

# TUPLINGATO

*The snowcapped Andes Mountains set the mood for our Adrianna visit.*

## A Rare Look Inside Catena's Legendary Adrianna Vineyard

FOR MANY YEARS, I have been an enthusiastic fan of Catena wines. Although I was already a lover of the famous flagship Nicolas Catena Zapata blend of Cabernet Sauvignon and Malbec, I was having trouble locating a case of this wine from 2004 and a good friend from the importer solved my riddle.

Knowing my fondness for this wine, arrangements were made to allow Costco to have an unusually high volume of this wine to come to the Lake Zurich store, which resulted in a very significant sale of this wine during the 2007-2009 recession. As a result of the above, Laura Catena arranged for me to visit the famous Adrianna Vineyard in Tupungato Valley which is about an hour from Mendoza. I believe our group of 11 was the first and perhaps the last to visit this historic site.

We left the Park Hyatt in Mendoza and drove to the Adrianna Vineyard in Tupungato Valley. The purpose of our visit was to see this historic site where the ultra-rare vineyards from which five wines are made. We had planned to stay only one hour at this stop, but we were so impressed that one hour turned into three.

We arrived, met our two agronomist hosts, and started the visit with the White Bones (Chardonnay). The snowcapped Andes served as a picturesque backdrop for the perfectly aligned rows of vines with an appropriate headstone marker. We were able to descend about 10 feet into the vineyard by way of a pit which had been dug into each vineyard. Although all these



*Our lucky group of 11 who visited Adrianna Vineyard.*

five vineyards had a river flowing over them in the past, the topography of each is markedly different soil.

After our first stop, we had a commemorative pour of White Bones and then drove a very short distance to the Whites Stones (Chardonnay) vineyard. The vineyard was on very different soil, and the vines were smaller and in earlier seasonal development than were those in the White Bones vineyard, which is a contiguous plot with White Stones, perhaps only 100 meters apart from center to center.

We then drove another short distance, perhaps 100 meters, to the Fortuna Terrae (Malbec) vineyard. Once again, the soil is very different from the White Bones and White Stones plots with more soil and less rocks found therein. At this point in our visit, we had already stayed two hours versus our allocated one hour and had the rest of the day scheduled with Catena events, so we did not visit the remaining two Malbec vineyards.

The good news is that for the next hour, we had one of the most memorable wine tastings ever. Because these plots had never been visited there are no facilities for guests covering everything from wine tastings to bathroom needs. So, from the tailgate of a pick-up truck within site of the snow-covered Andes Mountains, we had rich tastings (ample and multiple pours) of five of the greatest wines from Argentina, if not the world.



The Catena Zapata Adrianna Vineyard names its White Bones parcel for the soil's distinct layers of calcareous deposits, limestone, and fossilized animal bones. Their White Stones Chardonnay is named after a parcel of the high-altitude Gualtallary vineyard containing oval, white calcium-covered stones. Both parcels are remnants of an ancient riverbed with soil compositions that provide excellent drainage for the vines.

## TASTING NOTES

Here are short tasting notes on each wine:

**White Bones (\$120).** This Chardonnay is full-bodied with fruit intensity complimented by refreshing acidity and is elegantly dry with tastes of vanilla, white peach, and butter with a rich mouthfeel. This wine reminds me of a high-quality Meursault from France.

**White Stones (\$130).** This Chardonnay has delicate aromas of white flowers with mineral notes and has elegant flavors of jasmine and white peach gently intertwined. This wine recalls memories of some of the greatest Premier and Grand Cru Chablis I have ever had. Both this wine and White Bones can be enjoyed young with decanting and will age well for one to two decades.

**Malbec Fortuna Terrae (\$150).** This Malbec is the most forward and easily accessible of the Malbecs. It is a beautiful red with impeccable purity with evidence of wet stones, red cherries, and hints of flowers and spice. It is very aromatic with spicy black fruit notes and moderate acidity. The finish is elegant, round and smooth, and reflects the composition of the one-meter-deep loam limestone soil covered with white stones.

**Malbec River (formerly River Stones)(\$200).** River Malbec is the most rustic of the trio of Malbecs with somewhat riper and grainier tannins and some earthiness. It tends to be the most austere of the three, but shows a little more fruit. The beautifully textured wine opens with subtleness, showing power and elegance with evidence of violets and wet stones, minerality, spice, and is focused and harmonious. The tannins are rich and reveal cassis and spices on the finish.



We "roughed it" with a tailgate-style Adrianna wine tasting.



The five great Adrianna wines.

**Malbec Mundus Bacillus (\$350).** This is my favorite Malbec in the world, paying homage to the unique bacteria in the high altitude 1.4-hectare alluvial, limestone-rich soils at 1,420 meters. This wine always shows excellent concentration and great acidity with powerful flavors of black and red fruits alongside rich tannins, forecasting great age-ability.

In summary, this tasting of the five high-altitude Adrianna Vineyards in Gualtallary once again proves Nicolas Catena's decision a quarter century ago to plant the two grapes at extremely high altitudes (1,400 to 1,550 meters).

Once considered risky or an error, it is now widely acknowledged as brilliant. The wines are all from very small plots and deserve whatever effort you must make to acquire several bottles of each. Whether white or red, these wines should be decanted in their youth, and all will age one or more decades while improving. À Votre Santé! 🍷



PHOTO: THOMAS BALSANO

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