



Tim's Wine Market

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By JP Donnelly-Davis

In the US market, Argentinian wines are typically associated with the Malbec grape, but my trip there in 2013 opened my eyes to much more of what the country produces. While Malbec is currently the most planted variety, it only recently passed the Bonarda grape for that position. In fact, for over a hundred years the two varieties have jockeyed for the most planted variety in the country, depending on consumer tastes at any one moment. Less well known, but up-and-coming, are the high quality wines produced using Cabernet Sauvignon and the other Bordeaux varieties. During my visit, I was consistently more impressed with the Cabernets I was drinking than the Malbecs from the same producers. This month I have selected two very good examples of this variety, one in the pure form and another as a blend, to show you this phenomenon. - *Tim Varan*

2013 Vina Alicia "Paso de Piedra" Cabernet Sauvignon - \$22

In the early 1970s, Alberto Arizu, a young winemaker who had studied French viticulture extensively, took over for his father at the family-owned estate, Bodega Bosca. Up until that time, most of his family's wines had been inexpensive examples of Criolla, also called the Mission grape, made for local consumption. Alberto wanted to experiment with producing single-varietal wines and began planting international varieties. Joined by his wife, Alicia Mateu Arizu, and his son Gustavo, they began to produce single-vineyard bottlings of Cabernet Sauvignon to great acclaim. The success of these initial wines allowed Alberto and Alicia to plant additional French grapes, such as Carignan and Savagnin, in Mendoza, as well as invest in better vineyard management and cellar technology. Today, Vina Alicia is not only the name of one of the family's vineyards, but a line of wines made under the guidance of Alicia herself.

The Paso de Piedra Cabernet Sauvignon is produced from 40-year-old vines overlooking the Mendoza River, grown on a bed of primarily calcareous clay soils. This is also the same area where the Cabernet Sauvignon is grown to produce the next feature wine from Juan Benegas. The moderating influence of the river helps maintain acidity in the wines and prevent over-ripeness, as does the staggering elevation (over 3,500 feet above sea level). All vines are hand-pruned and undergo numerous green harvests per year to reduce yields and concentrate flavor.

This attention to detail continues at harvest; to make this wine, all the grapes are hand-harvested and brought to the winery on foot. Grapes are destemmed by hand before pressing and fermenting in temperature-controlled stainless steel, where regular punch-downs are employed to extract additional tannin and color. As fermentation continues, some of the juice is transferred to used French oak barrels. Once fermentation is complete, the entire wine is racked to used French oak barrels for eight months, followed by a light filtration. The wine then rests in bottle for an additional year before release. On average, only 25,000 bottles of this wine are produced each vintage.

When you open this wine, I strongly suggest decanting for at least half an hour. Once you do, this wine delivers classic Argentinian notes of blackcurrant, black cherry, wild raspberry, baking chocolate and menthol. Drink now through 2025 with chimichurri steak, beef tenderloin or lamb burgers.

2018 Juan Benegas "Don Tiburcio" - \$24

In the late 19th century, Argentina was rapidly industrializing. The newly-built national railroad linked Buenos Aires to rural provinces such as Mendoza, allowing for easy transfer of goods. For many Argentine wine producers, this provided an easier way to ship their wines across the country to Buenos Aires, where most of the domestic market was located. Mendoza, though, was still a relatively young wine region at the time, mostly known for alfalfa and beef production. The railroad eliminated much of the local market for both of these categories, and many landowners instead looked to the region's fledgling wine industry to save their farms.

Don Tiburcio Benegas, governor of Mendoza at the time and lifelong wine lover, used his considerable money and influence to promote the wines of Argentina and restore the region's prominence. In fact, it was largely due to his lobbying and personal fortune that the railroad was completed, which potentially explains why several stations were constructed in rural wine-producing regions. In between diplomatic missions to France, drafting agricultural laws for vineyard planting and governing, he somehow found the time to start up a winery of his own. El Trapiche, the family's initial winery, was a

tiny vineyard that quickly grew to over 6,500 hectares before Don Tiburcio's death in 1908. Today, the Benegas wines are still cultivated in the family's original vineyards, although the winery has since been sold, and continue to offer impressive quality and value.

Similar to the Vina Alicia described above, this is a Bordeaux-style wine featuring Cabernet Sauvignon. However, it is not a single varietal wine but a blend of all five "noble grapes" of Bordeaux: Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Cabernet Franc, Malbec and Petit Verdot, all of which were brought over from France in the 19th century.

Because of the massive size of the original El Trapiche vineyards, the Benegas estate features numerous different micro-climates and soil types. Two separate vineyards, both initially owned by Don Tiburcio, are farmed to create this wine: Finca la Encerrada, where the Malbec is sourced, is located 4,500 feet above sea level in the Uco Valley, while Finca Libertad, where the Cabernet grapes are farmed, is located on the banks of the Mendoza River itself. These different terroirs are blended together to create a wine with increased complexity, acidity and length. Cabernet Sauvignon, ripening earlier on gravelly riverside soils, is harvested first, followed by Cabernet Franc. The other grape varieties, particularly Malbec, enjoy a longer growing season and are harvested nearly a month later.

All five grape varieties are harvested by hand and brought to the winery where, after destemming and a pre-fermentation cold soak, they are vinified separately. After fermentation, each component of the finished blend rests for two weeks before blending. The finished blend is then racked into mostly used French oak barrels for six months, where it undergoes natural malolactic conversion. The wine is then filtered before bottling.

When you open this wine, you will want to decant it for at least half an hour. Once you do, this wine is quite aromatically complex with notes of red cherry, blackcurrant, black plum, clove, eucalyptus and vanilla. On the palate, the Cabernet Sauvignon and Cabernet Franc exhibit plenty of natural acidity and a slightly herbaceous finish while the Merlot, Malbec and Petit Verdot provide additional tannin and length. Drink now through 2025 with short ribs, beef stew or bone-in ribeye.

Braised Beef Ribs

I love to cook beef ribs for a crowd. They work with almost any full-bodied red wine and will hold for hours without overcooking. This recipe from Cook's Illustrated is my go-to example, and one worth having in your repertoire.

Adjust oven rack to lower-middle position and heat oven to 300 degrees. Pat beef dry with paper towels and season with 2 teaspoons salt and 1 teaspoon pepper. Heat 1 tablespoon oil in large heavy-bottomed Dutch oven over medium-high heat until smoking. Add half of beef and cook, without moving, until well browned, 4 to 6 minutes. Turn beef and continue to cook on second side until well browned, 4 to 6 minutes longer, reducing heat if fat begins to smoke. Transfer beef to medium bowl. Repeat with remaining tablespoon oil and meat.

Reduce heat to medium, add onions, and cook, stirring occasionally, until softened and beginning to brown, 12 to 15 minutes (if onions begin to darken too quickly, add 1 to 2 tablespoons water to pan). Add tomato paste and cook, stirring constantly, until it browns on sides and bottom of pan, about 2 minutes. Add garlic and cook until aromatic, about 30 seconds. Increase heat to medium-high, add wine and simmer, scraping bottom of pan with wooden spoon to loosen browned bits, until reduced by half, 8 to 10 minutes. Add broth, carrots, thyme, and bay leaf. Add beef and any accumulated juices to pot; cover and bring to simmer. Transfer pot to oven and cook, using tongs to turn meat twice during cooking, until fork slips easily in and out of meat, 2 to 2½ hours.

Place water in small bowl and sprinkle gelatin on top; let stand at least 5 minutes. Using tongs, transfer meat and carrots to serving platter and tent with foil. Strain cooking liquid through fine-mesh strainer into fat separator or bowl, pressing on solids to extract as much liquid as possible; discard solids. Allow liquid to settle about 5 minutes and strain off fat. Return cooking liquid to Dutch oven and cook over medium heat until reduced to 1 cup, 5 to 10 minutes. Remove from heat and stir in gelatin mixture; season with salt and pepper. Pour sauce over meat and serve with potatoes or egg noodles.

3 ½ pounds boneless short ribs, trimmed of excess fat

2 teaspoons kosher salt

1 teaspoon black pepper

2 tablespoons vegetable oil

2 large onions, peeled and sliced thin from pole to pole (about 4 cups)

1 tablespoon tomato paste

6 medium garlic cloves, peeled

2 cups red wine

1 cup beef broth

4 large carrots, peeled and cut crosswise into 2-inch pieces

4 sprigs fresh thyme

1 bay leaf

¼ cup cold water

½ teaspoon unflavored powdered gelatin