

THAT LITTLE WINE BAR

James The Sommelier – Argentinian Wines

'Wine honors the soul, so honor it with yours.'

Argentinian wine: The Late Bloomer

In keeping with the private nature of most South-American countries, Argentina has kept its wine growing cards very close to its chest. Not, as you may imagine, as a consciously seedy attempt to maintain a superior poker hand but with a more modest motive. This humble country, until recently, didn't think it had anything to hide in the first place! Despite having a heritage of superior agricultural knowledge born from the need of ancient civilizations desperate to flourish WITH nature (something their European counterparts would have found abhorrent), they had put no emphasis on the fact that they grew wine in harsh climates with technology hardly changed from what was handed down from their ancestors. Certainly, a late bloomer in the wine world but one which has huge potential to blossom.

It was only until recently that Argentina saw the potential of exporting its wine to the world. Until the late-1990s Argentina produced the most wine outside of Europe but had no worries with the fact that most of it was unexportable. Also, (I think describing it as a country full of drunks would not quite gel) the reason the world only began to experience the taste of Argentinian wine during the last ten years is because it was made only for internal consumption; stemming from a historical need to..... probably get drunk, actually. The vines planted were more concentrated on quantity rather than quality, something which now is being reversed with huge investment from global wine companies aimed at developing the resources, methods and attitudes of wine production to a competitive standard.

Undoubtedly, Argentina's rising fame comes hand-in-hand with its astounding effort of re-inventing a grape which, like most things the French swear allegiance to, was ignored. Malbec, known traditionally in France as Cot or Auxerrois, was mainly grown in the Cahors region and produced what they dubbed as the 'the black wines of Cahors,' a tribute to Malbec's intensely dark robe. However, this tough, hard-man image is slightly contradictory to Malbec's growing character, like a camp body-builder for example. It is a grape that is highly susceptible to rot, frost and mildew- things which the climate in Argentina negates due to the dry conditions as well as the high altitude. That, coupled with the integrated irrigation systems found in areas such as Mendoza and San Juan, means that Malbec may have finally found its rightful home in the world due to this synchronistic terroir.

Interest in Argentinian wine is certainly beginning to peak, then. This added to the fact that wine-tourism is also booming in the country itself. Wine-tourists from around the world are astounded by the depth of quality vs. price of wine all over the country with free wine tours and tastings available at almost every vineyard. Particularly in the north-western desert interior, tourists appreciate the fact that water supply is still dictated by complex and sophisticated irrigations systems build by the ancient Huarpes people designed to bring water from the Mendoza river to the arid plains.

In the words of Robert Parker "By the year 2015, the greatness of Argentine Malbec wine will be considered as a gift... this long-ignored grape's place in the pantheon of noble wines will be guaranteed." I would give it a go if I were you. Not as poetic, I know, but true all the same.

TIPS: Come to our Argentinian food and wine paring on February 21st

For more information about wine join our wine classes at That Little Wine Bar, 54 Chow Thye Road,
George Town, Penang

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