



# Keeping it in the Family

## High calibre wines stemming from five generations

Left, main image: Barrel cellar  
 Right, from top to bottom:  
 Spring awakening in Malans  
 Pinot Noir vineyard in Malans  
 Right, bottom: Winzerstube zum Ochsen

**When most people think of Switzerland three things come to mind: watches, chocolates and cheese. Yet Switzerland's wines, despite their outstanding quality, are typically not mentioned beyond its borders. This seemingly secret treasure is partly because Swiss wines are rarely exported and even the best domestic wines can be very rare.**

TEXT: JAIME SCHWARTZ | PHOTOS: DOMAINE DONATSCH

Some of Switzerland's most special wines are produced in the "Bündner Herrschaft," one of the most beautiful corners of Graubünden. Known as the origin of the famous Heidi story, it is one of the oldest and richest wine growing regions and one of the world's best Pinot Noir producing areas.

One particular winery in this region, specifically in Malans, stands out. Founded in 1897, the Domaine Donatsch is one of Switzerland's most prestigious wineries and has been in operation for over a hundred years. Currently its estate and wine production are overseen by fifth generation family member Martin Donatsch. Martin's wines

have received many international accolades, including the twice won title of "Champion du Monde des Producteurs de Pinot Noir." When asked about how winning has affected his practice Martin maintains his humility: "To consecutively win this great title was a fantastic surprise and definitely brought new attention to the winery. However, it hasn't changed the way I work, I still have the same setting with the same philosophy. It was only a confirmation that I'm on the right track." Martin keeps up his family's wine growing and producing traditions with classic grape varieties from Burgundy such as Chardonnay and Pinot Noir, as well as the autochthonous Completer.

Martin's talent is not surprising when considering the family history. His father Thomas had already made a name for himself by revolutionising Swiss viticulture through close contact with renowned French winemakers. "Since the 1970s my father has had a decisive influence on the viticulture and quality of Swiss wines which brought our wines to an international top-level." His father was the first to bring Burgundy barrels to Switzerland as well as the first to grow Chardonnay and other grape varieties. Martin elaborates on this "like-father-like-son" tradition of excellence: "My father's philosophy is to make natural

wines with great aging potential. Of course, however, you constantly try to improve on what's already there and I've been able to bring in and utilise my experience from

years of study in other wine regions. Although my main principles and philosophy have and will stay true to those of my father."

One of the outstanding accomplishments of the Domaine Donatsch is their revitalisation of the Completer. First cultivated in Malans over a thousand years ago, its name originates from the Catholic Church as it was pressed for use in the last evening prayer, or Completarium. Due to its difficulty to grow and high pressing standards, the variety had almost become extinct. The Donatsch family rediscovered this species and awakened it from its slumber by growing new stems from the rare Completer. "In 1947 my grandfather began to grow the variety out of curiosity and interest in its difficult and complicated nature. After a fifty year long interruption, and to mark the winery's 100th anniversary, we retook interest in it and discovered the grape in a new way," says Martin.

In total there are only two hectares of the Completer grown in Graubünden today and of those the Domaine Donatsch has over half a hectare. They grow the Completer as a late harvest variety and pick the grapes in mid-November. This time frame allows the Completer's sugar levels to rise while reducing its acidity which supports its unique and incomparable aroma. This truly stand-alone wine never ceases to amaze and fascinate sommeliers and wine enthusiasts. "I think we were able to improve the wines a little each year and now we are at a point where we are satisfied. Its success speaks for itself, well-known wine con-





Above: Martin Donatsch in the Completer vineyard & Pinot Noir harvest

Bottom, left: The Donatsch family, Heidi, Martin and Thomas in the Winzerstube zum Ochsen

noisseurs from around the world are interested in the Completer although it is very rare and hard to get," reveals Martin. "It's like a secret, or insider tip."

Of course, a fine wine can be even more delectable when one has the opportunity to enjoy a glass in an equally fine establishment. The cosy paneled dining room of the winery's restaurant "Zum Ochsen", nowa-

days run by Martin's parents, Heidi and Thomas, can be the perfect place to enjoy a special bottle. Whether it's drinking by the fire in winter or enjoying the summer from the terrace, one can revel in scenic mountain views. In addition to the great selection of wines offered by the winery, and in keeping with its historical connections, rare wines from Bordeaux and Burgundy are also available.



Not much has changed at the Domaine Donatsch since its inception and no big changes appear to be on their way. According to Martin, remaining a small family business is the key to the winery's continued success and enjoyment of their wines. "Sure, we could sell three times more but we don't care to. The privilege of operating on a small scale is that I can be involved in every process, from taking care of the vines and winemaking to selling and serving wines." The deep connection the Donatsch family has to their land and traditions certainly pours out through their wines.

[www.donatsch.info](http://www.donatsch.info)