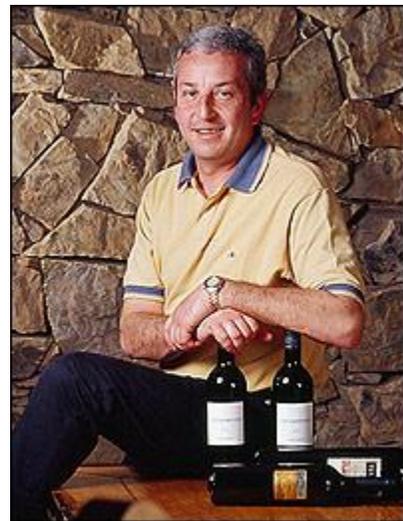# Wine Spectator

Wine Spectator Online

Winemaker Talk: Roberto de la Mota

Argentinean winemaker followed in his father's footsteps and beyond, to Cheval des Andes, and is now making his own Malbec

James Molesworth

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Winemaker Roberto de la Mota, 46, has been working full-time in Argentina's wineries and vineyards since he was 19 years old. But he developed a passion for winemaking much earlier, as he often helped his father after school at the Mendoza winery where he worked for more than 20 years. De la Mota joined his father at the winery and they worked together for many years, but eventually Roberto branched out to work as a consultant with Cheval des Andes, the joint venture between Argentina's Bodegas Terrazas de los Andes and Bordeaux's Château Cheval-Blanc that makes Malbec-Cabernet Sauvignon blends. De la Mota has since become one of Argentina's biggest champions of the Malbec grape. He is a partner in Bodega Mendel, a new boutique operation that has released a 100 percent Malbec and a Malbec-Cabernet Sauvignon blend, both produced from blocks of old vines located in the central area of Mendoza.

Enrique Siqués

Roberto de la Mota's father, also a winemaker, taught him how to work with Malbec.

Wine Spectator: What was your first vintage in the wine business?
Roberto de la Mota: My first vintage was in 1979, at 19 years old--my last year in high school.

WS: What got you interested in being a winemaker?
RM: All my childhood was [spent] in a winery. My father was a winemaker for a big winery called Arizu, and every day after school I was in the winery, sharing time with workers and [performing] cellar activities. It's difficult to say why, but I loved the vineyards and wines.

WS: What other wineries have you worked at, prior to starting your own?

RM: My first job was at Bodega y Cavas de Weinert as a winemaker and vineyard manager. I worked there with my father Raul from 1985 until 1994. In 1994 I was contacted for Bodegas Chandon as a vineyard manager, and in 1996 I started with the still-wines project, creating Terrazas de los Andes. In 1999 we developed Cheval des Andes, the Château Cheval-Blanc and Terrazas de los Andes joint venture. In 2003 I started my own project, Bodega Mendel.

WS: Who have been your biggest influences as a winemaker?

RM: Undoubtedly my father, but after him [Bordeaux wine consultant] Emile Peynaud, who was my father's friend. [Peynaud] visited Mendoza several times. Also my teacher in viticulture, Denis Boubals, in Montpellier, who passed on to me his love for the vineyard.

WS: What years was your father the winemaker at Bodegas Weinert?

RM: My father started with Weinert winery in 1976 and he worked there until 1997. In 1989 he passed on to me a lot of responsibilities in winemaking and operations.

WS: How has it been following in his footsteps? Have the two of you ever compared your wines to his?

RM: With my father I learned about quality, strict in all the details from the vineyards until the bottle, and obviously to love Malbec. Undoubtedly [the Weinert wines made by my father] are very different from mine. My father loves big barrels (25 to 60 hectoliters) and certain evolutions (mature flavors) in wines, but he [taught] me about finesse and elegance. My wines are younger, with more fresh fruit and less evolution, but I continue to try making wines with structure and concentration--but elegant at the same time.

WS: What is your favorite food pairing with Argentinean Malbec?

RM: Like many Argentineans I love good steak--it's simple, but one of the best combinations.

WS: What is your favorite wine (other than one of your own)?

RM: Château Cheval-Blanc St.-Emilion 1982. I had one bottle two months ago and it was spectacular!

WS: If you could be one other person in the wine business for one day, who would it be, and why?

RM: Very difficult question, but probably, Emile Peynaud during his days at Lafite Rothschild or Chateau Léoville Las Cases. Why? Because I love to blend wines.