

WINE News

Southern Hemisphere Summer Spectacular



JULY 6, 2020 FEATURES

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Look to the Southern Horizon for Quality and Value

By Thomas Smith

Years ago, whenever I spoke to customers about wines from the Southern Hemisphere, I invariably ended up making comparisons to the great wines of Europe. How can you not? To say “Burgundian” sounds so sophisticated and elegant. It gets the heart racing, pushing you into a state of anticipation, as though your next \$20 Pinot Noir might be a Richebourg in disguise. And honestly? I drink more New Zealand Pinot Noir than anything else, because the wine quality is phenomenal, its character is distinctive, and it dramatically over-delivers on price. Every. Single. Time.

In this newsletter, we want to showcase wines from the Southern Hemisphere that are standing out from the crowd. These are wines that could only be from the places in which they are grown. They display characteristics that distinguish them from other wines across the globe, and are examples of the exceptional quality being produced in South

America, South Africa, New Zealand, and Australia. For example, anyone will tell you that no Sauvignon Blanc on earth tastes like Marlborough Sauvignon Blanc. It has powerful aromatics and alluring tropical aromas—especially in the phenomenal 2019 vintage, which has just been released. In Chile, Carmenere is the country’s signature grape, and three-generation producer Clos de Luz is crafting stunning wines from the Almahue Valley. We also take a look at wines of the up-and-coming wine region of Uruguay, whose tiny wine scene is starting to garner global attention. And don’t miss our spotlight on what makes Hunter Valley Sémillon one of the truly unique wines of the world, as well as a selection of some of the best wines you’ll find anywhere south of \$20. So explore, broaden your tasting horizons, and I hope you find these wines as utterly compelling and delicious as I do.

Thomas Smith is K&L’s buyer for NZ, Australia, and South Africa.

2019 Mount Edward Pinot Noir Rosé Central Otago (\$14.99)

Mount Edward’s Duncan Forsyth has a reputation for crafting some of the best Pinot Noir in Central Otago. But their big secret is the rosé, which is made from the same premium fruit that goes into their \$30-plus Pinot Noirs. Bone dry, the is bright and refreshing, full of strawberry and rhubarb fruit, with a creamy finish.



2017 Susana Balbo “Crios” Malbec Mendoza (\$9.99)

A longtime go-to Malbec here at K&L, this is built like an easy-drinking Cabernet with dark and rich red fruits, just a little Argentine spice, earth, easy tannins, and a clean finish, this is an uncomplicated, delicious wine for all occasions—we like it with barbecue, kebabs, or taco Tuesdays. **93 DC, 90 JS, 90 RP**



2018 Boekenhoutskloof “The Wolftrap” Red Blend Western Cape (\$9.99)

Cofermented Syrah and Viognier from estate vineyards bring savory and floral components to the wine, while Mourvèdre from Stellenbosch adds structure and complexity. A bold, spicy, and versatile red that continues to be one of our best sellers from South Africa.



Cover: The sky at harvest in New Zealand, 2019. (Photo courtesy of Fromm Winery)



Now that's terroir: wild horses and the Andes mountains in the Uco Valley wine region. (Shutterstock)

Mendoza 2018: A Trio of Malbec Terroirs

By Kirk Walker

I was excited to take over the position as K&L's wine buyer for South America. For years, I had watched more and more of these wines come to the market with more and more specific appellations, especially from Argentina. I loved that the winemakers were now in positions where they were comfortable and excited to showcase the variety that Mendoza has to offer; loved that I now had the vehicle to talk about terroir as opposed to just producer, varietal, and price point. And I was excited because I knew I was going to learn more. But what I was not expecting to discover was that I *love Malbec*.

When I was hired at K&L, the wines that I loved the most were German, Austrian, Italian, and Champagne. Mostly white, all high acid, a lot of them precious, and mostly obscure. Malbec was a party wine, something to drink but not think about. It's hard not to like, and that could be why I overlooked it. I also think that in the many years since I started at K&L, viticulture and winemaking has changed in Argentina, as well as consumer preference. Malbec is aromatic. There is lift and a floral component to it. It's mostly dark fruited, but that depends more on terroir and style. The easy tannins I have grown to really appreciate, more than enough to savor with some tri tip, but soft enough to unwind with at the end of a long day by itself. And, very importantly for me, it is a varietal that expresses its terroir. I love that moving into this new decade, we will be talking about the terroir and Malbec, not just Malbec.

A perfect place to start my quick highlight of Malbec is the **2018 Vaglio "Aggie" Malbec Uco Valley (\$18.99)**. Why perfect? Vaglio is a passion project by José Lovaglio Balbo—Balbo, like Susana Balbo, one of the most important people in the modern Argentinean wine industry. Jose's day job is as winemaker at Crios. His passion is to highlight the terroir of Mendoza. The Aggie comes from Gualtallary, one of the most acclaimed subregions in Tupungato. It is high elevation, almost 4,000 feet, and its soils have lots of calcium carbonate in them. Jose's winemaking is minimal intervention, but not hands off. The wine, which spends eight months in 40% new French oak, captures both the new and the old Mendoza. The texture is ripe and pure, and the wine shows classic plum and dark berry aromas with



a floral, almost violet, note. The tannins are polished and supple, and it has a long finish with a lingering minerality—that's Gualtallary. **95 JS**

2018 Riccitelli Malbec "The Party" Lujan de Cuyo (\$22.99) Unintentionally, my next wine is from another second-generation winemaker—Matías Riccitelli. The surname is not as famous in the States as in Argentina, but his father was the winemaker at Catena for decades. His passion is for high-elevation vineyards, purity, and delicacy. The "party" is a party for the senses. All the fruit is from Lujan de Cuyo, and is fermented whole cluster, foot trodden, and fermented in concrete vessels. This wine is pretty, bright, and very complex. Floral, with red fruits and berries, herbs, spice, and minerality, this wine has the tension of a wine from a much cooler climate. It's unmistakably Mendoza, but there seems to be a hint of the Loire to it. This is an aptly named wine.



2018 Zuccardi "Concreto" Malbec Paraje Altamira (\$34.99) The final wine of this trio is from a family that has a long heritage of winemaking, also. Sebastián Zuccardi is a highly regarded and much-awarded winemaker. He makes several wines, from value to single vineyard, that always receive very good grades. Paraje Altamira is one of the premier terroirs of The Uco Valley, with elevation over 3,000 feet and very stony soils. These stones are all covered with calcium carbonate. Unlike the chalky soils of Europe, the white rocks of Paraje Altamira are coated with calcium—think mocha on a truffle, rather than deep beds of rock. The chalky stones do what they do in Europe, except the rest of the soil is alluvial. This is such a fascinating place for terroir! Concreto is crafted to explicitly express these stony soils. This wine is fascinating and delicious. It has a cool climate Old World mountain wine feel. It is very aromatic with wild flowers and crushed dark berries. There are hints of wild herbs and savory almost salty minerality. It just gets better the longer it's open, and has a finish that goes and goes. Please decant, and this wine will take you on a journey to the Andes. **95 RP, 93 WE**



Kirk Walker is K&L's buyer for South America, Spain, and Portugal.

Marlborough 2019: The Vintage We've Been Waiting For

By Thomas Smith

A few months ago, something interesting happened. As our New Zealand buyer, I spend a lot of time tasting wines from Marlborough, but starting in December the string of Sauvignon Blancs coming across my desk were tasting remarkably, almost profoundly good. Like, really, really, good. And every one of these wines was from the 2019 vintage, which is turning out to be the best vintage in recent years, and quite possibly the best of the decade.

Recent vintages in Marlborough have struggled. In 2018 we saw two cyclones dump rain across the valleys at the critical moment of harvest. Before that, exceptionally cool conditions in 2017 pushed harvest back weeks, and grapes struggled to get ripe. That's not to say that these vintages produced poor quality wines. I have absolutely enjoyed wines from these vintages. But the conditions of the 2019 growing season have definitely raised the bar.



Ready for harvest at Fromm.

Marlborough's 2019 vintage began with a little rain, but moved into an uninterrupted span of warm, dry summer days throughout the growing season. The grapes matured quickly, pushing their way to full phenolic ripeness at one of the earliest days on record. "The summer conditions led to 2019 being our earliest harvest ever with our first fruit into the winery on 1st March," explains Anna Flowerday, from Te Whare Ra. "The resultant wines have great depth of flavour and fleshiness with purity of fruit, bright aromatics and ripe, juicy acidity."

I couldn't agree more with this assessment. The 2019s are brighter, more balanced. There's full ripeness here with classic Marlborough expressions of tropical fruit and soaring aromatics, complemented by a beautiful acid balance. This might be one of the very best vintages we've seen for these wines, and the quality is evident in the glass. This is Marlborough Sauvignon Blanc at its most vibrant self.

A perfect example of this is the **2019 Allan Scott Sauvignon Blanc (\$13.99)**. *Wine Spectator* gave this one of their second-highest scores for a New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc—ever. In fact, the only two wines scored above it are nearly twice the price. This is exactly what I expect from Marlborough Sauvignon Blanc. Full of bright tropical notes, green pea, lively acidity, and laser focus. Allan Scott has quickly turned out to be one of the breakout stars of the vintage. **93 WS**



Last year's best-selling Sauvignon is back. The **2019 Momo Sauvignon Blanc Marlborough (\$14.99)** is completely organic and focused on fruit from areas surrounding Wairau, the heart of Marlborough. This is the best rendition of this wine I have seen yet, displaying bright expressions of passion fruit, citrus, and crisp herbaceous notes. The palate is full and fresh, with weight and texture that make it much more serious than its price.

A small family-run operation, Te Whare Ra is simply the best producer in Marlborough right now. Jason and Anna Flowerday handcraft their **2019 TWR (Te Whare Ra) Sauvignon Blanc Marlborough (\$19.99)** from two sites: their exceptionally well-farmed home vineyard in Renwick, and a second vineyard located in the Awatere Valley to the south. This is the best of both. With classic notes of guava, grapefruit, papaya, with elderflower, lime, and wet stones, this competes with the best Sauvignon Blancs made anywhere. **94 SK, 92 BC**

Kevin Judd's boutique winery in Marlborough has been creating some of the region's best Sauvignon Blancs. Judd knows a thing or two about Marlborough, having spent nearly two decades at the helm of Cloudy Bay before starting his passion project focusing on incredibly high-quality Sauvignon Blanc from a handful of the best vineyards in the Wairau Plain. Tropical and vibrant, the **2019 Greywacke Sauvignon Blanc Marlborough (\$19.99)** does a fine job of walking the tightrope between compelling, aromatic intensity with rich, powerful fruit. It's full of classic bright notes of kiwi, stone fruit, citrus, and tropical fruit, while the palate has the rich, almost creamy texture from Judd's exceptional skill with *sur lie* aging. The acidity adds a razor-like cut that counterpoints the texture of the palate, bringing the wine perfectly into balance. **95 BC, 91 RP, 91 WE**

Fromm typically earns more headlines as the premier producer of Pinot Noir in Marlborough, but one of the best-kept secrets in New Zealand is that the **2019 Fromm Sauvignon Blanc Marlborough (\$19.99)** is every bit as good as their Pinot Noir. This 100% organic Sauvignon Blanc shows a leaner, more focused intensity than many of its vintage counterparts. Fuji apple, grapefruit, lime, and brilliant minerality make this an incredibly refreshing wine, perfect for sipping on a summer day. **94 SK, 93 BC, 91 RP**





The harvest wrapped up in Marlborough, TWR's "wee woolly weeders" get back to work in the vineyard. (Photo: Te Whare Ra)

Top Picks in Value and Quality from NZ and Oz

By Thomas Smith

One thing the wines of New Zealand, South Africa, and Australia don't get enough credit for is value. At the \$20-and-under mark, these countries are producing some of the best wines you will find anywhere. Whether it's Australian Pinot Noir or New Zealand Riesling, we have a substantial collection of wines from these countries that outperform expectations, every time. If you're looking for a new house red, or just a weeknight white, make sure to check out our selection of wines from the Southern Hemisphere. Here are some of my favorites:

Top Picks in Varietal Value

I've already said plenty in this newsletter regarding the terrific 2019 vintage in Marlborough for Sauvignon Blanc. But I can't resist also calling attention to the **2019 Fromm Spätlese Riesling Marlborough (\$19.99)**. I absolutely adore this wine. It's incredibly versatile, and unreasonably delicious—I personally drank four six-packs of the 2018. It's that good. Don't be turned away by the term *spätlese*. Yes, this has a little residual sugar and a touch sweetness on the palate, but it's incredibly well balanced by the acidity. Think of biting into a fresh green apple, complemented by elderflower and wet stones. A gorgeous wine from one of Marlborough's best boutique producers. **93 JS**

New Zealand's Central Otago tends to steal the show for New Zealand Pinot. But for bright, focused, cool-climate Pinot Noir, it's impossible to beat the value coming out of North Canterbury. Greystone is a top producer here and is named for the grey-colored, limestone-rich soils in their vineyards. Limestone soils are a common thread among great Pinot Noir—from Burgundy in France to Calera in California. The **2017 Nor'Wester by Greystone Pinot Noir North Canterbury (\$19.99)** is a great example of exceptional Pinot Noir made in conditions perfectly suited to this variety. There are three major components here: black fruit, earthiness, and savory. They interplay in a way that brings a ton of depth to the glass, with black cherry, black raspberry, forest floor, and leather all playing off one another in each sip. **93 BC, 91 JS**



Australia's Yarra Valley is located just outside of Melbourne and is home to some of Australia's best Pinot Noir and Chardonnay. Subject to a cooling effect from Port Phillip Bay, the Yarra has ideal conditions for cool-climate varieties. Helen's Hill is one of my favorite producers for great values because they craft their entry-level series in the same way as their most expensive single-vineyard offerings. **2018 Helen's Hill "Ingram Road" Chardonnay Yarra Valley Victoria (\$14.99)** starts with hand-harvested fruit from estate vineyards. Fermented entirely with native yeasts, with an *élevage* in new French oak, this is off-the-charts delicious with flavors of lemon curd, peach, and apricot. Full and weighted on the palate, this is an incredibly tasty Chardonnay for a weeknight dinner. **94 JH**



High Quality Reds from New Zealand, Australia
2015 TWR (Te Whare Ra) "SV5182 Single Vineyard" Pinot Noir Marlborough (\$39.99) Yes, please. Brimming with red cherry fruit along with earthy undertones, this is aged to perfection with plenty of weight and power. This marks a stunning achievement for Marlborough Pinot Noir that you don't want to miss. **97 JS, 96 SK**



2018 John Duval "Entity" Shiraz Barossa Valley South Australia (\$29.99) John Duval is an Australian winemaking legend. Entity is his flagship wine, sourced from the best sites in the Barossa and Eden Valleys that only someone with his pedigree can secure. Treated with minimal oak, this Shiraz perfectly balances fruit with acidity, while black plum, charcoal, and dark cherry liqueur abound. This is what the best of Australian Shiraz tastes like. An incredible value. **97 JH**

2018 Te Mata "Bullnose" Syrah Hawke's Bay (\$39.99) Founded in 1895, Te Mata is New Zealand's most historic wine estate. Bullnose is their top Syrah, displaying all the hallmarks of Hawkes Bay: incredible density, with black fruits complemented by black pepper and rosemary. Smooth and supple, this is a wine you can open tonight without a second thought, but collectors take note: a few years in the cellar will only add to its mesmerizing bouquet. **97 SK**

From Gondwana with Love: Easy-Drinking Wines for the Parrilla

By Kirk Walker

When asked to do a Southern Hemisphere newsletter, the very first thing that I thought about was Uruguay. That's right, the fourth-largest wine-producing region on the South American continent. And three things immediately jump out to me when I think of the country: Tannat, blends, and Gondwana. Time and dirt are major components of wine, and I *sometimes* (who am I kidding—*most of the time*) get distracted by them. Gondwana was the supercontinent formed in large part by South America and Africa. This is a literal connection to the categories that Thomas and I buy wine from.

The Rio de la Plata Craton, which forms the bedrock for large parts of Uruguay, is an ancient part of that supercontinent. Some rocks here have been dated back 1.7 billion years. While that is not as old as some places in Australia and Africa, when these deep, Old World rocks get expressed in modern, New World wines, that's what makes these categories so much fun.

Uruguay is an almost ideal wine growing region, and growers, free from Old World regulations, grow what they please—that's why Tannat is the most important varietal wine in the country right now. Some of the best regions are like California's Santa Barbara, except not as dry—and with better grilling and barbecue (or wood-fired *parrilla*, in Uruguay).

The **Bodega Garzón 2019 Albariño Reserva Uruguay (\$17.99)** is delicious and exemplary, on various levels, of why Uruguay is so exciting. The sandy, granitic soils and the moderating maritime climate are perfect for this Old World variety—in fact, the same, ideal conditions for this variety back in Rias Baixas, Spain. The wine is crisp and mineral-driven, but has a ripe peach component, with citrusy accents. **91 W&S**



The **Garzón 2017 Tannat Reserva (\$17.99)** is a great introduction to Tannat as a varietal wine. This thick-skinned grape thrives in the climate. It lives up to its reputation of being a big, intense wine with lots of dark fruit, flowers, and a savory, mineral element. This has a lot in common with the intense, more modern wines of the Iberian Peninsula. A grilled meat wine, it's the ideal match for the local cuisine, and summertime outdoor cooking in general.

92 JS, 91 WS

Tannat can be an exceptional soloist, but put it together with some other varieties, and then the fun really starts. The **2018 Noble Alianza**

Marselan-Tannat-Merlot (\$12.99) is a wine that really can come from nowhere else but Uruguay (that's one of my favorite things to taste in the world of wine). This drinks like the love child of a Côtes du Rhône and Douro Superior, conceived in Punta del Este. It has the easy drinking and effortlessness of the CdR, and the dark fruit intensity of the Douro.

The **2017 Artesana Tannat-Merlot-Zinfandel Reserva (\$15.99)** is a blend that feels more like Bordeaux—which is surprising, looking at the blend of varieties. Tannat gives the structure, while the Merlot rounds and softens everything, and the Zin brings some intrigue. Unexpected and so much fun. **91 WE**



In Uruguay, Old World traditions—and rocks—meet New World freedom to experiment. (Photo: Bodega Garzón)



Carignan: Chile's Other "C" Wine

By Kirk Walker

There are many great wines from Chile that start with the letter "C," most notably, **Carmenere** and **Cabernet Sauvignon**. But only one of them started a movement: Carignan. Spanish in origin, hailing from the same neighborhoods that gave us Garnacha (Grenache), Carignan has several things going for it as a winegrape: it handles heat and drought very well, and it thrives in really poor soils.

The Maule Valley, located some 150 miles South of Santiago, fits that description to a T. The dry coastal ranges here are home to lots of old vines, many of which are Carignan. The movement is VIGNO, which stands for Vignadores de Carignan. It started about 15 years ago when a new generation of young winemakers discovered the riches of these old vines. In order to protect them, and support the farmers that have been maintaining these old vines, they created VIGNO. To carry the VIGNO label the wines must come from the Secano Interior portion of Maule, on the eastern side of the Coastal Ranges. The wines have to come from dry farmed bush vines, and the blend has to be dominantly Carignan. I was introduced to these wines several years ago and now I seek them out. Projects like this, where producers actively seek out old vine materials, often in overlooked regions (it has a very Bedrock Wine Company feel to it for me), are some of the most

exciting things happening on the fringes of the wine world. It's like a glimpse into the past through a modern-day glass of wine!

The **2016 Garage Wine Company "Vigno" Carignane Maule Valley (\$37.99)** is one of the best introductions to the program that I have had recently. The wine is a blend of Carignan, with a little Garnacha and Mataro, from a cooler site in the foothills. The Garage Wine Company was started as exactly as the name suggests, in a garage, by Derek Mossman, who also is one of the founders of VIGNO. Mossman and his wife make less than 2,000 cases of wine a year. It's all wild ferment, with very minimal intervention, but the wines are clean—there's no funky stuff happening here. This is a wine that feels at home in comparison to great Rhône blends. Think Châteauneuf or Priorat; I think the latter is most appropriate. This is high-toned, rich, aromatic, spicy, and lively, a wine that gives something new every time you put your nose into the glass. It's great wine, it's a crazy deal, but there's not a lot of it. **97 RP**



The Singular Wonder of Hunter Valley Sémillon

By Thomas Smith

Let's be real for a moment. Whenever we discuss "New World" wines, i.e., wines made outside the centuries of winemaking tradition in Europe, these wines are hopelessly compared to their European counterparts. This Pinot Noir is Burgundian; that Sauvignon Blanc tastes just like Sancerre, this is a Mosel-style Riesling. Not only does this lead one down a path of endless facsimile, it's an unfair comparison for both parties, rather than embracing a wine for what it truly is.

This is one of the reasons I adore Hunter Valley Sémillon, because of its entirely singular nature. In other parts of the world, Sémillon is typically a blending component, like in Bordeaux where it is blended with Sauvignon Blanc or Muscadelle to create dry whites and sweet dessert wines. Yet, through a series of unlikely events, Sémillon found its way to Australia nearly 200 years ago, and has since become a wine of its own tradition and style unlike any other.

James Busby, the father of Australian viticulture, brought Sémillon cuttings to New South Wales in 1825. Here, in the subregion of the Hunter Valley, something remarkable occurs. Despite incredibly hot and wet conditions, Sémillon produces a wine of brighter acidity and lighter body than in the cool, maritime climate of Bordeaux, a phenomenon that wine writer Oz Clarke has referred to as one of the wine world's "great enigmas."

The proof is in the glass. Low in alcohol, with pale color and off-the-charts acidity, these wines tend to have a two-fold nature. In their youth, characteristic bright acidity makes the wines bold and refreshing with notes of lime, citrus, and hay. This is my go-to pairing

with Thai curry or Szechuan stir-fry. But the incredible acidity of these wines also helps them age beautifully over time. Within five to ten years, they transform, developing creamier texture, with flavors of honeycomb, toasted almonds, and grilled brioche. In the world of wine, there is nothing like it. Here are some of my favorites:

The **2018 Tyrrell's Sémillon Hunter Valley (\$19.99)** marks the 160th vintage from this historic property. Bright and balanced, this is a classic entrée for anyone curious about Sémillon. Having both a little upfront fruit and a lean, mineral edge, this would nicely complement halibut steamed with lemon. **94 WE, 92 JH, 90 WS**

The De Iuliis family originally sold the fruit from their 50 acres vineyard to Tyrrell's throughout the '90s, until they decided to craft their own wines, beginning in 2001. The **2018 De Iuliis Sémillon Hunter Valley (\$19.99)** is the boldest of our Hunter Valley selections. With a texture like mineral water and an acidity like lightning, this is no-holds-barred Sémillon that captures the spirit of Hunter Valley. **92 JS**

Finally, the **2019 Brokenwood Sémillon Hunter Valley (\$19.99)** occupies a great middle ground between the two. Not shying away from power, this is a beautifully crafted Sémillon with lemon sorbet, finger lime, and just a little bit of heft in its body. I've had these wines going back to the 1990s and they age immaculately. So throw one in your cellar and forget about it. It could end up being one of the best surprises you'll ever have. **95 JH**



Light Up Your Palate with Chile's Clos de Luz

By Kirk Walker

Direct importing is a very important part of K&L's wine business. We have been direct importing wines from Europe for decades, and in just under a decade, direct imports have become very important components to our Southern Hemisphere program, as well. Direct importing allows K&L to bring wines closer to our customers. Closer in knowledge about the region, the producer, and the wines. I would not have the passion that I have for the wines of New Zealand and Australia if it wasn't for the fantastic producers we direct import. But, I'm the South America buyer, and unfortunately, the markets are different. While those differences are very interesting to me, they do get boring when it comes to writing newsletters that are meant to inspire, intrigue, and allure readers to explore new wines. Suffice it to say, after this over-long preamble, I was excited when we had the opportunity to start direct importing Clos de Luz.

Clos de Luz is located in the Almahue Valley. To help place it on the map, it's in the Central Valley appellation of the Rapel Valley. Bordered on the western side by the Coastal Ranges, and to the east by the Andes, this area has long been one of the most important wine regions in Chile. The two biggest subregions in the Rapel Valley are the Colchagua Valley and the Cachapoal Valley. The Almahue Valley is sandwiched between these two regions, just south of the Cachapoal River. It's a warm growing region, but the heat is buffered by cool air descending from the Andes. Of particular importance for the wines are the alluvial soils with volcanic origins, and clay. The family of current proprietor, Gabriel Edwards, was the first to bring modern viticulture into the valley in the 1930s. His grandmother, Luz, for whom the winery is named, planted the vineyard in which the "Massal" wines are sourced.

When it comes to winemaking, Edward believes in "less is more." His philosophies have more in common with the natural wine movement than with the larger commercial producers that dominate the region and country as a whole. He believes in freshness, and that is exactly what you get with his wines. There is plenty of ripe fruit and tannins, but the volcanic soils and the old vines bring a lift and vibrancy that most US drinkers are not accustomed to from Chilean wines. In order to obtain that freshness, he uses very little oak in the wines—just enough to round a rough edge here or there, and to bring a suppleness to the tannins.

The place to start talking about the wines is the **Clos de Luz "Massal 1945" Carménère Rapel Valley (\$19.99)**.

These could be the oldest ungrafted Carmenere vines in Chile, and probably the world. What was once planted mistakenly as Merlot is now one of the unique treasures of Chile. It was a fortunate mistake, too, since these soils are ideal for Carmenere—they do not produce the hyper-green wines that were most of our introductions to the varietal. Carmenere feels like it belongs in the Cabernet family: the fruit, the tannins, and the



herbaceousness all feel related. The fruit has a brighter, more purple, dark berry quality than Cabernet. But it's on that final point where Carmenere really stands apart. Instead of showing up with green, unripe bell pepper character, Carmenere, when grown correctly, has a red, or ripe bell pepper quality—some even say paprika. The wine is cellared in barrique and foudre of various ages. Again, this wine is bright and aromatic, but has depth. Subtle spice, with earth and a mineral tones, back the vibrant, lifted fruits that range from red to that classic purple. It's full-bodied, with depth and elegance. This is the wine that I want people to judge all future Carmenere against.

The most "K&L" wine of their portfolio is the **2017 Clos de Luz Arao Carménère Blend Rapel Valley (\$15.99)**. I say this because the wine feels like Bordeaux—it has the balance and structure of the wines that I think of first when I think of K&L. And yet, it doesn't taste like Bordeaux; it tastes like Almahue Valley. It is has bright, lifted dark berries, and red fruits. It has soft spice, with hints of mocha, and coffee. The palate is clean and dry, with soft tannins, and enough richness to give it some heft. The wine is bright, poised, complex and elegant—that's tough to accomplish at this price point. **92 JS**

Unfortunately, I am running out of space. But I have to mention a few last wines. The **2017 Clos de Luz "Massal 1945" Cabernet Sauvignon Rapel Valley (\$19.99)** has to be one of the best Cabernets in the store for the money. We have a lot of good wines from California and France—this Cab combines the best of both those worlds. Ripe fruit, with structure, cedar, tobacco, earth, and spice. It's a serious wine that doesn't take itself too seriously. **91 RP**

The **2017 Clos de Luz "Massal 1945" Malbec (\$19.99)** is so much fun. It's Malbec from the other side of the Andes! This is classic, charming Malbec, but the fruit profile is different than its Argentinean cousins. It starts bright red, with some darker elements, and is aromatic, elegant and long. This is awesome Malbec. **92 JS**

Finally, there is Syrah. Like New Zealand, Chile's not the first place you think of for the variety. But wow, the **2017 Clos de Luz "Azuda" Syrah Rapel Valley (\$19.99)** is an argument for it. This is a bright wine that displays lots of the fresh, mixed berries that the best Syrahs have. There is a touch of spice and pepper, but the tannins are lush and round. Talk about charming. **93 JS**





Harvest 2020 is long past in Argentina's Mendoza wine country. (Shutterstock)

Last Word—There's More than Malbec to Argentina

By Kirk Walker

It's too easy to reduce Argentina's wine to Malbec alone. But that's like reducing California wine to Cabernet Sauvignon, Chardonnay, and Pinot Noir. While Malbec is the main export, Argentina has a rich and diverse wine scene. The French grapes Malbec, Bonarda (Douce Noir), and Béquignol are more widely planted here than in their country of origin. The long, warm growing season is optimal for Rhône varieties. And of course, you are going to find the big three that were mentioned earlier. There are a lot of old vines in Argentina—and young winemakers, who are looking for forgotten vineyards and obscure corners of the country to find interesting materials. This is how the wine world innovates. The future is looking delicious.

2018 Inkarrí Bonarda Mendoza (\$11.99) Bonarda is the other “big” winegrape in Argentina, once more widely planted than Malbec. Long thought to be Italian, it's actually from the Savoie. This is blackberry pie on a warm summer afternoon. Bright, juicy, and a little tangy. Fire up the grill! This is backyard barbecue wine.



2019 Passionate Wines “Del Mono” Tinto Tupungato (\$11.49) A blend of Syrah and Malbec. What a duo! There's great aromatic complexity here, with mixed berries, floral aromas, spice, a hint of earth, and just a smattering of something savory. It has a little more substance than a straight-up Malbec, but all of the easygoing tannins.

2018 Ver Sacrum “GSM” Rhône Blend Chacayes (\$17.99) A Rhône blend from Argentina! A mix of high-elevation Grenache and friends, it's ripe but cool. Berries, cherries, herbs de Andes, a savory earthiness, and spice. This cannot be beat for the price.

2019 Escala Humana “Livverá” Bequignol El Zampal (\$21.99) Don't know Béquignol? Neither did I before I tried this! Béquignol noir is a rare French variety from Gascony which is now much more widely planted in Argentina than in its country of origin. This is mountain wine. If you enjoy the bright, earthy, savory wines from the Jura or Alto Adige, this is for you. Light-bodied, with great concentration, and a long finish.



2014 Alma 4 Chardonnay Sparkling Wine Uco Valley (\$21.99) One of my favorite wines that I have had from Argentina in the last several months, this is all Chardonnay, aged 50 months on the lees. I get Meyer lemon, grapefruit rind, quince, and limestone minerality from this medium-bodied wine, which has a creamy texture and a long, dry finish. Cheers!



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