



8 ARGUMENTS TO WRING THE NECK OF 8 COMMON PRECONCEPTIONS ABOUT ALSACE WINES, AND TURN THEM INTO AS MANY NEW IDEAS!

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1. *'Alsace wines are too complicated!'*

If the energy of a place relies on its biodiversity, then Alsace is a very privileged region: a Continental Europe climate, an endless mosaic of rocks and soils on which eight very different varieties grow, and a culture at crossroads between two great European civilizations, which took the best of the two worlds, all result in a wide range of genuine and original wines.

However complex it may be, Alsace is complicated only for people in a rush; it is true that this species is rapidly growing, which is normal since they do everything very, very fast.

In order to make people better understand about the complexity of our *terroirs*, ever since 1985 we have been distinguishing between *Vins de Fruit*, *Vins de Pierre* and *Vins de Temps*. And ever since, many others have been imitating us, yet hardly any have gracefully mentioned us.

We have further used pictures, a universal language, to provide each *terroir* with its own distinctive visual identity.

Moreover, the "dry wine" text on our back labels is a clear answer to the nail-biting issue on residual sugars.

Indeed, if what is complex absolutely needs to be explained in order to be fully understood, this also opens up the doors to passion and real culture!

What is complex is like biodiversity: by dint of simplifying, optimizing if not making profits, you lose the main thing that is Life in itself!

So long live complexity and down with complication!

2. *'Alsace wines are has-been!'*

With mouthfuls of names like Gewurztraminer, Breuschwickersheim, Baeckehoffe or Muenchberg, which even the most zealous polyglot cannot remember, with the so-called "*flûte du Rhin*", a green bottle that is unfitted for today's storage systems while shiftily fostering confusion with wines from across the Rhine, with their fruity character that the common run of people always mix up with sweetness, and with folk-country labels imposingly shelved on end display racks of this world's worst supermarkets, Alsace wines are far from glamorous!

However, although nothing makes the Alsatians angrier than to be mixed up with the Germans, their being at the crossroads of cultures undoubtedly foreshadows a new Europe freed from inward-looking behaviours.

Alsace is a melting pot with a mustard and horseradish sauce, which could be used to help build up a really united Europe. Don't YOU think this is hot news?

Again and again, Alsace's double-sided background has led to particularly developed environmental awareness.

In fact, 13% of the vines are organically or biodynamically-grown and, due to pending conversions to organic farming, that figure will soon rise to 20%, making Alsace the greenest vineyard in the world.

And the fact that the Demeter France HQ and most biodynamics associations happen to be located in Colmar surely is no coincidence: with Dornach and the Goetheanum in the vicinity, Alsace is really fertile ground for biodynamics.

And you find it has-been! Are you sure you do not mix up old and new fashion?

3. *'Alsace wines give you headaches'!*

Did you know that, after WWII and until the 1972 Borocco Act related to the compulsory bottling in the Upper-Rhine and Lower-Rhine, most Alsace wines were bottled at Paris-Bercy? Wines would be shipped in bulk to Paris and, to avoid any risk, sulphured over the top. Hence their notorious fame!

Ever since, processes have been changing a lot and dosages have drastically dropped, especially with organic farming and even more with biodynamic farming, whereby legal dosages are sensibly lower than EEC provisions.

Thus, for white wines with less than 5g/l residual sugars, the maximum legally admitted sulphur dioxide contents are respectively 200mg/l with traditional farming, 150mg/l with organic farming and 90mg/l with Demeter farming.

So that today, Alsace wines, at least those made from the best vintners, do not contain more sulphites than other whites, and maybe even fewer, considering that rigour is no empty word here!

And because there is no good alternative to sulphur dioxide to date, we use very small quantities for harvest, and then just before bottling.

By the way, we have just tested a stabilization process on a few sample wines using homoeopathic volcanic sulphur, which seems to be a promising lead in the future.

That headache about headaches has really, really, no reason for being!

4. *'Alsace wines are sweet'!*

Oh yes, what a let-down to try and match a supposedly dry Alsace wine that turned out to be sweet, with a fish not necessarily named Wanda! Unconsummated, the sad marriage throws some strong doubts on the truthfulness of Alsace wines.

All the more so since most of those sugars are just here to hide misery and trap idiots, because the wines are so skinny and diluted or even chaptalized.

But residual sugars are also to be found in wines with great matter. And, even though the former are natural and thus can be considered as legitimate, they raise the same question about today's pattern of Alsace wines.

To us, the answer is obvious and crystal-clear. We want to make dry wines from ripe grapes!

Don't let us be misunderstood: we do not make completely dry wines on an analytic point of view, but seek a dry mouthfeel, residual sugar being intertwined with the flesh and watered down by acids and salts.

And that balance is usually reached when residual sugars exceed the wine's total acidity by 2 grams.

This is what we are striving for in our wines, except for the Gewurztraminers, and that enables us to print **Vin Sec** on our back-labels.

So our wines are good and loyal table wines. Dry yet fleshy, yummy, they call for a top off, and match as well with fish as with white meat, veggies and cheese.

5. 'Alsace wines smell after petroleum'!

I'm not talking here about those fires raised by some infuriated *pétroleuses*. More prosaically, I mean petroleum notes in Rieslings!

You do remember that, not so long ago, we said Cabernet Franc was smelling after green pepper. This was before the best winemakers in the Loire region managed to harvest ripe and green pepper-free Cabernets.

Ever since, we have figured out the green pepper taste was indeed typical of Cabernet Franc, but only when it is not ripe!

It goes the same with petroleum in Riesling. This is a distinctive plant tracker of grapes harvested unripe, especially when petroleum notes are to be found in young wines.

So please, stay away from petroleum-smelling young Rieslings, or you may feel sorely disappointed. Look only for noble petroleum ageing notes in some *terroirs*, not including Muenchberg, Fronholz and Heissenberg at all.

However, bear in mind that Riesling wines made from ripe grapes will never smell after petroleum. They will rather remind you of a bunch of white flowers or a peach and apricot basket, and most aged Rieslings will only exhibit a short-lived hint of it, never enough to fill up an oil barrel!

6. 'Alsace wines do not cellar'!

Did you know that Riesling had a better ageing potential than Chardonnay?

In fact, the acidity level naturally helps with the cellaring, but above all the ageing under anaerobic conditions preserves the redox potential. As a result, it is like bottling the wine with an anti-oxidizing boost which helps deal with the effects of time.

Obviously this makes sense only for low-yield *terroir* Rieslings with a mineral character, that will gain in complexity over the years; but these wines will keep for over 20 years and end up outclassing the best white Burgundies.

Great Pinot Gris have an ageing potential similar to that of great Chardonnays. As far as *vendange tardive* (late harvest) or *sélection de grains nobles* (noble rot) Gewurztraminers are concerned, thanks to their natural sugars they will keep for over 30 years, that is an eternity compared to today's notion of patience!

7. 'Alsace wines drink with Choucroute'!

While it is true that Alsatian cooking is one of the best in France, and that Choucroute is Alsace's flagship dish, it would be a huge mistake to confine Alsace wines within their regional boundaries.

Take modern cooking for example. The search for refined flavours and respect for the produce calls for wines that can enhance this elegant approach.

Well, with their refined aromas and acidic/salty structure, Alsace wines will be perfect to take modern cooking to the next level.

But more is coming... From ultra-precise Japanese cooking to fireside forgotten stew through spicy mixes, Alsace wines will always make your plates sing.

Alsace seems to have a wine for every kind of food: raw, cooked, smoked, hot, spicy, sweet & sour, salty-sweet, fat-rich, low-fat, and so on. Your imagination is the limit! Above all, do not forget about cheeses that are enhanced by the whites and do not go along very well with the reds; have a go on the same cheese with two glasses -preferably black- of wine side-by-side, respectively a white and a red, and you'll be bluffed up! For all these reasons, I consider Alsace wines to be all-purpose, because they can match with any kind of food, throughout the world. That takes us well beyond the local Choucroute!

8. *'Alsace is freezing cold'!*

No question about it: Alsace is located in the North-eastern part of France, that is, in people's minds, in a polar zone far remote from seaside pleasures and sunbathing! It is true, though, that the vineyards of Alsace are France's most continental ones, so necessarily far from the sea. Moreover, sheltered from the influence of the sea through the mountain barrier of the Vosges, they are France's second-driest vineyards after those of Languedoc-Roussillon.

Besides, seasons are very marked here and even though spring can be short, fall is usually gorgeous and thus perfect for vine-growing. It is common knowledge that the months of September and October are crucial in the fields.

Finally, temperatures vary a lot between night and day, which is a prerequisite for the grapes to get the finesse and complexity required to make great wines.

You see, unlike what you may think, the Alsace region enjoys a kind of climate that is perfect for making great white wines. On top of that you have the incredible richness of the soil. The potential here is unique in the world, and blows away the common picture of this 'easy acidic cold-weather white wine'!

In a nutshell, Alsace is the be-all, end-all, an Eldorado-like valley along the Rhine, still unexplored by "white-gold hunters"!

And like the dwarf Alberich who seized the Rhine gold, it is the mission of Alsatian vintners to extract gold from their vineyards, not to then turn it into an almighty ring but to let the world drink it. By doing so, reality will go beyond the *Nibelungen* legend!

9. *'Let's drink to the last droplets of verse'!*

'Let's drink, drink Alsace wines
Let our glasses be filled
With a wine that wavers like a flame....
Before they break
Like a burst of laughter'.

(my free interpretation of *Nuit rhénane* by Guillaume Apollinaire, in *Alcools*)

André Ostertag, Vintner
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