

Created by: Debra C. Argen and Edward F. Nesta

Domaine Zweifel - The Art of Making Swiss Wine

Touring the [Domaine Zweifel](#) vineyards in Zurich-Höngg, Switzerland with Master Vintner Urs Zweifel, was an informative and very tasty way to spend an afternoon.



It was a perfect sunny and warm October morning in 2006 when we went to visit Domaine Zweifel located just outside the city of Zurich in Zurich-Höngg. Although Zurich is the largest wine producing area in eastern Switzerland, it seemed hard to believe that the vineyards were so close to the city center.

As wine lovers, there is always something very exciting about touring a vineyard. Seeing the grapes hanging from the vines with such promise some years, and such disappointment in others, you know that being a vineyard owner requires optimism, persistence, courage, and most importantly hard work.



The Zweifel family knows all about hard work and growing grapes, which they have done for over 560 years, and today the company is run by third and fourth generations of the Zweifel family. Fourth generation Urs Zweifel told us that Emil and Paul Zweifel first started selling wine in 1898, however by 1920, mildew and phylloxera stopped the grape production and the company expanded by producing apple juice. By 1946, the company had the most modern apple juice factory, with expansion continuing in the 1950s when Urs' grandfather bought a potato chip company from a cousin who died. Today Zweifel produces the most potato chips in Switzerland. In 1968 his grandfather started planting Pinot Noir, Pinot Gris, Räuschling, and Riesling, in new vineyards that he acquired. In 1970s Urs' mother started a wine shop, and today they have 4 shops in the area selling their own wines, as well as international wines. By the 1980s, the family sold the apple juice production, and concentrated on their wines.



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As he talked, we walked through the vineyard planted on a slope beside the picturesque church of Höngg Hiller overlooking the city of Zurich, stopping now and then to take a look at the rows of grape varieties and sampling a Pinot Gris grape still warm from the vine basking in the mid-Autumn sun. To determine if the grapes are ripe, you must sample a grape to see the color of the seeds, which are brown when ripe.



Having visited many vineyards, one thing that we noticed is Domaine Zweifel looks different from other vineyards where usually there are neat rows of dirt between the vines, whereas at Zweifel, they let the grass grow between the rows of vines to prevent erosion. When it comes to grape growing, Domaine Zweifel believes in taking a very hands-on approach by removing the leaves from the vines, pruning the canes, and picking the grapes all by hand.



In 2006, the weather was hot in July, with a drastic change in August with wet and cooler temperatures, and the production was lower this year on the 37-year old vines, but good quality.



Domaine Zweifel grows many grape varieties including Riedel Blanc, picked for making wine and also for ice wine. We tasted a Räuschling grape with distinct lemon and slightly smoky flavor, and learned about the grape Müller-Thurgau, a cross between Riesling and Sylvaner.



After touring the vineyard, it was time to explore the red and white wine cellars. It was the end of the

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harvesting and they were pressing Shiraz and Carmine Noir (a cross between Cabernet Sauvignon and Pinot Noir) together in small quantities. Urs explained that they press the grapes and then leave the mash for 1-2 days, stirring the mash 3-4 times per 24-hours, and then when the mixture starts fermenting, they only stir 2 times per 24 hours, followed by transferring the juice to either stainless steel tanks or wood barrels. Unable to resist, we leaned over and took in the deep aroma of the Carmine Noir.

Enough "sightseeing," it was now time to get serious and do some very new barrel and stainless steel tank tasting which will help predict the future possibilities of the wine. The first wine that we tried was Müller-Thurgau, which was acidic, fresh, light and exhibited fruitiness, and will remain in a stainless steel tank for 6-8 months.

Our next barrel tasting was a Räuschling, (close to an Elba), with a lemon and smoky nose, with tart citrus on the palate, that will remain in stainless steel for 6-8 months, and they will leave the yeast in from October - January to give "mouthful."

Our third selection was Sauvignon Blanc, which Domaine Zweifel started growing 10 years ago. This was a very young wine, showing a nice level of acidity, but still needed aging.



Winemaking is all about experimentation, they tried French and American oak barrels, but now use Swiss oak barrels, they tried using silicone corks and found that with silicone, the shelf life was only 3 years because the silicone let oxygen into the bottle, and now they use only natural corks or screw tops. Another disadvantage of using silicone corks is that you lose the aromas, while the aromas remain with screw tops and natural corks. Switzerland has a long history using screw tops, usually for inexpensive wines, although now they also used for more expensive wines. However, unlike natural corks, where the wine will continue to age a little more in the bottle, with screw tops the wine has to be "finished" when it is bottled.

We continued our tank sampling with Pinot Gris from the vineyard where we had just tasted the grapes, and tasted sweetness, more body, and aromas. It was very interesting and educational to be able to sample wine so early in the process, when they will remain in the tanks for 4-6 additional months.

Our last white selection was from a new vineyard only 4-5 years old located close to Zurich, a Johanner, a cross from Germany between Scheurebe and Johanner, which had nice aromas and a peppermint nose, with young fruit, that was very fresh on the palate.



Moving on to the red cellar barrel tasting, we tasted the 2004 URSUS, Urs' special wine of barrel aged Pinot Noir, Shiraz, and Cabernet Cubin that would be bottled in 2 weeks, and had a lovely nose, and after one taste, we knew that this wine would cellar well and be a stunner.

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We continued tasting with a Pinot Noir from 2005, and learned that there are 100 different clones of Pinot Noir, and 4-5 clones grown in Switzerland. This Pinot Noir clone was from Burgundy, to make a Burgundy style wine grown in Zurich, which exhibited lots of tannins, pepper and spice.

Our third tasting was a Pinot Noir from 2005 from another region, which exhibited more fruit, black cherries, and dark berries.

Urs told us what he enjoys about making wine is that you influence the product from the start to the finish, and although harvest time is special, after the harvest is when the art of making wine begins, and ever year is exciting and different.

Our last barrel tasting was a Cabernet Cubin and Saint Laurent (from Austria) from 2005, with a rich deep color. We tried the Cuvée Ausserfeld 2005, aged in 4-5 year old French Oak barrels made in Italy (in Gamba), which still required 1-2 more years of bottle aging.

In 1996, Domaine Zweifel made a new cellar, and now they use the old cellar as a museum, which is an interesting treasure of history. In addition to wine, they also make fortified wine, organic wine, brandy, spirits, and Centenaire III Z, which is their top of the line Pinot Noir.

After touring the vineyard and tasting in the cellars, we were ready to sit down and have a relaxing lunch in their restaurant **Wein & Dein**, which opened in 2002, where they match the wine to the food and offer two different wines by the glass for every course.

Read about **Wein & Dein** in the **Restaurants** section and other articles on **Domaine Zweifel 'sLattenberg Rauschling 2005** in the [Wine Cellar](#) section.



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