Source: Valerie Kathawala

At 50.3° N, the Ahr is Germany's northernmost red wine region. But what was once a liability is now an asset. Initially, viticulture was only possible here because most of the Ahr River sits in a sheltered canyon in the Eifel Mountains. Steep slopes, mostly of dark slate and sandstone, capture the sunlight allowing even black grapes to ripen. Compared with the Mosel, Main, or Rhine, the Ahr River is very narrow where it passes through the region's vineyard areas. Thus, its temperature-moderating and sunlight-reflecting influences have less impact.

From its source high in the Eifel Mountains, the Ahr River follows a winding 85-km/53-mi course, dropping almost to sea level at the town of Remagen, where it meets the Rhine.

The portion of the Ahr River where vines are cultivated is just 25 km/16 mi in length. West of this "sweet spot," the elevation and narrow span of the canyon make it too cold and shadowed for viticulture; east of this zone there are flat floodplains that do not offer enough sun-trapping slopes or suitable soils for viticulture.

Although the Ahr region has a continental macroclimate, it enjoys mild conditions during the growing season. Its location at the southern edge of a lowland area (the Kölner Bucht, or Cologne Bay), allows warm, moist Atlantic air to sweep inland. However, the Ahr sits in the lee of the Eifel Mountains, which create a rain shadow. Average annual precipitation is 654 mm/26 in (versus the national average of 830 mm/33 in) with 1,450 average hours of sunshine during the growing season.

In the Ahr, summer temperatures can reach highs of 40°C/104°F. Summer storms and high humidity are common. The average winter temperature is 2.6°C/37°F.

Average temperatures have climbed over the past 20 years from 10.5°C/51°F to 12°C/54°F. The annual hours of sunshine have shot up, too. Moreover, due to its latitude, in June and July, the Ahr basks in up to 30 minutes more daylight per day than southern German regions. Cumulatively,

this adds up to significant extra solar radiation for the Ahr's vines and ripening for its grapes.

While precipitation levels hold steady, they are now distributed less evenly throughout the year. Drier winters and heavier rains during the growing season are the new norm. This poses even greater challenges for water retention, erosion and disease pressures on the steep slopes.

For such a compact wine region, the Ahr boasts a wide range of mesoclimates. There are three (unofficial) zones: western, central and eastern. (They may also be referred to as the upper, middle, and lower Ahr.)

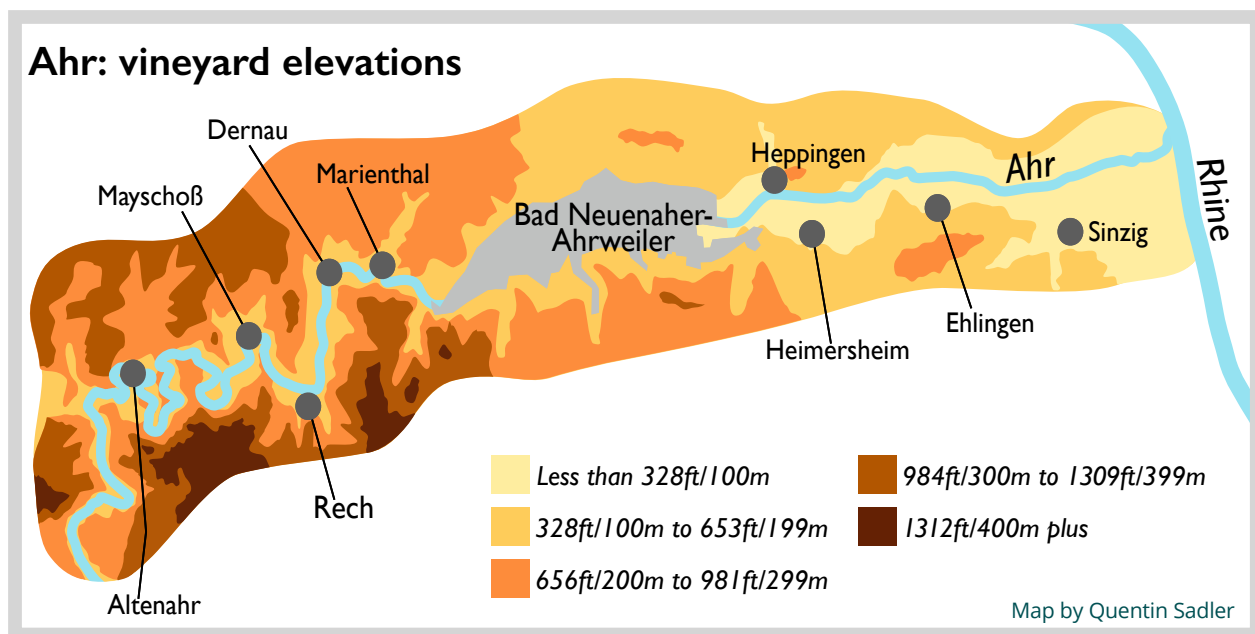
In the western or upper Ahr, each tight river bend opens onto different expositions and topographical features. Shielded from the wind but exposed to strong sunlight, the air and soil temperatures of these higher-elevation sites climb quickly during the day and cool rapidly at night. The middle and eastern Ahr, with lower elevations and flatter topography, maintain more consistent temperatures. These variations are clearly captured in the Ahr's village and single-vineyard bottlings.

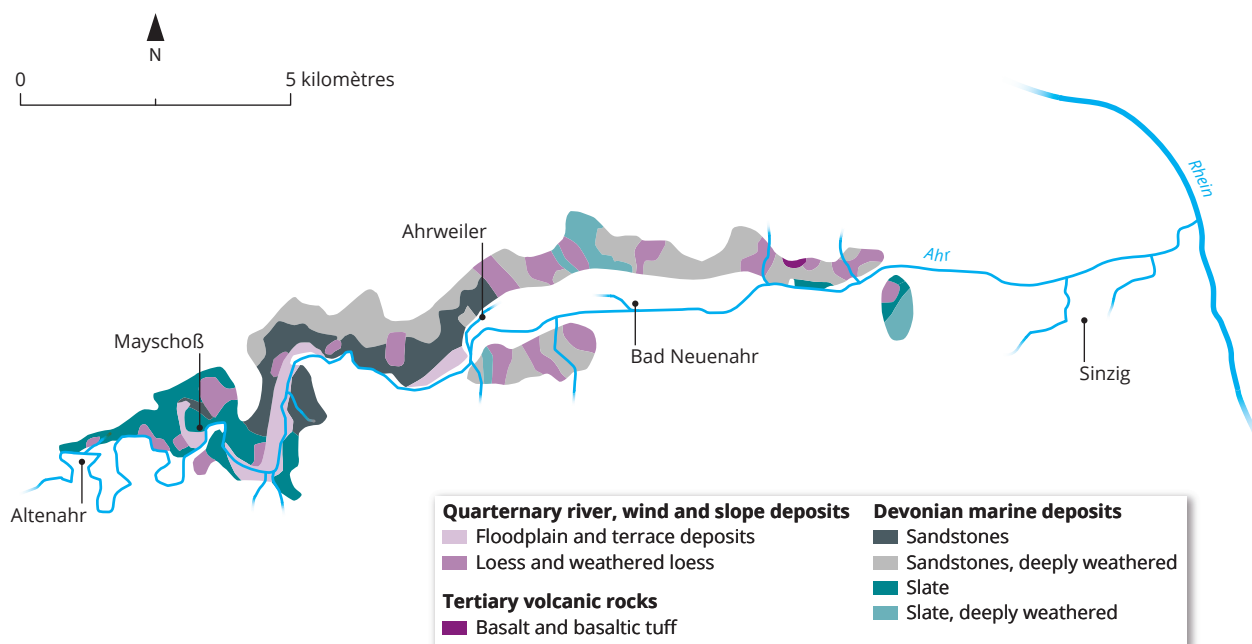
Geology, Topography and Soils

Ahr Valley bedrocks and soils largely consist of Devonian slate and **Grauwacke** (sandstone) with some basalt, loess and loam that retain warmth and allow for a fine balance of moisture retention in dry years and excellent drainage in wet ones.

Geochronology explains how these features came together. During the Devonian period of the Paleozoic Era (420-360 MYA), the area that is now the Ahr Valley was filled by an inland sea. Sediments were laid down that would later harden into slate, quartz and grauwacke. In the early Cenozoic (roughly 60 MYA) tectonic shifts created a zone of weakness that formed a saddle, or low point, between two areas of higher elevation. The folding processes that created the Rhenish Massif then pushed up that saddle. The central Ahr Valley experienced the steepest uplift. Because slate and grauwacke are easily eroded and weathered, the nascent river was able to gouge a spectacular canyon.

Today, cliffs line both sides of the gorge. In some places, the canyon walls are separated by a width





of less than 50 m/164 ft. The dramatic rock faces now lined with the valley's most prized vineyards are the result of this interplay between upward pressure and deep erosion. Volcanic activity along an ancient fault line during the Quaternary period (1 MYA) brought mainly basaltic lavas to the surface.

In the western and middle portions of the Ahr, gray and blue slates and grauwacke are common, but the middle area has more grauwacke with some loess-loam. The eastern section is a mix of sandstone, slate and loess but also includes a patch of volcanic bedrock. Soils not only vary from west to east but also from higher to lower elevations: weathered slate and grauwacke are largely found on the higher sites; sandy loam and loess, as well as humus-rich alluvial sediment, layer the bedrock closer to the river.

Slate

Much is made of Riesling's affinity for slate soils. But slate turns out to be ideal for Spätburgunder, too. It can deliver dense, complex, spicy wines of savory smokiness. In earlier, colder eras in the Ahr, slate offered what Dernau grower Julia Bertram calls "radiant floor heating" for the vines. Now, in

a warmer period, slate's ability to retain and drain water serves the vines well, though there is some risk of excessive heat accumulation.



Slate. Source: DWI

Grauwacke

Grauwacke is also superb for Spätburgunder and can give finely structured wines with more restrained fruit characteristics. In the middle Ahr, grauwacke mixes with slate.



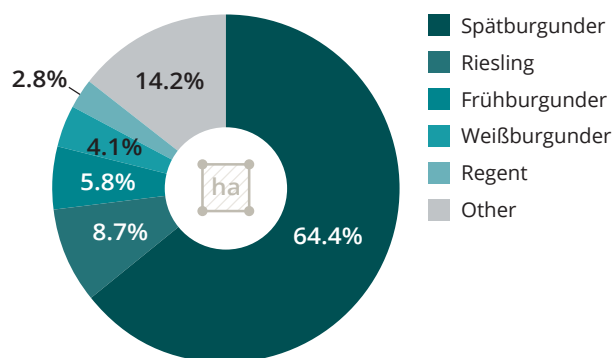
Basalt

Basalt is a dense but fine-grained igneous rock that weathers easily. It is dark and nutrient rich, tending to yield deep, powerful wines with more overt fruit. This soil type accounts for a very small share of Ahr vineyards; most are located in the eastern sector or lower Ahr.

68% of the vineyards are steep (30% or greater slope); 15% of which are considered steepest, (50% or greater slope). As noted, elevation decreases moving from west to east, as the Ahr travels from its mountain source down to the Rhine Plain. Most vineyards are 100-220 m/330-720 ft in elevation.

Most of the Ahr's vineyards face south, southeast, or southwest to capture maximal sunlight and warmth. Some of the best sites are shaped like amphitheaters, which naturally trap sunlight and warmth. However, the run of hot, dry vintages the Ahr has experienced since 2018 challenges producers to find ways to retain soil moisture and limit sugar accumulation in grapes in these steep, exposed sites.

Grape Varieties



With 80% of its vineyards planted to black grapes, the Ahr is Germany's premier red wine region. The focus is Spätburgunder. However, important cameos are played by Frühburgunder, a finicky but high-quality local specialty and Riesling, which proves its suitability to steep slate slopes is not limited to the Mosel. A hodgepodge of other varieties, including higher-cropping or easier-to-cultivate Müller-Thurgau, Domina, Regent and Portugieser, are favored by the region's hobby growers.

The big question is whether the Ahr was always a red wine region. It appears that red wine conclusively gained the upper hand at some point in the 18th century. By the early 20th century, 90% of the Ahr was planted to black varieties, but this then began to change. By the 1980s, Riesling and Müller-Thurgau accounted for a much larger share (40% combined). Today, black varieties have reclaimed their dominance.

White Grapes

Riesling. Although conditions mirror those of the Mosel, where Riesling reigns, this preeminent German variety curiously plays only a minor role in the Ahr. Those growers who do work with Riesling tend to make fresh, fruity expressions.

Others It should come as little surprise that a region focused on Spätburgunder would have at least a smattering of **Weißburgunder** (Pinot Blanc).

Black Grapes

Spätburgunder is the queen of the Ahr. It is planted throughout the region and achieves pinnacles of aromatic and flavor complexity here and is a benchmark for quality wines across Germany. Ahr Spätburgunder at their best are, savory and elegant with the structure for longevity in the bottle over several decades.

Frühburgunder is believed to have been grown in the Ahr since at least 1526. The Ahr is one of the few German regions where commercially significant plantings survive and it is the only German region in which Frühburgunder is a permitted VDP *Grosses Gewächs* variety. It is planted in spots where Spätburgunder does not ripen well: cooler sites with more shade. Those producers who have stuck by it do so at some risk as it challenging to grow. Today, it is largely cultivated out of a sense of regional pride. Ahr Frühburgunder makes a savory red wine, with notes of dried meat and herb marrying with more typical Spätburgunder notes of cherry and earth.

Ahr Frühburgunder is registered in the International Slow Food Ark of Taste in recognition of its distinctiveness and risk of extinction.

Regent is a robust, workhorse variety common in Ahr red blends.

Viticulture

In no other part of Germany is viticulture as dominated by steep-slope, terraced vineyards as in the Ahr. The valley's principal villages sit below precipitous slopes and cliffs that are carved into a mix of orderly steps and bizarre zigzags.

In the Middle Ages, the Ahr's extreme northerly location required more than sheltered, steep, south-facing sites to make fine wine. Cloisters that had viticultural outposts in the Ahr had dry-stone terraces (i.e. without mortar) built. This painstaking, artisanal work was typically carried out in winter when most other vineyard tasks could not be done.

Archeologists estimate the oldest Ahr dry-stone terraces date to around the year 1200. Construction and reconstruction continued over a period of 600-900 years. Modern restoration work occasionally reveals two, even three layers of walls behind existing structures. Today, it is estimated that half of the Ahr's terraces are in need of costly, labor-intensive repairs.



Source: Valerie Kathawala

The average vineyard size in the Ahr is 0.6 ha/1.5 ac. Most producers have holdings scattered up and down the valley. This helps them to capture the Ahr's diverse **terroir** expressions and to spread both risk and ripening potential. However, it also reduces working efficiency.

For generations, Ahr growers' primary challenge was getting their grapes to ripen. Now, the challenge is to foster vineyard conditions that temper ripeness. Forward-thinking producers use a combination of organics, biodynamics, permaculture and inventive vine training (even going so far as utilizing partial pergola). They have also introduced trees, vegetables and sheep, and have added compost to optimize soil health and biodiversity. Among top growers, rigorous canopy management, multiple passes through the vineyard at harvest and extremely low yields, enable them to produce red wines that are lower in alcohol and higher in vibrance and intensity.



Grower Benedikt Baltes in his permaculture vineyards, Source: Valerie Kathawala

In the 1990s, as in much of Germany, Ahr growers began to pay particular attention to vine material. This prompted a gradual shift away from the high-yielding but lackluster clones to higher-quality Swiss, French and old German clones, including some identified as being native to the Ahr. They also propagated vines from massal selections. The goal of these efforts was smaller berries with looser clusters, improved rot resistance and ripening curves better aligned to the Ahr's current climate.

From the early 2000s through today, yield reduction through changes in trellising, green harvesting and canopy management have further improved quality. The focus among leading Ahr growers is on extremely low yields. High alcohol levels are avoided through a combination of viticultural vigilance and sensitive winemaking practices.

While no official figures are available, it is estimated that roughly 10% of the Ahr's vineyards are farmed organically and/or biodynamically. Organic and biodynamic viticulture is challenging in the Ahr due to the steep slopes and intensive handwork required, as well as the climate. The presence of many small, part-time and hobby growers is also significant in holding back wider-spread adoption of environmentally friendly viticulture as they may lack the resources or incentives to invest in conversion.

Viticultural challenges include flooding, hail, spring frosts, drought, fungal diseases, vine trunk diseases such as Esca and insects including *Drosophila suzukii*.

In the Ahr, most top sites are located mid-slope on steep, stony, south-facing sites. These terroirs can produce wines that are rich and supple or fine-boned, elegant and ethereal. Estate and village-level wines tend to come from sites that are lower down on the slopes, closer to the river, where soils are deep. Wines from these sites tend to be richer and more fruit-driven.



Source: Ahrtal-Tourismus Bad Neuenahr-Ahrweiler e.V., Photo by: Max Harrus

Winemaking



Weingut Meyer-Näkel barriques. Source: Valerie Kathawala

The quality revolution that swept Ahr viticulture in the 1980s and 1990s was accompanied by dramatic changes in winemaking. Ahr producers made major investments in cellar equipment, especially **barriques**. Ahr reds became richer,

more alcoholic and more extracted as growers experimented with longer maceration times in smaller vessels and greater proportions of new oak. Today, the revolution is in mindset and technique. Leading growers strive for styles in keeping with the zeitgeist. The vanguard is working with large, neutral, oak **Fuder** (600 and 1,200-liter barrels) or **barrique** and extending **élevage**.

Although off-dry wines are still a feature of some producers' portfolios, the overwhelming majority of Ahr wines are now dry. In addition, some top-end producers are timing releases closer to the moment of optimal drinking.

Blanc de Noir is a beloved wine style in Germany, particularly in the Ahr. It took off around 2010, in response to Germany's white wine boom. The French name harkens to the style's origins in the Champagne region of France. To make this typically fresh, light, still wine, producers simply press off their red grapes without any maceration on the skins. This style gives producers great flexibility. In any given vintage, they can divert a larger or smaller share of their red grape harvest to Blanc de Noir (instead of ripping out black grape varieties and replacing them with white ones). In a vintage that's excellent for reds, they can dial back the quantity of Blanc de Noir they produce — and vice versa. Today, Blanc de Noir is an important part of Ahr producers' portfolios and can account for up to 20% of total production. Top growers take this style seriously, offering increasingly structured, complex expressions. The 2021 German Wine Law states that the designations "Blanc de Noir" or "Blanc de Noirs" may only be used for domestic wine, sparkling wine or semi-sparkling wine if it is a product with a protected designation of origin (PDO), is made from black grapes vinified like white grapes and has the typical color of white wine. (Many display a little pigment.)

The Ahr VDP has seven member estates cultivating 87ha/215ac of vineyards. Permitted varieties for VDP GG wines are:

- Spätburgunder
- Frühburgunder

The Ahr's regional wine association is Ahrwein e.V., founded in 2011.



Source: Ahrwein e.V.

Villages and vineyards

The Ahr has one **Bereich** and 43 **Einzellagen** (single sites). The towns of Ahrweiler and Bad Neuenahr deserve special mention. Although both municipalities have their own identities, they have each grown and expanded to the point where they form one larger township along the river (Bad Neuenahr-Ahrweiler). This collective name does not appear on a wine label; the individual town names do. Unless otherwise indicated, the dominant variety throughout these sites is Spätburgunder.

Note: It is difficult to determine precise vineyard sizes. We have chosen what we believe to be the most accurate measurements, compiled from numerous sources. Vineyard size is indicated by this key for ease of reference:

- S** Small (less than 5 ha/12 ac)
- M** Medium (5–20 ha/12–49 ac)
- L** Large (20–99 ha/49–245 ac)
- XL** Very Large (more than 99 ha/245 ac)
- U** Size unavailable

Bereich: Walporzheim/Ahrtal

Following the river's flow from west to east, the western or upper Ahr stretches from Altenahr to just before Walporzheim. In this narrow, winding section of the valley, vineyards almost reach the river and in some places leave only enough space for a two-lane road — the only passage through the valley. The first wine village of note is Altenahr.



Village: **Altenahr**

This tiny, millennium-old village sits at a corkscrew bend in the Ahr. It was badly damaged by the 2021 flood.





M Vineyard: **Eck** is a partially terraced, extremely steep, south/southeast-facing site of grauwacke and weathered slate. Significant Riesling plantings give racy, nervy expressions. Spätburgunder from the Grauwacke portion can be muscular, while those from slate are more linear.

 Village: **Mayschoss**
The village of Mayschoss is famous for its ruined 11th-century castle, the Saffenburg, and its eponymous co-operative. Mayschoss, which sits at a hairpin bend in the Ahr, was hit particularly hard by the 2021 floods. Currently, visitors will find more flood tourism than wine tourism, especially as wineries, hotels and restaurants rebuild.

XL Vineyard: The **Mönchberg** vineyard encompasses a range of **terroirs** as it spreads up a steep hill of the same name. The hill tops out at 345 m/1,130 ft elevation; the vineyards rise to 220 m/720 ft. Mönchberg is bordered to the north by forest, which keeps out cold winds. Its slopes face south, with a gentle concave curve concentrating the sun's power. Choice sections lie on the steeper slopes of weathered slate, grauwacke and loam (some untouched by *Flurbereinigung*). Riesling and Frühburgunder join Spätburgunder as important varieties here.

From Mayschoss, the Ahr swoops south, then juts north to make a backward letter "J." The village of Rech is located at the point where the river turns north.

 Village: **Rech**
The small but notable wineries of this tiny village line the valley's main road. Vineyards and deep forests rise behind and around them.

L Vineyard: The **Herrenberg** is Rech's claim to fame. Weathered grauwacke and slate line a steep, south-facing slope. The top section of the site is terraced. Some of the site is planted to ungrafted Spätburgunder. Spätburgunder

and Frühburgunder can give strikingly savory, meaty, saline expressions here.

 Village: **Dernau**
This key wine village is home to some of the Ahr's greatest single vineyards. They rise steeply from the village's edge and most are strikingly terraced. Dernau is home to two of the Ahr's most prominent producers, Weingut Meyer-Näkel and Weingut Bertram-Baltes. Wines are structured, elegant and built for aging.

M Vineyard: The **Pfarrwingert** is considered an Ahr flagship. This is a filet cut from the larger Dernauer Herrenberg. It enjoys a prominent position with multiple southern exposures high above the river (200 m/656 ft elevation). Steeply angled, terraced slopes draw the sun throughout the day, creating one of the warmest mesoclimates in the valley. Weathered grauwacke and slate give deeply aromatic wines of sinewy elegance and depth. Frühburgunder is also an important variety in this site.



L Vineyard: The **Hardtberg** wraps around the Pfarrwingert. It faces south and is riven with small side valleys. (A government bunker built by the Federal Republic of Germany at the height of the Cold War is hidden beneath the vineyards. A preserved section of the facility is

open to the public). Soils are mainly slate and grauwacke. Loam is present in lower areas. Frühburgunder is also planted here.

- XL** Vineyard: **Goldkaul** is tucked into high forests and cooled by mountain air. It faces south-southwest and is located in a small side valley. It has never been subjected to *Flurbereinigung* and contains at least one high, small parcel of very old vines. Soils are weathered slate and grauwacke. Riesling is also planted here.

From Dernau, the Ahr makes a tight loop before straightening somewhat and continuing east. The river emerges into the open past the "Bunte Kuh" rock formation, which marks the gateway to the middle Ahr, shortly before Walporzheim.

Village: **Marienthal**

This tiny commune is dominated by an imposing former cloister perched high above the river. The cloister is now jointly owned by four local wineries and wine is produced there under the Weingut Kloster Marienthal label.

- M** Vineyard: **Trotzenberg** curves around a sharp bend in the Ahr and the village of Marienthal itself, catching sunlight along its south-/southwest-facing slopes of weathered grauwacke (upper portion) and loess-loam (lower). Slopes are steep and elevations climb 120-200 m/394-656 ft above sea level. Top wines come from the south-facing portions of the vineyard. These wines can be muscular; those from the lower portions are more supple. The forest directly above the Trotzenberg allows cool air to flow into the vineyard at night, promoting long ripening and boosting aromatic complexity. Frühburgunder is also an important variety on this site.

Village: **Walporzheim**

This village marks the midpoint in the Ahr Valley. Here the valley begins to widen; the steep, terraced slopes flanking the river gradually give way to less severe inclines.

- M** Vineyard: **Kräuterberg** ("slope of herbs") has stony soils with fine, sandy loam mixed into weathered slate and grauwacke. The steepness and warmth of this low, sheltered site gives wines with a fine herbal signature.

- S** Vineyard: At just 0.64 ha/1.58 ac, the **Gärkammer** ("fermentation chamber") is Germany's smallest officially recognized vineyard. This site nests within the larger Kräuterberg, with a protected position, southern exposition and dark slate soils. Together, these factors create a particularly warm mesoclimate. The Gärkammer is planted exclusively to Spätburgunder, some parcels of which are ungrafted. It has been a monopole of Weingut J.J. Adenauer since 1714.



- M** Vineyard: **Alte Lay** is a steep, south-facing slope of grauwacke, sandy loam and slate soils.

From Walporzheim, the Ahr makes a sharp bend northeast to Ahrweiler where vineyards are found on both sides of the river and at a greater distance from it.



Village: **Ahrweiler**

The main village of the Ahr is the spa town of Ahrweiler. It is packed with half-timbered houses and a tourism infrastructure that has rebounded from the 2021 flood faster than most. From here, it is easy to walk straight to the **Rotweinwanderweg** (red wine hiking path) where visitors can experience the terraced vineyards on foot and up close.



Vineyard: **Rosenthal** is a south-/southeastfacing site with a particularly prized choice mid-slope section. Grauwacke and sandy loam dominate to the east, slate and loess-loam to the west. The grauwacke sections give fine-grained, long-aging Spätburgunder and Frühburgunder. The slate and loess-loam area yields more powerful, structured wines.



Vineyard: **Silberberg** is a steep, amphitheater-like site with weathered slate and grauwacke at higher elevations, and loess and clay closer to the river. The aspect is southwest, with steep slopes. Frühburgunder is also an important variety on this site.



Vineyard: The south-facing **Forstberg** extends into a small side valley. Its soils consist of loam mixed with grauwacke and slate and some loess and loess-loam.

The eastern or lower Ahr encompasses the relatively straight, open stretch of lower and more dispersed vineyard area from Bad Neuenahr to Heimersheim.



Village: **Bad Neuenahr**

This spa town basks in the sun. So, too, do its premiere sites. Here, the valley opens broadly and the vineyards are some distance from the river itself. Wines tend to be full bodied and fruity.



Vineyard: **Sonnenberg** (the name means “sun hill”) is composed of two broad, south-facing parcels on a moderate slope. The soils are a mix of grauwacke and slate along with loam, loess and some feldspar-rich sandstone. Both Frühburgunder and Spätburgunder are planted here.



Vineyard: **Schieferlay** faces south-southwest (including side valleys that face west and east). It is known for delivering wines with a wide range of characteristics: fruity and spicy when grown on grauwacke and slate, richer when grown on stony, sandy loess-loam. Frühburgunder is also an important variety on this site.



Village: **Heimersheim**

The valley's easternmost wine town includes broad and gently sloped sites on a mix of grauwacke, slate, loess, loess loam, and, notably, basalt soils. Wines from the basalt-dominant sites of this village tend to be dense and complex. Both Spätburgunder and Frühburgunder are planted in its primary vineyards.



Vineyard: **Landskrone** stretches southeast to southwest, ensuring vines get optimal sunlight throughout the day. Soils are very diverse, ranging from grauwacke to slate, loess and loess-loam, to basalt in the upper part of the vineyard. Wine can be fruity, spicy or full-bodied and powerful.



Vineyard: **Burggarten** has stony soils with a mix of basalt and weathered slate. It is distinguished by a notably warm mesoclimate.