

Delray restaurateur shares love of South American wines at this weekend's Vinofest

By [Charles Passy](#) | [Beverages](#) | January 27, 2010



When Frank Reider opened the Brazilian restaurant GOL! in downtown Delray Beach four years ago, he planned on offering a solid list of wines — some French, some American and some that simply fell in that “other” category.

But he soon realized that the “other” was where his list offered the most value and appeal. Specifically, he saw that his customers liked the wines from Argentina and Chile (and to a lesser extent, Brazil) — a region that just happened to tie in thematically with his South American-inspired eatery.

And so was born a magnificent obsession.

“In the last 10 years, these countries have developed high-quality, extremely sophisticated wines,” says Reider, a New York native who spent considerable time in Brazil working in the banking and hotel industries.

Now, Reider’s obsession has given birth to a self-published book, *Wines of Passion: The Best of South America*, that’s arguably the most detailed survey ever written of South American wines. It’s also given birth to the three-day (Thursday to Saturday) Latin American Vinofest in downtown Delray — Reider’s attempt to share his love for this wine-making region with the world.

The event, which is run by a non-profit company that Reider has established, will feature representatives from 45 South American wineries and showcase 120-plus wines. Events include a \$50 wine tasting on Thursday night along the downtown Delray main strip of Atlantic Avenue, a series of \$95 wine dinners on Friday and Saturday nights at select Delray restaurants and a \$30 wine appreciation seminar on Saturday afternoon.

Not that South American wines are exactly a well-kept secret. In the past decade, wine lovers have increasingly looked to the region as a low-priced alternative to Europe and America — a locale, in other words, where that hard-to-find \$10 quality bottle can indeed be found. Little wonder that during some months in 2009, Argentina and Chile saw double-digit increases in sales, while France saw declines nearing 30 percent.

But Reider believes that Americans have pigeonholed South America into that “value” category. So he’s using Vinofest as an opportunity to showcase more expensive wines that reveal the region’s true assets.

By many standards, parts of South America rank right up there with France’s Bordeaux and California’s Napa Valley as a great place to make wines. The sunny climate ensures a long “hang time” meaning that grapes will have the opportunity to stay on the vines for an extended period and realize their fruitful potential. In some areas, the sandy soil and mineral-packed water are other fortunate variables.

Plus, the region has plenty of wine-making history, going back to the days some five centuries ago when Spanish settlers planted European grapes in the area. Another boon to the era: When the phylloxera plague destroyed much of the European wine industry in the 19th century, producers were forced to look elsewhere.

All this has resulted in the popularity of grape varieties of European origin that grow especially well in South America — notably, Malbec in Argentina and Carmenere in Chile (the latter is often dubbed “the lost grape of Bordeaux” In the case of Malbec, the variety typically stands alone — no blending with other grapes, that is — resulting in red wines of distinct spiciness and complexity (violet is often a prominent flavor note).

Needless to say, Reider considers the wines that both varieties yield to be winners. And as he points out in his book, he soon discovered he wasn’t alone in his opinion.

“It turned out that the prestigious French vineyards had discovered the potential in Latin America and had made major investments there. In Argentina, Lafitte Rothschild had established a joint venture with Argentina’s largest wine producer, Catena, and the Caro Vineyard was born,” Reider writes in *Wines of Passion*, a book that is the result of more than a year of research and travel to the area.

Naturally, Catena will be one of the wineries represented at Vinofest. The vintners are eager to come because they know that the United States is a booming market for them. And with its large Latin population, Florida is even further significant.

“It’s a good launching point for this kind of a festival,” says John Di Leo, Florida manager for Premier Beverage, a leading wine distributor that plans on having a large presence at the Delray event.

As for Reider, he’s hoping the festival will also help promote his restaurant, which specializes in the all-you-eat Brazilian-style churrascaria spread, replete with a 40-item salad bar and meats sliced tableside. But he’s just as excited about getting the public to try a few wines that they may not have sampled before, especially since even the top South American bottles rarely go for more than \$50-75 — a fraction of what similarly acclaimed European and California wines cost.

“If they could taste all these great wines, they might just remember a few,” Reider says.

Latin American Vinofest:

Fast facts

Where: Downtown Delray Beach (festival headquarters: Gol! restaurant, 411 E. Atlantic Ave.)

When: Thursday to Saturday

Phone: (561) 272-6565

Web: thevinofest.com (tickets for events can be purchased online)

Schedule

Thursday, 6 to 10 p.m.: Latin American Wine Showcase (featuring tastings of 50-plus wines and small bites), downtown Delray Beach along Atlantic Avenue. Cost: \$29.95 at the event or if purchased in advance.

Friday and Saturday, starting at 6:15 p.m.: Winemaker dinner/auction events at select restaurants in southern Palm Beach County, including Gol!, La Cigale, Cafe Luna Rosa, Sundy House, Boston's on the Beach and Lemongrass (full list will be posted at the Vinofest Web site or call 561-272-6565 for details). Cost: \$95.

Saturday, 1 to 4 p.m.: Latin-American Wine Seminars (at Seagate Hotel, 1000 E. Atlantic Ave.). Cost: \$30 for entire afternoon at the event, \$25 if purchased in advance.

Five wines to try at Vinofest

Bodega Norton Torrontes (Argentina). White wine made from 100 percent torrontes grapes (Torrontes is the signature white varietal of Argentina). 'Smooth, enjoyable mix of minerals and fruits,' says Reider. Priced at around \$10, the wine is a great, value-priced one to pair with sushi, he adds.

Pascual Toso Malbec (Argentina). Red wine made from 100 percent malbec. 'Tasty fruits with layers of variety,' says Reider. Look for a 'smooth, long, languid' finish, too. Priced at around \$12.

Terrazas de los Andes Malbec Reserva (Argentina). Red wine made from 100 percent malbec. This 'complex and smooth' wine offers a full bouquet of cherries and flowers, says Reider. Priced around \$18.

Montes Alpha Pinot Noir (Chile). Red wine made from 100 percent pinot noir. 'Elegant, silky,' says Reider, adding that the bouquet blends notes of blackberry and minerals. 'A very special wine,' given the price (around \$20), Reider concludes.

Miolo Merlot (Brazil). Red wine made from 100 percent merlot. A 'medium-bodied' wine 'with cherry-dominated taste,' says Reider. Priced around \$14.