

Argentina Malbec – The Wine With “Altitude”

Over the last few years, Malbec has become closely associated with Argentina and in fact, has become Argentina’s signature grape. However, it is actually a transplant from Cahors in southwestern France where it is sometimes referred to as “cot” or “the black wine” and show blackberry fruitiness and soft ripe tannins.

In its native habitat, Malbec was used predominantly as a blending grape. The climate in southwestern France made Malbec challenging to grow as it was very susceptible to frost and the colder often wet weather made it prone to rot.

In the mid 1800’s, Michel Pouget, who was a French agronomist (one who studies the science of soils and crops) brought cuttings of Malbec and several other varieties to Mendoza. Malbec loved the growing conditions in Argentina and to date; Argentina has the largest plantings of Malbec in the world (approximately 22,400 hectares). Unlike the colder, wet growing conditions of France, Argentina’s warm dry climate began taking Malbec to new heights – literally - in the wine world.

In Mendoza, which is Argentina’s largest growing region, “altitude” is everything. The average altitude of the vineyards here is around 900 metres. As a result of the high altitude the temperature is lower but the sunshine is stronger. The temperature variance between day and night is extreme. These extreme temperatures contribute to the color and aromatic qualities of the wines and allow them to retain their acidity. The Malbecs from higher altitudes tend to have thicker skins which produce a higher concentration of tannins; however even with the higher concentration they produce silky, soft and round wines.

The “upward” trend in plantings continues to grow. Could the sky be the limit? Due to the movement toward controlled yields, premium vines, effective pruning and irrigation, Argentina is producing excellent wines. National and international investments in new plantings and wineries indicate a soaring future for the countries wine industry.

Argentina’s Malbecs are medium to full body usually with deep dark fruit, such as plums, black currant and often with vanilla and toasted notes. They tend to be fuller and have a unique style that is different from their counterparts in the Old World.

Here are a couple of Malbecs I have tried and found to be very enjoyable.

Catena Malbec Mendoza 2008 750 ml \$24.48

This Malbec comes from high altitude vineyards and is a deep ruby color, dark ripe fruit, lots of plum, perfect spiciness giving it a creamy mouthfeel with a wonderful long finish.

Brush the snow off the grill and slap on your favourite steak. Simply fantastic!

Trapiche Broquel Malbec Mendoza 750 ml \$15.99

Another wine from lofty heights, this wine shows a lot of black juicy fruit and spice. The fifteen months spent in oak offers vanilla and toasted notes with a lingering finish. This Malbec is a really great value. Try pairing this one up with roasted lamb or enjoy it with Indian cuisine.

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