

Swiss Pinot Noir: Too Good to be Exported
December 30, 2014

Switzerland is proud of its "specialty" white grape varieties such as Petite Arvine, Amine or Heida or their indigenous red wine grapes like Humagne Rouge, Cornalin or Bondola. All these varieties are cultivated mostly in the French-speaking Valais or, the Bondola grape, in the Italian-speaking Ticino. The only relevant red grape variety planted in almost every canton, no matter if French-, Italian- or German-speaking, is Pinot Noir or Blauburgunder as it is called in the eastern, German-speaking part of Switzerland. In total about 4430 hectares of vines are Pinot Noir making the varietal a prominent share of the total area under vine which is a little bit less than 15000 hectares.

The biggest Pinot producer is the Valais in the French-speaking, southwestern corner of the country where 1840 hectares are dedicated to Pinot Noir. The scenery is quite spectacular here with all these terraces seemingly piled on top of each other. Since many red wines from the Valais are blends of Pinot Noir and Gamay Noir (the wine is called Dôle), Grisons (Graubünden) in the upper Rhine valley is the most prominent and, still, the finest Pinot Noir producing area in Switzerland, although Thurgau and Neuchâtel produce more and more excellent Pinot Noirs, too.

In Grisons the vines are cultivated on the steep and sunny, south and southwest facing slopes of the Alps in altitudes between 500 and 650 meters above sea level and benefit from the foehn, otherwise they would rot away before they had a chance to ripen in this spectacular area where rainfalls are dramatically higher than in most other European wine growing regions. The vines root in clayey, calcareous slate soils and give well structured, fresh and lovely perfumed Pinots of which the finest are aged in barriques. They can age for a decade and more but often needs some years to show all their talents.

Other important appellations for Pinot Noir in Switzerland are Vaud (501 ha), Zurich (380 ha), the Drei-Seen-Land including the cantons of Bern, Fribourg and Neuchâtel (275 ha) and Genève (122 ha).

Mid of November I tasted roughly 150 top Pinot Noirs from Switzerland blind in Zurich just to get an overview of styles and qualities. The finest 50 or 60 I tasted again on two days and the results are presented below.

Although the vilification methods of the finest Pinots are almost the same like in Burgundy or elsewhere (with cold maceration, a *cuvaison* between 14 and 28 days, *saignée*, malolactic fermentation and barrique aging between 12 and 24 months) styles and qualities can vary enormously. Everywhere you can find top producers working with old Swiss clones which are mass selected since many years whereas others have completely changed to Burgundian clones or prefer a mixture. Even more crucial for the style is the harvest date and, in correlation, the acceptance of acidity and a firm tannin structure. In Grisons acidity can almost not be avoided though it can be smoothed by rich and creamy textures and the sweetness of grapes harvested with 100 or more degrees of *oechsle*. Warmer, sweet and juicy types of Pinot Noir can be found in the Valais although world class Pinots are quite rare here. However, the contemporary hot spots for Pinot Noir lovers are Thurgau's Ottenberg and the wines from Neuchâtel where Pinot gives powerful and intense, though also silky textured and very elegant wines grown on calcareous soils. Jacques Tatasciore's Domaine de la Rochette is surely the most spectacular Pinot producer in Switzerland. His "*grands crus*" can compete even with the finest Burgundies. They are very rare and highly expensive but a must try for all

Pinot Noir lovers and growers.

Most of the wines I tasted were from the excellent 2011 vintage which gave rich and healthy wines with power, intensity and length. The only danger was super or over-ripeness but again this is rather a question of style than of quality. 2012 was much more difficult due to rain and hail and diseases such as mildew. The wines have transparency and raciness but often lack the intensity and power of a great wine. 2013 is too early to judge though the Pinots I had showed a good concentration and vibrancy.

There are not that many wines exported into the foreign countries. Since Swiss people know what's drinking well (besides of Bordeaux, Barolo and Amarone) they buy almost the complete production of the finest wines straight from the producer or one of the many excellent wine shops of the country. However, since Zurich, Lausanne or Geneva are always worth a trip there is a good chance to find the wine you want in restaurants and bars. Life is good in Switzerland and it does not get deleted by Swiss Pinot Noir. Just the contrary is the case. Cheers!

—Stephan Reinhardt

		Year		Wine Name	Rating	Maturity	Price
<input type="checkbox"/>		2011		Domaine de la Rochette (Jacques Tatasciore) Les Rissieux	95	Early	
<input type="checkbox"/>		2011		Domaine de la Rochette (Jacques Tatasciore) Les Margiles	94	Young	
<input type="checkbox"/>		2011		Weingut Wolfer Pinot Noir Grand Vin	93	Young	
<input type="checkbox"/>		2012		Domaine Henri Cruchon Raissennaz Grand Cru	93	Early	
<input type="checkbox"/>		2011		Weingut Fromm Malanser Schopfiwingert Pinot Noir	92	Early	
<input type="checkbox"/>		2011		Schlossgut Bachtobel Pinot Noir No. 4	92+	Young	
<input type="checkbox"/>		2011		Schlossgut Bachtobel Pinot Noir No. 3	92	Early	
<input type="checkbox"/>		2012		Weinbau Thomas Studach Malanser Pinot Noir	92+	Young	
<input type="checkbox"/>		2010		Domaine de la Rochette (Jacques Tatasciore) Les Chanez	92+	Early	
<input type="checkbox"/>		2011		Cave de Chambleau Pinot Noir Barrique Pur Sang	91+	Young	
<input type="checkbox"/>		2012		Sprecher von Bernegg (Jan Domenic Luzi) Pinot Noir vom Pfaffen/Calander	91	Early	
<input type="checkbox"/>		2012		Gantenbein Pinot Noir	91+	Young	
<input type="checkbox"/>		2012		Obrecht Pinot Noir unfiltered Monolith	90	Early	
<input type="checkbox"/>		2012		Christian Hermann Flascher Pinot Noir Reserve	90	Early	
<input type="checkbox"/>		2011		La Maison Carree Auvernier Neuchatel Rouge Pinot Noir	90	Early	

<input type="checkbox"/>		2012		Steiner Schernelz Village Buurehof Pinot Noir Barrique	90+	Young		
<input type="checkbox"/>		2013		Michael Broger Blauburgunder Schnellberg	90	Early		
<input type="checkbox"/>		2011		Domaine Donatsch Pinot Noir Unique	90+	Young		
<input type="checkbox"/>		2012		Maurice Zufferey Pinot Noir Tzanio	89+	Young		
<input type="checkbox"/>		2012		Tom Litwan Oberflachs Auf der Mauer Pinot Noir	89	Early		
<input type="checkbox"/>		2000		Grillette Domaine de Cressier Graf Zeppelin Pinot Noir Reserve	89	Early		
<input type="checkbox"/>		2011		Pinot R(h)ein Pinot R(h)ein	89+	Early		
<input type="checkbox"/>		2013		Cave Gerald & Patricia Besse Calvaire Pinot Noir	89	Early		
<input type="checkbox"/>		2012		Weingut Erich Meier Pinot Noir Barrique	89+	Young		
<input type="checkbox"/>		2013		Weinbau Ottiger Pinot Noir Rosenau Spissen	89	Early		
<input type="checkbox"/>		2012		Baumann Weingut Osterfingen Oberhallau Blauburgunder Zwaa	89+	Young		
<input type="checkbox"/>		2012		Cave La Romaine Cuvée des Empereurs Pinot Noir Coteaux de Sierre Réserve	89+	Young		
<input type="checkbox"/>		2012		Domain les Freres Dubois La Tour de Marsens Pinot Noir Réserve des Héraults	88+	Young		
<input type="checkbox"/>		2011		Weingut Schmidheiny Perseus	88+	Young		
<input type="checkbox"/>		2011		Grillette Domaine de Cressier Graf Zeppelin Pinot Noir Reserve	88+	Young		
<input type="checkbox"/>		2011		Domaine Saint-Sebaste Clos de la Perriere	88	Early		
<input type="checkbox"/>		2011		Christian & Juerg Marugg Flascher Pinot Noir Barrique	88	Young		
<input type="checkbox"/>		2013		Cave des Tilleuls Pinot Noir de Vetroz	88	Early		
<input type="checkbox"/>		2011		Tom Litwan Elfingen Rüeget Pinot Noir	88+	Early		
<input type="checkbox"/>		2012		Cru de l'Hopital Pinot Noir de Mur	88	Young		
<input type="checkbox"/>		2012		Matthias & Sina Gubler Pinot Noir Pilgrim	88+	Young		
<input type="checkbox"/>		2012		Weingut Hermann – Peter & Rosi Hermann Flascher Pinot Noir Selection	87+	Early		
<input type="checkbox"/>		2012		Weingut Schloessli (Fabian & Irene Teutsch-Marugg) Pinot Noir Reserve	87+	Early		
<input type="checkbox"/>		2011		Domaine Grand'Cour (J-P Pellegrin) Pinot Noir P	87+	Young		
<input type="checkbox"/>		2013		Domaines Rouvinez Colline de Geronde Pinot Noir	87	Early		
<input type="checkbox"/>		2013		Albert Mathier & Fils Rhoneblut Pinot Noir	87	Young		
<input type="checkbox"/>		2012		Jann Marugg Flascher Pinot Noir Reserve	87			
<input type="checkbox"/>		2011		Domaine de Balisiers L'ilot Noir	87+	Early		

<input type="checkbox"/>		2010		Weinbau von Tscherner Churer Blauburgunder Gian-Battista	87	Young		
<input type="checkbox"/>		2012		Luthi Weinbau Pinot Noir eleve en Barrique	87+	Young		
<input type="checkbox"/>		2012		Weingut Pircher Pinot Noir Stadtberg Eglisau	87	Young		
<input type="checkbox"/>		2012		Hofkellerei des Fuersten von Lichtenstein Vaduzer Pinot Noir Selection Abt	87	Early		
<input type="checkbox"/>		2013		Marie-Therese Chappaz Grain Pinot Champ Dury	87+	Young		
<input type="checkbox"/>		2013		Cave des Amandiers (Alexandre Deletraz) Pinot Noir	86+	Young		
<input type="checkbox"/>		2012		Cave du Rhodan Salgesch Pinot Noir Grand Cru Hommage	86	Young		
<input type="checkbox"/>		2012		Hofkellerei des Fuersten von Lichtenstein Vaduzer Pinot Noir Selection Bocker	86	Early		
<input type="checkbox"/>		2011		Weingut zum Sternen (Andreas Meier & Co) Kloster Sion Reserve Pinot Noir Klingnau	86	Young		
<input type="checkbox"/>		2013		Weingut Lindenhof Pinot Noir 7 Cepages	86	Early		
<input type="checkbox"/>		2011		Weingut Burkhart Schloss Weinfeld Burgunder non filtre	86+	Young		
<input type="checkbox"/>		2012		Weingut Krebs Pinot Noir Alte Reben	86?	Young		
<input type="checkbox"/>		2011		Domaine de la Republique et Canton de Geneve Pinot Noir	86+	Early		
<input type="checkbox"/>		2010		Cicero Weinbau Pinot Noir M	86	Early		
<input type="checkbox"/>		2012		Chateau d' Auvernier Pinot Noir	85	Early		
<input type="checkbox"/>		2012		Schwarzenbach Weinbau Meilener Pinot Noir Selection	85+	Young		
<input type="checkbox"/>		2012		Andrea & Anita Lauber Weingut Plandaditsch Pinot Noir Barrique	85	Early		
<input type="checkbox"/>		2013		Andre Fontannaz – Cave La Madeleine Balavaud Grand Cru Pinot Noir de Vetroz	84	Early		
<input type="checkbox"/>		2012		Domaine des Muses Pinot Noire Reserve	84	Young		
<input type="checkbox"/>		2012		Les Frères Dutruy Pinot Noir Les Romaines	84	Early		
<input type="checkbox"/>		2012		Cave La Tornale (Jean-Daniel Favre) Domaine de Clavoz Pinot Noir de Sion	84	Young		
<input type="checkbox"/>		2012		Weingut Davaz Flascher Pinot Noir Uris	84	Early		
<input type="checkbox"/>		2013		Hofkellerei des Fuersten von Lichtenstein Vaduzer Pinot Noir Herawingert	84	Mature		
<input type="checkbox"/>		2012		Landolt Weine Schiterberger Blauburgunder Spätlese Barrique	84	Early		