

May | June 1998

appellation

WINE COUNTRY LIVING

vineyards of

RHODE ISLAND

THE TORRES FAMILY VILLA
in spain

napa valley's

BEAULIEU GARDENS

US \$3.95 CAN \$4.95

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0 73361 64557 9

departments

6

a toast

Reflections on the seduction of speed and the sweetness of slow.

text Colleen Daly

12

mixed case

Budapest's cultural intricacies. Wine-glass designer Georg Riedel's one-man crusade. The World Croquet Championship at Sonoma-Cutrer. Napa Valley Wine Auction's faithful volunteers. The Art of Entertaining. A memorable sojourn down the River Cher. The philosophy, art and wine of Renaissance Vineyard & Winery.

16

calendar of events

30

by the glass

The Cape of New Hope—South Africa reinvents its role as a wine-producing nation.

text John Platter

32

unfiltered

Tony Hillerman returns to an Alsatian vineyard and brings memories of wine—and war—back to life.

illustration Julie Scott



74

across the table

Wine editor Alexis Bespaloff recalls a conversation with Baron Philippe de Rothschild on the 25th anniversary of his greatest accomplishment.

80

off the menu

La Tupina—Bordeaux, France. Chef Jean-Pierre Xiradakis demonstrates his passion for traditional Gascon cooking. Recipes included.

text Alexander Lobrano

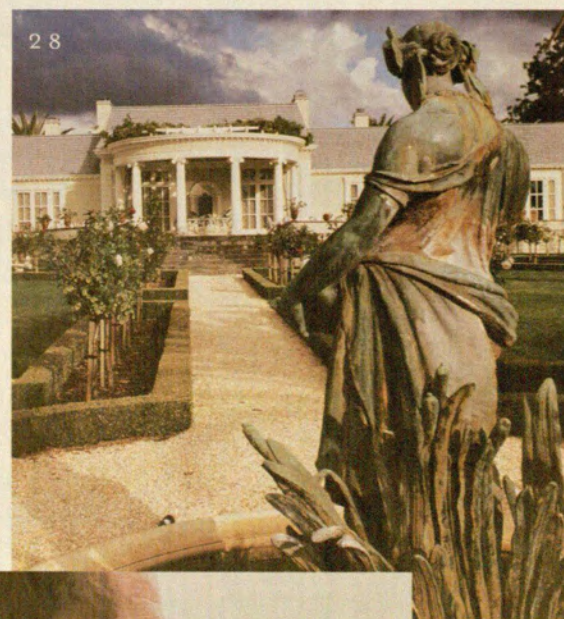
photos Gregoire Kalt

104

last bite

Rhubarb Tarte Tatin with Honeyed Crème Fraîche.

photo Thia Konig





unfiltered

the second time I saw Itterswiller was in the summer of 1987. Window boxes were ablaze with geraniums and its cobblestone streets were aswarm with Parisians, Berliners, New Yorkers, Milanese—gourmets making this lovely old Alsatian hill town part of their French wine country tour. Harvest was starting, but the vineyards were still heavy with grapes and dealers in nearby Strasbourg were predicting a vintage year. It was here I first drank a fine French wine. However, I had come back to test not my taste, but my memory. Had I really been as stupid as I remembered?

Having been an Oklahoma boy when it was still experimenting with prohibition, I was no stranger to wine. Grapes were part of Papa's struggle to support a family through Dust Bowl and Depression and, since few had money for fruit, we pressed enough for a couple of barrels of each vintage. Papa's friends rated it high. But until the Army sent me to Itterswiller, I had no basis for comparison.

I first saw Itterswiller November 29, 1944. I was nineteen, a gunner in the weapons platoon of C Company, 410th Infantry. Our battalion had just crossed the Vosges Mountains between Saint-Dié and the Rhenish Plains the hard way—trudging over the roadless ridges with tanks and artillery left behind. In theory the panzer units holding the highways, cut off and surrounded, would then surrender.

Alas, the Germans, who still had their tanks and artillery

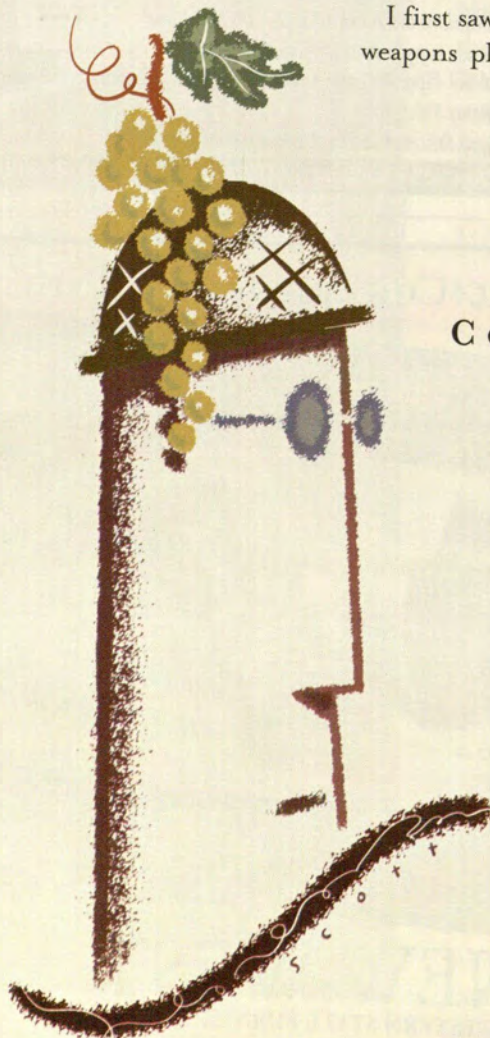
CONJURING UP ITTERSWILLER

MEMORIES OF AN ALSATIAN VINEYARD

Tony Hillerman

with them, didn't cooperate. Their defense stopped us in the hills just above Itterswiller. We dug in, sweated out an artillery barrage and prayed for the sound of our own tanks coming down the road behind us to lend a hand. But the tanks that came up from our rear were German. They captured the farm buildings that housed our aid station and company headquarters. When darkness fell they marched the prisoners they'd collected down the road below us into Itterswiller.

By the morning of November 30, what was left of Company C was out of officers. The company commander had been wounded and taken to the aid station. We'd lost our own platoon leader to an artillery round a week earlier. On our hill, a tech sergeant was in charge. Two men sent back to find out what had happened at headquarters ran into a German artillery spotter team on the ridge behind us and made it back to us with some shooting but no harm done. Nobody knew what was going on. Word circulated that the Germans were withdrawing. Rumor or fact? Every few minutes a single artillery shell would whistle in, keeping our heads down.



JULIE SCOTT

That occasional shell became my excuse for violating the cardinal rule of the military: NEVER VOLUNTEER.

I found Bob Huckins standing over my foxhole—an old friend and company scout. Huckins said the sergeant had word from whoever sends such word that the Germans had indeed pulled out of Itterswiller. We were to move out and clear the village. But first, the sergeant wanted a patrol of six volunteers to walk down for a closeup look. Huckins was going. Why not come along?

I NOTICED A WHITE-HAIRED MAN BEAMING AT ME FROM A SECOND-FLOOR WINDOW ACROSS THE COBBLESTONES . . . HE HELD A WINE BOTTLE AND HE SUMMONED ME.

Like most teenagers, Huckins and I knew we were immortal. However, having an 88-millimeter shell whistle in every few moments is nerve-racking, and infantrymen learn early that the best way to survive artillery or mortar fire is to move toward the source. Anything is better, when you're nineteen and confidently bulletproof, than cowering in a muddy hole trying to hide in your helmet. Away we went, led by a rifle platoon staff sergeant, keeping under cover when we could and sneaking up on Itterswiller on a route partly covered by a hillside vineyard.

The sun was out now. Around the corner we could see the red-painted door of the first building of Itterswiller. For once, military Intelligence (that perfect oxymoron) had it right. The Germans were gone.

Then a yell in German came from the vineyard above. A sentry dug in among the vines had awakened from his nap, seen us and shouted an alarm. Things happened simultaneously—the roar of engines starting in the village came just as Huckins shot the sentry. Two Germans ran out the red-painted door, found themselves outnumbered, dropped their weapons and threw up their hands. The

sergeant motioned them to head back for the hills where C Company awaited them. I yearned to tag along.

But the sergeant was cut from the cloth of Leonidas, who sent the message from Thermopylae to "tell Sparta we died here in obedience to your command." He edged around the corner for a better view and saw trucks and a column of German infantrymen disappearing down the main street.

While he was doing that, I was setting the stage for my first glass of fine Alsatian wine. I was pressed against a

wall, seeking invisibility, when I noticed a white-haired man beaming at me from a second-floor window across the cobblestones—possibly the only civilian intruding in our war. He held a wine bottle and he summoned me.

Alas, it was bugout time. We fled. But that afternoon when C Company formally liberated Itterswiller the old man spotted me again, trudging along with the other grunts. He stood in his doorway displaying a huge smile, the bottle and a glass. Now there was time for wine.

The house was still there when I returned 43 years later and so was the vineyard where Bob Huckins shot the sentry. But when I stood on the cobblestones and stared out across the valley at the hill where we'd had our foxholes, my memory couldn't recreate the smoke that had hung over the trees, nor the fear, nor the faces of the friends who had died there. The geraniums were dazzling in the afternoon sun, the wine was wonderful and the middle-aged man who served me told me that neither he nor his sons had had to fight a war. Alsace had never before enjoyed two generations of peace.

"We must drink to that," he said. And we did. 🍷

SOUTH AFRICAN WINES

continued from page 31

international." Acknowledging that a number of Cape wines have crossed the Rubicon to real world distinction, Back said that South African vintners "still have to infuse our top wines with more sustained intensity and regional definition. We have the capacity—in natural resources and technical know-how."

About 75% of the Cape's 260,000 acres of vineyards still consist of non-premium grape varieties such as Colombard, Muscat, Chenin Blanc and Cinsault—at best making fresh, crisp, fruity whites and simple reds.

That is set to change: extensive new plantings of all the major varieties, especially Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon, Chardonnay and Sauvignon Blanc, are coming on stream; since the lifting four years ago of restrictive production quotas, which favored the hotter, high-yielding regions that produced cheap wines, many new vineyards are being established in cool-climate districts, which are more likely to yield balanced wines with finesse and complexity.

Despite an acute shortage now of planting material for new vineyards, newly fashionable "alternative" grape varieties such as Viognier, Nebbiolo and Mourvèdre will continue to broaden the range of fine wines. In addition, South Africa's most powerful wine weapon, Pinotage—the local red-wine grape that is a cross of Pinot Noir and Cinsault—which often showed astringent, abrasive, turpentine notes in the past, is now being styled in an increasingly more presentable way: juicy, complex and distinctive.

South Africa's wine renaissance is well under way. 🍷

JOHN PLATTER grew up in Kenya and is a former foreign correspondent who worked in Africa and the Middle East. He and his wife, Erica, have owned a small vineyard in the Cape since 1978 and they coauthor South Africa's biggest-selling annual wine guide, now in its 19th edition.