

Argentina's Best

Having recently returned from a three-week trip to South America spent mostly in Argentina, I have to admit that I'm a believer. It was certainly one of my all-time experiences. This is a country that elicits strong feelings. From the cosmopolitan and historical European influenced capital of Buenos Aires, to the vast, open unsettled arid high plain desert, to the majestic Andes stretching high into the sky, it's almost unbelievable that so much can be packed into one country and be so easily accessed.

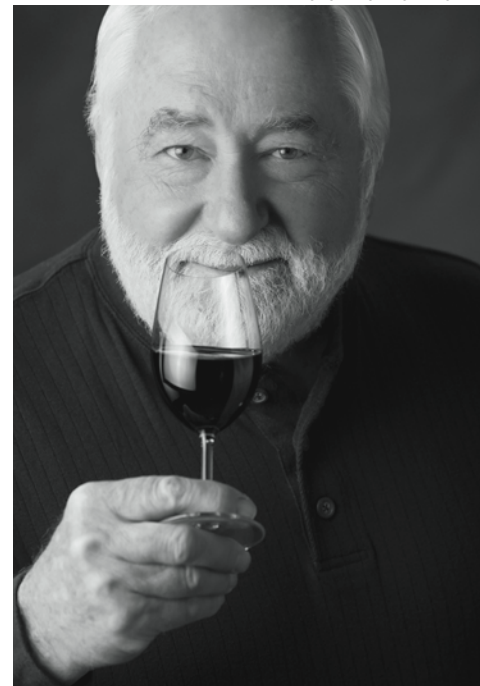
My wife and I flew to Buenos Aires via Miami. The distance is 6,000 miles but thankfully only two time zones away so recovery was swift. I highly recommend staying at the Park Hyatt in Buenos Aires. It is a one-stop shop for arguably the best hotel and restaurant in the country, as well as one of the country's top two sommeliers, Marcelo Rebolé. We dined *alfresco* one evening at the Palacio Duhau and had our favorite fish, Black Hake, from the Antarctic Ocean's 500 –1,500 meter depth. We enjoyed other dining experiences while experimenting with Argentina wines. While we found many we liked, we were particularly impressed with the Malbec and Cabernet Sauvignon-Malbec blend from Rutini. This was reconfirmed later at a tasting at the winery in Mendoza.

Buenos Aires is a very beautiful city, often

referred to as the Paris of South America. The heritage of most inhabitants is Italian and Spanish with a significant German influence as well. The city is the greenest I've seen. In fact, a canopy of trees covered many streets, which is a key reason of the small pollution even though the city is full of cars. In addition to a very enjoyable city tour, we loved the Boca artist area where Buenos Aires originated. One night we went to see a tango show, which we enjoyed immensely.

We flew to San Rafael in Mendoza province and spent a delightful week at the Algodon Wine Estate. Owned in part by some friends from Illinois, we were treated to a fabulous time. The property consists in part of 150 acres of vines planted from 1946. Wines consisted of Chardonnay, Cabernet Sauvignon, Malbec, Bonarda, and Grand Reserva (blend of Cabernet Sauvignon, Malbec, and Syrah). While all are fine expressions of the grapes, the Bonarda is my favorite and I predict it could be the next "hot" wine from Argentina. The second largest planted variety in Argentina, it is used mainly as a blending grape. I think of it as a hypothetical blend of Red Zinfandel and Barbera. It is great with food or by itself and Algodon's offering is thought by some to be Argentina's best. All these wines are available in the Chicagoland area.

PHOTO: THOMAS BALSAMO

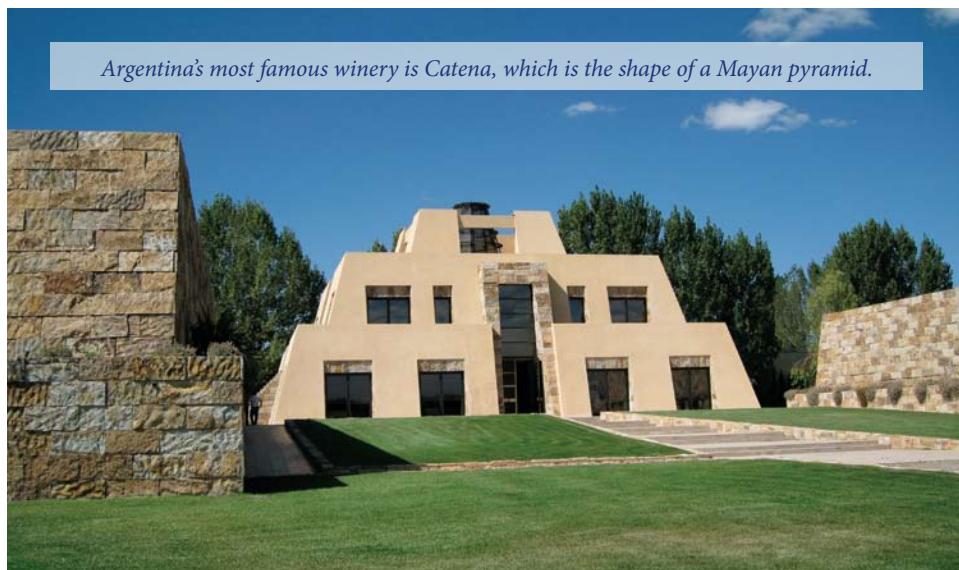


Barrington resident Jim Bryant is pursuing his passion and love of wine as an international wine consultant. This follows a 30-year career in senior financial and general management positions at two Fortune 100 companies. He is the owner of James R. Bryant L.L.C.; contact him at profwino@comcast.net.

The estate has a private golf course with polo fields coming soon. Our days were spent horseback riding through the vineyards and potential homesites; white water rafting in clear, cool water flowing from the Andes; golfing; relaxing by the pool (rarely saw a cloud in 20 days); and eating more food and drinking more wines than one should. What a time! For more details, you can visit the Web site at www.algodonwineestates.com.

We were fortunate to meet the patriarch of a famous Argentine family; his distant grandfather had been governor of Mendoza province 11 times. In 1830, this ancestor bought a huge estate in San Rafael and built a large estate house that exists today in similar form except for updating with assumed necessities. The owner, Camilo

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Aldao, owns a winery, Bombal & Aldao, where he does not sell wine except by the barrel, i.e., 290 bottles. The wines are kept in a cask — reserved in the name of the owner — in the winery’s cellar until they are bottled and sold. I participated in a blending “shoot-out” — where a trial of various blends of different varietals are achieved for the best tasting blend — and birthed a cuvee of 20 percent Cabernet Sauvignon, 30 percent Merlot, and 50 percent Malbec. This was an honor.

If you are interested in visiting one of my favorite places, you can visit the Web site at www.fincalosalamos.com for general estate details. Stay at this famous estate and perhaps buy your wine and be wrapped in pleasant memories for its life.

En route to Santiago, several of us visited some of Argentina’s most famous wineries near the city of Mendoza. Without a doubt, Argentina’s most

famous winery is Catena, which is the shape of a Mayan pyramid. The current patriarch, Nicolás Catena, to a large degree put Argentina on the world’s wine map. Although his family produced wines long before his time, armed with two doctorates in economics, he figured out how to produce the country’s best wines. Fittingly, in 2009, he was awarded the Wine Person of the Year by Decanter magazine. We had a fabulous gourmet food and wine luncheon featuring the Catena Alta Chardonnay, Cabernet Sauvignon, and Malbec on site in the prized cellar room. This winery stands in contrast to La Rural Winery, which looks much like it did a century ago. This winery produces the famous Rutini wines mentioned earlier and ironically is partially owned by Catena.

We visited two other very high-end wineries: O.Fournier and Salentein. Both are avant-garde

in design and produce fabulous wines. We had a gourmet lunch with their best wines at O.Fournier and were very pleased with the Alpha and Beta Crux and the reserve Sauvignon Blanc. The wines at Salentein were also superb. Perhaps my most passionate wine moment came when we visited the Luigi Bosca Winery. I have long sold and consumed several of their offerings and have always been amazed at the quality-price ratio. However, to have these, plus other rare wines on-site with the ambience and hospitality shown at this historic estate, was a fitting end to a great winery tour. The finale was when we were poured one my favorite wines, the Lugi Bosca Finca Los Nobles Chardonnay. The grapes come from vines averaging 90 years old. It will stand up to any Chardonnay I’ve tasted — even those costing hundreds of dollars.

Santé! U