

# Mélanie Pfister

## Bas-Rhin



### The Wines

- *Breit*: The acronym *Breit* comes from *Hangenbreite*, the name of the vineyard. The appellation rules for this wine were promulgated in 1976 and André, Mélanie's father, quickly planted Chardonnay—he was an early adherent, having gone to Champagne's wine school in Avize. From the first, he started with a long aging period. Today, the Pfisters well understand this wine and consistently make an unusually elegant, perfumed, top end sparkling wine. This is a blend of roughly half Chardonnay and a quarter each of Pinot Blanc and Auxerrois (the back label states half Chardonnay and half Pinot Blanc because the latter is commonly assembled with Auxerrois in Alsace.). The wine rests on its lees for a minimum of 24 months (bear in mind that most French crémant, regardless of origin, ages on its lees for a mere nine months or so). Depending on what bottling you have— there are between three and four disgorgements of a given year's crémant— what you're drinking could have aged as long as thirty-six months on its lees. This is a single-vintage wine without any older reserve wine, but the vintage is kept discreetly on the back label rather than printed on the front because of the multiple disgorgements. The final sentence in the back-label text gives the exact number of months of aging on the lees. Production averages 800 cases annually; dosage is 3-4 grams per liter, making this an extra brut.

Note that Mélanie bottles a limited number of magnums. Effectively, these releases constitute her *dégorgement tardive* crémant--the wine rests on its lees in bottle for some five years and is bottled with a lower dosage (the 2018 aged 5.8 years before disgorgement and was dosed at 1.1 g/l).

- *Paar*: *Paar* means *pair* in German; this wine is made from the two varietals, Pinot Blanc and Auxerrois. The vineyard surface is 2.4 hectares, or six acres essentially split between Pinot Blanc and Pinot Auxerrois, but Mélanie's wine tends to have a bit more Pinot Blanc than Auxerrois. Some is reserved for the sparkling wine, but most goes into this still bottling. Pinot Blanc gives floral notes and fine acidity, while Auxerrois gives fat and spice. Most of the current crop of vines was planted in 1973 and '74, with a small section dating from the late '60s, and all grow in predominately clay soils. Annual production averages 500 cases.
- *Mel*: The acronym *Mel* comes from Mélanie, the woman who created this wine. It is a blend of Riesling, Pinot Gris, Gewurztraminer, and Muscat, in that order—but every year the percentages vary according to what variety does best. In that sense, the wine is intended to reflect the best of a given year. It is also intended to proclaim *Alsace!* in spades. The varieties are picked separately and fermented individually before being blended. Save for the Muscat, all come from the Silberberg terroir. Annual production averages 500 cases.

- *Berg*: The acronym *Berg* comes from *Auf dem Berg* and *Silberberg*, two neighboring hillside vineyards. This is a wine full of earthy stone fruit and a dry, crisp length that rises far above its "entry" class. The vineyard soils are a variation of France's famous *argile-calcaire* mix, or clay-limestone mix. (Locally, Berg's soils are known as *Muschelkalk*, a geological term referring to the middle Triassic period, and in Berg's case it's *Muschelkalk* topsoil--averaging 3-feet--over limestone bedrock.) The clay gives Riesling body while the calcareous limestone gives finesse, focus, and length.

Riesling from limestone terroir differs from Riesling growing in Alsace's granitic soils or pink sandstone (*grès*) soils by virtue of its structured ability (and need) to age. Unlike clay, granite and sandstone-based soils drain quickly, and its wine tends to be expressive right out of the gate. The Pfisters farm six plots of Riesling to make the Berg cuvée, totaling 1.29 hectares, or 3.18 acres of vines. Annual production averages 900 cases.

- *Riesling Grand Cru Engelberg*: *Engelberg* means *Angel's Hill*. This was the south-facing hillside vineyard that was written about in 884 and praised for its fine wine. The hillside's topsoil is very thin and marly--averaged 20 inches in depth--sitting on a mound of hard Oolitic limestone mother rock into whose cracks the vines root. The purity of this limestone was such that a quarry was established in the middle of the slope and produced lime into the 20th century. The vineyard was granted Grand Cru status in 1985, and the Pfisters farm 0.77 hectares of Riesling here, or just under two acres of vines all located in the prime mid-slope zone of this exceptional grand cru. Annual production averages 300 cases.
- *Lenz*: The acronym *Lenz* comes from the name of the vineyard, *Lenzerstuecker*. Two parcels, three acres total, all in the lieu-dit of Silberberg. This is made in tank with a long aging on the lees and typically bottled in August before the harvest--but if the wine needs more time, it's given more time, for there is space in the cellar to do this. The terroir here is based on limestone, making for an elegant, drier style of Gewurztraminer with residual sugar levels hovering around 13g/L, which is much less than the much richer norm. Production averages 200-400 cases.
- *Furd*: The acronym *Furd* comes from the name of the vineyard, *Furdenheimer Tal*. Of all the wines listed on this page, this is the richest in terms of sweetness, but the impression is one of concentration and elegance—a Pfister hallmark—rather than sweetness. This comes from 1.32 hectares, or 3.26 acres of vines, growing on a steep hillside with relatively rich, deep soil. Annual production averages 750 cases.
- *Silb*: *Silb* takes its name from *Silberberg*, or Silver Mountain, where the Pinot Gris vines for this wine grow. They are divided among three tiny plots totaling three-quarters of an acre on the Silberberg ridge, which is adjacent to the Engelberg ridge (the two join to form the plateau that falls down to Mélanie's village of Dahlenheim). These plots were planted early in this century on top of Silberberg in shallow, limey soil overlying dense limestone bedrock. The soils, plus the windy site, make for an atypically elegant, mineral rendition of Pinot Gris, one with exceptionally juicy acidity. The wine is fermented and aged in older 228L and 300L barrels, racked to steel after 15 months, and aged for another three to nine months before bottling. Annual production ranges from 1,000-2,000 bottles.

- *Hüt: Pinot Noir*: From a one-acre plot of Pinot Noir that Mélanie and her father first planted in 2008 on the top of the Engelberg hill. The plot grows next to the grand cru border (delineated by a tractor road) and bears the name Hüt as a play on words--it refers to the actual lieu-dit name of Huette and to the fact that the highest houses (huts) in the village of Dalhenheim stand there. The vines face south, and the soil is rocky with a good amount of clay. The wine normally ferments spontaneously and is aged in older Méo-Camuzet barrels from Burgundy. Mélanie's first production was in 2017. She makes roughly 200 cases each year.

*What most people might not realise is that Pinot Noir has a long history in Alsace that pre-dates the founding of the French Republic. It was when the Swedes intervened in the Thirty Years' War (around 1631), that the first Pinot Noir vines were planted in Alsace. This happened because soldiers took Pinot Noir vines with them en route from Burgundy to Baden-Württemberg. The first vines were planted around the village of Marlenheim, which is one of the first villages on Europe's oldest vine trail. --Benjamin Roelf, [jancisrobinson.com](http://jancisrobinson.com).*

- *Macération (Orange Wine)/ Pinot Gris*: First produced with the 2018 vintage, this comes from Mélanie's parcel of Pinot Gris next to her Rahn Pinot Noir vines: limestone and loess, east exposure, a cool site. This macerated for around 15 days and fermented in steel and then was raised in neutral oak. Production varies between 2,500-3,000 bottles.
- *Macération (Orange Wine)/ Gewurztraminer*: This comes from the Lenz parcels (see above), where the vines were planted in 1999 and 2002. No SO2 additions during any of the winemaking or aging, and only 1 gram per liter was added at bottling. This macerates for around 10 days, followed by fermentation in steel, and then élevages in amphora, neutral barrels and steel (to better preserve the delicate fruit). Production varies between 2,500-3,000 bottles.
- *Rouge Toujours*: Pinot Noir. Just before the pandemic, Mélanie decided to make a red and a white wine and bottle them under the Vin de France appellation, which permits much greater flexibility. For example, she could bottle this Pinot Noir in a Burgundy bottle rather than, as required by the AOP regulations, a Hock bottle (forget Pinot; it's hard enough to sell Riesling in those tall bottles!). Rouge Toujours comes from a small parcel of less than two acres planted in 1980 with *sélection massale* cuttings. The vines are hand-harvested early in the morning, the fermentations normally are spontaneous, and aging is done in steel. No fining or filtration. Mélanie looks for fresh, juicy, supple Pinot Noir here with this classic cuvée (the Hüt cuvée of Pinot Noir sees élevage in barrel). On average, 250 cases are made yearly.
- *Rendez-Vous en Blanc*: Riesling, Pinot Blanc, Pinot Gris, with 6% or so of Gewurztraminer. The sister to Rouge Toujours above. The 2018 aged in tank on its lees for 18 months, thanks to the pandemic, which tanked all her markets, but going forward the élevage is for a minimum of 12 months on the lees in steel before bottling. Dry, fresh, and aromatic, this is meant to be an easy, delicious preface to Alsace (and a great glass pour!).