



# DISCOVERING NEW WORLD WINES



By Franklin Reider

## WINES

There are few gastronomical pleasures greater than discovering new wines that can truly make a meal flourish. Typically, my tastes favor wines from France. However, through my experience developing a wine list for a Latin restaurant, I revisited the family of Malbec wines from Argentina.

After having lived in Latin America for more than two decades, I thought I knew Latin wines very intimately. I belonged to a number of wine groups there, and still — 90 percent of the wines we drank were from France and Italy! Furthermore, the major wine-rating gurus paid no attention to Argentina and Chile.

It was only four years ago that Robert Parker's *Wine Advocate* published its first article on wines from Argentina, despite the fact that Argentina is the 5th largest producer of wine in the world. In fact, the per capita consumption of wine there is eight times that of the United States (35 liters per capita in Argentina versus seven liters per capita in the U.S.). Both of these figures are pretty significant, and when you consider that in the year 2000, the Argentine consumption was 90 liters per capita, it is even more amazing.

This huge drop in internal consumption of wine

forced the Argentine vineyards to export their wines to make up for the shortfall. Joint ventures with foreign vineyards sprang up in great numbers, and traditional names like Rothschild and Cheval Blanc started such investments in both Argentina and Chile.

Mendonca is the major wine producing city in Argentina. Located at the base of the Andes Mountains, Mendonca's vineyards are in arid environments at elevations of 2,500-4,500 feet. At this location, the vineyards are subject to intense sunshine and cooler air temperature, resulting in more mature grapes with much lower alcohol and sugar contents. Rarely do wines from this region have an alcoholic content of more than 14.5 percent.

Of all the grapes produced in this region, Malbec and Cabernet Sauvignon really stand apart from the rest, and the wines produced from these grapes between the years 2004-2006 are considered exceptional. Unlike fine wines from other countries, the 2004 bottles from Argentina can be consumed now. Since these grapes ripen early, the wine is mature in most cases. Typically, the better vineyards age their wines in French Oak barrels for some 18 months prior to bottling. The result is a smooth, almost silky taste. There are tannins present and the wine will develop with age, if properly cellared.

ARGENTINA IS THE 5TH LARGEST PRODUCER OF WINE IN THE WORLD.

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I find the texture to be quite full-bodied and the dominant grape taste seems to be currant and black cherry.

Caro is the name of a vineyard jointly owned by Catena wines of Argentina, the country's largest wine producer and Lafite Rothschild, France's premium Bordeaux vineyard. They have two moderately priced wines that are off the charts in quality. I must note there are some 25 excellent Malbecs that I have tasted and over 100 produced in Argentina today. Caro is one of the stars but far from the only Malbec of quality.

My favorite, Caro, the namesake of the vineyard, is 55 percent Cabernet and 45 percent Malbec. The result is a Bordeaux-like taste that is full-bodied and rich. For optimal taste, it should be decanted and rest some 15 minutes prior to drinking. The 2004 was given a 93 by *Parker's Wine Advocate* and rated highly by *Wine Spectator*. It is not easy to find in most restaurants but its presence on a wine list demonstrates some extra work by the proprietor and a dedication above the norm.

Caro also produces a less expensive version called Almancaya, which is the name of a grape revered by the Indians that lived in the region. It is a 50-50 blend of the two grapes and has constantly been rated in the low 90s by all reviewers. The 2004 is ready to drink now and it one of the best values in the wine world, available at under \$20. Again, blind tasters will swear it is French and of noble birth. <sup>stb</sup>

*Franklin Reider is the proprietor of GOL! THE TASTE OF BRAZIL in Delray Beach and created the wine list that won the award of excellence from the WINE SPECTATOR magazine.*