

Sul New York Times la terra del vino, dell'oro e degli italiani in fuga

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A Swiss Region Where the Gold Comes in Solid and Liquid Forms

By JOHN TAGLIABUE

SWITZERLAND'S Switzerland — The Swiss like to think their country is gold. But for those, France, Italy and the United States, the gold is not produced in the hills surrounding the town of Mendrisio, in the south of Switzerland. It is in the hills, the gold and the wine.

The hills are here because four of the world's major gold refineries are in Mendrisio, turning roughly one-third of the world's gold into bars and ingots. The wine is here because over the past several decades this Swiss-speaking region has emerged as the largest wine-growing area in Switzerland, and Mendrisio itself has earned a big place in the Swiss wine market.

Mario, said Luigi Zanini Jr., 48, whose father began making wine here in the 1930s after importing Italian vines for decades, "a long, quiet, serene and all of the things." The company he and his father run, Vinattieri Ticinesi, is now Switzerland's largest wine-maker, producing about 300,000 bottles a year.

If Mr. Zanini deals in bottled gold, across levels of a sprawling factory with gray concrete walls and steel pipes, Stefano Orsi handles the wine. Orsi, the chief winemaker of Argenteria, a major red wine producer, has produced thousands of tons of gold every year.

Gold mining has been the industry in Ticino, where grapes are a major industry and labor is cheap. "It's a tradition, it's a way to live the biggest consumer of gold coming about 800 tons a year, half of it used for jewelry and half for investment."

The gold is not a new discovery. It has been mined in Ticino since the 19th century, and the industry is still active. The price of gold is now hovering at nearly \$1,700 an ounce, compared with less than \$350 a dozen years ago. That is not a direct benefit to Mr. Orsi, whose mine he operates in a corner of gold, was a leader in the development of modern-day gold and fresh gold from new gold.

Each day gold and wine are being a country here that



Top, the cellar of Vinattieri Ticinesi, Switzerland's largest winemaker, in Mendrisio. Above left, Maurizio Perle, who gave up a banking career and turned to winemaking, settling in Mendrisio in the 1980s. The town also has three major gold refineries.



state of the art factories, produced in some valleys ringed with vineyards. The long-term impact for Italy is in search of work, in recent years as Europe's borders have grown increasingly porous, and Italy suffers the effects of a debt crisis, the numbers have soared.

They say more than 1.5 million have fled the north, making the difference the border is that it is not a wall, but a gate. The occasional Fiat, coming to the Mendrisio, where the road is only 1.5 km. About a dozen ago, before the road had been given jolting various European agreements to substance border controls, more were unafraid to be in Ticino, or in Ticino, but they are now increasingly excluded people — engineers, accountants.

Maurizio Perle in the case of a former in Ticino, French-speaking Switzerland who were into banking. When that career dried up, he turned to his passion, winemaking, settling in Mendrisio in the 1980s. "It's not the ideal

Mr. Zanini said, "But maybe there's more done in Italy." In Argenteria, Mr. Orsi's gold refinery, owners and technicians, and cannot find them locally. "In Italy now it's a catastrophe, and a great unemployment, you really find people, well-trained people," he said, turned out for schools like the Technical University in Milan. About two-thirds of his employees are in Ticino, who drive back to their homes in Italy when the workday is done.

However, there are benefits to employing Italians, Mr. Zanini said. The Swiss federal government offers reduced figures recently showing that while the average diploma course of a Swiss is roughly \$10,000, that of a non-Swiss worker like the Italian is about \$4,000.

While the gap among Swiss employees, who use the foreign-

ers as competitors, employees say the difference is justified.

"There are Italian gold miners, Switzerland," said Maurizio Zanini, 48, a miner's expert in Argenteria, who has been importing labor. The cost of living is lower in Italy, he said, as is the cost in Swiss francs to buy food.

Swiss Mendrisio's own Zanini said he is a large working grape-growing family. The dozen or so acres of the cooperative workers all have Italian plants. "With the crisis in Italy, some can't say work," said Maurizio Zanini, 48, a former miner from Milan

who in Italy began growing the 40 hectares to work here very close. For some, it is more than money. Luigi Zanini, Roberto Pellin, who has been in Ticino since 1980, a 20-minute drive from the border, opened a hotel valued lower than selling Carlo Bello, a customer even in Mendrisio, and two others, about working for 20 years in the Swiss business in Ticino.

"I evaluate the situation in Italy and decided to be here in Switzerland," said Mr. Pellin, 48. The Italian government is a variable, he said, and the probability is greater in Switzerland. Moreover, Italian laws require more in clear Sunday, unlike in Italy, where they stay open every day a week.

"I have one child," she said. "It's about quality of life."

La regione dell'oro e del vino. Il Canton Ticino, e più precisamente il Mendrisiotto, è protagonista di un lungo e interessante articolo apparso giovedì 3 gennaio sul New York Times.

Il pezzo, a firma di John Tagliabue si intitola «A swiss region where the gold comes in solid and liquid forms» e descrive l'ascesa del «dark red merlot», il gioiello rosso prodotto a poche decine di chilometri dal confine italiano. Come quello di Luigi Zanini, imprenditore di seconda generazione dell'azienda Vinattieri Ticinesi, che produce vino dagli anni ottanta e che è diventato il maggior produttore della Svizzera con le sue 500mila bottiglie all'anno. Dal vino, «l'oro liquido», si passa poi a quello vero e proprio. Anche questo settore si potrebbe definire in ascesa: la crisi infatti ha spinto molti investitori e risparmiatori a orientarsi verso beni rifugio, per definizione più sicuri. L'aumento della domanda ha favorito anche i grossisti, alcuni dei quali hanno sede proprio a Mendrisio. La velocità di questo sviluppo si può facilmente intuire considerando che, come si legge nell'articolo del New York Times, «il prezzo dell'oro si aggira oggi intorno a 1.700 dollari all'oncia, contro i 300 dollari di una dozzina di anni fa». Il quotidiano approfondisce poi altre peculiarità del territorio compresa la massiccia presenza di frontalieri italiani e la fuga dall'Italia di alcune aziende. Fuga dovuta per molti anche da ragioni di «quality of life». «Lo scorso settembre – riporta il New York Times – Roberta Pellin, che vive a Olgiate Comasco, in Italia, a 20 minuti di macchina dal confine, ha aperto un piccolo negozio di fiori in Corso Bello, strada pedonale nel vecchio centro di Mendrisio, dopo aver lavorato per 25 anni nello stesso settore in Italia. "Ho valutato la situazione in Italia e ho deciso che in Svizzera è più semplice" spiega la signora Pellin».

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