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Swiss Wine

Five things you need to know about Swiss wine



Rare wines from revitalized, historic grapes are putting Switzerland on the wine lover's map

Swiss wines are nearly impossible to find outside of the country, as they make up less than 1% of global production. Only 1.5% is exported, because the natives — who rank in the top ten in per capita consumption — drink the rest, and still have to import more than double that amount from other countries.

The first time someone told me they were from one of Geneva's best known wineries, I started to laugh. Then I realized they were serious. Even today, unless one lives in Switzerland, it's easy to go an entire lifetime without ever considering the existence of Swiss wines.

Like most people, I first assumed there was a much larger production of white than red wines because of Switzerland's mountainous, northern climate. In fact, however, the latest figures show 58% red vs. 42% white wine production. Some are well-known red and white grapes such as Chardonnay, Gamay, Marsanne, Pinot Noir, Sauvignon Blanc and Syrah. But that's not what I'm here to talk about.

Winemakers worldwide are reviving historic grapes, and Switzerland is no exception. In addition, consumers and sommeliers are searching for more and more obscure wines to try. I'm not immune to the quest for rare wines to sample and write about, so I was excited when I happened to meet Ellen Wallace

on my travels last year. An authority on Swiss wines and author of the recent book *Vineglorious!*, Wallace offered me the chance to stay with her and learn about these wines. We spent our time in the canton of Valais — a French-speaking region southeast of Geneva — where she lives.

In this region, many tiny, high-altitude vineyards thrive despite their international obscurity. The smallest vineyard plots I saw in Valais were only a few square yards in size. They were planted on the nearly-vertical mountainside above the town of Visp, at an altitude of 4,000 feet. (The actual name of the vineyards' location is Vispertermenin.) Though this is thought to be the highest altitude vineyard in Europe, grapes flourish here because it's tucked in above a bend in the Rhone River which allows the vineyards to face south. The historic dry stone walls of the vineyard terraces also hold heat and help the grapes to ripen.

Hundreds of vineyard owners and wine-lovers have taken on the heroic task of keeping these 500-year-old vineyards alive. They toil away on slopes up to 70% grade, doing all their work by hand. Luckily, a few decades ago they decided to pool their labors-of-love into the St. Jodern Kellerei cooperative, which makes a surprising number of very good wines; it is known throughout the country for its beautifully structure "authentic Heida" wine (Heida is also known as païen, traminer or savagnin blanc in other regions). Up in the thoroughly-modern co-op tasting room

perched on the side of the mountain, I sampled the 2016 *Heida Classique Vispertermenin* which was just bottled and showed the saltiness of the terroir, with the wine's nuttiness and citrus/tropical fruit only starting to develop (after 50% malolactic fermentation).

Though Chasselas leads white production, there's plenty more to love

The best-known of the Swiss wines, Chasselas is made from white, thin-skinned grapes, and ranges from floral to fruity, with a touch of minerality and not much acidity. Though there is quite a bit of this produced in Switzerland — it's 27% of the country's cultivation — in the Valais region where I toured wineries, a few other white wines are also popular. I had to learn about Fendant, a hero wine of Valais. But wait... Fendant is actually the regional name for Chasselas. Valais winemakers claim that though Chasselas originated in Geneva, their own steep, terraced vineyards grow the finest version.

The Valais winemaking Mercier family came over for dinner one night, and helped out with the raclette (a delectable Swiss melted cheese dish served over new potatoes, with cornichons and other garnishes). To pair, they brought their "most popular every-day wine," the 2016 *Denis Mercier Fendant*, a minerally wine of their terroir which is typically stony and calcareous.

Another well-known white in Valais is Petite Arvine (aka Arvine), a citrus-note, savory wine that may also have fresh stone-fruit flavors. One of the best I had was the 2015 *Maurice Zufferey Petite*



Arvine, which was complex with lively acidity, some forest notes and big stone fruit as well. Another winemaker, Benoit Dorsaz, showed us his biodynamic vineyards, and with the sound of goat bells in the distance we sampled his aromatic, young 2016 Fully "Les Perches" Petite Arvine.

The other well-known white here is Savagnin Blanc (not to be confused with Sauvignon Blanc) which is a full, aromatic wine that can contain a hint of chalky minerality. A good example, featuring those classic aromas and flavors, was the 2015 *Yvonne Savagnin Blanc* from Chateau Maison Blanche.

Yes, they make red wines too

I was quite pleased to discover several very good red wines, made mostly from grapes I hadn't heard of such as diolinoir, gamaret and humagne rouge. But one of the most notable was cornalin (aka rouge du pays), which only a few winemakers have mastered. In its best expression, it is a mixture of red and black cherry aromas and flavors. The finest I had was the 2015 *Cornalin Tradition Domaine des Muses*, produced by Robert Taramarcz, which featured typical aromas of woodland notes, full yet controlled fruit morphing into dark raspberry flavors on the end-palate. Both the mouthfeel and the tannins were velvety from end-palate to finish.

Dole, a blend of pinot noir (at least 70%) and gamay, offers a combination of light fruit and earthiness. One of my favorites — *Bétrisey & Albrecht 2015 Sang Barbare Dole* — was served at a lovely outdoor lunch at the unlikely-looking



Motel Restaurant Treize Etoiles in St Léonard, where we all had excellent beef fondue (sliced beef cooked in a fondue pot of broth). It started with a big, earthy aroma but lightened on a palate of bright fruit and earthiness; it was, typically, 70% pinot noir and 30% gamay.

It's easy to find vineyards and tasting rooms near Geneva

The region of Geneva itself has vineyards and wineries. To the east is the canton (province) of Vaud, which produces about a quarter of all Swiss wines every year. Just east of Vaud, the southern canton Valais produces the most wines of any region in Switzerland: 33%. It extends along the Rhone River for over 60 miles, with vineyards on both sides, mainly on steep hillsides. And it's visually spectacular; in late spring and summer the valley floor is leafy green, but every time I lifted my head I was astounded once again by the magnificence of the snowcapped Alps behind the vineyard hills.

[The other three Swiss wine-producing areas are farther away from Geneva. The French-speaking Three Lakes region north of Vaud produces 7% of Switzerland's wine. The Italian-speaking region Ticino near the Italian border produces 8%. And the German-speaking area in the northeastern part of Switzerland produces 18% of the wine.]

Wine and Cheese pairings abound

Not just famous for chocolate, Switzerland is also known for its great dairy products. You won't see anything labeled "Swiss cheese" in Switzerland, but that's the type of cheese they use to make their famed cheese fondues and raclette dishes: large, aged rounds with a nutty complex flavor and small bubbles of air sprinkled throughout the cheese. The raclette I had was made with two different cheeses, melted alternately: Aletsch and the Valais Val d'Or. Definitely try the white wines — well as the reds — with the cheese dishes.

Source: www.swisswine.ch

Swiss Wine History

The Beginning

The story of Swiss wine like elsewhere in Europe, began in Switzerland by three notable events:

- Roman Invasion
- Monks and their activities
- The arrival of parasites (phylloxera, mildiou, oidium)

Wine with the Lacustrine

Lacustrine was a city built on the side of a lake and most likely existed around and before the age of bronze. It is believed but no concrete evidence exists that vineyards existed in such cities that would pre-date the arrival of the Romans. Around Saint-Blaise (situated on lake Neuchâtel) remnants of grape seeds were found dating back to the Neolithic era (3000 to 1800 B.C.). This discovery provides a hint of evidence that indicates there was a presence of vineyards during that era and that know how existed on how to press the grapes. Questions around this discovery still loom with whether or not the vines were wild or whether the vines were indeed being cultivated.

The Arrival of the Romans

The legions of Julius Caesar during the 1st century B.C. brought seeds and planted vineyards North of the Alps that lay the foundations for modern vineyards that still exist today in Switzerland and are the foundations of modern Swiss Wine. In the modern day Canton of the Valais many of the oldest grape varieties that are grown such as Petite Arvine, Amigne, and Reze all have latin roots. Even certain commonly used terms such as vingeron (wine-grower) (vinitor), and wine (vinum) all have latin origins. Based on discovery of archaeological sites the following regions had vineyards planted by the Romans: Canton of Ticino, Canton of the Valais, outlying areas of Lac Geneva (Lemano) and on the lake side area of Neuchatel, Biemme, Zurich and Constance, Argovie, Schaffhausen and the Rhein Valley.

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Swiss Club News

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The Monks Contribution

Barbaric invasions led to the collapse of the Roman Empire and devastate vineyards across Europe. The coming of Christianity as a main stream religion in Europe leads to a renaissance in Swiss wine making given how central wine is to an important Christian ritual. Monks played a pivotal role as a work force in restoring much of the damage caused to Western Europe's vineyards and plant new crops. It is not until the end of the Middle ages that a great many private land owners begin to cultivate wine commercially.

Swiss Wine Making During The 16th Century

In the 16th century Switzerland burgeoning population had acquired a taste for Swiss wine which drove up demand leading to a boom in wine making. Private enterprises seeing the financial opportunity began to produce new varieties. Wine making was strongly encouraged in Switzerland as it had become an important part of Swiss culture and of the economy to such a point that a bad year could drastically lead to reduction in the overall quality of life for the general population.

What did **Swiss wine** taste like during the 16th century? It was dry, harsh and acidic. Not exactly a "Grand Cru" quality wine at the time. Private estates were continuously trying to improve upon their fermentation methodology/crop production and looking for ways to improve the wine's taste appeal. During the fermentation process they tried adding honey, spices and other various ingredients. It took until 1579 for wine making to take a leap forward with the aid of a scientific journal from Zurich. The journal indicated that wine could be softened by adding a mix of water, salt, oats, wheat and butter. This also meant that the wine could be preserved for longer.



Auckland Swiss Club

Past Events

Card Evening 12 July

1st	Sonia Fitzi	4360
2nd	Adrian Blaser	4249
3rd	Henry Werffeli	4056
4th	Louis Wallimann	3998
5th	Andrew Iten	3956
6th	Carmen Gordon	3948
7th	Brigitta Rohr	3889
8th	Lynne Dunphy	3745
9th	Heinz Frei	3677
10th	Erwin Steiner	3676
11th	Emil Tellenbach	3653
12th	Edith Hess	3480
13th	Ian Gordon	3351
14th	Hilde Iten	3270
15th	Hans Iten	3212

Card Evening 9 August

1st	Berta Good	4260
2nd	Nelly Steinemann	4126
3rd	Andrew Iten	4009
4th	Hilde Iten	3899
5th	Henry Werffeli	3831
6th	Fidel Good	3790
7th	Emil Tellenbach	3765
8th	Lynne Dunphy	3725
9th	Heidi Wilson	3724
10th	Adrian Blaser	3701
11th	Edith Hess	3635
12th	Erwin Steiner	3577
13th	Louis Wallimann	3470
14th	Franz Krieger	3240

Swiss National Day

This year the 1st of August celebrations took place at the Auckland Swiss Farm and was celebrated with a 'Bure Zmorge Buffet'. At 10 in the morning our event started with Emil and Conrad providing some music. Neil, our president, welcomed 80 adults and 18 children. Soon after we all enjoyed a breakfast feast of bacon, scrambled eggs, a variety of breads and of course Zopf, Birchermuesli, Cheese, Aufschnitt, Fruitsalad, Lebkuchen and many more treats. With our hunger satisfied we all enjoyed the beautiful singing of the Jodlers. Then Neil handed out the medals to the winners for Shooting, Jassen, Kegeln and Steinstossen.

Adrian Blaser welcomed Tatjana Hediger from the Swiss Embassy in Wellington and they then spent some

time with the Jungbürger, 3 young Swiss travelled from the wider Auckland region.

The event was enjoyed by everyone. Many thanks to all the helpers. See you at the next event.

A small group of around 20 gathered at the farm for our bonfire night on the 1st of August. The weather was cold but thankfully not wet. Everyone warmed up cooking their own dinner around the bbq and the children were entertained with sparklers and small fireworks. The bonfire was lit and what a big fire it was!

Forthcoming Events

Samichlaus at the Swiss Farm

The last big event of the year is our Sami Claus celebration on the Sunday the 1st December. The weather will be great I'm sure, and it's always an exciting day out for the kids and parents alike. The bbq will be under way with sausages to purchase and lots of yummy treats for young and old. If you bring your family to only one event in our calendar, then this is the one to be at.

Santa will again be in attendance, with free goodie bags for all the children. (Please note there is a \$10 charge for goodie bags for those who are not members).


Please complete the registration form on your club email. by Friday, 22nd of October

The Swiss Café and Bakery has been operating in Milford since 1993 and specialises in all things Swiss. All our products are baked fresh daily without the use of premixes. Some of our European specialities include Berliners, Engadiner Nusstorte, Zuger Kirschtorte, Swiss fruit flan and many more! We also offer catering, special occasion cakes and party breads upon order. As well as our baking we offer cabinet food and a full cooked breakfast menu in store. Although we have a wide range of traditional products our bakers are always keen to develop new products to keep up with customer demands. We are proud to now have a **wide range of gluten free sweet and savoury items** which we endeavour to keep expanding! We are also proud to serve award winning coffee from Toasted Espresso.

Open:

Monday – Friday 7am – 4.30pm
Saturday & Sunday 7am – 2.30pm

find us on Facebook under Swiss Café and Bakery

SWISS CAFÉ & BAKERY 

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