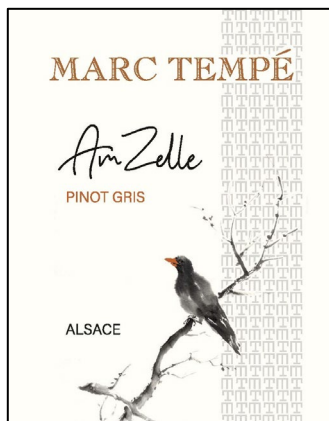


# Domaine Marc Tempé (biodynamic) Haut-Rhin



Of all our growers, Marc Tempé is the most idiosyncratic. The man marches to no drummer but his own, and he does so with blissful confidence devoid of arrogance. He doesn't care what you or I think, and he doesn't care about money; he cares about making really good, pure wine that really reflects its little piece of ground. Powerfully built (he's called The Bear by at least one little boy in Colmar), hard working, he is also indefatigably upbeat, a quality that has shone steadfastly from the first day I met him in 1997.

He started his journey as a lab technician for the INAO, the body that governs France's appellation system. He then stepped outdoors to become a vineyard expert for the same body, responsible for selecting *lieux-dits* (place names or single-vineyards) for possible inclusion into Alsace's new grand cru system. In 1993 he started his domaine with his wife Anne-Marie, from parcels inherited from both of their families. They immediately began the conversion to biodynamic farming, and 1995 became their first commercial release. In 1999, Léonard Humbrecht, the patriarch of Domaine Zind-Humbrecht, called Marc his "spiritual godson" in *La Revue du Vin* (note, with all due respect to Z-H, that Marc's wines tend to be drier, and less expensive).

Today the domaine comprises nearly 20 acres in the Haut Rhin radiating from the village of Zellenberg. The vines are pruned severely for low yields, harvested by hand, and pressed very slowly and carefully in order to retain acid and keep the pH as low as possible (the length of the pressing is determined by the type of grapes and their maturity, rather than by the simple calculus of weight + time = formulaic result). The grapes are never chaptalized; the must is never acidified; and laboratory yeast is never introduced. The wines are made either in old *foudres* (huge casks) or older Burgundy barrels (mostly obtained from Domaine Laflaive, a fellow biodynamic grower, and their use is dictated by the varieties— Pinot Gris, for example, does well in these smaller vessels—or by the small size of a given parcel). Fermentations are extended in one of two old, moist Zellenberg cellars, and the wines rest on their lees for a minimum of 24 months. This is something that no business plan would sanction but which, Marc is convinced, serves to emphasize a wine's minerality and terroir. At bottling there is no fining and only a deft use of sulfur. Some wines, particularly the *lieux-dits* and grand crus, are bottled without filtration.

These are later harvest wines that are richly nuanced and complex, filled with unctuous orchard fruits, and just plain delicious. If you like hedonistic wines with an intellectual bent, Tempé would be your man.

FYI, as of 2022 according to Alsace's syndicate the CIVA, of the 4,000-odd grape growers in Alsace, 48% are members of co-ops and 35% sell wine in bulk, leaving independent wineries at only 17%.

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