

**February Wine Column  
From Xavier Le-Bellégo  
Forbury's Restaurant**

**Argentina is the second biggest Producer in South America after Chile and the fifth biggest wine producer in the world (Hard to believe...)**

Argentina is diverse and includes the Rain Forest, the Andean Mountain and the plains of Patagonia, leading to glaciers in the southern area, Argentina has the world Southernmost city called Ushuaia, meaning fired earth.

The wines of Argentina have only recently been recognized as enjoyable wines within the public and the restaurant industry.

The Mendoza region is where the majority of the best wines are produced, in fact this is where the Malbec grape is grown in the world with others like Cabernet, Merlot and syrah, Tempranillo "the Rioja variety" loves Argentina hot climate, keeping cool with irrigation of the water from the andes mountain.

White-wise Torrontés (a spicy Muscat like grape native to Argentina and similar to Gewurztraminer) makes tangy, fresh spritzy, floral on the nose, aromatic flavours on the palate with a touch of spice. Early drinking white, (these are great party wines), Chardonnays have a forward oaky nose with creamy vanilla notes, rich and buttery.

Chenin Blanc gives a distinct floral nose with aromatic appeal.

Sauvignon Blanc has a rich herby nose with some grassiness and papaya notes.

The main grape for the red are Malbec, Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Syrah (or Shiraz) and Petit Verdot and Tempranillo.

The Malbec grape shows some mineral and leafy note in the background, rich on the palate showing some tar and chocolate, vanilla edge fruit with a spicy edge.

The Cabernet Sauvignon shows some blackcurrant fruit with some slight minerals notes and seductive toasted oak.

Much of Argentina red grapes are grown in high altitude (up to 1400 metres). Which provides nice heat and light followed by cool evenings, it helps increasing the level of acidity in the wine, the concentration of flavour and obtaining ripe tannins (natural preservative found in grapes skin that lends a dry flavour to a wine in its youth, but softens with age).

There are only a dozen wineries (eg. Argento, La Agricola, Bodegas Salentein, Terrazas, Clos de los Siete) or so that are leading the drive for quality and they are planting a range of grape varieties reflecting the terroir (a French word that rolls of a particular vineyard "including micro climate, soil, drainage, altitude, aspect, exposure and slope", in theory every vineyard has terroir, the main issue is whether you can taste it in the glass.

This activity, which includes the work of agriculturists and oenologists is permanently carried out and ensures the winery the availability of wines with unique identity.

Most Malbec based wines are aged in French oak for up to 12 months.

Merlot and Cabernet are fermented in stainless steel tanks and aged in 60% new French barrels.

Torrentés and Chardonnay spend a period of ageing in bottle to allow the short oak fermentation to harmonise with the fruit.

In Recent years Argentina has attracted wine makers from around the world, notably Mr Lurton from "Chateau Cheval Blanc" in the Saint-Emilion area of Bordeaux, now producing sublime wine from Malbec and Cabernet Sauvignon, they call it "Cheval des Andes", I have bought a few cases for my cellar, as it will age nicely for up to 15 years.

Argentinean red wine are generally easy drinking wines, very fruit driven, white wine can be enjoyed young while it keeps its freshness.

My wine selection:

Torrentés Villa Vieja, La Agricola, Mendoza 2005	£5.20 (Caves de Pyrenes)
Salentein Malbec, Bodegas Salentein, Mendoza 2002	£7.55 (Caves de Pyrenes)
Cheval des Andes, Mendoza 2002 (made by the wine maker of Chateau Cheval Blanc)	£27.50 (a real Gem)

Limited stock, ask Xavier for details.

Written by Xavier Le-Bellégo  
Forbury's Restaurant