



## Semillon, Splendidly

By Mary Ewing-Mulligan

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**Mendel, Mendoza (Argentina) Semillon, 2010** (Vine Connections, \$25): My fascination with Semillon wines began 20 years ago when I blind-tasted an aged, unoaked Hunter Valley (Australia) Semillon and confused it for a white Burgundy. The richness and power of that wine thrilled me, as did its smokiness and its complexity of flavor. In the years since, unfortunately,

Semillon wines seem to have become a rare commodity. Luckily, the Mendel winery in Argentina has brought a new Semillon to the U.S.

You might already know that Semillon grows in Bordeaux, where it is blended with Sauvignon Blanc (although, increasingly, Sauvignon Blanc is used alone). Semillon brings weight and richness to the wine and complements the freshness and crispness of the Sauvignon component. Unless it grows at very high yields, Semillon is all about weight, rich texture and ageability.

Mendel Semillon comes from grapes grown at 3,600 feet in altitude in the Uco Valley of Argentina's Mendoza region. The vines are un-grafted and on average are more than 60 years old. Fifteen percent of the grapes were harvested later than the rest and their juice fermented in new American oak barrels. This 2010 is the second vintage of this wine.

What's compelling about this wine is its combination of weight and rich texture with high-acid depth and freshness. The wine's aroma is broad and not particularly intense but it is complex: smoky, honey and hazelnut notes mingle with fresh citrus, mint, lemon peel and an almost spicy minerality. In your mouth, the wine is dry and full-bodied without any edge of high alcohol (only 13.6%). The taste gives a broad, grounded impression but it is not at all heavy, because the crispness of the wine's high acidity arises in the mid-palate and adds a striking dimension of depth. The wine's flavors are similarly yin-yang: rich but quiet notes of smoke, honey and earthy minerality contrast with zingy, refreshing lime and lemon. The texture is rich in a rather waxy or oily way, contrasting again with the crispness of acidity.



Mendel is the modern face of an old wine company owned by a family of Italian origin, which proprietor Anabelle Sielecki acquired in 2004 and named for her father. The winemaker is now Roberto de la Mota, one of Argentina's most respected enologists. Of the five wines that the Mendel winery produces, this Semillon is the only white. As much as I love this Semillon, I must admit that Mendel has other wines that are even more impressive, such as the 2007 Unus (a 70-30 Malbec-Cabernet blend) and the 2007 Finca Remota Malbec.

The 2010 Mendel Semillon is a dream with food because it has both weight and freshness. It's delicious with spicy beef salami, roast chicken or cassoulet, but it has the crispness to accompany delicate foods such as salads, simple fish or an herb omelet. This wine is perfect now, but I don't feel that you need to be in any rush to drink it, because Semillon does age well. This is a splendid wine and a worthy bearer of the Semillon flag.

**90 Points**