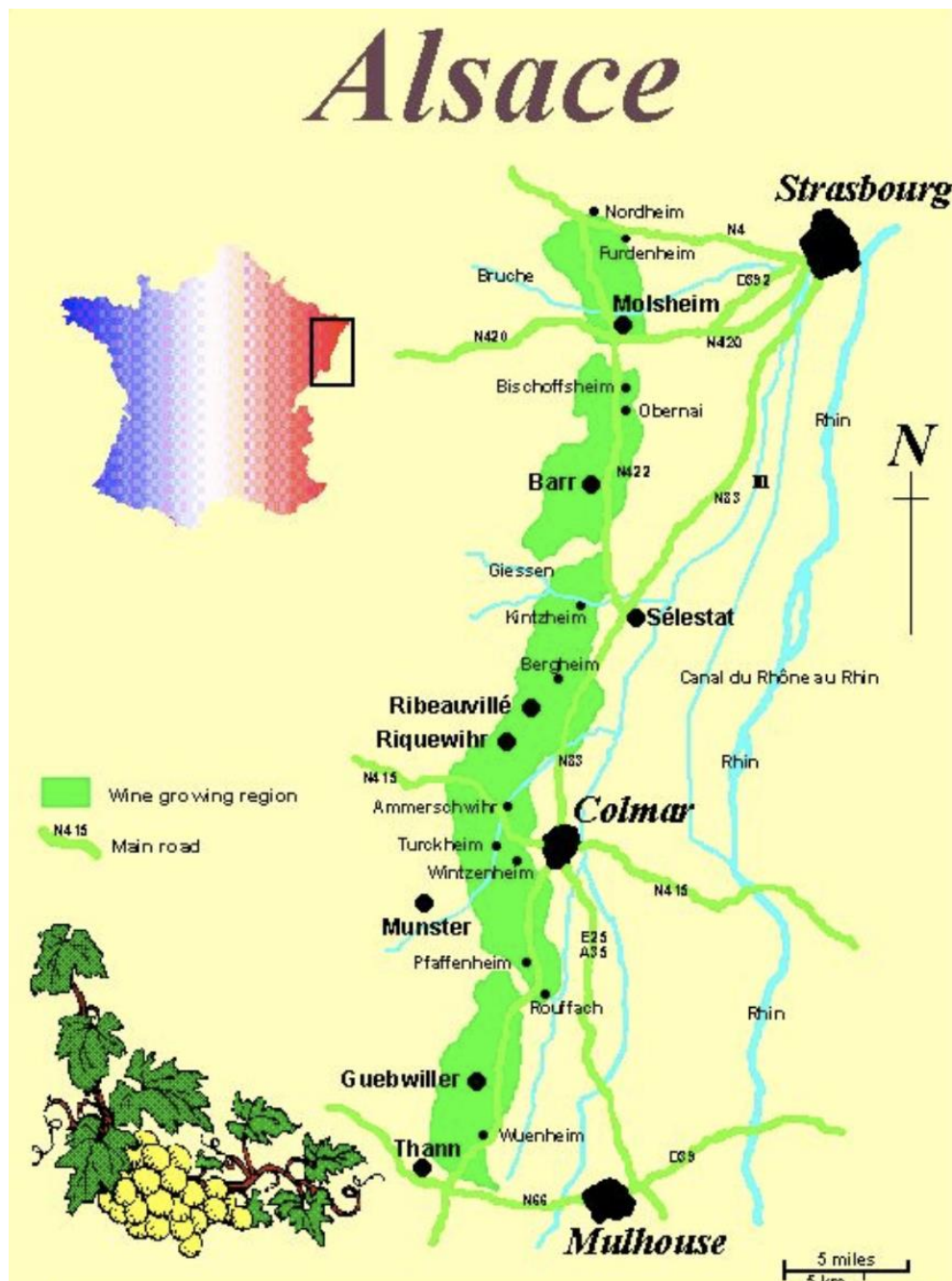




THE
ATHENÆUM
PALM MALL LONDON

Alsace Wine Tasting March 27th 2025

Speaker: Dr Victoria Preston
Chair: Professor Frank Larkin



Introduction to the Alsace Wine Region

Alsace has approximately 15,600 hectares of vineyards planted, stretching from north to south along the eastern slopes of the Vosges mountains. The region has around 4,200 vineyards and about 900 wine producers, including independent wineries, cooperatives, and large-scale négociants. Many of the vineyards are family-owned, often passed down through generations. Alsace is one of the smaller French wine regions, producing nearly 150 million bottles of wine per year (about 4% of France's total). This equates to around 1.1 million hectoliters of wine annually of which 90% are white wines.

The Alsace wine region has a long and rich history influenced by both French and German cultures. Viticulture in Alsace dates back to the 2nd century AD, when the Romans planted vineyards along the fertile slopes of the Vosges mountains. The region's ideal climate and terroir allowed winemaking to flourish. By the Middle Ages, Alsace wines were highly prized across Europe, with monasteries playing a significant role in cultivating vineyards. Many of the Grand Cru sites of today were first identified during this time.

Alsace's history is marked by frequent shifts between French and German rule, which shaped its wine styles and traditions. After being part of the Holy Roman Empire, Alsace became French in 1648 with the Treaty of Westphalia. However, it was annexed by Germany in 1871 and returned to France after World War I. During World War II, Germany briefly reclaimed Alsace before it was restored to France in 1945.

Since then, Alsace has focused on improving the quality of its wines. In 1962, it established its Appellation d'Origine Contrôlée (AOC) system, ensuring high standards. The Alsace Grand Cru AOC followed in 1975, highlighting the region's top 51 vineyard sites. These wines are characterized by lower yields, higher ripeness levels, and terroir-specific characteristics. Some vineyards with exceptional terroirs are recognized as 'Lieu-Dits' (literally a 'named place' - a vineyard known for its specific characteristics) without being classified as Grand Cru. Crémant d'Alsace AOC, a traditional-method sparkling wine, was established 1976 and usually a blend of Pinot Blanc, Pinot Gris and Auxerrois (Chardonnay) grapes but Crémant Rosé is also made exclusively from Pinot Noir

Alsace is well-known for its aromatic white wines, particularly Riesling, Gewürztraminer, Pinot Gris, and Muscat. Its unique bottle shape (flûte d'Alsace) and emphasis on single-varietal wines set it apart from other French wine regions, as does the fact that the grape varieties are usually mentioned on the label.

Our tasting will focus on Riesling (20.9% of plantings), Pinot Blanc (21.5% plantings), Pinot Gris (15.7% of plantings), and Gewürztraminer (19.7% of plantings). Only 2% of plantings are devoted to Muscat. If you would like to try it, you will find a Famille Trimbach Muscat Reserve 2018 on the CRWL.

Grapes

Riesling

The aromatic and flavour profile is floral and fruity with notes of white flowers, citrus fruits, green apple, and stone fruits with subtle hints of white pepper, fennel, and chamomile. Wines derived from this grape often display flinty, smokey, or petrol-like aromas, particularly in aged wines. The Vosges mountains protect the region from rain, providing a long growing season that enhances ripeness and complexity. Riesling grows best in complex terroirs with granite, limestone, schist, and volcanic soils. The high acidity and structure allow Alsace Rieslings to age well for decades, developing honeyed, nutty, and petrol-like notes over time. Food pairing versatility: excellent with seafood, white meats, Asian cuisine, and Alsatian dishes like choucroute with pork. Unlike German Rieslings, which often have residual sweetness, Alsace Rieslings are predominantly dry with well-balanced pronounced acidity. They compare best with Austrian Rieslings, which are also mostly dry. Whereas as Austrian Rieslings are grown in cool climates, Alsace Rieslings are grown in a relatively warm and sunny climate, leading to riper fruit flavors and higher alcohol.

Pinot Blanc

A versatile grape variety that produces wines known for their freshness, subtle fruitiness, and easy-drinking nature. The Pinot Blanc aroma and flavour profile exhibit apple, pear, peach, citrus and floral hints of acacia and honeysuckle. These grapes are characterized by mild spiciness and minerality with subtle almond or hazelnut notes. They have moderate acidity with a soft, round texture with a smooth mouthfeel. Often vinified in a dry style, Pinot Blanc is less aromatic than Riesling or Gewürztraminer. This varietal grows well in several soils such as limestone, clay, and sand and this contributes to different expressions of the grape. The Vosges mountains help create a dry, sunny environment that enhances ripeness and balance. Wines made from these grapes are best enjoyed young. Food pairing: complements poultry, seafood, quiche and mild cheese. Frequently used in the production of Alsace's sparkling wines, Crémant d'Alsace, due to its freshness and balanced acidity.

Pinot Gris

This grape is characterized by a rich and intense aromatic flavour profile, such as ripe pear, quince, peach, apricot, and citrus, honey, ginger, almond and a light smokiness. It exhibits earthy and mineral nuances such as mushroom, truffle, and wet stone characteristics. The grape exhibits moderate to low acidity. The structure is full-bodied and round with a rich, oily texture and good depth. Often off-dry to slightly sweet, though dry styles exist, Alsace Pinot Gris often has a touch of residual sugar, giving it a lush mouthfeel. This varietal grows in diverse soils such as a mix of limestone, clay, and volcanic soils. Benefiting from Alsace's dry, sunny conditions, Pinot Gris reaches full ripeness, developing its signature richness and intensity. It ages well, developing notes of dried fruit, honey, caramel, and nutty undertones. While usually fermented in stainless steel, some producers use oak to add complexity. Its diverse expressions include Vendanges Tardives (late-harvest wines with concentrated sweetness and complexity), and Sélection de Grains Nobles (noble rot-affected wines that are lusciously sweet, with honeyed and caramelized flavors). The grape's food pairing versatility makes it perfect for foie gras, duck, smoked meats, roasted poultry, and creamy sauces. Complements Thai, Indian, and Moroccan dishes and matches well with blue cheeses. In contrast to the light, crisp, and zesty Pinot Grigio style from Italy, Alsace Pinot Gris is full-bodied and complex.

Gewürztraminer

One of the most distinctive and aromatic grape varieties in the world, the grape produces intensely perfumed, full-bodied wines with rich textures and exotic flavours. Its aromatic and flavour profile comprises rose petal, honeysuckle, and jasmine, lychee, mango, pineapple, and grapefruit. There are spicy and earthy undertones of ginger, cinnamon, clove, nutmeg, and sometimes a smokey or musky character. Wines exhibit low to moderate acidity, making them rich and soft on the palate. The texture is full-bodied and oily with more weight and viscosity compared to most white wines. Many Alsace Gewürztraminers have some residual sugar. The grapes grow well in limestone and marl soils which provide structure and enhance its intense aromatics. The Alsace region's long growing season allows for full ripeness, contributing to Gewürztraminer's bold flavors and high sugar content. Wines made from these wines have good ageing potential and develop in complexity.

over time, gaining honeyed, dried fruit, and spicy notes. These grapes are also expressed in Vendanges Tardives (VT) and Sélection de Grains Nobles (SGN), producing lusciously sweet wines with intense concentration and honeyed notes. Food pairing versatility: they are perfect for spicy and exotic dishes, and pairs well with Thai, Indian, Moroccan, and Sichuan cuisine, equally complementing rich dishes such as foie gras and strong cheeses like Munster. Sweet versions are excellent with fruit-based desserts. Alsace Gewürztraminer is typically fuller-bodied, more aromatic, and more intense than versions from Germany, Italy (Alto Adige), or the USA.

Vineyards

Cave de Turckheim

<https://www.cave-turckheim.com/gb/cvt/16-winemakers-alsace>

Cave de Turckheim, founded 60 years ago, lies at the mouth of the Munster Valley. It is a co-operative winery that works with approximately 200 growers in Alsace. The Cave is a *récoltant* (grower-producer) not a *négociant* (purchaser of grapes) and only produces wine from the grapes of its member growers. Its vineyards span the full breadth of Alsatian terroir and grape varieties and its wineries are located in Turckheim, Wintzenheim, Niedermorschwihr, and Riquewihr, north and west of Colmar. Substantial investment in the winery has enabled the team to vinify many parcels of grapes separately, offering Michel Lihrmann (senior winemaker for 25 years) the chance to highlight each wine's nuances in his signature dry, yet fruit forward, style. Committed to producing the highest quality wines, growers are encouraged to keep yields low - for example, yields are capped for its Grands Crus vineyards at 45hl/ha rather than the permitted 55hl/ha.

Maison Trimach

<https://www.trimbach.fr/>

Leading vineyard, origins dating back to 1626, now in its 13th generation with 50% of its production devoted to Reisling. Its vines are located on the Ribeauvillé fracture field. This field traverses the vineyard from north to south, from Rodern to Turckheim. 70% of the vineyards (60 ha owned) are mainly concentrated in the villages of Ribeauvillé, Bergheim and Hunawihr. There is a vast palette of different terroirs: the Ribeauvillé fault offers a mosaic of complex limestone rocks including the shell limestone called *Muschelkalk*. There are also marls (limestone & clay), sandstone from the Vosges, and migmatites - a mixture of gneiss and granite. Maison Trimbach has the following Grand Cru Vineyards (the derived wines are not part of our tasting): Clos Ste. Hune Rosacker Grand Cru, Geisberg Grand Cru Osterberg Grand (the latter two contribute to the Cru Cuvée Frédéric Émile Riesling blend).

Domaine Zind Humbrecht

<https://www.zindhumbrecht.fr/en/>

Leading vineyard which has been cultivated by the Humbrecht family since 1620. Domaine Zind Humbrecht was created in 1959 by the fusion of two winegrowing families, the Humbrecht family from Gueberschwihr and the Zind family from Wintzenheim. Today it is run by Olivier and Margaret Humbrecht and their sons and Pierre Emile. The domaine comprises 42ha of vines present in the Grand Crus of Rangen de Thann (5.5ha), Goldert in Gueberschwihr (0.9ha), Hengst in Wintzenheim (1.4ha), Brand in Turckheim (2.4ha), Sommerberg (0.3ha) and Wineck-Schlossberg (1ha); as well as the terroirs of Rotenberg (1.8ha) and Clos Häuserer (1.2ha) in Wintzenheim; Herrenweg (11.5ha), Clos Jepsal (1.3ha) and Heimbouurg (4ha) in Turckheim and the Clos Windsbuhl (5.15ha) in Hunawihr.

Wines

Cave de Turckheim Crémant d'Alsace

Blend: Pinot Blanc, Pinot Gris, Auxerrois (Chardonnay)

Growing Area: vineyards span the full breadth of Alsatian terroir

Vinification Process: Traditional method (like Champagne), with a second fermentation in the bottle and aging on lees.

ABV: 12%

Sensory Profile: Bright, fresh, with fine bubbles. Notes of green apple, citrus, white flowers, and brioche.

Cave de Turckheim Pinot Blanc 2022

Growing Area: vineyards span the full breadth of Alsatian terroir

Vinification Process: Stainless steel fermentation to preserve freshness and fruitiness.

ABV: 13%

Sensory Profile: Crisp, dry, and refreshing. Notes of apple, pear, white peach, and subtle floral hints.

Cave de Turckheim Riesling 2022

Growing Area: vineyards span the full breadth of Alsatian terroir

Vinification Process: Fermentation in stainless steel to maintain acidity and purity of fruit.

ABV: 12.5%

Sensory Profile: Dry with high acidity. Aromas of citrus, green apple, white flowers, and mineral notes.

Maison Trimbach Riesling 2022

Growing Area: Near Ribeauvillé from estate-owned and partner vineyards

Vinification Process: Fermented in stainless steel to highlight terroir expression.

ABV: 12.5%

Sensory Profile: Elegant and crisp, with citrus zest, white peach, and flinty minerality.

Maison Trimbach Gewürztraminer AOC 2020

Growing Area: Limestone-rich soils of Ribeauvillé and surrounding area. Also Bergheim, Hunawihr, Mittelwihr, and Kientzheim

Vinification Process: Fermented in stainless steel to preserve aromatics.

ABV: 15%

Sensory Profile: Rich and aromatic. Intense notes of lychee, rose petals, spice, and tropical fruit.

Maison Trimbach Pinot Gris Réserve 2018

Growing Area: Ribeauvillé and nearby villages. Also Bergheim, Hunawihr, and Mittelwihr

Vinification Process: Stainless steel fermentation, sometimes partial oak aging for complexity.

ABV: 14%

Sensory Profile: Full-bodied, smoky, and rich, with notes of ripe pear, apricot, and honey.

Zind-Humbrecht Riesling Roche Calcaire 2022

Growing Area: limestone-rich soils of village of Guebenschwihr, south of Colmar

Vinification Process: Long fermentation with indigenous yeasts, aged on lees.

ABV: 13%

Sensory Profile: High acidity, minerally, with citrus zest, white flowers, and flinty complexity.

Zind-Humbrecht Riesling Clos Windbuhl 2022

Growing Area: Clos Windsbuhl vineyard in Hunawihr, near Ribeauvillé. Elevation 350 metres (one of the highest in the region). South and south-east facing slopes, limestone terroir

Vinification Process: Biodynamic practices, long-lees ageing.

ABV: 12.5%

Sensory Profile: Intense, elegant, and structured. Notes of lime, stone fruit, and wet stone minerality.

Zind-Humbrecht Gewürztraminer Hengst 2019

Growing Area: Located in Wintzenheim, near Colmar. Elevation: 270–360 meters. Soil marl and limestone, South and south-east facing slopes.

Vinification Process: Organic and biodynamic, slow fermentation.

ABV: 13.5%

Sensory Profile: Rich and complex, with lychee, rose, exotic spice, and a long finish.

Maison Trimbach Gewürztraminer Vendanges Tardives 2017

Growing Area: Limestone-rich soils of Ribeauvillé and surrounding area. Also Bergheim, Hunawihr, Mittelwihr, and Kientzheim

Vinification Process: Late-harvest grapes, allowing for natural sweetness and complexity.

ABV: 13.5%

Sensory Profile: Lush, sweet, and intense, with honeyed lychee, dried apricot, and spice.

Maison Trimbach Pinot Gris Sélection de Grains Nobles 1990

Growing Area: Ribeauvillé and nearby villages. Also, Bergheim, Hunawihr, and Mittelwihr

Vinification Process: Botrytized grapes, very late harvest, aged for complexity.

ABV: 14%

Sensory Profile: Luscious, deep golden, with honey, dried fruit, nuts, and exotic spices.

Sources: *The Wines of Alsace* by Tom Stevenson, London & Boston: Faber & Faber (1993), *Alsace Wine Region* by JancisRobinson.com (downloaded 8.11.2024); vineyard and supplier websites, and ChatGPT

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