



Open the cover, push the button and start grilling: Ernie is the first public grill in all of Switzerland, connected to the gas mains and fuelled with 100% CO<sub>2</sub> neutral organically produced gas, has its own entry on Google maps and is well known all over the town.

**Bernese Energy & Water (ewb) and Beer Grill AG:**

## Ernie and his mates love getting really heated up

Two years ago, the Berne energy & water company ewb presented the Swiss capital with three public grills. Prototype Ernie, located in the Dalmazimätteli park on the bank of the Aare river, is the first public grill in Switzerland connected to the gas mains, and it runs on 100% CO<sub>2</sub> neutral organic gas. An anniversary provided the occasion for the gift: 175 years ago, the first gas ran from the gasworks to the city's new street lamps. Wernie and Bernie, the other two appliances, are also situated in parks, the Brünnpark and Berner Allmend, the "village green." All three installations rely on sophisticated equipment from Beer Grill AG. The Berne example has caught on: ewb and Beer Grill have received several enquiries for the equipment from interested communities.

**Text: Sabine Born | Photos: Nicole Stadelmann, ewb**



There is a lot of action in Berne’s Dalmazimätteli park on the bank of the Aare river. Boaters are drying their rubber dinghies, people are picnicking, celebrating summer. And, where slackline or yoga fans were ropewalking or bending down to do the “dog looking down” the year before, the pop-up “Park am Wasser” with two bars, a mobile kitchen and lots of sitting accommodations now enlivens the lawn. There was quite a lot be discussed to get this organised. Ernie, however, ignores the squabble. No one challenges Switzerland’s first public gas grill with its own entry in Goggle maps – Ernie enjoys universal acceptance since his inauguration in 2018 and has been an integrated part of life on the riverbank ever since.

Ernie was busy from the beginning: open the lid and push the button to heat the grill, and boaters, Bernese natives, tourists, guests from the youth hostel across the river and other trippers came to BBQ their sausages, chops and steaks or corn cobs, cheese and zucchini. A public grill, free to use for everybody! The distinctive block with its

stainless steel top and Corten steel sides was presented to the City of Berne by Energie Wasser Bern, the Swiss Capital’s municipal energy and water provider on the 175<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first lighting of the gas lanterns in the streets of Berne in 1843. The sturdy device was developed and built by Beer Grill AG form Villmergen, Canton of Aargau. In April 2018, Berne Mayor Alec von Graffenried and Daniel Schafer, CEO of Energie Wasser Bern, heated up the new device for the first time to grill the special inauguration sausage – an XXL pork link draped to form the ewb logo, exactly 175 years after the main valve at the municipal gasworks was opened for the first time to illuminate the streets of the town.

**A great idea from down under**

To be fair, the idea to provide Berne with safe and clean public BBQs came from way down under: on a

Bild: A. Moser/ewb



ewb gave the City of Berne three public gas grills: Mayor Alec von Graffenried and Energie Wasser Bern CEO Daniel Schafer celebrated the first firing up of Ernie in Dalmazimätteli park on the bank of the Aare river by grilling a giant ewb sausage.





Grills for public places – the City of Berne heartily welcomed the ewb concept – last not least because providing the safe appliances eliminated the reason for using individual charcoal devices in parks.



holiday trip through Australia, Cornelia Berger, ewb's marketing and communications manager, enjoyed putting her cheese and eggplant slices on the public grills installed in parks and at highway service areas across the country, available to the public free of charge. «Why don't we have public grills in Berne, I wondered, and when I got back, I presented the idea at the company. However, hardly anybody was really interested – until we had a brainstorming about what we could do to celebrate the upcoming 175th anniversary. And suddenly, the Australian public grills were back on the agenda. And CEO Daniel Schäfer gave me the OK to realise the project.»

And then, things took off. The schedule was tight. Cornelia Berger: «I talked to our workshop manager Markus Aeschlimann about who could supply the equipment. We agreed that we had to adapt a proven product, and, looking for grill manufacturers, we soon landed at Beer Grill AG in Villmergen, who were the only ones to instantly raise their hand and were totally enthusiastic about the idea. We understood each other from the start, and, after quite a number of phone calls, meetings and exchanging emails, Beer rather quickly provided concrete suggestions.» Jean-Rodolphe Hofstetter, Beer Grill's regional manager for central Switzerland, agrees: «We always welcome offbeat ideas. ewb approached us with a definite plan, which we scrutinised and worked on to finally present a grill device that was feasible. Our Technical Manager Benjamin Bihl was quite quick to present his first design. And from the first meeting on, we all knew that the kickoff date was definitely fixed: Ernie had to be heated up on April 25, 2018.»



## More than a grill expert

Beer Grill AG, founded in 1922, is a family business, whose success began with a grill for roasting chickens. Now run in fourth generation by Monika Lang, the company later specialised in equipment for food presentation in buffets and showcases. Beer's list of customers includes Switzerland's major supermarket chains Coop and Migros and, in Germany, the Europapark in Rust near Freiburg, the country's largest amusement and entertainment facility. With their German subsidiary and their own field sales force, Beer are well established in the EU market. Everything is produced at the company headquarters in Villmergen, Aargau. Beer Grill have 50 employees and, due to customer orientation and short decision-making channels, are very flexible. «We are a cool traditional company that also takes good care of its employees», as Jean-Rodolphe Hofstetter, regional manager for central Switzerland, sums it up.



In Berne's Brünnpark, gas grill Wernie had to be replaced by an electric cousin, e-Wernie, when the gas supply was cut off. No problem, the neighbourhood grill masters and mistresses said. Just push the button, and the grill gets hot.



### **Express development**

The biggest challenge, according to Technical Director Benjamin Bihr, was the tight deadline: «We had very little time available. Normally, it takes us six months to develop a new product. We developed, designed and built Ernie in just four weeks. And it passed the field trial on site at



Bernie, the gas grill on "Allmend", the city fairground, was put into service in August, 2020. Jean-Rodolphe Hofstetter, Beer regional manager for central Switzerland: «We not only make equipment for communal catering and the hotel industry, we are also the perfect and reliable partners for special projects.»

Dalmazimätteli. The technical design challenges were heavy, too. Safety was a big issue. Gas flows, the grill gets very hot and is definitely no toy for kids or careless people. It had to be easy to use, be switched on by pushing a button and fitted with a timer. The gas supply is available from 9:00 am to 10:00 pm. The heating cuts off after 20 minutes, and also immediately as soon as the cover is closed. All this had to be taken into account.»

«Vandalism was another problem. The grill had to be fixed to a solid foundation, and the design itself extremely sturdy. There are no screws that might invite to tampering visible on the outside», Andreas Habegger, ewb construction manager says, also responsible for the Ernie project. He contributed the exterior design with the engraved lettering «VougasBärn. 175 Jahre» on the sides. «The city insisted on the rusty look, which is part of its outdoor corporate design that is prominently displayed at several places around town», Habegger told COURMET, «so we used Corten steel. Markus Aeschlimann, head of our workshop, personally crafted the logo. In Dalmazimätteli we had also had to lay a gas pipe from the adjoining street, which required digging a ditch, laying the pipe, filling in the ditch again and finally laying rolled sod.» So, everybody on this project worked at full speed.

**First public electric grill in Brünnpark**

Prototype Ernie was followed by its cousins Wernie and Bernie. The first was installed in Berne’s Brünnpark, Bernie only recently in the Allmend, site of the city’s annual amusement fair. Thus, he will be in the midst of the hustle and bustle of a major popular event, as soon as Corona permits. But its grill hardly gets cold even in days without a major event. And Wernie’s location in the west of town is in the midst of housing estates next to a playground where kids make their sand cakes while their parents grill the sausages that are available at the adjoining kiosk Wernie was put into service.

Wernie seems to be happy, considering he had some bad luck a year and a half after starting, because the gas line supplying his fuel were cut off when the neighbouring disused former school building was demolished. Cornelia Berger: «Gas-powered Wernie was so popular that we had to find an alternative solution: an electric grill – we call him e-Wernie – has replaced his gas-fuelled cousin, who is currently waiting for his next mission at a new site in Markus Aeschliman’s depot.» Obviously, the electric version also has its right to exist and potential for a new market, as electricity is usually easier to provide than gas. But ewb’s job isn’t done by setting up the grills in spring and taking them back to the workshop for maintenance at the end of the season: an ewb team that looks after the public fountains also stops at the grills every day to keep Ernie, Wernie and Bernie in prime shape, emptying the dripping pan, brushing the grill clean and checking that everything is OK.



**Ernie sets an example**

Their good reputation has spread: Ernie, Wernie and Bernie have become a talking point. Beer Grill AG have already produced the first public grill for the town of Interlaken, Canton of Berne, and Energie Wasser Bern have also received enquiries from interested surrounding communities.



Photo: A. Moser/ewb

And, at the end of the season, the main valves are shut and the appliances taken to ewb’s fire hydrant workshop for maintenance. Workshop manager Markus Aeschlimann: «We give them a thorough check and polish everything up so that the appliances are ready for turning on the gas at the beginning of next year’s season.



A powerful team: Ernie, Wernie and Bernie could only be put into service thanks to the full-hearted joint engagement of all the people involved (from left to right): Andreas Habegger, ewb building project manager, Markus Conrad, Beer Grill sales & marketing manager, Cornelia Berger, ewb marketing and communication ewb, Jean-Rodolphe Hofstetter, Beer regional manager, Benjamin Bihl, Beer technical director and member of the board and Markus Aeschlimann, head of the ewb metal workshop.



**More on the subject**

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