
Discovering Swiss Wines

An Essential Guide for Wine Explorers and Expats



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Introduction



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Small but beautiful

For many people Switzerland evokes images of beautiful lakes and mountains, precision timepieces from watches to cuckoo clocks - hence the reliably punctual trains - and contented cows producing tasty cheese (with and without holes) and chocolate in every conceivable shape and flavour.



However, it is rare that anyone from outside the country spontaneously mentions its wines, even though the vineyards in some regions have been in production since Roman times.

In the grand scheme of things, Switzerland represents less than half of one percent of global wine production. But, when it comes to wine consumption, each person in Switzerland drinks on average 33 litres of wine every year, placing it fourth in the world. Switzerland easily beats the levels in major countries such as Australia and Germany at 25, UK and Spain at 21 or USA at 10. What is more, virtually all of the wine produced in Switzerland is consumed domestically, leaving very little available for export. In case you want to know how little, the amount is around 1% of the total. Indeed, 65% of the wines consumed in Switzerland are imported so as to meet the demand.

In fact, the small scale and fragmented structure of the local wine industry and the relative obscurity of many of the grape varieties, not to mention the consistent strength of the Swiss Franc, are further reasons for the lack of any concerted export drive.

As a result, Swiss wines rank as not only one of the country's best-kept secrets, but also something of a mystery for those who come to live and work

here. In place of familiar grape varieties like Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc and Cabernet Sauvignon you are more likely to find Chasselas, Petite Arvine and Cornalin, typically produced in limited amounts by winemakers in a village close to where you live. These local varieties account for just over one-third of total Swiss production.

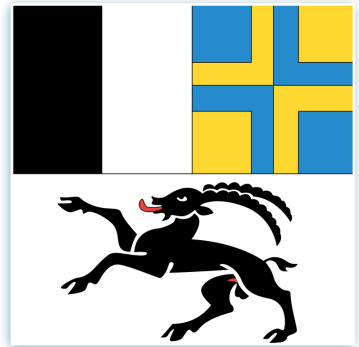
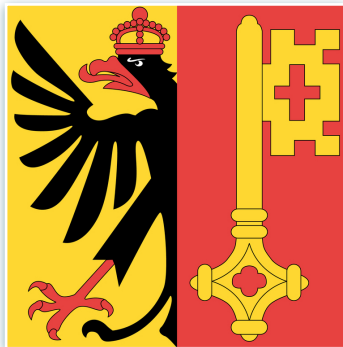
It may come as a surprise to learn that red wine production exceeds white wine 58 : 42. Every canton in the confederation actually produces wine, but two cantons – Valais and Vaud - dominate the wine scene. Most producers grow a wide range of different grape varieties to cater for various tastes, especially since imports of foreign wines were strictly controlled until as recently as the 1990s.

The historical dependency on the Chasselas grape variety also encouraged many producers to broaden the range of varieties they offered. This single variety now covers a quarter of the country's vineyards. Together with Pinot Noir, the leading black grape, these two varieties account for more than half of the plantings in Switzerland. The Gamay black grape is the third major variety, though it is often blended with Pinot Noir. The Italian-speaking canton of Ticino south of the Alps is renowned for Merlot, the fourth most planted variety, which produces red wines of variable, but constantly improving quality.



Good value is not always that easy to find as prices (at least for quality wines) tend to be driven up by relatively high costs of production due to local wage rates as well as steep sites in many places where mechanisation is not an option. But the alternative is to miss out on some genuinely unique and often surprising wines that you will simply not come across anywhere else on the planet.

Major Wine Regions



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1) Valais



The source of one-third of Switzerland's wines

The Valais enjoys the protection of the Alps, the warming föhn wind and a sunny climate which provides ideal growing conditions that ensure well-ripened grapes. The vineyards flank mainly the south-facing side of the Rhône valley where some of the slopes can be as steep as 90%. The warm climate allows some of the vineyards to be planted above 750 metres and, in the case of Visperterminen, at an altitude of 1,100 metres making it the highest vineyard in Europe.

One of the delights of discovering Valaisan wine is the number of indigenous grape varieties. In terms of red wine, Humagne Rouge and Cornalin are the two local specialities produced in reasonable quantities, growing alongside better-known varieties such as Pinot Noir and Syrah.

The white wines of the Valais equally deserve a mention as there are several intriguing indigenous varieties that are simply not found anywhere else outside the region such as Petite Arvine and Amigne. The former (sometimes called simply Arvine) is probably the finest of all the local varieties in the region, if not all of Switzerland.

These and other varieties such as Pinot Gris (known locally as Malvoisie) also produce noteworthy medium-sweet ('mi-flétri') and delicious sweet ('flétri') wines. Look out for the Grain Noble ConfidenCiel charter which ensures the very best in sweet wines produced in the canton.



The remarkable Provins co-operative

This wine co-operative is in fact the largest single producer of Swiss wines, accounting for about 10% of total Swiss wine production. In the Valais alone it represents about one fifth of all the wine produced in the canton.

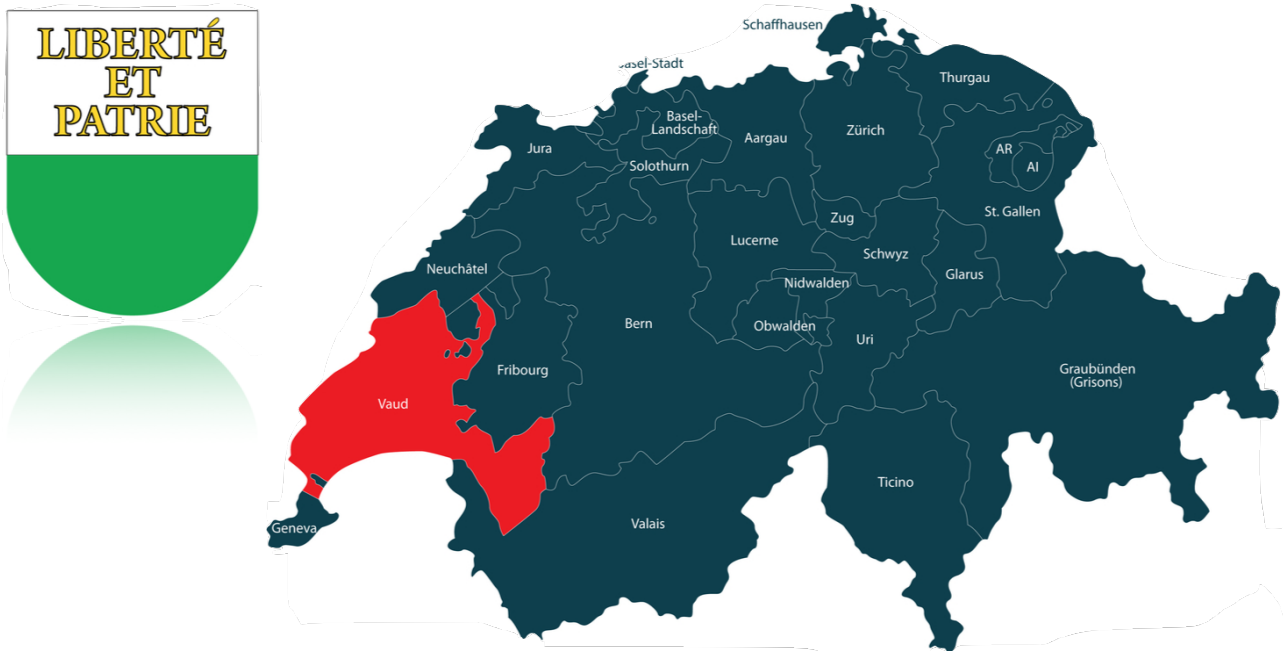


PROVINS
DEPUIS 1930

The co-operative was formed as far back as 1930 when small producers were struggling to cope with over-production, foreign wine imports and the economic crisis. It supports the production and marketing of around 240 Valaisan wines.

There are some 20 different ranges, each promising a particular level of quality and value which target different sectors of trade. In all, there are more than 3,300 suppliers who own 1,150 hectares (2,840 acres) producing in the region of 11 million kg of grapes each year.

2) Vaud



The land of Chasselas and the 3 suns

There is no other place on the planet where wines made from the Chasselas grape hold sway more than the canton of Vaud, the second largest wine-producing area in Switzerland. This grape variety alone populates over 60% of the vineyards in the canton. It is also the only canton in the country where white wine production exceeds that of red wine.

Of the various sub-regions in the canton the UNESCO World Heritage site of Lavaux deserves special attention. This spectacular 30 kilometre stretch of steep terraced vineyards overlooking Lake Geneva runs between Lausanne and Montreux and its wine-making



history can be traced back as far as the 11th century. It is renowned for its so-called three suns as the vines not only soak up the direct sunlight from above,

but also benefit from the reflection off the surface of the lake - the second sun. The third sun is the heat absorbed by the walled terraces, the effect of which keeps warming the vines long after the sun has set.



Around the village of Epesses in the Lavaux the wines of Dézaley and Calamin deliver the very best expressions of Chasselas with real weight and character.

The gentle slopes that run between Lausanne and Geneva form La Côte where there are numerous aristocratic wine-

making châteaux and domaines. The villages of Mont-sur-Rolle and Féchy account for some of the more remarkable Chasselas wines.

At the eastern end of the lake, between Villeneuve and Bex, the Chablais produces a generally richer style of Chasselas.

Fête des Vignerons

The well-entrenched local wine culture is the focal point of this impressive and colourful festival which takes place in Vevey just five times in every 100 years. The celebrations pay homage to the vines and wines, the growers and producers in word and song, dance and dress, all of which are specially conceived in a creative showpiece that attracts thousands to the region. The 12th edition of the festival since 1797 takes place in 2019, so be prepared!



3) Geneva



In the Geneva region Gamay ranks as the principal variety and exists primarily as a single varietal wine, even though many other varieties are gaining ground. This is the same grape that accounts for easy-drinking young reds from the vineyards of Beaujolais, some 150 kilometres to the west in France.

Here it produces well-structured red wines that are both fruity and spicy and there is also a refreshing rosé. However, it should not be confused with a similar-sounding variety called Gamaret, which is prevalent in the region and makes powerful, spicy red wines.



4) Ticino



The Italian-speaking canton of Ticino is unique in so many ways as it is located south of the Alps and therefore enjoys the hottest climate, though also the wettest, thanks to often heavy storms.



In the fourth largest wine-producing region of Switzerland the Merlot grape is pre-eminent. Accounting for over 80% of production it ripens to perfection in the sub-Alpine climate. It can produce red wines in a range of styles from fairly light to rich, full-bodied and carefully oaked wines that can hold their own against some top Bordeaux reds.

5) Three Lakes Region including Neuchâtel



If there is one region in the country where Pinot Noir comes into its own it is the Three Lakes around Neuchâtel. Here it dominates almost half of the vineyards as one of a very small number of permitted black grape varieties, producing notable red and rosé wines. The pale salmon pink *Œil de Perdrix* refers only to dry rosé wines made exclusively from Pinot Noir. While this type of wine is produced in other cantons it is, in fact, an invention of this particular region. Like most rosé wines they are best drunk reasonably young before the fresh fruit flavours fade.



6) German Swiss Regions including Graubünden



Pinot Noir is the most widely planted black grape variety in Switzerland. In the 17 wine-producing cantons of German-speaking Switzerland this variety is the clear leader, representing 60% of all plantings. More often than not it bears the name *Blauburgunder*, which translates as ‘the blue grape from Burgundy’, paying homage to its spiritual heartland in the vineyards of the Côte d’Or in France.

Pinot Noir truly flourishes in the Bündner Herrschaft, a small region around Chur (Coire) in the canton of Graubünden (les Grisons), close to the border with Liechtenstein. Here it produces wines with the delicate aromas and haunting sensuality that are true to the elegance and finesse of the variety.



Chapter 2

Classic Grape Varieties



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Pinot Noir

(28% of Swiss production)

It may come as quite a surprise to learn that this is the single most planted grape variety of any colour in Switzerland.

While this variety can produce some noteworthy wines on its own, Pinot Noir plays a key role in the ubiquitous, though often unremarkable Dôle, where it is blended with the Gamay variety to make a rather light style of red wine for easy, everyday enjoyment.



On its own Pinot Noir produces very elegant wines in several German-speaking cantons such as Graubünden (les Grisons) and Zürich. However, it is worth remembering that in these parts of Switzerland the grape variety typically goes by the German names of Blauburgunder.



In canton Neuchâtel it not only makes fine red wines, but also very good rosé sold as Œil de Perdrix (literally, eye of the partridge). In canton Vaud you can even find some great examples of less common white Pinot Noir wines called Blanc de Noirs, where the grape skins have not been used to impart any red colour to the finished wine.

When you pour a glass of Pinot Noir you should already notice the relatively pale and translucent ruby colour. The grapes have particularly thin skins, which impart much less colour than most other black grape varieties. The aromas are delicate, sensual and can be quite haunting, rather like perfume.

It is often said that 70% of the pleasure of Pinot Noir is on the nose so don't rush to take that first sip. Savour the moment and let your nose work a little harder than usual.

On the palate you will taste a relatively light fruity wine by red wine standards. Another appealing feature of Pinot Noir is the typically low level of tannins, which means the wine feels very smooth on the palate without much of the astringency associated with red wines in general. In younger wines the flavours of red fruits such as strawberries and raspberries come to the fore. Notes of oak are present but rarely prevalent.



With age Pinot Noir can develop some remarkable aromas and flavours that evoke the autumn season such as forest floor, mushrooms, truffles and savoury notes but still with an underlying touch of sweetness. In summary, when it comes to Pinot Noir, think elegance and finesse rather than punch and power.

While some of the wines command premium prices, many offer genuinely interesting and good value alternatives to the increasingly costly offerings from Burgundy.

Chasselas

(26% of Swiss production - also known as Fendant, Perlan and Gutedel)

For most people coming to Switzerland for the first time it is often a revelation that the country even produces wine. Then the overwhelming impression is that Switzerland is awash with an unfamiliar grape variety called Chasselas.



This is, in fact, only the second most planted grape variety in all of Switzerland after Pinot Noir. The biggest challenge for Chasselas in terms of notoriety, if not respect, is that Switzerland exports very little of its wines, no more than 2%. So either you discover Chasselas as a wine while you are here to visit or live, or you are likely never to experience it as a wine.

In the realm of wine its principal home is decidedly here in Switzerland where it makes wines under various pseudonyms such as Fendant in the Valais, Gutedel in the German-speaking cantons and Perlan in Geneva. The Valaisan name Fendant is actually derived from the French verb "fendre", meaning "to split", which is what happens to the golden Chasselas grape if squeezed between thumb and forefinger, rather than just becoming squashed.

The wines, especially when they are drunk young as most of them are, tend to be quite dry, fresh and fruity though fairly light on aroma and flavour compared to most other white wines of the world. Often you will get a refreshing trace of carbon dioxide, a small amount of which can be retained from the fermentation process. This is a good enough reason to finish the bottle on the day you open it to avoid losing this slight prickle of gas, an integral part of the character of the wine.



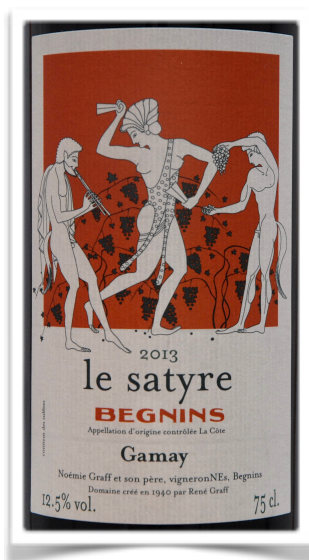
Probably the most important feature of Chasselas is the way in which the wines, for all their relative lightness, are highly expressive of the terroir where the grapes grow. Granite soil brings out floral notes, chalky soil makes them more fruity and honeyed, on clay they take on more weight and character. On the prime slopes around Dézaley in the Lavaux region of Vaud they become distinctly minerally. In the best areas of Canton Valais around Sierre and Chamoson you get a nice combination of fruit and an exquisite bitterness on the finish.

You may not realise that the better examples of Chasselas from the better producers in the better years can actually age remarkably well, for ten even fifteen years. The flavours become wonderfully smooth and develop complex nutty and honeyed notes. But very few estates sell these wines, at least not on the open market. You are more likely to find them on the wine lists of top restaurants. Whenever you visit a winery it is certainly worth asking to try an older vintage and, if you strike lucky, offer to pay for the privilege and the pleasure.

Gamay

(9% of Swiss production)

This is the second most planted black grape variety in Switzerland after Pinot Noir with which it is often blended to make a light and fruity blend called Dôle. Gamay is most commonly associated with the Beaujolais region of France and, in particular, the annual release of the very young and often forgettable Beaujolais Nouveau.



In Switzerland Gamay produces a range of styles. At one end of the spectrum are light and fruity wines, purple in colour, low in tannins and best drunk chilled while young. At the other end you find fine, red-fruited and peppery wines, deeper in colour, some of which have been aged in oak and promise greater longevity.

The good news is that there is more of the richer style of wine being produced both in France and here in Switzerland, including cantons Geneva and Vaud. Sadly the label rarely gives you much clue as to the differences.

It is worth adding that, over in the Beaujolais region of France, the best wines made from Gamay do not even bear the name of Beaujolais anywhere on the label. Yet the villages that give their name to these wines probably sound rather familiar: Morgon, Fleurie and Moulin-à-Vent to name just a few.



Merlot

(8% of Swiss production)

In Ticino, the fourth largest wine-producing region of Switzerland, the Merlot grape variety is pre-eminent. Accounting for over 80% of production it ripens to perfection in the sub-Alpine climate.



Here Merlot produces red wines in a range of styles from fairly light to rich, full-bodied and carefully oaked wines that can hold their own against some top Bordeaux reds. The best Merlot del Ticino comes close to the opulence of wines from Pomerol.



Also, don't be surprised to find Merlot Bianco, where the wine has been vinified as a white. This style is becoming increasingly popular and is something of a rarity in the wider world of wine.



Chapter 3

Local Grape Varieties



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Petite Arvine

(also known as simply Arvine)

This is rightfully considered to be amongst the finest of all the white (and red) indigenous varieties in Switzerland, producing elegant and, in some cases, quite intense wines.

Petite Arvine grows almost exclusively in the Valais and exists as a dry wine as well as medium-sweet and sweet wines, if the grapes are harvested later in the year. Yet, in total, it represents little more than 1% of all the vines planted in Switzerland.

As a dry wine its natural acidity brings freshness and a certain tension to the wine. It has aromas of citrus (especially lime) and distinctive notes of grapefruit, occasionally rhubarb, minerality and a distinctive touch of saltiness. The finest examples deliver fabulous balance and a long finish.

If the grapes are left to shrivel on the vines and harvested later, they produce medium-sweet ('mi-flétri') and delicious sweet ('flétri') wines. The intense bouquet and powerful flavours bring you an enchanting mix of candied

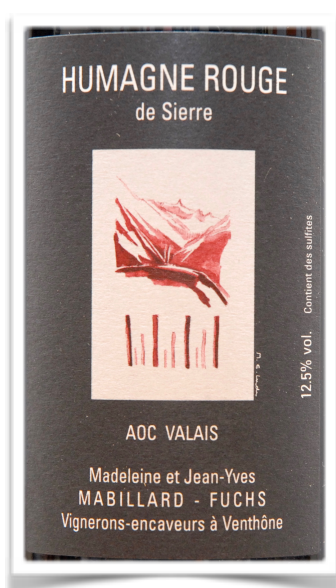


orange, honey and spices. The pronounced acidity keeps the natural sweetness in check and the after-taste lingers seemingly forever. These sweeter wines will comfortably keep for up to 20 or 30 years.



Humagne Rouge

This variety produces the second great red wine with a Valaisan identity after Cornalin (*see page 23*). DNA profiling has now shown that this variety is identical to 'Cornalin d'Aoste', an ancient and almost extinct variety from the Valle d'Aosta just over the Alps in north-west Italy. This may explain why the Swiss gave it a different name to avoid possible confusion with Cornalin in the Valais.



The wines made with Humagne Rouge are wild and rustic with aromas of wild fruits, wooded undergrowth, bark and violets. You might call them true mountain wines. Drunk young they tend to be quite fruity. With 3 or 4 years of age they open up and become more structured with aromas of pepper, woodsmoke and leather with black fruit flavours, vegetal notes and relatively high tannins. The best wines can have a lovely balance, finely poised between elegance and rusticity, leading to a persistent finish.

There are, in fact, two grape varieties in Canton Valais that bear the name Humagne: Humagne Rouge and Humagne Blanche, a white grape variety. It would not be unreasonable to assume a relationship between the two. The reality is that there is no connection between them at all (*see page 27*).

Cornalin

One of the delights of discovering Valaisan wine is the number of indigenous varieties. In terms of red wine, Cornalin and Humagne Rouge (*see previous page*) are the two local specialities produced in reasonable quantities.

It often happens that the same grape variety goes by several different names. In the case of Cornalin you can also find it called Rouge de Pays or Landroter, which can be translated as 'Local Red', 'Countryside Red' or 'Homeland Red'.

While the variety is exclusive to Canton Valais it was nearly abandoned altogether at the start of the 20th century. Fortunately the perseverance and patience of several growers and producers - true visionaries - have made it possible for us to keep enjoying these wines today.

If Humagne Rouge is best characterised as somewhat rustic in style, Cornalin is a little more refined and more age-worthy. It produces deep cherry-coloured wines that exhibit aromas of black cherries and wild berries. The wines are full-bodied with silky tannins and can benefit from some ageing in bottle. They can be delicious when drunk young with an extraordinarily strong fruitiness, but as they age and calm down they take on a remarkable smoothness that is both elegant and classy.

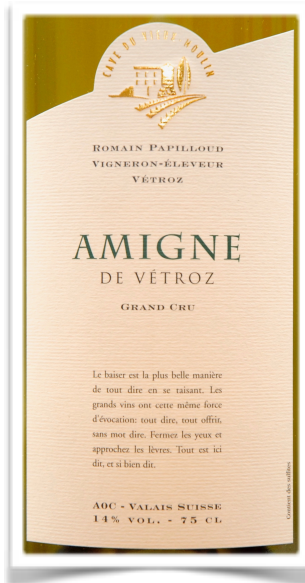


If you want to immerse yourself in the world of Cornalin you should make time to visit La Maison des Cornalins at the Château de Vaas in Flanthey between Sion and Sierre. This new museum has only been open for a few years and includes a wine bar with around 15 Cornalin wines along with many other wines from the area.

Amigne

You could rightly call this variety a genuine Swiss speciality as it is only planted in the Valais. The rather unusual name of this delightful Valaisan rarity comes from "Vitis Amoena" which is Latin for "pleasant grape". In fact,

there are just 40 hectares (100 acres) in the whole canton and 30 of these are specifically in the single commune of Vétroz, where the plantings have tripled in the past 20 years. Often you will find the wine labelled as Amigne de Vétroz for this very reason.



Amigne produces rich, full-bodied dry wines with aromas and flavours of ripe tangerine and apricot fruits. It is also made as a medium-dry wine, in other words with a touch of sweetness, and increasingly as a voluptuous sweet wine. This late-harvest style typically boasts an old gold

colour with intense aromas of orange zest, honey and vanilla. Its smooth flavours of caramel linger on the palate, counter-balanced by a crisp acidity. It promises a lovely long finish.

The way to tell how dry or how sweet each wine will be is to look for the three bees icon on the front of the bottle. Sometimes you can find it on a special neck label. One bee is dry, two bees is medium-dry and three bees is decidedly sweet. This system of labelling is unique to wines made from Amigne.

Amigne can age really well – up to 10 years for the dry style and 15 for the sweet version - so look out for some older vintages or even tuck a few bottles away for future enjoyment.



Humagne Blanche

This is the oldest known white grape originating in the Valais. It is cited in historical records going back to 1313 under the name "Humani". Widely planted until the 19th century it had virtually disappeared by the start of the 20th century. This relative rarity is slowly making a comeback.



When young the wines deliver a powerful floral bouquet, characterised by a subtle mixture of linden blossom, honey and hazelnuts. The good level of acidity creates fresh, fruity wines with delicate flavours of honey and dried fruit followed by a long, fresh finish. With age a richer, more full-bodied and opulent wine combines a delicate fruitiness with hints of vanilla and notes of walnut and hazelnut that become more pronounced over time.



Remarkably it makes wines that are rich in iron - 3 times the level found in most other grapes. This accounts for its reputed medicinal qualities. In bygone days it was known as a tonic for young mums as well as

monks, not to mention bishops! The wine even had a nickname 'vin des accouchées' ('the wine of women who have just given birth'). But modern research has called this particular legend into question.

In fact, there are two local Swiss grape varieties both called Humagne that you might just think have something in common, one red and one white: Humagne Rouge and Humagne Blanche. But, as it happens, these two totally Valaisan specialities are completely unrelated.

Chapter 4

New Indigenous Varieties



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Gamaret

This is an original Swiss grape variety that was successfully developed in Pully (VD) in 1970. Gamaret is actually a crossing of two other varieties, namely the black grape Gamay and a white German variety called Reichensteiner, from which it takes its name.

It makes wines with an enticing deep purple colour and delivers powerful aromas of blackberries and spices with rich tannins. Gamaret wines take nicely to oak ageing. You might be tempted to associate the flavours with wines from warmer, more southerly climates far beyond Switzerland. Tasted blind, it is not unusual for Gamaret wines to be identified as coming from other countries.



Gamaret is often found in blends as it brings colour, body and tannic structure lacking in some other grape varieties.

It is worth adding that Garanoir, which was developed at the same time and in the same place with the same two grape varieties as parents, produces wines that are more fruity and less concentrated than Gamaret.

Diolinoir

This variety is what is known as a crossing when two varieties are cross-fertilised in an effort to benefit from their respective strengths and attributes.

Diolinoir was created in 1970, the result of a crossing between Pinot Noir and Rouge de Diolloy (also known as Robin Noir) found by chance in a grape collection near Sion in the Valais back in the 1920s. The advantage of this particular crossing is that it has good resistance to disease and rot, which can plague the vineyards.



Diolinoir is only planted in around 120 hectares (300 acres) in Switzerland, of which more than 80 are in Canton Valais. Here the grape produces fine and rather powerful wines. They boast a lovely dark inky colour, are quite lively on the palate and deliver notes of cherries and black fruits like blueberries and blackberries. They have tight tannins that make them good wines for ageing, even for as long as 15 to 20 years.

Originally Diolinoir was intended for blending in order to add colour and depth to certain Swiss wines. More recently it has been making a name in its own right as a single varietal wine.



Chapter 5

International Grape Varieties



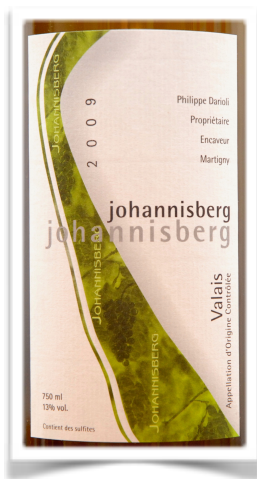
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Sylvaner

(also known as Johannisberg and Gros Rhin)

This variety also goes by the name of Gros Rhin to distinguish it from Riesling, which is known locally as Petit Rhin, as well as Johannisberg. Outside Switzerland Sylvaner (as it is commonly known) thrives in the Alsace region of France and in the Franken region of central Germany, where it is spelt Silvaner. Just in case you were thinking that life would be simpler if it was all simply called Sylvaner, imagine how complicated things became back in the late 1920's. The designation Johannisberg used to be the local name for Riesling but then it was decided to use the name to refer to Sylvaner instead. There must have been a few confused shoppers at the time.

Most of the plantings are to be found in the Valais where it is the second most planted white grape variety after Chasselas. Yet, in style, Johannisberg could



not be more different as the wines it makes have both more body and more character. In fact, this variety produces a range of styles : dry, medium-sweet and sweet wines made from grapes affected by botrytis (also called noble rot).

The dry style can be quite complex on the nose with notes of pear and pink grapefruit, floral hints and a distinctive touch of bitter almond. On the palate it is fruity and reasonably rich with a hint of bitterness typical of this grape variety on the fairly long finish. In the medium-sweet version you find more apricot and exotic fruits (pineapple and lychee) on the nose and palate. The sweet wines reveal an intense nose of dried fruits, quince jelly and a light note of grilled almonds. Equally powerful on the palate they deliver a seemingly never-ending finish that is irresistible to lovers of sweet wines. What's more, this style of wine can be kept for up to 20 years.

Syrah

In the world of wine if there is one variety challenging the dominance of Cabernet Sauvignon it is Syrah (or Shiraz as it is called in much of the southern hemisphere).

This variety was only introduced to the Swiss vineyards relatively recently. Some of the best wines in Switzerland are the product of old vines planted back in the mid-1980's by pioneering producers in the Valais around the village of Chamoson. However, these demand a certain patience as they require around ten to fifteen years to mature in bottle and reveal all their glory. The good news is that most of the more readily available Syrah wines can be enjoyed much sooner.

It makes full-bodied red wines and the best examples can be surprisingly concentrated. You find the characteristic flavours of ripe black fruits such as blackberries and blackcurrants, woodsmoke and spices like liquorice and most notably pepper, which distinguishes this variety. Age-worthy Syrah wines take on more gamey and leathery aromas.



Savagnin Blanc

(also known as Païen, Heida and Traminer)

Let us be clear right up front. We are not talking about Sauvignon Blanc, which most of you will have heard of and tasted, but Savagnin Blanc. In the Valais this variety assumes the name of Païen in the Bas-Valais and Heida in



the German-speaking area of the Haut-Valais. Occasionally you may even find it labelled Gentil Blanc. You can also find Savagnin Blanc produced elsewhere in Switzerland as Traminer in Neuchâtel and – less confusingly - as Savagnin Blanc in the Geneva region. In fact, this grape belongs to the Traminer family, of which the hauntingly aromatic pink-skinned white grape variety Gewurztraminer is another variant.

These multiple identities for the same variety may be one explanation why the grape is not better known. One thing's for sure, it is enjoying something of a revival with plantings on the increase in the Valais. Grown as Heida this variety has been a traditional speciality in the area above Visp, on the way to Zermatt and Saas-Fee. At Visperterminen you find this 'Perle der Alpenwine' – the pearl of Alpine wines – planted in the highest vineyards anywhere in Europe where they rise up to 1,150 metres.

On the whole Savagnin Blanc produces full-bodied and well-structured dry white wines. Powerful flavours of citrus fruits, orange zest, apricot, quince and exotic fruits blend with aromatic notes of saffron, incense and sandalwood. This variety takes well to oak ageing, yielding creamy vanilla and toasty notes. The wines can be drunk young but, with 5 to 7 years of age, they develop even richer and fuller aromas and flavours, delivering a taste sensation that most people would not expect to find in a Swiss white wine.

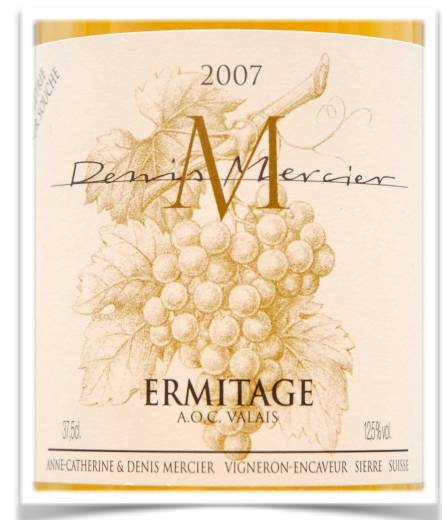
Marsanne

(also known as Ermitage)

While it's not one of the better known varieties Marsanne is most commonly found in the northern Rhône area of France in appellations such as St Joseph, Crozes-Hermitage and, the most famous of all, Hermitage. This explains why it sometimes goes by the name of Ermitage in Switzerland. The grape variety's reputation for creating long-lived full-bodied wines reached the Valais in the course of the 19th century, even if it lost the leading 'H' along the way.

Marsanne is an aromatic grape that makes wines with real character in both dry and, in the Valais, sweet styles. The dry wines take nicely to maturing in oak barrels and develop notes of wild strawberries and raspberries as well as stone fruits like peach and apricot. There is an almond nuttiness which comes out more with age along with smoky notes from the oak.

When the grapes are left to hang on the vine to concentrate the grape sugars and harvested late (even in December or early January) they produce sweet wines that are truly opulent and unctuous. They leave a wonderfully intense impression on both the nose and palate, delivering notes of honey, figs, raspberries and, above all, truffles. The wine also boasts an enticing rich gold colour. The flavours from just a small mouthful captivate all your senses and linger seemingly forever. Both styles are long-lived – the dry wines can be enjoyed after about three years, but can comfortably be kept for at least 10 years, and the sweet wines easily for 15 to 20 years, though they seem to have a limitless lifespan.



Simon's Personal Wine Adventure



I have a great passion in life: wine and everything to do with wine. When I left university I always dreamed of working in wine, but it took another 25 years to realise that dream. The fact that I now dedicate every single day to the world of wine in running my own business - Fitting Wines - means that life is about as good as it can possibly get. Discovering new producers, exploring new regions, tasting new wines are all part of my daily quest to satisfy and delight my clients.

At Fitting Wines I help adventurous yet overwhelmed wine lovers unlock the door to a world of wine discovery so that they can ...

- avoid the stress of trying to understand the bewildering choice of wines on the market and deciding which ones are right for their tastes
- spend little or no time having to search through publications online or offline to find out which wines are recommended and where to buy them
- save on money and on disappointment as a result of choosing wines that are not good value-for-money or not to their taste - or both

In essence, I put the pleasure back into their wine experience and help them discover new and exciting wines of the world that match their preferences in wine as well as their individual lifestyle.

Since most people have fairly limited knowledge of the world of wine, they generally need help to navigate the seemingly endless choice of different regions, grape varieties and producers. Something needed to be done to help wine lovers who share a sense of adventure and who thrill at the prospect of not only discovering more in the world of wine, but also enjoying a fabulous wine experience in the company of their family and friends.

This is the reason why I became a qualified wine expert, being awarded the Diploma in Wines and Spirits by the WSET, the world's leading training body for the wine industry, based in London UK.

Then I launched Fitting Wines with its range of personalised wine services and conceived the 'Personal Wine Profile' - exclusive to Fitting Wines - as a unique approach to profiling an individual's tastes and preferences in wine.

It is impossible for any one person to master everything that is happening in the world of wine. There's just too much going on everywhere. But at least I know, based on the testimonials from my clients, that I am playing my small part in broadening the horizons of adventurous wine lovers and giving them greater knowledge and confidence to enjoy quality wines of the world with their family & friends and a better overall wine experience.



Hugh Johnson OBE, the world's best-selling wine writer, presenting Simon with the WSET Diploma in Wines & Spirits



WSET
WINE & SPIRIT
EDUCATION TRUST
LEVEL 4 DIPLOMA CERTIFIED

Simon speaks about wine on the following Swiss radio stations ...



The English Show

... has written about wine in a range of publications in Switzerland



... and teaches oenology and leads wine tastings for groups and individuals



fitting wines
PERSONALISED WINE SERVICES

For more information contact Simon at www.fittingwines.com



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