

WORTH THE WAIT

Argentina's ready-to-drink wines certainly impress, but **STEVEN SPURRIER** is most excited by the ageing potential of the high-end reds

Since my first visit to Argentina, (see My Argentine Revelation, *Decanter*, July 2008) I've been increasingly impressed by not only the quality of the reds, but also their ageing potential. Reading Christelle Guibert's Claret from over the Andes (*Decanter*, March 2009), I agree with her belief that 'it is the unique blend of Malbec, Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon that will be the country's calling card', but disagree that 'most of the wines... won't last more than five years'.

Of the 15 out of 50 wines I ranked four stars or above in last year's piece, my drinking limits ranged from 2012 for O Fournier's Alfa Crux Blend 2004 to 2024 for Catena Zapata's Nicolás Catena Zapata

2004. Both stood out again in a recent tasting, but I raised the age limit of the first to 2016 and lowered the latter to 2020. For the rest, my drinking period generally ended on the wine's 10th birthday.

My average drinking date for claret is nearer 15 years, and I admit my 1988s are now losing fruit, but watching bottles reach maturity is one of the great fascinations of wine; fortunately I have a cold cellar for this. For Médoc, especially for vintages before 1989 and 1990, it's been a question of waiting for the tannins to soften, a requirement unnecessary for Argentinian reds, where richness of fruit and ripeness of tannins are a given. With

RIGHT: Steven Spurrier may well be adding some Argentinian wines to his cellar after a recent impressive tasting

such an asset, why bother to lay them down, asks Guibert. My answer is simple: to see what happens. If the wines are good at the start, they should be just as good, but different, over time. The better they are, the more potential they have to bring greater pleasure with age.

Of the wines tasted for this article, most were blends dominated by Malbec and Cabernet Sauvignon. Patagonia to the south was present, as was Salta to the north, but Mendoza ruled, with vineyards from Tupungato and Luján de Cuyo showing very good results. For a wine to benefit from being laid down, it has to possess the ability – sometimes the need – to age, while the balance of fruit and tannins will show a potential length of life. These wines fell into three camps: wines that have little to gain from ageing (which I've ignored here); wines that need to age; and wines that do not need ageing, but would be fascinating to watch as they did. ¡Salud! **D**



WINES THAT ARE ENJOYABLE NOW BUT HAVE THE CAPACITY TO AGE



ACHAVAL-FERRER, QUIMERA, MENDOZA 2004 ★★★★★

A Bordeaux blend with superb Cabernet Franc nose. Plummy blackcurrant fruit, fleshy yet refined. Beautiful, harmonious wine. 2009–2016. **£23.95–£28.50; C&B, F&R, Fou, Han, Nsn, WDi**

O FOURNIER, ALFA CRUX 2004, UCO VALLEY, MENDOZA ★★★★★

50% Tempranillo, 30% Malbec, 20% Merlot. Dense, smooth ripe black and red fruits. Smoky and spicy with oak support that adds lift. Great purity and expression. 2009–2016. **£25.28; Hgt**

CHEVAL DES ANDES, LUJAN DE CUYO, MENDOZA 2005 ★★★★★

Rich, succulent, warm, earthy/spicy fruit, ripe polished tannins, lifted fruit expression and very good length; young vines, but a very classy wine. 2009–2015. **£31.63–£46.99; Evy, F&R, Far, Unc, WcC**

NOEMIA, RIO NEGRO, PATAGONIA 2006 ★★★★★

95% Malbec, 5% Cabernet Sauvignon. Lovely crushed fruit nose and palate with oak invisibly blended in. Silky and satiny finish. 2009–2015. **£61.99; WTr**

COLOME, MALBEC, SALTA 2005 ★★★★★

From vines growing at up to 3,000m. Packed, concentrated fruit: pure berries and natural vineyard tannin to firm it up. Seductive density. 2009–2015. **£13–£15; Evy, PuW, WSR**

SOPHENIA, SYNTHESIS, THE BLEND, TUPUNGATO, MENDOZA 2006 ★★★★★

Ripe blackcurrants, spicy and supple on the palate, very polished texture, still showing smoky oak, great purity of expression and enough grip to keep it evolving. 2009–2018. **£21.99; EII**

PULENTA ESTATE, GRAN CORTE, LUJAN DE CUYO, MENDOZA 2005 ★★★★★

A Bordeaux blend with 12% Tannat. Nose opens up, losing its primary fruit, showing smoky depth and complexity. Elegant palate with the weight of a fine Rioja. 2009–2015. **£16.95–£21.45 Evy, Oxf, PWT, You, WnW**



POESIA, LUJAN DE CUYO, MENDOZA 2005 ★★★★★

60% Malbec, 40% Cabernet Sauvignon from vines planted in 1935. Supple, spicy fruit softened but not vanilla-ised by oak, Bordeaux-style palate showing fruit and terroir. Elegant. 2009–2015. **£30; Gns**

MAURICIO LORCA, GRAN OPALO, MENDOZA 2006 ★★★★★

Unoaked, with 30% Syrah added to Bordeaux grapes. Smooth, pure berry fruit with enough natural tannins not to need oak. Fleshy yet very precise fruit. An exciting wine. 2009–2015. **£25; LBG**

CATENA ZAPATA, ADRIANNA VINEYARD, TUPUNGATO, MENDOZA 2005 ★★★★★

Finely expressed pure Malbec, fleshy fruit, richness and depth, smoothness and length. 2009–2015. **£36.95; Hai, You**



ERAL BRAVO, YBS, LUJAN DE CUYO, MENDOZA 2006 ★★★★★

YBS stands for Year's Barrel Selection, to create a 60% Malbec, 40% Cabernet Sauvignon blend. Earthy, direct fruits, bright and genuine fruit, good mid-term potential. 2009–2014. **£27; LBG, TSW**

SALENTEIN, NUMINA GRAN CORTE, UCO VALLEY, MENDOZA 2004 ★★★★★

Concentrated coffee-bean nose, good extraction but still chunky. Good, solid, meaty wine. 2009–2014. **£14.99; D&D**

For full details of UK stockists, see p130 of the main issue

WINES THAT NEED AGEING TO REALISE THEIR POTENTIAL

CATENA ZAPATA, NICOLAS CATENA ZAPATA, MENDOZA 2004 ★★★★★

Black fruit and wild violet nose, supple and succulent with superb ripeness, then the tannins kick in. Polished, with great depth. 2010–2020. **£46.65; Bib, CeD**



MENDEL, UNUS, LUJAN DE CUYO, MENDOZA 2006 ★★★★★

70% Cabernet, 30% Malbec, old vines; smooth, suave, fresh; satin density. Complex. 2010–2018. **£20.60, PrA, WSo**

BENEGAS, BENEGAS LYNCH

CABERNET FRANC, MENDOZA 2005 ★★★★★

Well-structured with oak still needing to blend in. Great presence and length, with a stony finish. 2010–2016. **£35; LBG**

CUVELIER LOS ANDES, GRAND VIN, MENDOZA 2005 ★★★★★

70% Malbec with Cabernet Sauvignon,

Syrah, Merlot and Petit Verdot. Fragrant and spicy black fruits, Médoc grip, fleshy fruit, severe tannins. 2011–2018. **£25.53; Nov**

CARO, MENDOZA 2004 ★★★★★

55% Cabernet Sauvignon, 45% Malbec from Lafite-Rothschild and Nicolás Catena. Spicy nose, lots of leathery, firm oak and restrained, ripe fruit. 2010–2016. **£24.50–£28.50; AGW, Evy, F&M, Lai, Wdi**

VIÑA DONA PAULA, ALIVIA, UCO VALLEY, MENDOZA 2007 ★★★★★

A 100% Cabernet Franc, dense raspberry concentration on the nose, lean yet very pure, acidity and tannins still dominate the natural ripeness of fruit but very good potential. 2010–2015. **£11.99; Odd**



NQN, COLECCIÓN, PATAGONIA 2005 ★★★★★

60% Malbec, 30% Merlot, 10% Cabernet Sauvignon. Chunky, ripe black fruits with

raw tannins, but fruit will come out in time. 2010–2015. **£29.99; AdV, Goo, WnW**

RJ VIÑEDOS, RAUL JOFFRE MALBEC, UCO VALLEY, MENDOZA 2004 ★★★★★

Finely concentrated, smoky new oak, good depth of berry fruit and good fleshy ripeness, oak and tannins need to soften. 2010–2016. **£34.99; LBG**

VIÑA ALICIA, BROTE NEGRO MALBEC, LUJAN DE CUYO, MENDOZA 2006 ★★★★★

Rich, ripe black fruits, good acidity but still on the raw side, should lose this greenness next year. 2010–2014. **£35; LBG**

CHAKANA, ESTATE SELECTION, LUJAN DE CUYO, MENDOZA 2007 ★★★★★

Rich blackcurrant fruit, briary and supple, oak present and tannins a bit four-square, but good purity, needs another year. 2010–2015. **£13.99; Fel**

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