

Lifestyle

# The land of yellow wine

Switzerland lies at a wine-making crossroads in Europe. Not only is it home to a diversity of wonderful wines and stunning vineyards, but it also borders some of the richest and most varied wine regions in the world. In this first of a series of articles to learn more about our wine-producing neighbours we hop across the border with France to the Jura.

Every wine region on earth strives to promote wines and traditions that set them apart. The Jura, one of our closest neighbours, does this better than most. Since it lives in the shadow of more illustrious Burgundy it certainly needs to punch above its weight. The Jura's truly distinctive contribution to the world of wine is Vin Jaune. On the first weekend of February each year this unusual wine is celebrated with grand pomp at 'La Percée du Vin Jaune' when the latest vintage is officially released.

Vin Jaune is atypical in many ways. First of all, it is made from the Savagnin grape variety (which also produces dry white wines in limited quantities in the Valais where it is known as Païen or Heida). This so-called 'vin de voile' is the result of a veil (or voile) of yeast that is allowed to grow on the surface of the wine in cask. This veil protects the wine partially (but not totally) from oxidation in the barrel and imparts a particular nutty taste somewhat resembling a dry sherry. In fact, this veil of yeast is rather like the flor that is responsible for the Fino style of dry sherries in Spain though, unlike sherry, Vin Jaune is not fortified with alcohol.

By law Vin Jaune has to wait six years and three months after the harvest before it can be bottled. In other words, this year's Percée sees the 2007 vintage being feted. Even then, the bottle itself is one of a kind called a 'clave-lin'. It holds just 62 centilitres (rather than the typical 75 cl wine bottle), supposedly the volume of wine left from one litre after six years.



Vin Jaune production is wrapped in age old laws and practices.

The wine can come from a range of appellations such as Arbois, L'Etoile, Côtes du Jura and Château-Chalon, which ranks as the most famous. Regardless of origin the wine may not be to everyone's taste. Nevertheless, it is worth trying at least once and preferably with a plate of local Comté cheese and walnuts.

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The combination brings out the very best in all three components. A local dish that is proudly served at every restaurant is chicken (preferably from nearby Bresse) cooked in vin jaune with morel mushrooms, to which a glass of the wine makes the perfect match.

However, there is much more to the Jura wines than Vin Jaune. You can also expect to find good sparkling wine, Crémant du Jura, made from

Chardonnay and using the same traditional method of production as Champagne. For sweet wine lovers there is delicious 'vin de paille' where the grapes are traditionally dried on straw mats after the harvest to concen-



trate the sugars in the grapes before fermentation. If you like to try obscure grape varieties you need look no further than the indigenous Poulsard and Trousseau black grapes that produce red and some rosé wines. The region

also makes quality dry white and red wines from Chardonnay and Pinot Noir, the classic grapes from neighbouring Burgundy. Finally, if you like age-old traditions, you must try Macvin du Jura that has been produced in the region since the 14th century. It is a sweet 'vin de liqueur' fortified with Marc du Jura, the local pomace brandy, and can be enjoyed at the start or end of a meal.

As so many of the best examples of these various Jura wines do not leave the region, one of the best ways to sample them and to enjoy the cuisine and hospitality of the region is to go there. There is a great website full of useful information on the region's wines and foods: [www.jura-vins.com](http://www.jura-vins.com) (though only in French). For information on the region as a whole in English and other languages visit [www.jura-tour-sim.com](http://www.jura-tour-sim.com).

The Jura can also claim to be the birthplace of Louis Pasteur, the great French chemist and father of microbiology. While he may be best remembered for his groundbreaking work on vaccination and pasteurization, it is thanks to him that the modern wine and beer industries came to understand the process of alcoholic fermentation. Take a guided visit of the Musée La Maison de Louis Pasteur in Arbois, open from April to mid-October.

The Percée is one of the most popular annual wine festivals in all France so expect to join tens of thousands of visitors who have also chosen to brave the predictably cold weather. Visit [www.percee-du-vin-jaune.com/](http://www.percee-du-vin-jaune.com/) for more details on this weekend's big event (though only the French language version is for the 2014 event). If you do decide to join in the festivities and discover Vin Jaune and the many other local treats, make sure you wrap up warm!

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