



Harvesting wine in the vineyards of Geneva

in a wooden-raftered cellar where the smell of wine and cheese mingle with wood smoke from the fireplace.

On a late October morning, the sun shining brightly, Anne and Bernard were among the pickers deftly gathering up bunches of Chasselas grapes. The hot summer, the light rainfall and the cool autumn promise an exquisite 2016 vintage. At an elevation of 480 metres on fields sloping southwards towards the Rhône valley overlooking the Alps, the carefully trimmed vines thrive on the moraine left over from the melting glaciers of the Ice Age. An underlying layer of sandstone, limestone and silt lend their flavour to the Chasselas, a distinctively local variety of grape, nicknamed Les Crécelles by Bernard, the cellar's grower-oenologist.

Apart from Chasselas, Domaine des Charmes also produces a lively Chardonnay along with an exquisite Aligoté, Pinot Blanc and Savagnin. But the bouquet and flavour of the Sauvignon Blanc is truly breath-taking. And then there are the reds, such as the superb Pinot Noir "Le Clos 1er Cru", a heady Gamaret and the silky smooth Merlot and, among which the Baron Rouge, created from the Gamay grapes, has become a bestseller, picking up several awards along the way.

Autumn brings in a waft of cool, crisp air, quite welcome following an uncharacteristically hot summer – the hottest in recorded history across Europe and many parts of the world. In Geneva's vineyards, as the leaves gradually drain their green, turning yellow and rust before giving up their place altogether on the uniformly and meticulously trimmed bushes, there is a flurry of activity to pick the grapes at precisely the right moment of ripeness. The harvest season began on slopes rolling off the Jura mountains in late September, bringing in a rich haul marking the 2016 vintage. It promises to be very special.

Anne and Bernard Conne, now joined by their son Olivier, have lovingly nurtured the exquisite collection of wines in the Domaine des Charmes in Peissy, a charming hamlet outside the city of Geneva in the wine growing area of Satigny. Anne, an architect, has creatively converted a barn where the family lives across from the 17th century building which houses the vats and barrels where the wines ferment and mature – and which can be imbibed



Constant upgrading and innovation of viticulture methods have resulted in more eco-friendly processes of cultivation. "We have always used bio-technology in our vineyards," said Anne, pointing to the grass growing in between the neat rows of vines. "We have now succeeded in eliminating the use of herbicides by introducing a system this year that allows us to plough the soil underneath the vines." No doubt, this process will enhance the favourable reaction of the wines on the palette as well.

Peissy is among many of Geneva's wine growing villages which open their doors on the Caves Ouvertes weekend in late May when worshippers of Bacchus descend in hordes to imbibe the wines of the region. Dardagny and Russin on the western edges of Geneva join with the hamlets of Satigny and Collex-Bossy further east in heralding a summer of wine tasting.

On 5 November 2016, Peissy was exclusively host to the Fête de la Saint-Martin, its patron saint. Legend has it that St. Martin, who hailed from the Abbey of Marmoutier in the Loire valley of France, inadvertently pioneered modern techniques of viticulture as his faithful but hungry ass grazed in the vineyards and munched on the grapes, stunting the growth of the vines. As we now know, the

trimming techniques in vogue today that stunt the growth of the vines produce the juiciest grapes.

The fête is celebrated by imbibing the newest vintage while feasting on a variety of sausages along with potato and cheese gratin cooked in huge vats over wood fires fed by old vines. Fresh grape juice, lightly fermented, is on tap. The deep baritone notes of the Swiss alpenhorn waft over the village. And the friar St. Martin, dressed in his traditional robes, presides over the festivities along with his trusted ass to bless the devotees of wine.

And so, as the wintry nights set in, what better than to retire with a bottle of Le Clos to the fireside and sit back and have the flames warm your hands – and the wine warm the cockles of your heart.

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