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Vintage 2008 & 2009

Even in 2003, Marc Beyer and his team rendered a collection true to their domaine's principles of dryness, acid-retention, and mineral expression, while for the most part avoiding alcoholic overload or flatfootedness. So I wasn't surprised that they considered 2009 child's play by comparison and fielded an often excellent if variable collection. "It was a vintage where you really had to wait," says Marc Beyer of 2008, "but the fruit kept its acidity; eventually the maturity came up to over 13 (% natural alcohol); and the wines achieved a perfect balance." Certainly the best of them did, at least. With their tendency to express volatile esters; their often big-boned and angular architecture; and their unapologetic absence of residual sugar, Beyer wines may well strike many of today's oenophiles and writers as an anachronism, whereas for others of us, they are like a part of the profoundly beautiful village landscapes of Alsace to which we repeatedly return with a sense of comforting familiarity and the knowledge that their slow evolution will be as reliable as their adherence to a traditional style. But that is not meant to suggest that surprises are precluded, and in fact in both 2009 and 2008 there are a number of Beyer wines the likes of which I have difficulty recalling from this address or any other.

86 PTS – Gewurztraminer 2008

Also recommended, but no tasting note given.

90 PTS – Gewurztraminer Comtes d'Eguisheim 2008

While I found the bacon- and celery root-scented regular Beyer 2008 Gewurztraminer attractively juicy but a bit lean and green, their 2008 Gewurztraminer Comtes d'Eguisheim was impressive in its combination of refreshment such as this grape was capable of delivering in this vintage with a surprisingly voluminous and subtly creamy character. Mint, smoked meats, musk, mushroom, rose petal, and celery root dominate from the nose to an extended finishing impression supported by the merest suggestion of sweetness. Low-toned coffee and toasted pecan, add a further rich dimension while the sheer juiciness encourages the next sip. This fascinatingly complex and satisfying Gewurztraminer ought to show well for at least a dozen years.

86 PTS – Pinot Gris 2008

Also recommended, but no tasting note given.

89 PTS – Pinot Gris RESERVE / Comtes d'Eguisheim 2008

While the regular Beyer 2008 Pinot Gris was somewhat awkwardly and persistently fungal, the 2008 Pinot Gris Comtes d'Eguisheim is striking. Alkaline, herbal, and smoked meat notes with hints of forest floor, moss and mushroom inform the nose and suffuse a voluminous yet bright palate. As so often with upper-tier Beyer wines, a high-toned aura of fruit distillates wafts all the way through this as well. This is a Pinot Gris that reminds one in its animal and woody dimensions of Pinot Noir, a long finish is mouthwatering as well as intriguing. It should be fascinating to follow over the next 12-15 years.

92 PTS – Pinot Gris Sélection de Grains Nobles 2008

The fungal proclivities of vintage, cepage, and botrytis genre seem close to generating an exponential concentration of mushrooms in Beyer's 2008 Pinot Gris Selection de Grains Nobles. But the unusual character of this wine doesn't stop there. On the one hand it is quite creamy in texture, on the other imbued with a Riesling-like sense of citricity. Candied grapefruit rind and caramelized peach mingle perhaps a bit uneasily but undeniably stimulatingly with fresh grapefruit and mirabelle distillate. And the finish to this elixir is imbued with a striking and invigorating sense of sheer energy and refreshment, even if in no sense resolving its tensions. Citrus, moss and mushrooms are the last flavors to fade from the palate and will keep you waiting. This will be fascinating to follow for a quarter-century or more, and it would be a special treat to be able to directly compare it down the decades with its so very different 2009 counterpart.

91 PTS – Riesling Comtes d'Eguisheim 2008

Scents and palate suffusion of iodine and shrimp shell reduction lend the Beyer 2008 Riesling Comtes d'Eguisheim every bit as minerally a cast – albeit of a very different sort – as its Ecaillers counterpart. Hightoned whiffs of pit fruit distillates and mothball pique the nose. Saliva-inducing, saline savor is mingled with yellow plum and zesty grapefruit, while hazelnut, pistachio, and fruit pit add piquancy to an impressively sustained finish. This is a surprisingly voluminous rendition of Comtes d'Eguisheim, yet in its way also as minerally a one as you are likely to encounter. Expect it to be worth following for the better part of two decades.

92 PTS – Riesling Les Ecaillers 2008

As typical for this cuvee as the 2009 was out of the ordinary, Beyer's 2008 Riesling Les Ecaillers leads with fascinating saline, alkaline, marine aromas including intimations of seaweed, so that when their counterparts emerge on the palate, one has the impression of tasting what the oyster's been eating as well as the surrounding flesh and sea water. Polished yet glycerin-rich, this carries juicy fresh lime into a mouthwatering and almost ineradicably mineral finish. It ought to remain fascinating and firmly (pun intended) in charge of its destiny for at least the next 12-15 years. But it will not be a wine for pit fruit and berry lovers.

89 PTS – Riesling R de Beyer 2008

Sourced as usual from the Eichberg – one parcel predominantly chalky and the other more clay-rich – Beyer's 2008 Riesling R de Beyer smells piquantly nutty, offering high-toned distilled pit fruit esters and a surprisingly fusil aura given its youth. Alkaline and crushed stone mineral allusions pull this in the direction of relative austerity, as is the case with the 2009 rendition as well. While less savory in its expression of things mineral than its Ecaillers and Comtes d'Eguisheim counterparts, this is nevertheless imposingly persistent and striking in its way. It should hold well for more than a decade.

Year	Wine Name	Rating	Maturity	Price
2008	Leon Beyer Gewurztraminer	86		22
2008	Leon Beyer Gewurztraminer Cuvee des Comtes d'Eguisheim	90	Early	
2008	Leon Beyer Pinot Gris	86		22
2008	Leon Beyer Pinot Gris Reserve Comtes d'Eguisheim	89	Early	
2008	Leon Beyer Pinot Gris Selection de Grains Nobles	92		
2008	Leon Beyer Riesling Cuvee des Comtes d'Eguisheim	91		
2008	Leon Beyer Riesling les Ecaillers	92	Early	38
2008	Leon Beyer Riesling R de Beyer	89		

85 PTS – Gewurztraminer 2009

Also recommended, but no tasting note given.

87 PTS – Gewurztraminer Comtes d'Eguisheim 2009

While I found the “regular” Beyer 2009 Gewurztraminer disappointingly lacking in mid-palate, their 2009 Gewurztraminer Comtes d’Eguisheim is at the very least more formidable. Peat, celery root, and rose petal on the nose have their counterparts on a voluminous, subtly oily palate. Pungent herbs, toasted pecan, and black pepper lend grip to a slightly warm and very faintly gum-numbing finish. I would want to revisit this within 3-4 years as I am unconvinced as to its aging potential. (The Beyer 2009 Gewurztraminer Vendange Tardive – for now at least – lacked enough offsetting acidity or strength of personality to really emerge from under the weight of its residual sugar.)

86 PTS – Gewurztraminer Vendanges Tardives 2009

Also recommended, but no tasting note given.

90 PTS – Muscat RESERVE 2009

Marc Beyer considers his 2009 Muscat d’Alsace Reserve one his most successful of recent years. It originates with largely old vines (roughly half Ottonel) in the Pfersigberg. After an opening aromatic salvo of catnip and elderflower, this displays the sort of voluminous, oily, expansive palate – informed by pungent herbs and ripe apricot – that I associate with its vintage. But there is a surprising degree of fresh fruit juiciness and a subtle sense of citricity even as a subtle suggestion of low-toned underlying nut oils and coffee also emerge. Bittersweet orange rind, apricot kernel, and the persistently pungent nip of herbs make for a gripping conclusion to a striking performance, if one about which opinions are likely to differ. I would not be surprised to see this hold up well for a decade, however it would be not only fascinating but advisable to monitor it year-by-year.

88 PTS – Pinot Blanc 2009

Scented and flavored with fresh apple, raw almond, and orange zest along with Chablis-like, chalksuffused herb and meat stock, the Beyer 2009 Pinot Blanc displays admirable, surprising freshness and cut, not to mention sheer persistence for a wine of this vintage and genre. (That applied to Beyer’s 2009 Sylvaner as well, but I graded it down a tick on aromatic purity.) In fact, this is as distinctively delicious a Pinot Blanc from Beyer as I can recall. I have no experience with drinking older examples of their Pinot Blanc (all other varieties, yes), but suspect that this fine value will keep nicely for at least three years. (I was too late to catch the Beyer 2008 Pinot Blanc at the winery and had not had a chance to locate a bottle stateside.)

85 PTS – Pinot Gris 2009

Also recommended, but no tasting note given.

87 PTS – Pinot Gris Comtes d'Eguisheim 2009

While Beyer's basic bottling of Pinot Gris finished a bit drying and bitter, a second lot which I'll refer to as 2009 Pinot Gris Reserve and which might be released under that name, or as Comtes d'Eguisheim, was considerably more promising. (As of press time, Marc Beyer told me that not only had this decision not been made, but there was no hurry, since the Comtes d'Eguisheim bottlings are generally not released until three or more years after bottling.) Plum distillate and smoked meat fill the nose and an expansive, glossy palate, where a stony aspect lends both interest and a hint of austerity unanticipated in this vintage. One could wish for more succulence and sheer personality – as Beyer acknowledges – but this will need to be revisited in a year or two, just as he will be doing, to determine its ultimate level of classification.

93 PTS – Pinot Gris Sélection de Grains Nobles 2009

Mocha, marzipan, caramel, peach preserves, and litchi scent the Beyer 2009 Pinot Gris Selection de Grains Nobles, then inform an opulent, subtly oilytextured palate, without being overshadowed by what is admittedly near-extreme sweetness. Dark honey with hints of carob and mushroom add a further dimension to this, seamless, confectionary, yet complex expression of extremely ripe and not hugely botrytized berries. This long-finishing elixir is likely to keep well for 30 or more years, so that those with patience (and the requisite longevity themselves) can expect it to pay dividends in complexity and nuance eventually as its sheer sense of sweetness begins to wane. It certainly beat the odds against profundity in its vintage.

84 PTS – Pinot Noir 2009

Also recommended, but no tasting note given.

86 PTS – Pinot Noir RESERVE 2009

Also recommended, but no tasting note given.

87 PTS – Riesling 2009

Apricot eau de vie, elder flower, mint and sage flower in the nose of Beyer's 2009 Riesling are reminiscent of Muscat. A bittersweet alternation of apricot flesh and apricot kernel, orange rind and pungent herbal concentrate on a firm palate manages to bring some welcome refreshment to bear in its finish. (Full disclosure: part of what accomplishes this is almost certainly the 2008 that Beyer retained in cask and back-blended to the legal limit, in order to add pep to this 2009.) This should prove quite user-friendly over at least the next 4-5 years. (I did not have occasion to taste this wine's 2008 counterpart.)

88 PTS – Riesling Comtes d'Eguisheim 2009

Scents of lightly-baked apple and mirabelle distillate on the nose of the Beyer 2009 Riesling Comtes d'Eguisheim have their pip- and pit-tinged counterparts on a voluminous, subtly oily palate, with just enough fresh primary juiciness retained to lend the finish – which also evinces wet stone – some sense of refreshment. This is not the first very ripe, low-acid vintage in which it has struck me that the best available material might have been sacrificed to render an Ecaillers cuvee of adequate refreshment and minerality, thus leaving the Comtes d'Eguisheim a bit flat-footed. But Beyer insists that for the most part, as usual, the two bottlings rely on different parts of the site, this one on deeper, clay-rich soil. This might “live” for a dozen or more years, but I would be inclined to drink it over the next 6-8.

91 PTS – Riesling Les Ecaillers 2009

As was demonstrated by the 2003 edition, even in a warm, low-acid, very high-ripeness vintage, it's possible to retain the freshness and minerality that define the "shucker's cuvee" chez Beyer, and that is very much the case with the 2009 Riesling Les Ecaillers. Scents of elder flower, sage, sweet corn, winter pear, smoky Latakia tobacco, kirsch, and cherry stone segue into a voluminous and glycerinrich palate, joined by stimulating impingement of piquant citrus rinds and huckleberry, toasted hazelnut and almond, and preserving a core of primary fruit juiciness and hence a modicum of refreshment. This is unforgettably multi-faceted even by the standards met for this cuvee down the decades, and if it lacks the brightness or chalkiness of a more normal vintage, it does offer mouthwatering salinity that renders the finish even more compelling. If served this the raw oysters and bivalves that inspired its name, I predict that this more voluminous and metaphorically darkly-hued rendition will prove every bit as fascinating as a more typical specimen. One could keep this well for at least a decade, even though few will.

88 PTS – Riesling R de Beyer 2009

Peat-like smokiness, toasted nuts, and piquant intimations of fruit pit on the nose of Beyer's 2009 Riesling R de Beyer lead into a voluminous, bittersweet palate on which a sense of stony underpinnings reinforces a hint of acerbity. This bigboned Riesling is saved from brusqueness by a rivulet of primary juiciness in its tenaciously stony, smoky, nutty finish. The overall effect will hold attraction especially for self styled Alsace purists who at the same time like a wine of Burgundian amplitude and mineral austerity.

86 PTS – Sylvaner 2009

Also recommended, but no tasting note given.

Year	Wine Name	Rating	Maturity	Price
<input type="checkbox"/> 🍷	2009 🏰 Leon Beyer Gewurztraminer	85		22
<input type="checkbox"/> 🍷	2009 🏰 Leon Beyer Gewurztraminer Cuvee des Comtes d'Eguisheim	87		
<input type="checkbox"/> 🍷	2009 🏰 Leon Beyer Gewurztraminer Vendange Tardive	86		
<input type="checkbox"/> 🍷	2009 🏰 Leon Beyer Muscat d'Alsace Reserve	90		
<input type="checkbox"/> 🍷	2009 🏰 Leon Beyer Pinot Blanc	88	Mature	20
<input type="checkbox"/> 🍷	2009 🏰 Leon Beyer Pinot Gris	85		22
<input type="checkbox"/> 🍷	2009 🏰 Leon Beyer Pinot Gris Reserve (Possible Comtes d'Eguisheim)	87		
<input type="checkbox"/> 🍷	2009 🏰 Leon Beyer Pinot Gris Selection de Grains Nobles	93		
<input type="checkbox"/> 🍷	2009 🏰 Leon Beyer Pinot Noir	84		20
<input type="checkbox"/> 🍷	2009 🏰 Leon Beyer Pinot Noir Reserve	86		
<input type="checkbox"/> 🍷	2009 🏰 Leon Beyer Riesling	87	Early	22
<input type="checkbox"/> 🍷	2009 🏰 Leon Beyer Riesling Cuvee des Comtes d'Eguisheim	88	Early	
<input type="checkbox"/> 🍷	2009 🏰 Leon Beyer Riesling les Ecaillers	91		38
<input type="checkbox"/> 🍷	2009 🏰 Leon Beyer Riesling R de Beyer	88		
<input type="checkbox"/> 🍷	2009 🏰 Leon Beyer Sylvaner	86		

Alsace's Exhilarating 2008s

... and rarely outstanding 2009s

By David Schildknecht

With respect to Riesling, vintage 2008 in Alsace exhibits a pattern and results familiar from Germany. Following a much later start to the season than in 2007; a generally cool summer; and a rainy August and first half of September, a nail-biting come-from-behind finish blessed by cool, breezy and sunny weather from mid-September brought vinous virtues greatly resembling those of their immediate predecessors. If you liked the bright acids; the levity; the energy; and the abundance of flavors that call forth the "m"-word that were to be found in the 2007 Rieslings, you'll love the 2008s. As in Germany, several growers expressed variations on the joke that "you don't have to go back many months to find the vintage that 2008 most closely resembles." What's more, to the extent that a recognizable difference in vintage character has thus-far emerged, the 2008s are a bit more generous in fruit and floral aromas than are their predecessors. Instances of less-than-fully-ripe Riesling are predictably fewer in number in Alsace than in the more northerly regions of Germany. Gewurztraminer, while more sensitive to a relative paucity of heat such as that in 2008, was also more sensitive at flowering, with the result that yields were even lower and bunches sparser than with Riesling, and in good sites and hands the wines are satisfyingly ripe and complex, as well as higher in acidity and more moderate in alcohol than we have become increasingly accustomed to over the past quartercentury. Pinot Gris was capable of truly remarkable success: wines that combine Riesling-like spine, refreshment, and finesse with the inherent smoky, meaty, spicy, deeply rich and texturally alluring virtues of which this member of the Pinot family is singularly capable. That noted, it must be pointed out that Pinot Gris often figured prominently among 2008s that evinced a pronouncedly fungal overtone, presumably from background botrytis, a phenomenon that reinforced a not uncommon trait of this grape to evince mushrooms. It occurred to me on a number of occasions while tasting 2008s – and then Antoine Kreydenweiss voiced the same observation – that "in blind tastings, experienced Alsace wine lovers are often fooled as to which cépage is in their glass." There are plenty of lovely successes with Muscat and Auxerrois too this vintage, and even some surprisingly strong Pinot Noirs. Those who can recall the wines of 1988 – which I do fondly, and indeed I am still enjoying them – will, I suspect, find distinct, if temporally distant, similarities with 2008, an analogy in which I got numerous growers to concur. Aspects of 1998 and 2002 are present as well. Samuel Tottoli of Kuentz-Bas seems to me to have fingered the salient overall features of the 2008s when he pointed to their ripe, vibrant acidity and pronounced salinity. Seeds of botrytis took hold early in the growing season – along with all manner of other fungi which required vigilant, constant combat to keep at bay – but ultimately there was considerable noble rot, which, when combined with the high acids and extract inherent in the grapes; the long hang times permitted by clear autumn weather; and the desiccation borne of north winds, made for modest amounts of memorable nobly sweet wine.

It would be hard to pick a growing season or a constellation of gustatory characteristics more dramatically different from those of Alsace in 2008 than are to be found in the year following. To read the weather reports – superficially, at least – 2008 had everything going against it whereas 2009 had everything going for it. Flowering was early and complete, and there was an unusually high level of rainfall during the first half of July, serving to guarantee that in an otherwise dry, warm growing season, only vines in the rockiest, shallowest-soiled, most exposed places experienced any late-season stress. "When I came back from holiday in August and visited the Rangen," relates Olivier Humbrecht, "I couldn't believe my eyes. It was green as if you were in Swiss Alpine pastures. In 2003 on the other hand, those vineyards were burned and yellow already by the end of June," well before that infamous summer began racking-up records. So what do the vigneronns have to show for all of this balmy, stress-free 2009 weather? Virtually botrytis-free fruit with uniformly high must weights and moderate, ripe acids have made for one collection after another in which few of the best wines truly distinguish themselves, and in which many others suffer from diffusion of flavor; lack of refreshment; not to mention from acute instances of the Scilla and Charybdis that have challenged so many modern Alsace vintages: either awkwardly high alcohol in or residual sugar, which the loose structure and mild acids of 2009 are hard-pressed to buffer. "It was especially difficult to achieve an ideal sugar-alcohol balance in 2009," Antoine Kreydenweiss candidly noted. Adding to the difficulties was a phenomenon about which a sizeable share of growers seemed adamantly convinced, namely that the conversion of sugar to alcohol was especially efficient this year, and if anything finished alcohol levels proved higher than predicted. (Paul Kubler hypothesized that low-botrytis, lowstress, and high nitrogen contributed to the abundance of vineyard yeasts and the unfortunate efficiency with which yeasts of whatever origin this year performed their work.)

Olivier Humbrecht offers the hypothesis that "if there is a weakness to 2009, it is because of the large size of the crop." Pressed, he alludes to another factor that may have handicapped many 2009s. "Usually, when you pick, Nature has a lot to say in the matter of when. But in 2009 it was just you and your vines. The weather was nice and dry all the time; the grapes didn't rot; so it was always tempting to wait an extra day. And because it was a big crop, people didn't think twice about

taking some risk. When you have a very small crop like 2010, you think twice before you harvest too late. You might lose too much. But in 2009, you think 'ok, my cellar is already almost full, what can it hurt, to give the grapes a little more time on the vine?'" But in fact, concludes almost inveterately late-picking Humbrecht, "When you saw that acids were low and dropping; sugars high and rapidly rising; and you considered the condition of the skins, it was clear to me that in most cases there was no point waiting to harvest the 2009s."

There are many attractive 2009s – especially among Rieslings – but these will with few exceptions be best drunk young. (A further exception is Pinot Noir, where serious potential was often impressively tapped, though it remains to be seen how many of these wines justify the extended maceration and barrel-*élevage* that was often lavished on them, much less justify extended bottle aging.) "It looks so perfect thus far that some mornings I have the feeling I must be dreaming," Marc Hugel had remarked on his video-blog near the commencement of harvest, and perhaps in the end we should call 2009 an instance of weather too good for the wines' own good. Seldom has there been a better example of how ill-served consumers are by the sort of bandwagon effect that builds surrounding certain vintages. Yes, 2009 is superb for most of France as well as in Germany. But the exceptions can be major ones (as witness also the Eastern Loire). Depending on how long it takes for Alsace's 2009s to reach U.S. markets (many estates are not yet even represented by their best 2008s), one should approach them with increasing caution and re-taste before making significant commitments. As a grower, if I hadn't already released my best 2008s, I'd be tempted to release my 2009s first. And as a consumer, if I were looking for more overt richness and lower acidity than is characteristic of 2008 or 2007, the first place I would turn would be 2005, from which not a few outstanding releases can still be found lurking in U.S. retail establishments. (But revisit any particular 2005 before making cellar plans, since some of them are aging more rapidly than I anticipated.) The 2010 pattern in Alsace, incidentally, follows that in Northern France generally as well as in neighboring Germany: ripeness was challenged as it has seldom been in the last 25 years – though ultra-late picking and noble rot will have surmounted that challenge in at least some instances – but even more significantly, yields are the lowest in 30 or more.

In my report on the 2007 and 2006 vintages in issue 188, I referred readers to issue 175 and my "lengthy litany" there "of issues and criticisms connected with the evolving style of Alsace wines;

growers' labeling practices; the classification of Alsace grand crus; and the difficulties of marketing the wines internationally." Rather than reiterate points made there that I still find valid, I shall confine myself on this occasion to a few observations specific to my latest canvassing of Alsace's top growers. I sensed a slight up-tick in concern to bottle wines whose levels of residual sugar and alcohol do not handicap them in accompanying cuisine. That said, the strong acidity of 2008 renders a given level of residual sugar less evident; whereas the continuing problem of finding the right balance between alcohol and sugar was – as I already noted – exacerbated in vintage 2009, when many musts were evidently just too full of sugar with no place to go that wouldn't leave the resultant wine slightly off-balance. I also sensed a slight increase of interest in mixed *cépage* blends, but not to a degree that suggested any grower other than Jean-Michel Deiss now imagines his or her representative grand cru bottlings of the future being multi-*cépage*, much less from field blends. Finally, some growers demonstrated or spoke to me about their future intentions to rein-in their region's notorious proliferation of bottlings, although for each such grower, I seemed to find a fellow-vigneron burning with passion for yet another new vineyard-designate, super-S.G.N. essence, or other *cuvée* he or she intends to add to an existing list of 20 or more wines per collection, such as is today's norm. Few U.S. Importers seem to share such passion, and some have in recent years understandably narrowed the focus of their Alsace offerings.

I mention at this point the recent creation of fourteen so-called appellations communales solely lest readers run across this fact and wonder why I did not address it. There is, to be sure, much that I could already say – most of it critical – about this endeavor to delimit certain villages solely for specific grape varieties. But I won't be drawn into a critique on this occasion. Some of the appellations will doubtless be appealed; they went into effect only this January; and it remains to be seen how many top-flight growers utilize them, so a proper consideration – something I'm not looking forward to any more than I do to attempts at explaining and downplaying much inane recent Austrian and German legislation or practice – can await my next report from Alsace, which will cover vintages 2010 and 2011.

The notes that follow – based on my November, 2010 visits to 28 Alsace cellars – occasionally include outstanding 2007s that their growers had not yet been ready to show me in November, 2008. Following Wine Advocate convention, ratings of any wines tasted from cask or tank are expressed as a point spread. In addition to the general lag in wines of many Alsace growers coming to market, a number of top estates – notably Léon Beyer, Paul Blanck, Hugel, Josmeyer, Rolly-Gassmann, and Trimbach – habitually hold-back their top bottlings for several years (in Gassmann's case, for as long as a decade) before releasing. Nonetheless, all of the aforementioned estates routinely show me their complete collections of young wines, so that I am able to offer my account of them in the comparative context of a vintage report. The protracted fermentation and *élevage* characteristic of Marc Tempé's wines (not their only anomalous traits!) render it futile to assess most of them in the year following their harvest, so my reports on his collections are always one year out of sync. It will usually be evident from my notes those few other instances in which I was forced to postpone the tasting of certain wines of 2009 (or even 2008) vintage until my next trip, expected to be in November, 2012. Readers should be aware that none of the V.T. or S.G.N. wines of vintage 2009 had officially received approval (the so-called *agrément*) for release as such when I tasted them last November, and while top-echelon growers seldom experience any difficulties or controversy with approval,

it is conceivable that a few of the nobly sweet 2009s reviewed in this report might eventually be marketed under another description, and I shall attempt to eventually correct the on-line record to reflect any such exceptions should they arise. While I have generally noted the suggested retail prices supplied by importers – occasionally tempering these based on a brief survey of the market – in a few instances where prices have been exceedingly stable from vintage to vintage I have indicated retail prices as guides even for wines that are not yet in the market. In many cases, though, I can't tell you how the 2008s – much less the 2009s – will be priced once they reach our shores ! or perhaps I should write "provided" they show up. A generally recessionplagued market is exacerbating a declining trend in sales for what are at their best some of the most versatile, distinctive and distinguished of white wines, not to mention wines far more reliably age-worthy than their pricier counterparts from the Côte d'Or. Both the 2007 and 2008 vintages offer especially exemplary opportunities to explore these vinous treasures from the "Côtes des Vosges."

—David Schildknecht