

BODEGA CHACRA

PATAGONIA ~ RIO NEGRO

Wine Spectator

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14 Enticing Wines from Argentina

by Nathan Wesley

Wine lovers typically have Malbec on their minds when they think of Argentina, whose wine exports to the United States have quadrupled over the last few years to more than 6 million cases in 2010, according to trade group Wines of Argentina. While Malbec leads the pack, representing some 40 percent, or 2.4 million cases, of U.S.-bound exports, winemakers are diversifying their portfolios, especially with popular international varieties such as Cabernet Sauvignon and Chardonnay, which follow on Malbec's heels at 11 and 7 percent respectively. Here are 14 wines that demonstrate the country's potential to offer value and diversity outside the Malbec mainstream.

Leading this report is Bodega Catena Zapata's Cabernet Sauvignon Mendoza 2008. It offers impressive quality in a troubled vintage and features a classic Cabernet profile that, despite some cool weather, gained the typical weight associated with the appellation's warm, sunny climate.

Bodega Chacra, founded in 2003 by Piero Incisa della Rochetta, whose grandfather started the "super Tuscan" Sassicaia, is setting the benchmark for Pinot Noir in South America. The bodega's entry-level Barda bottling is sourced mostly from 20-year-old vines, with additional juice coming from 80- and 55-year-old vines. Della Rochetta has also recently begun bottling a Merlot; both wines display the estate's penchant to couple a pure, elegant fruit profile with the region's racy graphite and aromatic notes.

Another Italian winemaker, Alberto Antonini, is also making wine in Argentina's southern frontier. Antonini, a partner in the Mendoza-based Altos Los Hormigas, is collaborating with local winemaker, Mariano Vignoni, at Bodega Eduardo Alfredo del Rio, which is owned by Mirenxtu Elorza and her husband, Eduardo del Rio. In addition to Malbec, they are also bottling Merlot, Pinot Noir and Chardonnay, all of them very good. The Chardonnay makes this report for offering a ripe yet sleek and minerally wine for under \$20.

BODEGA CHACRA Merlot Patagonia Mainqué 2008 Score: 89 | \$39
Compact and pure, with a lovely core of blackberry and damson plum fruit framed by silky tannins and layers of grilled herbs, olive and smoke that linger on the chalky finish. Drink now through 2013. 50 cases imported. —N.W.

BODEGA CHACRA Pinot Noir Río Negro Barda 2009 Score: 89 | \$25
Balances ripe red and black cherry fruit against bright acidity and firm minerality. Light, silky tannins frame the juicy finish, which lingers with hints of licorice and wild herbs. Drink now through 2013. 4,657 cases made. —N.W.