

Domaine Pfister

Bas-Rhin



In 2022, Pfister became the latest member of the small but illustrious A.C.T. group – standing for Alsace Cru & Terroirs, an association of 18 producers dedicated to creating “grands vins.” Pfister’s wines are marked out by clarity and precision, reflecting vintage variation faithfully ... these are for those who love subtle wines. Definitely a new star.

–Anne Krebiehl, MW, Vinous Media, April 2023

I love Mélanie Pfister’s still wines, which are among the most elegant and limestone-driven in the region, and her Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut is also an excellent wine.

–John Gilman, View from the Cellar, January-February 2023

These wines [Engelberg Riesling 2019, Hüt Pinot Noir 2019, and Silb Pinot Gris 2019] really seal her position as one of the region’s most important rising stars.

–Stuart Pigott, Senior Editor, jamessuckling.com, June 2022



Domaine Pfister began life in 1780 during our Revolutionary War. That seems a long time ago, until you learn that Pfister’s village of Dahlenheim was favorably noted for wine production in the distant year of 884. A written record has survived, detailing how the village supplied wine to the Abbey of Saint Michel de Honan during that era. Dahlenheim was an important center of wine production throughout the Middle Ages as well. It’s located due west of Strasbourg in the northern reaches of the Bas Rhin (legally, a separate department from the Haut Rhin, and meaning, simply, lower down the Rhine River—but keep in mind that the Rhine flows north to the Baltic).

This is Riesling country. Up here the Vosges Mountains are not nearly so toweringly majestic, nor, correspondingly, so protective. Dahlenheim itself is nestled in the flank of the great Engelberg hill, due west of Strasbourg, and has no vines on the Rhine plain. Its vineyards are not as shielded from cold weather as further south in the Haut Rhin, and this cooler climate, along with the abundance of hillsides and of limestone and less sandy soils, favors Riesling and makes for particularly elegant, mineral renditions of the wine. Mélanie Pfister makes two Rieslings, both entirely dry. Berg, the first, comes from the limestone hillside adjacent to Engelberg, making for a wine that is tantalizingly full, rich, and piercing in its drive. The other one is from the grand cru of Engelberg, a wine whose endless fields of white flowers and orchard fruits, to say nothing of its electric minerality, makes you sit up straight.

If you like wines marked above all by purity of fruit, elegance, and character (to say nothing of reasonable pricing), you have come to the right place. Mélanie and her father farm 43 parcels totaling ten hectares (twenty-five acres) of vines, twenty-five percent of which is in Riesling. Mélanie "officially" took over from her father with the 2006 vintage, but dad is far from retiring. He very proudly has got his daughter’s back and works the vines as hard as he ever did. He just no longer sweats the cellar work.

Leading up to that transition, Mélanie did internships at the following estates: Zind-Humbrecht (Alsace), Méo- Camuzet (Burgundy), Château Cheval Blanc (Saint Emilion), Château d'Yquem (Sauternes) and Craggy Range (New Zealand). It's worth considering that most aspiring winemakers would take it as a fine feather in the cap to be accepted into any *one* of those training programs, and Mélanie got into all of them. In 2005, she made the first Cuvée 8 (now called *Mel*), a blended wine that she had long envisioned and so named because she is the eighth generation Pfister to make wine at the domaine. Following the transition, the next big step she took came after the harvest in 2010, when she broke ground on a new cellar. She knows how she wants to make and handle her wine and beginning with the 2011 vintage she has been able to do just that.

At the beginning of 2018, Mélanie and her father decided to go entirely organic and received certification in 2021. In addition, beginning in 2019, they began using biodynamic preparations in the vines. It's important to realize, however, that these steps into progressive viticulture are simply small and logical ones for them. In the early 1980s, Mélanie's father quit using herbicides and adopted a no-till regimen. He was way out in front of his generation, but to him it was clear that this was a much healthier and natural way to farm grapes. Initially, he treated all the parcels identically, but over time and with Mélanie's involvement he began adopting methods according to parcels. Thus, today a given parcel dictates what grasses, legumes and grains are sown, and some parcels are mowed and mulched while others are sown with plant material that can be pushed over by a machine (called a "rolofaca") and left flat between rows.

In 2019, at the urging of both of her parents, Mélanie retired the label with its distinctive band of orange and the signature of her great-grandfather in favor of a new design, one that gives each wine an acronym stemming from its vineyard name. Plus, she added her name to the domaine name.

Apart from her upper tier Pinot Noirs and her Pinot Gris "Silb," which see time in oak, most of Mélanie's wines are made and aged in steel tank. Recently, she's begun working with 700-liter sandstone amphora, especially for the orange wines. The *élevage* is an extended one on the lees with the base range seeing nearly a year of aging before bottling while the upper range ages 18-24 months. Indigenous yeast is preferred, but she reserves the right to use non-aromatic cultured yeasts in more problematic years when the risks of off-flavors are greater. The wines are normally fermented dry and bottled with a minimum addition of sulfur. Normally, 15 different wines are made each year with an overall production of roughly 5,000 cases.

About her family's style of wine, Mélanie wrote the following in 2012:

The house style appeared itself as the style of wine my parents and grandparents liked to drink: aromatic, well-balanced, rather dry style of wines. As a matter of fact, my grandfather used to say, "Finally, I am probably the one who drinks the most of my wines, so I craft the wines I like!" – no concession, he liked dry wines.

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%.

<http://www.domaine-pfister.com/>