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# Hugel et Fils

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Ian D'Agata

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*"Two thousand ten was a small-production year due to flowering issues, and in Alsace there's almost always a problem with flowering," Marc Hugel told me in September. "It seemed to take forever, lasting over three weeks, while in 2011 and 2009 the flowering was over in eight days." Followers of this producer know that although Hugel doesn't use the names of grand crus on their labels (though I have heard rumors that they might finally relent and bottle and label a grand cru as such in the near future), they in fact own some splendid vineyards in a number of the most famous grand crus of all, including almost 80% of the historic Sporen (which like all the other grand crus has been greatly expanded over the years), as well as six hectares in the Schoenenbourg and a small extension into the Sonnenglantz. As unbelievable as it may sound, in 2010 Hugel made 25% of all the SGNs in Alsace, as the cold clay soils of the Sporen (especially) allowed for late harvesting, long hang time and very high acidity levels.*

**2011 Pinot Blanc De Blancs** (\$17) (a blend of auxerrois and pinot blanc): Bright straw. Beeswax and white flowers on the simple, clean nose. Fresh and lively on the palate, with refined flavors of white stone fruits and minty herbs. The finish is smooth if only moderately persistent, but this has sneaky concentration. Makes a very flexible food wine. Marc Hugel told me he doesn't want much auxerrois in the blend as he feels it gives too much body to what he wants to be an easygoing, light and lively wine. Mission accomplished, I'd say. **88**

**2011 Pinot Noir** Very pretty red. Bright red cherry and floral aromas. Fresh and clean on the palate, with a candied red cherry flavor nicely lifted by bright acidity on the long finish. Made from a mix of purchased grapes and young estate vines. It's simple, fruity, easygoing wines such as this one that demonstrate how much Alsace pinot noir has improved over the last 15 years. **87**

**2011 Pinot Noir Jubilee** (from a yield of about 40 h/l; aged in 25% new *barriques*): Bright red. Rich red cherry and violet aromas. Sweet and almost creamy in the mouth but bright and nicely delineated, showing a delicate peppery note on the rich, fruity finish. From estate-grown grapes planted in 1966 in a site right next to the Schlossberg in the Rosenbourg area; this is a real step up in fruit concentration and complexity from the entry-level pinot.

**89**

**2009 Pinot Noir Jubilee Les Neveux** Bright red. Delicately flinty red berries and medicinal herbs complemented by a touch of vanilla on the nose. Then rich and creamy in the mouth, with flavors similar to the aromas. Finishes with very good length. The heat of 2009 helped the pinot noir ripen well. Made from a parcel in the Rosenbourg (planted in '66 and purchased by Hugel in '85), where the virus-affected vines yield very small, very rot-resistant berries, allowing the Hugels to harvest late. **90**

**2011 Riesling** (\$24) Straw-green. Subdued aromas of licorice, spice, wet stone and earth. A fresh, smooth, rather gently styled riesling with moderate fruit intensity and structure. Offers a delicately fruity appeal, but the finish also displays typically sound riesling acidity. Includes 70% purchased grapes, mostly from the area of Riquewihr, especially sites with clay-limestone soils. **87**

**2011 Riesling Cuvee Tradition** Bright straw-green. Aromas of white peach and flowers are complicated by a sweet spicy note that is very typical of parts of the Schoenenbourg. The palate offers lime and white stone fruit flavors, with richer notes of quince and *mirabelle*. Ripe acids provide a soft, tactile mouthfeel but also good backbone. Almost 70% of these grapes are from the Schoenenbourg. Just 3.5 g/l residual sugar here, in the classic Hugel style. This is much more interesting and concentrated than the good but simpler entry-level riesling. **89(+?)**

**2011 Riesling Jubilee** (\$60) Pale straw-green. Very refined aromas of lime, talc and white flowers. Fresh and juicy, with delicious ripe acidity providing noteworthy lift to the white stone fruit and mineral flavors. The production of this wine will be lower than usual, at about 10,000-12,000 bottles, as Marc Hugel felt that yields were too high in some parts of the Schoenenbourg and preferred to concentrate on those parcels that naturally gave less fruit. This impressive riesling will not be released for a few years. **92(+?)**

**2011 Pinot Gris Classic** (\$24) Bright straw. Lemon, orange and fresh herbs on the nose. Not dense but pure and spicy, and quite perfumed in the mouth thanks to sound acidity. Finishes clean and persistent. Includes 50% bought grapes, mainly from the Sporen grand cru early-ripening soils. **88**

**2011 Pinot Gris Jubilee** Gold-tinged straw. Citrus skin, pear, poached cinnamon and wet stone on the nose. Rich, dense and suave, with lively tangerine acidity lifting the smoky flavors of ripe pear and caramel apple. This has a tactile, mouthcoating quality but stays fresh and balanced, demonstrating noteworthy intensity and finishing concentrated and long. Outstanding pinot gris. Aged in about one-third used small barrels, this is made with estate-grown grapes from the Rosenbourg, a more *calcaire*-rich and later-ripening site than the Sporen. Marc Hugel told me he believes the former site brings the finesse and the latter the power.

**91(+?)**

**2011 Gewurztraminer** (\$24) Bright straw. Soft citrus scents along with *mirabelle* and cinnamon honey on the nose. Then compellingly sappy in the mouth, with off-dry flavors of crystallized citrus, ginger and mango. Turns very floral on the high-acid finish. A very stylish gewurz in the typical refined Hugel mode. From 80% purchased grapes. **90**

**2011 Gewurztraminer Cuvee Tradition** Bright golden straw. Ripe, deep aromas of yellow plum, rose petal and baking spices. Round and silky in the mouth, with compellingly fresh flavors of honeysuckle, candied papaya, sweet brown spices and honeyed raisin nicely framed by juicy acidity. Finishes long and spicy, with terrific finesse for such a big, round wine. About 80% of these grapes are from the Sporen. **91(+?)**

**2011 Gewurztraminer Jubilee** (\$50) Bright golden yellow. Knockout nose offers explosively rich aromas of candied mango, crystallized papaya, smoked meat, sweet spices and nutmeg. Big, rich and fat, yet with bright, tangy flavors of yellow tropical fruits complicated by underlying minerality and sweet spices. Structured, focused and very long, this is an extremely impressive and powerful gewurztraminer from a great year for the variety. Taste this blind and you can't help but guess Sporen, although Marc Hugel noted that it's not always made from 100% Sporen grapes. "It depends on the vintage," he said. "In great years like 2005 and 2007 that produce a lot of late-harvest wines, the Jubilee is made from other parcels that do not normally give grapes used for late-harvest wines."

**93(+?)**

**2010 Sylvaner** Bright greenish straw. Hints of pineapple, thyme and oregano on the nose, followed by lively, dry flavors of green apple, mint and coriander. There's some power to this basic bottling, and the bright acidity (6.5 g/l) really extends the aromas and flavors at the back. This simple, easygoing wine is perfect as an aperitif or with any dish involving asparagus or artichokes. **88**

**2010 Pinot Blanc Cuvee Les Amours** (\$17) Pale straw. Delicate aromas of dried fruits, lime blossom and nuts on the auxerrois-dominated nose. Quite reserved on the palate, showing white fruit flavors complicated by honey and spices. Tastes very acidic (6.3 g/l total acidity), as if picked on the early side, but the acidity makes it seem rather fresh for a blend in which the auxerrois grabs the lead role. **87**

**2010 Gentil** (\$15) Bright, pale straw-green. Lime skin, talcum powder and elderflower on the refined nose. Bright and fresh but slightly hard-edged on the palate, where firm acidity gives the wine a leanish mouthfeel. But the bright finish shows complex white stone fruit and mineral flavors. This will undoubtedly have less early appeal than the 2011 Gentil but is probably the more serious wine. **87**

**2010 Muscat Tradition** (\$25) Pale straw-green. Penetrating, perfumed aromas of lime, pink grapefruit, mint and white flowers. Enters the mouth crisp and lively, showing aromas similar to the flavors. Smaller-scaled wine but pure and fresh. This doesn't have the structure for a higher score, but the aromas alone are worthy of attention. **88**

**2010 Pinot Noir Jubilee** Good full red. Bright red fruits, cinnamon and vanilla on the nose. Enters the mouth bright and juicy, showing spicy red fruit flavors and a smoky richness. Displays a strong saline quality on the moderately long finish but has the fruit to support it. Distinctly less exuberant than the 2011. **87(+?)**

**2010 Riesling** (\$24) Pale straw-green. Precise, perfumed aromas of white flowers, lime, chamomile, crystallized ginger and tequila. Then pure, refined and balanced, with sneaky concentration and lovely purity to the white stone, lemon and ginger flavors. Ripe mineral-driven acidity really extends the finish. This clocks in at 7.5 g/l total acidity (vs. 7.2 g/l in the 2011), but the must had 11 g/l and so the Hugels chose to do a partial malolactic fermentation. Offhand, I can't remember a better base riesling from Hugel, ever. Very well done! **89**

**2010 Riesling Cuvee Tradition** Bright pale green. Flowers and lime skin on the nose. Leanish, bright and spicy, with flavors of lime, peach, and almond. This has a creamier quality than the entry-level riesling, and finishes with good length and grip. Though this is certainly the more important of the two wines, I'm not sure it's really that much better. **90**

**2010 Riesling Jubilee** (\$60) Bright golden straw. Fresh, slightly musky aromas of ginger, lime and pink grapefruit. Then quite dry but fairly rich on the palate, with pure, bright flavors of ripe stone fruits, quince jam and custard cream. Finishes tactile and persistent: one can tell that some of these grapes were harvested later. **93(+?)**

**2010 Pinot Gris Classic** (\$24) Bright straw-yellow. Compelling, very ripe aromas of passion fruit, banana cream pie, pear jelly and white truffle. Then more minerally and high-acid on the palate, and a bit disjointed in the early going. But this concentrated, ripe entry-level pinot gris will develop further. **88(+?)**

**2010 Pinot Gris Jubilee** Bright golden straw-yellow. Ripe aromas of smoky peach and caramel apple. Enters austere, then turns softer and almost fat in the middle palate, with complex flavors of waxy yellow fruits, pear nectar and strawberry gaining in sweetness. Finishes long, suave and rich. This excellent pinot gris, which nicely hides its 15% alcohol, needs time to show all it's got. **92(+?)**

**2010 Gewurztraminer** (\$24) Bright gold-tinged yellow. Aromas of spiced apple, grapefruit, gooseberry and cinnamon. Considerably richer than the classic gewurztraminer, this wine shows deep flavors of banana cream pie, ginger, cinnamon and flowers. Finishes smooth, creamy and long. Lovely. **88**

**2010 Gewurztraminer Jubilee** (\$50) Good pale, bright yellow. Highly expressive aromas of canned peach, candied mango, cinnamon, nutmeg, lichee and cured meats. Round, ripe and pure, with deep, pliant fruit and spice flavors offering plenty of varietal character. This very refined gewurztraminer is lifted on the long finish by fresh balancing acidity.

**91**

**2009 Riesling Vendange Tardive** (12.2% alcohol; 4.5 g/l total acidity; 46 g/l residual sugar): Bright golden straw. Orange rind, pineapple, almond flower, grilled hazelnut and mint on the very clean nose; the superripe character gives away the hot year. Then sweet and rich in the mouth, with very smooth tropical fruit and ripe citrus flavors. Finishes long and squeaky-clean, with palate-coating richness from the grapes concentrated by *passerillage*. These grapes were harvested on October 15th, all from the Schoenenbourg grand cru. Etienne Hugel told me that the family hasn't produced a riesling VT since 2001 (eight years!), but this 2009 is the first of three in a row. I know that a lot of noble rot is not really in the Hugel house style, but I think a little more botrytis in this wine (not easy to find in 2009, however) would have greatly increased its complexity and overall interest factor. As it is, this is almost *too* ripe and clean. **91**

**2010 Riesling Vendange Tardive** (12.3% alcohol; 8.9 g/l total acidity; 45 g/l r.s.): Pale yellow-gold. Expressive but very refined aromas of peach, tangerine, ginger and cured meats. Densely packed but light on its feet, offering penetrating flavors of *mirabelle*, quince and lavender. Offers a near-perfect combination of sugars and acids and considerable minerally, minty extract. The very long, fresh finish features an apricot nuance. Seems much less sweet and large-scaled than the 2009, but has far more clarity, cut and complexity. Fantastic stuff. **94(+?)**

**2011 Riesling Vendange Tardive** (12.8 alcohol; 6.4g/l total acidity; 63 g/l residual sugar): Green-tinged straw-gold. Spicy, peppery melon and fig aromas are complicated by rose water and orange oil. Then sweet and fleshy on the palate, showing excellent depth and an element of refinement to its fruit cocktail flavors. Finishes noticeably tactile and sweet. About 20% of these grapes were of SGN quality, compared to the 10% to 15% in the '09 and '10, according to Marc Hugel. A luscious, broad style of riesling VT for Hugel, but my guess is this will develop extremely well in bottle. **92(+?)**

**2009 Riesling Selection De Grains Nobles** (9.6% alcohol, 8.6 g/l total acidity, 220 g/l residual sugar): Bright straw-gold. A botrytis bomb on the nose, which is atypical for 2009, but I'm not going to quibble: sexy marmaladey, smoky botrytis notes magically enhance the peach, apricot and floral aromas. Then compellingly sweet and magically mouthcoating, with very pure, harmonious acidity lifting the crystallized ginger and tropical yellow fruit flavors. I tasted this again just as I was getting up from the table to leave, and the rich finish lasted until my next appointment (in another town!). This bottle sports a neck label in honor of Jean Hugel, who did so much for Alsace wines, and who passed away in 2009. **97**

**2010 Riesling Selection De Grains Nobles** (10.6% alcohol:, 12.6 g/l total acidity, 120 g/l residual sugar): Pale, bright yellow. Very pure, high-pitched aromas of lemon tart, ginger, mango juice and

marzipan, with a suggestion of candied violet. Moderately glyceric but not at all heavy, this SGN stands out for its mindblowing balance of sugars and acids, its firm structure, and the vivacity and exceptional purity of its ripe pineapple, lemon, white peach and mineral flavors. The extremely long, palate-staining finish shows an utterly pristine, crystalline, almost steely quality that reminded me of the the Scharzhofberg in the Saar and the Abtsberg in the Ruwer. As riesling SGNs are among my favorite wines in the world, I have had every one made by Hugel since the 1976 vintage numerous times, and this is without question one of the best I have ever tasted. Made from grapes grown between the Schoenenbourg and the Sporen on a site called Engelsreben (which translates to "vineyard of the angel"), this is completely different in style from the 2009 but just as memorable. **98(+?)**

**2011 Riesling Selection De Grains Nobles** (11.6% alcohol; 9 g/l total acidity; 160 g/l residual sugar). Pale straw color with gold highlights. Pungent aromas of minty apricot, mandarin orange and sweet spices complicated by smoky botrytis. Very sweet, pliant and creamy but with wonderful ripe acidity framing and lifting the flavors of yellow peach, mandarin orange, honey and licorice. An almost fat wine by Hugel standards, but precise and pure thanks to sneaky acidity. Perhaps this could use just a bit more grip to reach a ripe old age effortlessly, but I see no reason not to pull the cork on this wine while you wait for your 2010 SGNs to mature. It's amazing how times--and the climate--change: Jean Hugel made only one SGN in his life (the 1976) while nowadays these wines are almost commonplace. My guess is that he would have been proud of what Marc and Etienne have come up with in '09, '10, and '11. **94(+?)**

**2009 Pinot Gris Vendanges Tardives** (12.4% alcohol; 6.1 g/l total acidity; 75 g/l residual sugar): Bright straw. Fresh aromas of lime and tangerine, plus a suggestion of mushroom. Sweet and clean in the mouth, with lively peach and ripe citrus flavors leading to a smooth, tactile, persistent finish. Ultimately a wine of very good rather than outstanding complexity: *passerillage* rather than botrytis accounts for a more linear, less nuanced delivery of ripe fruit flavors. **90**

**2010 Pinot Gris Selection De Grains Nobles** (11% alcohol; 8.3 g/l total acidity; 161 g/l residual sugar): Pale yellow-gold. Aromas of crystallized peach, honeycomb and orange marmalade are complicated by strawberry syrup and truffles. Thick on the palate but with superb acidity giving the red berry, poached pear and caramel apple flavors of this nectar plenty of energy and finesse. Wonderfully long and lively on the finish, showcasing rich, thick pinot gris flavors but also refined and pure thanks to high but harmonious acidity. **96**

**2009 Gewurztraminer Vendanges Tardives** Bright straw gold. Sexy marmalade botrytis tones complement quince, toffee and cinnamon on the nose. Pure, clean and rich, with noteworthy balancing acidity to the ripe yellow fruit and sweet spice flavors. Really an impeccable sugar/acid balance (roughly 5 g/l total acidity and 98 g/l residual sugar), as this wine does not come across as flabby or too sweet. **91(+?)**

**2010 Gewurztraminer Vendanges Tardives** Good full yellow. Cinnamon-poached pear, white stone fruits and flowers on the nose. Suave and rich in the mouth, but with steely, laser-like acidity enlivening the ripe yellow fruit and sweet spice flavors. The bracing finish mounts and lingers. There is about as much botrytis presence in this wine as in the 2009, but due to the higher acidity (6.1 g/l) this wine seems more austere, so give it plenty of time in the cellar. This is so fresh and refined that I'm not sure I would have recognized it as a gewurztraminer; I might have guessed pinot gris. This is likely to last for two or three decades. **93(+?)**

**2011 Gewurztraminer Vendanges Tardives** (4.5 g/l total acidity; 81g/l residual sugar): Bright golden yellow. Smoky botrytis complicates mango, fruit cocktail, banana cream pie and smoked pork on the rich, complex nose. Very rich, sweet and tactile on the palate, with strongly smoky flavors similar to the aromas. Finishes thick, creamy and very long. This has a slightly higher alcohol content (12.9%) than the 2010 and 2009 VTs and is clearly a bigger, more massive wine, yet it doesn't come across as hot or heavy. **94**

**2009 Gewurztraminer Selection De Grains Nobles S** Full yellow-gold. Remarkably varietal aromas for such a sweet, botrytis-loaded wine: tropical yellow fruits, sweet brown spices, even rose petal and lavender, plus a high-toned whiff of nail varnish. Very pure and clean, with high-toned, magically mouthcoating flavors of lichee, white pepper and smoked bacon. This very sweet wine, which clocks in at 188 g/l residual sugar, with about 6 g/l total acidity, features a powerful, slightly tannic structure and finishes with mesmerizing persistence. Reminded me of the great 1989 made here. From a selection of particularly *roti* berries culled from the heart of the Sporen. **96(+?)**

**2010 Gewurztraminer Selection De Grains Nobles** (12% alcohol; 6.3 g/l total acidity; 117 g/l residual sugar): Full, bright yellow. Pure aromas of pear nectar, peach tea and wild rose are enlivened by very clean botrytis. Racy and pure on the palate, delivering lively flavors of pear, nectarine and honeyed brown spices. This very juicy and refined SGN conveys an impression of lightness and grace. In fact, I found it more like a

high-level VT than an SGN but it's an outstanding wine nonetheless. **91(+?)**

**2010 Gewurztraminer Selection De Grains Nobles S** (11.9% alcohol; 6.6 g/l total acidity): Bright straw-gold. Pure if slightly high-toned aromas and flavors of dried apricot, minty orange marmalade, grilled pineapple and marzipan. Wonderfully rich yet tangy on the palate, with pure botrytis notes adding another dimension of complexity and sound acidity extending the finish. Very silky and long on the back end, but shows a slight mushroomy note that detracted from my enjoyment of the wine. **90?**

**2011 Gewurztraminer Selection De Grains Nobles S** (148 g/l residual sugar; 7 g/l total acidity): Bright, full yellow-gold. Knockout nose offers roasted, botrytis-rich aromas of grilled peach, cherry-almond and vanilla. Silky and viscous on entry, then sharply delineated in the middle owing to powerful ripe acidity, which further concentrates the very sweet flavors of honey, white chocolate, caramel and peach nectar. The incredibly long finish features near-perfect balance and an exhilarating peach note. Though this reminded me of the 2009, it's much fresher (0.5 g/l of acidity more does make a difference). It actually seems a lot sweeter too: I would have guessed 200 g/l of sugar. **97(+?)**

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