

Swiss wines - Kirsch an old speciality of Switzerland

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A New Building for Basle's Industries Fair

The cornerstone of the large new Exhibition Building of the Swiss Industries Fair was recently laid in Basle. Representatives from the Basle Government and the legislature, the architects and the personnel of the fair were present at the ceremony. The new buildings will be finished by the opening date of the next Industries Fair, May 8, 1954.

Switzerland's Embroidery Industry

The Swiss embroidery industry has been working at full capacity during the past few months. Its products are particularly favoured by the present trend of international fashions. Switzerland's exports of embroideries reached an amount of 22.6 million francs during the first quarter of 1953. Significant changes have taken place in the destination of those exports. European countries now account for about 50 per cent. of Switzerland's embroidery exports while in previous times only 25 per cent. was sold in Europe.

SWISS WINES — KIRSCH AN OLD SPECIALITY OF SWITZERLAND

There is no Swiss wine—there are only Swiss wines. There are wines from Zurich, Schaffhausen, St. Gall, Thurgau, Aargau and the Grisons. These are Rhine wines—white and fruity, keeping their quality well; red wines that differ with each vineyard, here light and clear, there dark, possessing a bouquet and improving with age like the Burgundies from which some of them have come.

In Ticino, a fertile canton, the climate is particularly suited to the growing of certain foreign vines. One from Bordeaux has just been introduced there, the Merlot with its high alcoholic content, which is marvellously robust and will probably be the Ticino wine of the future—although the native Nostrano, unfortunately so delicate, has great charm. And now for the aristocrats of our vineyards which reign along the Rhone valley—the Fendant, like honey on fire; Johannisberg, virile and full-bodied yet with something discretely mellow which brings out its opulent flavour; Amigne, Hermitage, Malvoisie with their liqueur-like tendencies. They are wines of the sun and the rocks; they sparkle, they are aflame. Among their magnificent golds, a red flares up—Dole, very distinctive in spite of its amber reflections which make it akin to the district.

No similarities for the wine-grower of Neuchatel; what contrast could be more marked than a red Cortaillod, completely Burgundian in its best years, and a white Neuchatel, inclining towards Rhine wine, firm, full-bodied, aristocratic—incomparable when served with snails or sal-

mon trout. The tang of the soil, with its infinite variations, is found all along the vineyards of Vaud which dominate Lake Lemman, from Aigle to Nyon where two great names—Dezaley and Cote—are to be found. Wines full of hidden poetry, of undiscovered wisdom which, once discovered, can never be forgotten. Will you venture as far as Geneva? Of course. The least spirituous of our wines is the most spiritual: dry, bitter, but delightfully fresh and of an incomparable candour, it gradually reveals a very characteristic flavour.

If there is no Swiss wine, but only Swiss wines as different one from the other as the Swiss cantons, there is on the other hand only one Swiss kirsch—whether it comes from the orchards of Zoug or Aargau, from those of the canton of Vaud or from the Basle Country. This cherry water really contains, alive and exhilarating, the very essence of the fruit; a fruit which is to Switzerland what the mirabelle plum is to Lorraine. Exciting cocktails can be made of it and confectioners are indebted to it for the essential flavour of their most delicious fillings. It also makes it possible to understand why a country to which nature has given kirsch owed it to itself and to the world, by its industry, to make a respectable contribution to the pleasures of the table.

The cultivation of cherries occupies a prominent place in Switzerland's extensive fruit-growing industry. It is not to be wondered at, therefore, that in Switzerland one traditional method—many generations old—of making use of the country's excellent fruit is the production of kirsch from that, undoubtedly most noble of fruits, the cherry.

Switzerland occupies a leading position in the production of kirsch, both as to quantity and as to quality. Swiss kirsch is the most popular of the choice spirits. Connoisseurs highly appreciate its bouquet, its fruity and well-rounded flavour, extremely agreeable to the palate.

Thanks to the vast experience gained in the course of the centuries, a Swiss kirsch of outstanding quality is now distilled. Positively famous—and not only in Switzerland, but all over the world—is the kirsch from the "cradle region" of Switzerland (Schwyz and Zug), the Basle region, Aargau and Valais. The achievement of this superb quality calls for the exercise of meticulous care in the vatting of the cherries, and for this reason only sound, well ripened and carefully selected cherries are used in the production of Swiss kirsch. These cherries are placed in fermenting vats or barrels (the "mash"), where they undergo a slow process of fermentation taking several months. Then the first distillation of the resultant "wash" begins. In this process, to which the closest attention is paid, resides the secret of producing a kirsch of faultless

quality. By distillation, certain liquid and volatile substances are separated from other non-volatile constituents of the "wash", the former being first converted into vapour and then restored to a liquid state by cooling. It is in this way that the distillate is obtained, with its ethereal oils which give the final product its aroma and taste. Kirsch is distilled to an alcohol content of not more than 60 per cent. by volume, and is consumed at a strength between 41 and 48 per cent. by volume. The storage of kirsch is another factor of importance to its quality. The longer it is stored, the more are its aromatizing and flavouring constituents refined and perfected. For this reason only old kirsch, i.e., kirsch that has been stored for many years, is released for export. And all these various factors serve to explain why Switzerland's superb kirsch is so popular abroad.

The uses of kirsch are most highly diversified. Kirsch, drunk neat, is a sheer delight. A coffee with kirsch after every meal is beneficial and a source of great enjoyment. To know this old Swiss speciality is to love it. Kirsch is an indispensable "chaser" for fondue; it is advisable to drink a small glass of it with and immediately after a fondue. Kirsch is also excellent when added to vermouth, to which it gives that bitter-sweet bouquet that is so popular. A vermouth-kirsch is an aperitif to satisfy the taste of the most fastidious. Cocktails are always mixed from a variety of liquids, and Swiss kirsch is the ingredient that determines the quality of such cocktails as cream-kirsch, omnibus, Swiss dream skiwasser, kirsch-fizz, rose, and Ostende. Kirsch is largely used in the sweet and patisserie trade: kirsch flans, fruit cake, kirsch-flavoured filled chocolates, kirsch-flavoured tablet chocolate, coupe au kirsch, and kirsch ices, are just a few specialities. Finally, kirsch is also used in the production of fine liqueurs such as cherry brandy, creme de kirsch, and kirsch egg-nog.

Drink Swiss kirsch, a natural product with a splendid flavour all its own. It is issued only with the official token of genuineness which is your guarantee of unsurpassed quality.

RAIL AND ROAD TRAFFIC IN THE SWISS MOUNTAINS

By H. O. ERNST, Manager, London Office, Swiss National Tourist Office and Swiss Federal Railways.

(Continued from last issue.)

The winter season's first traffic handicap is dense mist, followed later by frost and snow. Each presents its own problem. Fog will reduce visibility to less than a few yards and deaden sound. Special care is therefore required in shunting yards where accidents and great delays are not infrequent. Often frost adds to the difficulty by rendering brakes less effective. Snow in small quantities will not seriously interfere with railway operations provided track points are kept free and in working order. The latest type of electrically operated points are now provided with heating elements. Salt is not used, as it creates rust. A naked flame is also inadvisable for defrosting electrically operated gear, as it is likely to burn through the cables. In the stations snow can be cleared by means of brooms or hand-operated snow ploughs. Falls to the depth of three to four feet in twelve hours are, however, often met with, even in the lowlands, and call for a sustained effort to keep trains running. Of first importance is a sufficient number of additional workers for the task of snow clearing. This is where the emergency staff rota I mentioned earlier comes into operation. As a first task, points and signal installations have to be cleared and put back into working order. In the meantime Motive Power will have made arrangements to free the line itself by running a wedge-shaped snow plough or, if necessary, a powerful rotary snow sweeper pushed by an electric locomotive. Other workers will also shake the snow from telephone and telegraph wires or, if broken by the weight of snow, repair them. Speed is important in order to avoid late trains and ensure the prompt delivery of goods.

Earlier I mentioned the Gotthard Line, the main international rail highway through Switzerland from north to south. Between the shores of Lake Lucerne and Goschenen at the entrance of the main tunnel, a distance of 24 miles, there is a difference of altitude of 2172 feet. On the north side, the track runs more or less parallel with the river Reuss, partly in the open, partly in tunnels. Elaborate precautions are taken throughout the year to protect the track against falling rock and in the winter against avalanches. Rock faces become unsafe through erosion by frost. Especially after the spring thaws and periodically throughout the year, likely spots are examined and made safe. When it rains in the lowlands, it snows in the mountains. Therefore the likelihood of severe frost and heavy falls of snow increases as the line gains altitude. At Goschenen depths of several metres are not uncommon. On such occasions up to a hundred extra men are needed to clear the station and keep the line open. Avalanches do occur every winter in the Reuss Valley, but the Gotthard Railway and the road are so well protected by stone and wood barriers placed at strategic points that the masses of snow seldom reach the traffic