

## (on the vine)

Trimbach. If I have read once that Clos Ste Hune is made from grapes grown in the vineyard below the 14th-century church of Hunawihr, I have read it a thousand times. I'm not sure who first penned this particular fallacy, but it was a long time ago. I do, however, know how and why this misconception came about. Clos Ste Hune is, of course, a single-vineyard wine from Hunawihr, and the fact that it has a different label from the rest of the Trimbach range, and that this label depicts vines growing on the slope immediately beneath the church at Hunawihr, is the reason why so many people have put two and two together.

Unfortunately, the answer they have come up with is five, not four, because that particular vineyard is not Clos Ste Hune. Furthermore, with a northeast-facing slope, it makes wine of little distinction. Clos Ste Hune is, in fact, on the very opposite side of the village. It is not behind (and here we have a clue to why the wrong vineyard features on the label of Clos Ste Hune) the Caveau du Vignerons. This eating house is equally of little distinction, but it is the building itself that is of consequence; not because it was designed and built in 1610 by Heinrich Schickhardt, architect to the Duke of Württemberg, but because it was the business premises used by Frédéric-Emile Trimbach. If you go to the side or rear of the Caveau du Vignerons, you can see the church with its slope of vines from precisely the same angle as it can be seen on the label of Clos Ste Hune. Then, if you dig around among Trimbach's old labels, you will soon discover that the scene used for just one wine today was in fact the generic format for the entire Trimbach range at one time. Look a bit further and you might find some old stationery depicting Trimbach's Hunawihr winery, with the church and vineyard in the background (see p.156). This well-known view might be mistaken for Clos Ste Hune today, but it merely expressed the location of Trimbach to its loyal customers almost a century ago. Mystery solved.

Clos Ste Hune proper is nothing like as impressive as the slope leading up to the church depicted on the label, and unfortunately it is a *clos* in name only (though why the owner of any *clos*-less *clos* in France does not build a terroir-enhancing wall to enclose the vines, I cannot understand). Nevertheless, the wine it produces is indeed impressive—which leads to another misconception. There is a belief that Trimbach is against the grand cru concept per se and will never use the term. But the 1934 Clos Ste Hune Grand Cru label (reproduced here) shows that this is not true. Certainly, Trimbach is not at all happy with AOC Alsace Grand Cru, and its criticism is threefold. First, Trimbach (and others, such as Hugel and Léon Beyer) believe the system adopted has devalued the grand cru term by including some vineyard names that have never had any historic claim to fame and, in terms of potential quality, do not deserve such an illustrious classification. Second, they (and others) are dismayed by the expansion of boundaries for some truly famous vineyard names. Brand, to give an example, was originally little more than 3ha (7.4 acres) but is now officially classified at almost 58ha (143 acres)! And third, specific to Trimbach, they object to the perverse notion that a monopole (a vineyard in single ownership) cannot have grand cru status. If the monopole principle applied to Bordeaux, none of its châteaux, including all the famous first growths, would be

classified. In Alsace, however, the monopole of Clos Ste Hune is not allowed its own grand cru status.

If Trimbach wanted to claim grand cru status, it would have to be as AOC Grand Cru Rosacker. But it has never been part of Rosacker (only since the grand cru classification), and in terms of quality, the bloated terroir of Rosacker means nothing, whereas the limited terroir of Clos Ste Hune means everything. I might add that should the authorities realize their error and allow AOC Grand Cru Clos Ste Hune, this status would do Clos Ste Hune more harm than good, in view of the hotchpotch of wines that has been produced under the grand cru classification.

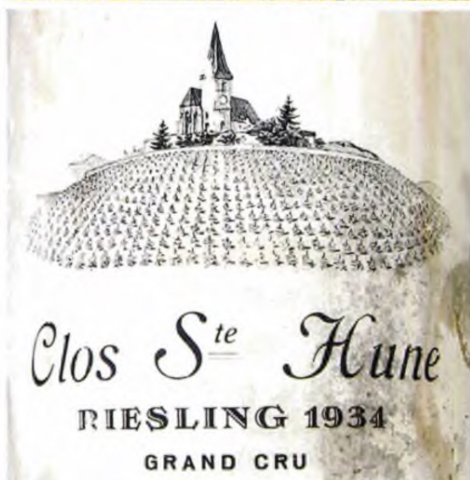
It is evident to outside observers that Clos Ste Hune should be classified above AOC Grand Cru. How many wine regions can claim such a singular, iconic varietal wine? Just as all producers in this region should be—and are—grateful to both Hugel and Trimbach for opening up international markets, so they should be grateful to Clos Ste Hune for the exceptional respect that this small piece of earth has earned from almost every independent wine specialist in the world. In *The Wines of Alsace* (Faber & Faber, 1993), I unilaterally declared Clos Ste Hune the one and only premier grand cru classé of Alsace. This would of course be a wonderful honor for Trimbach, but all Alsace producers would benefit, just as all Sauternes producers continue to benefit from the recognition of Yquem's reputation for its extraordinary quality and extraordinary consistency of quality. More than 14 years later, I'm still waiting for Alsace bureaucracy to see what's in front of its nose.

### The family

If it was Frédéric-Emile who first realized the commercial potential of this house, turning it into one of the most important producers in Alsace, then Bernard (b.1932) and Hubert (b.1938) must take at least equal credit for making Trimbach world famous. While this would not have been possible without the fabulous quality of the wines produced by Bernard, particularly the benchmark Clos Ste Hune, it is Hubert whom the future Trimbach family must really thank. He might not know or care about Trimbach's website, but for half a century he has lived out of a suitcase, devoting his life to spreading the word about Trimbach. The ever-smiling, Nordic-looking Hubert, with white-blond hair and ginger eyebrows, could sell the proverbial ice to an Eskimo—which was lucky for Trimbach, because virtually no one had even heard of Alsace when he first hit the road. Trimbach wines can now be found in all four corners of the globe, especially in the USA, where Trimbach accounts for one in five of all Alsace wines sold. Although his nephew Jean (Pierre's brother) is responsible for day-to-day sales and marketing, Hubert is still very active, particularly at events like Vinexpo, when he will hire a suite at a nearby hotel to entertain a non-stop procession of important customers. He spends so much time in hotels, restaurants, and airports all over the world that, when he returns home, even the village life of Ribeauvillé is too much, so he has built himself a large new house in the vineyard, where he lives like a hermit until he jets off again.

The fortified church at Hunawihr; a satellite image of the village, with Clos Ste Hune, in Grand Cru Rosacker, outlined in red, the vineyard beneath the church in green; old labels of Clos Ste Hune proudly proclaimed its grand cru status





Photography: (top) Nigel Blyth / Cephas; (bottom right) AVA and Tom Stevenson; (bottom left) Anne Trimbach





Winemaker Pierre Trimbach who, along with his brother Jean, represents the 12th generation, and who safeguards the dry wine tradition of his house and region

I love Bernard: Every time I visit Trimbach, Pierre tells me that his father has just retired. Again! But I still have to watch where I walk in the cellars, since I will inevitably turn a corner to be hosed down by Bernard sloshing around in his gumboots. I have a sense of constant déjà vu writing about Bernard and Hubert, for it is all very similar to how I described them in my book in 1993. But this is not self-plagiarism, it simply indicates that nothing has changed. If anything, Bernard is younger and fitter than ever. He'll outlive me, of that I'm sure. He has a brilliant memory. We will be around the table, either tasting or eating at his home, and one of us will mention a vintage, from the early 1970s, perhaps, and you can see the memory light up his eyes, like someone has just rung up a cash register. That jolly smile will fix on his face, his right index finger will go up, he'll say, "Wait a minute," and a little later he is back with a basket of dust-covered bottles.

If anyone has changed, albeit superficially, it is Bernard's sons, Pierre and Jean, the 12th generation. Pierre is as gray-haired as I am, but curiously it is the gray flecks in Jean's hair that make a bigger difference. Twenty years ago, when Jean was 27 or 28, he looked as if he was still at school; now he peers over his spectacles like a schoolteacher. Pierre is just rock solid—someone who is confident about what his vineyards can provide and is determined to continue the Trimbach philosophy of respecting the dry-wine traditions of Alsace, while so many around him are producing sweeter and sweeter styles. For Pierre, the production of a *vendange tardive* or *sélection de grains nobles* is a wonderful freak of nature—not something that is forced year in and year out—with the rest of the range

bearing varying, inconsistent, and unpredictable degrees of sweetness from year to year as the inevitable consequence. Thankfully, Trimbach is one house where dry means dry.

### The wines

Yields are moderate rather than low, the pressing is quick but gentle, the juice running into gravity-fed stainless-steel vats where the fermentation is slow and cool, with not a splinter of wood in sight, and absolutely no malolactic. Wines are racked from their lees as soon as possible, bottled early, and cellared for at least one year. This is the complete antithesis of Zind Humbrecht (different wines, different greatness), and the wines produced could not be more different. Trimbach wines are intense, steely, and bracing, with concentrated, elegant fruit that is not so much restrained as tightly coiled. They require bottle age to unwind slowly, whether this takes 12 months for the Pinot Blanc or 12 years for the Clos Ste Hune. You can rely on the basic range, all from purchased fruit, to be true to their varietal style and to be uncompromisingly dry. The *Réserve* and *Réserve Personnelle* wines may contain more than a dash of their own grapes and offer a distinct step up in quality, showing far more power and precision. Two of the three wines I have chosen to profile below (Gewurztraminer Cuvée des Seigneurs de Ribeauvillé and Riesling Clos Ste Hune) are produced exclusively from Trimbach's own vineyards, as is at least 80 percent of Riesling Cuvée Frédéric-Enile. They represent the pure essence of the Trimbach style and are widely judged to be among the very greatest of Alsace wines.

If you listen to most biodynamic producers in Alsace today,

photography courtesy of Tom Stevenson

they will tell you that when Riesling is grown on limestone or calcareous clay, the grapes are far too sugar-rich to make a dry wine by the time they are "physiologically ripe." Well, Cuvée Frédéric-Emile and Clos Ste Hune are both made from grapes grown exclusively on calcareous clay, and both are beautifully dry. Although the science behind biodynamics might be a bit far-fetched, I have nothing against this wonderfully natural form of sustainable agriculture. I do, however, take issue with the definition of ripeness recited with almost religious zeal by so many biodynamic producers today. Rudolf Steiner, the creator of biodynamics, never used the term "physiological ripeness," and he could not possibly have imagined the obscene levels of ripeness that are achieved today. Today's young biodynamic Turks have every right to their own opinion, but it is a matter of indisputable fact that either Cuvée Frédéric-Emile and Clos Ste Hune are made from ripe grapes or wine experts of every nationality regularly judge two wines made from unripe grapes to be of world-class quality.

No winemaker is perfect, and Pierre Trimbach is no exception. Occasionally his Pinot Blanc and Sylvaner can be less than exciting. But that is par for the course for those two varieties (and the Pinot Blanc can be a steal when it's on form). The only Trimbach wine I really do not like is the Pinot Noir, but even that is consistent: I don't like it every year! Trimbach's Pinot Noir is traditional Alsace in style, which is betwixt and between rosé and light red wine and, worst of all, made with a white-wine mentality. From almost any other producer I wouldn't mind this, because no one is forcing me to buy the wine and I don't have to drink it—but from a flagship producer such as Trimbach, it really is not good enough. Trimbach should seriously consider investing in a completely separate, but very small, red-wine-making facility, with a barrel room (but strictly minimal oak contact), and get to grips with malolactic bacteria—albeit ensuring that the location is far enough removed from the primary wine facility not to threaten their laser-like whites. ■

### THREE BREATHTAKING VERTICAL TASTINGS

I tasted these wines over two days at Maison Trimbach in June 2007: the Seigneurs de Ribeaupierre on the first day, with Cuvée Frédéric-Emile and Clos Ste Hune tasted side by side the next day. I considered tasting these last two wines blind but dismissed this for two reasons. First, I did not want to get sidetracked by guessing games with two such complex wines, each of which deserved my undivided attention. And second, if, in full knowledge of which is which, I considered a vintage of Cuvée Frédéric-Emile to be superior to the same vintage of Clos Ste Hune, I could be sure of one thing: that I had not been seduced by the label! Since I consider Cuvée Frédéric-Emile to be the second-best Riesling in Alsace, however, I expect it to rival Clos Ste Hune occasionally, if and when climatic factors give it the edge.

The "general style" note at the beginning of each vertical tasting is there to cut down on repetitious text in the notes on specific vintages that follow. Consequently, individual tasting notes should be taken within the context of the general style indicated.

#### Gewurztraminer Cuvée des Seigneurs de Ribeaupierre

**Origin** Grand Cru Osterberg, Ribeauvillé; Trottacker, Ribeauvillé; and Muehlforst, Hunawihr.

**Soil** Calcareous marl and limestone (Osterberg); very stony clay, calcareous clay and marl (Trottacker); and heavily fossilized calcareous clay (Muehlforst).

**Notes** Osterberg is known to impart an almost aggressive edge of acidity to some Riesling wines, but for the naturally low-acid Gewurztraminer this appears to be transmuted into a powerful tactile effect that enhances the wine's grip. Trottacker is just northeast of Osterberg, while Muehlforst is northeast of Clos Ste Hune. Usually cellared in bottle for at least five years before release.

**General style** A powerful and hugely complex wine that should be aged ten or more years to reveal the full pungency of its spice-laden terpenes.

**2001** Five years in bottle, and still most of the terpenes have yet to be unleashed, though they are there in force on the very rich, extremely long, and elegant finish, which has heaps of Middle Eastern promise (ginger, cinnamon). Quite sweet at this stage. Great potential. (13.60%, RS 11.6g/l, TA 5.0g/l.) Drink 2008–15. **19**

**2000** Spices just starting to show on the nose (cinnamon, cardamom). Very round, ripe, and moreish, with a mouth-swelling richness on the finish. Tastes drier than the 2001, even though it's not. Very instructional how fractionally more acidity and alcohol can make such a difference, though I suspect this might also be due to the effect of the extra year's bottle age on intensity of the terpenes. (13.65%, RS 15.5g/l, TA 5.2g/l.) Drink 2007–18. **19**

**1999** Pierre has only half-bottles left. The wine is very deep colored and oxidizing. Not as bad as it sounds, but I've had much better bottles. (13.30%, RS 14.5g/l, TA 4.5g/l.) Do not drink half-bottles! **11**

**1998** Vanilla-dusted, sweet Middle Eastern spices (star anise, ginger, cinnamon), and a touch of basil on the nose. Very soft, fresh, and elegant on the palate, with a restrained, yet long and lingering aftertaste, indicating much more to come. Tastes dry. Very fine indeed. (13.30%, RS 11.5g/l, TA 4.2g/l.) Drink 2007–14. **19+**

**1997** First bottle opulent but oxidative. Second bottle absolutely pure, with no oxidative character at all. Very fine, fruity-spicy pungency (cloves, allspice, grapefruit). Elegant. (13.75%, RS 22.0g/l, TA 4.9 g/l.) Drink 2007–10 **17.5**

**1996** Typical 1996 stink! I cannot think of one 1996 Alsace wine I would drink, and this is by no means the worst. The combination of high sugar ripeness and high malic acidity is a disaster for aromatic white wines. (13.80%, RS 11.0g/l, TA 6.0g/l.) Do not drink. Impossible to score.

**1993** Pierre thought he had only half-bottles left, but when the contents turned out to be weak and flabby, he resolved to look again because he likes the vintage very much. Twenty minutes later, after I had long since moved on from this vintage and had forgotten why Pierre had disappeared, he returned with a red face and a full 75cl bottle. It was worth the trouble. The fruit in the full bottle is beautiful. So young and unbelievably light, and long. (13.20%, RS 9.3g/l, TA 4.3g/l.) Drink 2007–13. **18**

**1990** Herbal-spice aromas (basil, rosemary, cardamom), with a hint of burnt-match. Classic, dry, long. (14.30%, RS 10.4g/l, TA 4.3g/l.) Drink 2007–09. **17**



## (on the vine)

**1976** Recorked in the winter of 2006/07. Amazingly pale and fresh for a 30-year-old wine, with a long, crisp finish, full of pungent spices (cloves, cinnamon, cardamom, allspice, grapefruit). A textbook demonstration that a white wine does not need acidity or sweetness to age gracefully. I cannot imagine what it would take to make a greater Gewurztraminer than this. (13.60%, RS 4.2g/l, TA 4.3g/l.) Drink 2007–17. **20**

**1973** Coconut-laced spices (cinnamon, vanilla, nutmeg) pervade the nose and palate. Stimulating, invigorating fruit. So long, spice-laden finish. Tastes dry, with spice searing the palate, to add a tactile impression to the length in place, or in support, of the acidity. Thirty-four years old and as fresh as a daisy. Not better than the 1976, just the result of an entirely different vintage producing a totally different wine from grapes grown in exactly the same place. Yet there is some underlying similarity that connects the two. Remarkable. Drink 2007–17. **20**

### Riesling Cuvée Frédéric-Emile

**Origin** Grands crus of Geisberg and Osterberg, Ribeauvillé.

**Soil** Clayey-limestone with high proportion of muschelkalk over a compacted bed of limestone and sandstone.

**Notes** A blend of Geisberg and Osterberg, from the steep lower slopes directly behind Maison Trimbach in Ribeauvillé. Most years it is a 50/50 blend, but the Osterberg can go as high as 60 or 70 percent, depending on how much the Couvent de Ribeauvillé delivers from its Geisberg vineyard. Picking is accomplished in at least two sweeps, typically at 12% and 13%.

**General style** A paradoxical wine, Cuvée Frédéric-Emile is generally fuller and more muscular than Clos Ste Hune, yet it opens up earlier (when it can appear to be “better” than Clos Ste Hune), though it ages just as gracefully. Usually cellared in bottle for at least four years before release.

**2003** Released before the 2002, this vintage has precious petrolly aromas.<sup>1</sup> Firm, distinctly more muscular than the 2003 Clos Ste Hune. An early drinker, but easily capable of developing gracefully for a decade or so. (12.85%, RS 5.7g/l, TA 7.1g/l.) Drink 2007–17. **18**

**2002** Touch of vanilla on the nose, Granny Smith's apple on the palate. Crisp and firm, yet also a tad fat in a welcome way. (12.90%, RS 4.2g/l, TA 8.2g/l.) Drink 2007–20. **18.5+**

**2001** Very tight nose and palate. Absolutely classic Cuvée Frédéric-Emile. This vintage won the *Decanter* World Wine Award Trophy in 2007. (12.70%, RS 1.6g/l, TA 7.9g/l.) Drink 2009–19. **18.5**

**2000** An exceptional wine from this big year. Very young, crisp, and bracing, with great extract. Classic Trimbach, classic Cuvée Frédéric-Emile, and, for me, much better than the same vintage of Clos Ste Hune. (13.05%, RS 2.9g/l, TA 7.1g/l.) Drink 2009–19. **18**

**1999** Beautifully tight minerality of fruit: very fresh and crisp. (12.75%, RS 1.6g/l, TA 8.0g/l.) Drink 2008–18. **18**

**1998** Much deeper color than other Cuvée Frédéric-Emile vintages of this sort of age. Ripe peach-stone fruit. (13.00%, RS 5.4g/l, TA 7.4g/l.) Drink 2007–12. **17+**

**1997** Rich, ripe, and crisp, but the fruit is so fresh, vital, and vigorous that even after ten years it still needs time to release its terpenes. One vintage where Cuvée Frédéric-Emile is distinctly superior to Clos Ste Hune. (13.00%, RS 4.2g/l, TA 7.2g/l.) Drink 2009–19. **18**

**1996** One of the more palatable 1996s, with just the barest hint of that year's vintage character on the palate. Very tart, as would be

expected from the high level of malic acidity. Due to the vintage, this is not one of the greatest Cuvée Frédéric-Emile wines, but it is hugely superior for the year, and it still has all of its best years well ahead. (12.55%, RS 4.2g/l, TA 9.0g/l.) Drink 2010–25. **16**

**1995** Fresh, vigorous, and yet beautifully bottle-mature on the nose, with lovely, ripe terpenes, citrusy-petrol notes, and fine minerality. The further into the palate, the crisper and more tightly focused the fruit becomes. How beautifully this has developed over the past few years! Excellent promise. Better than the Clos Ste Hune due to the latter's fat botrytis character. (12.75%, RS 3.5g/l, TA 8.3g/l.) Drink 2007–15. **18**

**1994** Old-gold color, with caramel notes on the nose that initially give the impression of malolactic, but this notion is rejected on the palate, where there is absolutely no malolactic effect on the acidity. This a good wine that could have been better. With 25 days of rain in September—a highly irregular phenomenon in Alsace—1994 was very much a vintage that required strict selection, and I think the selection for Cuvée Frédéric-Emile could have been stricter. Having said that, I have tasted many a 1994 Alsace Riesling that has already fallen apart. My criticism is relative: Cuvée Frédéric-Emile has to be judged at the very highest level. (13.10%, RS 6.3g/l, TA 8.1g/l.) Drink 2007–10. **16.5+**

**1993** Remarkably fresh, crisp, and racy. Very fresh acids. Classic minerality. On a par with the 1993 Clos Ste Hune, albeit in a totally different style. (13.00%, RS 4.4g/l, TA 7.3g/l.) Drink 2007–17. **18**

**1992** Very young and fresh looking, with a pale color, and green apple fruit on the palate. (12.70%, RS 2.9g/l, TA 6.6g/l.) Drink 2007–12. **17.5**

**1991** This was not released as Cuvée Frédéric-Emile but was declassified in its pure, non-blended form as Riesling Réserve, of which there is not a single bottle remaining. Pierre told me that the last time he wanted to taste it, he obtained a bottle from the cellar of Michael Schuster; but when I enquired, I discovered that it came from his wife's side of the cellar, and there was only one left. Monika is very proprietorial about her wines, and rightly so, but I successfully bartered it for a bottle of Champagne Vilmar Grand Cellier d'Or 2000! Considering its declassification, I was not expecting much, but the wine is holding up extremely well. What it lacks in finesse it more than makes up for in its typically muscular structure, upon which hangs excellent mature Riesling fruit. (13.00%, RS 4.0g/l, TA 7.2g/l.) Drink 2007–12. **17**

**1990** First bottle scalped. Second bottle as clean as a whistle and brilliantly fresh, with deliciously juicy fruit and a complex, petrolly minerality on the finish. (13.00%, RS 3.2g/l, TA 6.9g/l.) Drink 2007–20. **18.5+**

**1985** This beautifully balanced wine is so fresh and racy at 22 years of age, with such great finesse and complex minerality, that it demonstrates the lie of so-called physiological ripeness, which would define the grapes in this great dry Riesling as unripe! (12.50%, RS 3.9g/l, TA 7.2g/l.) Drink 2007–17. **19.5**

### Riesling Clos Ste Hune

**Origin** Premier Grand Cru Clos Ste Hune, Hunawihr (stuff Rosacker!)

**Soil** Pebbly calcareous clay over dolomitic limestone, sandstone, and clay.

**Notes** Owned by the Trimbach family for more than 200 years, Clos Ste Hune expanded from 1.4ha to 1.6ha (3.45 to 3.95 acres) in 2006, when Trimbach purchased the two rows that separated this *lieu-dit* from the village. These vines belonged to Albert Winzer, and the

grapes went into Mme Winzer's *tarte aux raisins*, possibly the most expensive dessert in the world! Picking is accomplished in at least two sweeps, typically at 12% and 13.5+%. Usually cellared in bottle for at least five years before release.

**General style** Although the epitome of fine breeding and finesse, young vintages of Clos Ste Hune can often disappoint the uninitiated when compared to the same vintage of Cuvée Frédéric-Emile, but when aged under ideal conditions for ten or more years, Clos Ste Hune stands out due to its purity, finesse, and minerality.

**2003** Released before the 2002, this has even more precious petrol aromas than the 2003 Cuvée Frédéric-Emile, but on the palate it is a different story, with far more restraint, tight citrus fruits, and evident minerality resulting in surprising finesse considering how quickly evolved the wine is on the nose. Impressive for the year. (13.25%, RS 6.2g/l, TA 6.5g/l.) Drink 2007–22. **19**

**2002** So classy. Very, very fine. Lovely, crisp minerality of fruit. Infanticide to open now. Really should not be touched until it is ten years old, but I know I won't be able to keep my hands off it. Stunning potential. (13.00%, RS 4.4g/l, TA 8.2g/l.) Drink 2012–32. **20**

**2001** Another fabulously classy wine. Just the barest hint of petrol peeping through on the nose. Great finesse. Superb. The laser-tight precision of fruit demonstrates its youth, indicating great potential. (13.00%, RS 2.7g/l, TA 8.0g/l.) Drink 2007–27. **19.5+**

**2000** The deeper color, atypical fatness, and lack of minerality in a wine that is the driest Clos Ste Hune in recent history tells the story. This vintage contains 20–25 percent botrytized grapes, and although this makes for a profoundly rich and extremely complex wine, it is not Clos Ste Hune and, on a personal note, not my sort of Riesling. I can well understand that some people will love this wine, but I cannot give it the sort of score it would deserve in their eyes and still keep faith with the level of scoring for the other Clos Ste Hune vintages. I won't overrate it, and I don't want to give it an insultingly low score, so readers should look out for this vintage if this sounds like your sort of wine. Whatever Pierre does with botrytized Clos Ste Hune grapes in the future, I don't think they should be part of this wine. (13.45%, RS 1.3g/l, TA 6.9g/l.) **NS**

**1999** This vintage was drinking well a couple of years ago, when it was deliciously pure and juicy. Now, however, it has an atypically rustic feel, but if left for 60 minutes or so, this melts away, leaving tight yet appealing citrus aromas. This suggests that it is going through a phase and should not be broached for a few years. In previous notes I have given this vintage the edge over Clos Ste Hune 1998, but scoring at this juncture is impossible. Try again in two years. (13.25%, RS 1.9g/l, TA 7.1g/l.) **NS**

**1998** Great richness, minerality, and finesse. Dances on the tongue. (13.45%, RS 3.7g/l, TA 7.4g/l.) Drink 2007–17. **18+**

**1997** I have never liked this vintage of Clos Ste Hune. It leaves a "furry" feel that catches at the back of the throat, and this has got worse with age in the original bottling. It's not from the terroir, and it's not a winemaking fault—which only leaves the cork, though it is not TCA. I must try sparging my remaining bottles with argon. (12.85%, RS 1.9g/l, TA 7.0g/l.) **11**

**1996** Pure 1996 in its sharp acid balance, but much finer than the Cuvée Frédéric-Emile, with even less vintage character showing through on the palate. (12.65%, RS 5.0g/l, TA 9.0g/l.) Drink 2010–25. **16.5+**

**1995** Another deep-colored, botrytis-affected vintage. There is no doubting the complexity of this wine, but it is too fat for Clos Ste

Hune, and the botrytized fruit obscures the terroir. Not scored for the same reason as the 2000 vintage above. (12.55%, RS 5.0g/l, TA 8.0g/l.) **NS**

**1994** Old gold, though not as deep as the 1994 Cuvée Frédéric-Emile, and boasting flecks of green in the reflections. Rich, ripe, juicy-peach fruit. Lovely acids and minerality. This is a year requiring selection of only the healthiest fruit, and this has evidently been applied very strictly for Clos Ste Hune. (12.75%, RS 6.0g/l, TA 8.5g/l.) Drink 2007–15. **17.5+**

**1993** This vintage has a much deeper color than the 1993 Cuvée Frédéric-Emile, but unlike the 2000 and 1995 Clos Ste Hune, this is not due to any significant botrytis content. The length of fermentation can affect the color of a white wine, and according to Pierre, this wine went through a particularly long fermentation. The nose is honeyed and peachy, the palate sweet (from bottle maturity, not residual sugar per se) and juicy. More like a high-alcohol version of Rheingau than Clos Ste Hune, but impressive all the same. (12.60%, RS 5.4g/l, TA 6.5g/l.) Drink 2007–13. **18**

**1992** Fresh, sassy fruit nose and palate. Creamy-rich, fresh peaches, touch of vanilla, with very fresh impression of plums and apples on the finish. Lovely minerality. (12.60%, RS 4.0g/l, TA 6.6g/l.) Drink 2007–20. **18.5**

**1991** Disappointingly one-dimensional for Clos Ste Hune, but it is rich, fresh, and still promises to develop, so perhaps it will gain complexity with time. (13.00%, RS 3.7g/l, TA 7.2g/l.) Drink 2007–17. **17+**

**1990** With such high ripeness, the modest 5.3g/l of residual sugar found in this wine tastes really quite sweet. Beautifully ripe, mature, juicy fruit. Great finesse and minerality. (14.50%, RS 5.3g/l, TA 6.7g/l.) Drink 2007–30. **19.5**

**1976** Stunning, honey-matured finesse. What more could you ask for in a great dry Riesling? (12.90%, RS 4.6g/l, TA 6.6g/l.) Drink 2007–27. **20**

**1975** Perfection, but I still cannot make up my mind which is greatest: 1975 or 1976. (12.30%, RS 3.6g/l, TA 8.4g/l.) Drink 2007–27. **20**

# Note

1. The so-called petrol (kerosene, gasoline, or paraffin) aroma is a well-known varietal characteristic of a classic, racy Riesling wine of some maturity. It does not literally smell or taste of petrol, but it is an instantly recognizable descriptor that experienced tasters use without pretension. The active chemical compound responsible for the petrol aroma has been identified as trimethyldihydronaphthalene, or TDN for short. TDN develops during the bottle-aging process through the degradation of beta carotene, an antioxidant that is itself derived from lutein, another antioxidant. The ratio of beta carotene to lutein is higher in Riesling than in any other white grape variety. Studies show that the lower the pH of a wine, the higher its potential for developing TDN. The longer it takes for the petrol aromas to emerge, the more finesse they have. Interestingly, cork absorbs 40 percent of TDN, thus screwcaps preserve more petrol aromas.

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