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Zurich: Swiss Wines to Remember

January 24, 2012

By [Marla Cimini](#)



Winemaker Pasquale Chiapparini; photos by Marla Cimini

After receiving a coveted invitation to the [Masters of Food and Wine](#) event held at the [Park Hyatt](#) in [Zurich](#) last autumn, I immediately started daydreaming about the sensational dining experiences ahead.

I knew enough to anticipate succulent — and sustainable — menus and the stunning Alpine scenery. However, I didn't expect to fall for Swiss wines, and with good reason. They are rarely exported, even to other European countries. Instead, Swiss winemakers are content to make small batches and sell them locally.

However, most of these wineries love to welcome visiting foodies, with the enthusiastic winemakers as behind-the-scenes personal guides. It's good news for travelers seeking culinary adventures, as there are many worthwhile wineries located just outside Zurich. It's an easy jaunt to spend an afternoon touring a boutique vineyard and returning to the city in time for dinner.



Zurich Lake bouillabaisse

My wine journey started at The Masters event, which was created by Frank Widmer, executive chef at the Park Hyatt and the author of *The Chef and the Cowboy*. Widmer crafted a series of dinners to showcase food and wine pairings from the region. He brought the Swiss wines to table by inviting representatives from the [Young Swiss Winemakers Association](#) to provide personal introductions to their bottles.

Later, I went directly to the source with my group. During a visit to the boutique [Chiapparini Vineyard](#), we were treated to an old-school lesson on bottling, corking and labeling the wine by hand, under the watchful eye of vintner Pasquale Chiapparini, president of the winemakers group.

We somehow succeeded in performing the challenging tasks without breaking either glass bottles or expensive equipment. After an afternoon of "working" in the winery, we participated in a bit of wine tasting, featuring Pasquale's wonderful light reds, *Sorein* (which means "so red" in language) and crisp, citrus-noted whites, *Soweiss* (which translates to "so white").



Old school wine corking

Afterwards, we enjoyed a special picnic on Chiapparini's sunny terrace hosted by Widmer. The wines were a perfect match with a lunch menu that included hearty sandwiches featuring mozzarella cheese and pesto, and Scottish salmon with sweet kumquat marinade on whole grain breads, as well as the requisite Swiss chocolate pastries for dessert.

Even if you're not taking part in a Masters or other special event, Swiss winemakers will do their best to arrange a day or an afternoon visit to their vineyards. I can also recommend [Bechtel Wines](#), which is known for its Merlot, Chardonnay and Sauvignon Blanc; [Weinhof Juno](#), which specializes in Pinot Noir and *Zweigelt*, an Austrian red grape; and [Weingut Schwarz](#), whose proprietor, Andreas Schwarz, focuses on Pinot Noir and Riesling.

Pasquale Chiapparini can set up a visit to his winery or connect you with others. Don't be concerned by the wineries' websites being in German — the owners speak English. Besides, the sound of a cork being pulled on a favorite bottle doesn't need much translation.