

Alpine Wine

Delicious and difficult to procure Swiss varietals take their place at the mountaintop



The Swiss are known for a lot of things: cheese, chocolate, watches, neutrality ... but wine? Believe it or not, Switzerland boasts six main wine regions and more than 220 indigenous grapes, but the country has kept its viticultural tradition mostly secret since Roman times. But now, despite strict regulations, low production, and even lower export rates—just south of 2 percent—standout vintages are emerging as a must-have indulgence for wine aficionados.

Many Swiss wines are not found anywhere else. The Ticino region, for example, is known for its rare white merlot. “Wine-savvy guests often request a glass,

eager to try something totally new,” says Walter Mattinat, sommelier at Hotel Eden Roc, in Ascona. Meanwhile, in the UNESCO Lavaux sub-region, visitors can try the ancient varietal Plant Robert, which was saved from extinction in 1966 and tastes decidedly spicier than gamay, its French counterpart. But, says Luis Tarralheiro of the wine-tasting center Lavaux Vinorama, “Our goal is not just to sell wine, but to share our winegrowers’ experience and heritage.”

That experience can be tough. Due to Switzerland’s mountainous terrain, many vines are planted on steep hillsides, often requiring grapes to be handpicked—a

Swiss Precision
An orderly vineyard at the base of Tourbillon Castle in Sion, Switzerland, the country’s third largest winemaking region

SWISS SIPPERS
WITH UNITED’S DAILY YEAR-ROUND SERVICE TO ZURICH AND GENEVA FROM NEW YORK/NEWARK AND WASHINGTON/DULLES, YOU CAN BE TASTING SWISS WINES IN NO TIME. GO TO UNITED.COM TO START PLANNING YOUR TRIP.

n activity that keeps labor costs high and production low. So low, in fact, that roughly two-thirds of the wine consumed here is imported. And unlike in neighboring countries, where winemaking cooperatives are becoming more common, the majority of Swiss wineries remain small, family-run businesses. “Like our ancestors, we maintain the integrity of our vineyards by not purchasing grapes from cooperatives,” says Benoît Caloz, whose family owns the award-winning Colline de Daval and Caveau de la Vouetaz in Valais, the country’s largest wine-growing region. “Others may produce more, but we control the quality from beginning to end.”

Three Swiss Wines to Try

Amphore Assemblage

ALBERT MATHIER ET FILS VALAIS
VIN BLANC 2010, \$65

- Vinified in the 7,500-year-old Qvevri ceramic clay vase method, this orange-hued white is a robust blend of indigenous Rèze and the French varietal Marsanne and features notes of tea, dried apricot, and linden blossoms.



Villette Plant Robert

JEAN-DANIEL PORTA LAVAUX VIN
ROUGE 2014, \$28

- Harvested exclusively on small plots in Lavaux and protected from extinction by an association of local wine growers, the Plant Robert grape produces dark, aromatic wines with fruity notes and a hint of spice.



Quattromani

GIALDI, BRIVIO, DELEA, TAMBORINI
TICINO VINO ROSSO 2013, \$57

- Merlot grapes, fermented in oak barrels for 16 months, are the key to the intensity of this complex multisensory wine, created by four collaborating Ticino producers. Notes range from ripe berries to cloves to chocolate.

