



Travel: Vaud for wine lovers

Whether you drive along the northern shore of Lake Geneva from Nyon round to Aigle, speed along in the tilting train, or even cover some of the distance on foot, you could be forgiven for thinking the only game in town is wine. Sue Style pays a visit



Here in Canton Vaud, the country's second largest wine region, a quarter of all Swiss wine is produced. Everywhere you look, an artful patchwork of carefully tended vines teeters on terraces buttressed by drystone walls, criss-crossed by yellow-signposted walking trails and interspersed with small cobbledstoned villages of old-world charm.

An enchanted land for wine lovers, the vineyards afford spectacular views out across the shimmering lake to France and distant Mont Blanc and the Dents du Midi. Many, particularly between Lausanne and Vevey, rival those of the Douro or the Mosel for giddy steepness and jaw-dropping beauty.

Practically any time of the year you decide to visit – spring and autumn are my favourites – the

Surrounded by some of the most-respected vineyards in Switzerland, Epesses enjoys magical views across Lake Geneva

Fact File

The canton of Vaud has a total of...

3,784

Hectares of vines

66%

(2,498ha) is white

34%

(1,286ha) red

Principal varieties

Chasselas, Gamay, Pinot Noir

'When you age Chasselas from a prime site, it gets dressed up and becomes a jacket-and-tie wine!'

says Blaise Duboux

likelihood is you will stumble upon some kind of wine festival, great or small. Every spring, the Arvinis wine salon (www.arvinis.ch/en/) in Montreux assembles around 200 wine-growers for a full programme of tastings and workshops, while over the Whit weekend (the dates vary annually) it's the turn of Caves Ouvertes when wineries throughout the canton throw open cellar doors for clients to taste and buy.

September sees the annual Lavaux Passion (www.lavauxpassion.ch), a streetfest held in a different village each year offering more opportunities to taste, mingle and meet the wine-growers. This year's event (in Cully) doubles up as a celebration of the 10th anniversary since the Lavaux vineyards were designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site for their remarkable natural beauty. And mark your calendars now for the mother of all wine festivals, the Fête des Vignerons in Vevey, which has taken place approximately every 20 years since 1789 and will be staged next in summer 2019. Auditions have already started for this mind-blowing theatrical performance, which involves a handful of professionals and around 4,500 volunteer musicians, singers and dancers, aged between six and 96 years old, all with some connection to the local wine-growing scene.

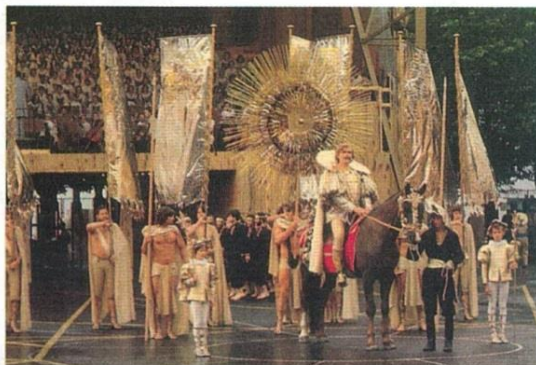
Famous vineyards

The lakeside region divides into three sections. Starting at the western end, La Côte, stretching from close to Geneva around to Morges, is the biggest and most bucolic part. Vineyard holdings are larger here and vines rub shoulders with apple and pear trees.

First up in Founex is Les Frères Dutruy (www.lesfreresdutruy.ch), which offers visits on weekdays to the original property in the village and on Saturdays to the modern winery close by. Julien Dutruy is an irrepressible guide to the domaine's wines and a good example of Switzerland's younger generation of well-travelled winemakers, with two-year stints in Bordeaux and Burgundy under his belt. Unusually for La Côte – a region majoring in Chasselas – the Dutruys' main plantings are of Gamay, Pinot Noir and Gamaret.

Further round the lake at Mont-sur-Rolle, jovial winemaker Yves de Mestral's Domaine de la Maison Blanche (www.domainemaisonblanche.ch) sits on ➤

Right and below: grand theatrical performances are acted out at the Fête des Vignerons





Above: Christophe Chappuis at the family vineyard in Rivaz

How to get there and how to get around

By car, train or plane to Geneva. The vineyards start just outside the city and end at Bex, about 1.5 hours along the lake. Switzerland has one of the most efficient and best integrated public transport services in the world, so using the train, PostBuses and boats to get around within the region is a viable (and restful) option. The Swiss Travel Pass (buy before arrival from outside the country) gives free, unlimited, travel on all public transport. Ask about the local transport card, too – it's given out free by all hotels.

'The Lavaux region is home to some of Switzerland's most venerated vineyards, originally terraced and planted by monks'

a gentle elevation overlooking the lake, surrounded by vines. If the weather is fine, tastings take place in the garden; it's just the place to start testing Chasselas' oft-quoted ability to faithfully reflect the terroir in which it is grown, as seen through the lens of de Mestral's different cuvées of the same grape from various plots (plus a sparkling wine).

The central part, the Lavaux region, extends from Lausanne round to Vevey. This is home to some of Switzerland's most venerated vineyards, originally terraced and planted in the Middle Ages by Cistercian monks and to this day responsible for some of the most elegant and ageworthy Chasselas.

There's a huge concentration of talented wine-growers here (helpfully indicated by small brown signposts), among them Domaine Chappuis (www.domainechappuis.ch) in Rivaz, a family-run estate established in 1335 – Christophe Chappuis belongs to the 22nd generation to make wine here. You can sign up for the 'Lavaux Experience', which involves a morning in the vineyard where he explains the tasks of the season followed by a tasting, lunch and three bottles to take home; or simply settle down in the cosy tasting room and work your way through his range of superb Chasselas and stunning red blends.

Lavaux snapshot

If you run out of time, or just fail to secure an appointment with one or other wine-growers, Vinorama, a wine bar-cum-shop in Rivaz will come to the rescue (see 'Dine like a local'). The brainchild of Christophe Chappuis's father Vincent, it gathers wines from around 150 vigneron in Lavaux all under one roof. The visit starts with a short video, which explains the winemaker's year, then you can taste from the weekly-changing offer of open wines and/or buy a bottle to go.

Up the hill in the village of Epesses, biodynamic grower Blaise Duboux is another master of Chasselas and a firm believer in its ability to age ('when you age Chasselas from a prime site, it gets dressed up and becomes a jacket-and-tie wine!'). He's also an ardent defender of Plant Robez (aka Plant Robert), a Gamay clone thought to have arrived long ago from Burgundy, which took root here, then all but

Château d'Aigle is situated just minutes from Lake Geneva



WHERE TO STAY

L'Auberge du Raisin, Cully

A 10-room hotel in the centre of the lovely village of Cully owned by the Gauer family of hoteliers, groaning with old-world charm. There's a traditional, wood-panelled restaurant and a cosy cellar serving raclette during autumn and winter. The Auberge almost backs onto the quayside from where boats depart. www.aubergeduraisin.ch

Hôtel des Voyageurs, Lausanne

A small, atmospheric hotel in an artfully modernised Art Nouveau building, which won't break the bank. It's in the heart of the old town, close to the metro and within walking distance of the city's many excellent wine bars (try Yatus) and eating spots, such as the buzzy Brasserie Montbenon (www.brasserie-demontbenon.ch). www.voyageurs.ch



Villa Lavaux, Grandvaux

Classy, 4-star boutique B&B on the edge of the village set in the midst of the vineyards, hosted by a charming Belgian/American couple. Cows graze in the field below the house and it will take your jaw a day to recover from the views from the terrace round to Lausanne and out across the shimmering lake to distant Mont Blanc.
www.villalavaux.ch

Auberge de la Gare, Grandvaux

A small (five-room) jewel of a hotel perched on a little balcony above the lake, owned and run by Raymonde and Philippe Delessert. The restaurant is known for miles around for its delicious, seasonally inspired, fairly priced food. As the name suggests, it really is the village's station hotel and the train stops right outside.
www.aubergegrandvaux.ch



Auberge de la Gare, Grandvaux

My perfect day in the Lavaux vineyards

For sheer perfection, abandon the car and use a combination of a short boat ride (check timings at www.cgn.ch), a bit of a walk and a bus to get back to base in the evening. (If you prefer to drive, start in Rivaz, drive to Epesses and finish in Cully.) Start in Cully for the short boat trip to Rivaz – just time enough to lean back and gape at the Lavaux vineyards stacked steeply up to the skyline. On arrival in Rivaz, walk up (five minutes) to Domaine Chappuis in the village where Christophe Chappuis makes superlative Chasselas, as well as fine red blends. From here, take off on the well-marked walking trail up to the village of Epesses, a 45-minute walk through some of the world's most spectacular terraced vineyards.

In Epesses, it's time to settle down for a leisurely lunch at the aptly named Auberge du Vigneron

(www.aubergeduvigneron.ch/) a favourite haunt of wine-growers with a selection of seasonal dishes chalked up on the blackboard – with luck you can sit on the terrace high above the vineyards looking down on the lake. At 3pm the wine bar-deli Les 11 Terres (www.11terres.ch) opens – owned by 11 of the village's wine-growers (including top talents Blaise Duboux and Luc Massy), it's the place to taste a selection of their wines and stock up on local cheese and cured meats.

Walk back down to Cully (about 15 minutes) or catch the PostBus (check timings at www.cff.ch) and check in at the Auberge du Raisin, where you can feast on traditional Swiss dishes, lake fish fresh from the local fisherman, Monsieur Monbaron, or grilled meats from the rotisserie and a wine list studded with Lavaux's best.



Above: you can taste the weekly-changing offer of open wines at Vinorama, a wine bar-cum shop in Rivaz

disappeared in the 1960s and was resuscitated in 2002 by Duboux and a band of believers.

The final piece in the lakeside vineyard puzzle is the Chablais region, spread out along the right bank of the Rhône between the Château de Chillon and Bex, on the threshold of neighbouring Valais. Badoux, established in Aigle by Henri Badoux in 1908 and now part of the Schenk group, is famous for its best-selling Chasselas, Aigle Les Murailles, whose iconic label, painted by Frédéric Rouge in 1918 and unchanged ever since, shows the green lizard that basks in the estate's steep shale/gravel terraces above the town. It's their bread-and-butter wine, whose huge sales allow oenologist Daniel Dufaux to have fun with small cuvées of other whites (Viognier, Pinot Gris), reds (Pinot Noir, Merlot, Malbec, Cabernet Franc) and even an orange wine from Chasselas named Hommage; many of these can be tasted in the newly created wine bar and shop adjoining the winery.

The best part about visiting the Lake Geneva wine region is that distances are short – from Nyon to Aigle it's barely 100 kilometres, or one hour speeding along the motorway or using the excellent train service. But speed, of course, is hardly the point. It's the chance to slow down and wander gently through the vineyards, stopping along the way to familiarise yourself with the landscape, meet the people – and taste the very special wines.

*Sue Style for Decanter
(in association with Lake Geneva Region Tourist Office)*

A dozen great buys

The Lake Geneva Region is distinguished by its devotion to Chasselas. The region's prodigious diversity of soils and terroirs – the product of glaciers, rivers and mountains – gives variety and complexity to what can justifiably be called Switzerland's signature grape. The climate is greatly influenced by the lake, which creates ideal conditions for vine-growing and winemaking. In Lavaux, the most celebrated sub-region between Lausanne and Vevey, they talk of the vineyards being bathed in three suns: firstly the direct sunlight, then the reflected rays from the lake and, finally, the heat absorbed by the extensive

network of stone walls, which return their warmth to the vineyards during the night.

While Chasselas takes the lion's share of wine production in volume terms, other white wine varieties are increasingly found. These include Viognier, Pinot Gris and Chardonnay, often designated *spécialités* to distinguish them from the pre-eminent grape. Classic Chasselas is light (hovering around the 12% mark) with fugitive floral aromas and a slight prickle from the (naturally present) CO₂ in the bottle, which gives it a lift and makes it an appealing aperitif wine. This style of Chasselas – usually a domaine's entry-level wine



Domaine Chappuis, La Guenietta 1er Grand Cru, Chasselas, Lavaux 2015 94

N/A UK www.domainechappuis.ch

Christophe Chappuis' top Chasselas (and Dézaley's sole premier grand cru) from old, low-yielding vines grown on steep clay and gravel slopes. Deep citrus aromas (marmalade) and mineral concentration. A great wine that will repay ageing (and decanting). **Drink** 2017-2032 **Alc** 12.8%



Blaise Duboux, Dézaley Haut de Pierre, Chasselas, Lavaux 2015 92

£34.70 (2011) **Gauntleys Fine Wines**

Duboux's single-vineyard Dézaley from old vines grown on sandstone on vertiginous 45° slopes. Deep golden, fugitive quince blossom aromas, fully dry, combining curves with class – a supremely elegant Chasselas that will age well. **Drink** 2017-2026 **Alc** 13.2%



Domaine La Colombe, La Colombe Grise, Pinot Gris, La Côte 2016 90

N/A UK www.lacolombe.ch

Pinot Gris is gaining ground in Chasselas-dominated La Côte. This one, from 50-year-old vines farmed biodynamically, is aged in stainless steel and used barriques – fresh, fully dry, closer in style to a Baden Grauburgunder than an Alsace Pinot Gris. **Drink** 2017-2019 **Alc** 13.5%



Frères Dutruy, Chasselas Cuvée Spéciale, La Côte 2016 89

N/A UK www.lesfreresdutruy.ch

Sprightly, entry-level Chasselas from the Dutruy brothers' spanking-new cellars. Alluring bouquet, a touch of carbon dioxide and a little leaner than its sunnier sisters along the lake in Lavaux. *Un vin de plaisir!* **Drink** 2017-2019 **Alc** 12.2%



Badoux, Aigle Les Murailles, Chasselas, Chablais 2015 88

£31.94 **Alpine Wines**

A true Chasselas classic grown on steep shale/gravel terraces above the town of Aigle and complete with the iconic green lizard label. Gently floral nose, good minerality and a memorable, slightly bitter finish – think Switzerland in a glass. **Drink** 2017-2018 **Alc** 13%



Domaine Maison Blanche, Mont-sur-Rolle Grand Cru, Chasselas, La Côte 2015 88

POA **Alpine Wines**

The clay-limestone soils around Mont-sur-Rolle give this a bit more heft than most in La Côte. Delicate, floral with gentle minerality, a good appetite-sharpener or with lake-fish, the regional speciality. **Drink** 2017-2018 **Alc** 12%

– is best drunk within a year of bottling, preferably on one of the many terraces overlooking the lake, possibly accompanying a plate of *filets de perches*, Switzerland's favourite dish of fried lake-fish fillets. More 'serious' and structured wines with the ability to age up to 20 years come from the greatest terroirs of the central Lavaux region. Many of them feature in sommelier Jérôme Aké Bédà's seminal book *Les 99 Chasselas à boire avant de mourir* (99 Chasselas to drink before you die).

Red wines are by no means forgotten, with Gamay and Pinot Noir leading the pack. The over-productive, less interesting clones planted a generation ago are gradually being replaced by selections better suited to the terroir and climate, and winemakers are learning to work with – and, perhaps more importantly, without – oak. The result has been a noteworthy increase in the quality of the region's reds, which regularly win plaudits and prizes in prestigious local competitions, such as the annual Grand Prix du Vin Suisse, or international contests like the Decanter World Wine Awards.

Look out, too, for Gamaret and Garanoir, two siblings created by the Swiss Viticultural Research Station (now at Changins), each of them a Gamay Noir x Reichensteiner cross and approved for

'The climate is greatly influenced by the lake, which creates ideal conditions for vine-growing and winemaking'

planting in the 1990s. Gamaret is valued for its resistance to rot, good colour, supple tannins and relatively low alcohol, while Garanoir ripens earlier, is also resistant to rot with more fruity, spicy qualities and higher alcohol than its sibling. Although sometimes vinified separately, they are most often blended, either together, or paired variously with Gamay, Pinot Noir, Merlot or Cabernet Franc (the latter two are also found as single varieties).

This is a warmly hospitable region with a mix of old-established, but young-at-heart growers and a younger generation who travel and taste widely, and are not afraid to experiment with new varieties and new production methods. Most wine-growers are multilingual, love to practise their English and relish the relative novelty of introducing their wines to visitors from abroad.

Sue Style for Decanter
(in association with Lake Geneva Region Tourist Office)

For UK stockist details, see page 97



Domaine Chappuis, Dézaley Grand Cru Ambroisie, Pinot Noir, Gamay, Merlot, Syrah, Lavaux 2015 92

N/A UK www.domainechappuis.ch

From vines grown at the foot of a 4km wall in Dézaley vineyard, this explosive blend of Pinot Noir, Gamay, Merlot and Syrah allies ripe red fruit aromas with impressive structure – an ambrosial delight. **Drink** 2017-2030 **Alc** 13.5%



Frères Dutruy, Gamay Les Romaines Grande Réserve, La Côte 2015 92

£39.10 Hedonism Wines

Award-winning Gamay from 45-year-old vines grown on clay-limestone, yielding tiny, concentrated grapes (a proportion whole-bunch fermented). Floral (violets), curvaceous and succulent – would give a top Morgon or Moulin-à-Vent a run for its money. **Drink** 2017-2020 **Alc** 13.6%



Blaise Duboux, Plant Robez, Gamay, Lavaux 2015 91

N/A UK www.blaiseduboux.ch

A rare Vaudois variant of Gamay with an illustrious history, resuscitated by Duboux and grown on light soils around Epesses. A mouthful of juicy fruit (sour cherries, blackberries), fresh in spite of higher than usual alcohol due to the hot vintage – pair with lamb tagine. **Drink** 2017-2021 **Alc** 14.5%



Badoux, Lettres de Noblesse Merlot d'Yvorne, Chablais 2014 90

£37.20 (2011) Alpine Wines

A modern-style Merlot for Daniel Dufaux (vines planted 2008) – a product of whole-bunch fermentation with only indigenous yeasts. Deep black cherry, concentrated and spicily complex.

Drink 2017-2024 **Alc** 15%



Cave de la Côte, Expression Gamaret-Garanoir, La Côte 2015 89

£18.98 (2014) Alpine Wines

A harmonious, juicy-fruit blend combining two of Switzerland's home-bred varieties. Ruby red with wild bilberry aromas, tannic but supple with an attractive twist of bitterness in the tail. An excellent choice to serve with spicy food. **Drink** 2017-2020 **Alc** 14%



Domaine Maison Blanche, Mondeuse Noire & Pinot Noir, La Côte 2011 89

£27.08 (2008) Alpine Wines

Yves de Mestral adds Pinot to his succulent blend to 'add warmth and elegance to a rather rustic Mondeuse', a variety once common around Lake Geneva. Sweetly perfumed, discreetly oaked (two years in used barrels), a low-alcohol mouthful of deliciousness. **Drink** 2017-2019 **Alc** 12%

Dine like a local

Five Lake Geneva insiders pick their favourite places in the region to wine and dine



Jérôme Aké-Béda

Sommelier and maître d'hôtel,
Auberge de l'Onde, Saint-Saphorin



Blaise Duboux

Organic-biodynamic wine
grower in Epesses, Lavaux



Restaurant Là-Haut, Chardonne

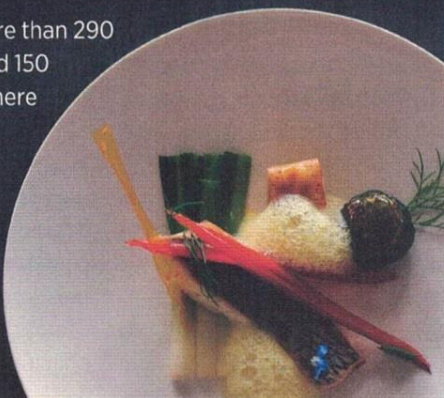
'A new restaurant, opened six months ago by young Mathieu Bruno, who was a chef de partie with us for a while and has now struck out on his own with his Québécoise wife, Milène. He cooks creative, seasonal cuisine and his wine list includes many of my favourites with a handful by the glass (such as Pierre Fonjallaz's Dézaley Réserve) – plus there's a gorgeous view from up there (hence 'là-haut'), high above the vineyards.'

<http://restaurant-la-haut.ch>

Lavaux Vinorama, Rivaz

'This wine bar and shop offers more than 290 labels (red and white) from around 150 different vignerons. Every week there are eight different Chasselas from various growers and terroirs to taste, and every two weeks a fresh selection of eight red wines and four 'specialities', such as Pinot Gris, Pinot Blanc, Viognier or Chardonnay.'

www.lavaux-vinorama.ch



Les 11 Terres, Epesses

'A wine bar and shop right here on our main street belonging to 11 wine growers in the village (myself included) and designed as a showcase for our wines. It's open from 3pm until 7.30pm (closed Tuesdays and Wednesdays during the winter and spring), and a bit longer at the weekend. You can drop in, have a (Riedel) glass of wine and a planchette (board) of organic cheeses, cured cold meats or smoked duck breast from a local farmer. Check the website to see which of the 60-odd wines in stock are offered by the glass that week.'

www.11terres.ch

Auberge du Vigneron, Epesses

'I also have a soft spot for our village auberge, just along the street from 11 Terres. It's run by a young couple, Laurent and Estelle Frutig, who serve food that is simple and good, with bistro-type dishes chalked up on a blackboard (typical Vaudois smoked sausage with lentils, lake fish with *frites*, beef tartare, crème brûlée with pistachios...), accompanied by a good selection of local wines by the glass.'

www.aubergeduvigneron.ch

Joelle Nebbe-Mornod

Swiss-born owner of Alpine Wines,
a major importer of Swiss wines to the UK



Restaurant La Pêcherie, La Plage, Allaman

'Whenever I'm in the Lake Geneva Region I have to have my fix of delicious *filets de perches* [perch fillets from the lake, served with *frites* and tartar sauce]! Every Vaudois has strong opinions on who does the best, but this unpretentious little lakeside place in Allaman is one of my favourites. There is other fish on the menu, too – such as char, whitefish and pike – and the restaurant is right on the water, so the view is fabulous and the fish couldn't be

fresher. There's a short wine list, mainly from La Côte.'
www.la-pecherie-allaman.ch

Hôtel de la Gare, Lucens

'This is a hotel-restaurant I love to visit when on a wine-buying trip in Canton of Vaud. Owned and run by Pierrick and Jane-Lise Suter, it offers good food and an outstanding Swiss wine list, which (unusually for Switzerland, where people are very faithful to their local wines) covers the whole country. (The 2017 *Gault Millau* Switzerland guide ranks it among the 10 best lists in the country.) It's a bit off the beaten track, but has simple rooms so you can drink and not drive – or, as it's by the station, if you time it right, you can return to Lausanne by train.'

www.hoteldelagarelucens.ch

Brice Gauer

Manager, Auberge du Raisin
in Cully and member of the
Gauer hotel dynasty



Le 3C at Hotel Les Trois Couronnes, Vevey

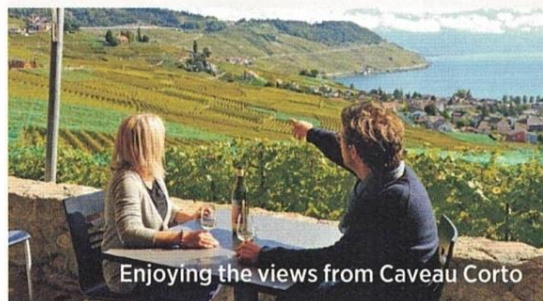
'The Hotel des Trois Couronnes in Vevey has a Michelin-starred restaurant, which I like, too, but for a glass of Calamin [Chasselas from the smallest Lavaux appellation] and some mezze or a plate of pasta or vegetable tajine, combined with uninterrupted lakeside views from the huge terrace, Le 3C Brasserie is very hard to beat.'

www.hoteltroiscouronnes.ch

Caveau Corto, Grandvaux

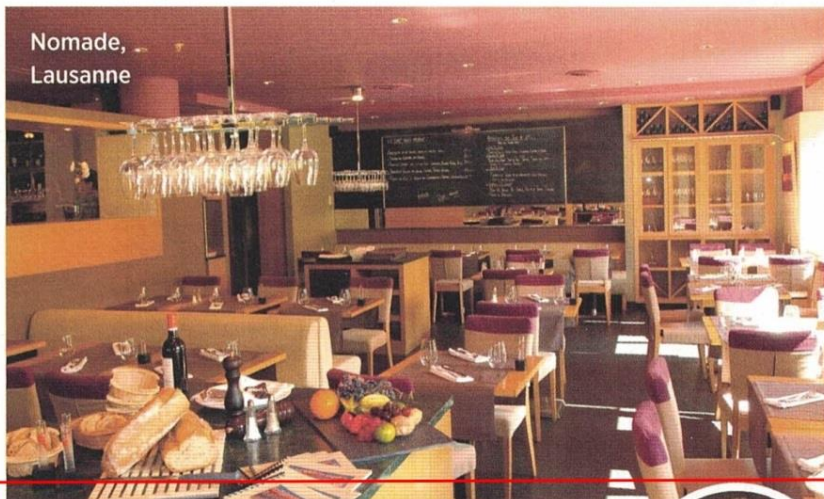
'One of my favourite places for meeting up with friends over a glass of Calamin [the most local Chasselas appellation] is Caveau Corto in Grandvaux, named in honour of the legendary character Corto Maltese, whose story was illustrated by Hugo Pratt, a resident for many years in the village. Open at weekends from April to November, it has spectacular terraces with views down onto the vineyards and across the lake. It's jointly owned by 12 Grandvaux winegrowers, who each take a turn to staff the place and feature their wines for that weekend, along with simple plates of food.'

www.caveaucorto.ch



Enjoying the views from Caveau Corto

Nomade, Lausanne



Raymond Paccot

Oenologist at Domaine La Colombe in Féchy,
La Côte



Chef Carlo Crisci's
dishes at Le Cerf and
La Fleur de Sel are a
feast for the eye as
well as the palate

Restaurant Le Cerf and Brasserie La Fleur de Sel, Cossonay

'We're great gourmets (and gourmands!) in our household and it's tough to limit myself to choosing just two places, but this is one of my favourites. Chef Carlo Crisci does terrifically inventive food – I bet he'd go down a storm in London if he ever decided to set up there! For a simpler, more accessible menu that gives you a sense of the chef's creativity, there's also the brasserie [with a Michelin red bib]. The wine list is faithful to the local crus (including some of ours!) – it's a great way to discover new wines when visiting an area.'

www.lecerf-carlocrisci.ch

Nomade, Lausanne

'A restaurant, wine bar and shop in the lively Flon area of Lausanne's old town, where you can have a full meal, or just the *plat du jour* or a plate of tapas – always packed, great atmosphere and some interesting wines by the glass are on offer.'

<http://restaurantnomade.ch>