

THE WINES OF SWITZERLAND



The ABC's of Swiss Wines

By Per-Henrik Mansson

Vineyards seem to be everywhere in Switzerland. While vines grow in nearly all of the country's 23 cantons, or provinces, the French-speaking area dominates both in terms of quality and quantity. Switzerland is divided into three main cultural sections, and Swiss viticulture can be divided along the same regional lines: Swiss-French (28,300 acres planted), Swiss-German (6,400 acres) and Swiss-Italian (2,360 acres).

In the French-speaking part of Switzerland (called *Suisse Romande*), lakes and watercourses play an important role in moderating the mountain climate. In addition, most of the grapes are grown on hillside vineyards with southern exposure, which helps with the ripening process.



The winegrowing areas of Geneva and Vaud stretch out along the northern side of Lake Geneva. Continuing east from Lake Geneva, the canton of Valais stretches out along a narrow valley that is surrounded by mountains, has dry weather and teems with fine vineyards.

Valais is the largest winegrowing area of Switzerland (13,000 acres), and it produces 40 percent of all wines made in the country. Like Burgundy, its land is often subdivided in small parcels; here, among 21,500 owners. The Rhône River begins its long journey in Valais, traveling from its Alpine source to the famed Rhône Valley, and then into the Mediterranean Sea. Protected by the Alps, the bottom of the valley is dry and windy.

Valais has a rich diversity of grape varieties: Chasselas, Sylvaner, Marsanne Blanche (also called Ermitage), Pinot Gris (or Malvoisie), Petite Arvine, Amigne, Muscat, Riesling and Chardonnay; reds include Pinot Noir, Gamay, Humagne Rouge and Syrah.

The canton of Vaud stretches between Valais, to its east, and Geneva to the west. Vaud's capital is Lausanne, and just beyond its suburbs, handsome vineyards overlook spectacular views of the lake and of the French Alps to the south. Vaud boasts 10,000 acres of vines, and two-thirds of this production is Chasselas. The white grape is grown mostly in two appellations, Lavaux (east of Lausanne) and La Côte (to its west). Gamay and Pinot Noir are the region's second and third most widely grown grapes, but new varieties are being tested and may gain in popularity.

Geneva is Switzerland's third largest wine region, after Valais and Vaud, but it's still small — only 3,350 acres are under vine. Chasselas represents 44 percent of the grapes grown, followed by Gamay with 37 percent. But the landscape is changing as young winemakers introduce international varieties.

In Italian-speaking Switzerland is the fourth largest winemaking region: Ticino. The region, the most Mediterranean-like in Switzerland, is small, with but 2,370 acres of vineyards, but 85 percent of them are planted to Merlot, a grape which has shown promise in the region. Vineyards may not cover much ground there, but winegrowing takes place in nearly three-quarters of all of Ticino's communities, showing how anchored wine is in this area.

The German-speaking part of Switzerland is also sometimes referred to as the "Oriental Switzerland." Several cantons have only symbolic plots of vines — the capital Bern and its canton, with 34 acres, for instance. In total, 17 cantons claim 6,400 acres of vines, from which they produce 2 million cases per year. Given the northern location of these areas, growers have found the most success making white wine with a hybrid of Riesling and Sylvaner called Räuschling; for red they make Pinot Noir, called Blauburgunder.

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J. & P. TESTUZ SA - Vaud

Dézaley is the most famous and the most spectacular wine district in Switzerland. 95% of its production is white wine coming from the Chasselas grapes and the remainder from Pinot Noir and Gamay.

JEAN & PIERRE TESTUZ, located in the heart of the winegrowing district of the Dézaley, is one of the most prestigious Swiss wine companies today. It was established more than 450 years ago, and has passed through 13 generations.

Today, TESTUZ is a very well known trade name famous for its high quality wines naturally, being surrounded by prestigious vineyards in the heart of Dézaley. They only deal with best quality.

Dezaley Grand Cru AOC "L'Arbalete"

Location: on a hill overlooking Lake of Geneva (Lac Léman)

Soil: very steep slope, slate subsoil

Varietal: 100% Chasselas

Style: great breed, balance and subtle, incomparable complexity

Serving Suggestions: Dover sole, friture, trout

Press: "Polished, firm; good concentration in its light honey, apricot and floral flavors" (Wine Spectator)

Origin of Chasselas - The typical Swiss type of vine, Chasselas is the grape that best represents the identity of this country. Among the most known, the Chasselas of Moissac, cultivated and appreciated like table grape. In Switzerland, Chasselas always was selected and cultivated, thanks to its ideal adaptation to Switzerland's land and climates.

Henri Badoux S.A. - Vaud

Created in 1908 by Henri Badoux, this family business set out from its earliest years on the road to success, associating Aigle with the famous vineyard of 'Murailles'. In those years the wines of the region—like those of Lavaux—already enjoyed an enviable reputation for high sugar content combined with low acidity. Biochemical analysis confirms that they 'have both body and sweetness', while the tartar (a guarantee of good aging) is higher than in the growths of the other vineyards of Vaud. Henri Badoux's great merit was to know how to tap this extraordinary potential and set the business on the road to success.

When his son Henri Emile BADOUX took over in 1940, he inherited a business which was still modest in scale. Under his guidance the vineyards were extended until they constituted an imposing estate of more than fifty hectares in the famous appellations of Aigle, Yverne, Ollon and Saint-Saphorin. He pioneered the planting of Pinot Noir in Pays de Vaud, first at Aigle, then at Yverne and Ollon. During the same period, the cellars and winemaking plant were extended, a central processing and storage facility was built at Aigle, and later a new fermenting plant at Yverne. Gradually, the company's reputation spread throughout Switzerland and beyond, mainly to Germany and the United States.

Henri Olivier BADOUX took over as head of the family company at the beginning of the eighties, a decade in which the priority was to develop the appellations d'origine vaudoises, as well as to impose strict quality standards. In the vineyards, he instituted an increasingly draconian regime of yield control and adopted environmentally friendly methods of cultivation. Today, the cellars are equipped with the most technically advanced installations for pressing the must and vinifying the crus in just the right conditions. The high quality of the range of wines ensures them pride of place on the lists of restaurateurs and specialist distributors, as well as a large clientèle among wine connoisseurs.



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Aigle AOC Les Murailles

Appellation : AIGLE Appellation d'Origine Contrôlée

Variety of Grape : Chasselas

Situation and exposure : Terraced vines with walls reaching eight meters in height. Exposure to full sun at midday

Type of soil : Gravely, shaley (broken slate), light, favoring the finesse and distinction of the fruit

Vinification : Soft pressing, severe debourbage. First and the second fermentation under temperature control. The vinification in stainless steel tanks makes it possible to extract a maximum of flavors

Tasting Characteristics : A silky texture encloses the richness of the fruit, dense and gentle on the palate. Remarkable for its harmony, roundness and intensity, it combines grace, elegance and softness. Backing onto the foothills of the Alps, this superb vineyard towers majestically into the sky. The steepness of its terraces seems to defy the laws of equilibrium, ensuring generous isolation and maximum drainage. Föhn winds and warm breezes slide between the vinestocks right up to the time when the grapes are perfectly ripe: beyond the reach of the damp air and mists of autumn, the grapes receive maximum protection from rot. The excellent condition and ripeness of the grape, allied to yield limitation, are the two keys to the quality of Aigle 'Les Murailles' and its reputation as the supreme wine of Vaud.

Serving temperature: 46 - 50°F

Robert Gilliard - Valais

Proprietors of a vineyard of almost 40 ha at the heart of the prestigious Sion appellation, Robert Gilliard symbolizes the family tradition and - through its crus - provides a true taste of the soil of the Valais.

Fendant de Sion "LES MURETTES" and "DÔLE DES MONTS" are two wines which epitomize the great traditions behind the name of Gilliard. Their origins go back almost to the foundation of the House in 1885. During a century of history, the estate has expanded and diversified its appellations. Today, it produces a wide range of whites, rosés and reds, all of which embody the spirit of their unique native soils and noble grape varieties. Cellared, vinified and bottled in the family cellars, Gilliard wines mirror the soul of the Valais, a land of fire, rock and stark contrasts.

Quality and Ecology - Working on the principle of quality before profit, the House of Gilliard keeps the average of its vines at about twenty years. It is only around the tenth year, in fact, that a vine will give of its best. In pursuance of these objectives, the maximum yield is limited to: 1 liter per m² for Fendant, 8 to 9 dl per m² for Johannisberg, 7 to 9 dl per m² for Petite Arvine, Pinot Gris and the other specialities, 8 to 9 dl per m² for Pinot Noir and Gamay.

Gilliard is aware of the need to protect the environment and the purity of the wine, and therefore has adopted an integrated approach to plant protection on its estates. Only "soft" methods are used, i.e. treatments which do not harm the natural environment or adversely affect the quality of the final product.

Dôle des Monts

Its name is legendary. Its appeal is entirely in its harmony, its distinction, its aromas of ravenous fruitiness, its nicely blended tannins. With a vigor that is concealed beneath its elegant exterior, it is the amorous accomplice of a leg of lamb, poultry and grilled meats, partridge or guinea fowl.

Nose: Light fragrance of red, ripe fruits, strawberries, raspberries.

Eye: Dark red, ruby

Mouth: Very fruity, well-full-bodied.

Production country: Switzerland

Production area: Valais



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Type of vine: Pinot Noir, Gamay

Alcohol Volume: 13.0 % Volume

Accordance with food: Red meat, Hunting meat, Hard cheese, Soft cheese

Serving temperature: 55°F

Fendant Les Murettes

A great classic. Svelte, elegant, fruity on the palate, with a mineral character; it is a wine for any time of day. It is enjoyed as an apéritif, with grilled or pan-fried fish, with shellfish and seafood, and raclette and alpine cheeses.

Nose: Flowery, slight character of the different areas.

Eye: Straw yellow, bright good presence of CO₂.

Mouth: Mineral character, good presence of CO₂, crispy, intense.

Production country: Switzerland

Production area: Valais

Type of vine: Fendant [Chasselas]

Alcohol Volume: 12.0 % Volume

Accordance with food: Aperitif, Hard cheese, Sauerkraut, River Fish

Serving temperature: 52°F



Chateau D'Auvernier - Neuchatel

This estate, which is located on the shores of the Lake of Neuchâtel, currently markets the produce of about 60 hectares of grapevines. Although the Auvernier Castle Cellars actually possess only 16 hectares of grapevines, they cultivate an additional 24 hectares and buy the harvest of 20 hectares more from vine growers with whom their ties, in some cases, go back several generations.



The light to medium chalky soils, in places with barely 40 to 50 cm of topsoil overlaying the bedrock, can be very generous, providing the grapevine with two to three meters of undersoil. Geologically similar to the Burgundy soil, although situated a little further south, it benefits from the proximity of the lake, which regulates the temperatures, thereby offsetting the additional 100 meters or so in relation to its French counterpart.

The Neuchâtel Blanc, which is light in color with an aroma of lime, is a light fruity wine with just a hint of a sparkle due to its maturing on lees. It is derived from the Chasselas Fendant Roux. This vine of oriental origin was brought back to the region by the Crusaders. This is a cheerful wine - just the thing for aperitifs. It goes well with grilled or boiled fish as well as with seafood. Perfect with cheese, it rounds off the evening on a joyful note. To be consumed within 3 years. Serving temperature 50-54°F

Neuchâtel Blanc, Château d'Auvernier

Location: on a hill overlooking Lake of Neuchâtel in NW Switzerland

Varietal: 100% Chasselas

Soil: limestone (as in Burgundy)

Style: fresh with a floral bouquet

Serving Suggestions: trout, smoked fish, oysters and other seafood

Press: "the most complete and multidimensional" Michael Franz (The Washington Post)