

Anthony Rose:

“The American critic Robert Parker called Weinert Malbec South America’s only outstanding wine”

- “Latterly, Roberto has created an approachably fresh, barbecue-friendly malbec, the 2009 Lunta, and a delightfully lemony, Graves-like dry white, the **2010 Mendel Semillon**. From a vineyard planted in 1928 surrounding the winery, **his signature red, the 2008 Mendel Malbec**, shows sweet black cherry aromatics and black-fruit richness moderated by a damsony bite, while the 2007, is similarly dark-fruited, if softer. In its power and potential for longevity, the violet-scented and cherry-rich **2007 Mendel Unus**, a malbec / cabernet sauvignon blend, is a fitting tribute to his father's inspiration”.

Anthony Rose: 'The American critic Robert Parker called Weinert Malbec South America's only outstanding wine'

Saturday, 2 July 2011

Occasionally, a wine has an impact that takes it into the realm of legend. The 1977 Cavas de Weinert Malbec is such a wine. Three years after Juan Domingo Péron's death, the volume of cheap wine drunk in Argentina rivalled that of France and the notion of quality was as alien a concept as political stability. Made from old malbec vines, in large new oak barrels, this wine was impressively powerful. It was the creation of Raúl de la Mota, then in the twilight of an illustrious career. Born in 1918, de la Mota was strongly influenced by Bordeaux's eminent Professor Émile Peynaud after the latter's visit to Argentina for the French wine company Calvet. In the 1980s, the American critic Robert Parker called Weinert South America's only outstanding wine.

Most of the substantial quantity made, 150,000 litres, has either been blended or drunk, but last month, Raúl's son Roberto brought one of his last bottles up from the cellar. It was a bespoke bottling for the celebrated Argentinian chef, Francis Mallmann, and it came in bright green. "I hated the 7-Up green," says Roberto, who worked with his father for eight years at Weinert. "The bottler told me he'd change the colour when the wine industry bought more wine bottles than he sold 7-Up." Still very much alive, with the leathery maturity of a fine Bordeaux, it lived up to its reputation. Later bottlings are indeed dark green.

With the Arizu winery as his playground, Roberto de la Mota grew up with the scent of fermenting wine in his nostrils. He studied wine in Mendoza and France, but it was his father who "instilled in me the value of understanding the French passion for terroir and quality". The crisis of the 1980s, when some 40,000 hectares of malbec were uprooted, impelled Argentina to turn to exporting. De la Mota

played his part by importing French grape varieties barely known in Argentina such as viognier, petit verdot and cabernet franc. As irrigation changed from traditional flood to modern drip, he introduced plants resistant to vineyard pests.

In 1994, Roberto went to work for Moët et Chandon's Argentinian outpost, developing a new wine, Terrazas de los Andes, based on the high altitude of their Andean vineyards. With Château Cheval Blanc's Pierre Lurton, he helped to create Cheval de los Andes, before leaving to set up his own winery, Mendel, in Mendoza's Mayor Drummond district.

"It was like a dream. I was in the vineyard and in the winery with small tanks, putting wine in barrels. No more pressure on volume – quality only." A car accident in 2007 that left him paralysed failed to dent his enthusiasm for making top-quality malbec.

Latterly, Roberto has created an approachably fresh, barbecue-friendly malbec, the 2009 Lunta, around £10, House of Townend (01482 638888), and a delightfully lemony, Graves-like dry white, the 2010 Mendel Semillon, £9.95, The Wine Society. From a vineyard planted in 1928 surrounding the winery, his signature red, the 2008 Mendel Malbec, £17.99, buy 2 = £14.99, Majestic, shows sweet black cherry aromatics and black-fruit richness moderated by a damsony bite, while the 2007, around £17.95, Jeroboams, House of Townend, is similarly dark-fruited, if softer. In its power and potential for longevity, the violet-scented and cherry-rich 2007 Mendel Unus, a malbec/cabernet sauvignon blend, £30.75, Jeroboams, is a fitting tribute to his father's inspiration.