

Parker team wakes up to Swiss wines

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By Ellen Wallace

GENEVA, SWITZERLAND – Those of us who know Swiss wines knew the day would come when the Robert Parkers of the world would discover Helvetia's rich and varied collection of wines; that day has arrived.



Robert Tamarcaz,
winemaker of Domaine des Muses

Swiss wine researcher and author José Vouillamoz in 2011 invited David Schildknecht, a member of Parker's wine reviewing team and for years a regular contributor to Parker's Wine Advocate, to visit a public tasting session in Zurich, Memoire & Friends, organized by the Memoire des Vins Suisses wines, some of the country's best. The two also did a tour of a limited number of wineries in Vaud and Valais three months later.

Vouillamoz is co-author of the November 2012 tome, Wine Grapes, with Jancis Robinson and Julia Harding, the most complete work ever published on wine grape varieties, widely touted as a must-have reference book.

Schildknecht has just included four Swiss winemakers in his personal Best of 2012 collection, a very subjective selection of his favourite winemakers among the hundreds he visits in a year. Anyone who is familiar with the wines of canton Vaud's Pierre-Luc Leyvraz in St Saphorin, Blaise Duboux, also in Lavaux, Robert Tamarcaz at Domaine des Muses in Sierre, canton Valais and the Cantina Kopp von der Crone Visini, south of Lugano in Ticino, will be very pleased to see them included, for this is a marketing boost that small winemakers can usually only dream of.

St Saphorin's vineyards at sunset, October 2012

Those who were not included may be miffed, and several Swiss articles about Schildknecht's visit, at the time, added to the polemic about how such a powerhouse as the Parker organization can step into a small wine region and make a tiny sampling, then walk off and talk about "Swiss wines".

For those of us who are not in the thick of Swiss wine politics, the wineries chosen are not what matters here: Swiss wine is less than 2 percent of the world's production and few wines are exported, for several reasons, so despite often excellent quality on a world scale, they have trouble getting noticed. Parker's team has just put Swiss wines on its map, and all good winemakers here will benefit, not just the three selected by Schildknecht.

For me, Schildknecht's selection is a flag-waver for winelovers which simply suggests that if you can turn up three terrific wineries during two short visits, you should explore further because Swiss wines offer a wonderful world of amazing wine discoveries. If you're lucky enough to live in Switzerland, like me, take advantage of this!

Chasselas-lovers in particular (count me in) will feel vindicated by his words on this so-Swiss grape, born on the shores of Lake Geneva:

"Whatever you call it, a once-prevalent Northern European cépage gets a bad rap for being better-known as a table grape (or, in Alsace, as an agent of German viticultural imperialism). But put the right genetic variants (of which there are many) in the right soil as well as the right hands and Chasselas – a.k.a. Gutedel; a.k.a. Fendant – can render among the most distinctively and irresistibly delicious whites on earth.

"Where they're famous for Chasselas – the only place – is in Switzerland's Vaud, whose steep, towering terraces along the North Shore of Lake Geneva can in the best instances yield whites of distinguished subtlety. They are low-acid – usually undergo "malo" – yet leave you groping for mineral descriptors that do them justice, as well as for another glassful of something so instantly refreshing.

