

Great European drinking, exchange rate grates



Dr Rob Lethbridge

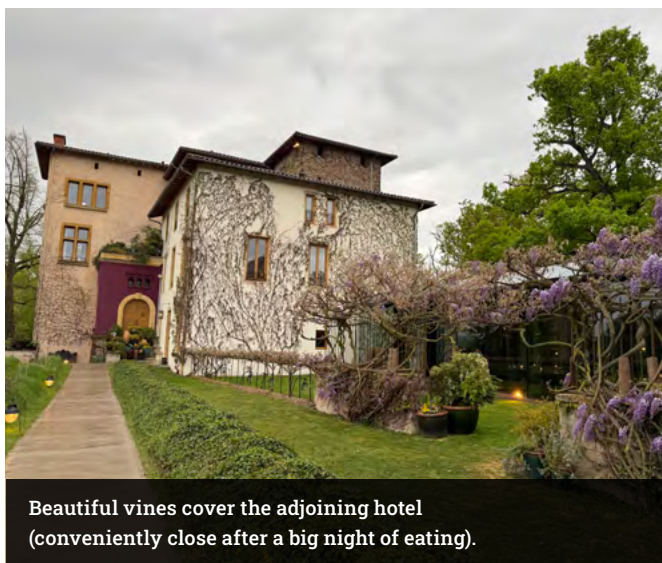
It took me a while to hit my wine-drinking stride in Europe. Flying into Zurich, it felt more like a beer kind of vibe to go with my \$35 wurst (this holiday vastly increased my fury at macroeconomic trends). In Interlaken the hotel gifted me two free bottles of a pretty indistinct Vin de France – just acceptable enough for the price (free) to not bother

getting anything better.

When I finally ventured into wine shops, they were often intimidatingly French. And the reality of parenthood meant time for languorously perusing impenetrable labels wasn't really on the cards. Really, it was at restaurants where I did the majority of my wine exploration. Unlike a 'cave à vin' though, the kids are continuously fed to keep them quiet, and someone with a better grasp of French, German (and English) than me can interpret things.

I think it's my generally risk-averse and non-confrontational nature that makes me love a tasting menu with wine pairing. I feel that if you spend a bunch of money on a main course and a bottle of wine, there are two major issues: if it's terrible, I'll be disappointed; and even worse, have no one to blame but myself. Handing over the reins to a chef and sommelier means that if something's not great, at least there's something else coming soon and – possibly more importantly – it's not my fault they decided to serve something awful.

Luckily, in these cases, the food and wine were equally extraordinary. Radius in Interlaken works on the principle



Beautiful vines cover the adjoining hotel (conveniently close after a big night of eating).

that all products should come from within 50km of the restaurant (radiating out, as it were) and given that Switzerland barely exports even their big producers, this resulted in some amazingly weird and delicious stuff. Saline and honeyed Sauvignac (apparently a hybrid of Riesling x Sauvignon), an orange Pinot Gris, and a Malbec grown exclusively against a wall in someone's field to help it ripen despite the cold – showed amazing diversity for such a small region.



The open-plan kitchen at Troisgros, where raised voices are banned.

Troisgros outside of Ouches was more classically French, pulling in Gaulish big hitters including a casually refilled Dom Perignon. Less 'wacky' but extraordinary in its quality, a beautiful Guy Bocard Meursault made me (very briefly) refuse to ever drink Margaret River Chardonnay again, and an Alain Burguet Pinot from Gevrey-Chambertain was all bruised cherries, dark red fruit and bright acidity. Each wine came with a beautiful explanation of place and time, as well as enhancing the food with each sip. The meal was topped off with a pour of highly-aged Chartreuse, which burned my tastebuds and wallet in equal measure.

The wine-y highlight of the trip though was wandering the streets of Paris to find Ambassadors de Bourgogne, and a 2016 Lavaux St Jacques from Armand Rousseau which made me reevaluate every glass of Pinot Noir I've had up to that point. Bright, balanced, savoury, and just gorgeous to mull over while watching the world go by – even if it did reinvigorate my anger at the value of the Australian dollar. ■