

ALSACE

As with the Loire, the region of Alsace appears to have suffered from the significant drop in per head consumption in its key market, France; a market which thrived on Alsace's sparkling wines among others. A tiny region of 16,000 hectares lying to the east of the Vosges mountains close to France's border with Germany, it too like the Loire has a plethora of grape varieties (Muscat, Sylvaner, Pinot Blanc/Auxerrois, Riesling, Gewurztraminer, Pinot Gris, Pinot Noir) among its largely white wine styles that has probably only served to confuse the end consumer; added to which the full-bodied wines are produced in German-shaped bottles.

The Bas-Rhin, the area to the north of Colmar, is the source of the region's fullest, most generous style of white wine; it's where the fruit is generally riper thanks to the open topography and varied expositions together with its warmer, often pink sandstone soils. The farmers who till this part of Alsace are unfairly labelled as the '*Barrois*' by their southern neighbours in the Haut-Rhin; unfairly because much of the Haut-Rhin relies upon fruit bought from the Bas-Rhin to complete and bring added ripeness to their blends. The most accomplished producer in this region is André Ostertag.

The Haut-Rhin is therefore the southern half of the elongated Alsace region that runs effectively as a continuation from the German vineyards of Mosel-Saar-Ruwer. This is the coolest, consistently highest and

steepest part of the region's vineyards that face east across the border into Switzerland. This part of Alsace is notable for the high quality of its Riesling and Gewurztraminer wines, as grown on the limestone, sandstone and granitic soils. It is also home to some of the region's most famous producers: Zind-Humbrecht, Marcel Deiss, Weinbach and Trimbach.

Alsace is also celebrated, not just for the unequalled number of Michelin restaurants of any region in France (cooking among other things Munster cheese in one of nine ways), nor for the unequalled number of sunshine hours in France, but for being the birthplace of Rudolf Steiner; the man who articulated and labelled biodynamic agriculture back in 1924. Needless to say Alsace has the highest proportion of biodynamically certified producers; as documented by the international body DEMETER, whose president is, coincidentally, the Alsacien producer Oliver Humbrecht MW.

Humbrecht is currently working on a project to classify the region's *Premier Crus*. The *Grand Cru* vineyards were agreed in 1985, although controversially so as many of the region's many famous growers abstained from voting, suggesting that it wasn't being strict enough in lowering yields. This handed the cooperatives the initiative to profit from the label without producing the assumed quality a *Grand Cru* would merit. So Humbrecht is canvassing widely to avoid a repeat.

Vintage Notes

Vintages to look out for in the last decade are **2002**, **2005** and **2007** but the last three vintages have all been excellent too. Alsace is clearly enjoying a purple patch.

