The town of Riquewihr
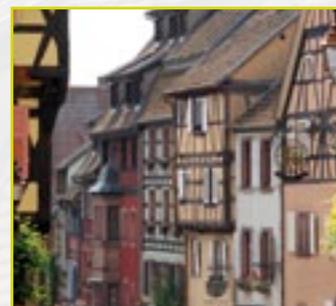
The town of Riquewihr, one of the *"Most Beautiful Villages in France"* *(Plus Beaux Villages de France)*, lies in a vale that is open to the east at the outlet of the Sembach River; towards the west, a vast state forest at an altitude of more than 900 m forms the background to this site.

Riquewihr is flanked to the north and to the south by the Vosges foothills planted with vines which produce the Major Vintages of Schoenenbourg and Sporen, which were already being mentioned in the Middle Ages. The town has prospered over the centuries, especially during the 16th century, thanks to its vineyards and to its wine trade for which is was famous throughout Europe.

The fortified town of Riquewihr is protected by twin walls. The old town retains a very dense urban fabric: houses erected in the 15th to the 18th centuries provide an exceptional wealth of architecture. The town spread beyond the ramparts during the second half of the 19th century.

A little history...

In the 8th century, a freeborn owner called Richo appears to have worked vineyards on the site. He gave his name to "Richo villa" which then became Riquewihr. Owned by the counts of Eguisheim-Dabo during the 5th and 6th centuries, Riquewihr, with its seigneurie, then passed to the counts of Horbourg who, in 1291, surrounded the town with its first defence fortifications. A 1320 document mentions the status of "town" of Riquewihr for the first time. In 1324, the counts of Horbourg sold the seigneurie of Riquewihr to count Ulrich of Wurttemberg.

In 1397, count Eberhard II of Wurttemberg became betrothed to the heiress of the county of Montbéliard, Henriette de Montfaucon whom he married 10 years later. From then on, the seigneurie of Riquewihr belonged to the counts of Wurttemberg-Montbéliard. In the meantime, in 1495, the county of Wurttemberg was raised to the rank of duchy.

In 1534, count Georges of Wurttemberg allowed the Zwingli (Swiss) inspired Reformation into his lands; in 1559, duke Christophe of Wurttemberg introduced the teachings of the German reformer Luther, in order to safeguard the religious unity of his possessions on both banks of the Rhine river. During the political and religious Thirty Years War (1618-1648), Riquewihr suffered badly: pillaging, ransoms, epidemics, famine, death, destruction etc. As the French influence extended to include Alsace, Riquewihr was placed under royal authority in 1680 (Louis XIV) while remaining the property of the Wurttemberg–Montbéliard family.

When the French Revolution broke out in 1789, the inhabitants of Riquewihr supported the French Republic. The dukes of Wurttemberg -Montbéliard were thrown out under the Treaty of Paris (1796) and Riquewihr permanently became part of France.

ALSACEZ-VOUS !

Riquewihr

Riquewihr set among the vines.
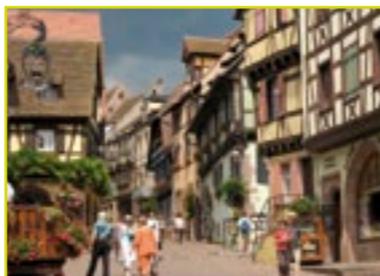
Rue du Général de Gaulle.

View on the catholic church.

réalisation www.atelierc.com / photographies C. Dumoulin

Office de Tourisme du

PAYS DE RIBEAUVILLE ET RIQUEWIHR

Ribeauvillé : 1 Grand'rue • Riquewihr : 2 rue de la 1ère Armée
www.ribeauville-riquewihr.com
☎ **03 89 73 23 23**

To round off your visit:

- **Take part in the guided tours:** ■ In July and August: guided tours* of the old town of Riquewihr. ■ Throughout the year, unaccompanied: an audio guided tour* of the town and its model. The visit is suitable for the non-sighted and partially sighted and for the general public (audio guides available from the Tourist Office). ■ From April to October, aboard the little tourist train, visits with commentary of the vineyard and of the town of Riquewihr. ■ From mid July to mid September: a 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 *(an unaccompanied walk is also possible throughout the year: guidebooks available from the Tourist Office).*

- **Discover the museums of Riquewihr:** Hansi Museum – The thieves'Tower/the Winemaker's House – Dolder Belfry – Alsace's museum of Communication.

- **Please ask the Tourist Office for the following brochures:** *"Riquewihr, the Gem of the Vineyards"* and *"Riquewihr, a voyage through history*".* *(* Only in french).*

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

- **The wine grower houses:** over the stone built ground floor housing the press and covering the basement cellar, there would be one or two further storeys (depending on the owner's fortunes and requirements) which would usually be timber framed; only the wealthy burghers had the means to built the whole house of stone. So, in Riquewihr, timber framed houses alternate with stone built houses.

- **Timber frame symbol systems**
  A geometric timber frame would ensure that the houses remained stable. The frame featured three motifs:
  - **the Saint-Andrew cross**, regarded as a symbol of protection;
  - **the sella curulus** whose presence on a façade showed that the house belonged to a notable;
  - **the "Mann"**, the outline of a standing man, expressing virility.

- **Trade emblems**
  On door lintels or on the arches over the entrances to houses, we find trade emblems which include, among others, that of the:
  - **cooper:** a mallet and two crossed clamps used to hold the staves when the hoops were fitted (see point 16 of the itinerary),
  - **tailor:** symbolised by a pair of scissors (see point 11 of the itinerary).

- **The oriels:** one or more bow fronted levels on a house façade, providing the occupant with more daylight and a better view of the street (see points 3 15 16 17 18 of the itinerary).

Riquewihr
The 'Gem of the vineyards'

Pays de
Ribeauvillé et Riquewihr
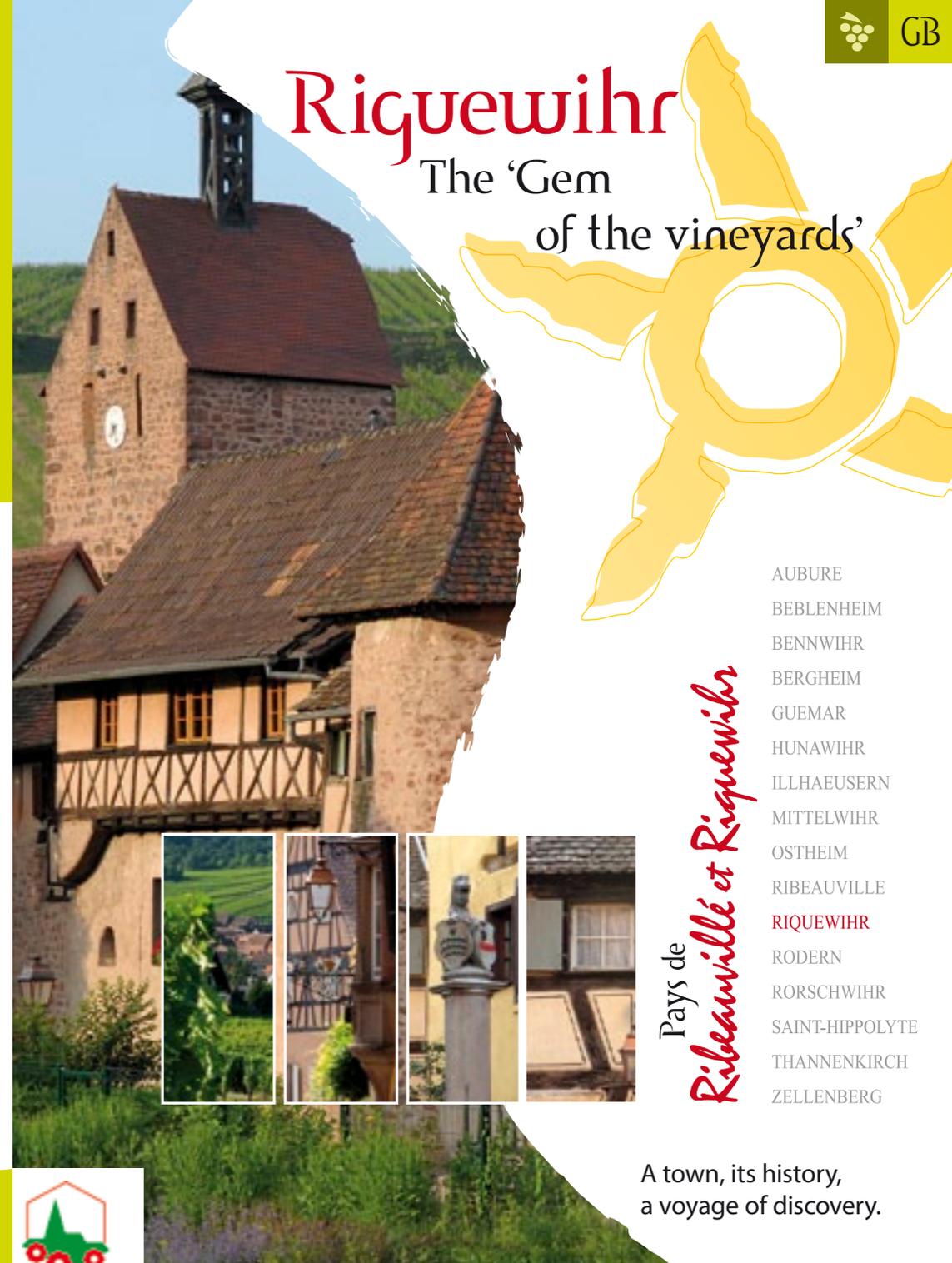
AUBURE
BEBLENHEIM
BENNWIHR
BERGHEIM
GUEMAR
HUNAWIHR
ILLHAEUSERN
MITTELWIHR
OSTHEIM
RIBEAUVILLE
RIQUEWIHR
RODERN
RORSCHWIHR
SAINT-HIPPOLYTE
THANNENKIRCH
ZELLENBERG

A town, its history,
a voyage of discovery.

A voyage *of discovery*

❶ Reproduction of an engraving of Riquewihr
(wall facing the Town Hall - place Fernand Zeyer)
The engraving made by Mathias Merian in 1644 provides an overview of the town and shows the location of its fortifications.
Of **the first** 1291 fortification, we can see:
- the **corner towers** of which three have survived: the Tour des Voleurs/Thieves Tower, the tower called "Hellerturm" and the so-called "Anabaptists" tower,
- a **tower** on the south flank: the Tour des Bourgeois/Burghers' Tower or Tour Blanche/White Tower, destroyed at the beginning of the 19th century,
- the **Porte Haute/Upper Gate** to the west, named "Dolder" and which is still in place and the **Porte Basse/Lower Gate** to the east which was demolished in 1808; both of these gates were strengthened by an outpost.
As fire arms developed, the town's defences were strengthened in about 1500: the first enclosure was modified and a **second rampart** constructed on the eastern, southern and western fronts. At the start of the 17th century, two strongholds and a tower would be added to the corners of the fortification.

❷ Town Hall *(place Voltaire - place Fernand Zeyer)*
After it was demolished in 1789, the old Town Hall located in the centre of the town was replaced by a new, neo-classical style building erected in 1809 close to the town's lower gate which had just been demolished. Outside, a water-filled ditch remained as a reminder of the moat that had once surrounded the town.

❸ House Schickhardt *(12 rue du Gal de Gaulle)*
House built in 1606 for Ambroise Dieffenbach (burgher and member of the judiciary) by Heinrich Schickhardt (architect in the service of the Duke Frederick the 1st of Wurttemberg, who was a military engineer, a property developer and an inventor of machines). Remarkable entrance door and corner bay.

❹ The "skyscraper" *(14 rue du Gal de Gaulle)*
Bringing together two separate 1561 buildings under one single gable, this house has 5 timber framed floors decorated with sella curulus motifs over a stone built ground floor: at 25 m tall, it is one of the tallest timber framed houses in Alsace. On the right hand corner of the house, an angled corner wall was cut to ease of traffic circulation. Here, we can see a piece worker's mark (the stonemason's signature on his work) used to calculate his wage.

❺ Place des Trois Églises (place of the 3 churches)
The street and the square owe their name to the fact that, in olden times, there were three churches here:
- the **parish church** dating back to the 12th and 15th centuries and dedicated to Sainte-Marguerite: abandoned in 1833, this Gothic building was replaced in the mid 19th century by the present day

Protestant church. During the same period, a Catholic church was erected near the "Porte neuve"/New gate,
- t**he pilgrimage church of Notre-Dame** (n°16): founded by the Ribeaupierre family in 1337 to house a "holy image" that was reputed to work miracles, it was converted into a presbytery after the introduction of the Reformation,
- **the church of Saint-Erard** (n°14): dating to the start of the 14th century, this chapel was connected with the adjoining hospital. In 1539, after the Reformation, it became a boys' school.

❻ North fortifications *(rue dite "Steckgraben")*
Go down the alley between n°14 and 16, place des Trois Églises. At the bottom, view the 1291 fortifications from the road: no second fortification wall was added to this section in 1500 but it has undergone numerous modifications.

❼ Courtyard of the nobles of Berckheim *(38 rue du Gal de Gaulle)*
Wholly stone built, the house at the end of the courtyard has mullion windows; the lintel over the doorway to the stairwell bears the date of 1523. A sun dial decorates the hexagonal turret.

❽ The gourmet's house "À l'étoile" *(42 rue du Gal de Gaulle)*
This house (owned by the town) was rebuilt in 1686 in the baroque style. It has one of the most ornately decorated façades in the town: the sella curulus motif, corner posts and windows with richly sculptured wood frames, walls below the window sills decorated with the Town's coats of arms, a star and the gourmet-innkeeper bearing a jug and goblet etc. The sign of the house was produced by the Alsace designer, Hansi.

❾ The nail maker's house *(45 rue du Gal de Gaulle)*
Rebuilt in 1667, this timber framed house has two corner posts, each sculpted in the shape of a man. The one on the left recalls the trade of nail maker carried on by the sponsor of the house.

❿ The fountain of gauging / Fontaine de la Sinne (called "Sinnbrunnen") *(At the foot of the Dolder)*
It was at this fountain erected in 1560 that checks were carried out on the capacity of wine barrels and other containers. The heraldic lion bears the coat of arms of the lords of Horbourg (star) and the coat of arms of Riquewihr (Wurttemberg deer antlers and star).

⓫ Thieves' Tower (La Tour des Voleurs) *(at the end of the rue des Juifs)*
Erected in 1291 and reworked in the 15th century, this 18 m high tower is pentagonal on the outside and square on the inside. Riquewihr using to be the seigniorial seat of Justice up until the end of the 18th century, the torture chamber (still visible) permitted to put the accused to the question ... and to held them in a cell (accessed by the wall walk). The tower communicates with the 1563 winemaker's house decorated with the tailor's emblem, which backs onto the fortifications.

⓬ The Dolder *(at the top of the rue du Gal de Gaulle)*
Acting as the belfry, watch tower and upper gate of the town, this 25 m high structure is Riquewihr's emblematic monument. Erected in 1291

at the same time as the first fortification, this tower retains its medieval appearance with its austere outer façade designed to repel any attackers and an internal façade decorated with projecting timber framed structures. From the top of the Dolder, the visitor will enjoy an extensive view of the rooftops in the old town and out towards the Alsace plain.

⓭ La Porte Haute/Upper Gate *(rue du Gal de Gaulle, after the Dolder)*
Undoubtedly built at the end of the 13th century, it was extended when the defence system was strengthened in about 1500. Defence elements are still visible: a heavy two-leaf door, a wooden portcullis (one of the oldest in Europe), the opening into which fitted the drawbridge etc.
See the 1291 and 1500 fortifications, on either side of the Dolder and of the Porte Haute.

⓮ The Conrad Ortlieb house *(rue du Cerf)*
Built in 1574 for the gourmet Ortlieb (the sworn intermediary acting as a go-between for the wine growers and the wine merchants), it has two coaching spots, one of which is cut an angle to make it easier for horse-drawn vehicles to pass through. There are also mullioned windows and a bas-relief decorates the façade:
- in the left hand section, the owner states, among other things: *"...each may contemplate this building... It has been constructed to my design and I know that not all will find it pleasing"*,
- in the right hand section, the owner is talking to Death: *"Oh Death, you have no hold over me. In this house I live a life of luxury"*. Death replies: *"Give up all this magnificence; you have built this house for another"*.

⓯ The Autrey monastery courtyard (or "Adrihof ") *(5 rue du Cheval)*
These buildings were rebuilt at the end of the 16th century, replacing a property that had belonged to the Autrey monastery (Vosges) since 1320. The dwelling has a two-storey oriel overlooking the street. From the courtyard, a 1510 staircase leads down to the cellar. There is also a well that goes back to 1587 a polygonal turret stairwell with several interesting features: two 'sloping' windows, a spiral staircase with complex mouldings and a late gothic style stair rail topping the whole.

⓰ The Strasbourg Courtyard (or "Strassburgérhof") *(11-13 rue de la 1ère Armée)*
Erstwhile tithe court for the Strasbourg bishopric until 1324 (tithe = tax levied by the clergy). This Renaissance style home with its oriel and turret stair well features the date (1597) and the cooper's emblem.

⓱ The Dissler house *(6 rue de la Couronne)*
This wealthy home built between 1609 – 1610 is characteristic of the art of the Rhenish Renaissance, especially its gable wall with volutes and obelisks and its richly ornate oriel.

⓲ House located 13 rue du Gal de Gaulle
This house comprises two buildings: on the left, the gate dates back to 1565; on the right, the façade has an elegant two-storey oriel. An inscription in Old High German on the west side of the oriel, commemorates the 2nd elevation of the house in 1709 and recalls that, that year, the vines and many fruit trees were killed by severe frosts that occurred throughout Europe.

⓳ The Château of the counts of Wurttemberg-Montbéliard *(Château courtyard)*
In 1539-1540, count Georges de Wurttemberg demolished the old château and replaced it with the one that still survives to this day with its crenellated gable wall, characteristic of 16th century Rhenish art. The seigniorial administration was housed in a huge adjacent building (the "office") built a little later. These buildings were sold during the French Revolution. Bought back in 1861 by the Town, the château would be used as a school; since 1971, it has housed the museum of communication. A bas-relief above the entrance to the stair turret bears the coat of arms of the Wurttemberg-Montbéliard family and count Georges' motto (*"Die Stund bringt's End"*: *"Every hour can be the last"*). A plate commemorates the birth here, in 1487, of Ulrich, future duke of Wurttemberg.

Riquewihr