

HANNA
LEE

TANGO, TANGO, TANGO!

By Hanna Lee, President of the NYC Chapter of Women for WineSense, www.womenforwinesense.org

When I think of Argentina, three things come to mind: tango, wine, and beef. They are all things I love and am passionate about! Tango has been my love and passion for many years, since I saw the Broadway show, "Forever Tango," and it captured my heart. I started a tango lessons several months ago and indeed, I am in love with its beauty, sexiness and elegance. It is said to be the soul of Buenos Aires. I agree.

And there is wine. Argentina has produced wine for over three centuries, and it is the fifth largest world wine producer following Italy, France, Spain, and U.S. About 60 percent of the country's total wine production of fine wine is red. Given their national culinary treasure, "asado," which means cuts of meat (usually their world-renowned beef) that are cooked on a grill or an open fire, it is natural that they produce and mostly drink red wine.

Malbec & Mendoza:

The most well-known and popular red wine in Argentina is Malbec. It is made from Malbec grape, which is one of the traditional blending grapes of Bordeaux. Malbec, however, found its ultimate expression in Argentina, rather than in its

native land. Malbec is grown mostly in Mendoza, approximately 600 miles west of the capital, Buenos Aires. Mendoza is the leading wine region of Argentina and 75 percent of Argentina's wines are produced in this area. The weather in Mendoza is warm and sunny, resulting in Malbec wines that evoke ripe fruits like black plums and black cherries, as well as hints of chocolate and licorice. The wines have a firm structure and a velvety texture with soft and smooth tannins.

I have tasted some great Argentinean wines recently. Here are my five recommendations, along with their suggested retail price:

- Norton White Label Malbec 2003 (\$8)
- Clos de los Siete Mendoza 2004 (\$16)
- Kaiken Ultra Malbec 2003 (\$20)
- Bodega Catena Alta Mendoza 2002 (\$45)
- Bodegas Caro 2002 (\$45)

To learn more about Argentina and its wine culture, I interviewed Alejandro Poffo, Deputy Consul, Commercial Office at Consulate General of Argentina in New York.

HL: What is so special about Argentinean wines? What makes them unique?

AP: The wine production zones in Argentina enjoy a continental climate, with low humidity, well-drained soils and, in most cases, arid landscapes. Water comes from the de-icing of the pristine Andean mountains. This is perfect for the vines, as it allows a very organic agriculture. People in the Argentine wine business have a passion for growing the finest grapes and making world-class wines. We've been one of the main wine producers of the world for many generations.

HL: Are there any particular vintage years that were spectacular in Argentina?

AP: Unlike other countries where there might be a huge variation in quality, due to the climate and geography where grapes are grown in Argentina, there is a consistency in the quality of our wines. We do have some outstanding vintages though, such as 2002 and 2003.

HL: For the wine enthusiast, when is the best time to visit Argentina? And which regions would recommend?

AP: March is harvest time in Argentina and the time when the annual harvest festival in Mendoza takes place. In Argentina, the wine route stretches mainly through the western Andean foothills, from Salta in the north to

Chubut in Patagonia.

HL: Besides touring wineries, what else should a tourist do in Argentina?

AP: Being such an extended and varied country, you have all kind of options, from the glaciers and vast landscapes in the south to the high mountains and wine producing regions in Mendoza and San Juan, the pre-Columbian culture in the north, fly-fishing in rivers and lakes, trekking and canoeing, and, of course, tango in Buenos Aires.

HL: Where can people learn the "tango" in NYC?

AP: There are free tango lessons at the Argentine Consulate on Tuesdays and Wednesday at noon. There are literally hundreds of options to learn at all levels all over the city. For additional information or brochures, email cnyor@cancilleria.gov.ar.

Tangoing the Night Away:

When you plan your next vacation, keep Argentina in mind. With its charming wine, exciting food, lively music and sultry dance, what more is there? In the meantime, I invite you to start now by having a glass of Malbec and tangoing the night away... ■

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