

The Definition of

Prestige

WHAT'S LEFT FOR Domaines Schlumberger to prove? Founded in 1810 and still family-owned, it's got an impressively long track record. Its 300 acres of vines make it the largest vineyard holder in Alsace, with the largest share of Grand Cru sites. In fact, it possesses the most contiguous vineyard land in all of France. But seventh-generation vintner Thomas Schlumberger isn't one to settle for the status quo.

When Thomas assumed the role of CEO from his uncle in 2017, he recognized that his ancestors had created a formidable legacy: As he puts it, "We are the luckiest generation of this family because all of the generations before us really put a lot of energy and money into moderniz[ation] and into creating a vineyard which has no comparison." But he asked himself a fundamental question: "What, [like every] other generation before, can I do to make the company better when I give it to the next generation?" Joining him in this quest is his sister, Séverine, who manages public relations and sales.

One of Thomas' boldest actions has been the creation of Le Clos Saint Léger Grand Cru Riesling. Although there is no shortage of premium Riesling in the Domaines Schlumberger portfolio, he felt compelled to produce "a signature wine of the family, something that defines prestige and the idea of Schlumberger nowadays." His source for what he

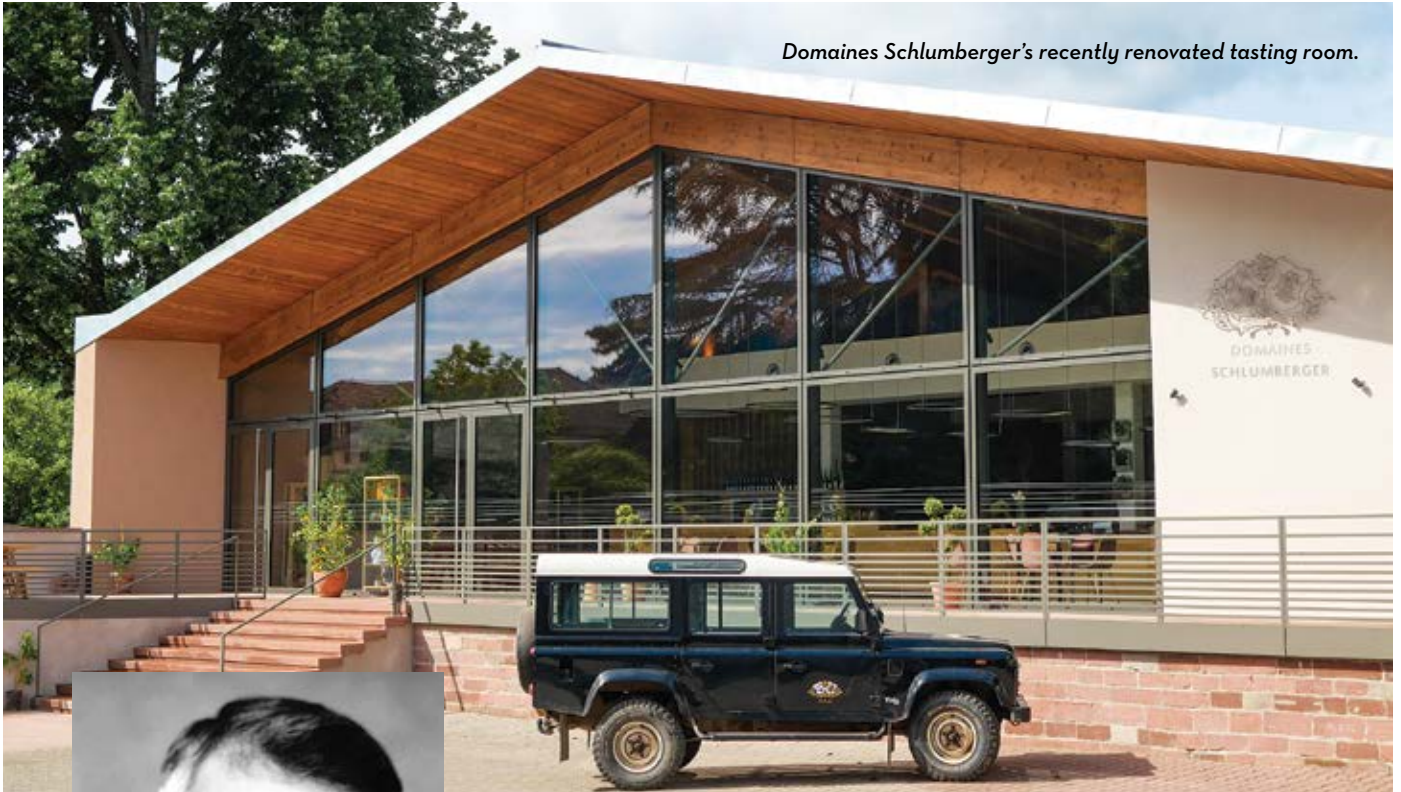


**DOMAINES
SCHLUMBERGER**
DEBUTS ITS
LE CLOS SAINT
LÉGER GRAND
CRU RIESLING

by Wanda Mann

PHOTO: VINCENT SCHNEIDER

Alsatian Grand Cru Kitterlé.



Thomas Schlumberger is CEO of Domaines Schlumberger in Alsace, France.

calls a "super-precise" Riesling with a lot of "finesse and style" is a 4-acre plot in Kitterlé, one of the four Grand Cru vineyards in which the domaine has ownership. Thomas selected this petite plot of grapes to create Le Clos Saint Léger Grand Cru Riesling because he believes it provides the best results year after year. He describes Schlumberger's 50 acres of Kitterlé as "kind of a horseshoe-shaped terroir with three different exposures [that's] based on volcanic sandstone, which is very [unusual] in Alsace; there are only a very few locations on volcanic sandstone, and Kitterlé is one of those. The vines [there] have 30 years of age, so they are perfectly well established in terms of root system and so on." Yields

are limited, but the soil encourages the growth of grapes with intense aromas and the structure needed for long-term aging.

The steep slant of the organically farmed slopes, as extreme as 45 degrees, requires the use of stone-walled terraces; horses are still used to plow this beautiful but treacherous terrain. ("We were the pioneers of introducing horses on the mountain, and that was a century ago," notes Thomas.) Le Clos Saint Léger's name was inspired by this topography. "By definition, a *clos* is surrounded by walls or forest. We have walls all around, and Saint Léger is actually the name of our historic church in the village from the 12th century. We are the continuity of what the monks used to do [i.e. make wine] back then," he adds.

After the "right spot" and the "right skills" were in play, "then the magic happened," according to Thomas. To truly distinguish Le Clos Saint Léger Grand Cru Riesling from the other wines in Schlumberger's portfolio, the producer adopted a different method of vinification. "Normally we use the big *foudres*, very large barrels," he explains. "In this case, we are using stainless-steel tanks to protect the wine from oxidation, to have a little bit more aging potential, and also to be able to release the wines a little bit later.

So, we just make a classic fermentation in a stainless-steel tank, and then we age the wines on fine lees, also in a stainless-steel tank, before we bottle it later on."

The debut vintage of Le Clos Saint Léger, 2017, is scheduled to reach the market this year. Asked how many bottles were produced, Thomas laughs and says, "Not enough"; the limited supply will be available only by allocation. (Release dates are pending on the 2018, 2019, and 2020 vintages.) Describing the climatic conditions of 2017, he adds, "We had a little bit of frost a little bit late in the [spring] season," followed by a "very hot summer with enough rain to secure the perfect maturity of the fruit." The result is a wine with "a lot of finesse and a lot of energy. It's a classic example of dry Riesling as we love it."

Le Clos Saint Léger lets the world know that Domaines Schlumberger has no fear of innovation as long as it's rooted in authenticity. Asserts Thomas, "It's really a vine growers' wine, which means that actually you take a single plot, you take a single varietal, and you only get what you get; [therefore] you have a vintage effect [that] is a little bit more obvious compared to other cuvées, where you can blend different plots for the same location or different varietals together. And that's exactly what we are looking for." 