The village of Beblenheim

A winemaking village lying 215 m above sea level in the sub-Vosgian hills, Beblenheim is dominated by the vineyard of the Grand Cru Sonnenglanz.
Although not fortified, the village is densely populated; made of masonry and timberframe, the houses of vineyard workers sit side by side or separated by a 'Schlupff' (narrow alley between two houses carrying wastewater and rainwater away and preventing fires from spreading from house to house). Built mainly during the 18th and 19th centuries (nearly two dozen others dating as far back as the 16th and 17th centuries), the houses of the vineyard workers most often face the street and have a rear courtyard. Three notable individuals lived in Beblenheim: Jean Macé, Chrétien (Christian) Pfister and Chrétien Oberlin (see points ❶ ❸ Ⓐ Ⓑ of the itinerary).

A little history...

According to ceramic shards unearthed around the village of Beblenheim, people settled in the area from pre-historic times through the Gallo-Roman era. Beginning in the Middle Ages, the history of Beblenheim is intertwined with that of the seigneury of Riquewihr of which it was part. Owned at one time by the counts of Eguisheim, the seigneury of Riquewihr fell into the hands of the counts of Ferrette, who then turned it over to the counts of Horbourg. In 1324, the counts of Horbourg sold the seigneury of Riquewihr to the counts of Württemberg, their cousins. In 1534, the counts (in reality dukes since 1495) of Württemberg allowed the Reform to be introduced in the seigneury of Riquewihr. In 1635, Beblenheim suffered the vicissitudes of the Thirty Years War: the village was besieged and pillaged by the Lorraines, its inhabitants maltreated and taken hostage and its houses destroyed. In 1648, the Treaty of Westphalia marked the end of the Thirty Years War and the return of Alsace to France, but the seigneury of Riquewihr remained the property of the dukes of Württemberg. For another two decades after the official peace, Beblenheim remained a desolate site, with no one returning there to live during the first seven years. During the French Revolution, the seigneury of Riquewihr was made a permanent part of France under the Treaty of Paris, under which the dukes of Württemberg were ousted (1796).
Along with the rest of Alsace, the people of Beblenheim experienced significant upheaval during the 19th and 20th centuries as the land was passed back and forth between Germany and France as a result of the wars plaguing Europe, finally falling once again under French rule in 1945.

The Simultaneum put in place in Beblenheim in 1687, refers to the practice of using the same church for worship by both the Catholic and Protestant religions *(staggering worshipping days or times, or one religion in the choir and another in the nave)*. Following on from the reported raised in 1674 by his minister Louvois (revealing the large number of churches in Alsace devoted to Protestantism), Louis XIV ordained that the choirs of churches should be returned to the Catholics when a village had at least seven Catholic families.

Alsacez-vous !

Beblenheim

The village seen from the vineyard.

Rue Jean Macé in blossom.

House of Jean Macé.

réalisation www.atelier.com / photographies C. Dumoulin

To round off your visit:

- **Take part in guided tours:**
  - mid-July to mid-September: walk with commentary along the Major Vintages Path in the company of a wine grower followed by a visit to a cellar and a wine-tasting.
  - during summer: tours showcasing the life and works of Jean Macé (for information contact the Beblenheim town hall, tel. 03 89 47 90 13).
- **Do on your own throughout the year:**
  an unaccompanied walk and discover the Major Vintages Path (guidebook available at the Tourist Office).

Glossary *(see items underlined on the itinerary).*

- **Trade emblems:** on door lintels or on the arches over the entrances to houses, we find trade emblems which include, among others:
  - **the cooper's emblem:** a mallet and two crossed clamps used to hold the barrel staves together with a hoop (see points ❻ ❾ of the itinerary),
  - **the cartwright's** emblem (whose job was to build carriages, carts and other means of transport): a wheel (see ❻ point of the itinerary),
  - **the emblem of the wine grower:** a pruning knife. This emblem was rarely seen because wine growers could not afford sculptors (see point ❿ of the itinerary).

- **Timber frame symbol systems:** a geometric timber frame would ensure that the houses remained stable. The frame features three motifs:
  - **the diamond**, symbol of fertility and fecundity (see point ⓰ of the itinerary),
  - **the sella curulus** (sort of curved x) whose presence on a façade showed that the house belonged to a notable (see point ❽ of the itinerary),
  - **the 'Mann'**, the outline of a standing man, expressing virility (see point ⓰ of the itinerary).

- **The tithe:** tax remitted in kind, usually 1/10th of the annual cereal crop or wine produce, levied by the clergy or the lord decimator (see point ❾ of the itinerary).

- **'Cours colongères':** in the Middle Ages, a lord could delegate the responsibility of working his land to farmers called 'Huber', generally on a hereditary basis. These Huber were grouped into walled estates called 'cours colongères' overseen by a mayor ('Ober Huber'). The mayor ensured that the land was worked as ordered and collected payment of the agreed tithes from the farmers. The cour colongère was governed under a set of laws and also served as a court in the event of disputes. The counts of Württemberg had 5 cours colongères on their lands in Alsace (33 farmers living under the one in Beblenheim)(see point ⓰ of the itinerary).

Beblenheim
Centre for winemaking

Pays de Ribeauvillé et Riquewihr

A village, its history,
a voyage of discovery.

A voyage *of discovery*

❶ Monument Chrétien Oberlin. On the square of the Protestant church is a grey monolith in honour of Chrétien Oberlin, mayor of Beblenheim from 1870 to 1902, pioneer of winemaking in Alsace and founder of the Wine Institute of Colmar. A brilliant ampelograph (one who studies vines and grapes – their species and varieties) known for his efforts in the study of phylloxera, which he successfully eradicated, Chrétien Oberlin developed a system using wire frames to hold the vine shoots in position whose use remains widespread today in winemaking regions.

❷ The Protestant church of Saint-Sébastien *(rue de Hoen / rue du 5 décembre)*
The current Protestant church was built between 1864 and 1866 to replace another that adopted the simultaneum during the era of Louis XIV. *At the rear of the church* a wall is decorated with the tombstones of nine notable citizens dating from the 15th to the 18th centuries. On one of them, to the right, can be seen an hourglass, used frequently to depict the passage and renewal of time.

❸ Chrétien (or Christian) Pfister's house *(4 rue Chrétien-Pfister)*
Born on 13 February 1857 in Beblenheim, growing up he was influenced by Jean Macé (see points Ⓐ Ⓑ of the itinerary). A senior lecturer at the Normal School and then at the Sorbonne, he became dean of the faculty of letters in Strasbourg after World War I and president of the Strasbourg Academy in 1927. In 1931, he retired to this, his childhood home, where he passed away in 1933.

❹ The Catholic church of Saint-Martin *(rue Saint-Martin)*
This Catholic church was built on the site of a former cemetery between 1864 and 1866 at the same time as the current Protestant church (see point ❷ of the itinerary), thereby marking the end of simultaneum.

➔ Take rue Saint Martin to the mayoral office of Beblenheim.

❺ The Town Hall *(2 rue de Hoen)*
The current town hall building, built between 1838 and 1840, was the birthplace of Chrétien Pfister (see point ❸ of the itinerary). The holdings of the library of Jean Macé (see points Ⓐ Ⓑ of the itinerary) are stored on the first floor of the building.

❻ Houses located 4, 8 and 2 rue Scheurer-Kestner
House no. 4 has a masonry main floor and a cantilevered timberframe upper floor. *Of interest on the porch on the house's left side* is a cooper's emblem, initials ('G.PS.' and 'M.P.') and a date (1794). House no. 8 on the same street bears another cooper's emblem, whilst at the back under the passage can be seen an impressive main-floor beam that was used in the half-timberwork of this former vineyard worker's home. Turning back up towards rue de Hoen, note the cartwright's emblem on house no. 2.

❼ The fountain of Saint-Nicolas *(rue de Hoen)*
Classified as a historical monument, this Gothic-style fountain made of yellow sandstone, dating from the 16th century is a particularly resplendent example of the fountains found in winemaking villages. It is decorated with finials, pinnacles (ornamental cones) and representations of saints Antoine, Nicolas and Jean, which were disfigured during the French Revolution.

❽ House located 4 rue du Raisin. *Of interest on the lintel over the porch of this imposing house built in 1569:* a swastika, emblem of fertility and happiness. On the timberframe balcony, the half-timberwork is decorated with sella curulus motif. The wrought-iron sign, added more recently, bears a star, the emblem of brewers.

❾ House located 5 rue des Chevaliers. *Of interest on the diamond-shaped porch of this house (stones carved into pyramid-like bows):* a beautifully sculpted cartouche bearing a cooper's emblem, the initials 'M.R.' and the year 1673. This building is thought to have housed a former barn and a tithe cellar.

❿ House located 26 and 25 rue Jean Macé. Built in 1551, house no. 26 bears a wine grower's emblem. House no. 25: a manor house made entirely of masonry and bearing the initials 'MG' and 'MV', built in 1791. A little further up on the right lies an old well, the last remnant of numerous water-drawing points once located throughout the village to supply water to its inhabitants.

⓫ House located 37 rue Jean Macé
This home with its stunningly sculpted corner post, a rare sight in a commune of this size, was constructed in 1623 for the seigneurial intendant of Schoppenwihr, Mathias Vogel, as indicated by the marking on the lintel over the front door (not visible from the street).

➔ Just across from this house, follow the narrow pathway between houses nos. 33 and 35 on rue Jean Macé. It follows the former bed of the brook that supplied the village with water. Continue along the gardens until you reach a small half-timberwork structure that likely served as the powder house of the residents of Beblenheim. Walk on to the rue Stutz.

⓬ Rue Stutz and house located 8 rue Stutz
Rue Stutz is named after a Madame Stutz who, in 1863, left her fortune to the commune of Beblenheim on the condition that the money be put towards works of benefit to the community. This street marks the limit between the old and new villages. Little house no. 8 on this street is referred to locally as a 'krumm' (Alsatian for 'slanted') house.

⓭ House located 7 rue de la Grande Cave
The building that today houses La Fromagerie Fischer was built in the 19th century using stones from the Château de Zellenberg (see information brochure on Zellenberg). In 1926, Albert Fischer, then owner of the restaurant L'Agneau Blanc in Beblenheim, purchased the building from a wine merchant to set up his own wine cellar and develop the maturing of varieties of Munster cheese, an activity that continues to this day. During World War II, the building's large cellars (228 sq. metres) served as shelter for the people of Beblenheim.

⓮ Chrétien Oberlin's house *(23 rue de Hoen)*
Erected in 1866, this house was the residence of Chrétien Oberlin (see point ❶ of the itinerary). The smaller house to the left was of benefit to the community in that Chrétien Oberlin had it built to accommodate his workers.

⓯ House located 15 rue de Hoen. The dwelling on this wine grower's farm was built in 1901 following the plans of Chrétien Oberlin (see point ❶ of the itinerary). Very different in style from the surrounding houses, this house is notable for its gabled avant-corps, striking quoins (stones used to reinforce the building's corners) and mantelpieces in whitewashed sandstone.

⓰ Former castle / winemaking cooperative *(14 rue de Hoen)*
Originally a cour colongère, this château was notably owned by the family Hoen of Dillenbourg from 1605 to 1938 and then sold to a wine merchant who, in 1952, bequeathed it to a group of wine growers in Beblenheim who founded the currently existing winemaking cooperative. Of the old 15th-century château remain the dwelling area and a raised, square defensive tower with windows (visible at the rear of the building; follow the alley to the right of the main building).
Also of interest:
- on the stone main floor of the primary residence, a worker's mark (signature of the stone carver on his work, used as evidence in determining his wage) on the window to the right of the door, the date 1461 in Roman numerals and a carved coat of arms (partially worn) on the structure's quoins,
- the timberframe upper floor of the primary residence featuring 'Mann' and diamond-shaped patterns,
- on the cellar walls, a sundial with a number of anomalies,
- on the rear wall of the wine cellar structure (down the alley), a 'couleuvrinière' (opening for inserting a gun with a long, slender barrel), the sole remnant of the still visible fortifications of the castle.

■ OFF THE MAIN PATH

Ⓐ The Petit-Château *(31 rue du Petit Château)*
The girls' boarding school at the Petit-Château was founded in the early 1840s by a Miss Verenet in Beblenheim. After fleeing Paris under pressure from the regime of Napoleon III, Jean Macé accepted a position as a 'young ladies' teacher' at the Petit-Château in 1852. Friend of Jules Ferry and of Jules Verne and his publisher Hetzel, Jean Macé was an advocate of mandatory lay public schooling, originator of the first communal library and founder of the community's cooperative credit organisation and the 'teaching league'. His published writings included a series of popular scientific works for which he became particularly well-known: l'histoire d'une bouchée de pain, l'arithmétique de grand-papa, les senteurs de l'estomac, la grammaire de Melle Lili,… After Germany's annexation of Alsace, Jean Macé (having no intent of becoming a German subject) left Beblenheim in September 1872 to live in Monthiers in Aisne, where he died on 13 December 1894. In accordance with his wishes, his ashes were returned to Beblenheim in 1946, where they lie today under the monument erected on the Alsatian Wine Route at the entrance to the village of Beblenheim.

Ⓑ Monument Jean Macé *(at the entrance to the village along the Route des Vins)*
This monument of black marble features bronze sculptures carved by the artist A. David:
- in the centre, the medallion features a bust of Jean Macé,
- to the left, Jean Macé surrounded by girls from the Petit-Château boarding school where he taught,
- to the right, Jean Macé carrying petitions with signatures in support of free, mandatory lay schooling to the National Assembly at Versailles on 19 June 1871.
Also carved into the stone is a list of the main works of Jean Macé.