

CWW Visit to Switzerland September 2016



CIRCLE OF
WINE
WRITERS

A group of CWW members were once again invited to attend the annual Swiss Wine Fair VINEA in Sierre, as well as visiting vineyards in the Vaud and the Valais, part of the time with other journalists. The trip was extended by a two-day visit to Ticino and Lugano for the presentation of the 2014 vintage.

Eight members took part in the trip from 1st – 5th September.

The vine-clad hills were alive...

DAY ONE

Keith Grainger sets the scene with the first visit and lunch in the Vaud at Château de Châtagneréaz with the Schenk family

Wine lovers want to believe that all wine is produced in beautiful surroundings, with passion by people who spend their lives tasting, tuning and perfecting the nectar of the gods. Such mental illusions, and sometimes delusions, are fuelled by the romance of movies like *A Good Year* and *A Walk in the Clouds*. The dull plains of Spain's La Mancha and the emptiness of Australia's Big Rivers are far from the mind and, let's face it, far from the glass.

So, Switzerland should be every wine lover's dream. Wines with a true sense of place, glasses full of exhilaration and producers who are not, who cannot be, in the volume wine business. The first visit of this Circle of Wine Writers study tour took us into the vineyards of the canton of Vaud, and to the hidden delights of Château de Châtagneréaz. Comprising just 18 hectares and overlooking Lac Léman (Lake Geneva) it is hard to imagine a more delightful setting, although our subsequent visit to Vex was to reveal a different kind of breathtaking beauty.

In fact, our time at Château de Châtagneréaz turned into three, no four, visits in one. To begin with there was an introduction to the property and its wines by owners Philippe

and François Schenk, who have interests in other properties in Switzerland including Château d'Allaman, as well as in France and Italy. Then there was lunch of a quality usually reserved for high-end restaurants and during the lunch, a presentation of Clos, Domaines & Châteaux.

This producers' association comprises some 23 properties and was founded by the Schenk family in 2004. The association pays great heed to environmentally friendly production methods and quality conscious production techniques. Each lunch course included a tasting of wines from one of the association's members, presented by the owner or winemaker.

There are less than 4,000 hectares of vineyards in the Vaud and to help us understand the diversity it offers, in a short time we were treated to an in-depth experience including a dip into the sub-regions, sites and terroirs. We were enjoying our visit and meal in Vaud's largest sub-region, La Côte; to the east along the lake is Lavaux, where the vineyards are steeper, and often cultivated on traditional, stone-walled terraces; the hilly, rocky vineyards of Chablais are situated to the south of Lavaux; and finally, the oldest wine region in Vaud is Côtes de l'Orbe, whose vines lie amidst fields, forests and manor houses set back from Lac Léman, to the north. We also began to understand the concepts of Grand Cru and Premier Grand Cru, as applied in the canton.



The group gathered outside Château de Châtagneréaz. CWW members pictured from left: Keith Grainger (in red jacket), Judy O'Kane, Donna Jackson, Marisa D'Vari, Cruz Liljegren (behind), Neil Fairlamb, Christine Austin and John McNerney (behind).

Photo courtesy of Donna Jackson.

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Cover photograph: *The vintage Swiss Post Bus taking the group to Ticino is serenaded by alphorn players. Photo by Judy O'Kane.*

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*Left: Vineyards in the Vaud canton's La Côte district, sloping down to Lac Léman (Lake Geneva). Below left: Petite Arvine with charcuterie. Below right: Raclette cheese. Photos by **Cruz Liljegren**.*

The member estates of Clos, Domaines & Châteaux certainly seem to work well together, realising that the strengths and success of one is good for all. Perhaps they are helped by a strong domestic market, but we could sense a real will to increase exports to the reputation-building markets in London and New York. However, I wonder how many wine merchants, writers and sommeliers in those cities wouldn't swap all in an instant for the delights of Lake Geneva?

The press launch and opening dinner of Le Salon Vinea des Vins Suisses: **Judy O'Kane** manages to keep up with events, just...

The white canopies under construction throughout the town of Siere suggested the early stages of a wedding banquet. We gathered in an upper room at the Château de Ville as Elisabeth Pasquier and François Murisier, respectively director and president of Vinea, launched the 2016 Swiss Wine Fair. Some 150 producers would show their wines from all six wine-growing regions across the country: Valais,



Vaud, Tessin, Neuchâtel, Geneva and German-speaking Switzerland. If the eye wandered momentarily there was much to admire: a parquet floor carrying memories of school, a hand-held fan in the front row that offered some brief respite from the heat and intricate carvings on the back of the door (even the door handles are elegant in Switzerland). We poured over briefing notes while Elisabeth introduced Vinea's initiatives for the promotion of Swiss wine, notably the Vinea-run competitions, the Mondial du Merlot & Assemblages, founded in 2008, and the Mondial des Pinots, founded in 1998. We would taste wines from both competitions over the following days.

There was a great sense of anticipation as we sat down to dinner on long benches, the steep vineyards around us suggesting an amphitheatre. After an apéro of Petite Arvine, a native grape of Valais, we set to work as the comforting smell of Raclette du Valais AOP cheese rose from the grill. We followed the example of our neighbours as each plate arrived, lifting a potato somewhere between a marble and a table tennis ball in size, and adding a tiny pickled onion to the side. Jean-Michel Bonvin, a committee member of Vinea, pointed to the map as a fresh wave of plates would appear, indicating how the unpasteurised milk allowed each cheese to retain its own individual taste. We began with Orsières, then Les Haudères (made from the milk of 'fighting cows'). We drank Fendant La Guérîte 2015 (the same Chasselas grape we had tasted earlier at lunch, which bears the Fendant appellation in Valais), with the minerality and slight saltiness pairing well with the richness of the cheese. We continued with Heida 2015 from St Jodernkellerei, then Gamay Grand Cru Les Mures 2015 from Cave Mettaz in Fully. We struggled to keep apace as sentences spilled across several languages and the grape names themselves kept changing – we had tasted Heida earlier in the day as Savagnin Blanc. The cheeses evoked childhood treats of cheese on toast, and eventually we were convinced that our cholesterol levels, having dipped dangerously low earlier in the day, had now been corrected as we continued the cheese experience through Vissoie, Turtmann and finishing with Simplon.

Other delegates were particularly excited about the organic wine conference due to take place the following morning with *Le Figaro* wine journalist Bernard Burtschy, alongside wine producers Caroline Frey, Reynald Parmelin and Swiss biodynamic producer, Marie-Thérèse Chappaz, whose name created particular anticipation. Our delegation, however, was rostered for an early morning tasting session in Château Mercier's former swimming pool, now renovated as a tasting room. Meanwhile, after dinner we made our way up the hill towards Château Mercier, an imposing house built in 1906 in volcanic rock. I retired into a tiny elevator with its own wooden banquette seeming somewhere between a waiting room and a confessional. I entered my vast bedroom with a choice of two single beds moored at opposite ends of the room and finally pulled on ropes which brought heavy wooden shutters crashing to a close over the town of Sierre and the vineyards around us.

DAY TWO

The Swiss Wine Selection tasting at Château Mercier is summarised by **Keith Grainger**

Château Mercier, set in its own, elevated grounds, is a far cry from the standardised accommodation that has become the norm for all too many business and leisure travellers. Every bedroom is different, even quirky, and the feel of the property is rather Edwardian. However, our early morning tasting was held not in the house, but in the neutral environment of the former swimming pool, which has now been converted into a conference/lecture room.

Here, led by Hervé Badan, founder of Swiss Wine Selection SA, we were given a brief introduction to Swiss wines generally, the six regions, and tasted an illustrative wine from each. There are only 15,000 hectares of vineyard

in Switzerland, and it came to mind that this is less land under vine than there is in Beaujolais. Annual production is in the region of 100 million litres which, bearing in mind the amount of steep terrain, gives an unexpectedly high average yield of nearly 67hl/ha. Only 1.5% of production is exported, mostly to Germany, the UK and Quebec. There are over 240 grape varieties planted including delightful native vines such as Rèze, Humagne Blanc and Lafnetscha.

The largest region is Valais, dissected by the Upper Rhône, with the most concentrated area of vineyards on the north bank of the river. Here the warm Foehn wind can be both a blessing and a curse. The wine we tasted from Valais was not the expected Fendant, nor Pinot Noir (the most widely planted variety), but a Syrah St-Gothard with overt black cherry tones overlaid with both spice and spruce. The Three Lakes Region is the smallest, named after Lakes Neuchâtel, Bienne and Morat. Hervé showed the enigmatically named Sans Titre made from Gamaret (a Gamay/Reichensteiner cross that we would encounter many times on the visit) and Merlot.

The presentation was over all too quickly, but the delights of the Val d'Hérens in Valais were beckoning.

John McNerney experiences high anxiety in Vex in the company of Jean-René Germanier

Following an early morning tasting, our party took a short coach ride along the Rhône Valley and then up the steep windy roads to the alpine village of Vex.

Here we were met by the team from Vinea who circulated sun protecting baseball caps, suitably branded, and drove us a short distance down toward the Val d'Hérens and one of their vineyards, Clos de la Couta at 630-800 metres altitude. The 4x4s dropped us off at the top of the steeply angled, terraced vineyard.

I found myself looking down a vertiginous sloped path of bone dry, loose schist and glacial moraine. A fear of heights and chocolate knees did not help as I negotiated the path through the well-manicured Pinot Noir vines toward

*The town of Sierre. Photo by **Cruz Liljegren**.*





the river. My slippery deck shoes were totally inappropriate for the descent, so I had no choice but to teeter down barefoot and thus can rightfully claim to have been at one with the vineyard, getting to grips with both the terroir and my terror. A fellow victim of crumbling joints, Donna Jackson, and I painted a Chaplinesque cameo as we offered each other flimsy support toward each precipitous hairpin bend.

Our hosts, Gilles Besse, the winemaker, and Jean-René Germanier of Jean-René Germanier Balavaud waited patiently at the foot of the vineyard where we were to lunch. They had dropped us at the top of their 1.7ha organic vineyard so the party could amble down through their

neat rows of Heida (Savagnin Blanc) and Pinot Noir vines.

As the enticing aroma of our *grillade* (barbecue) lunch wafted up the 150m from the foot of the Clos de la Couta we could see that both grape varieties were well advanced, basking in the hot sun, in their steeply-sided mini amphitheatre facing south east.

The relaxed pre-lunch tasting could not have been more welcome, starting with the crisp, glacial, refreshing Heida de Vex, Clos de la Couta 2014 that hinted at alpine flowers, creamy oatmeal and the nearby glaciers. Jean-René claims that this is the nearest vineyard to the Matterhorn.

He explained that almost every family in Valais owns some vines and here the vines were owned and harvested by approximately 40 villagers as the vineyard had been split over time due to the inheritance laws. Following some negotiations Jean-René has persuaded the owners to allow him to make a single vineyard wine or 'clos' which is planted 1.2ha with Heida and 0.5ha with Pinot Noir.

I also enjoyed the Pinot Noir de Vex Clos de la Couta 2013 made from a Burgundy clone suited to the cool climate and producing a fresh and complex style with low alcohol; fine toned pure fruit reminiscent of *fraise de bois* or Alpine strawberries.

The amalgamation of the clos has offered greater overall control and uniformity in the pursuit of a better quality wine.

Other wines tasted were the Balavaud Fendant (Chasselas) Vétroz Grand Cru 2015 with a touch of pear on the creamy mineral nose, and Cornalin de Champamarais 2011 (15.5% alcohol), which showed blackcurrant, figs, dark cherries and prune notes.

A fine lunch of rack of lamb and steak with accompanying salads, all served by the excellent team, was followed by two amazing tarts, one of local apricots and the other of local apples. A drop of Mitis, Germanier's sweet Amigne, smooth and chilled as the snow and then a warming, invigorating *eau de vie* rounded off a classic vineyard lunch.

Thankfully our hosts drove us back up the alp although a few sturdy souls did the climb. The generous gift of Clos de la Couta Heida de Vex was to serve as further support on even greater ascents later in the trip.



Top: The steep Clos de la Couta vineyard. Photo by **Cruz Liljegren**. Bottom left and middle: Gilles Besse; Clos de la Couta Heida de Vex. Photos by **John McNerney**. Right: Barbecue lunch being prepared in the vineyard. Photo by **Judy O'Kane**.

Like so many of the wines on the trip, we are unlikely to see Clos de la Couta outside Switzerland and if we did it could be considered relatively expensive, but I'm not sure that's the point. Gilles and Jean-René are constantly improving their wine and the fact that they sell most of it domestically makes it even more of its origin and place. Hedonism Wines in London stock some of the wines.

If you want to try this experience yourselves and I recommend you do, a pair of hiking boots would come in handy as would the agility of a mountain goat. And, in the absence of either, the desire to overcome your inner fears in the pursuit of experience (or wine) is essential.

DAY THREE

Cruz Liljegren gets high with Provins and doesn't give a dam(n)

We took off in the morning for an alpine bus ride that might well have made you sick if it wasn't for the spectacular views. Leaving Sierre, we passed little villages with curious names such as Chalais, Ollon, Sion, Thyon, Pralong and maybe even Kingkong. Or not.

We were heading to meet Luc Sermier, who has been the winemaker at Provins for more than 30 years. It wouldn't be crazy to call this behemoth winery the Gallo of Switzerland,



The Grande Dixence Dam and vineyard dogs.
Photos by **Cruz Liljegren**.

Keith Grainger on the consumer experience at the Vinea Swiss Wine Fair. Photo by **Cruz Liljegren**.

On the evenings of 2nd and 3rd September we spent quite some time at the VINEA Swiss Wine Fair, held in Hôtel de Ville Gardens and the streets of Sierre, between the railway station and the town hall. Here, 150 producers from Switzerland's six regions proudly showed their wines to all who invested in a ticket, along with our CWW group.

Surprisingly, to those of us from UK, with so much wine flowing the atmosphere remained relaxed, fun, light and uplifting. Producers proudly showed their latest releases. Food, I mean real food, was dispensed by the street stalls and the banter was as lively as the wines. But for those who thought the fun would never end, there was always those 100+ steps back up to our beds in Château Mercier...



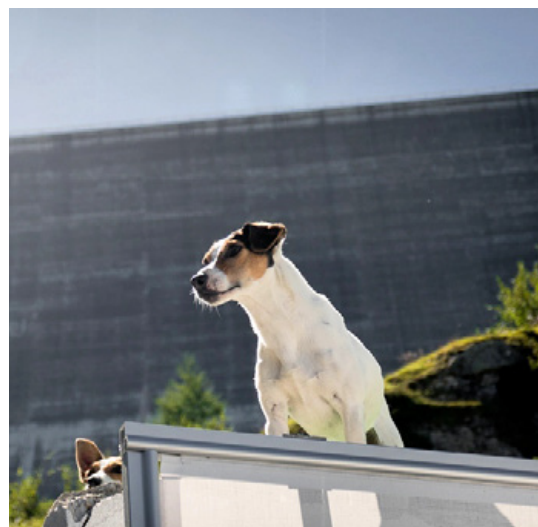
after all they do account for about 10 per cent of the Swiss wine output and a whole 23 per cent of the production in the Valais.

Luc Sermier gave the impression of being the sort of winemaker that *does* instead of *is*. He keeps a low profile to free up time for what really matters, the quality control of the wines. I guess the 3,400 vine growers who belong to the Provins co-operative wouldn't have it any other way.

It is a well known marketing ploy to age wines in an unusual setting. It can be playing music for the barrels, submerging bottles in the sea or letting them grow mouldy in an old medieval dungeon. The idea is that these things will make the wine unique. Indeed, in an increasingly saturated market it helps if your wine is unique.

Provins doesn't own any medieval dungeons, but it does claim to have the highest wine cellar in Europe at about 1,500 meters in the Val d'Anniviers and we were given a visit. After fermentation, the wines in the Vin des Titans range are transported in barrel to this very James Bond-like setting, where they finish their ageing. My favourite wine from this exclusive range was the red 2013 Defi Noir, which had weight, balance and enough personality to be of interest to anyone amused by similar rarities.

After a splendid lunch in the architectural disaster called Hôtel Restaurant du Barrage (nicknamed The Ritz) we headed up to see the Grande Dixence Dam, the highest dam of its type in the world. Filled with water for the first time in 1957, this construction holds a number of records: its weight, 15 million tons, makes it heavier than the great pyramid of Cheops, said Luc Sermier before we thanked him for what must have been one of the most unusual wine trips a wine writer can make.





Above the Grande Dixence from top: Journalist Paul Truszkowski; Judy O'Kane; Luc Sermier of Provins. Photos by **Cruz Liljegren**.

A selection of winners from the Mondial des Pinots 2016 is reviewed by **Donna Jackson**

The tasting of Pinots from around the world, which had been judged winners by a Vinea panel, was presented to us at Château Mercier and led by sommelier Michele Caimotto and oenologist, Emeline Zufferey.

There were ten wines to taste including eight Pinot Noirs, a mix from New World and Old World winemakers.

The first wine served was **Pinot Blanc Stadt Schaffhausen Heerenberg 2015** from the north-east of Switzerland, near Zürich. Unoaked, from steep slopes on the banks of the River Rhine, it won first prize among 76 Pinot Blancs that were entered and had 13% alcohol and 3.7 grams per litre (g/l) of residual sugar.

The Pinot Noirs were as follows:

1. **Creation Wines Pinot Noir 2015, Walker Bay, South Africa**. This gold medal-winning wine was made by Swiss winemaker Martin Cressy, transplanted to Hermanus. 2015 was a bright vintage with a long ripening season. The wine was aged in oak with one third being new French oak. It was double decanted before our tasting, yet still had persistent tannins.

2. **Arrowleaf Solstice Pinot Noir 2014, Okanagan Valley, Canada**. This was made from five different clones from three locations and the wine was aged in French oak puncheons for 12 months. The wine had finesse and a silky mouthfeel with 13.5% alcohol and 2.3g/l of residual sugar. A quarter of our group voted this as one of the favourites.

3. **Cave du Cep, Pinot Noir 2014, Neuchâtel AOC, Switzerland**. This was a tough vintage being cool and rainy resulting in some green grapes. The family have seven hectares of calcareous soil vineyards on the lake which makes the winters shorter and gives the three suns: the terraces, the reflection of the lake and long sun exposure. The temperature change between night and day is notable. The family farms

organically and the wine was aged for 12 months in French oak. Some felt this wine had a powdery feel.

4. **Saint Clair Family Estate Pioneer Block 16 Awatere Pinot Noir 2014, Marlborough, New Zealand**.

This Pinot came from a north-facing hillside with well drained, loam-clay soils 25km south of Blenheim. With 5.6g/l acidity and 13.5% alcohol, this was a popular choice in the group and my favourite. A benchmark Pinot Noir.

5. **Hohle Gasse Grand Cru Pinot Noir Muttentz 2013, Weingut Jauslin, Basel AOC, Switzerland**. From a cool rainy vintage, the grapes were harvested in November. The wine was aged in new oak and seemed over-oaked – wasn't a popular choice in the group.

6. **Bürgel Spätburgunder 2013, Geils Sekt-und Weingut, Dalsheim, Germany**. From the estate's 14-hectare vineyard, this wine came from 14-year-old vines and strict selection. Warm wind affected the 2013 vintage. The wine was aged in new oak. This was a popular choice among one third of the group.

7. **Pinot Noir Barrique 2013, Wullschlegel Weine, Graubünden AOC, Switzerland**. This wine was produced on a four-hectare estate and the grapes were cold soaked and macerated for three weeks. Here too, 2013 was a difficult year subject to Foehn winds. The area is better-known for Syrah.

8. **Schloss Halbtorn Pinot Noir 2012, Neusiedler See, Austria**. This wine is from a 1,000-year-old Austro-Hungarian estate of 50 hectares, situated on the border with Hungary by the River Danube on sandy gravel loam soil. Sixty percent of the vines were re-planted in 2001. This wine was also double decanted and was a top favourite among the group.

The tasting was completed with a **Strohwein 2014, Kellerei Leukersonne Valais AOC, Switzerland**.

Given the very different styles, geographic locations and vintages that these Pinot Noir wines represented, judging them was not an easy task and it certainly made for some very lively debate among the group. Thanks to Vinea for allowing CWW to experience these wines.



The musicians rehearsing at Château Mercier; pears in red wine and cinnamon. Photos by **Keith Grainger**.

Dinner and a classical concert at Château Mercier sends **Keith Grainger** into raptures of emotion. We all know that as wine writers, communicators, educators and photographers, our income is pretty derisory. Nearly all of us could earn more driving a London Underground train. Why do we do it? Well, the thought that we can stimulate, excite and inform those who read or listen to our words is to the fore. And then, of course, there is the lifestyle, the events, the visits and tastings. Perhaps we can't afford to drink Château Margaux, but we can go behind its doors and breathe, sense and taste the very essence of that magical place. And we can bathe in occasions that our readers may only dream about.

Thus it was at our dinner at Château Mercier in Sierre on Saturday evening. In the grand panelled hall, we were introduced to and took to heart a new art form: wine, food and music matching. Florence von Burg (violin and piano) and Luc Baghdassarian (piano) selected and performed a programme including Beethoven, Vivaldi, Bach and Bloch, with each extract chosen to be the perfect accompaniment to the course and wine.

Much as we have perhaps grasped the concepts of balancing the weight of wine with that of food, the acidity



cutting through the fat, and combining tannin with protein, in making our choices we are perhaps taking a scientific or practical approach. Matching wine, food and music is of course an art, and musical expression can change the way the contents of our glass or plate will affect our spirit, emotions or even soul.

At several points in this evening of fabulous food, distinctive wine and glorious music I found myself moved – a shiver down the spine, a glow in the heart, a lump in the throat. And grasping the new concepts made the brain cogs whirr. We all know that there is more than one match for any dish, but I never would have thought that *poire pochée au vin rouge et sa glace à la cannelle* (pear poached in red wine with cinnamon ice cream) could be so wonderful with 2012 Marsanne Blanche Cave des Bernunes, Sierre (Valais) together with the Scherzo from Beethoven's Spring Sonata no. 5, Opus 24 in F major. Or just maybe Leonard Cohen's Take This Longing?

DAY FOUR

The group makes a spectacular journey to Ticino as related by **Marisa D'Vari**

Our journey from Sierre in the French speaking part of Switzerland to the charming Agriturismo Fattoria L'Amorosa for our lunch in the Italian speaking region of Ticino was quite adventurous. Travel involved a bus ride to Sierre's quaint train station, followed by a short train ride, then a change to another train.

Happily, Andrea Conconi, director of Ticinowine, the region's promotional board, had very kindly arranged for a private compartment for our comfort. When we left the train, we were in for a big surprise – a vintage 1958 yellow Post Bus, looking something between an old-fashioned school bus and a yellow submarine. After taking photographs, we boarded eagerly and prepared to settle in for a nap and the long journey to Ticino through the Swiss Alps.

Ha! Little did we know what the combination of Mother Nature – and the clever Andrea – had in mind. Words can't describe the incredible pristine beauty of the Swiss Alps. As we chugged higher and higher into the mountains in our little yellow bus, every moment presented the type of unique view that had our little group falling all over each other to take photos. We saw snow-capped mountains (in early September) as the snow never melts completely here and

On the train to Ticino: Donna Jackson, Cruz Lijlegren and Neil Fairlamb. Photo by **Judy O'Kane**.





*A Swiss sommelier serves the group white Merlot from Ticino at the top of the mountain pass; Christine Austin with Andrea Conconi of Ticinowine. Photos by **Cruz Liljegren**.*

our ears began to pop from the altitude. Remarkably, along the upward climb were joggers and power walkers.

Then, just as we reached the summit of the pass we saw a roadside stand. As we approached this lookout area overlooking a dramatic landscape, our eyes widened to see a formally dressed sommelier behind a table containing bottles of white Merlot and trays of cheese. As we descended from the bus, four musicians playing enormous alphorns began to serenade us (see cover shot). It was all such a wonderful surprise and a nice introduction to the Swiss Italian Alps! So, we stood at the mountain top for nearly 20 minutes, snapping pictures, eating cheese and sipping wine.

"I don't know if it is the view, or the wine, but this is the best white Merlot I've ever had," said a CWW member of the wine, alphorn and cheese experience.

Reaching Ticino, we were quickly escorted to the restaurant Fattoria l'Amorosa where the handsome and English speaking Urs Mader gave us a brief history of the region and why Merlot is so important.

Though the region has produced wine since the Roman era, the quality movement began in 1956, when oenologists and researchers had recently discovered that Merlot is well suited to the terroir of the region and encouraged new plantings. The government gave stipends to farmers to grow Merlot, which helped get the industry off to a good start. Merlot here is THE GRAPE – it is used to produce both white and red wine, as well as some sparkling wines.

Urs was careful to mention that there is a difference between the Merlot grown in the south with its calcareous

soil that gives more feminine and generous wines and Merlot from the north, which lends itself to a more structured wine.

At lunch, during the main course, we enjoyed Caruto Merlot 2013, an oaked wine with 13.5% alcohol and a good introduction to what we would experience of the oaked and unoaked wines during our visits.

*Below left: Merlot grapes on a pergola; Fattoria l'Amorosa, the lunch venue in the Ticino vineyards. Photos by **Cruz Liljegren**.*



Neil Fairlamb reports on a Ticino Merlot tasting in a historic wine cellar outside Lugano

From the luxury of the Hotel Splendide Royal, we were taken to Mendrisio, a village outside Lugano. Here the village streets are lined with historic cellars where families would mature their wines and hang their cured meats: *prosciutto crudo*, *culatello*, *salame* and *mortadella*. One such had been converted into a wine bar where these delights could be sampled as an appetiser.

As guests of the Ticino Merlot producers, and under the guidance of Andrea Conconi of Ticinowine, we were given a comparative tasting of 16 wines, eight each from the north and south of the region. Acid soils predominate in the cooler northern part yielding crisper lighter wines, and limestone in the more 'Latin' style of the southern warmer area. Although there were indeed some lush wines from the south such as Salorino from Corti and the Montalbano Riserva from Monticello, these did have a tendency to fall away on the palate; by far the best of them was Castello di Morcote 2012 with some weight and extract to balance the soft texture. The northern style has more structure and tautness, and potentially more longevity, as shown by the Ronco dei Ciliegi from Mondo and Monte Carasso from Cagi.

At the presentation of the 2014 vintage the following day in the Palazzo dei Congressi in Lugano these impressions were confirmed, even if it was a rain-affected vintage. I would recommend Hubervini, Luigina, Silbernagl Garzoli and Matasci Fratelli as masters of elegant, refined Merlot.



DAY FIVE

Keith Grainger reports on the final day of the trip, including the presentation of the 2014 vintage Breakfast at Lugano's Hotel Splendide Royal was, as befits the name, both splendid and royal. But with work to be done we headed for the Palazzo dei Congressi for the Presentazione dell'annata 2014. This was a walk around event, with 52 producers having their own tables, showing three or four wines each. Naturally Merlot, including Bianco de Merlot, abounded. However, the outstanding wine for me was a Viognier – Centoquindici, Tenuta Agricola Luigina, made by Gault & Millau 'Rookie of the Year' Ettore Biraghi.

Our time here concluded with an interesting presentation of older wines given by Urs Mader. The consensus was that making wines for ageing was far from the producers' minds historically, but with careful production, the wines have the potential to age for a decade or more.

Lunch at restaurant Le Relais concluded with a delicious *Fondente di pistacchio e fichi con nocino turbinato*.

And for the afternoon, Andrea Conconi, director of Ticinowine, had yet another brilliant surprise for us in the form of a charter boat trip on Lake Lugano, accompanied by sparkling wine, of course.

A return to the Palazzo dei Congressi for a buffet dinner gave the opportunity to mix and talk with locals, whilst sampling yet more Ticino delights.

In Lugano, from left: Keith Grainger, John McNerney, Neil Fairlamb, Donna Jackson, Cruz Liljegren and Marisa D'Vari. Photo by Judy O'Kane.

Thanks and acknowledgements

There are so many people to thank for our wonderful time in Switzerland. The participants would particularly like to thank Vivienne Franks and Andrea Warren from the Circle for all their hard work.

Everyone we met in Switzerland gave their hearts and souls to us. Elisabeth Pasquier and François Murisier of VINEA made the trip possible; Alicia Mettler and Malvine Moulin were fantastic guides; and Andrea Conconi of Ticinowine was simply brilliant. And, thank you so much to everybody else involved with this most wonderful tour!



Top: Judy O'Kane and John McNerney having a terrible time with sparkling Ticino wine on Lake Lugano. Below: Earlier in the trip, Keith Grainger, who coordinated the report, in serious tasting mode. Photos by Cruz Liljegren.

Back cover: Clos de la Couta vineyard. Photo by Keith Grainger.

