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Renat Nussbaumer: Wine-growing on two continents

During the past 15 years, Swiss and New Zealand citizen Renat Nussbaumer has developed one of the most scenic vineyards in the Nelson area. The Nussbaumer family also owns a small vineyard in Cham, Canton of Zug, which Renat's father planted 35 years ago. What's the difference in growing grapes in Switzerland and New Zealand? In keeping with the topic of this issue, Helvetia Magazine has asked Renat to tell our readers about his wine-making experience and provide us with some photos of his vineyard on the Kina Peninsula.



Background and professional career

Renat turned 60 last year. His career had a major turning point in his mid 40s. After graduating with an MBA and Teachers degree at 24, he had several highly responsible jobs in the business world in Switzerland and overseas. At age 40, Renate and his partner Liselotte opted for a sabbatical in New Zealand. They ended up becoming residents in New Zealand, and Renat eventually bought 11 hectares of orchard land on the Kina Peninsula, Nelson area, in 1998, with the plan of establishing a vineyard there.

However, Renat then returned to Switzerland once more for seven years to another job in the corporate sector, even after grapes had been planted. Only since 2006 he has been a fulltime "wine man", growing grapes and marketing his Renato wines.

Gaining winegrowing expertise and rewards of the career change

Renat took part-time courses in viticulture at Wädenswil and the rest was "learning on the job".

He acquainted himself with vineyards in Alsace, Burgundy, Wachau, Tasmania, California and Oregon. He studied their vineyard and winemaking practices and partly worked on some of their vineyards. Working all those years on the "home vineyard" in Cham also helped to understand the seasonal cycle and disease problems of grapevines.

Growing grapes, making wine and marketing the bottles is like having control of the process from A-Z. Renat had always liked his previous jobs, but there was something else he wanted to get into after his bustling and demanding business life. He loves the fact that he can combine his work on the Nelson vineyard with 3-4 months of marketing and networking activities, wine grower dinners and speeches in Switzerland, a truly rewarding aspect of his business. Not to say that the markets are easy, the world (and especially Switzerland) is flooded with wines from any country you can imagine.



How do New Zealand and Swiss wines and vineyard practices differ?

Switzerland has different winegrowing regions with different micro climates, as has New Zealand. In most Swiss regions, you can expect humidity and rain to be a major threat during the growing season. Most New Zealand regions tend to experience dry summers with rainfall happening during the "off-wine-season" with no major impact on vine health. Our New Zealand climate with its high sunlight intensity and annual sunshine hours produces generally more fruit flavours than you could expect from many of the Swiss regions (apart from Wallis and Bündner Herrschaft).

This is most noticeable in varieties like Sauvignon Blanc, but also Chardonnay and Pinot Noir. On the other hand, Muller-Thurgau is doing well in the Swiss climate. He says this is a summer wine with a lovely perfume, in demand on the Swiss market. However, it is not a variety for international markets and it historically has a bad reputation in New Zealand.



Renat's enthusiasm and his Renato wines

There are five wines bottled under the Renato label: Pinot Gris and Chardonnay (their flagship wines), Sauvignon Blanc, Pinot Noir and Merlot. They all reflect the maritime climate and the high sunshine hours the vineyard on the Kina peninsula (close to Motueka) has to offer. Renat is very enthusiastic about his unique wines and they are well received by trade and private customers in his native Switzerland, but also by many clients in New Zealand. He says he does not regret the change from his "life of glamour" and would not want to revert to his previous profession. Last but not least, he has truly got the "best of both worlds"!



Compiled by Helvetia Team with information supplied by Renat Nussbaumer

Visit www.renatoestate.co.nz for more information. Wines are available by mail order.