

# ALSACE

*Contrary to the New World's belief that they invented the concept, Alsace has built its reputation on varietal wines. This is a region that traditionally produces rich, dry white wines, but they have in recent years become increasingly sweet.*

A FASCINATING MIXTURE of French and German characteristics pervades this northeastern fragment of France, cut off from the rest of the country by the barrier of the Vosges mountains, and separated from neighboring Germany by the mighty Rhine. The colorful combination of cultures is the result of wars and border squabbles that have plagued the ancient province since the Treaty of Westphalia put an end to the Thirty Years' War in 1648. This gave the French sovereignty over Alsace, and royal edicts issued in 1662, 1682, and 1687 proffered free land to anyone willing to restore it to full productivity. As a result of this, Swiss, Germans, Tyroleans, and Lorrainers poured into the region. In 1871, at the end of the Franco-Prussian War, the region once again came under German control, and remained so until the end of World War I, when it once again became French. At this juncture, Alsace began to reorganize the administration of its vineyards in line with the new French AOC system, but in 1940 Germany reclaimed the province from France before this process was complete. Only after World War II, when Alsace reverted to France, was the quest for AOC status resumed, finally being realized in 1962.

The vineyards of Alsace are dotted with medieval towns of cobbled streets and timbered buildings, reflecting—as do the wines—the region's myriad Gallic and Prussian influences. The grapes are a mixture of German, French, and the exotic, with the German Riesling and Gewurztraminer (written without an umlaut in Alsace), the French Pinot Gris, and the decidedly exotic Muscat comprising the four principal varieties. Sylvaner, another German grape, also features to some extent, while other French varieties include Pinot Noir, Pinot Blanc, Auxerrois, and Chasselas. While Gewurztraminer is definitely German (and fine examples are still to be found in the Pfalz, its area of origin), only in Alsace is it quite so spicy. And only in Alsace do you find spicy Pinot Gris, a grape that is neutral elsewhere. Even the Pinot Blanc may produce spicy wines in Alsace, although this is normally due to the inclusion of the fat-spicy Auxerrois grape.



HEADQUARTERS OF HUGEL & FILS

*The small wine shop, cellars, and offices of the merchants Hugel & Fils in Riquewibr are marked by a typically Alsatian sign.*

Very little red wine is made in Alsace. What is produced is intended principally for local restaurants and *Weinstuben*. Ninety percent of the wine in Alsace is white. Traditionally, the style of these very fruity wines is dry, although some varieties, such as the Gewurztraminer, have always been made less dry than others. With the introduction of Vendange Tardive and Sélection de Grains Nobles wines, growers have deliberately reduced yields to chase high sugar levels. This practice has resulted in even the most basic *cuvées* being too rich for a truly dry style, so the tendency to produce less dry wine has now spread to other grape varieties.

## VENDANGE TARDIVE AND SELECTION DE GRAINS NOBLES

“Vendange Tardive,” or late-harvested wines, have occasionally been made by a handful of quality-conscious producers throughout the history of Alsace, among them Hugel & Fils, who had long sold such wines under the German descriptions:

### RECENT ALSACE VINTAGES

**2003** The hottest summer since 1540 (and they really do have records going back that far). Rainfall was virtually nonexistent ( $\frac{4}{8}$  inches between May and September) and temperatures were relentlessly hot, at one point exceeding 104°F (40°C) for almost two weeks continuously. Heat and drought stress caused many vines to shut down their metabolic system during the *véraison*, especially the Riesling, which does not like hot weather. Remarkable as it might seem for such a hot year, some Riesling failed to ripen beyond 8 percent ABV. Indeed, most growers had picked the greater part of their crop by mid-September, whereas the grapes were not physiologically ripe until mid-October. There is no doubt that 2003 was an exceptional and extraordinary vintage, but aside from Pinot Noir (for which this is a benchmark year), and a handful of anomalies, the quality will not be either exceptional or extraordinary.

**2002** The best 2002s have the weight of the 2000s, but with higher alcohol levels and, more importantly, even higher acidity, thus have far more focus and finesse. Riesling definitely fared best, and will benefit from several years of bottle age, but Gewurztraminer and Muscat also performed well. The Gewurztraminers are very aromatic, with broad spice notes, whereas the Muscats are exceptionally fresh and floral. Pinot Gris was less successful. Some extraordinary Sélections de Grains Nobles (*see opposite*) have been produced.

**2001** Most growers and critics rate 2000 over 2001, but size is not everything, and this vintage has the finesse and freshness of fruit that is missing from most of the 2000 bruisers. The hallmark of the 2001 vintage is a spontaneous malolactic that endowed so many of the wines with a special balance. You hardly notice the malolactic in the wines, it is just a creaminess on the finish, more textural than taste and rarely picked up on the nose. Although I am an avid fan of nonmalolactic Alsace wine, this particular phenomenon left the fruit crystal clear, with nice, crisp acidity.

**2000** A generally overrated vintage, but bigger is not better, and there are relatively few stunning nuggets. Lesser varieties, such as Sylvaner and Pinot Blanc, made delicious drinking in their first flush of life but have since tired. The classic varieties lack finesse, although some exceptional Vendanges Tardives (*see opposite*) were made. Excellent reds should have been made, but many were either overextracted or heavily oaked.

**1999** A large crop of easy-drinking wines, with good *vins de garde* from lower-yielding domaines, although most other wines have begun to tire.



LA PETITE VENISE, COLMAR

This charming town, closely associated with the wine trade, boasts many architectural delights as well as a picturesque canal district.

“Auslese” and “Beerenauslese.” Wanting to introduce Francophile terms, the firm pioneered the decree authorizing and controlling the commercial designations of Vendange Tardive (VT) and Sélection de Grains Nobles (SGN). The decree was passed in March 1984, and these styles have been universally produced since the botrytis-rich vintage of 1989.

### DISAPPEARING DRY WINES

Although there has been an explosion in the numbers of producers making and selling VT and SGN wines—from just two or three prior to the decree to literally hundreds—the production of these late-harvest wines remains minute at just 2 percent of Alsace wines as a whole. The vast bulk of Alsace wines have traditionally been dry, but these so-called dry wines have become increasingly sweet over the last 10 years or so, and some are very sweet indeed. So much so that it has become almost impossible for the wine-drinking public to tell whether the wine they are buying is dry or sweet. This is not because Alsace producers deliberately chose to sweeten their wines; it is merely the by-product of good intentions.

All the best producers, including many of the names most commonly encountered on export shelves, have dramatically cut their yields, particularly in the *grand cru* vineyards. Reduced yields produce higher must weights, and in sun-blessed Alsace this soon leads to a choice between overalcoholic wines or significant amounts of residual sugar. However, the *grands crus* and other prized sites are not so much sun-blessed as sun-traps, thus lowering yields in these vineyards has increased must weights to the point where, even at 15 percent alcohol, the wines have so much residual sugar that they are really quite sweet. Throughout Alsace, Gewurztraminer and Tokay-Pinot Gris frequently contain residual sugar of 30 to 40 grams per liter, with 50 grams per liter or more not unusual. To give a few specific examples, Zind-Humbrecht’s Gewurztraminer 2001 Clos Windsbuhl weighed in at 35 grams per liter, while its Pinot Gris 2001 Heimbouurg had 50 grams per liter, and the Pinot Gris 2001 Clos Windsbuhl no less than 70 grams per liter, yet none of these wines is classified as a Vendange Tardive. As I wrote in *The Wines of Alsace* (1993), “Few people command the respect that Léonard Humbrecht does. There is not one *négociant* too large or lofty to acknowledge his tireless enthusiasm and almost evangelical crusade for lower yields.” Zind-Humbrecht pioneered low yields, then other growers saw the extraordinary plaudits and prices the wines attracted and followed suit. The result is a market full of sweet Alsace wine today. Or so it seems. The situation is not quite as bad as it appears, especially in restaurants and on the

## FACTORS AFFECTING TASTE AND QUALITY



### LOCATION

The northeast corner of France, flanked by the Vosges mountains and bordered by the Rhine and Germany’s Black Forest. Six rivers rise in the fir-capped Vosges, flowing through the 60-mile (97-kilometer) strip of vineyards to feed the River Ill.



### CLIMATE

Protected from the full effect of Atlantic influences by the Vosges mountains, these vineyards are endowed with an exceptional amount of warm sunshine and a very low rainfall. The rain clouds tend to shed their load on the western side of the Vosges as they climb over the mountain range.



### ASPECT

The vineyards nestle on the lower east-facing slopes of the Vosges at a relatively high altitude of about 600–1,200 feet (180–360 meters), and at an angle ranging between 25° on the lower slopes and 65° on the higher ones. The best vineyards have a south or southeast aspect, but many good growths are also found on north- and northeast-facing slopes. In many cases the vines are cultivated on the top as well as the sides of a spur, but the best sites are always protected by forested tops. Too much cultivation of the fertile plains in the 1970s has led to recent overproduction problems. However, some vineyards on the plains do yield very good-quality wines due to favorable soil types.



### SOIL

Alsace has the most complex geological and solumological situation of all the great wine areas of France. The three basic

morphological and structural areas are: the siliceous edge of the Vosges; limestone hills; and the hydrous alluvial plain. The soils of the first include: colluvium and fertile sand over granite, stony-clay soil over schist, various fertile soils over volcanic sedimentary rock, and poor, light, sandy soil over sandstone; of the second, dry, stony, and brown alkaline soil over limestone, brown sandy calcareous soils over sandstone and limestone, heavy fertile soils over clay-and-limestone, and brown alkaline soil over chalky marl; and of the third, sandy-clay and gravel over alluvium, brown decalcified loess, and dark calcareous soils over loess.



### VITICULTURE AND VINIFICATION

The vines are trained high on wires to avoid spring ground frost. There are a high number of organic and biodynamic producers. Traditionally, the wines are fermented as dry as possible (*see below*). Although very few have a strict no-malolactic policy (Trimbach being one of the exceptions), the general trend is to avoid it if possible. In years like 2001, however, it happens spontaneously during the fermentation process and is widespread, although the results are more creamy-tactile than buttery aromas.



### GRAPE VARIETIES

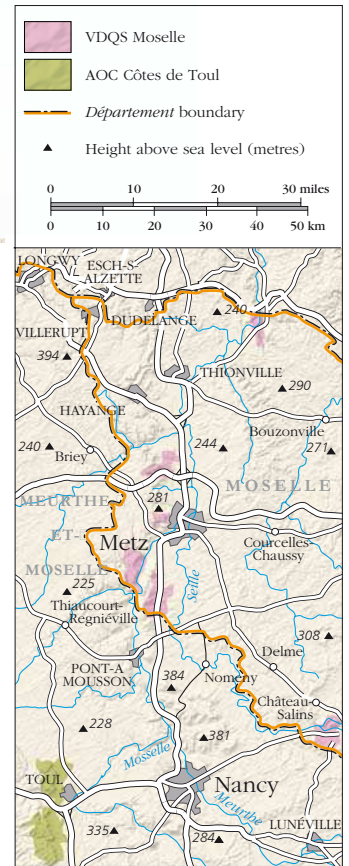
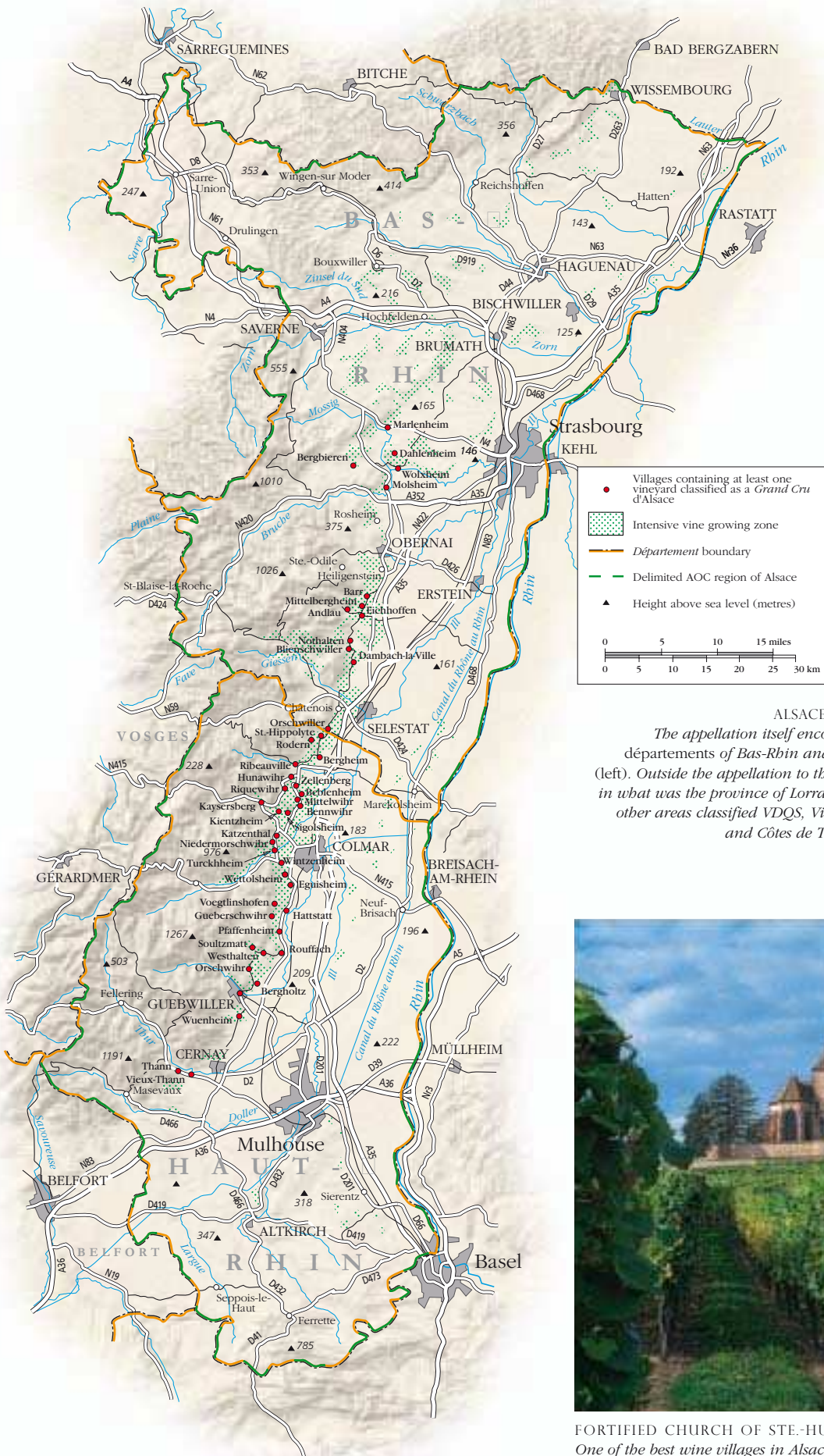
#### Primary varieties:

Gewurztraminer, Muscat (Blanc/Rosé à Petits Grains, and Ottone), Pinot Gris, Riesling  
**Secondary varieties:** Auxerrois, Chardonnay, Chasselas, Pinot Blanc, Pinot Noir, Savagnin Rosé, Sylvaner

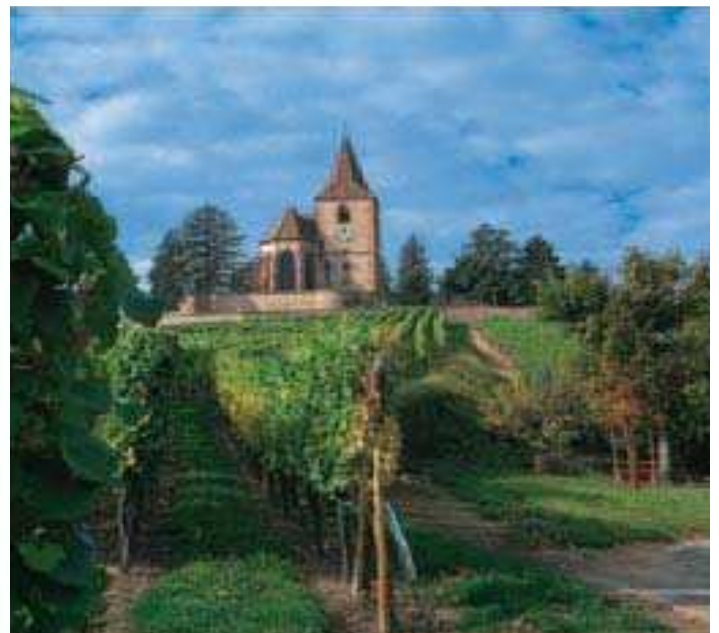


PINOT GRIS, ROTENBERG

A view of Turckbeim from the steep slopes of Rotenberg vineyard in Wintzenheim, where Domaine Humbrecht produces fabulously fat Pinot Gris wines with powerful aromatic qualities.



ALSACE, see also p.55  
 The appellation itself encompasses the départements of Bas-Rhin and Haut-Rhin (left). Outside the appellation to the northwest, in what was the province of Lorraine, are two other areas classified VDQS, Vin de Moselle and Côtes de Toul (above).



FORTIFIED CHURCH OF STE.-HUNA, HUNAWIHR  
 One of the best wine villages in Alsace, Hunawihr is most famous for its Clos Ste.-Hune vineyard, from which Trimbach consistently produces great Riesling.

best export markets. This is because the phenomenon applies primarily to the best producers and vineyards, particularly *grands crus*. These are the wines that make the headlines, are reviewed and entered into competitions. However, putting the problem into perspective does not help those who buy the best Alsace wines, or order a Riesling in a restaurant to go with fish only to find it is as sweet as Sauternes.

The simple solution would have been to introduce an obligatory dry wine designation, but in 2004 the opposite was accomplished when it was ruled that wines with a minimum of 12 grams per liter (9 grams per liter for Riesling) of residual sugar must be labeled “*moelleux*.” If a wine has more than 6 grams per liter of total acidity, then the minimum residual sugar rises to 18 grams per liter (12 grams per liter for Riesling). The trouble with defining minimum residual sugar content for a sweet designation is that it does not mean that all those wines that do not qualify are in fact dry. The introduction of *moelleux* has reduced, not

solved, the dilemma facing Alsace consumers, but when it comes to French bureaucracy, this is about as good as it gets.

## THE WINES OF LORRAINE

Viticulture in these parts dates back to Roman times, and when the *départements* of Meurthe-et-Moselle and Moselle formed part of the old Province of Lorraine, their vineyards covered some 74,000 acres (30,000 hectares). This area was more than twice that of neighboring Alsace today. They currently cover a mere 222 acres (90 hectares), virtually all of which are in the Meurthe-et-Moselle *département*. The viticultural outcrops of the Moselle are particularly sparse and make a sorry sight compared to their former glory; today it is the *Route de la Mirabelle* (damson road), not the *Route du Vin* (wine road), that is flourishing. Growing damsons, it would seem, is far less risky than growing vines, although most people find that working in the industrialized town of Metz is more profitable.

## THE GRANDS CRUS OF ALSACE

In the 2001 revised edition of this encyclopedia, I wrote: “The original *grand cru* legislation was introduced in 1975, but it was not until 1983 that the first list of 25 *grand cru* sites appeared. Three years later a further 23 were added, and there are now 50, although this number is the subject of much controversy, not least because it excludes what is acknowledged as one of the most famous, truly great *crus* of Alsace—Kaefferkopf in Ammerschwihr. While the *grands crus* will be of long-term benefit to both Alsace and the consumer, the limitation of *grand cru* to pure varietal wines of just four grapes—Muscat, Riesling, Pinot Gris, and Gewurztraminer—robs us of the chance to drink the finest quality Pinot Noir, Pinot Blanc, Sylvaner, and Chasselas.

“Even if these wines might not be in the same league as the big four, it seems wholly unreasonable to prevent their cultivation for AOC Alsace Grand Cru when market forces dictate that most growers will, in any case, plant the four classic varieties in their most prized *grand cru* sites because they fetch the highest prices. If, however, a grower on a *grand cru* is determined to make the best possible wine from any of the less lucrative varieties or, indeed, to produce a classic blend, why should we, the buyers, be prevented from knowing where the grapes came from because the law prevents the grower from mentioning *grand cru* on the label of such wines?”

I have been aware of these shortcomings since the publication of *The Wines of Alsace* (1993), so it was particularly heartening when in 2000 various impeccable sources informed me that the *grand cru* appellation would shortly be opened up to include varieties other than the so-called noble grapes. In 2004 Zotzenberg became the first (for Sylvaner), followed by Altenberg de Bergheim (for a blend of grapes), and, having cleared that hurdle, the INAO

was forced to give the go-ahead for *grand cru* application.

It will not stop there. There is talk of allowing Pinot Noir for Steinklotz, and if Steinklotz is classified for Pinot Noir, then Vorbourg cannot be far behind. The ball will just keep rolling because if Sylvaner from Zotzenberg, why not Chasselas from Hengst? There will be fears that these wines will dilute the status of *grand cru*, and that may indeed happen, but it does not matter. In the long term, it is the market that dictates status, not a decree. Reputations have to be earned, not bestowed. That is why the cheapest wine from Zind-Humbrecht is more expensive than some producers’ *grands crus*. The classification Alsace Grand Cru was late in coming, but happened in a rush, leapfrogging any thought of an intermediate *premier cru* appellation, and the delimitation of many sites was a joke. However, the market is already starting to separate the chaff from the wheat and the same will happen to classified wines made from less classic varieties and grape blends.

Under the same law that permits local *syndicats* of growers to press for different wine styles under their own particular *grand cru*, they are also permitted to impose more stringent quality criteria on a growth-by-growth basis. Where the *syndicats* have actually done this, you will find the new specifications listed below. Where there are no new specifications, the criteria laid down in the *grand cru* decree applies, and that is as follows. Riesling and Muscat: maximum yield of 66hl/ha (basic limit of 55hl/ha plus 11hl/ha PLC); minimum ripeness equivalent to 11% at time of harvest, and chaptalization up to 1.5% allowed. Pinot Gris and Gewurztraminer: maximum yield of 66hl/ha (basic limit of 55hl/ha plus 11hl/ha PLC); minimum ripeness equivalent to 12.5% at time of harvest, and chaptalization up to 1.5% allowed. Note that all ripeness levels are expressed as percent ABV.

### ALTENBERG DE BERGBIETEN

#### Bergbieten

An exceptional growth, but not a truly great one. Its gypsum-permeated, clayey-marl soil is best for Gewurztraminer, which has a very floral character with immediate appeal, yet can improve for several years in bottle. The wines are now allowed to be blended from different varieties. The local *syndicat* has renounced the PLC, limiting the yield to an absolute maximum of 55hl/ha. It has also outlawed all chaptalization, and has increased the minimum

ripeness of Riesling and Muscat from 11% to 12%, and that of Pinot Gris and Gewurztraminer from 12.5% to 14%.

🍷 Etienne Loue • Frédéric Mochel

### ALTENBERG DE BERGHEIM

#### Bergheim

This Altenberg has been a true *grand cru* since as long ago as the 12th century, and its calcareous clay soil is best suited to Gewurztraminer, which is tight and austere in youth, but gains in depth and bouquet with

aging. This *cru* will apply for classification of wines made from a blend of grapes.

🍷 Marcel Deiss • Louis Freyburger

### ALTENBERG DE WOLXHEIM

#### Wolxheim

Even though it was appreciated by Napoleon, this calcareous clay *cru* cannot honestly be described as one of the greatest growths of Alsace, although it has a certain reputation for its Riesling.

🍷 Zoeller

## BRAND

Turckheim



This *cru* might legitimately be called Brand New, the original Brand being a tiny *cru* of little more than 7½ acres (3 hectares). In 1924 it was expanded to include surrounding sites: Steinglitz, Kirchthal, Schneckenberg, Weingarten, and Jebstal, each with its own fine reputation. By 1980 it had grown to 74 acres (30 hectares) and it is now almost double that. This confederation of *lieux-dits* is one of the most magnificent sites in the entire region, and the quality of the wines consistently excites me—great Riesling, Pinot Gris, and Gewurztraminer. The local *syndicat* has reduced chaptalization of Riesling and Muscat from the allowable 1.5% to 1%, and that of Pinot Gris and Gewurztraminer from 1.5% to 0.5%. It has also increased the minimum ripeness of Riesling and Muscat from 11% to 11.5%, and that of Pinot Gris and Gewurztraminer from 12.5% to 13.5%.

🍷 *Albert Boxler • Dopff Au Moulin • Jos Meyer*  
 ⓑ • *Preiss-Zimmer • Zind-Humbrecht* ⓑ

## BRUDERTHAL

Molsheim

Riesling and Gewurztraminer—reputedly the best varieties—occupy most of this calcareous clay *cru*. I have tasted good, fruity Riesling from Bernard Weber, which was elegant, but not really top stuff. Gérard Neumeyer used not to impress me at all, but his genuinely dry 2001 Pinot Gris was one of the best Bruderthal I have tasted. The local *syndicat* has renounced all chaptalization. It has also increased the minimum ripeness of Riesling and Muscat from 11% to 12%, and that of Pinot Gris and Gewurztraminer from 12.5% to 13%.

🍷 *Alain Klengenfus • Gérard Neumeyer*

## EICHBERG

Eguisheim

This calcareous clay *cru* has the lowest rainfall in Colmar and produces very aromatic wines of exceptional delicacy, yet great longevity. Famous for Gewurztraminer, which is potentially the finest in Alsace, Eichberg is also capable of making superb long-lasting Riesling and Pinot Gris. The local *syndicat* has reduced chaptalization of Riesling from 1.5% to 1%, and outlawed it completely for Pinot Gris and Gewurztraminer. It has also increased the minimum ripeness of Riesling from 11% to 11.5%, and Pinot Gris and Gewurztraminer from 12.5% to 13%. The chaptalization and minimum ripeness of Muscat remain the same.

🍷 *Charles Baur* ⓑ • *Emile Beyer • Léon Beyer* (not sold as such, Beyer's Cuvée des Comtes d'Eguisheim is 100% pure Eichberg) • *Paul Ginglinger • Albert Hertz*

## ENGELBERG

### Dahlenheim and Scharrachbergheim

One of the least-encountered *grands crus*, this vineyard gets long hours of sunshine and is supposed to favor Gewurztraminer and Riesling; but few of the wines I have tasted suggest anything special.

🍷 *Jean-Pierre Bechtold*

## FLORIMONT

### Ingersheim and Katzenthal

Mediterranean flora abounds on the sun-blessed, calcareous clay slopes of this *cru*—hence its name, meaning “hill of flowers”—the excellent microclimate producing some stunning Riesling and Gewurztraminer.

🍷 *François Bohn • René Meyer • Bruno Sorg*

## FRANKSTEIN

### Dambach-la-Ville

Not so much one vineyard as four separate spurs, the warm, well-drained, granite soil of this *cru* is best suited to the production of delicate, racy Riesling, and elegant Gewurztraminer. J. Hauller used to be by far and away the best producer of Frankstein, for both the Riesling and Gewurztraminer.

🍷 *Charles & Dominique Frey* ⓑ • *Ruhlman • Schaeffer-Woerly*

## FROEHN

### Zellenberg

This *cru* sweeps up and around the southern half of the hill upon which Zellenberg is situated. The marly-clay soil suits Muscat, Gewurztraminer, and Pinot Gris, in that order, and the wines are typically rich and long-lived. The local *syndicat* has outlawed all chaptalization, and increased the minimum ripeness of Riesling and Muscat from 11% to 12%, and that of Pinot Gris and Gewurztraminer from 12.5% to 13.5%.

🍷 *J. P. & J. F. Becker* ⓑ

## FURSTENTUM

### Kientzheim and Sigolsheim



This estate is best for Riesling, although the vines have to be well established to take full advantage of the calcareous soil. Gewurztraminer can also be fabulous—in an elegant, more floral, less spicy style—and Pinot Gris excels even when the vines are very young. The local *syndicat* has reduced all chaptalization from the allowable 1.5% to 0.5%. It has also increased the minimum ripeness of Riesling and Muscat from 11% to 11.5%, and Pinot Gris and Gewurztraminer from 12.5% to 13%.

🍷 *Paul Blanck* ⓑ • *Bott-Geyl • Albert Mann • Weinbach/Faller*

## GEISBERG

Ribeauvillé

Geisberg has been well documented since as long ago as 1308 as Riesling country par

excellence. The calcareous, stony-and-clayey sandstone soil produces fragrant, powerful, and long-lived wines of great finesse. Trimbach owns vines here, and in a contiguous plot with vines in Osterberg, the whole of which produces the superb Riesling Cuvée Frédéric Émile. The local *syndicat* has reduced the chaptalization of Riesling, Pinot Gris, and Gewurztraminer from 1.5% to 0.5%. It has also increased the minimum ripeness of Riesling from 11% to 11.5%, and that of Pinot Gris and Gewurztraminer from 12.5% to 13%. The chaptalization and minimum ripeness of Muscat remain the same.

🍷 *Robert Faller • André Kientzler*

## GLOECKELBERG

### Rodern and St-Hippolyte

This clay-granite *cru* is known for its light, elegant, and yet persistent style of wine, with Gewurztraminer and Pinot Gris the most successful varieties. The local *syndicat* has halved the PLC, thereby reducing the absolute maximum yield allowed to 60.5hl/ha.

🍷 *Koberlé-Kreyer*

## GOLDERT

### Gueberschwihr



Dating back to the year 750, and recognized on export markets as long ago as 1728, Goldert derives its name from the color of its wines, the most famous of which is the golden Gewurztraminer. The Muscat grape variety also excels on the calcareous clay soil, and whatever the varietal the style of wine is rich and spicy with a luscious creaminess.

🍷 *Ernest Burn (Clos St-Imer) • Zind-Humbrecht* ⓑ

## HATSCHBOURG

### Hattstatt and Voegtlinshoffen

Gewurztraminer from this south-facing, calcareous marl soil slope excels, but Pinot Gris and Riesling are also excellent.

🍷 *Buecher-Fix • André Hartmann • Lucien Meyer*

## HENGST

### Wintzenheim

Hengst Gewurztraminer is a very special, complex wine, seeming to combine the classic qualities of this variety with the orange zest and rose-petal aromas more characteristic of the Muscat grape variety. But Hengst is a very flexible *cru*. Besides Gewurztraminer, its calcareous marl soil also produces top-quality Muscat, Riesling, and Pinot Gris. The local *syndicat* has renounced all chaptalization. It has also increased the minimum ripeness of Riesling and Muscat from 11% to 12%, and that of Pinot Gris and Gewurztraminer from 12.5% to 13%.

🍷 *Jos Meyer* ⓑ • *Albert Mann • Zind-Humbrecht* ⓑ

## KAEFFERKOPF

### Ammerschwihr

Although not technically a *grand cru*, this is one of the greatest Alsace *crus*, superior to many of the officially nominated sites, and after a long hagggle, will shortly be classified. Possibly even by the time this edition is published. Kaefferkopf was legally delimited in 1932. However, the bureaucrats refused to recognize all of it because it is not geologically uniform. Furthermore, they refused to recognize the traditional Kaefferkopf practice of blending varieties—usually Riesling and Gewurztraminer. However, after the brilliant, but fanatical Jean-Michel Deiss bulldozed his way through this bureaucratic nonsense with his sensational, succulently sweet, classic blends under the Altenberg de Bergheim Grand Cru, INAO had no option but to agree that Kaefferkopf blends may be classified as a *grand cru*. However, bureaucrats being what they are, they only did this on the proviso that the borders of Grand Cru Kaefferkopf should not be as large as the 1932 delimitation. This desire to keep *grands crus* as small, authentic, and as geologically homogenous as possible would be admirable if it had been applied to all the other 49 *grands crus*, but some *grands crus* are geologically less uniform and have swollen well beyond their historical boundaries. Brand, for example, is 20 times its original designated size. After unreasonably withholding *grand cru* status from the growers on Kaefferkopf for so long, and unreasonably allowing the growers on what is now Brand to get away with murder, the decent thing would have been to recognize the 1932 delimitation.

🍷 J. B. Adam (Jean-Baptiste) • Marcel Freyburger **B** • Meyer-Fonné (Nicolas) • Martin Schaetzel **B** • Maurice Schoech

## KANZLERBERG

### Bergheim

Although this tiny *cru* adjoins the western edge of Altenberg de Bergheim, the wines of its gypsum-permeated, clayey-marl *terroir* are so different from those of the Altenberg growth that the vinification of the two sites has always been kept separate. The wines have the same potential longevity, but the Kanzlerbergs are fuller and fatter. Kanzlerberg has a reputation for both Riesling and Gewurztraminer, but their ample weight can be at odds with their varietal aromas when young, and both wines require plenty of bottle age to achieve their true finesse. The local *syndicat* has renounced the PLC, limiting the yield to an absolute maximum of 55hl/ha. It has also outlawed all chaptalization, and increased the minimum ripeness of Riesling and Muscat from 11% to 12%, and that of Pinot Gris and Gewurztraminer from 12.5% to 14%.

🍷 Louis Freyburger **B** • Sylvie Spielmann **B**

## KASTELBERG

### Andlau

One of the oldest vineyards in Alsace, Kastelberg has been planted with vines since the Roman occupation. Situated on a small hill next to Wiebelsberg, Andlau's other *grand cru*, the very steep, schistous *terroir* has long proved to be an excellent site for racy and delicate Riesling, although the wines can be very closed when young and require a few years to develop their lovely bottle aromas. Kastelberg wines remain youthful for 20 years or more, and even show true *grand cru* quality in so-called "off" years.

🍷 Guy Wach

## KESSLER

### Guebwiller

Though a *cru* more premier than grand (the truly famous sites of Guebwiller being Kitterlé and Wanne, the latter not classified), the central part of Kessler is certainly deserving of *grand cru* status. Here, the vines grow in a well-protected, valleylike depression, one side of which has a very steep, south-southeast facing slope. Kessler is renowned for its full, spicy, and mellow Gewurztraminer, but Riesling can be much the greater wine. The local *syndicat* has renounced the PLC, limiting the yield to an absolute maximum of 55hl/ha. It has also outlawed all chaptalization, and increased the minimum ripeness of Riesling and Muscat from 11% to 11.5%, and that of Pinot Gris and Gewurztraminer from 12.5% to 13.5%.

🍷 Dirler-Cadé **B** • Schlumberger

## KIRCHBERG DE BARR

### Barr

The true *grands crus* of Barr are Gaensbroennel and Zisser, but these have been incorporated into the calcareous marl *terroir* of Kirchberg, which is known for its full-bodied yet delicate wines that exhibit exotic spicy fruit, a characteristic that applies not only to Pinot Gris and Gewurztraminer but also to Riesling.

🍷 Stoeffler **C**

## KIRCHBERG DE RIBEAUVILLÉ

### Ribeauvillé

One of the few *lieux-dits* that has regularly been used to market Alsace wine over the centuries. It is famous for Riesling, which typically is firm, totally dry, and long-lived, developing intense gasoline characteristics with age. Kirchberg de Ribeauvillé also produces great Muscat with a discreet, yet very specific, orange-and-musk aroma, excellent acidity, and lots of finesse. The local *syndicat* has reduced the chaptalization of Riesling, Pinot Gris and Gewurztraminer from 1.5% to 0.5%. It has also increased the minimum ripeness of Riesling from 11% to 11.5%, and that of Pinot Gris and Gewurztraminer from 12.5% to 13%. The chaptalization and minimum ripeness of Muscat remain the same.

🍷 André Kientzler • Jean Sipp • Louis Sipp

## KITTERLÉ

### Guebwiller



Of all the grape varieties that are grown on this volcanic sandstone *terroir*, it is the crisp, gasolinelike Riesling that shows greatest finesse. Gewurztraminer and Pinot Gris are also very good in a gently rich, supple, and smoky-mellow style. The local *syndicat* has renounced

the PLC, limiting the yield to an absolute maximum of 55hl/ha. It has also outlawed all chaptalization, and has increased the minimum ripeness of Riesling and Muscat from 11% to 11.5%, and that of Pinot Gris and Gewurztraminer from 12.5% to 13.5%.

🍷 Schlumberger

## MAMBOURG

### Sigolsheim

The reputation of this *cru* has been documented since 783, when it was known as the "Sigoltesberg." A limestone *coteau*, with calcareous clay topsoil, Mambourg stretches for three-quarters of a mile (over a kilometer), penetrating farther into the plain than any other spur of the Vosges foothills. Its vineyards, supposedly the warmest in Alsace, produce wines that tend to be rich and warm, mellow and liquorous. Both the Gewurztraminer and the Pinot Gris have plenty of smoky-rich spice in them. The local *syndicat* has reduced chaptalization of Riesling, Pinot Gris and Gewurztraminer from 1.5% to 0.5% and increased the minimum ripeness of Riesling from 11% to 12%, and that of Pinot Gris and Gewurztraminer from 12.5% to 13%.

🍷 Jean-Marc Bernhard • Marcel Deiss **B** • Daniel Fritz • Pierre Sparr • Marc Tempé **B**

## MANDELBERG

### Mittelwihr and Beblenheim

Mandelberg—"almond tree hill"—has been planted with vines since Gallo-Roman times, and used as an appellation since 1925. Its reputation has been built on Riesling, although today more Gewurztraminer is planted; high-quality Pinot Gris and Muscat is also produced. The local *syndicat* has renounced the PLC, limiting the yield to an absolute maximum of 55hl/ha. It has also outlawed chaptalization for Pinot Gris and Gewurztraminer, increasing the minimum ripeness for these two grapes from 12.5% to 13%. The minimum ripeness for Riesling and Muscat remains at 11%, and the possibility of chaptalization is retained exclusively for these two varieties.

🍷 Hartweg • Frédéric Mallo • André Stentz **C**

## MARCKRAIN

### Bennewihr and Sigolsheim

Markrain is the east-facing slope of the Mambourg, which overlooks Sigolsheim. The soil is a limestone-marl with oolite pebbles interlayering the marl beds. It is mostly planted with Gewurztraminer, with some Pinot Gris and a few Muscat vines. The Bennewihr *coopérative* usually makes a decent Pinot Gris under the Bestheim label. The local *syndicat* has reduced the chaptalization of Pinot Gris and Gewurztraminer from an allowable 1.5% to 1%, and increased the minimum ripeness of these grapes from 12.5% to 13%. The chaptalization and minimum ripeness of Riesling and Muscat remain the same.

🍷 Bestheim

## MOENCHBERG

### Andlau and Eichhoffen

Moenchberg—"monk's hill"—was owned by a Benedictine order until 1097, when it was taken over by the inhabitants of Eichhoffen. With its clayey-marl soil, excellent exposure to the sun, and very hot, dry microclimate, this *cru* has built up a reputation for firm, intensely fruity, and very racy Riesling. Excellent though it is,

however, the finest Moenchberg wines I have tasted have been Pinot Gris. Not to be confused with the equally excellent *grand cru* Muenchberg of Nothalten.

🍷 *André & Rémy Gresser*

## MUENCHBERG

Nothalten

This sunny vineyard belonging to the abbey of Baumgarten, whose monks tended vines in the 12th century, nestles under the protection of the Undersberg, a 2,950-foot (900-meter) peak in the Vosges mountains. The striking style of Muenchberg's wines is due in part to the special microclimate it enjoys, and also to the ancient, unique, and pebbly volcanic sandstone soil. The wines are now allowed to be blended from different varieties. The local *syndicat* has renounced the PLC, limiting the yield to an absolute maximum of 55hl/ha. It has also outlawed all chaptalization and has increased the minimum ripeness of Riesling and Muscat from 11% to 12%, and that of Pinot Gris and Gewurztraminer from 12.5% to 14%.

🍷 *André Ostertag* • *Jean-Luc Schwartz*

## OLLWILLER

Wuenheim



Ollwiller's annual rainfall is one of the lowest in France, with Riesling and Gewurztraminer faring best on its clayey-sand soil—although it is not one of the greatest *grands crus*, and the recommended wines are rated in that context.

🍷 *Château Ollwiller* • *CV Vieil Armand*

## OSTERBERG

Ribeauvillé

This stony-clay growth abuts Geisberg, another Ribeauvillé *grand cru*, and makes equally superb Riesling country. The wines age very well, developing the gasoline nose of a fine Riesling. Trimbach owns vines here, and in a contiguous plot with vines in Geisberg, the whole of which produces the superb Riesling Cuvée Frédéric Émile. Gewurztraminer and Pinot Gris also fare well.

🍷 *André Kientzler* • *Louis Sipp*

## PFERSIGBERG *also spelled* PFERSICHBURG & PFIRSIGBERG

Eguisheim and Wettolsheim

A calcareous sandstone soil well-known for its full, aromatic, and long-lived Gewurztraminer—although Pinot Gris, Riesling, and Muscat also fare well here. The wines all share a common succulence of fruit acidity, and possess exceptional aromas. The local *syndicat* has reduced chaptalization of Riesling from 1.5% to 1% and outlawed it completely for Pinot Gris and Gewurztraminer. It has also increased the minimum ripeness of Riesling from 11% to 11.5%, and that of Pinot Gris and Gewurztraminer from 12.5% to 13%. The chaptalization and minimum ripeness of Muscat remain the same.

🍷 *Charles Baur* • *Emile Beyer* • *Léon Beyer* (not sold as such, but Beyer's Cuvée Particulière is 100% pure Pfersigberg) • *Pierre Freudenreich* • *Bruno Sorg*

## PFINGSTBERG

Orschwihr

All four *grand cru* varieties grow well on the calcareous-marl and clayey-sandstone of this *cru*, producing wines of typically floral aroma, combined with rich, honeyed fruit. The local *syndicat* has renounced all chaptalization. It has also increased the minimum ripeness of Riesling and Muscat from 11% to 12%, and that of Pinot Gris and Gewurztraminer from 12.5% to 13.5%.

🍷 *Lucien Albrecht* • *François Braun* • *François Schmitt* • *Albert Ziegler*

## PRAELATENBERG

Kintzheim and Orschwihr

Although Praelatenberg dominates the north side of the village of Orschwihr, virtually all the *cru* actually falls within the boundary of Kintzheim, 1 mile (1.5 kilometers) away. The locals say that all four varieties grow to perfection here, but Pinot Gris has been best in my experience, followed by Riesling, and then Gewurztraminer. The local *syndicat* has reduced all chaptalization from an allowable 1.5% to 1%. It has also increased the minimum ripeness of Riesling and Muscat from 11% to 11.5%, and that of Pinot Gris and Gewurztraminer from 12.5% to 13%.

🍷 *Allimant-Laugner* • *Jean Becker* • *Engel Frères* • *Siffert*

## RANGEN

Thann and Vieux-Thann

The 15th-century satirist Sebastian Brant, writing about the little-known travels of Hercules through Alsace, reveals that the mythical strongman once drank so much Rangen that he fell asleep. So ashamed was he on waking that he ran away, leaving behind his bludgeon—the club which today appears on Colmar's coat of arms.

So steep that it can be cultivated only when terraced, Rangen's volcanic soil is very poor organically, but extremely fertile minerally. It also drains very quickly, and its dark color makes it almost too efficient in retaining the immense

heat that pours into this sweltering sun-trap. However, this fierce heat and rapid drainage are essentially responsible for the regular stressing of the vine, which is what gives the wines their famed power and pungency. Rangen produces great wines even in the poorest years, making it a true *grand cru* in every sense.

🍷 *Schoffit* • *Wolfberger* • *Zind-Humbrecht*

## ROSACKER

Hunawihr

First mentioned in the 15th century, this *cru* has built up a fine reputation for Riesling, but one wine—Trimbach's Clos Ste.-Hune—is almost every year far and away the finest Riesling in Alsace. Occasionally other producers make an exceptional vintage that may challenge it, but none has consistently matched Clos Ste.-Hune's excellence. Trimbach makes no mention of Rosacker on its label because the family believes, as do a small number of internationally known producers, who avoid using the term, that much of Rosacker should not be classified as *grand cru* (although Trimbach used to sell Clos Ste.-Hune *grand cru* in the 1940s). Rosacker's calcareous and marly-clay soil is rich in magnesium and makes fine Gewurztraminer as well as top Riesling. The local *syndicat* has reduced chaptalization of Riesling, Pinot Gris, and Gewurztraminer from 1.5% to 1%. It has also increased the minimum ripeness of Riesling from 11% to 11.5%, and that of Pinot Gris and Gewurztraminer from 12.5% to 13%. The chaptalization and minimum ripeness of Muscat remain the same.

🍷 *C. V. de Hunawihr* • *Roger Jung* • *F. E. Trimbach* (Clos Ste.-Hune)

## SAERING

Guebwiller

This vineyard, first documented in 1250 and marketed since 1830, is situated below Kessler and Kitterlé, Guebwiller's other two *grands crus*. Like Kessler, this *cru* is more *premier* than *grand* (yet still better than many of the *grands crus*). The floral, fruity, and elegant Riesling is best, especially in hot years, when it becomes exotically peachy, but Muscat and Gewurztraminer can also be fine.

🍷 *Dirler-Cadé* • *Loberger* • *Schlumberger*



THE VILLAGE OF RIQUEWIHR

Alsace is full of beautiful villages, but Riquewihr is one of the most delightful, having avoided much of the commercial exploitation that has made nearby Ribeauvillé a more thriving yet less intimate place.

## SCHLOSSBERG

Kientzheim and Kaysersberg

The production of Schlossberg was controlled by charter in 1928, and in 1975 it became the first Alsace *grand cru*. Although its granite *terroir* looks equally shared by the two sites, 1¼ acres (less than half a hectare) belongs to Kaysersberg. Schlossberg is best for Riesling, but Gewurztraminer can be successful in so-called “off” vintages. The wine is full of elegance and finesse, whether produced in a classic, restrained style, as Blanck often is, or with the more exuberant fruit that typifies Weinbach/Faller. The local *syndicat* has reduced the chaptalization of Pinot Gris and Gewurztraminer from an allowable 1.5% to 0.5%, and increased the minimum ripeness of these grapes from 12.5% to 13%. The chaptalization and minimum ripeness of Riesling and Muscat remain the same.

🍷 Paul Blanck ① • Joseph Fritsch • Albert Mann • Weinbach/Faller • Ziegler-Mauler

## SCHOENENBOURG

Riquewihr



This vineyard has always had a reputation for producing great Riesling and Muscat, although modern wines show Riesling to be supreme, with Pinot Gris vying with Muscat for the number two spot. Schoenenbourg’s gypsum-permeated, marly-and-sandy soil produces very rich, aromatic wines in a *terroir* that has potential for VT and SGN.

🍷 J. P. & J. F. Becker ② • Marcel Deiss ② • Roger Jung

## SOMMERBERG

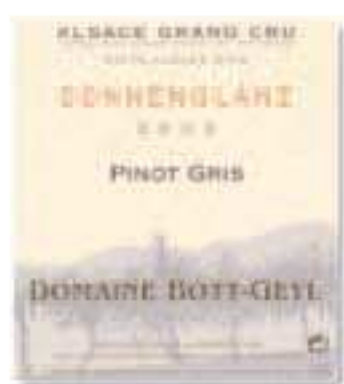
Niedermorschwihr and Katzenthal

Known since 1214, the fame of this *cru* was such that a strict delimitation was in force by the 17th century. Situated in the foothills leading up to Trois-Épis, its granite soil is supposed to be equally excellent for all four classic varieties, although Riesling stands out in my experience. Sommerberg wines are typically aromatic, with an elegant succulence of fruit.

🍷 Albert Boxler

## SONNENGLANZ

Beblenheim



In 1935, two years after Kaefferkopf was defined by tribunal at Colmar, Sonnenglanz received a similar certification. Unlike at Kaefferkopf, however, its producers failed to exploit the appellation until 1952, when the local cooperative was formed. But Sonnenglanz is a *grand cru* and Kaefferkopf technically is not. Once renowned for its Sylvaner, the calcareous clay soil of Sonnenglanz is best suited to Gewurztraminer and Pinot Gris, which can be very ripe and golden in color.

🍷 J. P. & J. F. Becker ② • Bott-Geyl • Hartweg

## SPIEGEL

Bergholtz and Guebwiller

Known for only 50 years or so, this is not one of the great *grands crus* of Alsace. However, its sandstone and marl *terroir* can produce fine, racy Riesling with a delicate bouquet and good, though not great, Gewurztraminer and Muscat. The local *syndicat* has renounced all chaptalization of Pinot Gris and Gewurztraminer, but permissible chaptalization of Riesling and Muscat remains at 1.5%. It has also increased the minimum ripeness of Pinot Gris and Gewurztraminer from 12.5% to 13.5%, but that of Riesling and Muscat remains 11%.

🍷 Dirlir • Loberger • Eugène Meyer ② • Wolfberger

## SPOREN

Riquewihr

Sporen is one of the truly great *grands crus*, its stony, clayey-marl soil producing wines of remarkable finesse. Historically, this *terroir* is famous for Gewurztraminer and Pinot Gris, which occupy virtually all of its vineyard today, but it was also traditional to grow a mix of varieties and vinify them together to produce a classic nonvarietal wine, such as Hugel’s Sporen Gentil, which was capable of aging 30 years or more (and in a totally different class from that firm’s own Gentil, which does not come from Sporen and is a blend of separately vinified wines).

🍷 Dopff Au Moulin • Roger Jung • Mittnacht-Klack

## STEINERT

Pfaffenheim and Westhalten



Pinot Gris is the king of this stony, calcareous *cru*, although historically Schneckenberg (now part of Steinert) was always renowned for producing a Pinot Blanc that tasted more like Pinot Gris. The Pfaffenheim cooperative still produces a Pinot Blanc Schneckenberg (although not a *grand cru*, of course), and its stunning Pinot Gris steals the show. Steinert’s Pinot Blanc-cum-Gris reputation illustrates the exceptional concentration of these wines.

Gewurztraminer fares best on the lower slopes, Riesling on the higher, more sandy slopes. The local *syndicat* has reduced chaptalization of Riesling and Muscat from the allowable 1.5% to 1%, and that of Pinot Gris and Gewurztraminer

from 1.5% to 0.5%. It has also increased the minimum ripeness of Riesling and Muscat from 11% to 12%, and that of Pinot Gris and Gewurztraminer from 12.5% to 13.5%.

🍷 C. V. Pfaffenheim • Rieflé • François Runner • Pierre Paul Zink

## STEINGRUBLER

Wettolsheim



Although this calcareous-marl and sandstone *cru* is not one of the great names of Alsace, I have enjoyed some excellent Steingrubler wines, particularly Pinot Gris. This can be very rich, yet show great finesse. Certainly Steingrubler is one of the better lesser-known *grands crus*, and it could well be a great growth of the future. The local *syndicat* has reduced all chaptalization from an allowable 1.5% to 1%. It has also increased the minimum ripeness of Riesling and Muscat from 11% to 11.5%, and that of Pinot Gris and Gewurztraminer from 12.5% to 13%.

🍷 Barmès-Buecher ② • Robert Dietrich • Albert Mann • Wolfberger • Wunsch & Mann (Collection Joseph Mann)

## STEINKLOTZ

Marlenheim

Steinklotz (“block of stone”) was in 589 part of the estate of the Merovingian king Childebert II, from which Marlenheim derives its still-flourishing reputation for Pinot Noir wines of red and rosé style, but since it has flown the *grand cru* flag, Steinklotz is supposed to be good for Pinot Gris, Riesling, and Gewurztraminer. However, local growers are determined to have their Pinot Noir recognized and will be applying for *grand cru* status for these wines.

🍷 Romain Fritsch

## VORBOURG

Rouffach and Westhalten

All four varieties excel in this calcareous sandstone *terroir*, whose wines are said to develop a bouquet of peaches, apricots, mint, and hazelnut—but Riesling and Pinot Gris fare best. Muscat favors warmer vintages, when its wines positively explode with flavor, and Gewurztraminer excels in some years but not in others. Vorbourg catches the full glare of the sun from dawn to dusk and so is also well suited to Pinot Noir, which is consequently heavy with pigment. The local *syndicat* has renounced all chaptalization. It has also increased the minimum ripeness of Riesling and Muscat from 11% to 12%, and that of Pinot Gris and Gewurztraminer from 12.5% to 13.5%.

🍷 de l’École (Fleuron de Vorbourg) • Muré ① (Clos St.-Landelin)

## WIEBELSBERG

Andlau

This vineyard has very good sun exposure, and its siliceous soil retains heat and drains well.

Riesling does well, producing wines that can be very fine and floral, slowly developing a delicate, ripe-peachy fruit on the palate.

🍷 *André & Rémy Gresser • André Rieffel*

## WINECK-SCHLOSSBERG

Katzenthal and Ammerschwihr

Wineck-Schlossberg's granite vineyards enjoy a sheltered microclimate that primarily favors Riesling, followed by Gewurztraminer. The wines are light and delicate, with a fragrant aroma.

🍷 *J. B. Adam (Jean-Baptiste) • Meyer-Fonné*

## WINZENBERG

Blienschwiller

Locals claim that this *cru* is cited in "old documents" and that Riesling and Gewurztraminer fare best in its granite vineyards. The Riesling I have encountered has

been light and charming, but not special. Gewurztraminer has definitely been much the superior wine, showing fine, fresh aromas with a refined spiciness of some complexity.

🍷 *Autber*

## ZINNKOEPLÉ

Soultzmatt and Westthalten

Zinnkoepflé's hot, dry microclimate gives rise to a rare concentration of Mediterranean and Caspian fauna and flora near its exposed summit. The heat and the arid, calcareous sandstone soil are what gives it its reputation for strong, spicy, and fiery styles of Pinot Gris and Gewurztraminer. The Riesling is a delicate and most discreet wine, but this is deceptive and it can, given decent bottle-age, be just as powerful. Mention should be made of Seppi Landmann, who has produced some stunning Zinnkoepflé, but also far too many

ordinary wines, and a few absolute bums, thus does not get a wholehearted recommendation below.

🍷 *Léon Boesch • Agathe Bursin • Jean-Marie Haag • Schlegel-Boeglin*

## ZOTZENBERG

Mittelbergheim

First mentioned in 1364, when it was known as Zoczenberg, the wines of this calcareous clay *terroir* have been sold under its own *lieu-dit* since the beginning of the 20th century. It is historically the finest site in Alsace for Sylvaner, and is destined to become the first *grand cru* to be officially recognized for this supposedly lowly grape variety. Gewurztraminer and Riesling show a creamy richness of fruit.

🍷 *Agathe Bursin • André Rieffel*

# THE APPELLATIONS OF ALSACE AND LORRAINE

## ALSACE AOC

This appellation covers all the wines of Alsace (with the exception of Alsace Grand Cru and Crémant d'Alsace), but 95 percent of the wines are often sold according to grape variety. These are: Pinot (which may also be labeled Pinot Blanc, Clevner, or Klevner), Pinot Gris, Pinot Noir, Riesling, Gewurztraminer, Muscat, Sylvaner, Chasselas (which may also be labeled Gutedel), and Auxerrois. This practice effectively creates nine "varietal" AOCs under the one umbrella appellation, and these are listed separately.

## ALSACE GRAND CRU AOC

The current production of *grand cru* wine is approximately 4 percent of the total volume of AOC Alsace. Because every *cru*, or growth, makes a wine of a specific character, it is impossible to give a generalized description.

**WHITE** See The Grands Crus of Alsace, p.187

🍷 Muscat, Riesling, Gewurztraminer, Pinot Gris, Sylvaner (Zotzenberg only)

## ALSACE SÉLECTION DE GRAINS NOBLES AOC



This is not an AOC in itself, but a subordinate designation that may be appended either to the basic appellation or to Alsace Grand Cru AOC. Its production is strictly controlled, and the regulations are far tougher than for any AOC elsewhere. In theory, these wines are harvested after VT, but in practice they are picked in several tries prior to the best VT, which will be produced from what remains on the vine after a further period of ripening.

These rare and sought-after wines are made from botrytis-affected grapes; unlike Sauternes, however, Alsace is no haven for "noble rot," which occurs haphazardly and in much reduced concentrations. The wines are, therefore, produced in tiny quantities and sold at very high prices. The *sauternais* are often amazed not only by the high sugar levels (while chaptalization is not permitted in Alsace, it has become almost mandatory in Sauternes), but also by how little sulfur is used, highlighting why SGN has become one of the world's greatest dessert wines.

**WHITE** Now made with less alcohol and higher sugar than when first introduced, these wines possess even more finesse than before. While Gewurztraminer is almost too easy to make, Pinot Gris offers the ideal balance between quality and price; just a couple of Muscat have been produced, and Riesling SGN is in a class of its own. Check the appropriate varietal entry for the best producers.

🍷 Gewurztraminer, Pinot Gris, Riesling, Muscat

🍷 5–30 years

## ALSACE VENDANGE TARDIVE AOC

This is not an AOC in itself, but a subordinate designation that may be appended either to the basic appellation or to Alsace Grand Cru AOC. Its production is controlled, and the regulations are far stricter than for any AOC elsewhere in France. VT is far less consistent in quality and character than SGN. This is because some producers make these wines from grapes that have the correct minimum sugar content, but that were picked with the rest of the crop, not late-harvested. Such VT lacks the true character of a late-harvested wine, which is only brought about by the complex changes that occur inside a grape that has remained on the vine until November or December. As the leaves begin to fall and the sap retreats to the protection of the root system, the grapes, cut off from the vine's metabolic system, start dehydrating. The compounds that this process (known as *passerillage*) produces are in turn affected by the prevailing climatic conditions. *Passerillé* grapes that have endured progressively colder

temperatures (the norm) and those that have enjoyed a late Indian summer (not uncommon) will produce entirely different wines. Until the regulations are changed to ensure that VT is always harvested after a certain specified date, choose recommended wines and look for a date of harvest on the back label.

Another aspect that requires regulating is the relative sweetness of the wine, as VT can be anything from almost dry to sweeter than some SGN. Refer to the appropriate varietal entry for the best producers.

**WHITE** Whether dry, medium-sweet, or sweet, this relatively full-bodied wine should always have the true character of *passerillage*—although sometimes this will be overwhelmed by botrytis. Gewurztraminer is the most commonly encountered variety, but only the best have the right balance; Pinot Gris and Riesling both offer an ideal balance between quality, availability, and price. Muscat is almost as rare for VT as it is for SGN, as it tends to go very flabby when overripe.

🍷 Gewurztraminer, Pinot Gris, Riesling, Muscat

🍷 5–20 years

## AUXERROIS AOC



Theoretically this designation does not exist, but Auxerrois is one of the varieties permitted for

the production of Pinot wine and makes such a distinctly different product that it has often been labeled separately. This practice, currently on the increase, is “officially tolerated.”

**WHITE** Fatter than Pinot Blanc, with a more buttery, honeyed, and spicy character to the fruit, the greatest asset of Auxerrois is its natural richness and immediate appeal. Inclined to low acidity, it can easily become flabby and so musky it tastes almost foxy, but the best Auxerrois can give Pinot Gris a run for its money.

☞ Auxerrois

🕒 Up to 5 years

✓ *Emile Beyer* • *Rolly Gassmann* • *JosMeyer* • *André Kientzler* • *Julien Rieffel* (the Klevner Vieilles Vignes is pure Auxerrois despite the Pinot Blanc synonym) • *Bruno Sorg* • *Marc Tempé* (Vieilles Vignes)

### CHASSELAS AOC

Rarely seen, but enjoying something of a revival among a few specialized growers.

**WHITE** The best Chasselas wines are not actually bottled, but sit in vats waiting to be blended into anonymous *cuvées* of Edelzwicker. They are neither profound nor complex, but teem with fresh, fragrant fruit and are an absolute joy to drink; they taste better, however, before they are bottled than after. The fruit is so delicate that it needs a lift to survive the shock of being bottled, and the wine would probably benefit from being left on lees and bottled very cold to retain a bit of tongue-tingling carbonic gas.

☞ Chasselas

🕒 Upon purchase

✓ *JosMeyer* • *André Kientzler* • *Schoffit*

### CLASSIC ALSACE BLENDS

Despite the varietal wine hype, Alsace is more than capable of producing the finest-quality classic blends, but their number is small and dwindles every year because so few consumers realize their true quality. It is difficult for producers to make potential customers appreciate why their blends are more expensive than ordinary Edelzwicker, but classic Alsace blends should no more be categorized with Edelzwicker than *crus classés* compared with generic Bordeaux. This category focuses attention on the region's top-performing blends which, whether or not they fetch them, deserve *grand cru* prices. Unlike the blending of Edelzwicker, for which various wines are mixed together—and where there is always the temptation to get rid of unwanted wines—the different varieties in most classic Alsace blends always come from the same vineyard and are traditionally harvested and vinified together. See also Kaefferkopf, p.189

**WHITE** Most of these wines improve with age, but go through phases when one or other grape variety dominates, which is interesting to observe and should help you to understand why you prefer to drink a particular blend. Depending on the amounts involved, Gewurztraminer typically dominates in the young wine, followed by Pinot Gris then, many years later, Riesling, but other varieties may also be involved when overripe.

☞ Chasselas, Sylvaner, Pinot Blanc, Pinot Gris, Pinot Noir, Auxerrois, Gewurztraminer, Muscat Blanc à Petits Grains, Muscat Rosé à Petits Grains, Muscat Ottonel, Riesling

✓ *Marcel Deiss* (Grand Vin de Schoenbourg, Altenberg de Bergheim Assemblage, Burg, Engelgarten) • *Marcel Freyburger* (Kaefferkopf) • *C. V. Ribeauvillé* (Clos du Zahnacker equal parts Gewurztraminer, Pinot Gris, and Riesling) • *Jean Sipp* (Clos du Schlossberg 50% Riesling, 20% Gewurztraminer, 20% Tokay-Pinot Gris, 10% Muscat) • *Louis Sipp* (Côtes de Ribeauvillé 40% Pinot Blanc plus 60% Sylvaner, Riesling, and Gewurztraminer)

### CLEVNER AOC

Commonly used synonym under which Pinot is marketed, sometimes spelled Klevner, but not to be confused with Klevener. See Pinot AOC

### CÔTES DE TOUL AOC

Part of the once-flourishing vineyards of Lorraine, these *côtes* are located in eight communes west of Toul, in the *département* of Meurthe-et-Moselle, and were elevated to AOC status in 2003. Although the best are merely ready-drinking country wines, Laroppe easily outclasses the competition.

**RED** The Pinot Noir is the most successful, and the wine is usually sold as a pure varietal. It can have surprisingly good color for wine from such a northerly region, and good cherry-Pinot character.

☞ Pinot Meunier, Pinot Noir

🕒 1–4 years

**WHITE** These wines represent less than two percent of the VDQS, just 844 cases (76 hectoliters). Nevertheless, the Auxerrois is the best grape, its fatness making it ideal for such a northerly area with a calcareous soil.

☞ Aligoté, Aubin, Auxerrois

🕒 1–3 years

**ROSÉ** Most Côtes de Toul is made and sold as *vin gris*. This pale rosé is delicious when it is still youthful.

☞ Gamay, Pinot Meunier, Pinot Noir, plus a maximum of 15% Aligoté, Aubin, and Auxerrois

🕒 Upon purchase

✓ *Vincent Gorny* • *Michel & Marcel Laroppe* • *de la Linotte* • *Isabelle et Jean-Michel Mangeot* • *CV du Toulous*

### CRÉMANT D'ALSACE AOC



Although small growers like Dirlinger had made Vin Mousseux d'Alsace as early as 1880, it was not until 1900 that Dopff Au Moulin created a sparkling wine industry on a commercial scale, and 1976 before an AOC was established. The quality is good, and is improving. Good to see the Hartenberg Pinot Gris back on track.

**SPARKLING WHITE** Although the Pinot Blanc has perfect acidity for this sort of wine, it can

lack sufficient richness, and after intensive tastings I have come to the conclusion that the Pinot Gris has the right acidity and richness.

☞ Pinot Blanc, Pinot Gris, Pinot Noir, Auxerrois, Chardonnay, Riesling

🕒 5–8 years

**SPARKLING ROSÉ** These delightful wines can have a finer purity of perfume and flavor than many pink Champagnes.

☞ Pinot Noir

🕒 3–5 years

✓ *René Barth* • *Bernard Becht* • *Joseph Gruss* • *Klein-Brand* • *C. V. Pfaffenheim* (Hartenberg Pinot Gris) • *Rieffel* • *Wolfberger*

### EDELZWICKER AOC

This appellation—its name means “noble blend”—is reserved for wines blended from two or more of the authorized grape varieties, and it was indeed once noble. However, since the banning of AOC Zwicker, which was never meant to be noble, and due to the fact that there has never been a legal definition of which varieties are noble, producers simply renamed their Zwicker blends Edelzwicker. Consequently, this appellation has become so tarnished that many producers prefer to sell their cheaper AOC Alsace wines under brand names or simply AOC Alsace, rather than put the debased Edelzwicker name on the label. See also Classic Alsace Blends

**WHITE** Essentially dry, light-bodied wines that have a clean flavor and are best drunk young. Most Edelzwickers are either Sylvaner or Pinot Blanc-based. Better or slightly more expensive products have a generous touch of Gewurztraminer to fatten up the blend, but most of these have forsaken the Edelzwicker designation, and there are now no examples that can be recommended with confidence.

☞ Chasselas, Sylvaner, Pinot Blanc, Pinot Gris, Pinot Noir, Auxerrois, Gewurztraminer, Muscat Blanc à Petits Grains, Muscat Rosé à Petits Grains, Muscat Ottonel, Riesling

🕒 Upon purchase

### GEWURZTRAMINER AOC



No other wine region in the world has managed to produce Gewurztraminer with any real spice, which is probably why this is usually the first Alsace wine people taste. Its voluptuous, up-front style is always immediately appealing.

**WHITE** The fattest and most full-bodied of Alsace wines. Classic renditions of this grape typically have the aroma of banana when young and take 3 to 4 years in bottle to build up a pungent spiciness of terpene-laden aromas,

often achieving a rich gingerbread character when mature.

🍷 Gewurztraminer

🕒 3–10 years (20–30 years for great examples)

✓ *Barmès-Buecher* **B** • *Charles Baur* **B** • *Léon Beyer* • *Paul Blanck* **O** • *Bott-Geyl* • *Albert Boxler* • *Camille Braun* (Cuvée Annabelle) • *Brobecker* (Cuvée Spéciale) • *Hugel & Fils* (Jubilée) • *André Kientzler* • *Meyer-Fonné* (Réserve Particulière) • *Muré* **O** (Clos St-Landelin) • *Rolly Gassmann* • *Georges et Claude Humbrecht* (Vieilles Vignes) • *Martin Schaezel* **B** • *A. Scherer* • *François Schmitt* (Pfingsberg) • *Jean Sipp* • *Bruno Sorg* (Pfersigberg) • *Sylvie Spielmann* **B** • *Antoine Stoffel* • *F. E. Trimbach* • *Weinbach/Faller* • *Zind-Humbrecht* **B** • **VT** *J. B. Adam* • *Léon Beyer* • *Léon Boesch* **O** • *René Fleith-Eschar* • *Louis Freyburger* **B** (Kanzlerberg) • *Geschikt* • *Hugel & Fils* • *Jean Huttard* (Burgreben) • *Roger Jung* • *André Kientzler* • *Ostertag* **B** • *Pierre Meyer* • *Maurice Schoech* • *André Thomas* **B** • *Weinbach/Faller* • *Zind-Humbrecht* **B** • **SGN** *Léon Beyer* (especially Quintessence) • *Paul Blanck* **O** • *Léon Boesch* **O** • *Albert Boxler* • *Dirler-Cadé* **B** • *Hugel & Fils* • *André Kleinknecht* **B** • *Albert Mann* • *Muré* **O** (Clos St-Landelin) • *Rolly Gassmann* • *Seppi Landmann* • *Damien Schlegel* • *Schlumberger* (Cuvée Anne) • *Sick-Dreyer* • *F. E. Trimbach* • *Weinbach/Faller* • *Zind-Humbrecht* **B**

## GUTEDEL AOC

Synonym under which Chasselas may be marketed. See Chasselas AOC

## KLEVNER DE HEILIGENSTEIN AOC

An oddity in Alsace for three reasons: first, the wine is made from a grape variety that is native to the Jura farther south and not found anywhere else in Alsace; second, of all the famous village appellations (Rouge d'Ottrott, Rouge de Rodern, etc.), it is the only one specifically defined in the regulations; third, it is the only grape confined by law to a fixed area within Alsace (the village of Heiligenstein). It is not to be confused with Klevner, a common synonym for the Pinot Blanc.

**WHITE** Dry, light-bodied wines of a subdued, spicy aroma, and delicate, fruity flavor. Sadly, no wines worth recommending.

🍷 Savagnin Rosé

🕒 2–4 years

## KLEVNER AOC

See Pinot Blanc AOC

## MOSELLE VDQS

This VDQS was called Vins de Moselle until 1995, when it became simply Moselle. Although many restaurants list German Mosel as “Moselle,” the river and the wine it produces are called Mosel in Germany, only becoming Moselle when crossing the border into France (and Luxembourg). Gamay is limited by law to a maximum of 30 percent of the surface area of this appellation. A maximum of 12.5 percent alcohol is applied to prevent producers from overchaptalizing.

**RED** Château de Vaux produces a surprisingly good Pinot Noir.

🍷 Gamay, Pinot Meunier, Pinot Noir

🕒 Upon purchase

**WHITE** There has been an improvement in these wines, particularly the Pinot Gris.

🍷 Auxerrois, Müller-Thurgau, Pinot Blanc, Pinot Gris, Riesling, Gewurztraminer

🕒 Upon purchase

✓ *Michel Maurice* (Pinot Gris) • *Oury-Schreiber* • *Château de Vaux* (Pinot Noir Les Hautes Bassières)

## MUSCAT AOC

The best Muscat wine, some growers believe, is made from the Muscat d'Alsace, a synonym for both the white and pink strains of the rich, full Muscat à Petits Grains. Others are convinced that the lighter, more floral Muscat Ottonel is best. A blend of the two is probably preferable. These wines are better in average years, or at least in fine years that have good acidity, rather than in truly great vintages.

**WHITE** Dry, aromatic wines with fine floral characteristics that often smell of orange-flower water and taste of peaches. A top-quality Muscat that is expressive of its *terroir* is a great wine.

🍷 Muscat Blanc à Petits Grains, Muscat Rosé à Petits Grains, Muscat Ottonel

🕒 Upon purchase

✓ *Jean Becker* • *Emile Beyer* • *Ernest Burn* (Clos St-Imer) • *Pierre Henri Ginglinger* **B** • *Roger Jung* • *André Kientzler* • *Frédéric Mochel* • *Muré* **O** (Clos St-Landelin) • *Rolly Gassmann* • *Sylvain Hertzog* • *Bruno Sorg* • *Sylvie Spielmann* **B** • *Weinbach/Faller* • *Zind-Humbrecht* **B** (Goldert) **VT** (or **VT** style) *Jean-Marc et Frédéric Bernhard* • *Barmès-Buecher* **B** **SGN** (or **SGN** style) *Claude Bleger* • *Fernand Engel* **O** • *Romain Fritsch* • *Albert Mann* (Le Tri)

## PINOT AOC



Not necessarily pure Pinot Blanc, this white wine may be made from any of the Pinot grape varieties, including Auxerrois (often confused with Pinot Blanc but in fact a totally separate variety). Most Pinot wines are a blend of Pinot Blanc and Auxerrois; the farther north the vines are cultivated, the more Auxerrois is used to plump out the Pinot Blanc. Zind is included under Zind-Humbrecht below because this luscious, effectively dry blend of 50 percent Auxerrois, 35 percent Chardonnay, and 15 percent Pinot Blanc used to be sold under the Pinot designation. When the authorities enforced the regulations that state Chardonnay may only be used in Crémant d'Alsace, not a still wine under the AOC, Zind-Humbrecht was forced to sell the wine as *vin de table*. Since it

is not allowed to indicate a vintage on a *vin de table* (the European Union wine regime obviously does not believe in greater transparency), Olivier Humbrecht used a code, and it does not take a genius to figure out Z001 stands for 2001, or that the next NV will be numbered Z002, and so on. The funny thing is that the maximum permitted yield for *vin de table* is 90 hectoliters per hectare as opposed to 100 hectoliters per hectare for the Alsace appellation, and chaptalization is banned. Silly us for thinking that an AOC is supposed to be superior to a *vin de table*!

**WHITE** Some Pinot wines are occasionally spineless, but lackluster examples are not as common as they used to be, as it is the plump and juicy *cuvées* that have made this the fastest-growing category of Alsace wine.

🍷 Pinot Blanc, Auxerrois, Pinot Noir (vinified white), Pinot Gris

🕒 2–4 years

✓ *J. B. Adam* • *Camille Braun* • *C. V. Cléebourg* • *Pierre Frick* **O** (Précieuse) • *JosMeyer* **B** • *Koerberlé-Kreyer* • *Albert Mann* • *CV Pfaffenbeim* • *Rolly Gassmann* • *Sylvie Spielmann* **B** • *Zind-Humbrecht* **B** (including Zin *vin de table*)

## PINOT BLANC AOC

This designation should only be used if the wine is made from 100 percent Pinot Blanc. See also Pinot AOC

## PINOT GRIS AOC



This designation is now the most common way of marketing wine from the rich Pinot Gris grape. For hundreds of years, it has been known locally as Tokay d'Alsace. Legend had it that the Pinot Gris was brought back to Alsace from Hungary by Baron Lazare de Schwendi in the 1560s, and as Tokay or Tokaji was the only famous Hungarian wine, it was assumed that this was the grape Tokay was made from, and the name stuck. But they got it all wrong; this grape came to Alsace from Burgundy, Schwendi had nothing to do with it, and Pinot Gris has nothing to do with Tokay/Tokaji. In the 1980s, the Hungarians wanted their name back, and initially the French agreed, but after counterarguments from Alsace producers, alleging over 400 years' use of the name, the French reneged, and agreed instead to change the name from Tokay d'Alsace to Tokay-Pinot Gris, with vague promises that they might drop the Tokay at some time in the future. That did not happen, but the fall of communism did, and with Hungary's entry to the European Union, the French were forced to honor their partner's historic appellation, so all bottles will have to be labeled Pinot Gris, with no reference to Tokay, no later than the end of 2006.

**WHITE** This full-bodied, off-dry wine is decadently rich, but has excellent acidity, and its fullness of flavor never tires the palate. A

young Pinot Gris can taste or smell of banana, sometimes be smoky, with little or no spice, but as it matures it increasingly develops a smoky-spice, toasty-creamy richness, finally achieving a big, honeyed walnut-brazil complexity with good bottle age. Top Alsace Riesling can be much finer, but the variety is so sensitive to soil conditions and handling that the quality is nowhere near as consistent as Pinot Gris across the board.

🍷 Pinot Gris

🕒 5–10 years

✓ *Lucien Albrecht* • *Barmès-Buecher* **B** • *J. P. & J. F. Becker* **B** (Froehn) • *Albert Boxler* • *C. V. Cléebourg* • *Robert Fallier* (Bénédict) • *C. V. de Hunawibr (Rosacker)* • *André Kientzler* • *Henri Klée* • *Albert Mann* • *Mittnacht-Klack* • *Muller-Koeberle* • *Ostertag* **B** • *Antoine Stoffel* • *Bernard Weber* (Finkenberg) • *Weinbach/Faller* • *Zind-Humbrecht* **B** • **VT** *Lucien Albrecht* • *Joseph Cattin* • *Jean-Marie Koebly* • *Marc Kreydenweiss* • *Hugel & Fils* • *Vignobles Reinhart* • *Zind-Humbrecht* **B** • **SGN** *J B Adam* • *Léon Beyer* (Quintessence) • *Albert Boxler* • *Marcel Deiss* **B** • *Louis Freyburger* **B** (Altenberg de Bergheim) • *Hugel & Fils* • *Marc Kreydenweiss* • *Koberlé-Kreyer* • *Kuentz-Bas* • *Albert Mann* (Altenbourg Le Tri) • *F. E. Trimbach* • *Weinbach/Faller* • *Zind-Humbrecht* **B** • *Pierre Paul Zink* (Barrique)

## PINOT NOIR AOC

Not so long ago, Pinot Noir d'Alsace was synonymous in style with rosé, but the trend has swung hard over toward a true red wine. After a steep learning curve, during which many wines were overextracted, lacked elegance, were prone to rapid oxidation, and bore the most ungainly caramelized characteristics, Alsace winemakers have now managed to master the handling of oak and red-wine techniques. Alsace producers are now allowed to use a fatter bottle of almost Burgundian proportions for Pinot Noir instead of the Flûte d'Alsace, the use of which has been enshrined in law since 1959. This is a positive move, and although strictly confined to Pinot Noir, I hear rumors that it will be used for other Pinot varieties, which would also be good.

**RED** Most are unsatisfactory (overextracted, too tannic, or too oaky—sometimes all three), but Marcel Deiss's Burlenberg is in a different class and is comparable to a good Burgundy. A step down, but still good, is Domaine Weinbach Réserve in a good year, and the most commercial of all, Hugel Jubilée Pinot Noir, with its special selection Le Neveux, is a serious contender for Deiss's crown. And that is about it. You can find perhaps another four or five wines each year that are delightful on the nose, but do not live up to the promise on the palate. Why is it that although both Alsace and Germany started at the same time (mid-1980s) to develop Pinot Noir as a serious red wine style (as opposed to rosé), only Germany has succeeded? The cadre of top-performing German Pinot Noir producers includes the likes of Deutzerhof, Kreuzberg, Huber, Johner, Knipser, Philipp Kuhn, Bernhart, Fürst, August Kesseler, and Aldinger, yet the only Alsace producer who would not be shown up in such company is Deiss, and the very best of Hugel's wines.

🍷 Pinot Noir

## MORE GREEN ALSACE

In addition to the Alsace producers recommended above, and which are either biodynamic or organic, there are also the following. No negative inference of quality should be taken from the fact that they are not featured among my recommended Alsace producers. There are a number that have been recommended in other editions, and still make some fine wines, but have been culled out to make room for others.

### Biodynamic

Geschick (Ammerschwir) • Jean Ginglinger (Pfaffenheim) • Pierre-Paul Humbrecht (Pfaffenheim) • Marc Kreydenweiss (Andlau) • Jean Schaezel (Ammerschwir) • Trapet Alsace (Bebenheim) • Valentin Zusslin Fils (Orschwir) • **Organic** • Yves Amberg (Epfig) • Yannick et Jean Baltenweck (Ribeauvillé) • Maurice Barthelme (Wettolsheim) • Rémy Biwand (Mackenheim) • Lucien et Théo Dietrich (Sigolsheim) • Yves Dietrich (Sigolsheim) • André Durmann (Andlau) • Eblin-Fuchs (Zellenberg)

Gilg (Wettolsheim) • Philippe & Fernand Heitz (Molsheim) • Annick Hummel (St-Léonard Boersch) • Bernard Hummel (St-Léonard Boersch) • Martin Jund (Colmar) • Clément Klur (Katzenthal) • Mathieu Knecht (Dambach la Ville) • Pierre Martin (Scherwiller) • Mischler (Bennwahr) • Mittnacht Frères (Hunawibr) • Charles Muller & Fils (Traenheim) • François-Joseph Munsch (Jungholtz) • André Rohrer (Mittelbergheim) • Albert Staehle (Wintzenheim) • Philippe Vorburger (Voegtlinshoffen) • Odile & Danielle Weber (Eguisheim)

🕒 2–6 years (12 years for exceptional *cuvées*)

**ROSÉ** At its best, this dry, light-bodied wine has a deliciously fragrant aroma and flavor, which is reminiscent of strawberries, raspberries, or cherries. Seldom seen on export markets, but still commonly encountered by the *picbet* in local *winstubs*.

🍷 Pinot Noir

🕒 1–2 years

✓ *Marcel Deiss* **B** (Burlenberg) • *Hugel & Fils* (Jubilée Le Neveux) • *Weinbach/Faller* (Réserve)

## RIESLING AOC



Of all Alsace grape varieties, Riesling is the most susceptible to differences in soil: clay soils give fatness and richness; granite Riesling is also rich, but with more finesse; limestone adds obvious finesse but less richness; and volcanic soil gives a well-flavored, spicy style.

**WHITE** In youth, fine Rieslings can show hints of apple, fennel, citrus, and peach, but can be so firm and austere that they give no hint of the beautiful wines into which they can evolve.

🍷 Riesling

🕒 4–20 years

✓ *J B Adam* • *Lucien Albrecht* (Clos Schild) • *Barmès-Buecher* **B** • *Léon Baur* **B** • *Léon Beyer* • *Paul Blanck* **O** (Furstentum, Schlossberg) • *Albert Boxler* (Sommerberg Vieilles Vignes) • *Albert Hertz* • *JosMeyer* **B** (Hengst) • *Mader* • *Albert Mann* (Schlossberg) • *Frédéric Mochel* • *Muré* **O** (Clos St.-Landelin) • *Rolly Gassmann* • *Martin Schaezel* **B** • *Roland Schmitt* • *Schoffit* • *Jean Sipp* • *Louis Sipp* • *Sipp-Mack* • *Bruno Sorg* • *Sylvie Spielmann* **B** •

*Bernard Schwach* • *F. E. Trimbach* (Cuvée Frédéric Emile, Clos Ste.-Hune, Réserve) • *Weinbach/Faller* • *Wunsch & Mann* • *Zind-Humbrecht* **B** • **VT** *Jean Becker* • *Hugel & Fils* • *JosMeyer* **B** • *André Kientzler* • *Weinbach/Faller* • *Zind-Humbrecht* **B** • **SGN** *Hugel & Fils* • *Fernand Engel* **O** • *André Kientzler* • *F. E. Trimbach* • *Weinbach/Faller* • *Zind-Humbrecht* **B**

## SYLVANER AOC

Hugh Johnson once described the Sylvaner as “local tap-wine,” and this is how it should be served—direct from the stainless-steel vat, with all the zip and zing of natural carbonic gas (normally filtered out during the bottling process). Like the Muscat, it does not suit heat, and is a wine to buy in cooler years. Most attempts at late-harvest or botrytized styles (which cannot legally be sold as either VT or SGN) are diabolical. This does not mean that people should give up, just that they should not try to palm off these failures on the public. Better to add their tiny quantity to a much larger volume of an Edelzwicker—or whatever they like to call it—and sell more bottles of a turbo-charged basic appellation at a much smaller premium, as this might result in better reviews and a better profit. Alsace producers should take a lesson from Angelo Publisi of Ballandean winery (*see* p.596), who replicates the VT style by cutting the fruit-bearing canes just after *véraison*. This cuts the grape off from the vine's metabolism and the effect is much the same as when the leaves drop and sap returns to the roots after the first snap of winter. The resulting wine is consistently fabulous.

**WHITE** Sylvaner is an unpretentious, dry, light-to medium-bodied wine, with fragrance rather than fruitiness. It is generally best drunk young, but, like the Muscat, exceptionally long-living examples can always be found.

🍷 Sylvaner

🕒 Upon purchase

✓ *Agathe Bursin* • *JosMeyer* **B** (Rouge—sic) • *Rolly Gassmann* • *Weinbach/Faller* • *Zind-Humbrecht* **B**

## VIN D'ALSACE AOC

Alternative designation for Alsace AOC.