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South American Idols

Argentine Wines in the Spotlight

By Fred Tibbitts Jr.



Argentine wine exports grew 47.5 percent in the first six months of 2003 versus the first six months of 2002, according to the just-drinks.com editorial team. The prime varietals leading the record growth are Cabernet Sauvignon, Malbec and blends of the two grapes.

Argentina has experienced some of the worst economic conditions in years, and as a result the peso has been greatly devalued, becoming very weak against almost every other currency, which has translated into some of the best values ever seen for Argentine wines.

What's Available

Most Argentine wineries produce one or more of the following varietals: The whites (Chenin Blanc, Chardonnay, Viognier, Riesling, Tempanillo, Sauvignon-Blanc and Syrah Rose) and the reds (Malbec, Shiraz/Syrah, Bonarda Sangiovesa and Merlot).

The varietal most people associate with Argentina's grape success is Malbec, because no other country does Malbec nearly as well, though it is grown with far less success in the southwest of France. Argentine Malbec ranges from simple and juicy to full-bodied, complex and age worthy. The richest Malbecs are aged in French oak and considered Gran Malbec, expressing blackberry, damson, black cherry, licorice and chocolate.

The best Malbec is cultivated at the higher altitudes within the province of Mendoza along the Andes Mountain range with the cooler climates, because whereas Chile is on the west side of the Andes and benefits from the maritime influence of the Pacific Ocean, the vineyards of Argentina are as far as 900 miles from the cli-

matic benefits of the Atlantic Ocean, so they must rely instead on higher elevations to moderate the temperatures of the semi-arid climate. The higher elevations consistently produce "Grapes of intense concentration, body and flavor," according to Roberto de La Mota, winemaker for Terrazas de Los Andes, owned by Moet & Chandon.

If you have yet to try Argentine wines, now is your chance: They're more available and more affordable than ever

With respect to the 2003 vintage, most varietals were of good quality but short on volume. It was an excellent year for Malbec because of very hot temperatures in the last month of the vintage. The reds are full of deep color with ripe tannins. Chardonnays are ripe and tropical. Semillons are zesty with a lemon ripe citrus profile.

If you serve a Malbec or Gran Malbec with steak, you'll be surprised how well they pair and your customers will have found a new companion with whom to dine. **BR**

Finding the Wines

For more information on Argentine wines, here are Web sites for some of the leading wineries:

- Trapiche — trapichewinery.com/
- Terrazas de Los Andes — terrazasdelosandes.com.ar/
- Nicolas Catena — nicolascatena.com/
- Tapiz — tapiz.com/
- Salentein — bodegasalentein.com/
- Viniterra — viniterra.com.ar/winery.html
- Crotta — crotta.com.ar/ingles/index.html
- Balbi — bodegasbalbi.com/

Other great Argentina wineries include: Etchart, Norton, Santa Julia, Big Daddy Vineyards, Alta Vista, Elsa, Henry Lagarde, Felipe Rutini, Alamos, Broquel, Davis Family, Viniterra, Finca Koch, Angaro, Anasztasia, Gentile Collins, Falling Star and Luigi Bosca (Not yet available in the United States due to a name dispute with "Bosca" of Italy).



Fred Tibbitts Jr., a member of the Advisory Board of Oxford Publishing Inc., is the foremost wine-by-the-glass consultant to chain hotels globally. He is president of his own global beverage consulting agency, Fred Tibbitts & Associates Inc. Visit him online at fredtibbitts.com.