



Finding El Dorado

While South America's legendary City of Gold was never found, treasures of the wine variety abound in Argentina and Chile. Steven Spurrier outlines what makes these countries so special, while Peter Richards MW and Marina Gayan MW pick out today's star names and must-buy wines

FOR WARREN WINIARSKI of Stag's Leap Wine Cellars in California's Napa Valley, wine is the three Gs: the ground, the grape and the guy (or gal). For me, in a similar fashion, wine is the three Ps: the place, the product and the people. South America, particularly Argentina and Chile, have the three Ps in spades. They seem to me the El Dorados of the

wine world – very different, but El Dorados both. I have spent five decades cellaring wines almost exclusively from Europe, and if some higher (or more likely lower) being were to tell me that my years with Old World wine had to end, it would be to South America that I would turn for solace. Solace laced liberally with excitement.

Chile: land of diversity

Taking Chile first, there doesn't seem to be a single grape that does not succeed in this viticultural paradise, where creativity knows no bounds. Geo Wines' 2010 Pedro Ximénez from the desert-like terrain of the Elqui Valley, vinified dry by the brilliant Alvaro Espinoza and selling for just £5.49 at Marks & Spencer ('Spurrier's World', July issue) shows how well the unexpected works. In Maule, the country's largest and oldest wine region, 100-year-old Carignan vines show such an elegant vigour in the glass that Carmenere might well be dethroned as Chile's indigenous variety. While hardly a year goes by without a new region being planted, and while the vineyards of this very long and narrow country are viewed north to south, serious work is in progress on an appellation structure that recognises the east-west influences that are more marked than those north-south.

Photograph: Theo Allofs/Corbis

Rene Merino, retiring president of Wines of Chile, set out the three steps of this programme at a conference held after the group's awards judging by

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an international panel in January: the first step is to divide the valleys into three sub-regions – near the coast, inland and on the foothills of the Andes – to create, for example, Aconcagua-Costa, Aconcagua-Entre-Cordilleras and Aconcagua-Andes. It's a classification welcomed by producers and already accepted by the authorities. The second step, to be developed this year, is to recognise as broad appellations many areas where there are vineyards without a recognised valley or geographical indication. Then there is a third step: to protect the names of certain smaller areas well-known for the quality of their wines, such as Apalta for its reds,

Above: looking towards the Andes in Chile's Torres del Paine. There's a golden glow across the whole country and over the border in Argentina, thanks to wines which Steven Spurrier says are the most exciting of the New World



Lo Abarca for its whites (especially Sauvignon Blanc) and Quebrada Seca for its Chardonnays. At a time when the French are abandoning the many Vins de Pays in the Midi for the catch-all name Sud de France and even creating the new category of Vin de France for cross-regional blending, such geographic identity is to be welcomed.

Argentina: solidity and potential

The great difference between France and Chile/Argentina is that in South America the industry and the government want wine production to grow and to get better. José-Manuel Ortega, one of Argentina's best producers in Mendoza under the O Fournier brand, and with a growing presence in Chile, is convinced that this will be South America's decade for wine. His opinion matches my experience that Chile is being recognised as a potential powerhouse, since the big boys pursue quality, while more and more boutique projects are moving away from the 'cheap and cheerful' category to become serious international contenders for exceptional, personality-driven wines.

Argentina has also gone through a quality revolution, with more focus on high-end regions such as Mendoza's Uco Valley, Patagonia to the south and Salta in the north. Winemakers have benefited from an influx of foreign know-how and the obvious potential has pushed investment, local and foreign, to create a modern yet still traditional industry.

What Argentina currently lacks in diversity it makes up for in vineyard potential. Sophie Jump, whose JS Wine Solutions has introduced many of the top wineries to the UK market, has teamed up with Decanter World Wine Awards judge and Argentina's leading wine journalist Fabricio Portelli to create the Friends of Argentina project to gain recognition of what is happening in the vineyards.

From Patagonia, only just entering its second decade of wine production, Malbec is being joined by Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc and one of the best New World Pinot Noirs I've ever tasted, Bodega Chacra, from the owners of cult 'SuperTuscan' Sassicaia. Mendoza has a fantastic array of micro-climates, with different soils and exposures already evident in a series of sub-appellations, the average altitude being a healthy 900m. The very dry vineyards in Salta are the highest in the world, some at over 2,000m, and here the white Torrontés – described by the sommelier at the Buenos Aires Hyatt as 'like life; sweet at the beginning and a little bitter at the end' – is at its best.

While Malbec and Torrontés still dominate the Argentina offering, there's much more to come: the local Bonarda has robust purity and acidity; Cabernet Sauvignon, Syrah and Tempranillo enhance Malbec blends; Cabernet Franc is proving to be a South American discovery; heavy bets are being placed on Pinot Noir; Sauvignon Blanc and Chardonnay seem already more vineyard than varietal; and Albariño and Viognier are beginning to cut a dash. The promise and potential of Argentina is becoming more evident every year.

Steven Spurrier is Decanter's consultant editor



Peter Richards MW is the Decanter World Wine Awards Regional Chair for Chile

Chile's top 15 producers

by Peter Richards MW

Altair

Winemaker Ana María Cumsille is one of Chile's brightest talents, making ageworthy wines that reflect their terroir. Altair is sourced exclusively from the estate vineyard in the Andes foothills in Cachapoal at 600m-800m altitude, and Sideral from across the Rapel appellation. Both are big-boned, powerful reds based around Cabernet Sauvignon, but in their fine texture, beautifully integrated components, layered complexity and terroir typicity, they are outstanding examples of Chilean red winemaking. The first vintage was 2002 and Cumsille is under no illusions that hers is a work in progress. But she has the advantage of established vines – the project was first designed around a prime 72-hectare vineyard owned by San Pedro, which went into association with Château Dassault of Bordeaux. The latter pulled out in 2007 but the change has not affected the wines, which seem to improve with every vintage.



One to try:
Altair, Cachapoal 2005 ★★★★★ 18 pts/20
£46 Amps, Conwy Fine Wines, Virgin, WoodWinters

Dense, elegant and with brooding, velvety power. This blend of mainly Cabernet Sauvignon with Syrah and Carmenere has flavours of dried herbs and blackcurrants, with a fine-textured, succulent palate. Serve slightly chilled to take the edge off the alcohol. **Drink:** 2011-2014. **Alcohol:** 14.7%



Aristos

One of Chile's newest, most exciting names is the result of an international collaboration between some reputed names. Vosne-Romanée producer Vicomte Louis-Michel Liger-Belair, of Domaine du Comte Liger-Belair, works with noted Chilean terroir specialist Pedro Parra and maverick winemaker François Massoc to make just two Cabernets and a Chardonnay. The first vintages were sourced from the Calyptra vineyard (see right), high in the Andean foothills in Coya in the eastern Cachapoal Valley. The Cabernet is refreshing and easy-drinking in the Chilean context, but it's the elegantly savoury, nutty and grippy Chardonnay, very much in a Burgundian mould, that is the star. Given Liger-Belair's origins, you might expect a Pinot Noir to be on the cards. But according to Parra, the team 'haven't found any in Chile good enough. Yet.'

One to try:
Aristos, Chardonnay, Cachapoal 2007 ★★★★★ 18.5
£40.42 (IB) Justerini & Brooks
This sensational wine spent an incredible three years in



Above: terroir specialist Pedro Parra, who consults for Aristos, one of Chile's newest, most exciting names

Top: maverick winemaker François Massoc works at both Aristos and Calyptra

Far left: Altair's hillside Petit Verdot vineyard

'There doesn't seem to be a single grape that does not succeed in the viticultural paradise of Chile, where creativity knows no bounds'

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barrel and the result is edgy, even funky, but brilliant. Savoury, lactic, nutty tones with a grippy succulent lemony acidity. If you prefer your Chardonnay younger, try the equally good 2008. **Drink:** 2011. **Alc:** 13.5%

Calyptra

In recent years, Chile's most exciting developments have been happening in the west, north, even south of the country, as viticultural boundaries have been pushed back with thrilling results. Only a few brave souls have gone east, into the towering Andes foothills – but the results are starting to show a new side to Chile. Calyptra is a prime example of this phenomenon, at 900m altitude in Coya, at the far eastern end of the Cachapoal Valley. Owned by plastic surgeon José Zarhi, vines were first planted in 1989 and the planted area now totals 37ha, including Cabernet Sauvignon, Chardonnay, Gewurztraminer, Pinot Noir, Sauvignon Blanc and Syrah. Some fruit is sold to make other excellent wines (see Aristos, left) but now the Calyptra brand is starting to establish itself as a mould-breaking label, with the emphasis on subtle, low alcohol and food-friendly wines. Non-conformist winemaker François Massoc is the chief architect of this style, though the high-altitude climate and stony terrace soils are undoubtedly of prime importance.

One to try:
Calyptra, Zahir Cabernet Sauvignon, Coya, Cachapoal Valley 2007 ★★★★★ 18
N/A UK www.calyptra.cl

Calyptra also makes exceptional Sauvignon Blanc and Chardonnay, both wonderfully understated yet complex and persistent. This Cabernet, though, is a standard-bearer for a new wave in Chile: complex and impressive yet also elegant, food-friendly and not overly alcoholic. **Drink:** 2011. **Alc:** 13.5%

Casa Marin

Originally established in 2000, owner Mariluz Marin's wines were initially lauded for their wild, uncompromising character – almost explosive in their power, exuberance and vivid sense of terroir. A decade later and the wines have mellowed somewhat, becoming more drinkable and elegant in style, but still retaining that bright acidity, succulent spice and uniquely scented character so typical of San Antonio's best wines. Highlights at the property, which is located just 4km from the icy Pacific Ocean in Lo Abarca, include both Sauvignon Blancs (Laurel and Cipreses), Sauvignon Gris, Riesling, Gewurztraminer and Syrah.

One to try:
Casa Marin, Cipreses Vineyard Sauvignon Blanc, San Antonio 2010 ★★★★★ 16.5
£17-£19 Everywine, Harvey Nichols, Hay Wines, Mentendorff, Swig



Sourced from a blustery, low-yielding hilltop site, this is a tangy, self-assured Sauvignon with aromas of nettles, fennel and pink grapefruit. The first vintages were spicy and almost savage; this style is more mineral, with gentle layers and an understated yet long finish. **Drink:** 2011. **Alc:** 13.5%

Concha y Toro

With its recent US\$238m acquisition of Californian producer Fetzer, Concha y Toro continues its aggressive drive to expand and improve. Chile's largest and most influential producer is also one of its finest, producing consistently excellent wines at all levels, from the reliable Sunrise, Frontera and Casillero del Diablo brands up to top names Don Melchor and Almaviva. Its influence spreads beyond its own stable of brands, however, in its ownership of other consistently excellent producers including Cono Sur, Emiliana Orgánico and Maycas del Limarí. It says a great deal about the company that top winemakers Marcelo Papa, Enrique Tirado and Ignacio Recabarren are all long-serving in an industry in which job hopping is the norm. In short, the Chilean wine industry is very lucky to have a producer like Concha leading its charge.

One to try:

Maycas del Limarí, Quebrada Seca Chardonnay, Limarí 2008 ★★★★★ 19
£20 **Corks Out, Fine Wine Seller, Harrods, Solent Cellar, The Wine Society**
Not officially Concha y Toro, as this is a Concha subsidiary, but winemaker Marcelo Papa is very much a Concha man. He's also a Chardonnay fanatic and in Limarí he's found the ideal site. Beautifully understated, powerful, mineral, savoury and tangy. Decant before serving.
Drink: 2011-2014. **Alc:** 14%



Above: Concha y Toro winemakers Marcelo Papa (left) and Enrique Tirado

Top: Cono Sur's Visión range is made by the innovative Adolfo Hurtado

Below: Marcelo Retamal, head winemaker at De Martino, champions Chile's diverse terroirs



Cono Sur

At the £7 to £15 price level, Cono Sur is one of Chile's, if not one of the world's most competitive, diverse and rewarding producers. The inquisitive spirit of head winemaker Adolfo Hurtado continues to set a high standard in a broad portfolio with few weaknesses. The likes of Sauvignon Blanc, Chardonnay, Gewurztraminer, Viognier and Pinot Noir are the stars, sourced from excellent terroirs across the country – there's even a stylish fizz from Bío Bío. It's been a big journey since Cono Sur was founded in 1993 as a subsidiary of Concha y Toro with a brief to be original and target export markets. It remains ahead of the curve: with screwcaps and sustainable viticulture now the norm, the producer has its own iPhone app and was recently voted 'Green Company of the Year' for initiatives such as organic packaging, lightweight bottles and carbon offsetting.
One to try:
Cono Sur, Vision Single-Vineyard Riesling, Bío Bío 2010 ★★★★★ 17
£8.60-£10 **Harrods, Matthew Clark, Slurp, Wine Studio**
A floral, waxy nose gives way to a spicy, mineral-infused palate, elegantly dry and with a beautifully focused, persistent finish. **Drink:** 2011-2013. **Alc:** 13.5%

De Martino

Reducing alcohol levels and eliminating new oak on the company's top reds are just two of the broad measures that head winemaker Marcelo Retamal



has recently instigated. All as part of what Retamal – a hugely influential figure in Chilean wine – terms a 'slow transition' back to wines that are 'easier to drink'. He's long been on a personal crusade against standardisation in wine, championing Chile's diverse terroirs. It's why De Martino now produces wines as varied as a high-altitude Syrah from eastern Elqui, a structured Chardonnay from coastal Limari and old bush-vine field blends from Cachapoal and Maule featuring Malbec, Tannat, Carmenere and Carignan. Winemaking is funded by cash flow from a lucrative juice and bulk wine business, but this detracts in no way from what is one of Chile's most laudable producers – much of which is due to Retamal's brilliant stewardship.



One to try:
De Martino, Single-Vineyard Las Cruces Old Bush Vines, Cachapoal 2007 ★★★★★ 18
£14.95 **The Wine Society**
A captivating field blend mainly of Malbec and Carmenere, from dry-farmed 70-year-old vines. Glossy dark fruit with nutty, floral hints. It's sleek and succulent on the palate – big-boned yet elegant and approachable. Spicy and savoury, lifted on the finish. Brilliant. **Drink:** 2012-2015. **Alc:** 14.5%

Errázuriz

One of Chile's most dynamic and reliable producers, restless in its innovative spirit and as a result a true industry leader. The winery's ethos is captured in its debonair yet conscientious president, Eduardo Chadwick, who has overseen a period of huge change in this Aconcagua-based winery over the recent decade. A stunning new showpiece winery and a hugely promising new vineyard in coastal Aconcagua – hitherto uncharted territory for fine wine – are visual representations of this progress. The wines give pleasure of a visceral rather than cerebral nature but the range is broad and solid enough to satisfy all tastes, from the refined Alto Maipo Cabernet Viñedo Chadwick to the nutty Wild Ferment Chardonnay and the new-look, biodynamic Bordeaux blend Señá. The winery is also famous for its blind tastings wherein its top wines (Señá, Don



Maximiano, Viñedo Chadwick) regularly trump greats such as Lafite, Opus One and Sassicaia.

One to try:
Errázuriz, Sauvignon Blanc, Aconcagua 2010 ★★ 16
£9-£11.50 **Majestic, Nisa Today, Slurp, Waitrose, Wine Rack**
The aromatics aren't as exaggerated as many a Chilean example, but the palate is tangy, mineral-infused and very persistent. Classy stuff from the newly developed cool Aconcagua coast area. **Drink:** 2011. **Alc:** 13.5%

Falernia

The pioneer of fine wine in Chile's northerly Elqui Valley is consistently one of the country's most exciting and daring producers. Perhaps it's the Italian blood behind the project – that of cousins Aldo Olivier, a long-time Chilean resident, and itinerant winemaker Giorgio Flessati – which inspires the creative liberalism. High-altitude PX, a Carmenere/Syrah blend made using semi-dried grapes and a new Torrontel (known as Torrontés in Argentina) are all delicious examples of ambitious winemaking and top quality terroirs to back it up, making wines of character and charm. A new single-vineyard project bodes well too. For now,

Above: Errázuriz's Don Maximiano estate in Chile's Aconcagua Valley, home to the producer's new showpiece winery

Syrah and Sauvignon Blanc remain the two stand-outs.

One to try:

Mayu, Syrah Reserva, Elqui Valley 2008 ★★★★★ 19
£8.97-£12 **Asda, Majestic, Waitrose**
Consistently one of Chile's top reds in terms of its outstanding value for money and captivating, unique character. Aromas of black olives and grilled meat lead into a succulent, elegant savoury palate with spicy notes and a long, refined finish. **Drink:** 2011-2013. **Alc:** 14%

Montes

Aurelio Montes is one of the great patriarchs of the Chilean wine industry. His influence spreads far beyond his eponymous winery – he consults widely and is regularly cited as a formative figure across several generations of Chilean winemakers. From humble, if dynamic beginnings as 'Discover Wine' based in Curicó in the late 1980s, Montes now makes wines as far afield as Argentina (Kaiken) and California (Napa Angel). Colchagua is Montes' home from home, however, via its resplendent Feng Shui winery in prime Apalta territory, which hosts some outstanding, steep-slope vineyards in a terroir pioneered by Montes himself. Montes wines are hearty and rich in character (no shrinking violets these) but often with a sophistication that sets them apart from the crowd.

One to try:
Montes, Folly Syrah, Colchagua 2006 ★★★★★ 17.5
£30.40-£40 **Andrew Wilson, Everywine, Slurp, Wine Chambers**
Intense and exhilarating, full of cassis and dark chocolate flavours. The texture is fine and the finish spicy and uplifting. Polished, utterly captivating. **Drink:** 2011. **Alc:** 15%



O Fournier

O Fournier has acclaimed winemaking operations in Ribera del Duero in Spain, Mendoza in Argentina as well as Chile. Founder and president, José-Manuel Ortega was once a clean-shaven banker; he is now a passionate, wild-eyed, hirsute advocate of characterful wines. It took him three years to find the right spots in Chile to make his wines, and in 2007 he settled on western Maule (reds) and San Antonio (whites). Though this is a young operation, it makes use of old vines and experienced staff to craft intense yet polished wines. The Urban line offers excellent value while Centauri delivers real character and vibrancy. Top Alfa Centauri wines, white and red, are outstanding examples of Chilean winemaking.

One to try:
O Fournier, Alfa Centauri Cabernet Sauvignon-Cabernet Franc-Merlot, Maule 2008 ★★★★★ 17.5
£28 **Seckford Agencies**

The Alfa Centauri oaked Sauvignon Blanc from Leyda is equally impressive, but this sleek, graphite-flecked red is a brilliant example of what Maule can do. Full and spicy but with tangy acidity and firm tannins. **Drink:** 2011-2013. **Alc:** 14.6%





Polkura

Sven Bruchfeld's tall, blond, Teutonic countenance is not the only thing that sets him apart in Chile – his wines are starting to do that for him. Polkura is a small project that Bruchfeld and university friend Gonzalo Muñoz set up in the western Colchagua hills in Marchihue; their first vintage was 2004. The focus is on Syrah – two wines are made including the top G+I cuvée, and there's also a succulent Sauvignon Blanc from Leyda under the Aylin label. The wines have progressed admirably since their debut and are now deftly crafted, modern and terroir-driven, full of rugged individuality and honed power. Bruchfeld and his winery are proud founder members of MOVI, an association of smaller Chilean producers.

One to try:
Polkura, Syrah, Marchihue 2008 ★★★★★ 17
 £14.49 Laithwaites

Peppery, sleek Syrah with some Malbec, Viognier, Tempranillo, Mourvedre and Grenache. Fleshy and fine, with a savoury edge to the layers of ripe fruit and creamy oak. **Drink:** 2011–2014. **Alc:** 14.6%

San Pedro

At the turn of the 21st century, San Pedro lost its way. A focus on quantity rather than quality, together with management upheavals, made for inconsistent and uninspiring wines. But it has taken less than a decade for this, one of Chile's largest producers, to turn things around. Quality has been vastly improved, even in lower lines like Gato and 35° South, while new fruit sources have been incorporated with dramatic effect. The most notable is Elqui, where San Pedro now makes outstanding Syrah and Sauvignon Blanc. Standards have also been raised in more traditional properties and varieties, such as Central Valley Cabernet Sauvignon.

One to try:
San Pedro, Castillo de Molina
Sauvignon Blanc, Elqui 2010 ★★★★★ 18
 £8 Majestic, Sainsbury's

Consistently one of Chile's best-value Sauvignon Blancs, this comes bursting with tangy flavours of gooseberries, tomato leaf and ripe citrus fruit. A fantastic wine for the price. **Drink:** 2011. **Alc:** 13%



Above: Sven Bruchfeld of Polkura in Marchihue

Top: Viña Leyda pioneered the cool climate Leyda/San Antonio appellation

Below: San Pedro has been transformed over a decade



Find out all the Decanter World Wine Award winners from Chile on Decanter.com and in our special Awards issue (on sale 8 September)

Tabalí

Not only is Tabalí co-owned by one of Chile's wealthiest men, Guillermo Luksic, it also boasts winemaker Felipe Müller and viticulturist Hector Rojas: both perceptive, ambitious, highly talented and keen to prove a point – which is exactly what they're doing. The emphasis here is on weaving ever more complexity, minerality and purity into the wines, and to this end an exciting new vineyard called Talinay was recently purchased. Just 12km from the Pacific Coast, the vineyard is unique in Chile for its high percentage of active limestone in the soil. It's early days, but signs are pointing to Tabalí becoming a defining producer in Chile for many years to come, especially for Sauvignon Blanc, Chardonnay and Pinot Noir.

One to try:
Tabalí, Talinay Pinot Noir, Limari 2009 ★★★★★ 18.5
 £16 Jolly Vintner, Perfect Partners

A wine that shows the magnificent potential of this cool, hilly limestone vineyard. Restrained nose of forest floor notes with herbs and red fruits. The palate is powerful and grippy, with wonderful structure, focus and purity. **Drink:** 2011–2015. **Alc:** 14%

Viña Leyda

One of Chile's finest producers, exemplary for its consistently rewarding cool-climate wines that offer outstanding value for money and wonderful diversity. At Viña Leyda, the range is superlative: Sauvignon Blanc, Pinot Noir, Syrah, Chardonnay and Sauvignon Gris, with barely a weak link between them. It's hard to believe that the property has only been going since 1997, having pioneered the Leyda/San Antonio appellation, which didn't exist before its arrival. New plantings even closer to the sea – El Granito is barely 3km from the shoreline – bode well for the future too.

One to try:
Viña Leyda, Secano Estate Sauvignon Gris, Leyda 2010 ★★★★★ 18.5
 £8.49 Marks & Spencer

Surely one of Chile's best-value, most distinctive whites, this Sauvignon Gris has a lush yet refreshing quality, with flavours of glazed citrus, pea pod and honey. Succulent, spicy and very food-friendly. **Drink:** 2011–2012. **Alc:** 13.5%

For full details of UK stockists, see p106



Above: the Andes loom over Bella Vista in Perdriel, one of Achával-Ferrer's three fincas



Marina Gayan MW is the Decanter World Wine Awards Regional Chair for Argentina

Argentina's top 10 producers

by Marina Gayan MW

Achával-Ferrer

Founded in 1998 by a group of friends and Italian winemaker Roberto Cipresse, Achával-Ferrer has fast established a reputation as one of Argentina's very top names. Early on, the founders discovered that old vines and very low yields were key to achieving high quality. 'What makes a wine extraordinary is the expression of the uniqueness of its terroir,' says Santiago Achával, president and winemaker. All the wines are 100% Malbec or Malbec-based blends, as it 'best reflects the terroir'. The top single-vineyard wines show the personalities of the three fincas (vineyards): Altamira in La Consulta, Mirador in Medrano and Bella Vista in Perdriel. The estate also produces a 100% Malbec – Quimera – made from grapes from the three sites, embracing the idea that the whole is better than the parts.

One to try:
Achával-Ferrer, Finca Bella Vista 2008 ★★★★★ 19
 £56.49 Corney & Barrow

Fragrant violet and tea with mineral notes. Concentrated and pure dense black fruit palate with chocolate and stony notes. Focused, elegant structure; its long finish is lifted by a savoury acidity. **Drink:** 2011–2016. **Alc:** 13.5%

Alto Las Hormigas

The wines here reflect the personalities of the two Italian winemakers, Attilio Pagli and Alberto Antonini: diverse and with a sense of place; a blend of modernity and tradition with great complexity. 'We are trying to focus more on the origin of the

'Argentina has also gone through a quality revolution, with more focus on high-end regions'

– Steven Spurrier



wines rather than on the superficial "varietal" notion,' explains Antonini, who wants Mendoza to develop its own appellation system. The pair believes that premium wines have to deliver both great quality and uniqueness. Antonini's intentions are to follow a European model and remove the grape name from all the estate's labels, retaining only the region and winery name. He means it – there is already no mention of Malbec on the label of the top Vista Flores single-vineyard wine.

One to try:
Alto Las Hormigas, Malbec Classico, Mendoza 2010 ★★★★★ 17
 £11 Highbury Vintners, Liberty Wines, Noel Young, Slurp, The Fine Wine Co, Wholefoods, WineDirect, WoodWinters

Alluring floral, violet and red berry notes. Smooth, round and juicy palate with delicate black fruit and chocolate flavours. Vibrant finish. **Drink:** 2011–2013. **Alc:** 14%

Andeluna

In 2001, businessman Ward Lay decided to invest in Tupungato amid one of Argentina's worst economic crises. The reason? He saw in Tupungato the potential to be the next Napa Valley. From the outset, rising star winemaker Silvio Alberto, under the guidance of French consultant Michel Rolland, worked to define Andeluna's style. 'Fruit expression takes priority,' he explains. 'We look for elegance without compromising concentration.' While Alberto focuses on varietal wines, he feels Argentina has great potential in blends of both grapes and regions, as seen in his flagship – a blend called Apasionado. Andeluna embraces the complete wine experience: the kitchen-style restaurant (with only four tables) is one of the best in Mendoza, and the wines are crowd pleasers with substance; some with enticing complexity. With only nine vintages in its history, Andeluna is an impressive newcomer.

One to try:

Andeluna, Cabernet Sauvignon, Mendoza 2010

★★★★ 17

£9.90 Slurp

Nice intensity of blackberries and bell peppers. Juicy and vibrant fruit backed up by structure. Notes of chocolate and eucalyptus typical of Tupungato in the Uco Valley. Good length. **Drink:** 2011–2013. **A/c:** 14%

Bodega Noemia

'The mystique about Patagonia is true – it has a very strong energy,' says Italian Contessa Noemi Maroni Cinzano, who spends six months a year in this southern region of Argentina. In 2000, Cinzano and her partner, winemaker Hans Vinding-Diers, discovered in Rio Negro a semi-abandoned Malbec vineyard planted in 1932. 'It was a gut feeling', as Vinding-Diers puts it, that this Mainqué vineyard was great. A year later they made their first vintage in a shed with no electricity – Bodega Noemia, Patagonia's version of a Bordeaux garage wine. In their quest to reach harmony between land and man, they grow the grapes of their 4ha vineyard biodynamically. They make four high-end Malbecs and production is so small they talk in numbers of bottles, not cases. Just a decade old, Bodega Noemia has already redefined Patagonian wines.

One to try:

Bodega Noemia, A Lisa, Patagonia 2010

★★★★★ 19

£25 (2009) **Harrods, Harvey Nichols, Lea & Sandeman, Planet of the Grapes**

Dark berry fruit – fresh and young with spicy notes. Bright and juicy palate, ripe yet elegantly structured tannins. The 1% Petit Verdot adds green peppery notes. Great cellaring potential. **Drink:** 2012–2016. **A/c:** 13.5%

Catena Zapata

Dr Nicolás Catena put Argentina on the world wine map. In his quest for quality, he built a team of top local experts and foreign wine consultants. He searched for the best terroirs in Mendoza, pioneering high-altitude vineyards. He developed



Above: Catena Zapata's distinctive, modern winery

Top: like the original Bordeaux *garagistes*, Bodega Noemia's first vintage was made in a shed

Below: rising star Silvio Alberto of Andeluna



his own Malbec clones. He was the first South American to successfully make and sell a wine at US\$20. Some thought him crazy, others could only admire his determination, and many have followed him. Now in his 70s, Catena (Decanter Man of the Year in 2009) still manages the family business with daughter Laura. Their vision, passion and thirst for knowledge show in the quality of their wines, split into three ranges of increasing complexity: Catena, Catena Alta and Catena Zapata.

One to try:

Catena Zapata, Catena Alta Chardonnay, Mendoza 2008 ★★★★★ 18

£19–£23 **Bibendum, Majestic, Slurp, WineDirect**

Attractive citrus-like aromas coupled with mineral and smoky notes. The palate is rich with an unctuous texture showing pear and white peach. A complex wine with real presence. **Drink:** 2011–2013. **A/c:** 14%

Colomé

The remotest mountain vineyards of the Calchaquí Valley fascinated Swiss-born Donald Hess. In 2001 he began to redevelop Colomé, a winery founded in 1831, which still had vines dating from the 1850s. 'Give and take', he says, is the basis for Colomé's commitment to the land: vines are grown biodynamically, embracing practices used by locals for centuries. Resident winemaker Thibaut Delmotte describes his winemaking philosophy as 'old school', which he defines as minimal intervention and the realisation that the grapes are in charge. His wines have a real sense of place. And by combining the site's high altitude with his and Hess' international vision, they have reinvented Salta's style. Last year Hess bought Bodegas Muñoz in Cafayate, which has been renamed to solely produce Colomé's exiting Amalaya blends.

One to try:

Bodega Amalaya, White, Calchaquí Valley, Salta 2010 ★★★★★ 17

£9–£11 **Henderson Wines, Noel Young, Swig,**

Wooden Wine Box Co

90% Torrontés, 10% Riesling. Intense aromas of white flowers, grape and apple. The palate is fresh and lifted by a crisp acidity and layers of jasmine, green apples and mineral notes.

Lingering finish. **Drink:** 2011–2012. **A/c:** 13.5%



Familia Zuccardi

If anyone can be credited with building a strong and reliable platform for Argentinian wines in the UK it has to be José Alberto 'Pepe' Zuccardi. The launch of the Q (for quality) range in the late 1990s marked the start of a long road of achievements. Today Familia Zuccardi embraces Argentina's diversity with passion and respect. It produces Argentina's most varied range of wines and styles, including the first-ever fortified Malbec – and champions grapes most producers would not dream of working with, taking them to new heights. And the company does not call itself a family just for marketing purposes: 'The nicest thing is that my three children brought with them projects they believe in,' says Pepe. The portfolio features four names: Santa Julia, Zuccardi, Fuzion and Malamado.

One to try:

Zuccardi, Emma Zuccardi Bonarda, Santa Rosa, Mendoza 2009 ★★★★★ 18.5

£20–£22.85 **Alliance Wines, Cavas de Gaucho**

Perfumed red fruit, coffee and paprika. Concentrated, juicy mouthwatering fruit and round, velvety tannins. Needs food and company. **Drink:** 2011–2014. **A/c:** 14%

Finca Decero

When building Decero from scratch, Swiss owner Thomas Schmidheiny took a long-term approach. He made full use of the apparent 'disadvantage' of Decero's newcomer status. With only four vintages on record, efforts have already paid off: remarkable wines, sensitively priced. All are made from Decero's sustainably farmed Remolinos vineyard in Agrelo. Estate manager Juan Marcó explains that the winemakers are not creators, only mindful translators. 'Our style is an honest reflection of Remolinos' subtleties and balance.' The estate has three ranges: all red, and all 100% varietal: Malbec, Cabernet Sauvignon, Syrah and Petit Verdot. But the top wine, Amano, is a blend of mainly Malbec and Cabernet – varieties the team believes are well suited to the Agrelo terroir.



Above: all Finca Decero wines are from its sustainably farmed Remolinos vineyard

Top: Sebastián Zuccardi and his father, José Alberto, known as 'Pepe'

Below: Viña Cobos, started by a trio of winemakers, including California's Paul Hobbs



Find out all the Decanter World Wine Award winners from Argentina on *Decanter.com* or in our special Awards issue (on sale 8 September)

One to try:

Finca Decero, Remolinos Vineyard Petit Verdot, Agrelo, Mendoza 2009 ★★★★★ 17.5

£15–£17 (2007) **Cavas de Gaucho, Slurp, Vinoteca**

Intense mineral, pencil shaving, boysenberry and green pepper notes. Densely layered palate backed by grainy, structured tannins. Real savouriness and length. A Petit Verdot in a league of its own. **Drink:** 2011–2015. **A/c:** 14%

Trapiche

In its more than 125 years, large producer Trapiche has been an intrinsic part of Mendoza's winemaking history. But it was only in the past decade that it changed its focus from quantity to quality. Chief winemaker Daniel Pi, who joined in 2002, is credited with taking this traditional winery to a new level. 'Diversity until death,' says Pi, who embraces it in all forms – from grapes to styles, regions and growers. The quality and distinctiveness of some of these growers inspired Pi to produce individual bottlings of single-vineyard Malbec. His wines have become a reference for Argentina's top-end wines and a confirmation of Pi's legacy. Trapiche has one of the widest ranges of wines in Argentina – in this case, big is beautiful.

One to try:

Trapiche, Broquel Cabernet Franc, Cruz de Piedra, Mendoza 2009 ★★★★★ 17

£11.99 (2008) **Alfred the Grape, Auriol Wine,**

Everywine, Fareham Wine Cellar, Fulham Palace

Wine, Morecombe Bay Wines, Nicholas, Secret

Cellar, Whalley Wines, Wooden Wine Box Co

Expressive, liquorice fruit and lifted aromas of green peppers. Concentrated, structured and

round with red berry fruit and smokey notes.

Long and individual. **Drink:** 2011–2013. **A/c:** 14%



Viña Cobos

Californian winemaker Paul Hobbs started working in Argentina in the late 1980s, consulting for Nicolás Catena. Amid economic crises and hyperinflation, Hobbs pushed winemaking boundaries. Little did he know then that he would end up splitting his life between Mendoza and California. Hobbs says he has two children in Argentina: daughter Agustina and Viña Cobos – a winery he jointly owns with fellow winemakers Andrea Marchiori and Luis Barraud. The trio got together with a simple approach: to make wines that reflect the true identity of each variety and its terroir. Their wines have great complexity and structure while retaining a lively freshness and juiciness. The portfolio of mainly high-end reds includes three lines: Cobos, Bramare and Felino.

One to try:

Viña Cobos, Bramare Cabernet Sauvignon, Luján de Cuyo 2009 ★★★★★ 18.5

£23.99 (2008) **Harrods, Planet of the Grapes, WineDirect,**

WoodWinters

Coffee, chocolate and intense cassis aromas with dried herbs. Serious structure and weight packed with long, densely layered fruit. A glimpse of Argentina's high-end Cabernet potential. **Drink:** 2012–2020. **A/c:** 15% **D**

For full details of UK stockists, see p106