
Chapter 17

Alsace



Climate and Grape Growing

- Climate: **Cool-moderate continental**
- **Vosges Mountains** - shelter vineyards from western winds. Lack of clouds. Sunny summers/dry autumns.
 - More sunlight = higher level of sugar ripeness
- North = lesser vineyards (plain between Vosges Mountains + Rhine)
 - Grapes here used for Cremant d'Alsace
- Further south = best vines on S/SE-facing slopes
- Soils: variety (lots of geological complexity)
- Grape growing practices:
 - **Sloped vines** = **trained low** - benefit from radiated heat/rows oriented to maximise sunlight
 - **Plains** = **vines trained high** - minimise spring frost risk
 - Organic/biodynamic widely practised - low disease
 - Logistic issue = harvest. Small plots/different varieties.
 - Ripen at different times - vintage spread over long time
 - Mid Sept - begin of Dec (VT/SGN)

Grape Varieties and Winemaking

Noble grapes = **Riesling, Gewurztraminer, Pinot Gris, Muscat**

- Majority of wines single varietal
- Blends - inexpensive/juice not selected for varietal wines - labelled as "Edelswicker" or "Gentil"
 - Not for premium brands
- Aromatic grapes - focus on retaining fruit. Wine making;
 - Fermentation in 100-year-old large barrels - tartrate deposit prevents any oak influence.
 - Unlikely but some wine makers allow MLF
 - Bottling = spring following vintage (young/fresh)
 - Issue: wine normally dry, but producers making more sweet
 - No official labelling determining sweetness
 - Vendages Tardives (VT) - dry - med-sweet = no indication
 - Sélection de Grains Nobles (SGN) - always sweet (Botrytis influence varies)

Riesling

- Most planted noble grape
- Best = medium-full-body/dry/medium alcohol/high acid/citrus/stone fruit/stoney-steely character
- Some being made with more residual sugar
- Less floral than Germany

Gewurztraminer

- Light pink skin grape - golden coloured wines
- Full-body/oily texture/low-med acidity/high alcohol/spicy nose/lychee/rose/sweet baking spices

Pinot Gris

- Rich/full-body/high alcohol/rich texture/pronounced flavour intensity/fresh + dried fruits/honey
- Same colour as Gewurztraminer - less aromatic

Muscat

- 2 Muscat varieties
 - Muscat Blanc a Petit Grains = very aromatic/orange blossom/rose/grape/light-med body/low-med acid
 - Prone to rot/poor fruit set - less aromatic
 - Muscat Ottonel = more reliable, most planted

Other grape varieties:

Pinot Blanc - widely planted. Grown in fertile, plain soils (not slopes). Used for sparkling wines. Non-sparkling = light/simple/refreshing.

Auxerrois - Similar to Pinot Blanc, spicier + more full bodied.

Sylvaner - Less widely planted - delicately perfumed/some richness (best drunk young)

Pinot Noir - only black grape permitted. Lacks weight of Burgundy - light/fruity. Some wine makers use new oak.

Alsatian Appellations and Classifications

Two appellations; **Alsace** + **Alsace Grand Cru**

Vendages Tardives (VT) + Selection de Grains Nobles (SGN)

Difficult to distinguish quality - producers add 'Reserve personelle' or 'Cuvee speciale' to label (no legal status)

Alsace

- Majority of the region's production
- Varietally labelled - 100% of wines must be from grape
- Small number of blends made (not variety labelled)
- Some villages allowed to add name to label (rare)

Alsace Grand Cru

- Over 50 vineyards have their own grand cru appellation
- Must be from single noble variety (some exceptions)
- Labels must have: vineyard/vintage/grape variety (where appropriate)
- Controversy = some Grand Cru appellations in large area - some not Grand Cru worthy - some producers like GC off label.

Vendages Tardives (VT) 'Late Harvest'

- Must be noble variety
- Min level of sugar ripeness
- Passerillage (or noble rot)

Selection de Grains Nobles (SGN)

- Must be noble variety
 - Min sugar ripeness (depend on variety)
 - Usually noble rot
 - Not produced every year or only in small quantities
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Multiple Choice Practice Questions

Questions:

1) Which of the following is NOT a noble grape of Alsace?

- a) Riesling
- b) Gewürztraminer
- c) Pinot Blanc
- d) Pinot Gris

2) Which of the following terms indicates a sweet wine in Alsace?

- a) Trocken
- b) Vendages Tardives
- c) Brut
- d) Sec

3) What is the legal minimum percentage of the primary grape variety required for a wine to be labelled as a varietal in Alsace?

- a) 85%
- b) 90%
- c) 95%
- d) 100%

4) What is the term used to describe Alsace wines made from grapes affected by noble rot?

- a) Vendanges Tardives
- b) Sélection de Grains Nobles
- c) Cuvée Prestige
- d) Vin de Paille

5) What is the primary winemaking style for Alsace Gewürztraminer?

- a) Light and crisp
- b) Dry and austere
- c) Rich and aromatic
- d) Sparkling and effervescent

Answers

1. c) Pinot Blanc

2. b) Vendages Tardives

3. d) 100%

4. b) Sélection de Grains Nobles

5. c) Rich and aromatic