

The Vintage

By Gina DeCaprio Vercesi



Alpine Wine

A new institution sparks fresh interest in an old Swiss wine region



In the Swiss wine region of Lavaux, it is said that the grapes ripen beneath three suns—one that shines down from the sky, another that reflects off the waters of Lake Geneva, and a third that emanates from centuries-old stone walls that anchor 10,000 vineyard terraces to the dramatic hillsides.

These vineyards, which stretch across 2,000 vertiginous acres between Lausanne and Montreux, are more than 1,000 years old, planted thanks to the influence of 11th-century Cistercian monks from Burgundy. Yet despite the region's age (and it's being designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2007), Lavaux still flies below the radar of even savvy oenophiles. In recent years, however, the Association Lavaux Patrimoine Mondial has worked to change that. In 2021, an interpretive center called Maison Lavaux opened in the village of Grandvaux. Set in a 16th-century estate with stunning lake views, the center displays an exhibit that showcases the ingenuity of the people who have coaxed wine from these slopes for a millenium.

"This is a living cultural landscape," says Anne Tardent,

one of a handful of specially trained Lavaux Heritage Guides who lead walking tours through the vineyards. "Every square meter has been transformed. We have families here who have owned wine terraces and have been making wine for 18 generations."

Today, nearly 200 growers cultivate grapes across Lavaux's three appellations and eight subregions, including the Grand Cru areas of Calamin and Dézaley. The signature grape—and the one that will best impart to the curious taster just what makes the region's wines special—is chasselas, which produces a crisp, mineral-rich

Above:
vineyards in
Lavaux, planted
on the terraced
hillside above
Lake Geneva

white layered with fruit and floral aromas.

"Chasselas is very neutral, but it's a revelator of the soil where it grows," Tardent says.

"In each of the Lavaux's production areas you will find different kinds of soils, and these different soils make different wines. Because of this, I always say that chasselas is a wine you can start in the morning, just after brushing your teeth, and drink until the evening, just before brushing your teeth. When you choose the appropriate chasselas—a young one, then an older one, then a Calamin, then a Dézaley—you can have almost 24 hours of chasselas."



THE BAR

The Lavaux Wine Bar in New York

Because around 96 percent of Swiss wine stays in Switzerland, chasselas and other Swiss varietals—gamaret, garanoir, and the ancient Plant Robert, to name a few—remain relatively unknown abroad. To remedy that, in late 2020 three people from Lavaux, Benoît Amsler and winemakers Titouan Briau and Jean-Charles Estoppey, teamed up with William Wyssmüller, a master cheesemaker from Gruyère, to open **The Lavaux Wine Bar** in Manhattan's West Village. Grab a seat in the restaurant's vintage red gondola and tuck into a fondue and a melty raclette paired with a golden chasselas from St. Saphorin.

Didier Marti/Moment/Getty Images (vineyards); courtesy of The Lavaux Wine Bar (gondole)