

## Gregor Kuonen Caveau de Salquenen: Special occasions wine

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Late fall/autumn vineyards in Salgesch/Salquenen

In the warm and sunny microclimate of the vineyards of Salquenen/Salgesch in the Valais, several award-winning wines are created by small vintners. The leader of the winemakers in Salquenen/Salgesch is the Gregor Kuonen Caveau de Salquenen.

Founded in 1913 by Alfred Kuonen, Gregor Kuonen's father, the winery has been a family operation for three generations. Constantly pushing their quality standards, they are now more successful than ever. Today's generation has the goal to produce absolute top quality wines, and their long list of awards shows that they are on the right path. The most prestigious award they have received is the "Grand Gold Medal" at the Mondial du Pinot Noir 2006 for their top of the line Pinot Noir Reserve du Caveau.

*Gregor Kuonen*





The Kuonen family

But the Valais is not just about Pinot Noir and Fendant. Gregor Kuonen has 46 different wines on their list, using more than 16 different kind of grapes, mostly grown in their own vineyards in Salquenen/Salgesch and Sierre. Some crops are very small, so that the annual production barely exceeds 500 bottles. These are wines which don't even appear on the price list, and are mostly offered only to regular customers.

The favorable climate is a good base for a kind of wine specialities which have a growing group of fans: naturally sweet wines. These are wines where the grape juice is so sweet that even after the fermentation there is still some sugar left. Most such wines are harvested very late (end of November, or even in December), being able to catch the sun of late fall. This can lead to juices with 140 degrees Oechsle (a measure of the sugar content), which is a very high number indeed. The Oechsle of a regular wine is generally around 75 to 80.

Such wines are very often stored in *barrisques* (small oak barrels), which add to their bouquet and flavor. Some wines are of a single grape variety, others are assembled. These are the treasures in Gregor Kuonen's cellars.

*G. Kuonen*



We had the chance to taste Petite Fugue from the Vieux Salquenen line. This wine won a Gold Medal award at the 2006 La Sélection contest, which means that it was considered an excellent wine by a professional jury. The Petite Fugue is an assembly of late harvested Pinot Gris (also known as Malvoisie in the Valais), Chardonnay, and Lafetschna (a very old rare local grape), aged in the barriques.

In the glass, we found a bright golden liquid, with a fragrance reminiscent of a selection of well-ripened exotic fruits and flowers with a notable vanilla note. To the taste, the wine is well balanced, full bodied without an overpowering sweetness. It certainly has a 'wow' factor! If you are a fan of Eissweins, Tokay and other such fine sweet wines you will fall in love with this for sure.

Further evidence of Gregor Kuonen's dedication to quality is the effort they put into attractive packaging and label design. Here's a display of bottles from their Collection Artiste line, where a different artist is commissioned to design a label every year. It's tempting to just collect the bottles for their design value alone!

*G. Kuonen*





Most of these wonderful wines are available only directly from Gregor Kuonen, although Manor in Sierre (and nowhere else) sells the Pinot Noir, by special arrangement. The caveau is open on weekdays from 8:00 to 12:00 and 13:30 to 17:30, and on Saturdays in April, May, June, September, October, November, and December from 8:00 to 16:00. You are welcome to taste (and you will walk out with some boxes of wine). How to get there and more information can be found on their website.

We would like to thank Gregor Kuonen and all their staff for creating and caring about such fabulous wines. A special thanks goes to Giuseppe Santaro for giving me (Max) a very instructive tour through the cellar.

Researched by Max Wyss, written by Max and Makiko Itoh of Just Hungry.)

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*Gregor Kuonen*