

# Frankfurter Allgemeine

SUNDAY NEWSPAPER  FAZ.NET

## Origin Zellberg

Sunday, August 21, 2022

How a small town in Alsace is making a name for itself and producing wines not easily found elsewhere.

By Stephen Reinhardt

In Alsace, there are also wines to be discovered that are at the same or even higher level than the names that have been known for decades, such as Zind-Humbrecht, Trimbach, Weinbach, Josmeyer or Hugel. Marc and Anne-Marie Tempé, for example, are fast approaching retirement – and who knows what will happen to their domain in Zellenberg once they give it up. Measured against the stupendous quality of the wines, however, the name Tempé is still far too unknown, especially in this country, where only - out of old friendship - restaurateur and wine dealer Pierre Moissonnier sells the wines ([lemoissonnier.de](http://lemoissonnier.de)), but more regionally than nationally, the main thing exclusive.

Marc Tempé only started marketing wines himself in the early 1990s, having previously worked for INAO, a government institute responsible for French agricultural products with official origin and quality labels. But then he took over the small family estate in the hilltop village near Riquewihr and converted it to biodynamic farming in 1996, as one of the first in Alsace. Working biodynamically means working preventatively and ecologically, taking into account the lunar calendar and using special compost preparations such as horn manure and horn silica. I really like how Tempé - in general, many winemakers in France - think about wine and how they work with the vines, grapes, musts and nascent wines: always promoting the expression of the vineyard and the grape.

VINTAGE '59  
IMPORTS  
[WWW.VINTAGE59.COM](http://WWW.VINTAGE59.COM)

The path from the vineyard to the glass always seems logical to me with Tempé. I never have the feeling that the winemaker would change the expression of the wine according to his own ideas, for example by leaching the grapes for a particularly long time or sulphurizing the must early to prevent further biochemical processes. Tempé believes in the goodness of its *terroir* (or vineyard) as well as in the quality of its grapes. The often fashionable requirements of the market do not interest him. There are many legal tuning options for producing wine through the use of additives. But the art of a Marc Tempé and other great winemakers is to leave things out and to attract their loyal customers through uniqueness rather than sheer difference.

In fact, the great wines of the world have not changed significantly in style or quality for decades (or longer). Instead, they have a recognizable nature, as they have always remained themselves - even in times of climatic and economic challenges. Tempé works very intensively in the vineyard, always making sure that fully ripe and clean grapes of the highest quality can be harvested from healthy vines on well-rooted soil without the use of synthetic agents. His vinification, which is based on knowledge and basic trust – i.e. how he makes his wine – gives the musts and future wines every opportunity to develop without him interfering substantially. Of course, every step from the time of harvest to bottling follows a decision - a wine does not make itself.

Tempé succeeds excellently in the wines that do not come from classified Grand Crus, but from local locations, such as from the loamy limestone soils in Zellenberg. Among the Pinot Noirs, the 2019 "AmZelle", which was fermented for over six weeks, matured on the yeast for almost two years and was unfiltered and bottled with only a little sulfur a year ago, offers more than many Burgundies at this price (39.50 euros): a clear, fine Pinot tone in a clear, elegant scent and a silky, elegant, juicy texture with concentrated but juicy, fresh fruit and remarkable freshness, which leads to a long, lastingly structured finish. The slowly unfolding wine should have had a sniff of air in the carafe for six hours before being enjoyed.

Equally enjoyable is the golden-yellow 2019 Riesling "AmZelle" (24.50 euros) from the wind-open, later maturing eastern flank of the Zellenberg, which was allowed to mature for two years in large oak barrels. It shows a dense, complex and aromatic bouquet of yellow plums with lemony and chalky notes of rock. This full-bodied, balanced Riesling is refined and elegant on the palate and develops an intense, salty finish with finely tart citrus notes, which is carried by delicate tannins. From here it is not very far to his complex Grands Crus from the Schoenenbourg (42 euros) and the Mambourg (56 euros), which are among the great dry Rieslings in the world.