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The magic of wine – or In Vino Veritas

“In Vino Veritas” – truth in wine. What truth? Do people divulge their secrets when sated with wine? Whatever the Romans meant by this saying, wine tells me lots about the culture, climate and soil properties of an area on the map or even of a continent. Whether a Swiss wine has been cultivated on the sandy south side of a hill overlooking a lake, on the loamy soil of a former glacier moraine, or in the dry plain of an alpine valley in the Ticino: the fact is that its taste reveals its origins. An everyday country wine can not only pleasure the palate, but also tells something about the country and people, revealing known and lesser-known traits and characteristics.

Wine is an integral part of the territory where it grows and matures.

In Switzerland people talk of the “Rösti trench” when referring to the linguistic barrier. One might also talk of the divide between red and white (i.e. German-speaking Switzerland, where



Alice Baumann

“A glass of wine reflects the identity and customs of a region”

red wine is predominantly drunk, and Franco-phone Switzerland, where white wine is the main tittle).

So a glass of wine reflects the identity and customs of a region. Now, however, within a changing Europe, wine is increasingly becoming the key to our feelings, our past and hence our subconscious.

People who know about Swiss wine generally also know a lot about Switzerland. Thus the vine is used as a yardstick, and the Oechsle degree (which indicates the natural sugar content of wine) is used to measure a people’s traditions as well as the quality of the wine.

On another level, wine induces nostalgia. It can be a synonym for the home country and generate a sense of kinship. As a child I helped to harvest grapes on Mount Hallau on the fringe of the Klettgau. Entire villages would follow the rituals of “Wümmet”, “Läset” and “Herbschtete”. I was fascinated by the industriousness of the women and the hard toil of the men. The grape-pickers, strapping youths from the village, carried on their backs a “Tansen” (bucket) filled to the brim with grapes. Bending down, they emptied the plump berries into gigantic “Zuber” (wooden containers). A “Brügiwagen” drawn by horse or tractor transported the harvest from the vine slopes to the village for pressing. Soon the vine was maturing in oak casks in cool cellars.

Even if this drink of the Gods is now stored mainly in metal casks and the entire process has been automated, nothing changes the fact that the taste of Swiss wine is unique in the world. Once tasted, never forgotten. And that’s nothing less than the truth.

With these patriotic thoughts I take my leave of the “Swiss Review” editorial team, after seven wonderful years. Nevertheless, I will remain loyal to Switzerland and to wine. Prosit! Santé! Salute! Cheers!

Alice Baumann



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The Swiss are only too willing to hide their light under a bushel, even if it’s worth revealing to the world at large. In the world of wine, for example, Switzerland has some astonishing vintages to offer. The picture shows Hallau wine grower Irma Gysel.

(Photo Ursula Battanta)

SWISS REVIEW

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