

Discover Vaud grapes and wines

The stunning countryside in Switzerland's Lake Geneva Region has won a reputation for wines offering a superb array of flavours and stylistic nuances. Robin Kick MW introduces grapes and styles that may be unfamiliar but are well worth discovering

Geneva or Zurich may be better-known place names in Switzerland, but the Canton of Vaud (one of the country's 26 federal states) rides on their coat-tails. At its core lie Nestlé, Switzerland's second-largest company; the 'Olympic City' of Lausanne; and Montreux, home to arguably the greatest jazz festival in the world. But around its buzz, there is also calmness and beauty. The vineyards that blanket the slopes in front of Lake Geneva confirm that this is not just a region of industry, but of significant agriculture as well.

Vaud produces one quarter of all Swiss wine and is its second-largest wine region. Its vineyards frame most of the northern half of Lake Geneva (known locally as Lac Léman). But its size is not its main feature: it is also one of

Switzerland's most beautiful regions. Lavaux, its viticultural core, features thousands of south-facing stone terraces. Bathed in balmy breezes and fanned by lakeside palm trees, these terraced vineyards were recognised as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2007. They were chiselled into its slopes starting in the 12th century by Cistercian monks. Over time, the network of terraces grew, and today there are more than 10,000 stone walls extending across 400km of the region.

Chasselas, the king

The sheer viticultural diversity is remarkable, as there are a total of 55 grape varieties planted. While these include grapes borrowed from France, Germany and elsewhere, as well as crossings, hybrids and several native species, the region's grande dame is Chasselas. Indigenous to the area, this variety makes up 92% of white plantings as well as 60% of total plantings in Vaud. So dominant is Chasselas that the region's second most important white variety, the international Chardonnay, totals only 1% of all plantings.

Chasselas is unexpectedly multifaceted. Sometimes gently spicy, round and occasionally waxy like Pinot Grigio, with notes of orchard fruit and citrus like Chardonnay, it feels familiar yet different.

Catherine Cruchon of Domaine Henri Cruchon in Morges further illuminates: 'Chasselas has a unique profile because, to my knowledge, all other grape varieties are built on at least two of the three components: alcohol, acidity and aromatics. Chasselas is not strong in any one of these, yet it can produce remarkable wines. Moreover because it is a neutral grape, it is an excellent transmitter of terroir. If you take the time to get to know it, you will discover a nuanced spectrum of textures and structures. There's no other variety like it.'

With plantings of Chasselas so widespread, it can reveal various expressions depending on clones, soil,

microclimate and winemaking. For example, in La Côte, the sub-region between Geneva and Lausanne, the vineyards are set back from the lake and



Gamay

are planted on undulating hillsides, similar-looking to those in Burgundy. This area generally produces softer-structured, more delicate wines with slightly lower alcohols due to deeper soils and less sun exposure.

Lavaux's dramatic south-facing, terraced slopes have poorer soils with less earth, and profit from the sun being reflected from the lake, helping with

ripeness. Its wines tend to be fuller, but also more mineral and ageworthy. Its two jewels – Dézaley (54ha) and Calamin (16ha) – are Vaud's only grand cru single vineyards. They sit nestled one above the other and give a yin and yang experience of Chasselas – Dézaley offering density and power, while Calamin is all lace and refinement.

The semi-mountainous Chablais, meanwhile, links Lavaux and neighbouring Valais – the driest of Switzerland's wine regions. Though Chablais' vineyards are farthest from the lake, the warm foehn wind travels through the valley, concentrating the grapes. Its wines tend to be broad, nicely concentrated and moderately powerful, with stony undertones.

Despite regional variations, winemaker influence cannot be underestimated. Traditionally, Chasselas was made to suit Swiss tastes – with riper fruit, lower acidity, a touch of residual sugar and a little carbon dioxide to give some lift. However, change is in the air and Chasselas is becoming fresher, tauter and drier: a welcome move for those who are used to crisp, mineral-driven whites.

Adventures in red

It's not all Chasselas though, with red varieties making up 34% of the Vaud's vineyards. The four most-planted varieties are Pinot Noir, Gamay – including Plant Robert, a rare, ancient Gamay biotype that is fleshier, darker and more compact in texture – Gamaret and Garanoir, two siblings that are

Kick's picks: wines from the Lake Geneva Region

Les Frères Dubois, De la Tour Dézaley-Marsens Grand Cru, Lavaux 2015 91

N/A UK www.lfd.ch

This special wine is produced from the domaine's oldest vines. Aged on its lees for six months in 500-litre barrels, then in a 45-year-old cask for 12 months. The resulting wine is reminiscent of a grand Savennières, with notes of lanolin, gunflint and orchard fruits. **Drink** 2019-2038 **Alcohol** 12.5%

Domaine du Daley, Le Chasselas Grand Réserve Villette Grand Cru, Lavaux 2015 88

£32.99 **Selfridges**

From a drought vintage, this 2015 provides a nice contrast to Chasselas from more classic years. Moderately opulent with appealing notes of sweet pear, honeysuckle and pineapple. **Drink** 2019-2021 **Alc** 12%

Domaine La Colombe, Féchy Chasselas, La Côte 2016 88

£19.90 **The Sampler**

A rounded and succulent Chasselas, this wine was produced from

biodynamic grapes, harvested earlier than usual, with only partial malolactic fermentation. This allowed the freshness of the grapes to remain intact. Finishes fresh and saline.

Drink 2019-2021 **Alc** 12.5%

Domaine Henri Cruchon, Servagnin Morges Grand Cru, La Côte 2015 89

N/A UK www.henricruchon.com

Servagnin is the oldest Pinot Noir clone in Switzerland and it is reserved only for producers in Morges. Poised and chiselled, this 2015 displays a wild streak of spice and woodland strawberries on the palate. Vinified with a touch of whole clusters.

Drink 2019-2024 **Alc** 12.5%

Badoux Vins, Aigle les Murailles Rouge, Chablais 2013 88

£31.94 **Alpine Wines**

The red equivalent to the winery's iconic white, Badoux's Aigle les Murailles Rouge has a quintessential Swiss feel, with notes of juicy black cherries, liquorice and spice. A touch of Gamay, Garanoir and Gamaret add an appealingly fleshy note to the palate. **Drink** 2019-2022 **Alc** 12.5%

crosses between Gamay and Reichensteiner, itself a white-skinned German crossing. The latter pair were created in 1970 by Agroscope, Switzerland's renowned agricultural research facility, as varieties with greater natural resistance to fungal diseases than Gamay, as well as deeper colour.

While many of the region's reds are blended to complement one another, some excellent examples can be found as varietal wines in their own right. Both Plant Robert and Gamaret are particular successes and are worth seeking out. Plant Robert even has its own society of wine producers, who originally came together to rescue the biotype from near extinction: www.plant-robert.ch.

Today, Vaud produces some of the most exciting wines in Switzerland.

Despite the high quality, surprisingly only 1%-2% of Swiss wine is exported. Yet the more one tastes, the more it becomes apparent why the Swiss would keep these treasures for themselves. From its terroir-driven Chasselas to its fresh, often surprisingly fleshy reds, these are clearly wines worth discovering, be it here in Switzerland, or in any market where they can be tracked down.



Robin Kick MW is a wine consultant, educator and judge based in Switzerland. She formerly worked at Christie's in Los Angeles and as a buyer at Goedhuis

& Co in London. Over the following six pages, she recommends unique wine experiences, events and itineraries for wine lovers visiting Lake Geneva Region



Gamaret



Chasselas



Garanoir

