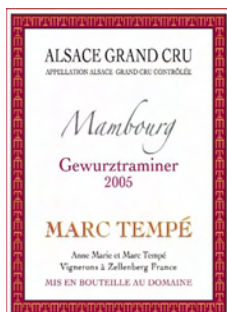


Domaine Marc Tempé, Haut Rhin (biodynamic)



Of all our growers, Marc Tempé is the most idiosyncratic. The man marches to no drummer but his own, and he does so with blissful confidence devoid of arrogance. He doesn't care what you or I think, and he doesn't care about money; he cares about making really good, pure wine that really reflects its little piece of ground. Powerfully built (he's called The Bear by at least one little boy in Colmar), hard working, he is also indefatigably upbeat, a quality that has shone steadfastly from the first day I met him in 1997.

He started his journey as a lab technician for the INAO, the body that governs France's appellation system. He then stepped outdoors to become a vineyard expert for the same body, responsible for selecting *lieux-dits* (place names or single-vineyards) for possible inclusion into Alsace's new grand cru system. In 1993 he started his domaine with his wife Anne-Marie, from parcels inherited from both of their families. They immediately began the conversion to biodynamic farming, and 1995 became their first commercial release. In 1999, Léonard Humbrecht, the patriarch of Domaine Zind-Humbrecht, called Marc his "spiritual godson" in *La Revue du Vin* (note, with all due respect to Z-H, that Marc's wines tend to be drier, and less expensive).

Today the domaine comprises nearly 20 acres in the Haut Rhin radiating from the village of Zellenberg. The vines are pruned severely for low yields, harvested by hand, and pressed very slowly and carefully in order to retain acid and keep the pH as low as possible (the length of the pressing is determined by the type of grapes and their maturity, rather than by the simple calculus of weight + time = formulaic result). The grapes are never chaptalized; the must is never acidified; and laboratory yeast is never introduced. The wines are made either in old *foudres* (huge casks) or older Burgundy barrels (mostly obtained from Domaine Laflaive, a fellow biodynamic grower, and their use is dictated by the varietals— Pinot Gris, for example, does well in these smaller vessels—or by the small size of a given parcel). Fermentations are extended in one of two old, moist Zellenberg cellars, and the wines rest on their lees for a minimum of 24 months. This is something that no business plan would sanction but which, Marc is convinced, serves to emphasize a wine's minerality and terroir. At bottling there is no fining and only a deft use of sulfur. Some wines, particularly the *lieux-dits* and grand crus, are bottled without filtration.

Some Wines

- *Alliance*: Tempé's *Edelzwicker* (blend), this is based on Chasselas (roughly 40%) with press wine from all of the domaine's other varietals. Made in *foudres*.
- *Pinot Blanc Zellenberg*: This comes from nine parcels of vines totaling 2.10 acres growing on the flanks of Zellenberg's hills. The vines average nearly a half century of age, and the blend includes some 35% Auxerrois (favored for body and spice, and traditionally blended in Alsace with higher-toned Pinot Blanc). Served by Edward Behr, editor of the wonderful *Art of Eating* quarterly, at his wedding. Made in *foudres*.
- *Pinot Gris Zellenberg*: From seven parcels totaling 1.75 acres in the commune of Zellenberg, producing a rich, honeyed wine. Made in *foudres*.
- *Gewurztraminer Zellenberg*: From six parcels totaling 1.75 acres in Zellenberg that average nearly 50-years-old. This is not the usual sweet, clumsy, alcoholic rendition of an Alsace classic that is unfortunately the norm; rather, it's an intensely aromatic wine with extraordinary depth, delineation and definition. Made in *foudres*.

- *Riesling Saint Hippolyte*: From two parcels totaling 1.5 acres in the commune of Saint Hippolyte. This is north of Zellenberg on the *route de vins* and is situated lower on the range of Vosges foothills. Soils here are relatively sandy, and these two parcels invariably produce an elegant, high-toned wine. Made in *foudres*.
- *Riesling Zellenberg*: From seven parcels totaling 2.14 acres in the Zellenberg commune (younger vines in the *lieu-dit* of Burgreben, plus some rows from the Grafenreben *lieu-dit*). Vines average close to 50-years-old. Full-bodied, earthy and appley, textured and mineral, this achieves the duality of being both broad and precise in flavor. Made in *foudres*.
- *Riesling Grafenreben (lieu-dit)*: From two parcels totaling 0.73 acres in the Grafenreben vineyard, which occupies the same flank as the Schoenenbourg grand cru spilling off the plateau just north of Riquewihr. The limestone soil here is relatively heavy with clay, making for a distinctively earthy and age-worthy Riesling. Made in older barrels.
- *Pinot Noir Altenbourg (lieu-dit)*: This comes from a parcel two-thirds of an acre in size with vines that are more than fifty-years-old. The south-facing Altenbourg vineyard is contiguous with the Furstentum grand cru, beginning just below it on the bottom slope of the Mambourg spur. Further out on the spur's flank is the Mambourg grand cru; next to it and closer to the Vosges comes Furstentum (with Altenbourg below); then to the east is the Schlossberg grand cru. Not bad pedigree. Made in older barrels.
- *Rodelsberg (lieu-dit)*: Marc's father planted this tiny parcel in the 1950s to Gewurztraminer and Pinot Gris. The mix is two-thirds/one-third, and the vines occupy all of one-third of an acre. They grow on top of the Mambourg spur, up on the arid, wind-swept plateau in what is today a nature reserve where a rare Alsacien orchid grows. This is the upper limit for grape growing in Alsace, and the meager limestone soil?stained red with iron oxides—combined with the sparse rainfall, harsh wind, and old vines make for particularly concentrated grapes. The vines are pruned severely and ripen at the same time, allowing the parcel to be picked at once and the grapes to be co-fermented. Made in older *demi-muids* (oversized barrels), this is, all in all, an extraordinary wine.
- *Riesling Mambourg Grand Cru*: From vines planted in 1952, this is one of Marc's rarest wines both because the parcel is only a half acre in size and because Riesling constitutes perhaps five percent of this grand cru vineyard's total plantings (it's known for Gewurztraminer and Pinot Gris). Mambourg is one of Alsace's warmest grand crus and among its steepest and oldest (noted in the written record as far back as 783AD). Marc's parcel is high on the hillside and produces an intensely mineral wine with just superb length and finesse. Made in older barrels.
- *Gewurztraminer Mambourg Grand Cru*: Marc farms seven parcels of Gewurzt on this steep flank and they total 1.14 acres. The parcels were planted at various times between 1930 and 1977. Depending on the year and parcel, they end up producing dry wines or *vendange tardive* or—especially the 1930 parcel—a killer *sélection des grains nobles*. The dry wine is as intensely floral as it is mineral, and full of rich, long, deliciously exotic fruit that is balanced by fantastic acidity—something that this variety all too often lacks. Made in *foudres*.
- *Pinot Gris Schoenenbourg Grand Cru*: From one parcel totaling 0.44 of an acre. Schoenenbourg grows on the rump of a long plateau stretching above the ancient village of Riquewhir and ending at Zellenberg. Soils here are limestone with a good amount of clay, making for a wine of great weight but also great elegance (this vineyard really does deserve its grand cru status). This is always among the most complete of Marc's wines. Made in *foudres*.

www.marctempe.fr