



**July 2019**

by Tim Varan

We will finish our tour of the Southern Hemisphere this month with a look at Argentina and Chile. For most New World consumers, the wines from Argentina are a comfortable fit as the climate, and therefore style of the wines, is most like California. Like the vineyards of Napa, and a significant portion of Sonoma, the growing conditions in Mendoza are sunny, hot and quite dry. Argentine vineyards typically grow at a much higher altitude, but other than that, it is a pretty easy place to grow if you have water. Also, the producers in Argentina have been heavily influenced by American winemakers, creating yet another parallel in style.



The grape-growing conditions in Chile are quite different from Argentina, having more in common with the Sonoma Coast and Central Coast growing regions of California. It is no coincidence that the proximity to the cool Pacific Ocean is the major influence for both. For Chile, it is the height of the Andes Mountains and proximity to the ocean that makes the climate so different from Argentina. In Chile, much of the moisture that moves in from the Pacific cools as it rises over the Andes and is either deposited as rain on the Chile side or snow on the mountains themselves. For this reason, Mendoza, which is immediately on the other side of the mountains, lies completely in the rain shadow of the Andes. For comparison, Valparaiso Chile receives 14.5 inches of rain per year, almost exclusively in the winter months of June and July. Mendoza receives just less than nine inches per year. The only way they are capable of farming is by using irrigation pulled from the rivers formed from snow melt from the Andes.

If you can find a positive attribute to European colonialism, both countries have a long history of winemaking. In Chile, the missionaries who traveled with the conquistadors planted vines at their missions for sacramental wine as early as the 1550s. Vines appeared in Argentina about the same time, although records are less specific. Throughout their history, both countries have produced fairly large volumes of wine, almost exclusively for domestic consumption. Due to their European heritage and waves of immigration throughout the 19th century, both countries consumed the vast majority of their production. This is because the focus was on quantity and price, not quality. Even in the early 1990s, the majority of both countries' production was not considered worthy of export. Then, the governments began to recognize the value of wine as an export and started to encourage outside investment and modernization. Today, Chile and Argentina rank globally in the top 10 of wine exporting countries.

For Chile, the origin of the commercial wine industry started in 1830 when Frenchman Claude Gay convinced the government to encourage wine production. With their financial help, he imported over 40,000 vines of 70 different varieties to experiment with the best performers in their growing conditions. In 1851, Don Silvestre Ochagava Echazarreta traveled to France and was the first to import Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Pinot Noir and Sauvignon Blanc. These grapes were imported before the outbreak of phylloxera, a root louse which ravaged the vineyards of Europe between 1870 and 1900. Eventually the Europeans found a solution to the phylloxera problem and imported cuttings back from Chile to reestablish their vineyards. Coincidentally, Chile is the only major wine producing county to never have a phylloxera outbreak to this day.

For Chile, the wine industry grew rapidly, with over 250,000 acres of vines in production by 1938. Unfortunately, after WWII the government implemented significant steps to reduce alcohol consumption, dramatically reducing domestic consumption and vineyard plantings until the early 1990s. At that point, the government began to recognize the value of wine as an export and invited many European wineries to participate, including Chateau Lafite-Rothschild and Bruno Prats (former owner of Chateau Cos D'Estournel) from France, the Torres family from Spain and the Jackson family (Kendall-Jackson) from the US. With their expertise, the quality of wine in Chile exploded upward by the early 2000s, especially among a younger generation of producers who are unencumbered by tradition.

A fantastic example of modern Chilean wines comes to us from Felipe Garcia with his **2016 P.S. Garcia Bravado (\$19)**. Felipe worked for several large wineries before striking out on his own in 2006. At the time, he was enchanted with an old vine parcel of Carignan growing in the Maule Valley. Considered by his bosses to be unsellable, he determined that old vine plantings were the soul of the Chilean wine future. Since then, he has scoured Chile looking for old vine parcels, often in less traditional areas. The grapes for this wine come from a 120-year-old vineyard in Itata, a wine region south of the classic central valley zone where most Chilean wines are produced. Itata lies 300 miles south of Santiago in the Bio Bio region, and is where the first vines in Chile were planted in the 1500s. The region was a significant producer of wine until the early 1900s, when the difficulty in logistics saw a significant shift in production to the central valley, south of the capital of Santiago. At that point, many producers began to replace vines with forestry, which is now the major industry of the region. However a few producers continued growing vines, mostly for personal consumption. Garcia discovered two small sites, the Piedra Lisa and Bellavista vineyards and purchases the grapes to make this wine.

For the 2016 vintage, the blend for the Bravado is 37% Syrah, 33% Carignan, 20% Grenache, 5% Mourvedre and 5% Petit Verdot. The average age of the vines for these two vineyards is 120 years old, and production is very low; only 400 cases of this wine are made each vintage. When you open this wine, make sure to decant it for half an hour before serving. When you do, it explodes with a complex combination of fresh blackberries and strawberries, rose petals, mocha and pomegranate syrup. On the palate it is surprisingly firm to start, with a relatively high level of tannins and moderate acidity, which hold this wine back a little now. Ideally, I would encourage you to cellar this wine for a year or two before serving. In the Orlando store we cleared the distributor out of the 2015 right before this arrived, and it sold like crazy. The extra year in the bottle really helped with the tannins and acidity.

Our second selection from Argentina is the **2016 Mendel Malbec (\$25)**. The Mendel Winery is the union of Roberto de la Mota, one of Argentina's most respected and experienced winemakers, and Anabelle Sielecki, whose family has been growing grapes for nearly 100 years. Mendel was the first name of Anabelle's father, a man who came to Argentina with nothing and ended up a successful businessman in many different industries. He was a man who loved the finest things that life had to offer—particularly wine—and so Anabelle pays honor to him with the production of this wine.

Winemaker Roberto de la Mota is the son of Raul de la Mota, one of the legendary winemakers of Argentina. His own career is one of critical success after critical success, with his most noteworthy efforts at Cheval de Andes. That wine is the joint venture between Cheval Blanc and Terrazas de los Andes (owned by Moet and Chandon).

The grapes for this wine come from the Lujan de Cuyo area, which lies south of the city of Mendoza. Most of the Lujan de Cuyo valley lies at around 3200 feet above sea level. At this elevation, the vines receive an extraordinary amount of sun but are balanced by cool nights. The soils of the area are mostly sand and light gravel, poor in organic material and consequently very dry. The ungrafted vines struggle to survive and each plant only produces a few kilograms of fruit. For this wine, Anabelle and Roberto select only the best blocks from a vineyard that is almost 90 years old.

To make this wine, Roberto ferments the grapes in stainless steel tanks, then ages the wine for 12 months in French oak barrels. In order to build additional tannin structure in the wine, he uses one-third new oak barrels in the aging. When you are ready to serve this wine, decant it for half an hour to an hour before you drink the first glass. The bouquet almost oozes out of the glass with a rich nose of black raspberry and blueberry jams, maduro cigar wrapper, graham crackers, molasses and dark chocolate. On the palate, this wine is quite dense, showing extremely concentrated fruit framed by relatively high tannins and moderate acidity. You will want to drink this wine between 2020 and 2025.

### **Steak Tips with Mushrooms and Sour Cream Sauce**

I am a sucker for the throwback recipes of the mid-century, like Chicken ala King and this dish, which reminds me a lot of Beef Stroganoff. They are dishes I remember eating frequently as a kid and are still crowd pleasers with my family now. I also find that the high amount of butter, cream and other dairy works well with hearty wines such as the features this month. I generally buy steak tips at Costco where they are sold as flap meat. You can also buy them pre-cut, but you will often find the pieces not uniformly cut.

**1 ½ pounds sirloin steak tips, cut into 2-inch chunks**

**Salt and pepper**

**2 tablespoons vegetable oil**

**10 ounces white mushrooms, sliced**

**2 shallots, halved and sliced thin**

**¾ cup low-sodium beef broth**

**½ cup brandy**

**2 teaspoons minced fresh thyme**

**½ cup sour cream**

**2 tablespoons coarse-grain mustard**

1. Pat steak tips dry with paper towels and season with salt and pepper. Heat 1 tablespoon oil in large skillet over medium-high heat until just smoking. Add meat and cook until well browned all over, 6 to 8 minutes. Transfer to serving platter and tent with foil.

2. Heat remaining oil in empty skillet until shimmering. Cook mushrooms, shallots, and ¼ teaspoon salt, covered, until vegetables have softened, about 3 minutes. Stir in broth, brandy and thyme and simmer until reduced by half, about 7 minutes. Off the heat, stir in sour cream, mustards and any accumulated steak juices. Season with salt and pepper. Pour sauce over meat. Serve over rice or with roasted potatoes.