



Varietal Focus: MALBEC

Lance Cutler

Editor's note: This marks the first Varietal Focus to take place in a foreign country. As you might imagine, the logistics were difficult. One winemaker was unable to attend the tasting at the last minute while another was unable to provide wine for the second tasting. (This is reflected in the tasting notes section.) *Wine Business Monthly* would like to thank Wines of Argentina for helping to make this tasting possible. Maria Laura Ortiz and José Seballe administered the tastings perfectly. While we tried our best to accommodate language issues, we apologize for our deficiencies in Spanish, especially to Fabián Valenzuela and Pablo Durigutti.

WHEN IT COMES TO grape varieties, Malbec is sort of a “lost child.” Known by dozens of different names in its native France, most commonly Malbec in Bordeaux and Auxerrois Cot and Pressac in Cahors and the Loire Valley, Malbec was widely planted in France for centuries. In Bordeaux it was one of the six varieties common to classic Bordeaux, lending the blend its inky color and complex plum flavors.

As popular as Malbec was in Bordeaux, after the severe 1956 winter wiped out 75 percent of the crop, most vignerons turned to other varieties when they replanted. In Cahors, in spite of suffering through the same frost, Malbec remained the primary grape variety but was often blended with Merlot and/or Tannat to make dark full-bodied wines.

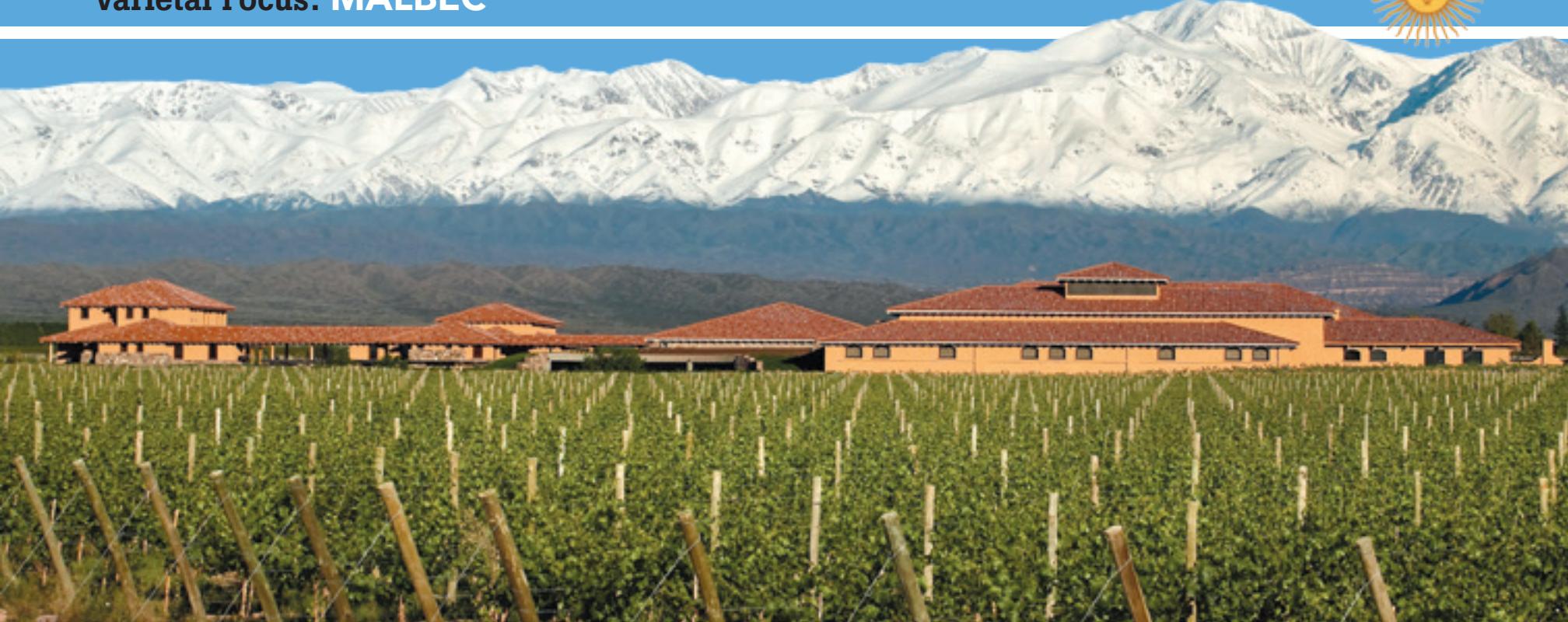
Today, Malbec is planted in Chile, Australia, California, Washington and a half-dozen other countries, but it is Argentina that lays claim to the variety as its most planted red grape. In fact, Argentina and Cahors account for more than 90 percent of the world’s Malbec production. In France, Malbec can be rustic, with meaty aromas and flavors and a very tannic finish, while in Argentina Malbec tends to be sweet, ripe, juicy wine redolent of red and black fruits with loads of velvety tannins.

Malbec was originally brought to Argentina in 1868 by agronomist **Michel Pouget**. The clones he brought seemed different from others in France, sporting smaller berries and tighter, smaller bunches than their French counterparts. It is possible that these particular clones were lost to France after the frost of 1956. In any case, these pre-phylloxera vines found the perfect home in Argentina where they were planted on the Eastern slopes of

the Andes. As a variety susceptible to grape diseases, especially frost, coulure (shatter), downy mildew and rot, the arid high desert vineyards, receiving less than 8 inches of annual rainfall, provided a safe harbor for the vulnerable Malbec. As a variety requiring more heat than Cabernet Sauvignon or Merlot and in need of wide diurnal temperature shifts to ripen fully, these mountain-side vineyards provided the perfect location. Well-drained alluvial soils allowed for deep-rooted vines. More than 300 days a year of sunshine and more intense ultraviolet exposure due to high elevation allowed the skins to develop and concentrate polyphenols, bringing more color and flavor to the finished wines.

While there was little rainfall, there was ample water for the vineyards from snowmelt off of the Andes. In fact, early on, abundant water provided by flood irrigation led to excess vigor and huge crops of Malbec, producing wines with little character that lacked distinction or charm. Before 1988, Argentine grape growers primarily focused on high production vineyards to produce undistinguished wine for export and to quench the massive thirst of the natives, who consumed close to 90 liters per capita each year. In the late 1980s foreign investors came to Argentina who were interested in purchasing old vine vineyards (at reasonable prices given the world market) and applying different growing and winemaking concepts to produce better wine.

In the mid-1980s an influx of foreign wine consultants, working with local growers and wineries, brought down yields, which provided more concentration and varietal character. Vineyard sites started moving upward in elevation, which provided more sunlight for the grapes and cooler nights.



Winemakers discovered that higher elevation vineyards that produce 3 tons per acre or less created generous, delicious wines full of Malbec's juicy sweetness, but loaded with spicy, violet complexity and soft tannins.

Investors from all over the world—France, California, Italy, Switzerland and Australia—worked their way through byzantine Argentine regulations to purchase outright or to form partnerships with locals to produce wine. Consultants, like **Michel Rolland**, **Paul Hobbs**, **Alberto Antonini** and **Roberto Cipresso**, brought new vineyard and winemaking techniques with them. Argentinos, who pride themselves on being well-educated and hard working, embraced the new technologies and dynamically changed their industry.

The infusion of new capital for development, a flood of ideas from around the world about how to make wine, the existence of thousands of hectares

of old vine vineyards and a wine drinking culture with educated people who wanted to get into the wine business combined to create a perfect storm for winemakers. They simply needed an identity, and they chose to identify Argentina with Malbec.

The featured winemakers and/or owners in this Varietal Focus include: **Juan E. Marco** of **Finca Decero**; **Alejandro Sejanovich** of **Anko**; **Karim Mussi Saffie** and **Guillermo J. San Martin** of **Altocedro**; **Fabián Valenzuela** of **Bodega Tapiz**; **Pablo Durigutti** of **Durigutti**; **Fernando Buscema** of **Bodega Catena Zapata**; **Susana Balbo** of **Dominio del Plata**; and **Santiago Achával** of **Achával Ferrer Winery**.





Finca Decero

2010 Finca Decero Remolinos Vineyard Malbec \$20 (Alc. 14.5%)

Juan E. Marco studied as an agricultural engineer in Mendoza. He then earned a master of science degree from UC Davis. After five years working in California, Marco returned to his hometown of Mendoza in 2004. With extensive management experience in winemaking, Marco joined **Finca Decero** as general manager in 2007.

According to Marco:

"Our main goal is to showcase the best attributes of our **Remolinos Vineyard**, which gives us a refined wine with finesse and elegance as opposed to bolder, tighter wines. There is usually a violet floral component, along with some dark fruit."



"While most of the soils at Remolinos Vineyard are alluvial, they range from sandy to clay and limestone at different depths and in different areas of the vineyard. Feldspars (aluminum silicates) rich in potassium are the predominant material, but organic content is very poor (0.3 to 0.4 percent), and soil pH is approximately 8.1.

"The vineyard was planted in 2001 with a variation of vine spacing but mostly 6.5x3.3 feet. The vineyard is at 3,500 feet elevation, and row orientations focus on protecting the cluster zone from mid-day and afternoon sun, so the orientation is northwest to southeast. The vineyard uses two clones, Mendoza 1 and Mendoza 2, but we also have old field masal selection material from different origins. We have a combination of rootstocks, like SO4, 101-14 and 3309, as well as own rooted plants. In choosing rootstock, we were looking to encourage lighter crop loads and smaller berry size.

"We are traditionally farmed but with a sustainable sensibility. The entire vineyard is on drip irrigation. Canopy management includes leaf pulling, shoot thinning and fruit thinning. Seventy percent of the vineyard has hail netting, which also helps protect against the sun."

"Although we do analysis on the fruit as complementary information, picking is determined by tasting the berries. We are looking for explosive fruit character, along with the typical sweet Malbec character. We will pick certain blocks early, looking for more floral violet character, and other blocks later looking for dark fruit character. We double-sort clusters in the field, and then at the winery we sort clusters and berries on separate vibrating tables. Fruit is destemmed, but not crushed, and gravity-fed to tanks. We add 0.03 grams SO₂ per kilo at the crusher and then cold soak for five to seven days around 45° F while punching down twice daily. We generally do not use sangria¹ unless specific conditions in a certain block require it to achieve adequate concentration."

"We usually inoculate with a neutral yeast to avoid masking vineyard expression in the finished wine. We will make tartaric acid additions based on pH and TA levels in the must before yeast inoculation. We measure NPA and will add ammonia, amino acids and micro-nutrients if necessary. At peak fermentation we pump-over three times a day and punch-down once a day. Before and after peak fermentation, we do fewer pump-overs. Fermentation

temperatures are variable, but the earlier picked floral blocks ferment around 78° F while the dark fruit blocks get up to 86° F.

"We separate free run juice and two press fractions and barrel down within 24 hours of finishing alcoholic fermentation. We keep 10 percent of the wine in stainless steel to preserve the violet character. Malolactic occurs in-barrel where we use 100 percent French oak with 30 percent new oak. We are slowly backing off the new oak, down to 22 percent. Wine ages in barrel for 14 months. We rack three to four times the first year depending on phenolic structure, and the wine receives a five micron polish filtration before bottling."

Winemakers' Tasting Notes

Juan: This has the distinctive floral character of Malbec with the violet nose. In the mouth there is a velvety structure that is well-balanced. It is not a heavy wine but a wine more in the finesse style of Malbec.

Fabián: It has more floral character than straight fruit. In the mouth the tannins are sweet and smooth. The acidity fills the mouth and is well-balanced with the alcohol. It is elegant wine, full of flavor.

Alejandro: I like the floral aromatics, and there is a very nice cherry fruit. The acidity carries the tannins well. It has medium body. It is very elegant but full of flavor. Nice style.

Guillermo: I like the balance. The tannins are very soft. It is medium-bodied but has a lot of fruit character. The floral character is distinctive. I like this style.

Susana: Very fresh fruit but with cherry flavors, not black cherries. It has medium body with elegant tannins that are well integrated. For me, it is a little short in the mouth. It is very juicy in the mouth but doesn't really have a long finish.

Fernando: I get ripe, dry cherries with some oaky spiciness. It has medium body and is very approachable and drinkable with that typical sweetness of Malbec. The tannins make it just a little bit dry.

Pablo: It has a nose of red fruit. There are complex aromas of spice and floral components. There is strong toast. It is short in the mouth but has Malbec sweetness. The tannins and acidity are well-balanced, but in the finish the tannins are a bit dry.



¹ "Sangria" is a process in winemaking where the winemaker drains off a percentage of the juice from red grapes before it starts to ferment or color. The thought is that it will make the remaining wine more extracted because the skin/juice ratio is higher.



Anko

2011 Anko Flor de Cardon Malbec \$29 (Alc. 13.9%)

Alejandro Sejanovich has a master's degree in vineyard management and winemaking from **Ecole National Supérieur Agronomique de Montpellier**. He worked for 16 years at **Bodega Catena Zapata**, where he served as vineyard director since 2003. He worked as winemaker and vineyard manager for **Luca** and **Tikal**, owned by **Laura Catena** and **Ernesto Catena**, respectively. After 16 years with the Catenas, Sejanovich struck out on his own with several brands, including **Anko**.



According to Sejanovich:

"We are trying to make a terroir-driven wine that reflects the unique schist soil of Estancia La Cardones, which provides a certain saltiness, along with an herbal spice and black fruit aromatics. We want a wine that is complex and mineral-driven but with soft tannin: A wine that is ready to drink early but will reward bottle aging with additional complexity."

"Our vineyard has very shallow, very rocky soil with abundant splintered shale on the surface. The little soil that is present is full of crushed mica, which reflects sunlight, causing thicker skins in the grapes. For the Flor de Cardon Malbec, we select those lots in the vineyard with the highest content of rocky surface stones, a profile that causes much lower yields and higher concentration."

"The altitude averages 5,700 feet, and the vineyard is planted 2,000 vines per acre with a northwest exposure. The vineyard is sustainably farmed with drip irrigation, using water from our well. We use moderate leaf pulling on the morning side of the vines, and we drop fruit. Picking is determined by tasting and testing. We pick in three different lots. About 25 percent is picked earlier to maintain acidity and floral character. The bulk of the crop is picked ripe to develop a big mid-palate. About 15 percent is picked late for sweetness and depth."

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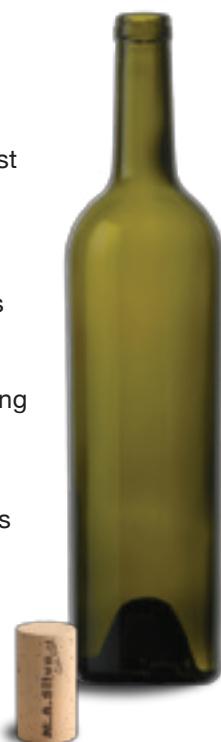
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"We crush and destem into concrete tanks, adding 50 ppm SO₂. A three- to five-day cold soak at 45° F follows as we try to extract as much as we can without the presence of alcohol. We will delestage during cold soak and early fermentation then pump-over three times a day, using sprinklers. We do not use sangria. We do not add acid but will add nutrients early on if necessary. We use native yeast for our fermentation."

"Fermentation temperatures vary by lot. The early-pick lot maximizes around 80° F. The main lot gets up to 85° F and the late lot a bit higher. We macerate on the skins four to five days after fermentation and then press, separating the free run from the press juice, but we will blend them together if the press is not harsh. Malolactic occurs in barrel where we use 100 percent French oak with 20 percent new oak. The wine ages for 12 months and is racked every three months. It is bottled unfiltered."

Winemakers' Tasting Notes

Alejandro: It has a dark purple color. It is very fruity with certain floral and herbal aromatics typical of the area. The wine shows soft and sweet tannins that carry the flavor with some saltiness typical of Malbec from Cafayate. There is black cherry and blackberry, along with good oak balance that increases complexity. It is nicely concentrated without being overdone.

Guillermo: The color is intense. I like the Malbec sweetness and fruit in the nose and the sweetness in the mouth. It's well balanced with soft tannins.

Juan: Dark fruit aromas with some herbal notes. Lots of complexity along with that typical saltiness. It's rich in the mouth and well balanced. I like the herbal and salt character of this Malbec.

Fabián: The nose is full of fresh fruit. In the mouth the fruit is well balanced with the oak. There is a warmth to the wine, and the bouquet is fine because the fruit is present at all times.





Altocedro

2010 Altocedro Grand Reserva Malbec \$50 (Alc. 15.3%)

Karim Mussi Saffie is 35 years old and has been the owner/winemaker of **Altocedro** since 1999. His family has been linked to the wine trade for more than 30 years. He focuses on his wines from La Consulta and has successfully positioned his brand in the international market while advising a number of emerging products in the best Argentine growing areas. *Editor's Note: Saffie was in Europe for this tasting. His assistant winemaker, Guillermo J. San Martin, attended the tasting, and the tasting notes on all of the wines are his.*



According to Saffie:

"We want to make a wine that is elegant with incredible balance. We want lots of red and black fruit character, along with floral aromatics with hints of violets and lavender. The wine should have a supple, elegant mouth-feel with firm sweet tannins that linger for an extremely long finish."

"Our vineyard sits at an elevation of 3,400 feet and consists of sandy loam over rocky bottom soils. The vines are masal selection Malbec planted in 1904 with 3,500 plants per acre. The row orientation is south-north and is sustainably farmed, using a traditional horse-drawn plow. We use no chemicals. We will shoot thin in the spring with some post-veraison pruning. We use traditional furrow irrigation."

"We determine when to harvest based on analysis and taste. We sort clusters and berries and then drop the selected fruit directly into barrels. We bleed off 25 percent of the juice. We add 10 ppm SO₂ and 2 percent Semillon to co-ferment in the barrels. We add DAP during crushing and once more mid-fermentation. Fermentation is carried out by indigenous yeast from La Consulta. Fermentation temperatures run at 70° F to 75° F, and it takes about seven weeks to reduce all the sugar at these low temperatures. In our attempt to achieve a gentle extraction, we roll the barrels eight to 10 times a day, giving them eight rotations each time to keep the skins wet."

"After malolactic finishes, we press the berries, keeping free run juice separate from press juice. We determine later how much press juice goes back into the blend. All of the wine is fermented and aged in 100 percent new French Burgundy oak barrels. We age the wine 24 months in oak with no racking for the entire duration. The wine is naturally cold-stabilized and receives no filtration."



Winemakers' Tasting Notes

Guillermo: It is a wine with a good personality. It has classic Malbec aromas with floral notes. It is medium- to full-bodied, and the oak is well balanced with the fruit. The alcohol is high, but it is not the first impression.

Juan: This is typical of La Consulta Malbec. It is very fruity with some licorice notes. I perceive the oak in a good way, but it is a strong component. In the mouth there is sweet oak, along with fruit. It is velvety and complex.

Fabián: Fresh, young fruit flavors with good acid. There is some vegetal character, but it is attractive, probably from the Semillon. It is very oaky now with a chocolate liquor character. It is like a liquor-filled chocolate bon bon.

Alejandro: Very intense aromatics of "licoroso." There is sour cherry flavor with liquor and chocolate. Very nice oak sweetness and smokiness interacting with the tannin and alcohol. Good ripe fruit with lots of complexity in a very different style.

Pablo: I get strong aromas of strawberry with a lot of wood. The wood is more present and well-defined. In the mouth it has medium weight with Malbec sweetness, but it is overwhelmed with the wood.

Susana: For me, there is too much oak. It is hiding the real wine. I cannot clearly define the fruit, but there is black cherry and blackberry under that oak. In the mouth the dry tannins from the oak are very present. The weight is medium, and there is some cherry present. I don't know if bottle age will allow the wine to balance the fruit and oak.

Fernando: I agree, there is too much oak with a lot of cinnamon and vanilla. It is hard to identify aromas other than those from the oak. In the mouth it is the same. It is mid-weight and seems round, but the oak overwhelms. It is balanced and round with good acidity, but the oak makes it hard to judge. I am certain that some consumers would love this wine.



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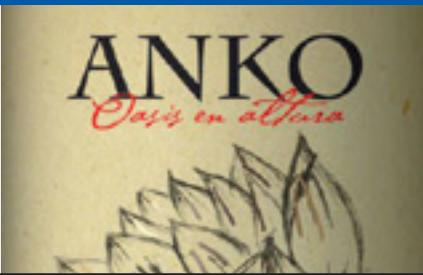
Data Sheet



Winery	Achaval Ferrer	Catena Zapata	Finca Decero
Wine	2009 Finca Bella Vista Malbec	2008 Catena Zapata Adrianna	2010 Decero Malbec
Vineyard	Finca Bella Vista	Adrianna Vineyard	Remolinos
Winemaker	Santiago Achaval	Alejandro Vigil	Marcos Fernandez
Consulting Winemaker	Roberto Cipresso	None	Paul Hobbs
Winemaker's Goal	Express vineyard—which makes dense, extracted and powerful wine that will age well	Elegant wine with complexity, concentration, balance and ageability that expresses the specific terroir	Looking for finesse, elegance, and balance in opposition to tight, bold wines
VINEYARD DATA			
Predominant Geology (soil type)	Thin sand loam top soil, gravel underneath	Shallow topsoil with gravelly surface stones	Alluvial with sand, clay and lime
Elevation	3,200 feet	4,757 feet	3,200 feet
Vine Spacing	2,600 vines/acre	1,925 vines/acre	2,260 vines/acre
Vine Age	90 years	20 years	10 years
Exposure	Southwest to northeast	Northwestern	Northwest to southeast
Clones	Heritage	Heritage	Mendoza 1, Mendoza 2 and old field massal material
Irrigation or Dry Farmed	Furrow irrigation	Drip irrigation	100% drip irrigation
Farming (organic, biodynamic, traditional)	Traditional	Traditional	Traditional
Production	3/4 ton/acre	1.2 tons/acre	3.5 to 4 tons/acre
Vineyard Practices	Severe shoot thin spring, leaf morning side at fruit set, severe crop thin at veraison, deficit irrigation between fruit set and veraison, but avoid stress	Early shoot removal Sept., then cluster thin in Dec. Strict water restriction to stop secondary shoot growth. Leaf thin east side in March	Leaf pulling, shoot thinning and fruit thinning
WINEMAKING DATA			
Cold Soak?	None	None	5 to 7 days at 42° F to 46° F
SO₂	None until spring, then 20 ppm	50 ppm	.03 grams per Kg at crush
Crush Format	Sort on bunches, then on berries after destem	30% whole cluster, 70% whole berry	Sort clusters, then berries. Destem with no crushing
Sangria (Seignee)	None	None	Usually not, will for particular blocks
Yeast	Indigenous	Native	Neutral yeast to not interfere with vineyard expression
Fermentation Temperature	Max 92° F	77° F to 82° F	Varies: 75° F for floral blocks, 95° F for dark fruit blocks
Punch-down Methods	Aerated splash pump-overs, 16 hours per day	100% barrel fermentation with hand punch-down	3 pump-overs daily plus 1 punch-down at peak. Less before and after peak fermentation
Oak Program	100% French, 100% new	100% new French	100% French oak, 30% new
Barrel Aging	14 months	18 to 24 months	14 months
Racking	No racking	Every six months	3 to 4 racks the first year
Filtration	No filtration	No filtration	5 micron before bottling

Varietal Focus: MALBEC

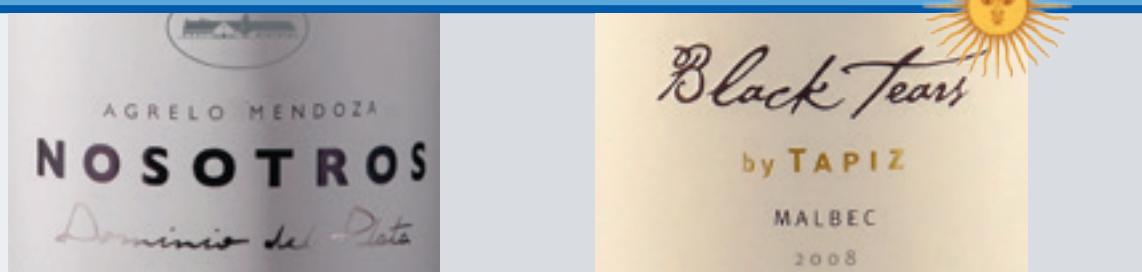
Data Sheet



Winery	Anko	Durigutti Winemakers	Altocedro S.A.
Wine	2011 Anko Flor de Cardon Malbec	2007 Familia Durigutti	2010 Gran Reserva Malbec
Vineyard	Estancia Los Cardones	Two heirloom vineyards: Maipu and San Carlos	La Consulta Estate
Winemaker	Alejandro Sejanovich	Héctor and Pablo Durigutti	Karim Mussi Saffie
Consulting Winemaker	None	None	None
Winemaker's Goal	Concentrated, complex and mineral driven—a racy style of Malbec	A modern wine with deep color, intense fruit, good acidity and ripe and round tannins	Elegant and powerful with incredible balance
VINEYARD DATA			
Predominant Geology (soil type)	Very rocky with sandy top soil	Stony	Sandy loam and rocky bottom
Elevation	5,800 feet	1,100 meters	3,444 feet
Vine Spacing	2,500 vines/acre	6x2.5 feet	3,500 vines/acre
Vine Age	5 years	70 to 80 years	More than 100 years
Exposure	Northwest	Northwest-southeast	South-north row orientation
Clones	Massal selection	Massal	Massal selection from La Consulta old vines
Irrigation or Dry Farmed	Drip irrigation	Flood irrigation	Furrow irrigation
Farming (organic, biodynamic, traditional)	Traditional	Traditional/organic	Natural and sustainable
Production	2.25 tons/acre	2.25 tons/acre	1.4 tons/acre
Vineyard Practices	Moderate leaf pulling on morning side with fruit drop	Drop fruit, pull leaves 20 leaves/mts-0.70 kg/plant-canopy 1.7mt	Shoot thinning in spring, post veraison pruning
WINEMAKING DATA			
Cold Soak?	6 days at 46° F	7 days at 41° F	None
SO₂	50 ppm at crusher	10 ppm at crusher	10 ppm
Crush Format	Crush and destem	Double sort belt, destem with no crushing	Double sorting table, gravity flow, no pumps
Sangria (Seignee)	None	20% to 30% depending on year	25%
Yeast	Native	Native	Indigenous
Fermentation Temperature	Max 72° F	84° F to 86° F	72° F
Punch-down Methods	2 pump-overs, 2 punch-downs, 1 delestage daily	4 pump-overs daily and 2 pigeages	Closed barrel ferment with 8 rollovers daily
Oak Program	100% French, 20% new	100% new French oak	100% new French oak
Barrel Aging	12 months	24 months	24 months
Racking	Every 3 months	Stir lees, no rack	None
Filtration	No filtration	No filtration	No filtration

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Data Sheet



Winery	Dominio del Plata S.A.	Boega Tapiz-Fincas Patagonicas S.A.
Wine	2008 Nosotros	2008 Black Tears Malbec
Vineyard	Three different vineyards	San Pablo Vineyard
Winemaker	Susana Balbo	Fabian Valenzuela
Consulting Winemaker	None	Jean Claude Berrouet
Winemaker's Goal	Complexity with elegance and finesse with firm but velvety tannins and a long finish of red fruits with hints of chocolate and vanilla	Reflect high altitude Malbec with concentrated color and ripe red fruit character with a hint of mint and opulent mouth-feel

VINEYARD DATA

Predominant Geology (soil type)	Clay loam at Agrelo 1, clay loam over rocky layer at Agrelo 2	Sandy loam
Elevation	3,200 to 3,450 feet	4,430 feet
Vine Spacing	7x2.5 feet, 8x4 feet	1.8 m
Vine Age	25, 15 and 13 years	11 years
Exposure	Southeast to northwest, south to north	East to west with rows north to south
Clones	Catena	Norton
Irrigation or Dry Farmed	Drip irrigation	Drip irrigation
Farming (organic, biodynamic, traditional)	Traditional	Traditional
Production	3.2 tons/acre	3 tons/acre
Vineyard Practices	Leaf removal, branch thinning	Pull leaves and de-bud

WINEMAKING DATA

Cold Soak?	4 days at 43° F	5 days at 46° F
SO₂	70 ppm before ferment, 25 ppm after ml	30 ppm
Crush Format	Sorting table, hand destem for barrel fermentation and light crush balance	Sort and destem
Sangria (Seignee)	10% to 15%	10%
Yeast	Wild yeast	Selected yeast
Fermentation Temperature	82° F to 88° F	80° F to 83° F
Punch-down Methods	1 punch-down daily during cold soak. Then 1 punch-down and one pump-over, then 2 pump-overs and 1 delestage or 1 punch-down during peak	Pump-over 3 times daily, then decreasing as fermentation finishes
Oak Program	100% new French oak	100% new French oak
Barrel Aging	24 months	24 months
Racking	Weekly first month, twice a month for 3 months, then once per month for 2 months	Post malolactic with SO ₂ addition
Filtration	No filtration	Filtered



Bodega Tapiz

2008 Bodega Tapiz Black Tears Malbec \$80 (Alc. 14.6%)

Fabián Valenzuela received his degree from the **Don Bosco School of Enology** in Mendoza. He has more than 20 years of experience as a winemaker, having worked previously for **Bodega Aitor Ider Balbo** and **Catena**. He has also worked harvests in France, Spain and the United States.

According to Valenzuela:

"We are trying to reflect and represent authentic Malbec character as grown in the Uco Valley. The high altitudes lend the Malbec concentrated color with ripe, red fruit, a hint of mint and an opulent mouth-feel.

"Our vineyards have sandy loam soils at an elevation of 4,430 feet. Vine spacings are 6x6 feet. The vines are on their own roots, and we use a clonal selection selected from one of the oldest Malbecs available from Agrelo. We are traditionally farmed, leaning toward sustainable and use drip irrigation. We will pull leaves and de-bud as needed, usually getting yields of 3 tons per acre.

"We test for phenols, Brix and pH, but primarily determine when to pick by taste, looking for the tannins to soften and for all vegetal/herb character to disappear. We bunch sort then destem and berry sort, adding 30 ppm SO₂. We pull out 5 to 10 percent of the juice for sangria and then cold soak in stainless steel tanks for five days at 47° F, giving the tanks one pump-over daily.

"We will add acid before fermentation if necessary, up to 1.5 grams per liter, and we will add DAP, as needed, during fermentation. We use a selected yeast, one that contributes to the mouth-feel of the finished wine. We destage the first day and then pump-over three times daily as fermentation starts, declining pump-overs as fermentation progresses and according to taste. Fermentation temperatures peak around 80° F to 83° F. After fermentation, we will pump-over once a day during an extended maceration up to 26 days. Malolactic is carried on in the tanks, usually finishing in two to three weeks.

"We press to 100 percent new French oak barrels, using free run juice exclusively, and stir the lees once every month. After one year, we rack to barrels using 50 percent new French oak. Altogether the wine receives 24 months of oak aging. To bottle, we filter at less than 1 micron."



Winemakers' Tasting Notes

Fabián: The nose is floral with ripe, red fruit. The mouth has sweet, well-structured tannins. The balanced fruit and oak in the nose carries into the mouth.

Alejandro: There is the floral character typical of high-elevation Malbec. Sometimes it is meaty, sometimes like wild herbs. There is a lot of blackberry, boysenberry fruit with lavender and these floral aromatics. It is fresh in the mouth with a fleshy feel. The wine is very present, and the wine has persistent length.

Guillermo: I agree with the description of the fruit and herbal flavors. I like the nose and the mouth-feel. This is a wine that needs more time.

Juan: I get more red fruit character, a lot of lavender and then some herbal, grassy character that is not green at all that I find very attractive. It is typical of high-altitude Malbec. It is a bold, intense wine with tannic grip that should give aging potential. The fruit holds all of that oak well, which shows the strength of the vineyard.

Fernando: It seems a bit closed, but I get blackberry and black pepper. I think with some time this will open a lot more. It is mid-weight and has good balance between sweetness and acidity. I get a little bit of sourness. It is long on the entry and the mid-palate but not throughout the finish. The tannins are concentrated. I think if this wine was decanted, it would show much better.

Pablo: I agree that the wine is closed in the nose. My first impression was that the fruit was over ripe, but now it seems like well-ripened fruit with some spice. It is well-balanced and concentrated. There is good acidity, but it needs to be a bit more integrated. There is some minerality, but the finish is not long.

Susana: I like this wine. I think it is really complex wine. It has ripe fruit character of plums and black cherries. I agree that there is some black pepper as well. The tannins are still nervous and need time to quiet down, but it is a wine with a lot of potential. There is good weight in the palate. I think the finish will improve with more time. It has length but not enough for the big palate. I think time will correct that. For sure it will grow. It is great wine. I like it very much.





Durigutti

2007 Durigutti Familia \$60 (Alc. 14.5%)

Pablo Durigutti is one-half of the Durigutti brothers. Both he and his brother **Héctor** are winegrowers, winemakers and highly sought after consultants. Pablo graduated from the **Don Bosco School of Enology** in Mendoza; and while Héctor focused on European methodologies, Pablo preferred to study American techniques. He worked with **Domaine Chandon** and the historic **La Rural** wineries in Argentina. He also consulted with **Soluna** (Switzerland), **Helmut Ditsch** (Austria), **Sur** and **Domiciano de Barrancas**, among others. The Durigutti brand is owned and operated by both of the Durigutti brothers. Familia is their icon wine.



According to Durigutti:

"We are trying to make a modern wine that represents Argentina's new style. We look for concentrated black fruit, along with floral components and a full middle. We want a wine that has dark color, fruit, good acidity and ripe and round tannins."

"The vines that produce this wine are 70 to 80 years old. They are planted in stony soil at an altitude of 3,500 feet. They are planted in 6x3 foot spacings with northwest and southeast exposures. The grapes are traditional masal clones planted on their own rootstock. We use traditional flood irrigation and farm organically. We average 2 tons per acre. Familia uses 85 percent Malbec, along with 15 percent other varieties that we use to fill the middle palate of the wine. Those varieties include Bonarda, Cabernet Sauvignon and Cabernet Franc."

"We determine when to pick primarily by taste, looking for brown seeds, polyphenols and balanced acidity. We add 10 ppm SO₂, destem and move grapes into oak barrels with one head removed, mixing the grapes with dry ice. Depending on the year, we sangria 20 to 30 percent. They undergo a seven day cold soak at 40° F before beginning fermentation with native yeast. We will add up to 1 gram per liter of tartaric acid and will use nutrients, if necessary, toward the end of fermentation. We will delestage the grapes two times and return to barrel during cold soak. Once fermenting, we pump-over four times daily and punch-down twice daily. Fermentations are carried out at 84° F to 86° F."

"Malolactic occurs naturally in barrel and usually takes about 30 days. We use 100 percent new French oak barrels. We age in barrel for two years and stir lees twice a month during that aging. The wine is bottled unfiltered."

Winemakers' Tasting Notes

Pablo: It has a complex nose with lots of fruit and secondary aromas. There are mineral and floral aromas. The La Consulta fruit gives good volume and sweetness, and there is good weight in the mid-palate. It has deep red color with some violet character. This wine will show more aroma and flavor with time in the glass.

Susana: I don't find the weight in the mid-palate, but I think the wine is well-structured. My expectations were for more length because of the Cabernet Sauvignon and Cabernet Franc. The acidity is a little high, so it needs more time to integrate. The fruit is beautiful with typical blackberry and a bit of strawberry typical of Bonarda. It is good wine.

Fernando: I agree about the Bonarda aromatics. There is a kind of ripe, dry fruit character, along with an interesting character of chocolate and mocha from the oak. It is intense and distinctive, and I like it. In the mouth the acidity comes first, which is nice and refreshing and adds length to the wine. It has medium concentration without harsh tannins. With time, I think the acidity will blend well with the other components.

Juan: This is a nicely balanced, elegant wine. There is medium weight, and the oak is well-integrated. Nice wine.

Guillermo: This is a well-made wine. I like it. It is softer than some of the others, less astringent. I think with some more age, it will get even rounder.

Alejandro: This is made from ripe fruit and has some alcohol present. There is a nice aromatic integrity of sour cherry and alcohol. It is a bit astringent and tannic. This is a wine that needs food.

Fabián: There is high complexity in the nose with a hint of sherry. There is a bit of licorice in the mouth where good acidity accentuates the tannin. I agree, this wine would be good with food.





Bodega Catena Zapata

2008 Bodega Catena Zapata Adrianna Vineyard \$100 (Alc. 14.5%)

Fernando Buscema started working in his family's winery. He studied enology at university, scoring top in his class. For six years he has been head of research and development for **Catena Zapata**. This year he completed his degree at UC Davis. Upon his return to Argentina, Catena appointed him as the new head of **Caro**, the joint project between **Catena Wines** and the French firm **Domaines Barons de Rothschild (Lafite)**.

According to Buscema:

"We are trying to achieve an elegant wine with complexity and concentration that shows the floral, violet character of high-altitude Malbec vineyards. This single vineyard ripens well, allowing us to have relatively low alcohol with good acid to make a wine that is balanced and age-worthy."

"The Adrianna Vineyard is 20 years old, planted in shallow topsoil with gravelly surface stones. The elevation of the vineyard is 4,850 feet. The exposure is northwest, and there are 2,000 vines per acre: all masal clones of Malbec planted onto their own root systems. The vineyard is drip-irrigated in a traditional manner with the focus on conserving water and using as few chemicals as possible."

"We perform an early shoot removal in September and a cluster thinning in December. Veraison took place toward the end of January when we restricted water to stop any secondary shoot growth. We leaf-thinned the eastern sides of rows in March and harvested during the second half of April, giving the vines a window of about 90 days from veraison to harvest, resulting in very high polyphenolic accumulation."

"We determine when to pick by analysis and taste. We want no green flavors, and we look for brown, crispy seeds before we get raisins or soft skin. We harvest three times, usually seven to 10 days apart. The first harvest gives us fresh fruit and good acidity. The second harvest gives us ripe fruit and elegance, and the third harvest lends sweetness and round tannins. Altogether we harvested 1.2 tons to the acre."

"We sort in the vineyard and get the grapes to the winery. We add 50 ppm SO₂ at the crusher. Sometimes the first harvest is destemmed; berries are cracked and moved to a tank where yeast is added for tank fermentation. The other harvests receive the same SO₂ and then go directly to barrel with 30 percent whole cluster and 70 percent whole berry to ferment. We use no cold soak, perform no sangria and make no acid or nutrient additions. Fermentations are carried out by native yeast at maximum temperatures of 77° F. We roll the barrels twice a day in the beginning, four to six times daily during mid-fermentation and then once a day towards the end of fermentation. We will delestage if a barrel is reduced. Fermentation lasts 15 to 30 days."

"We will drain and then press the barrels, mixing free run juice and early press juice. Fermentations are done in 100 percent new French oak barrels. Aging is done in 100 percent French oak with 60 percent new oak. We will declassify any barrels that we don't think meet our standards for Adrianna Vineyard. We rack about once every six months and bottle without filtering."



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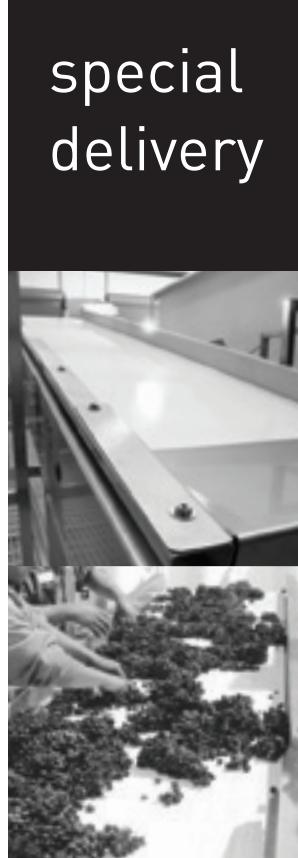
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Winemakers' Tasting Notes

Fernando: The nose has a nice combination of raspberries and smoky oak. I don't get much floral yet, maybe with more time. There is a very clean nose, nothing off and very little yeast influence. I get a little minerality in the nose as well. In the mouth there is a combination of acidity and sweetness in that order: A good mid-palate that is not over-powering. I get raspberry then blackberry that I like. The acidity helps make the wine long, without having too much tannin. It is a layered, complex wine that changes with time, showing diverse enjoyable versions.



Pablo: This is very fresh with red fruit, which becomes even more intense with time in the glass. There are fresh fruit flavors in the mouth that are the same as the nose. The wine's acidity balances the sweetness of the fruit. It is rich and mouth-filling and makes you want to drink more.

Susana: One word: balance. It is sweet on the palate, which is typical of Malbec, but not too sweet. It has plum and blackberry, but I don't get violet. It has nice complexity with good weight on the palate and a very good finish. The wine lasts in your mouth for a long time. The oak is well integrated with hints of tobacco, not mocha. I like this very much.

Guillermo: The first fruit impression is of strawberries with bubble gum, which I like. The flavor follows the nose with lots of Malbec sweetness and good tannin.

Alejandro: This wine shows maturity. There is good acidity with a bit of nice volatile acidity that adds to the wine and helps with length. It is the opposite of the Achával Ferrer, but I like them both.

Fabián: I get a candied aroma from this wine. It has sweet tannins with good acidity. The fruit is rich, almost as if it was cooked with sugar. The wine might be a bit short on the finish.

Juan: This is mature and tastes slightly over-ripe. There is lots of black cherry character, along with some slightly vegetal or woody character and some herbal notes. I like the wine, but it is a bit over-ripe for me.

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Dominio del Plata

2008 Dominio del Plata Nosotros \$95 (Alc. 14.5%)

Susana Balbo was the very first woman to graduate with an enology degree in Argentina. She accomplished that feat with top honors back in 1981. She went to **Cafayate** to work for **Michel Torino** and created the floral/citrus style of Torrontes that remains popular today. She worked at other wineries, notably **Martins** and Catena Zapata, before starting her own winery, **Dominio del Plata**, in 1999. In addition to making her own wines, Balbo has worked as one of Argentina's most respected consultants in countries like Spain, Chile, Italy, Brazil and Australia.



According to Balbo:

"For this wine, we try for balance and elegance, not power. I prefer personality. We want complexity with elegance and finesse and firm but velvety tannins. We blend vineyards for flavors of black cherry, strawberry, blackberry, herbs and violets."

"Nosotros is a blend from three different vineyards. Those vineyards are 25, 15 and 13 years old, respectively. The vineyards range in elevation from 3,200 to almost 3,500 feet. Soils run from deep clay to clay loam over a rocky layer. Vine spacings are 7x2.5 or 8x4 feet. All of the Malbec in our estate vineyards comes from Catena clones. The vineyards are drip-irrigated and farmed traditionally but with a sustainable mentality."

"We irrigate in a way looking to develop deep rooted vines. The vines are cane-pruned and use VSP trellis systems. We leaf-thin post veraison and do two green harvests to lower yields. We usually get 3 tons per acre or less from these vineyards. To determine when to pick, we analyze tannins and color, but final decisions are driven by flavors and tasting. We want fruitiness balanced with acidity. We prefer to measure skin tannins instead of focusing on brown seeds. We harvest different altitudes in the vineyards at different times. We also leave single rows unpicked so we can evaluate them to determine if picking later than we did would have been better."

"Grapes are sorted in the vineyard then come to the winery where they are destemmed and lightly crushed. We add 50 ppm SO₂. We barrel-ferment 20 percent of the wine. The grapes for this portion are hand-sorted and destemmed directly to barrels for fermenting. The remaining 80 percent is divided into three lots and fermented in tanks. One lot, 20 percent, is cold-soaked for two days at 43° F and then allowed to ferment. A second portion, 40 percent, is heated to 86° F before beginning fermentation. The final portion of 40 percent is fermented normally. All fermentations are carried out by native yeast. We also sangria up to 20 percent of the juice and ferment that in stainless steel barrels before returning it to the tank fermentations at 7° to 8° Brix."

"For the tank fermentations, we generally pump-over three times each day, along with one delestage for the first four to five days. After that, we pump-over twice daily, using oxygen in the pump-over during that process. Tank

fermentations are carried out in the 82° F to 88° F range and average 17 days. At pressing, we keep the various lots separate. We separate free run juice from press fractions and determine later how much press juice will work its way back into the blend."

"The wine goes through malolactic fermentation in barrels. The barrels are 100 percent new French oak. We batonnage the wine once a week during the first month, twice a month for the next three months and once a month for the following two months. We will do an egg white fining before bottling and bottle with no filtration."

Winemakers' Tasting Notes

Susana: This has the typical deep color with hints of violet in the nose. In the mouth are strawberries, black cherries and plums. There is light chocolate and some tobacco from the oak. The fruit is fresh, and the oak is not very present in the mouth. The wine has elegant tannin with a good finish that has medium weight on the palate. It is an elegant, well-balanced wine.

Fernando: There is a lot of fresh fruit: plum and cherry, in particular. I get spicy notes from the oak, which is well integrated. Initially, the wine was all about fruit, but it has already changed to reveal a balance of fruit and oak. It has Malbec sweetness without being too sweet. The acidity is good, not high. The fresh fruit aromas and flavors help give the wine length.

Pablo: It is an attractive, deep color. The nose has fresh fruit and with time has shown an elegant clove and plum complexity. It is very agreeable in the palate with round tannins.

Juan: I am getting licorice character, along with nice oaky aromas, almost like chocolate. It is attractive wine with nice tannic grip and good potential. I like the attractive oak, which is balanced by good acidity.

Guillermo: I like the nose but find it a bit hot. It is very harmonious on the palate and has good potential. I think it is a wine that definitely needs more time.

Alejandro: The fruit seems mature, probably late-picked. There is lots of oak and plenty of sweetness in the mouth.

Fabián: This wine has a chocolate liquor aroma. It is a bit hot in the mouth with that same chocolate liquor flavor. The finish is a bit short, considering the richness on the palate.





Achával Ferrer Winery

2009 Achával Ferrer Finca Bella Vista Malbec \$90 (Alc. 13.5%)

Santiago Achával was an Argentino studying for his MBA at Stanford when he started visiting Napa Valley wineries and developed his interest in wine. He completed his studies, returned to Argentina and by 1998 had become the winemaker/founding partner/president of **Achával Ferrer Winery**, one of the most acclaimed wineries in Argentina. Currently, he also works as consulting winemaker for **The Vines of Mendoza**. Along with his friend **Jon Staenberg** he started a new label in 2005 called **Hand of God**.

According to Achával:

"The whole focus of this wine is to show the mark of terroir from this Finca Bella Vista site and its 90-year-old vines. Everything we do in the vineyard and the winery attempts to focus those particular characteristics in the finished wine. We want a wine that is dense, extracted and powerful, a wine not just for endurance (aging) but one that will change and transcend over time."



"Finca Bella Vista is a well-drained vineyard of sandy loam soil on top of gravel at an elevation of 3,200 feet. We have 2,600 plants per acre with a southwest to northeast exposure. The vineyard uses traditional furrow irrigation. We work hard in the vineyard to produce grapes that require little intervention at the winery. We do severe shoot-thinning in the spring and leafing of the morning side of the fruit zone at fruit set. There is severe crop-thinning at veraison. We use deficit irrigation between fruit set and veraison, taking care to avoid stress that might shut down the biological process of the vine. In 2009 this regimen yielded 0.75 tons per acre, less than 1 pound of fruit per vine."

"We determine when to pick by taste, looking for tannic ripeness, but taking care not to lose the freshness and vibrancy of the fruit. Grapes are bunch-sorted and then berry-sorted after destemming. We lightly crush the fruit, looking for 50 to 70 percent split berries. We use no SO₂ during fermentation, making the first addition in spring of 20 ppm, a level we maintain during barrel aging. There is no cold soak and no sangria because we feel we have done our concentration work in the vineyard."

"We do not need to add acid to the must, because our low yields result in early ripening and early harvest with high natural acidity. This wine uses indigenous yeast for fermentation. We will add nutrients if necessary, determined by YAN testing. We ferment in small tanks, allowing temperatures to reach 90° F to 93° F. We pump-over using sprinklers continuously for 16 hours per day, keeping the cap wet at all times, which is necessary at our higher temperatures. This continuous pump-over also provides the yeast with the oxygen it requires to survive. We believe the combination of higher temperatures and continuous pump-over results in a more tightly knit fruit structure of the wine, especially in the mid-palate."

"We press at dryness, blending free run and press juice immediately, but we only press to 1.2 atmospheres. Malolactic occurs naturally in 100 percent

new French oak barrels. The wine ages in those barrels for approximately 14 months with no racking. It is then bottled with no filtration and receives an additional year to two years of bottle aging before release."

Winemakers' Tasting Notes

Fernando: This has a different profile. I get black pepper. From certain cooperages I get a bit of anchovy aromas, and I get that here. There might be a bit of reduction. There is more of a black fruit and blackberry profile. There is a vibrant acidity in the mouth that makes the wine very long. There is no sweetness at all. It is an austere wine. I would define it as linear with acidity, but I don't get the typical sweetness of Malbec.

Pablo: It has profound color. In the nose there is oregano and fruit, but the fruit is closed. I also get aromas of malolactic, almost dairy. In the mouth the fruit, acidity and the tannins are not together or balanced.

Susana: The wine is very concentrated with deep color. The mouth is very spicy. It is not fresh fruit; the spice is higher than the fruit. There is a little reduction and a touch of Brett. There are strong tannins, and I agree that the wine is linear, not round like most Malbec. This has a long finish with good weight, but the acid is not yet integrated. It needs more time to get approachable. The tannins are a bit divorced from the acidity. They are fighting. I like the potential of this wine.



Fabián: This has good color. There is ripe, fresh fruit with high acid. I get a lot of red fruits in the nose and the mouth. This has less concentration than the Durigutti with the same or even more acidity.

Juan: There is a complex nose that has boysenberry and acidity. In the mouth, the wine is rich and good but a touch too acidic.

Guillermo: I like the fruit aromas, but there is also a lactic, buttery aroma. I think this should have better fruit flavor. It's as if the acidity interferes with the fruit.

Alejandro: There are intense aromatics. I get some early harvest character with lots of floral characteristics and apricot marmalade. The same flavors appear in the mouth: marmalade and floral with acid. The acid carries the flavor.



Conclusion

While the modern Argentina wine industry is less than 25 years old, the winemakers are already producing amazing wines. The arid, high-mountain desert vineyards produce high-quality fruit and are able to sustain old vine vineyards for decades while supporting ample yields. Whether it was luck or shrewd insight, Malbec proved to be the perfect varietal to carry the wines of Argentina into the world marketplace. Argentine Malbec, with its rich inky color along with violet florals and sweet, juicy mid-palate, was easy to enjoy. Simply put, Malbec was an attractive variety, and the quality delivered at various price points was astounding.

Five years ago, most Argentine winemakers made Malbec the same way. They sorted the grapes, drained off a percentage of juice (sangria), adjusted pH with additions of tartaric acid and used **Innerstave** or other oak alternatives as much as French oak barrels. Wines were made ready to drink upon release, and little thought was given to making wines of age-worthy character.

Times have changed. Today most Argentine wineries have a three-tiered production system for Malbec geared to price points. On the first tier is young wine with little or no oak. A step up from that is Malbec aged in a mix of old and new oak. Higher on the ladder are Malbecs aged exclusively in new French oak barrels. Finally, some wineries have what they call their Icon wine. Icon wines are derived from the finest vineyards, aged in the best French oak barrels and meant to be age-worthy.

Argentine winemakers have morphed into experienced, knowledgeable, confident artisans. When it comes to their winemaking, they exhibit a fearless daring that borders on the audacious. No mountain is too high to plant a vineyard. No technique is too difficult or labor intensive if it makes



better quality wine. In this Varietal Focus, we have winemakers using single vineyard fruit, but we also have winemakers blending fruit from different vineyards. Some use native yeast while others prefer selected yeast. Fermentation temperatures range from lows of 70° F to highs of 93° F. Wines are fermented in stainless steel and concrete tanks as well as French oak barrels. Fermentation regimens include punching-down, pumping-over, delestage, continuous pumping-over and rolling barrels. More than that, each and every winemaker is confident that their methodology will produce great Malbec, and they are willing to tell you why.

The range of complex aromas and flavors exhibited by the wines in this tasting was wonderful. These wines have a depth of flavor, a weightiness on the palate and a juiciness in the finish that aren't possible with most other varieties. When you realize that for most of these winemakers, the wines represent their beginning foray into age-worthy winemaking, one cannot help but be eager to see how things develop. **WBM**

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