

ARGENTINE WINES

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Our first destination is Argentina. The wines and fine dining on offer in a city like Buenos Aires are truly world class. As a friend of mine in Argentina says "God is everywhere but he has an apartment in Buenos Aires."

So from the land of the Tango we are happy to offer our initial portfolio of Argentine Malbecs. We plan to introduce new wines on a regular basis moving with market demands.

ARGENTINE WINE TODAY

Argentina is the fifth largest wine producer in the world. 1500 million litres are produced annually with about 20% being considered quality wine. Currently 200 000 hectares of vines are planted and 70% is grown in the Mendoza area. Since the 16th century most wine has been consumed domestically, with a small percentage of production being exported to neighbouring countries.

Over the decade of the 90's there has been a change of focus in the industry from quantity production to quality production. This has been driven by a number of factors including a reduction in domestic consumption, a strong desire to tap into the profitable growing worldwide wine markets and, we suspect, a glance over the Andes at what their traditional rivals in Chile have achieved.

The grape varieties most commonly grown in Argentina are Torrontes, Viognier, Chenin, Chardonnay, Pinot Blanc, Riesling, Sauvignon Blanc and Semillion in white and Pinot Noir, Merlot, Bonarda, Tannat, Tempranillo, Syrah, Malbec and of course Cabernet Sauvignon.

But it is the Malbec that truly sets Argentina apart with around 16 400 hectares planted.

Generally the Malbec can be described as a mouth filling soft red wine. Originally introduced from Bordeaux, that in Argentina produces big rich fruity aromatic red wines with fresh but still complex flavours and soft tannins that even when young will appeal to most red wine lovers.

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HISTORY OF WINE IN ARGENTINA

The first people to enjoy wine made from grapes in Argentina were the Spanish conquistadors. Their journeys in search of riches led them into what is now Argentina and some of them settled in the provinces of Jujuj and Salta in the north west of the country. They chose those areas because of the proximity to a rather large silver mine at Potosi, in what is now Bolivia.

The first Argentine winemaker is generally agreed to be a Spanish priest called Juan Cidron, who arrived in the province of Santiago Del Estero (next to Salta) in 1556. Historical records show the first wine he made was from a Spanish-American grape known as Criolla. The vines then spread south to other parts of the country along the eastern side of the Andes as the interior of Argentina was settled.

THE FUTURE OF ARGENTINE WINE

Americans and Europeans have been enjoying quality Argentine wines in quantity since the mid 90's. These wines are now receiving increasingly better reviews and higher prices towards the top end of the market. For example some of the country's icon wines have been rating as highly as top Australian Shiraz's in America.

Foreign investment in Argentine viticulture and vinification is gathering pace rapidly with substantial American, French, Portuguese, Spanish and Chilean investment. This confidence and commitment will ensure that Argentina's wines have a larger presence in the world of wine over the next 5-10 years.