

PARKER ON WINE May 29, 2008

Argentina's Greatest Wines

Only a decade ago this country's wines were virtually unknown. Today its malbecs compete with the world's finest wines in both taste and price

by Robert Parker



If you have not yet caught on, the malbec grape is king in Argentina, and while many fabulous bargains exist, there are also some outrageously expensive malbecs that are truly world-class, competing with the finest wines made in Bordeaux and the Napa Valley. Here is a selection of the finest Argentinean malbecs in the marketplace from my colleague Jay Miller.

92 points**Val de Flores 2004 Malbec (Mendoza)**

The 2004 Val de Flores Malbec was made in consultation with Michel Rolland. The grapes came from a vineyard that is more than 50 years old in the Vista Flores region of Mendoza. The wine was aged for 14 months in new French oak and bottled unfiltered. Opaque and purple, it offers an alluring perfume of *pain grillé*, pencil lead, blueberry, and black-cherry jam. This leads to a full-bodied, smoothly textured, elegant malbec with gobs of flavor, silky tannins concealed under a blanket of sweet fruit, and a long, pure finish. Built to last, it will unfurl over the next six to eight years and drink well through 2030. \$50

93 points**Mendel 2005 Malbec (Mendoza)**

This wine was sourced from a 77-year-old ungrafted vineyard, and aged for 12 months in 40% new French oak. It is opaque and purple, with aromas of smoke, toast, violets, and black raspberry. Supple, ripe, and layered, it is firmly structured with well-concealed tannins. It will evolve for three to five years and drink well through 2025. \$25

94 points**Bodega Montevejo 2005 Lindafior Malbec (Mendoza)**

Montevejo's flagship is the Lindafior Malbec. The 2005 was aged for 18 months in 100% new French oak. It offers up an ethereal perfume of *pain grillé*, vanilla, pencil lead, espresso, blueberry, black cherry, and a hint of dark chocolate. Quite massive on the palate yet light on its feet, the wine exhibits thick, intense flavors, gobs of sweet fruit, concealed tannin, and a very long finish. It should easily age for a decade and drink well through 2030. \$65

94 points**Yacouchuya 2003 Cafayete (Argentina)**

The personal project of the renowned Bordeaux oenologist Michel Rolland, Yacouchuya is made from high-elevation, old-vine malbec. The 2003 is a full-bodied, intensely concentrated effort exhibiting stunning aromas of blackberries, blueberries, licorice, charcoal, and spice. Unctuously textured, with decent underlying acidity, this beautiful malbec was fashioned from a 65-year-old vineyard planted at 2,470 meters! \$65

95 points**Bodegas Achaval-Ferrer 2005 Malbec Finca Altamira (Mendoza)**

The 2005 Finca Altamira is more primordial and backward than the 2004. Very primary at the moment, with another decade in the bottle it will surely blossom and reveal far more complexity. At that time, my present score will look conservative. Although Achaval-Ferrer's wines have virtually no track record, I am confident they will evolve in the manner of a First Growth Bordeaux. \$112

94 points**Bodegas Achaval-Ferrer 2005 Malbec Finca Mirador (Mendoza)**

The 2005 Finca Mirador Malbec is more dense and austere. It is likely to have a longer drinking window and it will be a pleasant task to compare the two vintages in another decade. \$112

95 points**Luca 2004 Nico by Luca Malbec (Altos de Mendoza)**

The 2004 Nico by Luca Malbec (100% malbec) raises the bar. It offers a heady perfume of *pain grillé*, scorched earth, mineral, black cherry, and black raspberry preserve. Loaded on the palate, the wine has great depth and incipient complexity. This superb malbec will evolve for 8-10 years and drink well through 2035 in the manner of a top-classified growth Bordeaux. \$125

96 points**Bodega Enrique Foster 2004 Firmado (Mendoza)**

The 2004 Firmado is also 100% malbec from 60-year-old vines in Lujan de Cuyo. It was aged in new French oak for 15 months. Opaque and purple, it has a superb nose of wood smoke, toasty oak, scorched earth, espresso, black cherry, and blackberry liqueur. Super-rich and opulent, this impressive malbec manages to be elegant and light on its feet at the same time. It hides enough tannin under its blanket of fruit to permit another six to eight years of evolution in the bottle. Lengthy and pure, it will provide pleasure through 2025. \$100

96 points**Catena Zapata 2004 Malbec Catena Zapata Nicasia Vineyard (Mendoza)**

The 2004 Malbec Nicasia Vineyard, a site located in the Altamira district of Mendoza, was aged for 18 months in new French oak. Opaque and purple, it exhibits a complex perfume of *pain grillé*, scorched earth, mineral, licorice, blueberry, and black cherry. Thick on the palate, bordering on opulent, it has layers of fruit, silky tannins, and a long, fruit-filled finish. It will age effortlessly for another six to eight years and provide pleasure through 2025. \$105

96 points**Viño Cobos 2005 Malbec Bramare Marchiori Vineyard (Mendoza)**

The 2005 Bramare Malbec Marchiori Vineyard received essentially the same oak treatment as the cabernet. Nearly black in color, it coats the glass with glycerin. Its super aromas of violets, spice box, cedar, tobacco, espresso, black cherry, and black raspberry leap from the glass. The wine is full-bodied, concentrated, and possesses layers of complex flavors. This hedonistic effort will benefit from at least four to six years of cellaring and should drink well through 2025. \$75

97 points**Catena Zapata 2004 Malbec Catena Zapata Adrianna Vineyard (Mendoza)**

The 2004 Malbec Adrianna Vineyard from the Gualtallary district is inky purple with aromas of wood smoke, pencil lead, game, black cherry, and blackberry liqueur. Opulent, full-flavored, yet remarkably light on its feet, this medium- to full-bodied malbec is all about pleasure. It will certainly evolve for a decade but is hard to resist now. It is a fine test of one's ability to defer immediate gratification. \$105

98 points**Viño Cobos 2005 Malbec Cobos Marchiori Vineyard (Mendoza)**

The 2005 Cobos Malbec Marchiori Vineyard is about as good as malbec gets. The vines in the Marchiori Vineyard are more than 50 years old and yields were a tiny 1.7 tons per acre. It was aged for 20 months in 100% new Taransaud oak, received wild yeast fermentation, and was bottled unfiltered and unfiltered. Inky, blue-black in color, it offers up aromas of *pain grillé*, violets, truffle, black cherry, blueberry, and licorice. Round, layered, and full-bodied, it is surprisingly elegant and light on its feet for such a concentrated wine. The long, fruit-filled finish lasts for more than one minute. Allow six to eight years of further cellaring and drink it through 2035. \$105

98+ points**Catena Zapata 2004 Malbec Catena Zapata Argentino Vineyard (Mendoza)**

The 2004 Malbec Argentino Vineyard spent 17 months in new French oak. Remarkably fragrant and complex aromatically, it offers up aromas of wood smoke, creosote, pepper, clove, black cherry, and blackberry. Made in a similar, elegant style, it is the most structured of the three single-vineyard wines, needing a minimum of a decade of additional cellaring. It should easily prove to be a 25- to 40-year wine. It is an exceptional achievement in malbec. \$120

Robert Parker is the world's most influential wine critic. Visit www.eRobertParker.com to see tens of thousands of tasting notes, buy his books, or subscribe to his newsletter, *The Wine Advocate*.