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Chasselas Coming On

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 Posted on *December 4, 2019* by *Jochen Erler*,



*Having first tasted it as a student in the 60s, **Jochen Erler** senses a serious upswing in Chasselas' credentials.*

Chasselas is the most planted white grape in Switzerland, where it is also called Fendant (in Valais), while in Germany, it carries the name Gutedel, where it is the oldest grape, along with Elbling. The grape's French name originates from the region of Chasselas, where the French first planted it. It is a prolific *vitis vinifera* variety that delivers wine for easy drinking, with some fruitiness and little in the way of acidity. Mainly planted in Switzerland and in the southern part of Baden/Germany, it is in these two places where the competitions of the grape's wines takes place: the Mondial du Chasselas in the French part of Switzerland, and the Gutedel Cup in Freiburg/Baden.



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In the 60s, as a student in Lausanne, I made my first acquaintance with Chasselas. I visited some of the small wineries in the hills near Lake Geneva, where I found only one producer whose wine I liked. A few years later I took some of his bottles to New York. As a newly appointed member of staff at the UN, I was permitted to import the contents of my modest wine cellar tax-free. However, the Chasselas did not like being transported in the ship's belly, while my wines from the Mosel/Saar/Ruwer area and from Württemberg showed good development in the bottle. Many years later, I learned that this was due to Chasselas' low acidity and the solid structure of Riesling.

After almost 60 years of wine tasting, my participation as a jury member at this year's Mondial du Chasselas offered me an opportunity to better understand this grape. As I remember, at the time of my studies in Lausanne, most Fendants were thin and extremely neutral, presumably due to over-cropping and the lack of ripeness. At the competition, I was very much impressed by the fruitiness and minerality of a great number of wines. Although some of the 2018 wines had not yet settled, they will certainly benefit from some more time in the bottle. The greatest surprise was the excellent condition of all the old vintages, with only one exception (1987) that my team of jurors tasted: 2008, 2007, 2005, 2002 and 1997. For me, this is proof that good crop management and careful work in the cellar can also produce top wines for long ageing from the Chasselas grape.

Unfortunately, I was not able to attend the celebration that was held after the contest, which would have given me the opportunity to identify the wines tasted by my team. However, I learned that 86% of the 867 wines submitted to the competition had been of Swiss origin, while the other wines were from Germany, France and a few from overseas. I am now looking forward to next year's Gutedel Cup, and hopefully again to the Mondial.

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