

CLOS STE. HUNE THE VERTICAL

“How many other regions can claim such a singular, iconic varietal wine?”

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ROBERSON WINE

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The Trimbach winery is one of the oldest and best established family wine estates in the world. Founded in the village of Riquewihr (not, as their website suggests, in Ribeauvillé) in 1626, Jean Trimbach had left his home in Switzerland to resettle in Alsace at a bit of a strange time - the Thirty Years War was in full swing and within six years of his arrival the population of Riquewihr had fallen by 97% from its pre-war level. Despite the fog of war, Jean managed to produce his first wine from the 1626 vintage and it wasn't long before the family were well established as the most important grape growers in the town - his son and grandson would both go on to be mayor of Riquewihr before the century was out, perhaps owing as much to the lack of menfolk as any particular political skill they might of had.

It wasn't until the 1840s that the family relocated again, this time to the village of Huniwir, and it was here that *Maison Trimbach* really began to fulfil its potential. Under the guidance of Frédéric-Emile the company grew, taking on new vineyards and finding new markets for their wines. Frédéric-Emile continues to be revered by the family today and one of their best wines is named in his honour. There was one more move left for the winery, this time to Ribeauvillé after the end of World War One, and it is there that they remain to this day.

The modern era of Trimbach begins after WW2, when the 11th generation took charge of the winery - Bernard making the wines and his brother Hubert travelling the world to promote them. Their arrival at the family business ushered in a golden age for Trimbach, thanks both to the quality of wines that Bernard was making and the tireless proselytizing of Hubert. Gregarious and jovial, Hubert took the Trimbach wines to all corners of the globe, promoting the quality of not just the family's wines but elevating the region's reputation in general. The message was based on dry white wines - a style that Trimbach is renowned for and that they have stuck too resolutely in the face of escalating sugar levels across Alsace. Their insistence that Alsacian Riesling should always be bone dry (unless specifically in the VT or SGN styles) has rubbed-up a lot of their winemaking colleagues the wrong way down the years - so despite their global popularity with wine drinkers and sommeliers, the Trimbach family are not always universally loved in Alsace.

Today it is the 12th generation that are in charge, with Bernard's sons Pierre (winemaking) and Jean (sales and marketing) running the operation. Pierre's daughter Anne also works at the domaine and the family business is sure to be run by future generations in the years to come. The estate-owned vineyards stretch to 40 hectares and a further 95 hectares-worth of fruit is bought in for their négociant wines. Farming is *lutte raisonnée* and their yields of 40-60 hl/ha are conventional rather than obscenely high, with 100 hl/ha+ common throughout the region.

Trimbach continue to be the region's most well known producer, sticking resolutely to their dry style and consistently turning out high quality examples throughout their range. The fact that 1 in 5 bottles of Alsace wine sold in the USA is a Trimbach goes some way to demonstrating how successful their policy of roving sales and marketing has been. With Clos Sainte Hune at the top of their portfolio and - without much argument - at the top of the Alsacian wine pyramid, their reputation is likely to remain intact. It is one of the world's finest white wines and, despite Trimbach's large overall production, one of the region's rarest.

CLOS STE. HUNE

THE WINE

There is a good deal of mystery surrounding Trimbach's Clos St Hune. The photograph at the top of the opposite page shows the church in the village of Huniwuhr that is seen on the wine's label, replete with a beautiful sloping vineyard of Riesling vines. For many years this was presumed to be the Clos Ste. Hune vineyard (and was often reported in the press as such), but it is actually just another plot of Trimbach vines and the label we now associate specifically with CSH was once the label used across the winery's entire range. The view to the church is what can be seen from the back of the old Trimbach winery building - the family has long since moved out and this building is now a restaurant called (appropriately) 'Caveau de Vigneron'. The winery introduced a new range of label designs for every wine - except the CSH, which retained the traditional design, and as a result the picture has been assumed (understandably) to be CSH over the years. In actual fact, the vineyard plot shown on the label picture is a north-east facing vineyard that is not a particularly good site, despite being so picturesque!

The real location of the vines is on the other side of the main road that runs through the village, on the right-hand side of Rosacker Grand Cru. The map opposite shows the Trimbach's 1.67 hectare plot of the 26 hectare vineyard - and this is where another mystery starts...

The Trimbachs have owned this slither of Rosacker for over 200 years and according to them it was traditionally known as the 'Clos Sainte Hune', although it doesn't exist as an *actual* Clos (that is to say, it is not surrounded by its own brick wall). The family have been making a wine specifically from this tract of vines (and named CSH) since 1919, so when the Grand Cru appellation was expanded to incorporate Rosacker in 1983 (the original legislation went through in 1975, but only for Schlossberg) they were faced with a dilemma. They could forgo the CSH name and label the wine as Rosacker Grand Cru, or they could forgo the Grand Cru moniker and continue to use the name CSH (the rules don't allow for a 'monopole' vineyard to be classified as Grand Cru, so CSH was never going to get its own Grand Cru appellation). Obviously, they elected to carry on calling the wine Clos Ste Hune and this high profile rejection of the Grand Cru system continues to be used by critics as a stick to beat the appellation authorities with. But - and this is where the plot thickens - there are murmurings from some quarters that opting out of the Grand Cru system is convenient for Trimbach because it enables them to use the CSH name as a brand (the actual appellation is just the regular AOP Alsace), entitling them to blend fruit/wine derived from other vineyards into the wine. The question of whether Clos Ste Hune is a legally recognised specific vineyard or a just a brand (like Trimbach's Frédéric Emile or Cuvée des Seigneurs) has been debated on internet forums and in Alsatian wine bars for many years - the family insist that only fruit from this parcel of Rosacker is used in CSH, but there are persistent whispers that this is not really the case. The Trimbachs insist that the wine is - and has always been - made from this specific plot of vines, so the rumour and insinuations are probably little more than scurrilous gossip.

The vines themselves are south / south-east facing and sit on fossil infused limestone soils called 'Muschelkalk'. This is Alsace's finest terroir and it runs from Schoenenbourg Grand Cru in Riquewihr through to Altenberg de Bergheim Grand Cru in Bergheim. The Rosacker vineyard lies right in the middle of this vein of limestone. In terms of age, the average age of the vines is around 50 years old, but there are some parcels older than 80. It must be the concentration that comes from these old vines that gives the wine its prodigious capacity to age because, from a wine making perspective, Clos Ste Hune is not made in a way typically associated with 'fine wine'. The primary fermentation (there is no malolactic fermentation done) takes place at a moderate temperature (20C) in stainless steel tank. The wine is matured there until being bottled in the spring following the harvest (which is early when compared to top white Burgundy, for example). 750 cases are made and it is typically aged in bottle for at least 6 years before being released.