

2017 Chacra Chardonnay

by **LUIS GUTIERREZ** 29th Jun, 2018

Rating

94+

They want to reserve the name Chacra for their top estate wines, so the top white is the 2017 Chacra Chardonnay. It was produced with the Burgundian barrel fermentation method, and the wine aged in barrels with the lees for some 11 months. They used about 15% new barrels, and the rest were used barriques from Roulot in Burgundy. They are now building their barrel collection, which they will reuse in future vintages. This was produced exclusively with the grapes from 40-year-old vines that were planted ungrafted with Merlot and late regrafted to Chardonnay, where they have very mineral soils with alluvial stones covered in calcaire. The wine is high pitched and livelier, like an upgraded version of their Mainqué Chardonnay, despite the fact that this top cuvée has gone through full malolactic. This is both rounder and more austere, if that makes sense, with only 12% alcohol, and it just has more intensity and more energy. It has the dry mouthfeel of the chalky texture from the soils and the tasty saltiness the zone tends to deliver. This is a most impressive debut, certainly the best Chardonnay from Río Negro and among the best in Argentina. I'm eager to follow the development of this bottling and the following vintages, as it's unbelievably refined, mineral and intense for a first effort. So, when they get to know their vineyard better, I'm sure the wines will be even better. But it seems like they have found a special place to produce this wine... 1,350 bottles produced. It was bottled in January 2018.

Chacra has planted 0.31 hectares of Trousseau regrafted from Merlot that was planted in 2008, but the vines are not yet in production. For now, they continue with their range of Pinot Noir and two Chardonnays produced in conjunction with Jean Marc Roulot from Domaine Roulot in Meursault. As for the Pinot Noirs, 2017 was a warmish year with some really high peaks, but they changed the irrigation policy and gave the vines a lot less water than they used to; thus, the berries were smaller and ripened to perfection, and it could very well be the finest vintage they have produced to date.

Proprietor Piero Incisa della Rocchetta told me that he thinks the improvement is all through work in the vineyards in general—not only irrigation—that they have changed and improved year after year. I had the chance to taste the whites with Incisa and Roulot, and they took time to explain the project. They have been close friends for a long time, but Incisa wouldn't dare ask Roulot to do a wine in Patagonia. But when the opportunity arose, Roulot was thrilled to explore a different place without the

constraints they have in Burgundy. So, after visiting Río Negro in the winter of 2016, they got everything ready to start in the 2017 vintage.

Chacra had some old Merlot that was part of the deal when they bought the 1955 vineyard, and they had produced a Merlot in the past. However, it was not a wine that fit in their Pinot Noir-only portfolio, so those 40-year-old Merlot vines were regrafted to Chardonnay and Trousseau. By chance, when they did their soils study with terroir expert Pedro Parra from Chile, they found out that plot was the "filet mignon" of their vineyard. So they got very excited about it. They are now planting more Chardonnay and regrafting some more, as they have the idea to build a small separate winery just for the Chardonnay. In 2017, they made 50 barrels that were divided into two wines. They applied Roulot's vast experience with whites and his famous obsessive fine-tuning of the pressing to avoid obtaining harsh flavors or textures in his search for elegant and mineral wines. They have not yet discussed the size of the project, but perhaps the limit might be some 200 barrels. It's a really exciting development, and the wines go straight to the top of the hierarchy of white wines from Argentina. They also had the luck to start in a very good vintage. A development that is worth following.