

WINE News

Terroir, southern style.



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New Playbook for Wines of Chile and Argentina

By Joe Manekin

When I started buying the Argentinian and Chilean wines here nine years back, both countries were following the same commercial game plan: produce simple, one-note, fruity wines. Simple, fruity bordering on cloying, low-acid wines were the order of the day. The more expensive the wine, particularly at the high end, the more toasty new oak was required to convince the consumer of an expensive-tasting product. Fruit picked at very ripe levels was considered a requirement in order to yield soft, fruity wines with lower acidity and a rich mouthfeel. Tastes and trends change, of course, and we are now in the midst of a global re-think of how wine should taste, how it should be made, how

and where the grapes that produce it should be farmed. Argentina and Chile, previously known for high-octane reds and commodity Cabernet, respectively, now stand out in my mind for the amount of time and attention they spend underground, examining the dirt, better understanding terroir. In fact, I would make the argument that today, perhaps as well as anyone else, Argentina and Chile are selling their unique soils: their granite, their schist, their colluvial calcareous and alluvial, stony terroirs. Don't worry, we're not trying to literally sell you dirt and rocks! That said, the grapes grown in these prime patches of vine-growing earth produce some pretty spectacular wines.

2015 Chateau Los Boldos "Grande Reserve" Cabernet Sauvignon Cachapoal Valley (\$15.99) Stylish Andes foothill Cab, with the high-elevation region's intense, dark and mineral fruit on full display. K&L's Alex Pross says: "I love this wine! It has everything I look for: depth, precision, balance, complexity and most importantly, it tastes really good. Wonderful, food-friendly Cabernet Sauvignon that over-delivers given its modest price." **95 DC, 92 JS, 90 WS**



2015 Casarena "Owen's Vineyard" Cabernet Sauvignon Mendoza (\$24.99) Supple, round, red fruited, elegantly textured and long Cabernet. Tastes expensive. K&L's Gary Westby says: "What an outstanding bottle of Cabernet! Tasting this transported me back to my first days in the wine business, tasting the old fashioned greats of Napa. If you like to have your Cabernet with food, and love the old school style, this is a must, especially at this great price!" **94 RP**



2015 Zorzal Eggo "Tinto de Tiza" Mendoza (\$24.99) We featured this wine last year, sold it out, and I recently learned that the importer re-loaded with a small additional quantity from the winery. The wine is absolutely singing now, with savory dark and purple-skinned fruits, quite dry and with good amounts of dry extract providing serious structure, yet a mineral vibrancy and freshness as well. **94 RP**



Cover photo: The Vines of Mendoza.

Forget Uber, It's Time to Hail a Cab!

Each of these three Cabernet Sauvignon-based wines have their own sense of style and place, while all garnering strong reviews and gaining our hard-earned respect as intrepid, thorough retailers who taste a lot—really, a lot—of Cabernet year 'round.

2015 Aquitania Cabernet Sauvignon Maipo Valley (\$14.99) Alto Maipo, the highly coveted portion of Chile's most important Cabernet growing region, is generally a source of fruit for Cabs that retail for upwards of \$30, oftentimes going for multiples of that price point. There is definitely something to be said for the alluvial, gravelly soil and relatively higher elevation that this sub-zone is famous for; it makes wonderful Cabernet. The Aquitania has delicious fruit expression, though what stands out most for me are actually the aromatics, red fruited and rather subtly leafy, with hints of black currant as well. Coupled with an elegant and persistent palate, this is what well-made Cabernet-based wine is all about. **91 JS, 90 RP**

2013 Casa Lapostolle "Cuvée Alexandre" Cabernet Sauvignon Apalta Vineyard (\$15.99) Casa Lapostolle is most famous for their Clos Apalta, a wine that has been named "wine of the year" in *Wine Spectator* and is a rich, dark-fruited collectible that sells for over \$100 per bottle. While this varietal Cabernet is not the same Cab that goes into that blend, it is from the same neck of the woods, on the Apalta Vineyard, in Chile's Colchagua Valley. Spicy cherry confiture, sweet oak spices and dark chocolate aromas are all well balanced. Given the



cooler vintage, the palate profile is nicely ripe, with a stylish, spicy profile, well framed by the tannins. For a few bucks under \$20, this is an impeccably well produced Cabernet that deservedly has a number of loyal fans. **94 JS, 91 WE, 90 RP**

2016 De Martino "Estate" Cabernet Sauvignon Maipo Valley (\$14.99) The second-largest owner of organic vineyards in Chile, with 740 acres in production, De Martino is an example of Chilean-style wine industry scale coupled with the country's recent dynamism, energy and creative thinking. Maipo Valley "classic" bottlings represent good typicity and excellent value. This Cab shows generous dark fruits with a balanced mouthfeel, and overall, a feel of plump yet bright and honest fruit. Cab done right!

Power Trio: Three for the Cellar (Two with 100 Points!)

I challenge any collector with a deep cellar to show me the **Argentinian and Chilean wines in their collection.** I pose that challenge knowing full well that the market for collectible wine is dominated by Napa, Bordeaux, Burgundy and the Rhône valley, with a smattering of Champagne, German Riesling, Piemonte, Brunello, Vega Sicilia and Rioja thrown in for good measure. That ought to change.



If these perfect scores don't convince you, and the relatively low prices for perfection don't, either, I invite you to see for yourself how seriously well made and delicious these three wines are. While they are all clearly inspired by Bordelaise winemaking practices, they each have a marked personality all their own. And unlike many examples from the preceding list of usual suspects for the cellar, these wines are generally very approachable and delightfully drinkable upon release, while still amply structured and sufficiently pedigreed to improve in bottle for years.

2013 Bodegas Aleanna "Gran Enemigo" Cabernet Franc Gualtary Argentina (\$99.99) While I don't have a cellar full of Cheval Blanc, I do see the similarity in the floral, intensely fruited, yet impeccably balanced and refined qualities of that wine and this Gran Enemigo. Whether it's the Cabernet Franc grape variety, so well adapted to its growing site, the influence of limestone here, the deft barrel aging and winemaking, or some combination thereof, it is clear that this is top-quality red wine which should age quite nicely for some years. **100 RP, 99 JS**

2014 Cheval des Andes Bordeaux Blend Mendoza (\$79.99) Speaking of Cheval Blanc...how about an interpretation of Mendoza terroir by this St-Emilion Premier Grand Cru Classé A, known for its elegant, balanced and Cabernet Franc-marked style? I think you will find this wine to be a bit more generously fruited, though in its way every bit as elegant as its sister wine in the commune of St-Emilion bordering Pomerol. **97 RP, 95 JS**

2015 Viña Almaviva "Almaviva" Bordeaux Blend Puente Alto (\$119.99) From one of the original Bordeaux-inspired Chilean super wines, and a collaboration between the venerable Concha y Toro and Mouton Rothschild, the generously fruited and balanced 2015 was uniformly well received by the press. **100 JS, 96 DC, 95 WS**



Three Brothers, Two Wineries, One Trailblazing Style

Let's not mince words: Matias, Juan Pablo, and Gerardo Michelini are rock stars. They are Argentinian winemaking rock stars, that is. When I say “rock stars,” I’m not referring to overrated, fat, no longer relevant rock stars. Guns n’ Roses they are not, no sir, I’m thinking more along the lines of Frank Zappa and the Mothers. Their work is similarly avant-garde, without compromise, at times a bit challenging, running the risk of straying too far from what most people would consider good taste, but always thought provoking. Not to worry, though—for this feature we have focused exclusively on the hits!

Zorzal is the Michelini brothers’ winery in the village of Tupungato, featuring grapes grown exclusively in especially calcareous parcels of this highly desirable, high-elevation



Rockin’ in the cellar: Matias, Juan Pablo, and Gerardo Michelini.

section of the Uco Valley. It’s a humble winery surrounded by one of their recently planted vineyards, but in true rock n’ roll fashion there are hand-painted images on the winery’s cement eggs, as well as a drum kit and full band setup to jam as need dictates. Superuco is the brothers’ project located on the expansive Vines of Mendoza compound (where there are acres of vineyards planted, Francis Mallmann’s excellent Siete Fuegos restaurant, and a luxury wine country resort as well). Here they extend their range, producing site-specific bottlings, primarily from Malbec, though unlike for Zorzal, the fruit does not necessarily hail from around Tupungato. They have bottlings from other parts of the Uco Valley—from the *paraje* of Altamira and Los Chacayes, for example. Like Zorzal, these wines are always mineral and serious, though perhaps with weightier textures and denser structures.

2017 Zorzal “Terroir Unico” Pinot Noir Tupungato (\$14.99) The 2017 vintage of what has to be one of our more serious sub-\$15 Pinot Noirs is delicious: slightly floral, a bit savory, and nicely structured with precise, lightly firm tannins. Zorzal and the brothers Michelini are definitely forging a new path for Argentinian wine. Their MO is generally to harvest much earlier than everyone else; they prize acidity in their wines and believe that even wines from the warm, sun-drenched Uco Valley should be crisp, vibrant, and refreshing. These are incredibly interesting wines and well worth discovering. **90 RP**

2015 Zorzal “Filoso” Pinot Noir Tupungato (\$27.99) Produced from a 12-acre, highly calcareous site in Gualtallary, this Pinot Noir sees a good portion of stem inclusion as well as aging in concrete eggs (you guessed it, that is why this range of wines is called “Eggo”). This is a convincingly Burgundian Pinot, with lovely savor to complement the fruit. **93 RP**

2015 Superuco “Calcareo Granito” Cabernet Franc Tupungato (\$29.99) As the name suggests, this Cabernet Franc hails from a particularly calcareous and granitic parcel. The winemaking is unusual, involving whole clusters with a brief one month stint in amphora prior to racking to used barrels for 18 months. Rich and brawny, with intense blackberry fruit that finishes quite dry, this is indeed rather Chinon-like, perhaps with more weight, and loads of personality. **94 RP**





Get lost in a glass of *Laberinto Sauvignon Blanc*.

Fresh! Bright and Crisp Wines from Chile's Coast

These three wines are all delicious, expressive of terroir and indicative of the type of lively, exciting wines coming out of Chile these days.

2017 Laberinto "Cenizas de Laberinto" Sauvignon Blanc Maule Valley (\$17.99)

Rafael Tirado owns one of Chile's truly original properties in the tiny, high-elevation section of Maule Valley called Colbún. Some of the vines are literally planted in a *laberinto* (labyrinth) formation, which in Rafael's words would force him and anyone else working the vineyard to slow down and think! Grown in volcanic soil, this Sauvignon Blanc trends toward a Loire Valley style: salty minerality, lively citrus flavors and mouthwatering acidity.



2015 Ritual Chardonnay Casablanca Valley (\$17.99) I was seriously smitten by this—it might be the best Chardonnay for under \$18 I have tasted this year. This delicious Chardonnay is the result of a beautiful, coastal terroir, featuring lots of decomposed granite, some heirloom Wente clones planted 25-plus years ago, and a winemaker, Rodrigo Soto, who studied how to make Chardonnay with none other than David Ramey. There is a bright, rich, mouth-filling palate of citrus and stone fruit, with explosive acidity, along with the combination of texture and freshness which I associate with Wente clone Chard. Compare this Chardonnay to pricier ones from more expensive real estate (Sonoma County and Burgundy, for example) and prepare to be very pleasantly surprised! **93 JS**



2016 Arboleda Pinot Noir Aconcagua Costa (\$19.99) Next-level Pinot Noir need not: a.) come from California; b.) come from Burgundy; or c.) cost \$30 or more. In this case, we have a beautiful, high-toned, red-fruited, varietally true example from coastal Chile (12 kilometers from the Pacific Ocean). I love this wine for its freshness, its linear quality and surprising length on the finish. Professional critics seem to be on the same page with this wine, though unfortunately we only received about one-third of the amount we attempted to order, so this Pinot deal is not likely to be long for this world. That said, we still wanted to spread the news about this delicious, highly recommended sub-\$20 Pinot from Arboleda. **95 DC, 93 JS, 91 RP**



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