

FOOD & WINE ()

May 1999

A Swiss wine maverick

« Before lunch and dinner, or simply when meeting friends at a café, the Swiss order a trois décis - a three deciliter carafe - of the light, refreshing Chasselas that is the principal white wine of the Lake Geneva area. One of the most esteemed towns in the region is Féchy, and one of the most esteemed winemakers of Féchy is Raymond Paccot.

A fourth-generation winemaker, Paccot is something of a revolutionary in a careful Swiss way. Not only has he planted some of his acreage with Chardonnay and Pinot Noir grapes (80% of the region's vineyards are planted with Chasselas), but to test his theory that a tighter stopper would help maintain Chasselas' youthful freshness, he has begun bottling some of his wines with screw tops instead of corks.

On visit to Paccot's winery, La Colombe, we tasted his award-winning 1994 Bayels both ways. The wine in the screw-top bottle was pale and fragrant, still very much alive after four years. In contrast, the wine in the cork-sealed bottle had turned yellowish and had almost no aroma. " It's finished, because the cork lets in a little air " said Paccot. " But can I sell screw-top wine without hurting my reputation ? " We're betting on it. »