



# Malbec in the Spotlight

**Diverse, rich and perfect for savoring slowly, Argentinean Malbec is America's current go-to red.**

BY MICHAEL SCHACHNER



Remember five years ago, when Pinot Noir was all the rage? And prior to that, when Shiraz from Australia logged time as America's darling red wine? And even before that, when California Merlot was the big thing? Nowadays, the hottest wine in this country is Argentinean Malbec. Dense and dark, with full-bodied richness that few other grapes besides maybe Cabernet Sauvignon, warm-climate Syrah and Tempranillo can mimic, Argentine Malbec is about seven years into a golden run during which exports to the United States have grown exponentially year after year. Below are our ten top-rated and our top ten value Argentine Malbecs from 2009. Note: Full feature on

Argentine Malbec is available in our February 2010 issue.

**96 Bodega Catena Zapata 2005 Argentino (Mendoza); \$ 123.** One of the finest top end Malbecs on the market today. There's raisin, mineral, licorice, blackberry and more. The mouth is both huge and shows finesse. And the mile-long finish of coffee, mocha and molten black fruit is awesome. Drink now through 2013.

**96 Bodega Catena Zapata 2005 Nicasia Vineyard (Mendoza); \$123.** Baked pastry, blueberry, cola and coffee aromas rest in front of a mineral, terroir-packed palate of soft black fruit, chocolate, fine herbs and other touches. The mouthfeel is fabulous and the finish of Swiss chocolate and integrated spice is smooth as silk. Drink now through 2011.

**94 Alta Vista 2006 Single Vineyard Temis (Uco Valley); \$50.** A mighty Malbec in every way. Opens with toasty oak, a pinch of sawdust and perfumed black fruit, vanilla and spice notes. The palate is lofty and rich, with beautiful berry and plum flavors. A smooth, sexy wine from the Uco Valley that shows that vineyard sourcing absolutely matters. Drink now through 2013.

**93 Achaval-Ferrer 2007 Finca Bella Vista (Perdriel); \$112.** Electric purple in color, with a concentrated nose of mineral, black plum and toast. The palate is lush and giant, which is reflective of Perdriel in Mendoza's traditional midsection, but balanced by natural acidity and fine tannins. Huge berry and plum flavors are dense, and vanilla, coffee and herb flavors grace the finish. Drink now through 2016.

**93 Bodega Catena Zapata 2005 Catena Alta (Mendoza); \$57.** Inky dark and the finest Alta we've tried. The palate is creamy and lush, but with good acidic balance. And the flavors of black fruits, chocolate and spice make it a league leader. Drink now through 2012.

"Top 10 Malbecs – Pulenta Estate Malbec 2007" Wine Enthusiast Magazine, USA, Febrero 2010

**93 O. Fournier 2006 Alfa Crux (Uco Valley); \$47.** Brilliantly colored, with dynamite concentration and lovely black fruit and earth aromas. Precise on the palate but also big and muscular, with silky tannins, grip and a late rush of deftly applied French oak. Drink now through 2012.

**93 Pascual Toso 2007 Alta Reserva Las Barrancas Vineyards (Mendoza); \$36.** All early signs say this one is here for the long haul; it is aggressive but serious, with fine acids and tannins hoisting deep black plum and berry flavors. Chocolate, mocha and pepper work the long finish. Best now through 2013.

**92 Bodega Noemiade Patagonia 2007 Noemia (Río Negro Valley); \$132.** Noemia is proof that excellent Malbec can come from Patagonia. Big, bold and smoky on the nose, with blackberry and bacon. The palate is balanced, while flavors of smoked meats, black fruits, licorice and especially clove stand out. Best now through 2012.

**92 Bodega NQN 2006 Colección NQN Patagonia Universe ( Neuquén ); \$ 23.** Excellent Malbec at a very good price. Ripe, big, burly and a powder keg of alluring cassis, licorice and inky aromas. Rich, stout and smooth in the mouth, with generous black cherry, baked plum, coffee and chocolate flavors. Pure as can be; drink now through 2012.

**92 Mapema 2007 pz (Mendoza); \$70.** Small-production Malbec from longtime Catena winemakers Mariano de Paola and Pepe Galante, this is deep and black-fruited, with a cushioned bouquet, violet notes and blackberry. The palate is healthy and balanced , and the finish is smooth and offers a whiff of coconut. Drink now through 2013.

**92 Pulenta Estate 2007 I (Mendoza); \$29.** The nose offers a fine mix of floral berry, dusty earth and classic Malbec richness, while the palate is juicy, balanced and tastes of cassis, blackberry, fresh plum, cracked pepper and baking spices. Full and long on the finish; right where you want it to be. Drink now through 2011.

**91 Naiara 2006 Gran Reserva (Mendoza); \$35.** Blackberry, black cherry and cola aromas get this dense, pure Malbec going. Lush black fruit flavors lead the palate, which also brings cola and a dusting of pepper. Lighter on the finish than the start, with olive, vanilla and chocolate notes. A wine we had not tried until this year. Drink now through 2011.

## **Top Ten Argentine Malbecs \$20 and Under**

- 92 Piattelli 2007 Grande Reserve (Luján de Cuyo); \$20.
- 91 Lagarde 2007 Henry Lagarde Single Vineyard (Mendoza); \$20.
- 91 Trapiche 2007 Broquel (Mendoza); \$17.
- 90 Areo 2007 Malbec (Neuquén); \$15; Best Buy.
- 90 Clos de los Siete 2007 Malbec (Mendoza); \$18.
- 90 Don Miguel Gascón 2008 Malbec (Mendoza); \$12; Best Buy.
- 90 Familia Marguery 2007 Casa (Mendoza); \$15; Best Buy.
- 90 Martino 2006 Old Vines (Mendoza); \$19.
- 90 Terrazas de los Andes 2007 Reserva (Mendoza); \$17.
- 90 Trivento 2007 Golden Reserve (Luján de Cuyo); \$19.