



Wines tasted at Achaval Ferrer in Argentina.

Argentina's Best

ON JANUARY 14, 2016, we left for a mid-morning tour and tasting at one of Argentina's most famous wineries, Achaval Ferrer. This winery certainly has one of the best visual settings in Argentina. The Andes are vivid neighbors. We first tasted the Quimera 2012 which is a blend of Malbec, Cabernet Franc, Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, and Petit Verdot. This Bordeaux blend combines earthiness and minerality with rosemary and Asian spices. The fruit flavors are predominantly cherry and raspberry, with slight bittersweet chocolate accents on the finish. It was a beautiful wine to start the day at 10 a.m. We followed this with a splash of the entry Malbec and then a true treat—a barrel tasting of Achaval Ferrer's top three wines, all 100 percent Malbec from very distinctively different terroirs. These three wines are easily identified as Malbec, but each is unique in nuances of tastes based on their terroirs. The vines are all mature and selection of fruit is such that it takes the fruit of three vines to a make a bottle, whereas the Argentine average is four bottles per one vine. This critical selection and quality translates into relatively expensive wine (\$90–\$120 per bottle). Finca Altamira is dark with hints of blackberry, plum and cherry and floral overtones as well as espresso and

substantial minerality. This produces a serious and memorable wine. Finca Mirador is made from grapes of vines averaging 80 years old. With a nose of cassis and blueberry, it is more refined than the other two fincas, and can be enjoyed from 10-20 years. Finca Bella Vista is from 100-year-old vines. Featuring medium-bodied tannins, it shows a core of pure blackberry and wild strawberry fruit with lemon rind and dark chocolate.

After stealing last looks and taking pictures of



Artwork seen at Luigi Bosca.

the winery's backdrop, we left for a tour and tasting at one of my favorite wineries, Luigi Bosca. While the architecture is traditional Dutch style,

the Arizu family owners also incorporate the latest wine-making technology. On tour we saw the most beautiful art incorporated into the working environment. We sampled five wines starting with the Gala 3, a blend of Viognier, Chardonnay, and Riesling. The wine has an intense yellow/greenish color with aromas of citric acid, sugar, honey, pear, and apricot. It is full-bodied and very viscous and sweet on the palate.

Our second wine was my favorite, Finca Los Nobles Chardonnay. This comes from some of the oldest Chardonnay vines in the world, some over 90 years old. It is made in the style of Corton-Charlemagne which makes it a remarkable value at \$30 in the U.S. compared to the \$150–\$3,000 alternatives from France.

We transitioned to the red wines via 100 percent Pinot Noir, Prestige Rosé sparkling wine. Our first red was the Finca Los Miradores, the first Malbec produced in the Uco Valley. The wine is violet red in color with aromas of ripe berries, dark fruits, dried figs, and quince. In the mouth, it is fruity with round tannins, slightly spicy, and well-balanced leading to a long, intense, but elegant finish.

We finished with the Cabernet Bouchet which was dark ruby red with a complex nose of pepper and spices. This full-bodied wine has dark fruit flavors especially blackberry. The wine is elegant with ripe tannins and a long finish making it a good candidate for aging.

We left Luigi Bosca and headed for lunch at the



Lunch and wine tasting at Ruca Malen.

Ruca Malen winery in the Uco Valley. The drive of 45 minutes was on a ribbon of road cutting through vineyards as far as one could see, interrupted by a five-minute town crossing. This winery is situated in the foothills of the Andes with a stupendous view.



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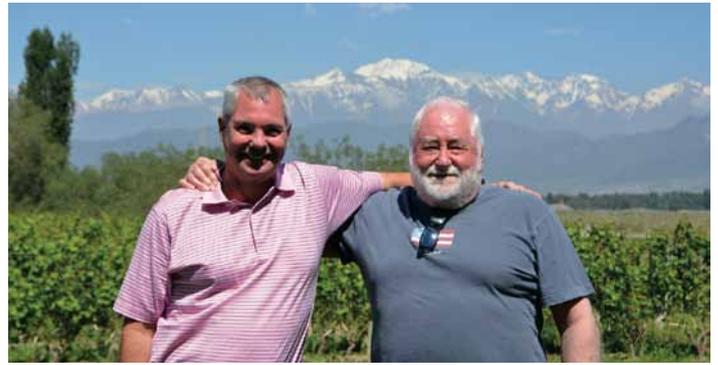
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David Varwig and Jim Bryant with Andes backdrop. (Photo: Pat Bryant)



The wine tasting room at Achaval Ferrer.

We had a choice of two starters. One was cured meat, crispy bread, and a wine reduction with ground herbs and chocolate powder. The other was a vegetarian offering of stacked grilled eggplant (millefeuille) with tomato and melted cheese. Most couples tried one of each and shared. Both were fantastic with the Ruca Malen Cabernet Sauvignon 2012, which was rich and soft in the mouth.

For the main course, we had a choice of a large filet medallion served with smoked carrots, citrus chimichurri, and grilled vegetables or the vegetarian gnocchi with cream and seasonal vegetables. We again shared these with plenty to spare and both choices were outstanding when paired with either wine—the Ruca Malen Malbec 2013 (Uco Valley) or the Kinien Malbec 2011 (Vista Flores-Tunuyan and Lujan de Cuyo).

Dessert was raspberries with Aquaribay ice cream with a mix of bonbons and cream. The wine kept coming and we almost couldn't stop as the effect of the setting, the high-quality food and wine, and friendship was 'over the top'. This restaurant has been awarded the best winery restaurant in the world by the Great Wine Capitals. What a day filled with memories for a lifetime! A vôte santé! 🍷



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Barrington resident Jim Bryant is pursuing his passion and love of wine as an international wine consultant. This follows a 30-year career in senior financial and general management positions at two Fortune 100 companies. He is the owner of James R. Bryant L.L.C.; contact him at profwino@comcast.net.