





Left: Some of the young winemakers behind the 'new' Argentina. Front, from left: Gabriela Celeste (EnoRolland) and Alejandro Sejanovich (consultant & winemaker). Standing, from left: Ernesto Bajda (Escorihuela), Jeff Mausbach (Manos Negras), Leonardo Querecetti (Trapezio), Matias Michelini (Finca Sopenia), Adrian Meyer (Terrazas de los Andes), Felipe Stahlschmidt (Catena Zapata), Pablo Richardi (Flechas de los Andes) and Pablo Cuneo (Ruca Malen)

Meet the new Argentina

Gone are the days when Argentinian wine meant massive, oaky, Malbec blockbusters. Now elegance, freshness and variety are the watchwords of the future, thanks to a group of visionary young winemakers. Christelle Guibert visits them

THESE ARE EXCITING times in Argentina. Its wine industry is moving at lightning pace, thanks largely to the efforts of a group of young winemakers, determined to revolutionise the country's wine scene and establish it firmly in the top echelons of the wine world. Two weeks in their company late last year made me realise how much has changed since my previous trip in December 2008. In two years, I found a move away from overripe, overextracted, overoaked wines. Today's wines are showing a new-found sense of balance, freshness and elegance allied to terroir, and a real sense of place.

According to Fabricio Portelli, director of the magazine and weekly wine programme *El Conocedor*, 'Argentinian wines today are showing the true character of their respective regions through better vineyard selection and control of fruit ripeness, and a move away from too much new oak.' Aldo Graziani, an Argentinian sommelier and wine consultant, notes: 'In the early 2000s, the country's wine regions underwent a radical transformation. Huge new wineries were opening and making big wines, with big oak in big bottles. Since 2006, winemakers have been changing style; we are now seeing fresher, more elegant wines with a better expression of terroir.'

That may be improving the industry as a whole, but in my opinion, the best wines now coming out of Argentina are from a new breed of young, talented winemakers. The following are a few to look out for.

Alejandro Vigil

Chief winemaker, Catena Zapata



VIGIL'S FIRST CONTACT with vines came at the age of two. Thirty-four harvests later, from Salta and La Rioja to Rio Negro and La Pampa, he is one of Argentina's most talented winemakers, already a role model for many of his contemporaries.

Behind his laid-back attitude lies a passionate, philosophical and, above all, very modest man. He claims he has two overriding goals: to continue feeding his insatiable curiosity; and to make wine that, when drunk, gives the consumer the greatest possible pleasure. 'We have to study more about everything,' he says. 'Argentina has a short history in making high-quality wine and the only thing that can make us reach the level of France or Italy is to study and experiment seriously.'

'A lot [of our early problems] had to do with our initial ignorance. The biggest progress I've seen is in managing the balance between a wine's maturity and acidity, both of which are directly related to the elegance and complexity of the finished wine. ➤

Malbec is important for all Argentinians, but Vigils admits it's not his favourite variety. 'But it's part of where I grew up,' he says. 'It is hard to define exactly what I think of Malbec other than that when I drink it I feel my grandparents' passion and the love of my parents recreated today in my son and wife.'

Alejandro Sejanovich

Consultant & winemaker



BORN AND RAISED in Mendoza, Sejanovich is seen by many as the most talented and thoughtful viticulturist in Argentina. He spent his childhood surrounded by vines, and from the age of 13, he already knew his vocation.

After bachelors and masters degrees in

vineyard management and winemaking, Sejanovich joined Catena Zapata in 1994 as vineyard manager. In 1997, he planted the highest-altitude vineyards in Mendoza – the Adrianna vineyard at 1,500m above sea-level – and spent the next 12 years managing this unique site. He also conducted the only Malbec clone selection research program in Mendoza.

In 2009, he planted his own 7ha vineyard in the heart of Altamira district in Mendoza. He left Catena Zapata last year and joined with Jeff Mausbach (a long-time colleague at Catena), and New Zealand winemakers Jason Mabbett and Duncan Killiner to develop the Manos Negras brand, working with local wineries. Thus far, the range covers a Torrontes in San Juan, a Malbec in Altamira and a Pinot Noir in Patagonia. His philosophy? 'Nurturing the wines in a gentle, non-interventionist fashion to allow the fruit and wine to express the terroir.'

Matias Michelini

Chief winemaker, Finca Sopenia

MICHELINI'S INSPIRATION TO become a winemaker came from his grandfather, an Italian winegrower who emigrated to Mendoza. 'My first experiences were washing tanks and controlling temperatures during fermentation,' he recalls. 'I started at the bottom of the ladder and it gave me a better vision of the work involved when transforming grapes into wine.' Since then, Michelini has done 20 harvests.

Before joining Finca Sopenia in 2003, he worked as a winemaker at Luigi Bosca in 1995. Three years later, he was asked by the Chilean winery, Santa Rita, to set up its new venture in Mendoza, Doña Paula. But his true passion is the Uco Valley and, to be more precise, Tupungato, where he was raised and now works and lives with his wife and four children.

His philosophy is to respect wine in its most pure way, and let the grape's own personality shine. 'I want the wine lover to be seduced when they drink a natural wine that respects the character of the region where it was made.' Michelini is focusing closely on the optimum ripeness of each variety



Above: Matias Michelini, chief winemaker at Finca Sopenia in Mendoza, believes he has a better understanding of the wine industry, having started 'at the bottom of the ladder' washing tanks

from different vineyards. 'I work with up to six harvest dates according to the grape and site; I want each grape to reach its best expression and balance.'

He is also experimenting with Bonarda, and since July 2010 has been consultant on a new project in Gualtallary – Zorzal Wines. He's also working on a personal project, Passionate Wine, and has released his first two wines: MalBon and Montesco.

Leonardo Querecetti

Winemaker, Trapezio



FROM AN ITALIAN family and with a grandfather who used to make wine, Querecetti did a degree in winemaking at the University of Cuyo in Mendoza. His first winery experience was at Bodegas Chandon in 2003, followed by

Trapezio in 2007. But it's only since February 2009 that Querecetti has had the chance to truly show his ability as a winemaker, at the small, family-run estate Trapezio. In less than two years, he has already put his stamp on the range and has become one of the rising stars of Mendoza.

'The best part of my job is the satisfaction I have when I open a bottle of my wine. I remember all the stories that converged to make it possible: the work in the vineyard, irrigation, harvesting, fermentation, ageing and people.' What makes Trapezio wines unique, says Querecetti, is a friendliness allied with complexity and elegance – with no loss of fruit or freshness. 'This makes you want another glass!'

His names his favourite grape as Cabernet Franc, saying: 'Malbec puts Mendoza and Argentina on the map, but I believe there is great potential in other varieties which can be developed to complement Malbec and continue to show the quality that Argentina can offer. Someday I'd like my own winery, dedicated to quality wines from unconventional varieties adapted to this terroir.'

'The best part of my job is the satisfaction I have when I open a bottle of my wine'

Leonardo Querecetti

Thibaut Delmotte

Winemaker, Colomé



IN 2005, DELMOTTE, a Burgundian winemaker, went backpacking in Argentina. Six years later, he's still there. After studying oenology and viticulture in Beaune in 1998, he worked in Burgundy and Bordeaux for six years before embarking on his trip

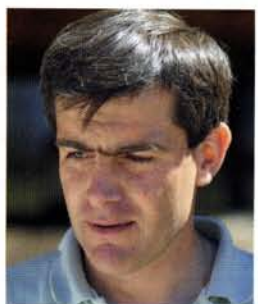
south. In 2005, he did the harvest at Colomé and owner Donald Hess offered him a full-time job.

With no experience of high-altitude vineyards, let alone Malbec and Torrontes, it was a challenge, worlds away from what Delmotte learned in France. 'The secret is adapting to the terroir and variety. At Colomé, the biggest difference is in the picking time – we harvest later for ripe aromas and freshness. The key to Malbec is retaining the fruit by using gentle extraction, long maceration and not much new oak.'

At Colomé, he's learning the beauty of blending terroirs. 'I try to make beautiful wine with good expression of fruit, concentration and enough acidity.' Delmotte loves trying new varieties – he is optimistic about experiments with Syrah and Petit Verdot, and he's still researching Tempranillo and Bonarda. 'The great thing about Argentina is we can always be challenged.' While he enjoys Malbec, this Burgundian's true love will always be Pinot Noir.

Pablo Cuneo

Chief winemaker, Ruca Malen



CUNEO DOESN'T HAVE a wine background but has always been interested in wine. 'What attracted me to winemaking was the wine itself. It's a very noble product that represents a place and a culture. But the biggest reward is when you enjoy the final result.'

After a degree in winemaking at the University of Cuyo, he joined Bodegas Chandon in 1997 and then Terrazas de los Andes in 2002. 'I worked with some very influential figures who enriched my career with a vision of winemaking from vineyard to consumer.'

Jean-Pierre Thibaud, ex-chairman of Chandon, was one of these. He and Jacques Montalembert, a winemaker in Burgundy, both had a dream: starting their own winery at the foothill of the Andes. In 1988 they bought the land and in 1999 Ruca Malen was born. Since 2006, Cuneo has led the winemaking team. 'I always look for fruit expression in my wines,' he says. 'So the only big change I made when I joined Ruca Malen was reducing the use of new oak. All my efforts in the vineyards and winery are focused on preserving the fruit character of each variety.' **D**

First eleven: top picks from new talent



Finca Sopenia, Synthesis Sauvignon Blanc, Tupungato, Mendoza 2009
★★★★ 18pts/20
£19.50 Ellis of Richmond, Winehound

From Matias Michelini, this is one of the country's best whites. Elegant nose of lime, grapefruit and herbal hints. The zesty, fresh palate is concentrated but elegant. **Drink** 2011

Trapezio, Chardonnay, Agrelo, Mendoza 2010 ★★★★★ 17.5

N/A UK +54 9 261 6105500

Elegant green pepper, citrus and lots of minerality. Very classy, harmonious palate of fresh, delicate apple fruit and lime. Nice mineral finish. **Drink** 2011-2013

Colomé, Torrontes, Cafayate 2010
★★★★ 16.5

£9.95 DK Vintners, Harper Wells, Harrods, Majestic, Noel Young Wines

Torrontes can be a 'one glass only' wine but you could enjoy a bottle of this: no sickly characters, just elegant fruit and fresh, vibrant floral notes. **Drink** 2011

Alejandro Sejanovich, Mendoza 2010
★★★★ 18

N/A UK alejandrosejanovich@yahoo.com.ar

I had the first taste of this ex-Catena winemaker's new project and it's very promising. Mainly Malbec with Cabernet Franc & Petit Verdot, it has an elegant, pure, black fruit nose. The palate is fresh and vibrant, wrapped with silky tannins, and fine minerality. No name as yet, but one to watch out for. **Drink** 2011-2016



Terrazas de los Andes, Reserva Cabernet Sauvignon, Mendoza 2008 ★★★★★ 18

£12 Houllts, Jeroboams, Roberson, Wholefoods

Terrazas is known for top Cabernet Sauvignon, thanks to winemaker Adrian Meyer. Very complex with notes of dark fruit, pepper and spice. The palate is round and very harmonious with integrated oak and firm tannins. **Drink** 2011-2014

Escorihuela, Don Miguel Gascon, Reserva Malbec, Mendoza 2009
★★★★ 17.5

POA Slurp

This Malbec also contains a dash of Petit

Verdot and Cabernet Franc. Beautiful purity of black fruits and spice. The palate is round and elegant with fine acidity. A well-balanced wine with a long, lingering finish. **Drink** 2011-2014

Catena Zapata, Cabernet Malbec, Mendoza 2008 ★★★★★ 17

POA Bibendum

A new experiment from Alejandro Vigil and Felipe Stahlschmidt. This is a mix of 60% Cabernet and 30% Malbec with Petit Verdot and Semillon. The wine has lovely fruit concentration with sweet but fresh blackberry and pepper. Very expressive, with mellow tannins and a lovely fresh finish. **Drink** 2011-2016



Ruca Malen, Malbec, Mendoza 2008 ★★★★★ 17

£11 (2007) Corney & Barrow

Grapes sourced from Uco Valley and Luján de Cuyo. The nose is dense with great purity of black fruit. The palate is elegant and structured, with fresh acidity and a long, lingering finish. **Drink** 2011-2014

Colomé, Amalaya, Cafayate 2009
★★★★ 16.5

£9.95 Majestic, Harrods, Harper Wells, Noel Young Wines, DK Vintners

70% Malbec, 20% Cabernet, 5% Tannat and 5% Syrah. Intense, vibrant black fruit and spice. The creamy oak adds complexity to the finish. **Drink** 2011-2013

Zorzal, Climax Malbec, Tupungato, Mendoza 2008 ★★★★★ 16.5

N/A UK www.zorzalwines.com

Matias Michelini's new venture with grapes sourced from Finca Sopenia. Restrained, savoury, spicy fruit. Robust, compact palate with tight structure. Rustic rather than fruity. **Drink** 2011-2013

Manos Negras, Pinot Noir, Patagonia 2008 ★★★ 16

N/A UK +54 9 115 715 3561

Pinot Noir doesn't come to mind when talking about Argentina, but Patagonia is starting to see some fine examples. Like Alejandro Sejanovich's wine, this is another venture from an ex-Catena winemaker – Jeff Mausbach. Elegant and delicate with lovely purity of fresh raspberry fruit. It's lightweight but has a long finish. **Drink** 2011-2013

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