



KERMIT LYNCH WINE MERCHANT

DOMAINE OSTERTAG

Country: France

Region: Alsace

Appellation(s): Alsace, Alsace Grand Cru

Producer: André Ostertag

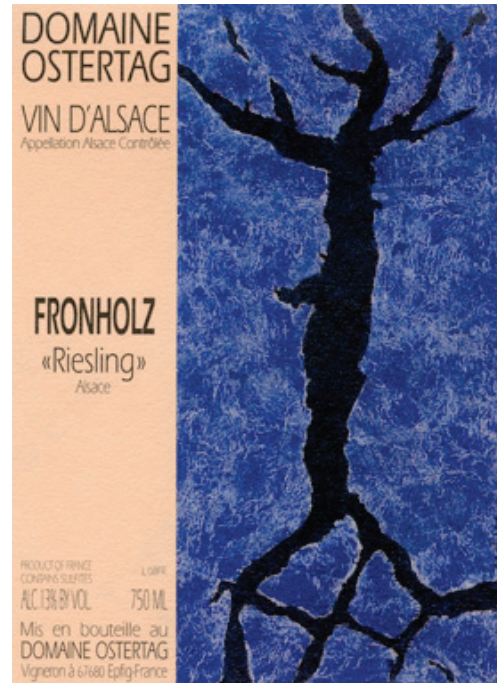
Founded: 1966

Annual Production: 8,300 cases

Farming: Biodynamic (since 1998)

Website: <http://domaine-ostertag.fr/en>

To call André Ostertag a revolutionary winemaker is to tell just half the story. He is a pioneer, certainly, but also an ardent environmentalist (as demonstrated in both his wine and his sculpture, another passion). After training in Burgundy, André returned to the family domaine in Alsace with renewed zeal: he lowered yields considerably and introduced viticultural and vinification techniques from other regions to his own home ground. The 1996 vintage marked his first collaboration with KLWM, and the following year he brought biodynamic viticulture to his fourteen hectares of vineyards, including his flagship parcel in the Muenchberg *Grand Cru*.



There is poetry to Ostertag's practices. He looks for the nuance of *terroir* rather than the typicality of a grape varietal. In an act of rejection against the official classifications dictated by the A.O.C., he made up his own categories: *Vins de Fruit* that express fruit character rather than that of a specific vineyard site, *Vins de Pierre* reflecting the *terroir* from which they originate, and *Vin de Temps* that rely on time and weather to encourage the development of botrytis. He ferments the majority of his wines completely dry, so their versatility at the table surpasses that of many other wines from the region. In Ostertag's experience, a careful use of oak subtly enhances the traditional Alsatian varietals from the Pinot family, giving them greater depth on the palate. He uses oak sourced exclusively from the Vosges Mountains and, for his Pinots, prefers *barriques* to the traditional *foudres*. He rejects formulaic, scientifically engineered wines, and since going biodynamic in 1997, has been an active member of the natural farming community. As he so beautifully explains in Kermit Lynch's *Inspiring Thirst*,

...true quality is that which succeeds in surprising and moving us. It is not locked inside a formula. Its essence is subtle (subjective) and never rational. It resides in the unique, the singular, but it is ultimately connected to something more universal. A great wine is one in which quality is contained. Such a wine will necessarily be uncommon and decidedly unique because it cannot be like any other, and because of this fact it will be atypical, or only typical of itself. (p 279)

That is a quote we wish more wine critics would take to heart.

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DOMAINE OSTERTAG (continued)

<u>Vins de Fruit</u>	<u>Blend</u>	<u>Vine Age</u>	<u>Soil Type</u>	<u>Vineyard Area*</u>
Gewurztraminer “Vignoble d’E”	Gewurztraminer	20+ yrs	Gravel, Clay	1.5 ha
Pinot Blanc “Barriques”	Pinot Blanc	20+ yrs	Clay, Limestone, Granite	0.8 ha
Pinot Gris “Barriques”	Pinot Gris	20+ yrs	Gravel, Clay, Schist	0.8 ha
Pinot Noir Rouge “E”	Pinot Noir	20+ yrs	Gravel, Clay	0.5 ha
Riesling “Vignoble d’E”	Riesling	30+ yrs	Gravel, Sand, Silica, Clay	2.5 ha
Sylvaner “Les Vieilles Vignes”	Sylvaner	40+ yrs	Clay, Granite, Gravel	2 ha
<u>Vins de Pierre</u>	<u>Blend</u>	<u>Vine Age</u>	<u>Soil Type</u>	<u>Vineyard Area*</u>
Muscat Fronholz	Muscat	40+ yrs	White Sand, Quartz, Clay, Marl	0.3 ha
Pinot Gris Fronholz	Pinot Gris	20 yrs	White Sand, Quartz, Clay, Marl	0.25 ha
Pinot Gris Muenchberg Grand Cru “A360P”	Pinot Gris	30 yrs	Red Sandstone, Volcanic Soil, Limestone	0.4 ha
Pinot Gris Zellberg	Pinot Gris	20+ yrs	Clay, Limestone, Pink Sandstone	0.5 ha
Pinot Noir Fronholz	Pinot Noir	40+ yrs	White Sand, Quartz, Clay, Marl	0.3 ha
Riesling Fronholz	Riesling	30+ yrs	White Sand, Quartz, Clay, Marl	1.2 ha
Riesling Heissenberg	Riesling	25+ yrs	Pink Sandstone, Gneiss, Granite	0.75 ha
Riesling Clos Mathis	Riesling	25 + yrs	Granite	0.60 ha
Riesling Muenchberg Grand Cru	Riesling	35+ yrs	Volcanic Sediment, Pink Sandstone	1.7 ha
<u>Vins de Temps</u>	<u>Blend</u>	<u>Vine Age</u>	<u>Soil Type</u>	<u>Vineyard Area*</u>
Gewurztraminer SGN	Gewurztraminer	20+ yrs	Gravel, Clay	1.8 ha
Gewurztraminer Fronholz SGN	Gewurztraminer	40+ yrs	White Sand, Quartz, Clay, Marl	1.2 ha
Gewurztraminer Fronholz VT	Gewurztraminer	40+ yrs	White Sand, Quartz, Clay, Marl	1.2 ha
Riesling Muenchberg VT	Riesling	35+ yrs	Red Sandstone, Volcanic Sediment	1.7 ha

* “ha”=hectares; one hectare equals roughly two and a half acres

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DOMAINE OSTERTAG (continued)

VITICULTURE / VINIFICATION

Practicing biodynamic viticulture since 1998, Domaine Ostertag does all vineyard work and harvesting by hand and uses no chemical fertilizers, herbicides, pesticides, or fungicides. The domaine owns 14.4 hectares of vineyards in over 80 separate plots spread over the villages of Epfig, Nothalten, Itterswiller, Ribeauvillé, and Albé.

The fruit is pressed gently, and indigenous yeasts induce a long fermentation that continues until the wines are fully dry (with the exception of the Gewurztraminer). André defies his region's conventions by aging his Pinot Blanc, Pinot Gris, and Pinot Noir in oak barrels, in the style of Burgundy, where these varieties originated, on their lees. He uses 228L oak barrels produced from an area of the Vosges mountains that is adjacent to his domaine. Very little new oak is used and it has a very light toast. All used barrels come from the domaine and may be 1 year or up to 20 years old. The percentages of new oak used each vintage is relatively stable: Pinot Blanc "Barriques" = 3%, Pinot Gris "Barriques" = 8%, Pinot Gris *Fronholz* = 10%, Pinot Gris *Zellberg* = 14%, Pinot Gris A360P *Muenchberg* = 20%. The Sylvaner, Muscat, Gewurztraminer, and all the Rieslings are aged in 100% stainless steel. The Pinot Noir "E" is a blend of stainless and *barrique*.

Vins de Fruit:

Ostertag's *vins de fruit* or "fruit wines" are made to express varietal character and feature the flavor of the grapes themselves. The first to be harvested, these wines are aged 6-9 months before release and are meant to be drunk young (within five years of release). The *vins de fruit* can be identified by their green bottles and the "Dancing Vines" label.

Vins de Pierre:

The next category is for wines that are designed to express their *terroir* and are aptly named *vins de pierre* or "stone wines." Harvested later than the *vins de fruit*, they are aged 11-18 months and can be drunk young or aged for up to 20 years. Their labels emphasize the vineyard names and feature a painting of a single vine.

Vins de Temps:

The estate's *vendanges tardives* and *sélections de grains nobles* are named for both meanings of the French word *temps*: the weather, which can make or break a vintage, and time, which is necessary to over-ripening for the late harvest wines and for the development of noble rot. The minimalist labels used here allow the wines' brilliant colors to stand in the spotlight. The *vins de temps* reach their peak after 20-50 years of cellaring.

The Fronholz Vineyard:

Located on the top and the southwest slopes of the hill of Epfig, the Fronholz vineyard gives wines with marked minerality, firm acidity, and elegant aromas that can be rather discreet in their youth. The estate's four hectares are divided among Riesling (1 ha), Muscat (0.3 ha), Pinot Noir (0.3 ha), Pinot Gris (0.75 ha), Gewurztraminer (1.3 ha), and Sylvaner (0.35 ha).

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The Heissenberg Vineyard:

Domaine Ostertag owns 0.75 hectares of vineyards in the Heissenberg or “Hot Mountain” vineyard in Nothalten. With a soil of pink sandstone of the Vosges and gneiss, this south-facing slope is planted exclusively to Riesling and gives fleshy, mineral wines with generous, exotic aromas.

The Zellberg Vineyard:

The southeast facing Zellberg vineyard is located on the mid-slopes in the village of Nothalten on a soil of clay, limestone, and the pink sandstone of the Vosges that gives fat, sensual wines with delicate aromas. The estate’s 0.45 hectares are planted to Pinot Gris.

Clos Mathis

The Clos is located near Ribeauville at the foot of the *trios châteaux* and next to the *grand cru* Kirchberg. It is a terraced hillside of granite with south-east exposure.

The Muenchberg Vineyard:

From the Alsatian “muench” meaning monk, this vineyard is named for the Cistercian monks who originally planted vines here in the 11th-12th centuries. In a south-facing amphitheater in Nothalten at the foot of the Vosges mountains, the Muenchberg site combines volcanic sediment and the pink sandstone of the Vosges with a touch of limestone. The vineyard offers definition, elegance, and great length and class to the Riesling (1.65 ha) and Pinot Gris (0.40 ha, aka A360P) planted here.

MISCELLANEA

The Ostertag Family:

The name Ostertag means “Easter day,” and the family coat of arms shows the Easter lamb carrying a battle flag. This image was the inspiration for the estate’s logo of a sheep.

The Labels:

The images on the *vins de fruit* and *vins de pierre* labels are by André’s wife, Christine Colin-Ostertag.