

# WINE REPORT

## 2009

INSIDE INFORMATION

RECENT VINTAGES

NEW FINDS

LATEST HARVEST

HOT TIPS

WINE SCIENCE

TOP 10 LISTS

BEST BARGAINS

TOP PRODUCERS

GREATEST WINES

LATEST NEWS

WINE INVESTMENT

BEST WINE GUIDE/  
WINE BOOK  
2004 & 2005  
IN HALL OF FAME  
2006 & 2007

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and a unique team of  
regional specialists

# 2009

## Global Report

# ALSACE

by

## Tom Stevenson

## GREATEST WINE PRODUCERS

- 1 JosMeyer
- 2 Domaine Weinbach
- 3 Domaine Zind Humbrecht
- 4 Trimbach (Réserve and above)
- 5 René Muré
- 6 Schlumberger
- 7 Hugel (Jubilée and above)
- 8 Domaine Ostertag
- 9 André Kientzler
- 10 Léon Beyer (Réserve and above)

## BEST-VALUE PRODUCERS

- 1 JosMeyer
- 2 Jean Becker
- 3 Lucien Albrecht
- 4 Cave Vinicole de Hunawirh
- 5 Jean-Louis Schoepfer
- 6 René Muré



# Vintage Report

Advance report on the latest harvest

## 2007

As in Champagne, a fantastically hot spring pushed the vines on one month in advance of their normal growth, but the weather started to fall apart in June. April and May were exceptionally hot and sunny, but on 15 June a hailstorm devastated up to 150 ha in the villages of Ammerschwihr, Sigolsheim, Kientzheim, Bennwihr, and Kaysersberg. I was dining at Bernard Trimbach's home the following week (20 June), when the telephone rang to say that a narrow band of fierce hail had struck their vines in Mittelwihr. Pierre and I went for a midnight drive in the wake of the storm to find 50 per cent of the potential crop had been destroyed. Mid-August rains encouraged the most meticulous growers to remove the leaves above bunches to help avoid a repeat of the previous year's rampant rot. Despite these climatic difficulties, the harvest took place under ideal conditions throughout a typically sunny Alsatian September, and many great white and sweet white wines have been produced, with Pinot Blanc, Riesling, and Gewurztraminer the most successful grape varieties. Pinot Gris also excelled. As for the reds, opinion is divided.

Updates on the previous five vintages

## 2006

**Vintage rating:** Red: 75, White: 75

The year of the mushroom! Over the past 20 years, only 2003 and 1996 yielded worse wines, but unlike those two years, this was neither an unpleasant nor difficult year to taste. While the dead fruit and lack of acidity made the 2003s hard-going and the malic (not malolactic) stink of the 1996 was (and still is) repulsive, the mushroom aroma pervading most 2006s was not at all offensive. It is the result of rot, but it is just boring and even had a silver lining because it made tasting my way through 470 2006s much easier — particularly the 380 wines at my centralized tasting at CIVA. While I have to give the best wines my undivided attention in any year, as soon as I hit a 2006 with mushroom on the nose or palate, I moved on. What would be the point of any further consideration? I'm not going to recommend such wines, although one producer told me that his American importer told him to send over as much "risotto wine" as

possible, because since he told his customers to drink it with mushroom risotto it's been flying off the shelf! No less than 12.6 per cent of the 2006s I tasted at CIVA were mushroom-affected, and when each producer is restricted to a maximum of four wines, presumably they are showing me their very best. Putting the all-pervading mushroom problem to one side, the worst varietal performance was *blanc de noirs* from Pinot Noir that was not fit for red wine. Many did not bother with red wine, yet some like René Muré made the best red wine of their lives. There are some excellent 2006s, but this is not a vintage to buy on spec. Every producer was affected. You must be very picky.

## 2005

**Vintage rating:** Red: 88, White: 90

Overall, 2005 is better than 2004, with brighter fruit flavours, and it vies with 2001 and 2002, but the wines need time to confirm their precise qualities. Gewurztraminer was the best all-round performer, while Riesling was the most variable (although some Rieslings were as good as the best Gewurztraminers) and the Pinot Gris was excellent. All other varieties were good to very good. Ideal conditions for botrytis suggest excellent botrytized (as opposed to *passerillé*) VT and SGN.

## 2004

**Vintage rating:** Red: 86, White: 87

Definitely a more classic vintage, with good fruit and excellent acidity levels. Not in the same class as 2002 or 2001, but it has a distinct edge over 2000 and is certainly fresher, fruitier, and more classic than 2003.

## 2003

**Vintage rating:** Red: 93, White: 65

There is no doubt that the oppressively hot year of 2003 provided an exceptional and extraordinary growing season, but apart from — potentially — Pinot Noir and a handful of anomalies, the quality is neither exceptional nor extraordinary. Ploughing through 350 wines from this vintage in March 2005 was one of the hardest, most unenjoyable, but most instructive tasting experiences of my life. Acidification was allowed by special dispensation, but not everyone took advantage; of those who did, very few got it right, whereas many of those who did not acidify failed to produce wines of any elegance. Most are ugly with a deadness of fruit. Pinot Noir should be the star, but I have not yet tasted a glut of great Pinot Noir, although the optimist in me hopes that I will have more exciting news in the next edition of *Wine Report*. Putting to one side Pinot Noir, the most expressive 2003 grapes were Pinot Gris, which in fact looked as black as Pinot Noir on the vine and were made with a natural *vin gris* colour.

## 2002

**Vintage rating:** Red: 85, White: 89

Although there is some variability in quality, the best 2002s have the weight of the 2000s but with far more focus and finesse. Riesling definitely fared best and will benefit from several years' 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 SGNs have been produced.