

# WHO'S WHO IN SWITZERLAND

Although Switzerland is known for chocolate, watches and skiing, it also boasts a thriving wine culture. Yves Beck reports on who the most significant people in the industry are.



Switzerland is a country with four official languages: German in the north, Italian in the south, French in the west and a little Romansh. Not surprisingly, these four languages signify four different cultural influences. In the north, wine lovers are happy to indulge in wines from Italy, France and Spain, or even further afield. In the west, wine – mostly French, naturally – is an integral part of daily life. It's in this region where the majority of Switzerland's own production takes place. In the Italian-speaking part, local wines hold pride of place, along with wines from Italy.

Altogether, Switzerland has 15,000 ha of vines and six official wine regions. The citizens of this prosperous country drink about 36 L per year per capita, two thirds of which retails from between 15.00CHF (\$15.75) to 34.00CHF per bottle. The wine market is very developed and wine consumers are knowledgeable.

## Most significant wine retailer

Coop, a cooperative, is Switzerland's largest wine retailer, with a turnover of 500m Swiss francs (\$525m) per year for wine. The group has more than 1,120 outlets and employs 75,000 people. Altogether, the assortment it and its subsidiaries offer includes more than 850 wines from all over the world. Its Internet wine platform, Mondovino.ch, offers customers 1,200 wines from more than 50 countries, and

has achieved an annual turnover of 25m CHF. A selection of wines sold by Coop is regularly offered both in stores and at wine trade fairs.

## Most significant wine publications

With more than 98,500 printed copies, Vinum is Europe's largest-circulation wine magazine. The authors write from Europe's major winegrowing regions, ensuring a high information value and authentic coverage of the respective terroirs. Each edition (Germany, German-speaking Switzerland, French-speaking Switzerland and Spain) has a distinct local editorial colour, showing that the publisher is taking market differences and different mentalities into account. The chief editor is Thomas Vaterlaus. [www.vinum.info](http://www.vinum.info)

The Schweizerische Weinzeitung ('Swiss Wine Newspaper') is 121 years old. It contains intelligent, entertaining articles that include reports from around the world of wine, including Switzerland, Europe and overseas, along with reports of wineries and their owners, and profiles of wine connoisseurs. There are good insider tips, and wines are tasted, described and evaluated. The photography is good. The chief editor is Wolfram Meister. [www.schweizerische-weinzeitung.ch](http://www.schweizerische-weinzeitung.ch)

Vinifera-Mundi was created in May 2009 by Jean-François Guyard. The objective of this

independent online wine review, aimed at an international audience, is to deliver both basic and comprehensive information about wine. Vinifera-Mundi consists of a team of five volunteer journalists, who all personally assume the costs associated with this activity. [www.vinifera-mundi.ch](http://www.vinifera-mundi.ch)

## Most significant sommelier

Paolo Basso, winner of the 'Best Sommelier of the World' title in 2013, is world renowned for his extraordinary palate and experience in the field of fine and rare wines. He is an internationally active consultant for luxury hotel groups and airlines, and helps to promote Swiss wines in collaboration with Swiss Wine Promotion. Basso is one of only five sommeliers in the world to have won both the European and global titles for 'Best Sommelier' and among the rare few sommeliers to have reached the final level of an international competition eight times. He won the title of best Sommelier of Switzerland in 1997, of best Sommelier of Europe in 2010, and of world champion in 2013. [www.paolobasso.ch](http://www.paolobasso.ch)

## Most influential wine writers

René Gabriel is Switzerland's most famous wine writer. The German-language critic belongs to the best Bordeaux critics worldwide. Until 2005, Gabriel was buying director at Mövenpick – a Swiss group of companies centred around hospitality and gastronomy – for 15 years. He runs his own company, Weingabriel LLC, and focuses on wine trips to France, Austria, Spain, New Zealand and South Africa. He also regularly organises prestigious wine tastings and wine auctions. Gabriel regularly writes about wines from all over the world in newspapers, magazines and online. [www.weingabriel.ch](http://www.weingabriel.ch)

Zurich-based Chandra Kurt is one of Switzerland's foremost wine writers. She has written more than 20 wine books, including Weinseller, the annual wine guide that has rated the core wine assortments of the major Swiss retailers



**Paolo Basso is acknowledged as one of the wine world's greatest sommeliers, renowned for his palate and expertise.**

since 1998. She contributes on a regular basis to leading national and international newspapers. She is a member of the Circle of Wine Writers in London and has worked in collaboration with Hugh Johnson, Tom Stevenson and Stuart Pigott. She is active internationally as a wine consultant; for example, with Swiss International Air Lines. [www.chandrakurt.com](http://www.chandrakurt.com)

Jacques Perrin is founder and director of Cave SA (Club des Amateurs de Vins Exquis), which selects and imports wine. He has been a member of the Grand Jury Européen since its founding in 1996 and is chief editor of Vinifera. He also acts as a consultant for friends producing wine and runs two wine blogs: [www.jacquesperrin.ch](http://www.jacquesperrin.ch) and [blog.cavesa.ch](http://blog.cavesa.ch).

### Most significant wine journalists

Pierre-Emmanuel Buss is a parliamentary reporter at the newspaper Le Temps. Passionate about wine, he has been in charge of wine news since 2010. He also writes a weekly wine column. Buss has authored two books on Swiss wines in collaboration with the Swiss sommelier of the year (2014) Jérôme Aké Beda: *Guide To the Best Winemakers of Switzerland* (2011) and *99 Chasselas to Drink Before You Die* (2014). [www.letemps.ch](http://www.letemps.ch)

Peter Keller is wine editor at the NZZ am Sonntag newspaper. He also runs the online portal [www.nzz.ch/wein-keller](http://www.nzz.ch/wein-keller) and conducts wine seminars for the newspaper's readers. Keller holds the WSET Diploma. [weinblog.blog.NZZ.ch/author/pkeller/](http://weinblog.blog.NZZ.ch/author/pkeller/)

Freelance journalist Martin Kilchmann, ex-editor of Vinum, writes for several newspapers. He is also the chief editor of the Swiss edition of Falstaff, the latest wine publication to appear in Switzerland. He is also author of books concerning South Tyrol, Piedmont, and Ticino. [www.falstaff.ch](http://www.falstaff.ch)



**Zurich-based Chandra Kurt, the author of more than 20 books, is one of Switzerland's foremost wine writers.**

**Alexandre Truffer** holds a Bachelor of Arts from the University of Lausanne. In 2005, he created RomanDuVin.ch, a Web magazine devoted to the vineyards of Switzerland, and was quickly noticed by Vinum. Appointed deputy editor and put in charge of the French edition of Vinum in January 2013, this freelance journalist is the author of various guides on Swiss French (Romandie) vineyards. Truffer is a member of the Organising Committee of the Mondial du Chasselas contest. [www.romanduvin.ch](http://www.romanduvin.ch)

### Most significant wine blogs

Yves Beck's topics are Swiss and Bordeaux wines, and he is a frequent user of Facebook and Twitter. He also writes for local newspapers and has published reports as a freelance journalist for Vinum, Schweizerische Weinzeitung and Plaisirs – Gastronomie & Voyage. Beck has written three books dedicated to the wines from the Biel area, Neuchâtel and Vully. He runs his own company GlobalBeck Services LLC and specialises in wine-related translations. [www.beckustator.com](http://www.beckustator.com)

### Significant wine personalities

Gilles Besse is the president of Swiss Wine Promotion and one of the most important ambassadors for Helvetic wines. He used to be a professional saxophonist before orienting his career to winemaking. After graduating from the winemaker's university in Changins, he became associated with his family's wine estate through his uncle Jean-René Germanier, a deputy in the Swiss government. [www.jrgermanier.ch](http://www.jrgermanier.ch)

Andreas Keller leads and owns Swiss Wine Connection GmbH in Zürich. The company aims to promote Swiss wine at home and abroad and regularly conducts wine tastings,



**The wine critic René Gabriel has a wine-related company and has created the Gabriel Glas, sold worldwide.**

exhibitions and wine awards. Keller is also co-founder of MDVS (Mémoire des Vins Suisses) an organisation of Swiss winemakers and journalists dedicated to the quality of Swiss wine and its ability to age. [www.swiss-wine-connection.ch](http://www.swiss-wine-connection.ch)

Elisabeth Pasquier is managing director of Vinea. The association is the principal organiser of wine competitions including the Mondial du Pinot Noir and the Grand Prix du Vin Suisse. Vinea is an important promotional and communication platform in Switzerland. This association edits the Swiss Wine Guide, now in its fourth edition. Once a year an important public wine fair is held in Sierre. [www.vinea.ch](http://www.vinea.ch)

Philipp Schwander MW is Switzerland's only Master of Wine. He writes for various newspapers and runs a wine business, Selection Schwander in Zürich. The company, which focuses on a few selected, high-quality wines from unknown winemakers, is a great success. Schwander visits the wine estates and selects the wines personally. He spends 40% of his time in European wine regions looking for attractive wines. [www.selection-schwander.ch/](http://www.selection-schwander.ch/)

Dr José Vouillamoz is a botanist and grape geneticist based in Switzerland. He has been an independent researcher at the University of Neuchâtel in Switzerland since 2004. He built up his international reputation while being trained in grape DNA analyses in the laboratory of Professor Carole Meredith at the University of California, Davis. In collaboration with several colleagues, he was the first to establish the DNA profiles of grape varieties from the Near East and to tackle the grape domestication issue from a genetic point of view. He is the co-author of the book *Wine Grapes* with Jancis Robinson MW and Julia Harding MW. His researches also established that the Chasselas variety comes from Switzerland. ■