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Tasting Highlights: Argentina

14 outstanding reds from some of the country's best winemakers—all with lots of bang for the buck

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Here's a selection of new releases that demonstrates what Argentina does best: lots of vivid, ripe fruit flavors with rich but fresh finishes, all with lots of bang for the buck.

All the wines here are under \$30, some under \$20, and they represent the efforts of some of Argentina's best winemakers. Luis Reginato is one of them—he fashions the wines for both Laura Catena's Luca brand as well as the La Posta del Viñatero label. **Roberto de la Mota**, undaunted by a car accident that has left him using a wheelchair, **has Bodega Mendel already among Argentina's elite wineries in just its third vintage.** Stefano Gandolini cranks out terrific values at Viña Doña Paula, while Susana Balbo's Dominio del Plata winery produces both the muscular BenMarco styled wines her viticulturalist ex-husband, Pedro Marchevsky, prefers, as well as her more polished, suave eponymous line.

With fall already around the corner, what better than a slab of beef on the grill and a rich, juicy red from Argentina? And for more on Argentina, keep an eye out for my annual tasting report in an upcoming issue.

BODEGA MENDEL Malbec Mendoza 2006 Score: 91 / \$27

This is nicely layered, with warm fig sauce, mocha, crushed raspberry and boysenberry fruit and a long, dark, spice and espresso-tinged finish. Powerful, but balanced. Should age nicely too. Best from 2009 through 2012. 3,500 cases made. —*J.M.*

BODEGA NORTON Privada Mendoza 2006 Score: 92 / \$28

Polished, with lots of spice and fruitcake notes up front, followed by an ample core of raspberry ganache, fig bread and mocha notes. Long, well-rounded finish lingers with poise, despite the overall concentration. Malbec, Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon. Drink now through 2012. 6,000 cases imported. —*J.M.*

ACHÁVAL-FERRER Malbec Mendoza 2007 Score: 91 / \$28

Rich, with delicious raspberry and macerated currant fruit enlivened by a strong violet aroma and piercing mineral streak long, dark, juicy finish is very vivid and racy. Drink now through 2009. 4,300 cases imported. —*J.M.*

BODEGAS ALMA NEGRA Mendoza 2004 Score: 91 / \$25

Rich, polished, modern style, with lots of mocha, fig bread, licorice and raspberry ganache flavors backed by a velvety, toasty finish. For the hedonist crowd. Bonarda and Merlot. Drink now through 2009. 1,000 cases imported. —*J.M.*

LUCA Syrah Uco Valley Laborde Double Select 2006 Score: 91 / \$25

Rich, toasty, ambitious style, with lots of flashy mocha, blueberry compote, blackberry and boysenberry fruit. Lushly textured, with a long, creamy finish that lets the exotic fruit echo. Drink now through 2010. 2,500 cases made. —*J.M.*

DOMINIO DEL PLATA Malbec Mendoza BenMarco 2007 Score: 91 / \$20

Very juicy, with fresh cut plum and fig fruit flavors laced with violet, graphite and high-toned spice notes. Long, racy finish. Drink now through 2010. 11,000 cases made. —*J.M.*

LA POSTA DEL VIÑADERO Malbec Uco Valley Pizzella Family Vineyard 2007 Score: 91 / \$18

Ripe and flashy, with a showy layer of mocha leading the way for spice cake, raspberry and boysenberry fruit flavors laid over a lush, creamy finish. Dense but lithe, with the fruit echoing through the finish. Drink now through 2010. 7,000 cases made. —*J.M.*

ALAMOS Malbec Mendoza Selección 2007 Score: 90 / \$15

Round and fleshy, with enticing spice, blueberry, fig and boysenberry flavors backed by hints of fruitcake and melted licorice. Stays fresh and vivid on the finish, with a lingering mocha hint. Drink now through 2009. 11,000 cases imported. —*J.M.*

BODEGA LUIGI BOSCA Syrah Maipú Reserva 2006 Score: 90 / \$21

Rich and polished, with a big core of black currant, fig, melted licorice and mocha notes. Round and fleshy, but focused, with a long, concentrated finish. Drink now through 2010. 472 cases imported. —*J.M.*

VIÑA DOÑA PAULA Malbec Luján de Cuyo 2007 Score: 90 / \$16

Dark and winery, with warm currant paste, cocoa powder and Turkish coffee notes backed by solid grip on the fleshy finish. Nice hint of grilled sage adds dimension too. Drink now through 2009. 6,500 cases imported. —*J.M.*

MAPEMA Malbec Mendoza 2006 Score: 90 / \$20

Ripe and forward with dark licorice, fig, currant preserve and chocolate notes riding along round, rich tannins. Rock solid finish. Drink now through 2010. 2,000 cases made. —*J.M.*

BODEGA NORTON Malbec Mendoza Reserva 2006 Score: 90 / \$18

Very toasty, with showy mocha and spice aromatics, but there's plenty of flesh here too, with lush raspberry, fig and plum notes that follow through on the long, polished finish. Drink now through 2010. 10,000 cases imported. —*J.M.*

DOMINIO DEL PLATA Malbec Mendoza Susana Balbo 2007 Score: 90 / \$27

Sports an enticing mocha and spice filled nose, along with creamy raspberry and boysenberry fruit flavors that carry through the lengthy, pure finish. Drink now through 2009. 6,000 cases made. —*J.M.*

LA POSTA DEL VIÑADERO Malbec Mendoza Angel Paulucci Vineyard 2007 Score: 90 / \$18

Juicy and ripe, with lots of fig, blackberry, mocha and currant paste notes that pump through the rich, fleshy finish. Solid acidity keeps it honest. Drink now through 2010. 8,000 cases made. —*J.M.*