

YEAR'S BEST **ALSACE** WINES

Our Alsace tastings revealed a trove of classics, with some stunning vintages from Trimbach; reimagined classics, with sensitively farmed wines from the likes of Olivier Humbrecht and Mélanie Pfister; and some markedly successful wines that sulfur never touched, from winemakers with a natural bent, including Christian Binner and Christophe Braun. Alsace has been blessed by a string of good to great vintages, especially the ripe and fresh 2017s, and the best of these wines will reward your attention with clean, elegant aperitifs this summer and robust, complex rieslings, gewurztraminers and pinots gris for the rich holiday meals later in the year. —J.G.

Our blind panels tasted **92** Alsace wines over the past 12 months. Our critic for Alsace, **Joshua Greene**, rated **30** wines as exceptional (90+) and **10** as Best Buys. Subscribers can find a complete list of wines tasted, and all reviews, at wineandspiritsmagazine.com.

RIESLING

94 | Mélanie Pfister \$65

2016 Alsace Grand Cru Engelberg Riesling Domaine Pfister is based in Dahlenheim, west of Strasbourg, in the northern Bas Rhin of Alsace. Mélanie Pfister took over the domaine in 2006 and, as of last year, her family added her name to the labels. While her father had farmed without chemicals and without tilling, he has lately been working with her to gain organic certification for the domaine, including the two acres they farm at Engelberg, near the limestone quarry in the middle of the grand cru. Pfister allows this riesling to ferment spontaneously, then ages it in tank, allowing the fruit depth to show unencumbered. What at first feels cool and hay-like turns toward brisk yellow apple and a lasting richness of toasted pineapple, the wine crackling with acidity that keeps driving that length of fruit. This still has the glow of youth, a voluptuous riesling to enjoy now, and structured to age for a decade or more. *Vintage '59 Imports, Washington, DC*

94 | Trimbach \$400

2014 Alsace Clos Sainte Hune Riesling This is Pierre Trimbach's 35th vintage of Clos Sainte Hune, which he now makes with his nephew, Jean. Located within the Rosacker grand cru in Hunawihr, the Clos is the family's most prized vineyard site, 4.12 acres of vines, the oldest planted in 1951, growing in *muschelkalk*, a fossil-flecked limestone. Protected by the height of the Vosges mountains and by the stone wall that surrounds the vines and helps trap the warmth of the sun, riesling thrives in this site. The 2014 vintage, from a relatively cool ripening season, has enough acidity and mineral power to catch in the back of your throat, and yet the wine

is saturated and elegant, making that tickle a signal to sit up and take notice. What's remarkable about this riesling is the precision of its flavors and structure, sustained in the midst of its bold intensity. The chalk, lemon pith and white cranberry purity of that flavor is youthfully reticent, delivering hints of what this will become with age. *Taub Family Selections, Boca Raton, FL*

94 | Domaine Weinbach \$65

2017 Alsace Cuvée Ste-Catherine Grand Cru Schlossberg The Faller family's winery is based in the Schlossberg grand cru, and their domaine includes a parcel of old-vine riesling in the middle of the slope, which they have farmed under biodynamics since 2005, their wines now Demeter certified. That parcel provides the Cuvée Ste-Catherine, a wine that Tasting Coordinator Corey Warren praised for "the deep complexity and nuance in its fruit," describing the wine's intensity of lemon flavor, from the juicy pulp to the pith and peel. It's as powerfully fragrant as it is searingly acidic, bright and juicy enough to fully incorporate that acidity into a beeline of flavor. You could drink it now with salty cured ham, or 20 years from now as a wine to contemplate. (*W&S 10/19*) *Vineyard Brands, Birmingham, AL*

94 | Domaine Zind-Humbrecht \$108

2017 Alsace Grand Cru Rangen de Thann Clos Saint Urbain Riesling The altitude at Rangen de Thann, rising to 1,575 feet, delays budbreak, while the steep volcanic slope provides air drainage, both of which protected this vineyard from the frosts of 2017. The 55-year-old vines at this southernmost vineyard in Alsace provide one of

GEWURZTRAMINER

93 | Mélanie Pfister \$37

2017 Alsace Lenz Gewurztraminer From the Lenzerstuecker vineyard in Silberberg, where Pfister's three acres of gewurztraminer grow in a mix of limestone and clay, this is a complex, silken white with lively cut to its texture. It holds the freshness of a cool draft of spring water, a juicy apricot flavor that's more savory and crunchy than sweet. Intriguing as a young wine, this is structured to age. *Vintage '59 Imports, Washington, DC*