

# WINE News

*When winter comes to the vineyards of the south, we drink their sunshine.*



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## Variety and Value from Chile and Argentina

By Joe Manekin

Abundant sunshine, cooling influences from the Pacific Ocean or high-altitude locations, a wealth of great old-vine material and plenty of healthy, organically cultivated vines—these are just a few of the factors that make wines from Argentina and Chile such compelling values. We continue to mine the gems and find all kinds of good stuff: Malbec at all price points and in an ever-expanding range of styles; under-\$20 Cabernet that continues to make the critics gush; Pinot Noir that is really beginning to sing and find its true voice; old-vine bottlings

containing everything from 1940s-planted Sémillon or Cinsault to 200-plus-year-old, own-rooted Pais (Mission) grapes. There has never been more variety or value in wines from Chile and Argentina. Combine the ongoing renaissance in California wine with the energy, rugged beauty and ascendancy of South Africa, along with the focus and quiet confidence of our favorite New Zealand winemakers, and then I think you can begin to get a feel for the emerging wine scene in Chile and Argentina.

### 2015 Don Rodolfo Malbec Mendoza (\$8.99)

Grown in the sand, clay and rock of Lujan de Cuyo with fresh water from the snowmelt of the Andes mountains, this plush wine is a deliciously pure expression of Argentinian Malbec. It shows great weight, fruit purity and originality for such a cheapie. Stylistically, think Malbec meets Syrah. **90 JS:** “A fresh Malbec with blackberries and dried herbs on the nose. Clean, fun and fruity.” It’s been a hit with K&L staff, too!



### 2016 Matetic “EQ” Sauvignon Blanc Casablanca Valley (\$14.99)

A leading producer of Sauvignon Blanc and Pinot Noir in Chile’s coastal Casablanca Valley, Matetic has once again produced a tasty, textbook Sauvignon Blanc. Bright citrus and stone fruits combine with a hint of snappy green notes. Flavors are bright, juicy, crunchy and balanced. Crisp, granite-driven and flinty, with a sea breeze inflection, this is a delicious SB. Enjoy a glass or two while prepping dinner, hanging outside or poolside. **92 RP**



### 2016 Gen del Alma “Ji Ji Ji” Malbec-Pinot Noir Gualtallary (\$14.99)

If you expect Malbec to be big, brawny and spicy, then this wine will come as quite a shock: it’s actually 50-50 Malbec and Pinot Noir. It’s all crunchy, tangy red berry fruit, incredibly light on its feet and refreshing. Think good grower cru Beaujolais or even Anjou Gamay. With traces of Malbec’s violet floral quality combining with minerality and bracing, electrifying acidity, this is a fascinating wine. **92 RP**



## This Must Be the Pais: Garage Wine Company

By Kirk Walker

Chile has recently captured my imagination, much like South Africa did a few years ago. This is a country with a long and deep tradition of winemaking, but also a country where most of its wines—at least those known in the States—come from very large-scale corporate wineries, with all of the baggage, good and bad, that comes with that.

Within the last decade there has been a growing movement of smaller, mostly younger, wine producers who are seeking out old, sometimes neglected, vineyards. It is this romantic movement, similar to the one occurring in South Africa, that caught my attention, and it is from those ranks that Garage Wine Co. emerged. They have sought out small vineyards and farmers throughout the length of the country to find partners in creating characterful and distinctively Chilean wines. They use open-top fermenters, native yeasts and neutral barrels for all of their wines.

A great wine to start with is their **2016 Garage Wine Company Cinsault Itata Valley (\$19.99)**. With high-toned aromatics of sappy red fruits backed with subtle baking spices, this medium-bodied wine



has modest tannins and fresh acidity, and is a perfect wine to get a party started with. It's a Pinot substitute for when you want a little more punch, without grip.

The next wine, or maybe the first, to explore is the **2016 Garage Wine Company Pais (\$19.99)**. This wine was a bit of a head-scratcher for me, especially when I read the back label—but that's a story for another day! This is a wine that plays with expectations: it smells delicate like a Pinot but shows the power of a Cab. Aromatically it is high-toned red berries macerated with a moderate amount of spices, while the palate has big, solid and polished tannins. What isn't confusing is how good this wine is.

**2014 Garage Wine Company Cabernet Sauvignon "Lot #61" Maipo Valley (\$39.99)** This is unadorned mountain fruit, as it is aged only in used barrique. Who in Napa is willing to do that? As it should be, this wine is all about the fruit, bright, concentrated dark berries, with focus and lift and a subtle, dusty earthiness on the finish. Full-bodied and nicely textured, this is a wine with immediate charm, but I would stash a bottle and check it out in a few to five years.



## Rogues and Donkeys: Varietal Outliers of South America

By Chantel Carroll

South American wines aren't all about Malbec, Carmenère and, well, Cabernet Sauvignon. Lesser-known varietals, regional blends and Rhône-style wines can be found from Mendoza to the other side of the mountains. Let's start our wine tour in Mendoza:

**Los Tercos Bonarda Mendoza (\$12.99)** Did you know that Bonarda is the second-most-planted grape in Argentina after Malbec? Bonarda is also known as Charbono in California (where it's much rarer). Tercos is owned and operated by Pedro and Patricio Santos, whose father is Ricardo Santos, a pioneering Argentine winemaker. The word "tercos" is Spanish for "stubborn" (like a donkey—see the label), to highlight the winery's relentless commitment to quality. This unoaked Bonarda has bright flavors of red currant and ripe, juicy black plums, with a nice dose of earthiness, sweet spice, medium acidity and balanced tannin. I enjoyed this wine with ropa vieja, a Cuban braised beef dish. **93 JS**



**Weon Carignane Maule Valley (\$13.99)** Next up, we take a hop over the Andes into the Maule Valley of Chile. Here we find Weon, 100% hand harvested from 60-plus-year-old vines of Carignan. David Marcel of the French Basque region and his wife Loreto Garau own and operate this small family project (Weon is an "endearing" slang term in Chile). The single, dry-farmed vineyard in Maule Valley benefits from its coastal influence. This wine is fantastic! Blueberry jam, fresh huckleberries, dried thyme, crushed white peppercorns, anise, rose petals, milk chocolate mid-palate, a fair amount of acid, sufficient tannin and generous, lingering fruit. This is a great food wine, perfect for a grilled pork loin with salsa verde.

**2015 Rogue Vine "Super Itata" Itata Valley (\$29.99)** Now we will head south of Maule Valley into the next valley south, Itata Valley. Here we find Rogue Vine. The project is led by a two-man team, Justin Decker and Leo Erazo. Committed to exploring the long-neglected vineyards of Itata, they also primarily employ horse plowing and hand harvesting. The "Rogues" call the vigneronos that they work with "amigos," as they are so appreciative that they've cared for this forgotten land for multiple generations. The old bush vines here are grown on steep hills in non-irrigated, granitic soils. These bush vines have deep roots, and produce a very expressive field blend of Carignan, Malbec and Syrah. This wine has a beautiful, savory herbaceous quality, with leather, anise and very ripe black cherry and black olive.

## A Fistful of Malbecs

By Joe Manekin

These three wines, while all quite different from each other, represent some of the most exciting buys we have right now in this section.

### 2013 Tapiz “Alta Collection” Malbec Mendoza (\$13.99)

Tapiz is one of the most renowned and awarded of Argentina’s wineries, made even more famous by the addition of winemaker

Jean-Claude Berrouet in 2012, recently retired from Petrus after 44 vintages at the revered Bordeaux chateau. To celebrate his addition to the team, Tapiz created a new “Alta Collection” line of wines using fruit that comes solely from Tapiz’s sustainably farmed San Pablo vineyard in the Uco Valley. San Pablo is one of the highest-altitude vineyards in Mendoza (4,600 feet above sea level). This extreme altitude provides warm days that impart concentration to the grapes, and cold nights that help retain natural acidity. **95 JS**



### 2015 Noemia de Patagonia “A Lisa” Malbec Rio Negro (\$16.99)

When it comes to Malbec in the burgeoning Rio Negro region of Patagonia, Bodegas Noemia is the name to know. What you’re getting here for well under \$20 is a beautiful, supple Malbec, with dark and red fruits, well integrated oak, and a profile whose richness of fruit and fineness of tannins combine to make this seem considerably more expensive. Whether you are a fan of more elegantly styled Malbec such as Achaval Ferrer, or generally seek out value in red blends from California, this Patagonian Malbec should absolutely be on your radar. **93 RP, 92 JS**

### 2015 Zorzal Eggo “Tinto de Tiza” Mendoza (\$24.99)

A most serious Malbec-based wine, this 2015 vintage is now in a Burgundy bottle, and the wine’s reserve, structure, acidity and overall balance seem to have risen to the occasion and new bottle shape! There is an initial austerity on the nose, though on the palate, the wild plums, subtle cured olive and meaty notes suggest very good quality northern Rhône Syrah. Spectacular value here in one of the driest, most structured and complex bottles of Argentinian Malbec we have yet to feature. **94 RP**

## Sumptuous Malbec (and Sémillon!) from Aleph

By Joe Manekin

**Roberto Rodriguez Canal, who along with his partner Patricio Santos produces the wines from Aleph, is a man who is way ahead of his time.** Back when Malbec first came on the market in a significant way and when the press was fawning over particularly rich, chewy, oakier styles, Roberto was championing a more elegant, restrained and classic style of Malbec. Having spoken to him about this, Roberto has always emphasized to me that his wines, more than anything else, need to please his palate, regardless of current tastes or trends. He also prefers to hold back the wine in bottle until he thinks it is drinking optimally, much as they do in regions such as Rioja. This classic approach is certainly not the most profitable (holding inventory for more than five years rarely is!), though it does afford us all the great opportunity to drink Malbec with some bottle age. If you are looking for original, beautiful expressions of Malbec, as well as something a bit different but no less historic in Argentina’s wine scene as Sémillon, I strongly suggest giving these wines a try.

**2010 Aleph Malbec Mendoza (\$24.99)** The fruit is sourced from Lujan de Cuyo, the traditional home base for Mendoza wine country’s historic bodegas as well as the area containing the largest number of older vineyards. As usual, this bottling is bright and quite tasty, with excellent depth of flavor and texture.



### 2003 Aleph “Old Vines” Malbec Mendoza (\$39.99)

This is terrific Malbec, with nearly 15 years bottle age, and therefore a real rarity. Great presence on the palate—dark fruits, graphite and some savory hickory smoke notes as well, but still fresh. The Malbec in this bottle comes from 90-year-old vines in the La Consulta district of the Uco Valley. Maybe one of our best deals in serious Argentinian Malbec.

**2013 Aleph Sémillon Mendoza (\$19.99)** Argentina has around 900 hectares of Sémillon vines, many of them planted in the first half of the twentieth century. In this case, these 70-year-old vines yield a lovely wine with waxy white fruit and a soft texture. Roberto, whose family hails from Galicia, Spain, suggests serving this delicious white with octopus.





## Season Your South American Repertoire with Wines of Salta

By Ivan Diaz

Argentinian wine is sometimes reductively categorized as “steak wine.” While it’s no myth that Malbec pairs beautifully with a grilled cut of marbled red meat, a multitude of other styles and versatile applications of Malbec and other Argentinian wines go largely unacknowledged.

Some of these alternative styles come from Salta, a mountainous region of Argentina that has the distinction of being the highest-elevation wine appellation in the world. The cooler, higher-altitude conditions produce wines that are perhaps more delicately balanced and finely structured compared to their Mendoza neighbors to the south. Malbec takes on a leaner, earthier quality while the region’s primary white wine, Torrontes, achieves its finest expression with perfumed aromas, bright acidity and savory minerals.

Amalaya is an excellent example of the unique strengths (and affordability) this region offers. Made using sustainably farmed grapes, the wines show pure, fresh characteristics that reflect the vineyard conditions rather than the winemaking process. The **2015 Amalaya Malbec Salta (\$11.99)** shows a wonderfully complex profile of restrained black fruits: cassis, plum and black cherry, all tempered by zesty herbs, bitter cocoa and savory spices. Less fruit-driven and with more backbone and integrated acidity than Mendoza, this Salta Malbec will pair beautifully with a Spanish tortilla, classic rib eye or rustic pappardelle Bolognese.



Their **2016 Amalaya Torrontes-Riesling Salta (\$9.99)** blend of 85% Torrontes and 15% Riesling is similarly well balanced and bright, showing classic Torrontes aromas and flavors. White flowers and tropical fruit are in the forefront while lemon and salty minerality provide dimension. It gains no sweetness from the Riesling, inheriting instead subtle accents of apricot and petrol. Pair with corn on the cob or humita for an authentic Argentinian experience. **95 DC**

Bodegas Colomé is perhaps the most well-known winery in Salta, crafting crowd-friendly but powerful examples of the region’s distinctive style. The **2013 Bodegas Colomé “Estate” Malbec Valle Calchaquí Salta (\$19.99)** is big and luscious but shows more spice and savory character than most comparably priced Mendoza Malbec. Black raspberry and blueberry are immediately identifiable but the zesty herbs (eucalyptus and mint) and meaty spiciness demand the most attention while sweet tannins draw out the satisfying finish.

The **2016 Bodegas Colomé Torrontes Valle Calchaquí Salta (\$11.99)** could be considered the gold standard of this grape’s expression. A Gewürztraminer-like aroma (floral perfume, lychee fruit and sweet spices) hits the nose up front, albeit with less intensity than the Amalaya. These components are balanced out by pervasive minerality, achieving compelling tension from the interplay between fruit, flowers, sea salt and flint, all threaded together with mouthwatering acidity. Ideal with your seafood of choice.



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