NEW PRODUCERS, JUST WHAT THE COUNTRY NEEDS

33 Swiss producers under age 40 are teasing us with hints of the thousands of wines of the future that their wineries and others in the Alpine nation will be making in a few short years. An interview with Jasmin Schmid, secretary general of the group “Junge Schweiz – Neue Winzer” (JSNW).

The “Junge Schweiz – Neue Winzer” group is keen to be seen and heard, and in particular to have the next generation of consumers explore the future of Swiss wine with them. They will be doing this through regular events, tasting sessions and old-fashioned “getting to know each other time” with wine-lovers, using new-generation marketing approaches.

“Our generation is much more about self-expression – for us, it’s about the person, not just the wine,” says Jasmin Schmid. “You are who you are as a winemaker and the wine represents you. The rest of us remember the people and their wines because of their stories.” She points out that on their website, www.jsnw.ch, the member is listed first and then the winery.

Character, personality, energy, sometimes (happily) a bit “crazy” – we’re talking about men and women under 40 who are starting to develop the contours of tomorrow’s Swiss wines. Will the wines made by this new generation of Swiss producers really be different, and is that good or bad? Jasmin is quick and firm when she replies, but I’m used to this from her, despite her youth she’s been a fixture as one of the organizers for events by Mémoire des Vins Suisses and others.

“If you’re young, you ask more questions. I think tradition is very important – but you also need to be free to be a bit crazy! They have different ideas about winemaking.

“I think the wines will be different, not the same wines, because we’re using new ideas, newer technologies, and just because that’s what you do when you’re young. They will try out new things and find their own style.”

She reflects for a moment. “Sometimes, when a wine is completely new to us, it’s almost easier, we don’t have to think about it compared to its reputation. But I think you have to try to understand it. You need personal contact with the winemaker.

“That’s what’s so important for Switzerland because our wines don’t speak for themselves as easily as big-name
More than their parents, perhaps, they have travelled and are starting to think in terms of Swiss wines, rather than just regional or local wines. They tend to see their own wines in a larger context that extends beyond the country's borders, no matter what their personal sales ambitions are, geographically.

The range of backgrounds is remarkable, from Simone Montone— who came to wine after working successfully as an artist, and Susi Steiger-Welle, who trained in Australia and France before returning to Switzerland, wanderer Jürg Marugg who took a winemaker's gap year, to Serge Dürner, an engineer and oenologist who just won the 2016 award for the world’s best Syrah and who teaches at Changins on the side. "In the end, winemaking is an art. It requires creative people, people who are really motivated."

Alain Schwarzenbach from Zurich approached Jasmin Schmid in 2015 about working part-time with the group. She was already juggling several roles through her work with Swiss Wine Connection and the Mémoire des Vins Suisses, organizing events, handling media relations, planning tasting events. She was young, like the group, although her soft Rapaldisia "Small Cowper Madonna" looks like determination and sharp thinking. "Now I'm responsible for organizing whatever they need to have organized," she laughs. "They are young – and that means it's always a bit chaotic. They're running wineries and making wine and some of them are starting families and so on. I don't make wine, but with my passion for wine, I want to promote Swiss wine: I just want people to know about Swiss wines, to know that there are great Swiss wines out there, to get to know these young people."

A current venture is to work with restaurants and wine bars willing to rotate their wines, for example for three months, as open wines. This is proving to be a good sales booster and way to get name recognition for a winery, says Jasmin. Organizing events that will put them in the public eye is a priority, and the JSNW has been initiating new projects every year. Next year they will have their first public wine tasting where the whole group is present and they will also be the guest of honour at Festivins in Fribourg.

Today “terror” is all the rage, but tomorrow? – how will they adapt their selling techniques? For this as well as the wines, the word is still out, but the networking under-40s are creating a thirst for more detailed news of what we will be drinking in the future.