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March 2015

Decanter



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Alsace Riesling 2012

While perhaps not hitting the dizzy heights of either 2008 or 2010, this classic vintage is still winning plaudits for its vivacity and freshness, says Panos Kakaviatos

WHEN 20 ALSATIAN vintners gathered for a tasting of Rieslings in magnum in Strasbourg late last year, they used words like 'classic' and 'fresh' to describe the wines from the 2012 vintage that were tasted during the evening.

'It has such vivacity, with cool fruit and attractive citrus flavours,' said Sophie Barmès of Domaine Barmès Buecher of her crisp and brisk Riesling from the cool-climate Clos Sand lieu-dit, located above the Steingrubler grand cru on a steep slope surrounded by forest.

Compared with 2011, 2012 has a 'cooler profile', agreed Anne Trimbach of Domaine Trimbach, whose flagship Rieslings are the Cuvée Frédéric Emile and Clos-Ste-Hune. 'We expect to have long-lived Rieslings in 2012 because of the excellent levels of acidity.'

Although damp conditions at flowering created conditions for mildew in July, the vigilance of the region's leading Riesling producers limited damage. A hotter than normal August threatened some vines, but cooler September weather ensured an excellent level of acidity while permitting grapes to mature.

Veronique Muré praised the vintage's 'aromatic finesse and mineral, saline finish'. 2012 was a classic vintage, she explained, with Rieslings 'dry, precise and linear, exuding grapefruit peel and lemon aromas'. Her brother Thomas Muré said that 2012 was 'not as great as 2010', but high acidity levels (still lower than in 2010) ensure longevity. 'The wines are opening up more quickly than the 2010s were at a similar stage of their development,' he explained.

Looking to the future

France's appellations body, INOQ (formerly known as INAO), is examining a proposal that would create two new appellations for Alsace, in addition to the three that currently exist: Alsace, Alsace Grand Cru and Alsace Crémant.

Should INOQ accept it, and the EU approve it - that could take several years - Alsace will gain a Cru Communal (like the Village-level AC in Burgundy) and Premier Cru AC.

The Alsace Vintners Association (CIVA) agreed the new, terroir-driven hierarchy last year, explained Olivier Humbrecht of Domaine Zind Humbrecht, with a plan to introduce the two new ACs. It is now putting together proposals for each individual request for classification to either communal or premier cru level, which naturally would mean stricter viticulture and winemaking specifications than standard Alsace AC.

Modelled on Burgundy, the new hierarchy would enable consumers to better differentiate between grand cru, premier cru, communal level and basic Alsace, Humbrecht explained. Each level would carry specific requirements such as yields, planting density and minimum alcohol level.

'We are at the beginning of the process,' said Barmès. She called the new hierarchy a 'logical' follow-up to the Grand Cru AC that was created in 1975 and features 51 classified areas, defined according to strict geological and climatic criteria. Only in 2011 was each of these lieux-dits recognised as an appellation in its own right.

The CIVA has started to conduct informal tastings for vintners in Colmar for premier cru candidates.

Panos Kakaviatos is a freelance wine writer based in Alsace



Alsace Riesling: know your vintages

- 2013** Challenging vintage. Complicated growing season and harvest. Choose from the best producers.
- 2012** Very good 'classic' vintage. Rieslings marked by freshness and vivacity. Drink 2015-2030.
- 2011** Good vintage, with some Rieslings lacking focus. Drink 2015-2020.

- 2010** Excellent vintage of both vivacity and opulence. Drink 2017-2030.
- 2009** Very good. Lacks the tension of 2010 or 2008, but succulent and rich. Drink 2016-2020, the best to 2025.
- 2008** Excellent vintage of precision and finesse. Drink 2016-2025.

Alsace Riesling: the facts

Climate Semi-continental with cold winters and hot, dry summers.

Production 18% of total French still white AC wine production comes from Alsace. At just over 20% (3,350 hectares), Riesling is Alsace's most widely planted grape, followed by Gewurztraminer and Pinot Gris.

Appellations
 Alsace AC 805,540 hl (72%)
 Crémant d'Alsace AC 270,062 hl (24%)
 Alsace Grands Cru AC 44,780 hl (4%)

Alcohol levels for Riesling
 Alsace AC minimum 10%, maximum 13% (including chaptalisation) and 10.5%-13.5% if including a specific communal appellation/lieu-dit, ie: Clos-Ste-Hune
 Grand Cru AC 12%-14%

Maximum yields for Riesling
 Alsace AC 80hl/ha, or 75hl/ha if including a specific communal appellation/lieu-dit, ie: Clos-Ste-Hune
 Grand Cru AC 55hl/ha >

The results

An underrated year like 2012 could mean some value buys, said our experts. The wines won't be cheap but it is an approachable vintage where the characters of the Riesling grape shine. Christelle Guibert reports

WHEN REPORTING ON a lesser vintage, expectations are naturally not as high as they could be, but our experts often find themselves pleasantly surprised, as this tasting proved.

'2012 might be the perfect vintage for wine lovers to get to know Alsace Riesling,' said Thierry Meyer. Marcel Orford-Williams agreed, adding: 'In a sense, 2012 is a handy vintage because the wines are ready now. Alsace has seen a string of great vintages - 2008, 2009 and 2010 - but none are ready to drink yet'. It could also be one where wine lovers can seek out value, as the wines will be less pricey than some of the more fêted vintages, noted Eric Zwiebel MS.

For lovers of austere and terroir-driven wines, 2012 may be a bit of a deception, Meyer explained. 'Great Alsace Rieslings that taste of the soil tend to have a character that isn't necessarily so Riesling-like. If consumers are looking for terroir in their 2012s they may be disappointed, as most of these grand cru wines were very varietal in style rather than terroir-origin.' Orford-Williams found the generic entry-level Rieslings 'homogenous and fairly simple but everything was more or less well-made', but the grand crus were a step up.

With 51 grands crus to choose from, not to mention the many lieux-dits (named sites), Alsace is not an easy region to understand, and the tasters admitted they found it hard

'2012 might be the perfect vintage for wine lovers to get to know Alsace Riesling' Thierry Meyer

to identify specific characteristics for each grand cru. 'There are too many grand crus,' said Orford-Williams. Meyer agreed: 'They have big limitations,' he said. 'The delineation is too big, often the yields are quite high, and sometimes the maturity isn't there, so we end up with something that tastes like Riesling but not a grand cru, as with 2012.'

Of the 33 grand crus represented in this tasting, they felt about 10 showed some specific style, with Rangen, Brand, Kastelberg and Schoenenbourg the most distinctive. Meyer added: 'This doesn't mean other grands crus can't produce great wines. It's very challenging to judge whether or not a grand cru has potential because it depends on the grower's effort - perhaps some of these underperforming grand crus are waiting to be revealed by good producers.'

The sweet/dry dilemma is also making Alsace difficult to sell. While most of the wines in this tasting had residual sugar levels below 6g/l, Meyer feels that the perception of sweetness is to do with the body of a wine. 'It's that some

The scores

84 wines tasted
2 Outstanding
10 Highly recommended
57 Recommended
12 Fair
0 Poor
3 Faulty

The tasters' verdicts

Thierry Meyer



Meyer is the DWVA Regional Chair for Alsace. He was born and raised in the region and began writing about wine in 1999. He founded L'Oenothèque Alsace in 2006 and launched the website Oenoalsace.com, later organising a structured programme of Alsace wine classes and dinners. Meyer was contributing editor of Bettane & Desseauve Guide des Vins de France from 2007 to 2011 and in 2014 headed up the Alsace Master-level education program for the French Wine Society.

Meyer's verdict

'With 82% of wines Recommended and above, the tasting showed that 2012 is a very good and homogeneous vintage for Alsace Riesling. Past tastings of young 2012s in bottle showed a lack of character, yet here the selection was much better with good depth and focus on the palate.'

'Many wines were easy to drink, with clean citrus and green fruit aromas, and a sharp, fresh, dry palate. The grand cru terroirs showed at their best, as they are already enjoyable to drink now. However, all the wines will benefit from three to four years' cellaring and will drink well over the next 10 years.'

'Several grands crus (Rangen, Brand, Kastelberg and Schoenenbourg) stood out, showing complexity, depth and focus, with terroir character. The style of Alsace Riesling can be surprising to those who haven't tried it before, however, so be careful before rushing to the Outstandings or Highly Recommendeds, as they may not taste like Rieslings you have tasted from elsewhere. Having said that, 2012 - approachable as it is - would be a good vintage with which to introduce yourself to Alsace Riesling.'

Marcel Orford-Williams



Orford-Williams joined The Wine Society as a buyer in 1986, where he has become a specialist for Alsace, Champagne and southern France, including the Rhône, Languedoc-Roussillon, Beaujolais and the southwest. In recognition of his services to French wine, Orford-Williams was made Chevalier de l'Ordre du Mérite Agricole

Orford-Williams' verdict

'It has always been my belief that Alsace is capable of producing wines that can rival the very best from anywhere. This tasting showed a healthy number of delicious Rieslings in many different styles that would give pleasure over the next few years. Moreover 2012 is just the right sort of vintage for easy drinking, and you can approach these now.'

'But of course Riesling is one of the world's greatest white grape varieties. And what is remarkable is its ability to adapt to different soil types and expositions, and produce wines with highly distinctive nuances.'

'Alsace famously benefits from a great variety of soil types from volcanic to sandstone by way of schists and limestone and I thought that in this tasting the wines clearly showed their origin with, of course, differences not only in taste but also maturity. Are people ready to taste a Schlossberg Grand Cru against a Rangen or Schoenenbourg? Absolutely!'

Rieslings don't have enough concentration rather than having too much sugar. Most of the overly sweet wines were only 5g/l-6g/l, while some had 10g/l and you didn't taste it because of the acidity and weight.'

The sweetness is also partly due to the vintage, continued Meyer: 'When you have a cold, late vintage, producers need to wait for the grapes to ripen and then you get botrytis because of the warm days, fresh nights and humidity. In 2012, none of the wines had botrytis so the sugar was really under control.'

The Alsace market has never been an easy one for UK consumers to understand, explained Orford-Williams. 'This is partly due to the fact that 25 years ago Riesling was considered to be Germanic - people like my father would never touch Riesling because of that,' he said. 'Today, young wine lovers are drinking Riesling from Australia, New Zealand, wherever. Riesling is becoming a much more international grape variety, and suddenly Alsace is finding a bit of a niche in the Riesling market.'

Meyer was also feeling very positive about the future. 'Convincing people to spend £30 to £50 on a dry Alsace Riesling is quite challenging. But look at Burgundy - £40 is considered a bargain! Alsace terroir is becoming a great discovery for wine lovers and it's getting more visibility. Also, because there is no oak, people are starting to understand better the complexity of the acidity.'

Entry criteria: producers and UK agents were invited to submit their dry Alsace Rieslings (100%) from 2012. One wine per producer was permitted.

Outstanding 18.5-20pts (95-100pts)



Domaine Zind Humbrecht, Clos-St-Urbain, Rangen de Thann Grand Cru

Decanter average score: 19/20pts (96/100pts)

Individual judges' scores: **Thierry Meyer 19 Marcel Orford-Williams 19 Eric Zwiebel MS 19**

£42-£92 *Coe Vintners, Fine & Rare, The Wine Society*

One of Alsace's very best producers, Zind Humbrecht owns vines in four superb grand cru vineyards: Hengst, Goldert, Brand and Rangen. Owner and leading biodynamic winemaker Olivier Humbrecht, who was the first French Master of Wine, takes pride in his 5ha walled monopole vineyard of Clos-St-Urbain, which combines exceptional exposition on steep slopes with unique soil structure of volcanic rock and sedimentary sandstone. Biodynamic winemaking includes extended pressing and abbreviated clarification cycles to retain indigenous yeasts and proteins in the must; the wine spends 18 months on the lees in old barrels.

Thierry Meyer Smoky, earthy and mineral aromas. Dry, complex and mineral palate with some bitterness on the long finish. Still young and quite spritzy but has great character. One to cellar.

Marcel Orford-Williams Austere but with fabulous, gorgeous fruit. Great length and character.

Eric Zwiebel MS Intense, mature, exotic bruised apple and honey blossom. It has a rich, oily texture, high acidity and is well structured.

Drink 2017-2030 Alc 14%

Eric Zwiebel MS



Zwiebel is cellar master at Summer Lodge, a country house hotel in Dorset. Born in Alsace, he worked as a sommelier for Le Pavillon Elysée Lenôtre in Paris. Following this, he moved to London to broaden his knowledge and two years later, in 2001, became a Master Sommelier. In 2004, he was named Best Sommelier of the UK, which he followed up with third place in the Best Sommelier of Europe final in 2006 and 2008. He reached the finals in the Best Sommelier of the World in 2007 and placed 4th at the 2013 competition in Tokyo.

Zwiebel's verdict

'I felt this was a very good result overall, with a number of excellent Rieslings - thanks to the producers for sending them in.

'For me, there wasn't enough difference between the basic Alsace AC wines and those with a specific lieu-dit to make me think that a new tier in the appellation hierarchy is deserved (see introduction, p75).

'Looking at the 2012 vintage, it's a little bit unlucky to be stuck in the middle of such great years as 2010 and 2013, where the fruit and acidity is much more pure and vivacious. The 2012s are more rounded in character, with less acidity, so it will be a vintage to drink earlier.

'Even so, perhaps some of these wines need a bit more time to express themselves fully, as with many great terroirs in the world.'



Charles Sparr, Schoenenbourg Grand Cru 18.5 (95)

TM 18.5 MOW 18.5 EZ 18.5

N/A UK +33 (0)3 89 47 92 14

This estate opened a new chapter with Charles Sparr, 26, recently taking over from his father Pierre. He is slowly replanting in the seven hectares of grand cru vineyards belonging to the domaine, including this Schoenenbourg. The vineyard enjoys southward exposure at the end of a valley on a steep slope with soils of gravel and siliceous sandstone, shell limestone and gypsum. 2012 was the first vintage that the wine was made entirely biodynamically. The wine was fermented for about three months on fine lees with no chaptalisation.

TM Intense, fruity and citrus-like aromas. The palate is full bodied and fresh with some sweetness and minerality. Long finish with pink grapefruit aromas. Complex and racy; a great wine.

MOW Clarity here. Lovely fruit with piercing acidity and great length. Gorgeous.

EZ Mature nose that is full of mushrooms, with a juicy, salty finish.

Drink 2017-2027 Alc 13% ➤

Highly Recommended 17-18.25pts (90-94pts)



Domaine Bott-Geyl, Schlossberg Grand Cru 17.25 (90+) TM 18.5 MOW 15.5 EZ 17.5

N/A UK www.bott-geyl.com

Nutty, yeasty nose with lime hints. Powerful, dry and vibrant palate with good density, firm and complex acidity, and a long grapefruit finish. Great character; one to cellar. **Drink** 2016-2027 Alc 13.3%



Domaine Charles Frey, Frankstein Grand Cru 17.25 (90+) TM 17 MOW 18 EZ 16.5

N/A UK www.vinsfreybio.com

Honey, wax and candied papaya aromatics. Palate is soft, sweet and salty with a light acidity, bringing a soft and delicate balance to this long, complex wine. **Drink** 2015 2024 Alc 12%



Emile Beyer, Eichberg Grand Cru 17.25 (90+) TM 16.5 MOW 18.5 EZ 16.5

N/A UK www.emile-beyer.fr

Discreet nose with peach, apricot and cinnamon flavours. Fresh palate with good density, moderate yet present acidity, and a great salty edge. A gorgeous, pink grapefruit finish. **Drink** 2016-2027 Alc 13.4%



Gérard Neumeyer, Bruderthal Grand Cru 17.25 (90+) TM 17 MOW 18 EZ 17

POA *Wine Story*

Citrus and green apple aromas with a salty edge. Fresh palate with great power, good ripeness and strong acidity. A fat, long, incisive wine with a long, powerful finish. **Drink** 2017-2026 Alc 13%

'Riesling is becoming a much more international grape variety, and suddenly Alsace is finding a bit of a niche in the Riesling market' Marcel Orford-Williams



Marc Kreydenweiss, Le Château, Kastelberg Grand Cru 17.25 (90+) TM 19.5 MOW 16 EZ 16

£44 *Champagnes et Châteaux*

Great stony character on the nose with hints of smoke. Palate is complex, dry, and multi-dimensional with bright acidity, bringing a very long finish. A great success in this vintage. **Drink** 2018-2027 Alc 13.5%



Muré, Clos-St-Landelin, Vorbourg Grand Cru 17.25 (90+) TM 17 MOW 17 EZ 17.5

£25.95 *Berkmann, Hawkshead, SH Jones, Slurp*
Quince and yellow apple aromas. Dry, clean palate with pure, complex acidity and a long finish. A full-flavoured wine that is a bit austere and needs a few years in the cellar. **Drink** 2017-2028 Alc 13.5%



Domaine Rieflé, Steinert Grand Cru 17 (90) TM 17 MOW 16.5 EZ 17.5

N/A UK www.riefle.com

Intense passion fruit, mango and papaya nose. Palate is rich and pure with depth. Long saline finish with good acidity. Not ready yet, needs some time. **Drink** 2016-2028 Alc 14%



Jean Becker, Mandelberg Grand Cru 17 (90) TM 16 MOW 18 EZ 17

£19.95 (2011) *Davy's Wine Merchants*

Passion fruit and yellow apple. Palate is soft and pure with medium acidity. Good, powerful structure with the potential to age; incisive. **Drink** 2017-2026 Alc 13%



Joseph Gruss & Fils, Eichberg Grand Cru 17 (90) TM 17 MOW 17 EZ 17

N/A UK www.ot-eguisheim.fr

Pink grapefruit and smoke aromas. Stony white pepper and a firm mineral edge on the palate, which has a strong acidity and a long finish. Brilliantly fine. **Drink** 2017-2026 Alc 13.5%



Paul Blanck & Fils, Schlossberg Grand Cru 17 (90) TM 17 MOW 17.5 EZ 16.5

N/A UK www.blanck.com

Discreet melon and apricot aromas. This has great concentration on the deep, full-bodied palate. Good acidity that evolves into a crisp, mineral finish. **Drink** 2016-2026 Alc 13.5%

Alsace Riesling 2012

Recommended 15-16.75pts (83-89pts)

Wine	Score	TN	MOW	EZ	Tasting note	Alc	Drink	Price	Stockists
Biecher & Schaal, Sommerberg Grand Cru	16.75 (89)	18	15	17.5	Mango, papaya, candied fruit and melon with hints of caramelised roasted nuts. Palate is medium bodied and fruity, boasting strong acidity.	13%	2015-2028	£12.50	Bibendum, Exel
Domaine Jean-Marc Bernhard, Wineck-Schlossberg Grand Cru	16.75 (89)	17.5	16.5	16	Matured exotic fruits, such as papaya and mango. Palate is rich and fat with a firm structure and a medium-long finish.	13%	2015-2024	N/A UK	www.jeanmarcbernhard.fr
Domaine Schoffit, Clos-St-Théobald, Rangen Grand Cru	16.75 (89)	16	16	18	Passion fruit, jasmine and candied mango notes. Palate is round and fruity with good acidity, but the sweet balance remains with an oily finish.	13.5%	2016-2030	POA	Gauntleys
François Schmitt, Paradis, Pfingstberg Grand Cru	16.75 (89)	16.5	17	16.5	Smoky and stony with a citrus grip. Crisp palate with strong acidity, medium complexity and a long finish.	13%	2016-2022	N/A UK	www.francoisschmitt.fr
Louis Slpp, Kirchberg de Ribeauvillé Grand Cru	16.75 (89)	17	18	15	Firm nose with white flowers and smoke aromas. Palate is dry and full-bodied, with good complexity and a robust structure.	13%	2016-2027	£22 (2008)	The Wine Society
Paul Kubler, Breltenberg	16.75 (89)	18	14.5	17.5	Aromas of matured exotic fruit and elderflowers. Dry and firm palate, salty and fresh, with a delicate balance.	13%	2015-2025	N/A UK	www.paulkubler.com
Rieffel, Vieilles Vignes	16.75 (89)	17	16.5	16.5	Intense nose of citrus and smoke. Fresh palate with petrol, strong acidity and slight bitterness on the finish.	13.5%	2015-2022	£16.50	Champion Wines, Smokehouse Wines, Woodwinters Wines & Whiskies
Moltès, Terre d'Apollon	16.5 (88)	17	14.5	18	Elegant, fruity and floral nose with an oily and juicy palate that has a lively freshness and long finish. A wine to keep.	13%	2015-2025	N/A UK	www.vin-mottes.com
Arthur Metz, Altenberg de Wolxheim Grand Cru	16.25 (87)	15.5	17	16.5	Discreet nose of almond. This has weight, lovely fruit flavours, great length and just a twist of mirabelle plum. A good Riesling.	12.5%	2015-2027	N/A UK	fr.arthurmetz.com
Cave Kientzheim-Kaysersberg, Anne de Laweiss, Schlossberg Grand Cru	16.25 (87)	15.5	17	16.5	Papaya, exotic candied fruit and honey blossom. Palate is light - close to watery - with medium acidity.	12.5%	2015-2024	N/A UK	www.cave-kaysersberg.com
Charles Baur, Brand Grand Cru	16.25 (87)	17	15.5	16.5	Pineapple and peanut aromas with elegant ginger lift. A clean palate with pure acidity, a full body and a long finish carried by a complex acidity.	12.5%	2016-2027	N/A UK	www.vinscharlesbaur.fr
Domaine Agapé, Rosacker Grand Cru	16.25 (87)	16	16	17	Deep, intense notes of petrol and nettle; somewhat austere. Palate is pure and clean with good density, balanced acidity and a long, chalky finish.	13%	2016-2028	POA	Ellis of Richmond
Dopff Au Moulin, Schoenenbourg Grand Cru	16.25 (87)	16.5	15.5	17	Quince, nettle, yellow apple and grapefruit. Soft palate with depth, good density and well-integrated acidity. A bit heavy but finishes well.	13.5%	2016-2027	£20-£23 (2011)	Fintry Wines, Great Wines Direct, Le Vigneron, Strictly Wine
Eric Rominger, Zlínkoepflé Grand Cru	16.25 (87)	16	16.5	16	Notes of beeswax and yellow plum with toasted bread. Medium-bodied palate with good acidity. Grapefruit aromas and bitterness on the finish.	13.5%	2016-2025	N/A UK	www.domainerominger.fr
Frédéric Moche, Cuvée Henriette, Altenberg de Bergbieten Grand Cru	16.25 (87)	17.5	14	17	Passion fruit, mango and lychee. Palate is firm and pure with minerals, great length and a pure taste. One to cellar.	13%	2015-2028	£22	The Wine Society, Vine Trail
André Kientzler, Gelsberg Grand Cru	16.25 (87)	17.5	15.5	15.5	Intense stony and chalky nose, still a bit austere. Firm and full-bodied palate with a good acidity and balance.	13.5%	2016-2026	£25-£30	Bancroft
Kuehn, Kaefferkopf Grand Cru	16.25 (87)	15	17.5	16	Discreet nose of citrus leading to a well-structured palate with weight and a slight bitterness. Good minerality here; salty, long and balanced.	13%	2015-2024	N/A UK	www.kuehn.fr
Kuentz-Bas, Trois Châteaux, Pfersigberg Grand Cru	16.25 (87)	16	16.5	16.5	Discreet nose that is grassy, smoky and stony. This has concentration but needs time. Has some freshness and a medium to long finish; lots here.	13.5%	2015-2027	£22	The Wine Society
Léon Baur, Eichberg Grand Cru	16.25 (87)	15.5	16.5	16.5	Aromas of orange and smoke with passion fruit. Rich, full flavoured and complex; fabulous. Balanced acidity with medium finish. Easy to drink young.	12.5%	2015-2025	N/A UK	www.leon-baur.com
Mader, Rosacker Grand Cru	16.25 (87)	15.5	18	15	Candied white fruits, mirabelle plum and honey with citrus. Rich, dry and complex - very fruity with great length.	13.5%	2016-2026	N/A UK	www.vins-mader.com
Michel Foné, Mambourg Grand Cru	16.25 (87)	16	17	16	Aromatic nose of lime and smoke. Somewhat austere but has a full body and a long, rewarding finish.	13%	2016-2026	N/A UK	www.micheltonne.com
Vincent Stoeffler, Kronenburg	16.25 (87)	17	17	15	Pineapple and mango with intense floral aromas. Medium-bodied palate with balanced, brisk acidity and a slight residual sweetness.	13.5%	2016-2025	N/A UK	www.vins-stoeffler.com
Domaine Allmant-Laugner, Praelatenberg Grand Cru	16 (86)	15.5	17	15.5	Honey blossom, white acacia and jasmine nose. Palate is sweet and soft but has some charm and a lively finish.	12.5%	2015-2023	N/A UK	www.allmant-laugner.com
Domaine Barmès-Buecher, Leimental	16 (86)	16.5	16	15.5	Intense nose of candied exotic fruit and touches of honey. Deep and fresh palate with good density. Has grip, length and fresh acidity.	13%	2015-2020	POA	Gergovle Wines
Dopff & Irion, Schoenenbourg Grand Cru	16 (86)	14.5	17	16.5	Mushroom and nettles with grassy vivacity and smoke aromas. Sweet with enough substance to carry it. This has lots of stuffing.	13.5%	2015-2026	N/A UK	www.dopff-irion.com
Jean Becker, Froehn Grand Cru	16 (86)	15.5	16.5	16	Chalky nose with citrus fruit. Almond and peach liqueur flavours with a rich, oily structure and a more austere finish.	13%	2015-2026	£20.95	Davy's
Jean-Marie Haag, Zinnkoepflé Grand Cru	16 (86)	15.5	15.5	17	Ripe citrus aromas and a fresh palate with clean acidity, medium complexity and a drier finish than many.	13%	2015-2028	£25.15	Jascots
La Cave des Vignerons de Pfaffenheim	16 (86)	15	17	16	Elegant, matured pineapple and exotic candied fruits nose. Good density, well-integrated acidity and a slight bitterness on the finish.	12%	2015-2022	£9.99	Hawkshead, SH Jones, Slarp
Luc Faller, Fruehmess Vieilles Vignes	16 (86)	14	15.5	18.5	Fresh citrus and petrol notes with a waxy character. Very well-structured palate that is oily with an intense mineral finish.	13%	2015-2023	N/A UK	www.sephboss.free.fr
Paul Ginglinger, Ortel Vieilles Vignes, Pfersigberg Grand Cru	16 (86)	16.5	15.5	16	Clean, citrus-like aromas with hints of fresh herbs. Palate is medium bodied, fresh with a bitter finish.	13%	2016-2026	N/A UK	www.paul-ginglinger.fr

Recommended (continued) 15–16.75pts (83–89pts)

Wine	Score	TM	MOW	EZ	Tasting note	Alc	Drink	Price	Stockists
Seppi Landmann, Vallée Noble	16 (85)	17	15.5	15.5	Slightly closed aromas hinting at yellow apple and exotic fruits. Palate is dry, pure and saline with a long finish; elegant.	14%	2015-2020	N/A UK	www.seppi-landmann.fr
Sipp-Mack, Rosacker Grand Cru	16 (86)	16	17	15	Nose of discreet nettle and stones. Palate is light and dry with citrus and mineral flavours, and a long finish. Has real character.	13%	2015-2025	£18.95	Gerrard Seel
Agathe Bursin, Zinnkoepflé Grand Cru	15.75 (85+)	15	16	16	Ripe citrus fruits with hints of toasted bread. Heavy in texture with an elegant and refreshing finish.	13%	2015-2027	£29.99	Armit Wines
Cave de Turckhelm, Brand Grand Cru	15.75 (85+)	16	15	16	Deep, complex nose of citrus, stone and grapefruits. Has great structure and a high mineral finish.	12.5%	2015-2023	£18.49	D Byrne & Co, Noel Young Wines (2008)
Domaine Gresser, Terroir de Calcaire Fossilé, Moenchberg Grand Cru	15.75 (85+)	14.5	16.5	16	Nettles, freshly cut grass and green apple. Palate is round but pure with medium acidity. Lacks grip and character.	13.5%	2015-2027	£27	Christopher Keiffer (2008)
Domaine Ostertag, Muenchberg Grand Cru	15.75 (85+)	16	16	15.5	Ginger and petrol nose with grapefruit and smoke tones. Palate feels round and rich with acidity and bitterness to balance.	13.5%	2016-2023	£32.99	AG Wines
Henry Fuchs, Kirchberg de Ribeauvillé Grand Cru	15.75 (85+)	16	16	15.5	Simple aromas on the nose with yellow plum and cinnamon flavours. Has grip, weight and length but no great finesse.	13.5%	2016-2026	£20.45	Christopher Piper Wines (2009)
Jean-Baptiste Adam, Wineck-Schlossberg Grand Cru	15.75 (85+)	15.5	15.5	16	Simple minty nose with hints of herbs. Palate is firm and has good grip yet is not very complex.	13%	2015-2024	N/A UK	www.jb-adam.fr
Josmeyer, Hengst Grand Cru	15.75 (85+)	15	15.5	16.5	Fresh aromas of apple, citrus and nettles. A rounded texture with big salty flavours and a mineral finish.	13%	2015-2027	£35	Pol Roger UK
Léon Beyer, Cuvée des Comtes d'Eguisheim, Pfersigberg Grand Cru	15.75 (85+)	15.5	15.5	16	Yellow plum and passion fruit with bitter grapefruit. Palate is dry with good grip and firm acidity.	13%	2016-2026	£29	The Wine Society (2007)
Schoenheit, Linsenberg	15.75 (85+)	16	15.5	16	Blackcurrant leaves, citrus and floral. Firm palate with some depth and length, and a slight bitterness on the finish.	13%	2015-2020	£15.95	Lea & Sandeman
Willy Gisselbrecht, Frankstein Grand Cru	15.75 (85+)	15	15.5	17	Sweet almond, stones and grapefruit nose. Fine and crisp with good length. Has some complexity and moderate ripeness.	12%	2015-2026	N/A UK	www.vins-gisselbrecht.com
Hugel	15.5 (85)	15.5	16.5	14.5	Simple, fruity nose with hints of sherbet. The palate is medium bodied, clean and crisp with good fruit.	12%	2015-2018	£17.49	Widely available
Trimbach	15.5 (85)	15.5	17	14	Aromas are full of citrus and smoke. Palate is light and simple yet clean, with a chalky, savoury finish.	12.5%	2015-2018	£10.95-£11.95	Great Western Wine, Luvians Bottle Shop, Millesima, The Vintage House, Totnes Wine Company, The Wine Society
Albert Schoech, Florimont Grand Cru	15.25 (84)	14.5	15	16	Almond and stone perfume with white fruits. Sweet palate with medium complexity and a clean taste but lacks the acidity to balance.	13%	2016-2026	POA	PLB
Domaine Bruno Sorg, Pfersigberg Grand Cru	15.25 (84)	15.5	15.5	15	Fresh white fruit and citrus flavours. There's a juicy vibrancy with high acidity though a little bit sharp.	12.5%	2016-2026	N/A UK	www.domaine-bruno-sorg.com
Domaine de la Ville de Colmar, Signature, Florimont Grand Cru	15.25 (84)	14.5	15.5	16	Lychee and honey blossom nose. Very full and broad with complex flavours and a supple roundness.	14%	2015-2026	£21.56	Grape Passions (2011)
Domaine Dussourt, Scherwiller Réserve Prestige	15.25 (84)	17	14.5	14	Intense nose dominated by ripe mango, florals and petrol. Citrus fruit flavours with good density and a slightly earthy finish.	12.5%	2015-2020	N/A UK	www.domainedussourt.com
Jean Geller, Wineck-Schlossberg Grand Cru	15.25 (84)	15	15	16	Almond, bubble-gum and white fruits on the nose. There's good fruit on the palate with balanced acidity. Medium complexity with a zesty finish.	12.5%	2015-2024	N/A UK	www.geller.fr
Meyer-Fonné, Kaefferkopf Grand Cru	15.25 (84)	14	16	16	Smoky bacon and green apple nose. The palate is dry, light and smoky, with a thin acidity. Medium finish of toasted bread.	13.5%	2015-2026	N/A UK	www.meyer-fonne.com
Mittnacht-Klack, Clos-St-Ulrich	15.25 (84)	15.5	15.5	15	Chalky and mineral nose with ripe white fruits. Lightly citrus texture with a slight sweetness. Medium finish with some bitterness.	12.5%	2016-2018	N/A UK	www.mittnacht.fr
Rolly Gassmann, Kappelweg de Rorschwihr	15.25 (84)	16	13.5	16	Clean and intense nose with grapefruit aromas. Rich and sweet palate showing purity, balance and density with freshness.	13%	2015-2022	£17	Berry Bros & Rudd
Albert Mann, Schlossberg Grand Cru	15 (83)	14	16	15	Fresh pink grapefruit and ginger notes. Palate is soft, lacking freshness and has little complexity.	13%	2015-2023	£32-£38	Erel, Highbury Vintners, Les Caves de Pyrène, Smiling Grape
Bestheim, Zinnkoepflé Grand Cru	15 (83)	15.5	16	13.5	Ripe fruit aromas that are quite attractive. Palate is light weight, fruity and crisp, but lacks the character to really express its origin.	12.5%	2015-2023	N/A UK	www.bestheim.com
Cave de Beblenheim, Schoenenbourg Grand Cru	15 (83)	13	15.5	16.5	Fresh-cut grass with green apple notes. A sweet palate with a light structure, very soft acidity, and a salty finish.	13%	2015-2027	N/A UK	www.cave-beblenheim.com
Frey-Sohler, Rittersberg	15 (83)	15.5	15.5	14	White fruit and citrus aromas; slightly floral. Decent palate: it is dry with some length but not much finesse or concentration.	12.5%	2015-2018	N/A UK	www.frey-sohler.fr
Gustave Lorentz, Altenberg de Berghem Grand Cru	15 (83)	14.5	15	15.5	Citrus and smoky nose leads to a palate that is soft and round and lacks a bit of structure.	14%	2015-2026	£25.99	Forth Wines, Inverarity Morton

Fair 13-14.75pts (76-82pts)

■ Aimé Stentz, Sommerberg Grand Cru 14.75 (82)
 ■ Baumann-Zirgel, Cuvée Amélie, Schlossberg Grand Cru 14.75 (82) ■ Cave Vlnicole de Cléebourg, Hannesacker 14.75 (82) ■ Domaine du Manoir, Clos du Letzenberg 14.75 (82) ■ Domaine Jean Sipp, Réserve 14.75 (82) ■ Joseph Cattin, Hatschbourg Grand Cru 14.75 (82) ■ Wunsch et Mann, Cuvée Roi Clovis Réserve 14.75 (82) ■ Domaines Schlumberger, Saering

Grand Cru 14.25 (80+) ■ Henri Ehrhart, Kaefferkopf Grand Cru 14.25 (80+) ■ Michel Chapoutier, Schieferkopf 14.25 (80+) ■ Domaine Bott Frères, Tradillon 13.75 (79) ■ Domaine Marcel Deiss 13.75 (79)

Faulty

■ Domaine Léon Boesch, Les Grandes Lignes (oxidised) ■ Klentzler (excess sulphur) ■ Driker-Cadé, Kessler Grand Cru (corked)

For full UK stockist details, see p87

Next month's panel tastings
 Rosso di Montalcino,
 Barolo 2010 & Côte-Rôtie

My top three Thierry Meyer

■ **Marc Kreydenweiss, Le Château, Kastelberg Grand Cru** Exceptional schist terroir character which eliminates any notion of Riesling. The typical tannic structure of the Kastelberg brings a racy style. For me, one of the greatest Alsace grand cru Rieslings of the 2012 vintage. **19.5/20 (98/100) Drink 2018-2027**

■ **Paul Kubler, Breitenberg** Coming from a sandstone soil mixed with some limestone, the wine is bone dry and firm with a great saltiness. With citrus and smoky aromas, this is a great Riesling with more terroir character than many grand cru-labelled siblings. Would be great with smoked fish or eel. **18 (93) Drink 2015-2025**

■ **Louis Sipp, Kirchberg de Ribeauvillé Grand Cru** This powerful Riesling from a complex soil of limestone, marl and sandstone is a perfect 2012 to cellar. White flowers and smoke aromas are still discreet. It shows good complexity and a full-bodied, robust structure. **17 (90) Drink 2016-2027**

My top three Marcel Orford-Williams

■ **Domaine Zind-Humbrecht, Clos-St-Urbain, Rangen de Thann Grand Cru** Great wines are rare and depend on a great terroir and the ability of a great grower, like Olivier Humbrecht, to express it. Wines from Rangen stand out, almost overwhelmingly so. The cru is based on volcanic soils and the angle of slope is dramatic. The wines always have intensity and incredible depth; this was glorious. **19/20 (96/100) Drink 2017-2030**

■ **Louis Sipp, Kirchberg de Ribeauvillé Grand Cru** Ribeauvillé is at the heart of Alsace and boasts France's oldest co-op and of course many fine estates. I especially liked Sipp's Riesling from the fine Kirchberg vineyard. **18 (93) Drink 2016-2027**

■ **Jean Becker, Mandelberg Grand Cru** The Mandelberg vineyard in Mittelwihr points south like so many others and sometimes I find the wines just a little too showy for their own good but I adored the attack and brightness Becker gave to this wine. **18 (93) Drink 2017-2026**

My top three Eric Zwiebel MS

■ **Domaine Zind-Humbrecht, Clos-St-Urbain, Rangen de Thann Grand Cru** A great classic from volcanic soil. The texture was oily, deep and intense with a nose of mango, honey blossom and bruised apple. The spectrum of this wine was a perfect balance of power and complexity. **19/20 (96/100) Drink 2017-2030**

■ **Charles Sparr, Schoenenbourg Grand Cru** Again a great terroir at its best, here dominated by gypsum. Texture with concentration, a full body and a long finish. The nose had some touches of mushrooms, white pepper and cinnamon with passion fruit. The finish was juicy, vibrant with a saline finish. **18.5 (95) Drink 2017-2027**

■ **Gérard Neumeyer, Bruderthal Grand Cru** A pleasant expression of marl and limestone terroir. The palate was full of freshness balanced by a rounded mouthfeel. On the palate there was a combination of zesty pink grapefruit and lemon as well as green apples and pears. The finish was sharp, precise and long with a juicy pink grapefruit finish - quite vivacious. **17 (90) Drink 2017-2026**

NB: the tasters' top wines are not necessarily their top-scoring, rather those which, on learning the wines' identity, they feel are the most notable given their provenance, price or other factors

Expert summary: Thierry Meyer

While this was a good result, the terroir character of the individual grand crus did not sing, though some lesser-known names did stand out



Thierry Meyer is the Decanter World Wine Awards Regional Chair for Alsace

THIS 2012 RIESLING tasting was very successful, with 82% of wines Recommended or higher. Despite asking specifically for dry Riesling, some wines were still perceived as too sweet, but usually this was due to a lack of concentration, rather than an excessive amount of residual sugar (75% had less than 8g/l RS, which tastes dry when the acidity and the structure are powerful enough).

While most wines showed great varietal style, it was a disappointment that so many grand crus lacked specific terroir character and showed little complexity. These were great premium Rieslings and we would have expected the individual crus to be more distinctive. Of the 84 bottles we tasted, 60 were grand cru wines representing 33 different grand crus. Zinnkoepflé, Pfersigberg, Schlossberg and Schoenenbourg were the most represented; Schlossberg and Schoenenbourg getting the highest average scores.

As mentioned, with 71% of wines tasted coming from one of the 51 Alsace Grand Cru ACs, two trends emerged: one is that producers are crafting grand cru Rieslings as premium Rieslings, amplifying the qualities of standard Riesling by providing more fruit, acidity, ripeness and density. These wines would be satisfactory with the grand cru name, without mentioning any terroir. On the other hand, some producers have decided to go for the full terroir character route, and produce wines of high complexity,

character and ageability but sometimes challenging to drink. In a light vintage like 2012, these stood out.

Established houses like Paul Blanck, Bott-Geyl, Marc Kreydenweiss, René Muré, Louis Sipp and Zind-Humbrecht shone in our tasting, but also a new generation of young producers. Winemakers to watch include Paul Fuchs (Henry Fuchs), Philippe Kubler (Paul Kubler), Lucas Rieffel (Rieffel), Frédéric Schmitt (François Schmitt), Samuel Tottoli (Kuentz-Bas) and Pascal Batot (Dopff au Moulin).

We had a few shocks. Some big names failed to shine (Trimbach, Hugel, Josmeyer, Schlumberger to name a few), as did well-known crus like Brand, Geisberg, Kastelberg, Rosacker and Sommerberg. In the latter case, it was hard to decide whether they were underperforming or whether lesser-known grand crus (that scored highly), such as Bruderthal, Frankstein, Steinert and Wineck-Schlossberg, were overperforming due to good producers. Since wines from lesser-known terroirs are often priced moderately, these high-scoring examples should be great value. **D**

'It was a very successful tasting, with 82% of wines Recommended or higher'