

## **Week 1 - Alsace**

### **Grape Variety**

Eight major varieties are grown. Riesling, Muscat, Gewurztraminer, Pinot Gris, Pinot Noir, Pinot Blanc, Chasselas and Sylvaner. Auxerrois is also permitted, but usually seen only as a component of a blended wine. Chardonnay is permitted for sparkling wine, but never seen on a label. Only the first four of these (or a blend of some of these four) are permitted in wines labelled Grand Cru.

### **Geographical Boundaries**

Alsace is quite far north, between 47.5 and 49 degrees north of the equator. The region is far from any large body of water, and the climate is continental, with cold winters. The summers are hot and quite dry, with drought often a problem. Humidity can be very high in the autumn. The vines are grown in a narrow strip of vineyards only a few kilometres wide, running from the city of Strasbourg in the north (the Bas-Rhin) to the village of Thann in the south (the Haut-Rhin).

### **Viticultural Methods**

As always, the best sites are on hillsides, some so steep as to require terracing. Most vines are in single or double guyot configuration. Mechanical harvesting is common on flatter vineyards, but not practical for hilly sites.

### **Harvest and Yield Restrictions**

Maximum yield is 100 hl/ha, which has the ignoble distinction of being the highest of any appellation in France. Yields are lower for the 50 Grand Cru sites, but still a high 65 hl/ha. Since the various varieties ripen at different times, harvest can last from September through to mid November. Some producers are experimenting with eiswein. Late Harvest (VT and SGN) styles are grower declared.

### **Minimum Alcoholic Content**

Must weights here are measured in the German Oeschle, as opposed to the degrees Baume used in the rest of France. Allowable levels of ripeness change by varietal. Chaptalization is common, except for Vendange Tardive and SGN wines which must be only natural sugars.

### **Winemaking Techniques**

New wood or small barriques are very unusual here. The large barrels that are often seen in Alsatian cellars can be over a century old, and have a glass-like lining of tartrates which prevent wood character or oxidation from changing the wines character. Wines are generally fermented dry, although there is a (controversial) trend toward leaving some residual sugar in the wines.