



JOE BREEN
WINE



SASSY STUNNERS: Alsace whites have a unique style

Pinot blanc does not normally set my heart aflutter, but when Alain Beydon-Schlumberger of Domaines Schlumberger came to Dublin over the summer, a glass of well-chilled Pinot Blanc Les Princes Abbés 2004, with its vivid, floral nose and fresh and clean acidity, cooled us down in preparation for a tasting of wines from one of Alsace's leading producers.

Alsatian wines are unique. Alone of the great wines of France, they are primarily identified by grape variety. More importantly, they carry the history of the 19th and 20th centuries. Beydon-Schlumberger's ancestors - his family moved to Alsace in 1542 - had to endure the chaos of war and conquest while trying to build one of the largest vineyards in Alsace.

It has left its mark. There is an independence of mind and spirit in this region - separated from Germany by the Rhine and from the rest of France by the Vosges mountains - that has led to some brilliant winemaking, particularly since Alsace began its comeback in the 1960s. *Decanter* magazine recently named two locals among the world's top 10 white-wine makers: Olivier Humbrecht of Domaine Zind-Humbrecht and Pierre Trimbach of Maison Trimbach. The latter's two signature wines, Cuvée Frédéric Émile and

Clos Ste Hune 1999, are stunning examples of his elegant, bone-dry style in Riesling.

It is not just Riesling that prospers on these high slopes. Generally speaking, the 2,000 growers - the bulk made up of family firms with long histories - produce up to nine wines, including Pinot Gris, Muscat and Sylvaner. The big players, such as Schlumberger, often double that number with special cuvees and single-estate grand crus.

Schlumberger produces two general ranges of wines, the entry-level Les Princes Abbés and the swisher Grands Crus range. In vintage years it also produces wines such as Cuvée Christine 2001, a late-harvest Gewurztraminer of intense, honeyed sweetness balanced with exceptional acidity.

That is the top of the range. But Alsace generally, and specifically producers such as Trimbach, Schlumberger and Hugel, offer very good entry-level value as well. In addition, the region is to the fore in redefining its relationship with the land. Schlumberger has 90 hectares under either organic or biodynamic production, and the domaine has subscribed to a charter for sustainable vine growing. ♦ jbreen@irish-times.ie

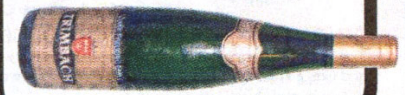
Domaines Schlumberger wines are distributed by Tindal Wine Merchants, 096-71963, sales@tindalwine.com

bottles of the week

Domaines Schlumberger, Riesling Les Princes Abbés, 2004, 12.5%, €16.95 The softest of pale greens in colour, with musky hints of peach and apricot on the nose, a steely, dry texture and a smooth, mild citrus finish. Perfect with shellfish.
From: Fahys, Ballina, Co Mayo; Baily Wines, Howth; Kelly's Wine Vaults, Clontarf, Dublin; Jus de Vin, Malahide, Co Dublin; and Cheers, Delgany, Co Wicklow.



Trimbach Cuvée Frédéric Émile, Riesling, 2003, 12.5%, €35-€40: Clos Ste Hune is touted as Trimbach's (and Alsace's) greatest wine; this comes very close. Restrained elegance gives way to a honeyed texture a long finish. Don't overchill.
From: Fallon & Byrne, Dublin; and Jus de Vine, Malahide, Co Dublin.



Distribution in Ireland: Tindal Wine Merchants, BALLINA – website : www.tindalwine.com

