

Switzerland's Wine Secret

By **Judy Koutsky**

Sharing a border with France, the Lake Geneva region is the French-speaking part of Switzerland, and Lausanne, one of its major towns, boasts one of the largest number of vineyards of any town in Switzerland. Not only is the scenery stunning (Lake Geneva is one of the largest lakes in Europe and the Alps can be seen in the background) but this area has a diverse range of red and white wines—and yet few people outside of Switzerland have sampled Swiss wine.

Why?

The production is all done by hand—each and every grape is handpicked—so the total amount produced is small compared to France or Spain. Plus, in part because it's all done by hand, the cost of production is quite high, which means a bottle exported would sell at a much greater price point than those from other countries. Not to mention that the demand for Swiss wine is so high within Switzerland, that the Swiss themselves drink almost all the wine they create. In fact, Swiss wine exports represent less than two percent of the total wine production. So, if you want to sample these unique wines, you may just have to travel to the Lake Geneva region in Switzerland to do so!

Where to Start

The most well-known variety is the Chasselas, which makes up almost two-thirds of the wine production here. This grape is influenced by the unique environment and climate of the mountains and lake. There is also the Gamay grape, which produces a fruity wine. Lastly, there's a small percentage of specialty wine:



Travelers can walk inches from ripening grapes.

produced here: Pinot Gris, Pinot Blanc and Riesling Sylvaner. These wine-producing villages (there are hundreds of independent wine makers in Lake Geneva) open their cellars from Easter to October, allowing visitors to sample the different varieties.

One of the highlights is visiting the terraced vineyards of Lavaux, a UNESCO World Heritage site, where travelers can walk along the crisscross paths inches from ripening grapes. This gives visitors a closer look at the vines, as well as the opportunity to learn about the

wine-making process, the type of grapes found there, the soil that is ideal for growing such grapes and the tradition of the region. Called the Swiss Riviera, the Lavaux region has 10,000 terraces of vineyards stretched out over 40 levels making it a beautiful mosaic of vines that stretch from Montreux and Vevey

American visitors to this region often come to sample the “secret” varieties that are well-known within the country. In addition to wine, the Lake Geneva region has 12 Michelin-star restaurants and a plethora of luxury hotels, making this region a mecca for fine food and hospitality.

FOOD AND WINE

If you're only going to eat at one restaurant in the region, it should be the 3-Michelin-star restaurant [Ho de Ville](#), where chef Franck Giovannini oversees the kitchen and the more than 1,000 plates served a day. The restaurant also offers a cooking class where guests prepare a meal in the kitchen side-by-side with some of the best chefs in the country. For some of the freshest locally caught seafood—including the much-loved lake favorite, perch—served with in-season vegetables and salad, visit Au Major Davel restaurant in [Bourg-en-Lavaux](#). Of course, you can't miss a Swiss favorite—and tradition: be sure to try fondue at [Hotel of Rougemont](#).



The Grand Hotel du Lac is known for the fine food and wine served at its restaurant, Les Saisons.

A HISTORY OF HOSPITALITY

[The Lausanne Palace](#), a five-star property that dates back to 1915 has hosted celebrities and royalty, including Coco Chanel, who stayed here regularly. The property is known for its dedication to Swiss wine—in fact it has its very own vineyard on the property, which produces 300 bottles. They also have an expansive wine cellar with more than 800 bottles of wine from around the world. A must is having dinner at the hotel's Michelin-star restaurant La Table d'Edgar, where the emphasis is on fresh, in-season items. Organic, cold-pressed extra virgin olive oil, sustainable meat and seafood are on the menu.

One of the most luxurious hotels in all of Switzerland is the 150-year-old [Beau-Rivage Palace](#), a Leading Hotels of the World. Located on the shores of Lake Geneva with 10 acres private gardens and views of the Swiss and French Alps, the property houses the two Michelin star Anne Sophie Pic restaurant.

Built in 1868, the [Grand Hotel du Lac](#), is a Relais & Châteaux property, and boasts a popular Michelin-starred restaurant, Les Saisons, on-site. This boutique hotel is a good home base for a variety of activities including a scenic cruise on the lake. Also popular? A chocolate-making workshop, held at [Läderach](#)—where you can discover the history and intricacies of making Swiss chocolate, which is known (and loved) throughout the world.

WINE GROWERS FESTIVAL

While visitors come to the Lake Geneva region year-round, next summer the region will host the Winegrower Festival (“Fête des Vignerons”) in Vevey, which dates back to 1797. This event takes place every 20 years and the next festival will be held July 18 through August 11, 2019. More than 20,000 people from around the world are expected to attend this once-a-generation wine event.



While visiting the elaborately terraced Lavaux vineyards visitors can sample the unique wine and cheese of the area.

Getting Swiss Wine at Home

Are you seeing an increased demand for Swiss wines? Yes. It’s still a niche category for sure, but the assiduous work of great importers like [Schatzi Wines](#) located in Milan, NY—who have done the hard work of finding the most characterful wines and then telling their stories here in the U.S.—is leading to an increase in sales.

Do you have a favorite? I really like Domaine La Colombe’s Chassel Petit Clos 2016 for its fresh character of green pear and garden herb wound up together.

Why are Swiss wines not more abundant? The pricing is really the only thing holding Swiss wines back from even more sales. Not only do you have the inherent higher costs involved with the very small scale of each producer and the logistical costs of getting wine down off mountainsides but the Swiss currency is so strong that the wines are often priced a little higher than adventurous taste are willing to spend.

—Susannah Smith, Head Buyer for New York City-based [Flatiron Wines & Spirits](#)



*Domaine
La Colombe's Chasselas
Petit Clos 2016*
