

New Releases from Argentina

Stephen Tanzer

The U.S. market continues to be flooded with Mendoza malbec, as this wine has become as popular here--and as much of a brand name--as sauvignon blanc from Marlborough. In both instances, there are gazillions of very good wines, and many of them are largely indistinguishable from one another. Pricing of Argentine red wines can sometimes seem almost random--which is another way of saying that informed consumers can find great values in this category. The reds of Argentina rank among the world's great wine bargains. The country offers a host of outperformers in the \$15 to \$20 range--satisfying, rich reds that can compete against top cabs from California at two or three times the price. Whether it's 88-point wines for \$12, 89-pointers for \$15, or 90-pointers for \$20, these wines are very difficult to beat for value.

On the other hand, some Argentine wines that retail for \$50 and up are no better than their cheaper shelfmates: in many cases, they are "show-me-the-money" wines made from overripe fruit, overly extractive vinification, or too much time in too much new oak.

In my tastings this year, I once again found myself scoring many Argentine malbecs around 88 points--that is, very good wines that I would happily drink, assuming the price is right. But these 88-pointers fall short of outstanding for a variety of reasons. Some are chunky, while others are green-edged or show underripe/overripe character. Other wines lack shape, or refinement, or depth. Many of these wines could use a bit more complexity. Some finish with drying tannins or apparent alcoholic warmth. And then there's the oak variable. I continue to taste wines made with less-than-ideal cooperage, as well as others whose material is muddled or overshadowed by too much new oak.

The vintages I tasted. Recent vintages (2012, 2011 and 2010) have been on the cool side, generally without any periods of extreme heat. In growing regions that are accustomed to very warm summers, whether in Argentina or elsewhere, producers often hesitate to describe late, cool growing seasons as outstanding. But, for this critic at least, cooler vintages with slow ripening, long hang time and sound levels of natural acidity in the grapes often produce the best wines.

Many of the red wines in this year's report are from the 2011 vintage, and as a group the '11s did very well in my tastings this winter. The best of them offer a very attractive combination of richness, complexity, clarity and freshness. This growing season started about a week later than usual due to a cold winter. There were then some serious crop losses in many sections of Mendoza, especially in Uco Valley and Lujan de Cuyo--and in the malbec--due to a widespread frost on November 9. The cold snap resulted in some heterogeneity of fruit even where it did not cut potential yields. The flowering was then generous.

January and February were cool, with some February rains slowing down the ripening process. Ripening proceeded steadily in moderately warm conditions in March, with sugars and polyphenols ripening in sync and acidity levels remaining healthy. Unseasonably warm temperatures in April then sped up the ripening process and caused some dehydration for the latest pickers. In general, the harvest took place two to three weeks later than average.

Insiders view the 2011 whites as generally fresh, with the sauvignon blancs showing some varietally expressive herbaceousness, a characteristic that does not usually manifest itself in hotter years. In red, cabernet sauvignon and cabernet franc were particularly floral. Yields were a bit higher than average as many producers did not thin clusters following crop losses from the spring hail. The fruit character in 2011 is often a bit more red and less black than in hotter years, alcohol levels are mostly moderate (except where fruit was picked very late), and the wines show good richness and noteworthy elegance. The vintage is considered stronger than 2010 for pinot noir in Patagonia.

My recent tastings also featured a number of later arrivals from 2010, a very dry year that generally produced an even cooler style of wines. Crop levels were on the low side, with millerandage reducing cluster weights especially in chardonnay and malbec. January and the first half of February were warm, but the second half of the summer was milder, with March and April providing cool nights. Following one big storm on March 19, the harvest was mostly dry. Ripening was 10 to 15 days later than average, and the wines have lower alcohol levels and flesh, and higher acidity, than the 2009s.

I also got my first look at vintage 2012, yet another cooler year, although a bit warmer than 2011. In Mendoza the crop level was generally small, and insiders report that the red wines have very good fruit intensity and color. Conditions were more problematic in Salta, especially for torrontes, which in some areas was severely affected by summer rains and rot. Most producers cut their production dramatically or relied heavily on torrontes fruit from Mendoza, which did not experience the same weather problems. But perhaps because I'm a big fan of torrontes from Salta, I was much less impressed by this variety in 2012.

Among the pleasant surprises in my tastings this year, I found some bonardas with more refinement than previously. But while the variety is clearly capable of making some very good wines, I see little sign that this grape has the inherent complexity to make wines of serious interest to export markets, especially when there are so many good and cheap malbecs available.

I also tasted a handful of intriguing, firmly structured yet velvety cabernet franc bottlings at very reasonable prices. Cabernet sauvignon continues to improve in Argentina, and in several cases I preferred these wines to their malbec siblings from the same wineries. There is tremendous potential upside for cabernet in Argentina, but in Mendoza's very dry climate east of the Andes, the challenge is to make wines that avoid dry tannins.

I tasted all of the wines in this article between December and the end of February.

Achaval Ferrer

2010 Gran Malbec Finca Altamira (from 80-year-old vines): Bright ruby. Aromas of blackberry, espresso, bitter chocolate, minerals

and saffras. Penetrating, linear and youthfully imploded, with raspberry and bitter cherry fruit flavors given clarity by firm spicy acidity and a pronounced mineral component. This has an almost pinot-like primary quality and superb inner-mouth tension, and will require serious patience. **93(+?)**

2010 Finca Mirador Mendoza Good ruby-red, not quite as lucid as the Finca Altamira. Rather wild aromas of tobacco, pepper, herbs, roast coffee and game. Supple and surprisingly open-knit, with a bit less energy to its concentrated dark fruit flavors than the Finca Altamira bottling is showing today. The least tightly coiled of the three top wines from Achaval Ferrer and likely to be the earliest drinker. **91(+?)?**

2010 Finca Bella Vista Mendoza Bright medium ruby. Utterly uncompromising aromas and flavors of blackcurrant, cherry pit, flowers and crushed rock. Savory, dusty and very light on its feet, with superb vinosity and clarity of flavor. Conveys an impression of strong saline extract and little in the way of easy sweetness. A wine of outstanding energy and class, finishing with a firm tannic spine, pungent minerality and uncanny subtle persistence. My recorked bottle was still great after 72 hours in the refrigerator. **94(+?)**

(TGIC Importers, www.tgicimporters.com)

Alamos

2011 Malbec Mendoza (\$13) Medium red-ruby. Musky, rather wild aromas of blueberry, game, leather and coffee. Sweet, plush and seamless, with pliant dark berry flavors nicely framed by harmonious acidity. This generous, edge-free malbec, carrying a moderate 13.7% alcohol, can be enjoyed right now. **88**

2010 Malbec Selección Mendoza (\$20) Saturated bright red-ruby. Aromas of black cherry, licorice and bitter chocolate show an almost porty superripeness. Very sweet and chocolatey on the palate, in fact almost cloying. Finishes with lush, sweet tannins. Best for fans of the type. **87**

Also recommended: 2011 Cabernet Sauvignon Mendoza (86). (E & J Gallo, www.gallo.com)

Alessandro Speri

2010 Malbec Prodigio Mendoza (\$18) Bright red-ruby. Very pure, high-pitched aromas of candied blackberry, cassis, licorice and violet. Round, seamless and alive in the mouth, with spicy dark berry and black cherry flavors accented by pepper and herbs. At once savory and sweet, with a lightly chocolatey character carrying through on the persistent finish. This wine shows a more agreeable balance and oak influence today than does the 2009 Malbec Reserva. **89**

2009 Malbec Prodigio Reserva Mendoza (\$28) Bright ruby-red. Exotic chocolatey oak and mint dominate fruit aromas of cassis, blueberry and dark plum. Densely packed and rather extractive, with dark fruit and menthol flavors carrying a heavy burden of exotic oak spices. Finishes with tongue-clenching, oak-driven tannins. Plenty of soil character here but not much fun to drink today. Will this soften and absorb its oak? **87(+?)**

(Oasis Wines, www.oasiswines.com)

Algodon Wine Estates

2010 Malbec Mendoza (\$19) Full red. Plum, chocolatey oak and menthol on the nose, plus an emerging whiff of cherry. Supple and straightforward, with decent structure and freshness to the flavors of plum, currant and tobacco. A bit livelier than the bonarda bottling from this producer, but the finish betrays some slightly drying oak tannins. **87**

2009 Malbec/Bonarda Mendoza (\$30) (a 70/30 blend): Good dark red. Plum, dark berries, mocha and chocolatey oak on the nose. Smooth, fine-grained and sweet, stuffed with ripe plummy fruit. Has the middle to support its oak and tongue-dusting tannins. Finishes with good length. **89**

Also recommended: 2010 Bonarda Mendoza (86). (Jomada Imports, www.jomadaimports.com)

Vina Alicia

2010 Malbec Paso De Piedra Lujan De Cuyo (\$20) Bright ruby-red. Medicinal aromas of blackberry, licorice and toasty oak. Sweet, smooth, supple and chocolatey on the palate, but seems a bit tired. Finishes with seamless tannins but could use more lift. **87**

2010 Cabernet Sauvignon Paso De Piedra Lujan De Cuyo (\$20) Bright red-ruby. Musky aromas of redcurrant, chocolate, herbs and smoky oak. Smooth, sweet and fine-grained, with a distinctly tactile quality to the currant and spice flavors. Finishes with an impression of solid extract and sneaky length, the big, dusty tannins reaching the front teeth. An excellent value. **90**

2010 Malbec Las Compuertas Lujan De Cuyo (\$33) Bright ruby-red. Very ripe blackcurrant aroma is carrying a full load of chocolatey oak. Lush, oaky and sweet, showing an almost port-like ripeness and a faint herbal quality. Very concentrated but a bit aggressive. This reminded me of a tawny port on the finish. **89(+?)**

2009 Cabernet Sauvignon Morena Lujan De Cuyo (\$33) (cabernet sauvignon with 12% cab franc): Good ruby-red color. Black cherry and licorice on the nose. Sweet and dense but medicinal and a bit clenched today, with dominant flavors of black cherry and dark chocolate. Boasts good texture but a hint of greenness limited my enthusiasm. Finishes with slightly drying tannins and good length. **89**

2012 Tiara Lujan De Cuyo (\$33) (50% riesling, 40% albarino and 10% savagnin): Good bright medium yellow. Sexy aromas of green melon, kiwi, herbs, lichee and Moroccan spices, complicated by hints of mint and menthol. Supple, bright and juicy, with subtly complex flavors of musky ginger, quinine and flowers. Finishes tactile, musky, vibrant and long. A very impressive, pliant white blend from Argentina. **92**

2009 Cuarzo Lujan De Cuyo (\$65) (95% petit verdot, with 2.5% grenache and 2.5% old-vines carignan): Deep, saturated ruby. Crushed blackberry and licorice on the nose, accented by black pepper. Sweet and densely packed, offering impressive weight and palate presence to the lightly saline flavors of blackberry, boysenberry, dark plum, violet and dark chocolate. Wonderfully subtle, primary and deep, already showing remarkable flavor interest for young petit verdot. Expands and lingers on the slowly building, very long finish, with ripe tannins reaching the front teeth. Superb depth of material here, and a finishing hint of graphite. **93**

2009 Nebbiolo Lujan De Cuyo (\$75) (15% alcohol): Good full red-ruby. Minty high tones lift blackberry and violet on the nose. Black fruit and bitter chocolate flavors come across as a bit aggressive and warm today; I don't find quite the varietal accuracy that this wine has shown in other recent vintages. Finishes with building tannins and lingering dark berries. Impressively constituted but I wanted more obvious nebbiolo character. **90**

2010 Brote Negro Malbec Lujan De Cuyo (\$90) (aged in one-third new oak for 16 months): Bright, saturated medium ruby. Lively aromas of cassis, blackberry, licorice pastille and chocolatey oak. Densely packed and chocolatey-ripe, conveying an impression of chewy extract to its dark berry and black cherry flavors. Shows plenty of mocha and coffee oak influence but this broad, full wine avoids coming off as heavy or particularly sweet. Finishes quite broad and chocolatey, with huge but supple tannins that coat the front teeth. **92**

(Southern Starz, www.southernstarz.com)

Bodegas Alma Negra

NV Misterio Rose Malbec Sparkling Wine Mendoza (\$24) Pale copper-pink color. Strawberry and musky lees on the nose, accented by subtle high notes of orange zest, fresh apricot and flowers (reminded me a bit of muscat!). On the palate, subtly sweet red fruit and musky lees flavors are complicated by an enticing earth note. Less impressive on the back half than on the nose, finishes with a slight edge and moderate length. But an intriguing and inviting sparkling wine nonetheless. **88**

2010 M Blend Mendoza (13.5% alcohol on the label): Full medium red-ruby. Blackberry, black pepper and black licorice on the nose (Alma Negra means "black soul"). Densely packed and juicy, with considerable sex appeal to its concentrated, chewy dark berry and bitter chocolate flavors. Not at all a thick style, thanks to its appealing balance of sweetness and acidity. Finishes with smooth, building tannins and subtle length. **90**

2009 Misterio Mendoza (13.5% alcohol): Bright ruby-red. Blackberry, cassis, bitter chocolate and violet on the nose, complemented but not overwhelmed by oak scents. Dense and sweet but a bit youthfully bound-up, with dark fruit flavors carrying a full load of oak. Less harmonious than the M Blend today but there's more inherent sweetness here. The slightly clenched, chewy tannins call for patience. **90(+?)**

2009 Gran Misterio Red Wine Mendoza (14% alcohol; the black-on-black label is indeed mysterious, and also nearly impossible to read): Bright medium ruby. Musky aromas of black cherry, blackberry, dark chocolate and fig. Lush, creamy and sweet, with well-integrated acidity energizing the dense black cherry, tobacco and fig flavors. Serious concentrated, juicy wine with sexy oak tones and a very long, slowly building finish featuring noble tannins. Conveys a captivating balance of sweetness and verve. **92**
(Winebow, www.winebow.com)

Alpamanta

2010 Malbec Estate Mendoza (\$25) Good dark red. High-toned aromas of plum, redcurrant, cedar and coffee. A smooth, juicy midweight with nicely integrated acidity and a slightly medicinal cast to its currant and licorice flavors. With moderate stuffing and nuance, this malbec turned a bit drier as it opened in the glass. **87**

(T. Edward Wines, www.tedwardwines.com)

Alpasion

2011 Malbec Alto Valle De Uco Mendoza Bright, saturated ruby-red. Blackberry, cassis, licorice, fresh herbs and violet on the slightly medicinal nose, complemented by oak. Dense, plush and sweet, boasting seriously mouthfilling flavors of black fruits and licorice. Plenty of extraction here but avoids coming off as dry. The substantial tannins turned a tad gritty with air, but this malbec finishes with noteworthy energy and lift. **90(+?)**

Alta Vista

2011 Cabernet Sauvignon Premium Mendoza (\$21) (15% alcohol): Dark red. Slightly medicinal but sweet aromas of cassis, licorice and menthol complicated by dark chocolate and hints of pepper and herbs. Juicy, tight and fine-grained, with strong acidity giving a penetrating quality and good lift to the cassis and floral flavors. A bit youthfully aggressive today, but shows good flavor intensity. The tight, serious finish features substantial tongue-dusting tannins and very good energy. **88(+?)**

2011 Malbec Premium Mendoza (\$22) (15% alcohol): Bright ruby-red. Aromas of black cherry, licorice, bitter chocolate and lilac. Dense, broad and open-knit but not at all candied; fuller and sweeter than the Premium cabernet but possesses good energy. Finishes with substantial tongue-dusting tannins and a suggestion of grapey reduction. **89**

2010 Malbec Single Vineyard Alizarine Lujan De Cuyo (\$50) Full, saturated ruby. Aromas of blackberry, violet and chocolatey oak, plus a hint of menthol. Sweet, rich, dense and full if a bit chunky; stuffed with cassis, blackberry, violet and licorice flavors. Spreads out nicely to coat the mouth on the aftertaste, which shows substantial dusty tannins and a faint tartness. **89**

2010 Malbec Single Vineyard Temis Valle De Uco (\$50) (15.5% alcohol; from a 1942 planting at 3,400 feet): Bright, saturated medium ruby. Aromas of redcurrant, mocha and milk chocolate are lifted by an exotic oak component. Plush and broad but rather backward today, offering mouthfilling flavors of dark berries, plum and chocolatey oak. Hiding more than it's showing today, as the strong finishing fruit is quite blocked by wood tones. Substantial dusty tannins build with air. **89(+?)**

2010 Malbec Single Vineyard Serenade Lujan De Cuyo (\$50) Full, saturated ruby. A bit less black in character than the Alizarine malbec, offering scents and flavors of plum, redcurrant, spices and nutty, chocolatey oak. Rich, lush and tactile on the palate. Seems a bit lower in acidity than the Alizarine but the wine's spicy quality gives it definition and lift. Finishes with tongue-dusting tannins and very good length. **90**

2009 Malbec Terroir Selection Mendoza (\$30) (15.5% alcohol): Deep, bright, saturated ruby. Brooding but vibrant aromas of blackberry, menthol, licorice and herbs. Densely packed, seamless and intense, with blackberry, cassis and bitter chocolate flavors accented by an obvious herbal component. Displays excellent life in the mouth. Finishes long and lively, with suave, chocolatey tannins and an exhilarating hint of violet. Really saturates the mouth. (I should note that my first sample was a bit more herbal and showed more exotic suggestions of chocolatey oak.) **91**

2009 Alto Mendoza (\$100) (an 80/20 blend of malbec and cabernet sauvignon, aged in new French oak for 14 months): Saturated dark ruby to the rim. Superripe aromas of blackberry and licorice. Dense and lush, with nicely integrated acidity framing the seamless dark fruit flavors. Very concentrated blend but just a tad dried by the oak on the back end. I'd feel better about this wine's likely future development if it showed a bit more verve today. **89(+?)**

2007 Alto Mendoza (\$90) (15% alcohol; a blend of 70% malbec and 30% cabernet; aged for 18 months in new French oak): Saturated bright ruby. Blackberry, licorice, bitter chocolate and menthol complemented by sexy, sweet oak tones on the nose. Plush and broad but with a distinct herbal edge and firm acids giving shape to the fine-grained dark berry fruit. Very rich but less sweet than the 2009 Terroir Selection malbec. Began with slightly drying tannins but harmonized nicely with air. **91**

(Kobrand Inc., www.kobrandwineandspirits.com)

Altocedro

2011 Tempranillo La Consulta Mendoza (\$20) (13.9% alcohol): Bright red. Aromas of red cherry, currant, flowers and spicy oak. At once sweet and perfumed, with lively acidity giving good juicy lift to the pristine flavors of red fruits, flowers, spices and herbs. This refreshing and thoroughly delightful tempranillo reminded me of a Central Coast wine made from a blend of southern French grapes. **89**

2011 Cabernet Sauvignon Ano Cero Mendoza (\$15) (from 47-year-old vines): Medium red-ruby. Sexy, nuanced aromas of plum, mocha, game and cocoa powder. Sweet, supple and rather suave, with enticing inner-mouth floral perfume lifting the dark fruit and licorice flavors. This will rely as much on its firm acidity as on its ripe tannins for balance and longevity. Offers noteworthy complexity for

the price. **88**

2011 Malbec Reserva La Consulta (\$35) (15.3% alcohol): Ruby-red. Aromas of blackberry, licorice and dark chocolate, lifted by violet and mineral notes. Dense and sweet in the mouth, showing good creamy depth and some exotic oak character to the flavors of blackberry, menthol and herbs. I began optimistic about this wine's future in bottle, but the strong menthol quality and building oakiness made me wonder where it can go. **88**

2010 Malbec Gran Reserva La Consulta Mendoza (\$25) (reportedly from 97-year-old vines; 15.9% alcohol!): Full ruby-red. Cassis and violet aromas along with strong smoky oak. Suave, seamless and sweet; melts in the mouth with cassis, milk chocolate, sweet oak and menthol flavors. This distinctly creamy wine is carrying a lot of spicy oak and offers immediate drinkability. **89**

2011 La Consulta Select La Consulta Vineyards Uco Valley (\$25) (a blend of malbec, cabernet sauvignon, tempranillo and syrah): Saturated black-ruby to the rim. Brooding aromas of blackberry, licorice, violet, bitter chocolate and spices are less obviously oaky than those of Altoceadro's varietally labeled bottlings. Sweet, smoky and fine-grained, boasting considerable depth and power to its black fruit and saline flavors. Not overly oaky or sweet, and manages to carry its 15.8% alcohol gracefully. Saturates the palate on the deep, ripe finish, with the oak and alcohol nicely under control. **90**

(Vino del Sol, www.vinodelsol.com)

Altos Las Hormigas

2011 Bonarda Colonia Las Liebres Mendoza (\$11) Red-ruby. Deep aromas of blackcurrant, licorice and menthol. Juicy and tightly wound, with a restrained sweetness to the concentrated dark berry flavor. Finishes with subtle, rather suave tannins for the variety, a light herbal element and attractive floral lift. An elegantly styled, firmly built bonarda, and a good value. **87**

2011 Bonarda Colonia Las Liebres Mendoza (\$18) Full medium ruby. Brooding, pure nose offers blackberry, black cherry, licorice and mocha. Rich, sweet and deep on the palate, with cassis, blackberry and bitter chocolate flavors accented by menthol, herbs and musky meat. A step up in generosity of texture and depth from the regular bonarda bottling. Finishes with rich tannins and very good aromatic persistence. Plenty of varietal character here. **89**

2012 Malbec Clasico Mendoza (\$14) Bright full red. Blackberry, plum, currant and red licorice on the somewhat reduced nose. Juicy, spicy and firm-edged, with a medicinal cast to the dark fruit and bitter chocolate flavors. Good honest wine with moderate depth and pliancy and a slightly green quality to the aftertaste. **87**

2007 Malbec Vista Flores Single Vineyard Mendoza (36 months in *barriques*): Bright, saturated ruby. Deep, pure but youthfully imploded aromas of blackberry, bitter chocolate, violet, minerals and licorice. Thick and dense but tightly wound, showing an incredibly primary dark fruit character in light of its extended *elevage*. This youthfully firm-edged wine's tannic spine calls for at least another three to five years of patience; it should last for a decade or two. Showing less early sweetness than the 2006 version, but I like its floral lift on the back end. **91(+?)**

(Michael Skurnik Wines, www.skurnikwines.com)

Amalaya Winery

2010 Gran Corte Salta (\$20) (85% malbec with 7.5% each bonarda and old-vines cabernet franc): Bright ruby-red. Sexy aromas of wild blackberry, black cherry and game. Seamless, fine-grained and lightly saline, with almost syrah-like notes of blueberry, game and pepper. Lovely balance and energy here. Builds nicely on the back end, finishing with supple, even tannins and very good saline persistence. Excellent value. **90**

(The Hess Collection Winery, www.hesscollection.com)

Andeluna Cellars

2011 Cabernet Sauvignon Altitud Mendoza (\$23) Bright red-ruby. Aromas of blackberry syrup, licorice and menthol. Silky, suave, broad and quite dry--what I think of as classic Michel Rolland texture. Good energy and integrated acidity to the dark berry, violet and sweet oak flavors. Finishes with substantial broad tannins, a bit of warmth and good length. **89**

2010 Malbec Altitude Mendoza (\$24) (15.5% alcohol): Bright full ruby. Aromas of blackberry, bitter chocolate, licorice and sexy oak. Lush, broad and dry, with very good energy framing the blackberry and cassis fruit flavors. The rather powerful tannins coat the tongue and teeth on the long, broad finish. Plenty of alcohol here but with no shortage of verve. **90**

2008 Cabernet Franc Pasionado Mendoza (\$50) Medium red. Dark berries and licorice on the nose, plus a rather intrusive green pepper note. Then densely packed and sweet in the mouth, with a more subtle pepper element adding complexity to the black fruit and fresh herb flavors. This idiosyncratic yet suavely made wine needs time in bottle to come into harmony, but its juicy finishing lift suggests it will reward patience. **90(+?)**

(San Francisco Wine Exchange, www.sfwe.com)

Angulo Innocenti Wines

2011 Malbec La Consulta Mendoza (\$20) Bright, saturated deep ruby. Slightly reduced aromas of blackberry, mocha, game, bitter chocolate and licorice. The palate offers blackberry and mineral flavors and a nice balance of sweetness and energy. Turns a bit aggressive on the back end, finishing with slightly drying tannins and good dark-fruit persistence. **88**

2011 Cabernet Sauvignon La Consulta Mendoza (\$20) Good medium red. Lively aromas of cassis, black cherry, minerals and licorice. Supple on entry, then fine-grained and a bit less pliant in the middle, with dark berry and licorice flavors enlivened by minerality. Finishes firmly tannic but not dry or hard. **88**

2010 Unisono Mendoza (\$45) (67% malbec, 26% cabernet sauvignon and 7% cab franc): Bright saturated ruby. Aromas of blackberry, cassis, fig, mocha and smoky minerality, plus a hint of chocolate mint. Concentrated, plush black fruit, licorice and spicy oak flavors display good depth and a glycerol sweetness nicely balanced by ripe acidity. But this big, mouthfilling is a bit youthfully aggressive today and needs a year or two in bottle to gain in complexity.

89

Also recommended: 2012 Cabernet Sauvignon La Consulta Mendoza (85). Other wines tasted: 2012 Malbec La Consulta Mendoza. (Vineyard Brands, www.vineyardbrands.com)

Anticura

2011 Malbec Vista Flores Mendoza (\$17) (15.4% alcohol): Good bright, dark red. Aromas of blueberry, cassis, plum, mocha, smoke, licorice and herbs. Sweet, lush and quite ripe, with dark berry, plum and chocolate flavors complicated by a saline quality. Finishes with broad tannins and suggestions of rosemary and thyme. **88**

2011 Cabernet Sauvignon Vista Flores Mendoza (\$17) Good medium red. Vinous aromas of plum, redcurrant and mocha. Spicy and broad on the palate; a step up in ripeness and lightness of touch from the malbec. Red fruit flavors are given lift by a floral topnote. Finishes with substantial broad, dusty tannins. Herve Chagneau, previously at Bodega Poesia, took over as winemaker here from Michel Rolland for the 2011 vintage. **89**

2008 Calcura Vista Flores Mendoza (\$24) (15% alcohol; a 50/30/20 blend of cabernet sauvignon, merlot and malbec): Bright, full red-ruby. Musky dark berries, licorice, fresh herbs and minerals on the nose. Juicy and suave, with a fine-grained texture to the blackberry, cassis and spice flavors. Even, gentle tannins spread out nicely on the long, perfumed back end. **90**

2009 Gran Vin Vista Flores Mendoza (\$45) (15.4% alcohol; 48% merlot and 26% each cabernet sauvignon and malbec): Good full ruby-red. Black- and redcurrant, licorice and spicy, chocolatey oak on the nose. Sweet, plush and very ripe, with plum, truffle and milk chocolate flavors enlivened by harmonious acidity. Melting, complex wine with polished, building tannins and excellent breadth. (Incidentally, I retasted the highly successful 2007, 2006, 2005 and 2004 bottlings alongside the '09: the plummy, very ripe '04, with a high-pH mouth feel, should be drunk now, while the other three are still developing. The 2006 is a knockout--at least as good as the 92 points I rated it two years ago.) **91**

(Southern Starz, www.southernstarz.com)

Bodega Atamisque

2011 Chardonnay Catalpa Valle De Uco Mendoza (\$18) Medium yellow. Fruit-driven aromas of peach, orange, flowers and vanilla. Sweet and bright, showing very good varietal character to its fresh stone fruit flavors. With alcohol under control, this chardonnay offers a felicitous combination of sweet fruit and energy. Finishes with good length and lift. **88**

2009 Malbec Valle De Uco Mendoza (\$30) (14 months in new French oak): Bright, full ruby. High-toned aromas of cassis, blackberry, licorice, bitter chocolate and sweet oak. At once sweet and vibrant, with strong blackberry flavor lifted by a violet note. Finishes with suave tannins and good persistence. **88**

2009 Assemblage Valle De Uco Mendoza (\$40) (50% malbec and 25% each cabernet sauvignon and merlot; aged in all-new French oak for 15 months): Saturated dark ruby to the rim. Liqueur-like wild strawberry and licorice on the nose, complicated by black pepper and nutty, chocolatey oak. Sweet and slightly gamey in the mouth, with dark berry and mineral flavors complicated by notes of smoked meat and truffle. The persistent, rising finish features firm tannins and very good grip. This nicely balanced wine may yet merit an outstanding rating but needs at least a few years in the cellar.

89(+?)

(Wine Bridge Imports, www.winebridgeimports.com)

Baron Edmond de Rothschild

2011 Malbec Aquaribay Mendoza (\$13) Medium ruby-red. Aromas of crushed blackberry, fig, menthol, tobacco leaf and nutty, chocolatey oak. Juicy, fine-grained and light on its feet, offering claret-like flavors of dark berries, fresh herbs, spices and chocolate. Lovely understated, energetic wine in an airy, elegant Old World style. Finishes with sneaky length and dusty tannins that reach the incisors. Really remarkably suave and subtle for its gentle price--I've seen this in the retail market for as little as ten bucks.

89

(Monsieur Touton Selection, www.mtouton.com)

Belasco de Baquedano

2010 Malbec Swinto Lujan De Cuyo (\$40) (15.5% alcohol): Saturated dark ruby to the rim. Superripe aromas of blackberry, licorice and bitter chocolate, with a port-like hint of walnut. Lush, sweet and concentrated, with firm acidity giving the powerful black fruit flavors an almost aggressive quality. Finishes with a broad dusting of tannins and a wave of fruit. I have a hard time recommending cellaring a wine like this, as it may be best over the next couple years. **89?**

Also recommended: 2012 Llama Old Vine Malbec Mendoza (86). Other wines tasted: 2010 AR Guentota Old Vine Malbec Mendoza. (Cabernet Corporation, www.cabernetcorp.com)

Bodega Benegas

2010 Malbec Juan Benegas Mendoza (\$12) Redurrant, plum, mocha, minerals and a smoky note on the nose. Supple and smooth, with a slightly medicinal cast to the plum, menthol and fig flavors. Offers good concentration and texture and finishes with dusty but essentially fine-grained tannins. **88**

2010 Malbec Mendoza (\$18) Full medium ruby. Aromas of blackberry, bitter chocolate, violet and nutty oak. Suave and horizontal in the mouth, showing a restrained sweetness to its dark fruit, smoke and mineral flavors. Finishes with palate-saturating flavor and even tannins. Wears its 15% alcohol well.

89

2007 Benegas Lynch Meritage Libertad Vineyards Mendoza (\$45) (a blend of 50% cabernet franc, 30% cabernet sauvignon, 15% merlot and 5% petit verdot): Full ruby-red. Currant, plum, mocha, smoke, minerals and earth on the nose, with a strong smoky oak component. Musky, pliant and sweet; like an evolving Bordeaux, if a bit aggressive with alcohol. Plush flavors of plum, truffle and smoke. This makes the winery's 2010 Benegas Malbec seem a bit dry by comparison but that wine is also brighter and fresher. **89**

2009 Don Tiburcio Mendoza (\$16) (15% alcohol; a blend of 50% malbec, 20% each cabernets franc and sauvignon, and 5% each petit verdot and merlot): Good dark red. Musky plum, cassis, graphite, herbs and pepper on the expressive Old World nose. Supple and nicely sweet, with good lift to the flavors of plum, currant, menthol and herbs. Finishes with serious dusty tannins and good lingering sweetness. Late herb and pepper notes contribute freshness and lift. **89**

Also recommended: 2011 Clara Benegas Chardonnay Mendoza (86). Other wines tasted: 209 Luna Benegas Cabernet Sauvignon Mendoza*. (Vias Imports, www.viaswine.com)

BenMarco

2011 Malbec Mendoza (\$20) Bright red-ruby. Slightly reduced aromas of blackberry, *kirsch* and licorice complicated by game and spices. Dense, juicy and bright, with good floral lift and perfume to its dark fruit and sexy chocolatey oak flavors. Comes across as sweeter than the 2011 cabernet. Nicely balanced, long wine with supple tannins and good grip **90**

2011 Cabernet Sauvignon Mendoza (\$20) Moderately saturated red-ruby. Musky aromas of redcurrant, plum, tobacco, mocha, herbs and menthol. Silky and suave on entry, then smooth in the middle, with moderate concentration and richness to the flavors of currant, dark chocolate, menthol, licorice and peppery herbs. Savory more than sweet and nicely aromatic on the lingering finish, which shows a good balance of fresh acidity and ripe, mounting tannins. Essentially a gentle style of cabernet and accessible already. **89**

2010 Expresivo Mendoza (\$35) (50% malbec, 20% cabernet sauvignon, and 10% each syrah, tannat and petit verdot): Bright, deep ruby-red. Plum and blackcurrant fruit aromas along with strong exotic oak notes of chocolate, mocha and coffee. Sweet, pliant, rich and deep, with black raspberry and blackberry fruit flavors carrying a full load of extroverted spicy oak. Distinctly sweeter than the 2011 malbec and cabernet bottlings, verging on decadent. But has plenty of energy to maintain its balance. Will offer early pleasure but shows the stuffing for mid-term aging. **90**

(Vine Connections, www.vineconnections.com)

Bodini

2012 Chardonnay Mendoza (\$13) (85% fermented in stainless steel, 15% in used oak): Bright, pale yellow-green. Fresh aromas of lime and lees. Juicy and fruit-driven, with a touch of sweetness and a slightly glyceric texture to the peach and apple flavors. Cleanly made and firm, and an excellent chardonnay value. **88**

Also recommended: 2012 Malbec Mendoza (86). (Vine Connections, www.vineconnections.com)

Domaine Bousquet

2012 Chardonnay Mendoza (\$11) Full yellow-gold color. Apricot, butter and exotic oak on the nose, accented by citrus nuances. Offers good flavor intensity without excess weight, with sound acidity giving shape to the stone fruit flavors. Finishes with good texture and length. **88**

2011 Chardonnay Reserve Tupungato Valley (\$18) Bright medium yellow. Nuanced nose combines lime, peach, minerals, flowers and musky lees, plus a suggestion of tropical fruits. Juicy, ripe and nicely focused, showing lively acidity and more depth and extract than the 2012 basic bottling. Finishes fresh, firm and persistent. **89**

2012 Cabernet Sauvignon Tupungato Valley Mendoza (\$11) Bright, dark red. Plum, redcurrant, smoke and tobacco aromas show a distinctly Old World quality. Supple and attractively restrained, offering nuanced flavors of red berries, tobacco and smoky minerality. Finishes with smooth, broad, mouthdusting tannins and good subtle persistence. **89**

2011 Cabernet Sauvignon Reserva Tupungato Valley (\$18) (blended with 15% malbec): Bright dark red. Aromas of raspberry, plum, mocha, spices, licorice, cedar, shoe polish and minerals reminded me of a softer version of a Medoc wine. Supple, lush and deep, with attractive restrained sweetness and inner-mouth aromatic character to the red berry, plum and mineral flavors. This classy cabernet finishes with medicinal hints of licorice and shoe polish; suave, building tannins; and very good length and lift. **90**

2012 Malbec Tupungato Valley Mendoza (\$11) Bright, medium-deep red. Slightly withdrawn aromas of blackberry, cassis, licorice and spices. Less suave and complex than the 2012 cabernet, displaying a cooler, somewhat medicinal character to its black fruit and licorice flavors. Shows modest depth on the back end. **87**

2011 Malbec Reserva Mendoza (\$18) Bright, dark red. Sexy black raspberry, blackberry, licorice and fig aromas, complicated by smoke, tobacco and violet. Creamy on the palate, with a restrained sweetness to its dark fruit and lightly herbal flavors. Offers lovely definition and lift on the back end, finishing with suave tannins but a bit less pliancy than the 2010 Grande Reserve. **89**

2010 Malbec Grande Reserve Tupungato Valley Mendoza (\$25) Good dark ruby. Sexy nose delivers scents of crushed blackberry, licorice and spices, plus a whiff of game. Broad, pliant and sweet, with ripe, perfumed dark berry, licorice and game flavors spreading out to coat the palate. Finishes smooth, ripely tannic and long, with complex finishing notes of game, pepper, herbs and dark chocolate. **90**

Also recommended: 2012 Malbec Mendoza (85), 2011 Cabernet Sauvignon Reserva Mendoza (86). (Domaine Bousquet, www.domainebousquet.com)

Bodega Bressia

2010 Cabernet Franc Monteagrello Mendoza (\$27) Good ruby-red. Blueberry, licorice, mocha and coffee bean on the nose, plus a whiff of roasted herbs. Slightly wild in a positive way, with dark fruit flavors complicated by smoky minerality and a saline element. Plump, fine-grained, silky wine, finishing with smooth tannins. Already very easy to drink. **89**

2010 Malbec Monteagrello Mendoza (\$27) Saturated, bright ruby-red. Aromas of black raspberry, roast coffee, fig, licorice, mocha and musky oak. Plush, pliant and sweet, with seductive berry, coffee, spicecake and tobacco flavors complicated by smoke and game nuances. Finishes with sweet tannins, a whiff of herbs and sneaky persistence. **89**

2009 Syrah Monteagrello Mendoza (\$27) Bright ruby-red. Slightly reduced aromas of medicinal dark cherry, licorice and cocoa powder. Round, plump and nicely sweet, but with a youthfully medicinal quality keeping the flavors under wraps today. More broad than deep--and a rather polite style of syrah. Finishes with tongue-dusting, slightly dry tannins and good length. **88**

2008 Profundo Mendoza (\$40) (50% malbec, 30% cabernet sauvignon and 10% each merlot and syrah): Slightly reduced aromas of blackberry, licorice, smoked meat and violet. Sweet, musky and seamless if still a bit youthfully reduced, with nicely integrated acidity giving shape to the middle palate. Finishes broad and suave, with sophisticated tannins, a lightly saline quality and very good length. This needs a couple years of patience. **90**

2008 Conjuero Mendoza (\$120) (50% malbec, 30% cabernet sauvignon and 20% merlot): Saturated ruby. Superripe, almost porty black fruits on the nose. Rich, tactile and saline in the mouth, showing more sweetness than energy and definition. Impressively lush but also very ripe and a bit aggressive. Where can this wine go in bottle? **89?**

(Kysela Pere & Fils, www.kysela.com)

Broadbent

2011 Malbec Mendoza (\$15) Good full red-ruby. Plum, mocha, smoke and licorice on the slightly reduced nose, with hints of game and nutty oak. Slightly rustic but mellow and flavorful, with creamy plum, redcurrant and animal elements complicated by a note of tobacco. Relies more on its acidity than tannins for structure but could still use a bit more delineation. **87**

(Broadbent Selections, www.broadbent.com)

Caballero de la Cepa

2011 Malbec Reserva Mendoza (\$17) Full medium-deep red. Red berries, pepper and a gunflinty minerality on the slightly reduced nose, along with an animal quality. Seamless and broad but not particularly sweet, with velvety flavors of red fruits and smoke. More about texture than flavor today, but subtle and nicely concentrated. Finishes with supple tannins and a light touch. **89**

(Broadbent Selections, www.broadbent.com)

Bodegas Callia

2012 Torrontes Alta San Juan (\$9) Pale straw-yellow. Aromas of peach nectar, mint, flowers, licorice and herbs, plus a whiff of orange oil. Brisk, bright and slightly tart. With modest texture and concentration, this turns a bit skinny on the back half. Not bad. **87**
 Also recommended: 2012 Malbec San Juan (86). Other wines tasted: 2009 Gran Callia Winemaker's Reserve San Juan. (Palm Bay International, www.palmbay.com)

Cantinian

2010 Cabernet Mendoza (\$15) Bright red-ruby. Rather grapey aromas of cassis, licorice and menthol. Supple and moderately sweet, with slightly prune-like dark berry fruit complicated by notes of smoke, truffle, herbs and chocolate. Soft, pliant wine with a touch of drying oak spices on the finish. **87**

Other wines tasted: 2011 Malbec/Cabernet Mendoza*, 2009 Reserve Malbec/Cabernet Mendoza. (Threshold Wine Company, www.thresholdwinco.com)

Carinae

2010 Malbec Reserva Mendoza (\$20) Saturated medium ruby. Cool aromas of blackberry, licorice, camphor and bitter chocolate. Rich, smoky, slightly high-toned dark berry and licorice flavors are nicely framed by bright acidity. Offers a supple texture and good palate coverage but the persistent finish features a green element and slightly dry-edged tannins. **88**

2008 Syrah Gran Reserva Mendoza (\$35) Deep ruby-red. Musky aromas of dark berries, woodsmoke, licorice pastille and smoky, nutty oak. Creamy-sweet and ripe on the palate, showing as much truffley soil tones as black fruits. Finishes with serious, slightly aggressive tannins. **88**
 (Roanoke Valley Wine Co., www.rvwc.com)

Bodegas Caro

2011 Malbec Aruma Mendoza (\$15) Medium ruby-red. Lively aromas of crushed blackberry, musky espresso and wild herbs are primary, pure and expansive. Juicy, spicy and dry, showing a restrained sweetness and a fine-grained texture to the black fruit flavors. Finishes with suave, supple tannins and sneaky length and lift. Nicely done, and an excellent value. **89**

2011 Amancaya Gran Reserva Mendoza (\$20) (15% alcohol; a 65/35 blend): Bright, deep ruby-red. Crushed blackberry and a whiff of menthol on the nose. Sweet, lush and intense, with a fine-grained texture to the cassis and blackberry flavors. Finishes with broad, fine but firm tannins and noteworthy spicy length. **90**

2010 Caro Red Blend Mendoza (\$50) (a 60/40 blend of malbec and cabernet sauvignon; 15% alcohol): Saturated dark ruby to the rim. Blackberry, licorice, graphite, violet pastille and a strong oak component on the nose and palate. Primary and penetrating, dense and rich, with some oak yet to be absorbed. Finishes long and firm, with a note of bitter chocolate. This will need patience and may well merit a higher score with several years of bottle aging. **90(+?)**
 (Pasternak Wine Imports, www.pasternakwine.com)

Casa Bianchi

2008 Enzo Bianchi Blend Mendoza (\$45) (85% cabernet sauvignon, 8% petit verdot and 7% malbec): Good medium ruby-red. Claret-like aromas of plum, redcurrant, cedar, mocha and tobacco, complicated by hints of herbs and herbs. Sweet, broad and savory, with lovely violet lift to the currant, mint and herb flavors. In a distinctly Old World style, finishing with smooth tannins and good length. **89**

(Quintessential Wines, www.quintessentialwines.com)

Casa Montes y Vinedos

2010 Petit Verdot Don Baltazar Mendoza (\$15) Bright ruby-red. Aromas of blackberry, licorice and musky chocolatey oak, lifted by a hint of violet. Rich and smooth on entry, but the nicely concentrated black fruit and bitter chocolate flavors are a bit muffled on the back end by serious tannins. Turns a bit dry and green with air. **87**

Also recommended: Don Baltazar Cabernet Franc San Juan (85). Other wines tasted: 2012 Ampakama Malbec San Juan. (National Refrescos Import Co., www.nrimports.com)

Casarena

2012 Chardonnay 505 Mendoza (\$12) (done entirely in stainless steel): Pale, bright yellow with green highlights. Peach, pineapple and a leesy nuance on the nose and palate, nicely lifted by a mineral component. Varietally accurate, nicely intense and cleanly made, and excellent value for its price. **88**

2012 Malbec 505 Mendoza (\$12) Dark red. Musky berries, tobacco and spices on the nose and palate, complicated by nuances of gunpowder and pepper. At once smooth and juicy, with a light touch and plenty of energy for a wine with this one's volume. Finishes smooth and persistent, with building tannins. Terrific value. **88**

2012 Cabernet Sauvignon 505 Mendoza (\$12) Bright ruby-red. Blackcurrant, licorice and pepper on the nose. Blackberry, spices and licorice on the palate, with a floral topnote contributing to an impression of lift. Nicely sweet, concentrated cabernet with serious length and plenty of early appeal. Really stunning quality for twelve bucks. **89**

2012 Esencia 505 Mendoza (\$12) (50% malbec, 30% cabernet franc and 20% merlot): Good bright, full red. Aromas of black cherry, currant, mint, licorice and menthol. Supple and sweet but slightly diffuse, with a smooth texture to the red berry, herb and spice flavors. In a drier style and more laid-back than the cabernet 505. Finishes with an even dusting of tannins and good length. **88**

2011 Chardonnay Mendoza (\$17) (aged in one-third new oak): Peach and vanillin oak on the nose. Sweet and silky, in fact a bit glyceric, but with good inner-mouth lift. Nicely tactile, dense wine with a finishing note of spun sugar. **88**

2011 Malbec Mendoza (\$17) (aged in 25% new oak; previously this wine was done in used barrels): Good bright ruby-red. Expressive aromas of black raspberry and smoky oak. Sweet, lush and seamless, conveying a chocolatey impression of ripeness. Finishes broad and sweet, with good energy and lift and no rough edges. **89**

2011 Cabernet Sauvignon Mendoza (\$17) (includes a substantial percentage of 82-year-old vines): Good red-ruby. Currant, licorice and bitter chocolate on the rather brooding nose; less fruity than the malbec. Then densely packed and lightly saline, and distinctly forthcoming today. Offers less lift at present than the 2012 Malbec 505 but more extract. Chewy, building tannins call for a couple years of patience. **88(+?)**

2011 Malbec Reserva Mendoza (\$25) (aged in 50% new oak): Good bright ruby. Captivating aromas and flavors of blackberry,

blueberry, licorice, herbs and mocha oak, plus a hint of fig. Densely packed, fresh and intense, offering very good extract and life in the mouth. Finishes even and long, with supple, building tannins, sweet fruit and a note of coffee oak. Classy and satisfying for the price. **91**

2010 Malbec Reserva Mendoza (\$25) Bright, full ruby-red. Inky blackberry, violet and bitter chocolate on the nose, plus a slightly caramelized suggestion of Taransaud oak. Juicy, spicy and intensely flavored, with a restrained sweetness to the flavors of dark berries, bitter chocolate and oak spices. Finishes firmly tannic and persistent, with more obvious oakiness than the 2011 version. **90**

2011 Cabernet Sauvignon Reserva Mendoza (\$25) (all from 82-year-old vines): Bright medium ruby. Restrained but pure aromas of blackcurrant, bitter chocolate, mocha and peppery herbs. Dense, sappy and deep, boasting a seamlessness in spite of its musky dark berry flavors accented by pepper and herbs. Classic, satisfying and complete cabernet, with a lush, round texture, excellent breadth and length, and very suave, fine-grained tannins. This could do some damage in a blind flight of top Napa cabernets. A steal at the price. **92**

2010 Cabernet Sauvignon Reserva Mendoza (\$25) Good deep red-ruby. Slightly medicinal black fruit aromas are distinctly bound-up today. Concentrated but youthfully clenched, showing less fruit today than the spectacular 2011 version. I find this a bit overripe/underripe. Finishes with slightly dusty tannins and good but not outstanding length. **89**

2011 Synergy Reserva Red Blend Mendoza (\$25) (70% malbec, 20% cabernet sauvignon, 7% cabernet franc and 3% petit verdot): Bright red-ruby. Black raspberry, licorice and bitter chocolate aromas are accented by pepper and herbs and lifted by a violet nuance. Juicy, spicy and quite suave, with a restrained sweetness and a silky texture to the understated flavors of black fruits, spices and mocha. Gentle in the middle, then firmly tannic and serious on the long, broad, chocolatey back end. A very successful blend. **91**

2010 Synergy Reserva Red Blend Mendoza (\$25) Bright ruby-red. Liqueur-like aromas of chocolate, baking spices, pepper and sweet oak. Rich, sweet and creamy on the palate, with dark berry and chocolate flavors dominating. Finishes with substantial palate-dusting tannins and very good length. A bit drier than the 2011 version. **90**

2010 Malbec Single Vineyard Perdriel Mendoza (\$40) (14.8% alcohol; aged for 24 months in new French oak): Bright ruby-red. Precise aromas of blueberry, cassis, espresso, chicory and cedar. Dense and very intense, with lovely inner-mouth energy to the creamy-sweet dark berry and dark chocolate flavors. Finishes very long and sweet, with big, ripe tannins and very good lift. Like this producer's Reserva bottlings, this velvety wine was made from vines cropped at around 1.5 tons per acre. **92**

2010 Malbec Single Vineyard Agrelo Mendoza (\$40) (14.8% alcohol): Bright ruby-red. Tight, pure aromas of black fruits, licorice pastille, black pepper, roast coffee and bitter chocolate; comes across as more Old World, even syrah-like, than the Perdriel bottling. Dense, tactile and impressively deep, showing a distinctly layered texture and surprising sweetness to its superconcentrated black raspberry fruit. This impeccably balanced, plush wine is most impressive today on the very long, lush, suavely tannic finish. A lot of wine for the price. **93**

(Southern Starz, www.southernstarz.com)

Bodega Catena Zapata

2011 Chardonnay Mendoza (\$20) (just 40% of this wine went through malolactic fermentation): Pale bright yellow. Sexy aromas and flavors of peach, apricot, brown spices and orange blossom, with complementary oak. Juicy and fresh, offering a captivating combination of ripe fruit and fresh acidity. Finishes nuanced, lively and persistent. **90**

2010 Chardonnay Catena Alta Mendoza (\$35) Bright medium yellow. Subtle stone fruits and brown spices along with a carnal, truffley nuance on the perfumed, very ripe nose. Juicy, suave and fresh in the mouth, showing a more unctuous texture than the regular 2011 chardonnay but with plenty of framing energy. The peach and ginger flavors display excellent depth. Finishes dry and stony, with insistent minerality and a dusty talc-like texture. Under winemaker Alejandro Vigil, Catena is now picking chardonnay as much as two or three weeks earlier than just a few years ago, with the first grapes coming in with pHs in the very low 2.7 to 2.8 range. **92**

2009 Chardonnay White Stones Adrianna Vineyard Mendoza (\$100) (from a 1993 planting on soil rich in chalk; cropped at 15 hectoliters per hectare; 60% new oak): Full, bright yellow-gold. Very ripe stone fruits, hazelnut, vanilla cream and sexy oak spices on the nose. Rich, sappy and deep, with the underlying chalky quality giving the wine superb *nervosite* and an impression of weightlessness. Stone fruit flavors are complicated by an enticing note of marzipan. With its precise, dry, stony finish, this very concentrated, bracing-yet-silky wine leaves the mouth feeling refreshed. The most promising Argentine chardonnay I've tasted to date, in the style of a grand cru Chablis. The White Stones and White Bones wines are Catena Zapata's new spare-no-expense chardonnays meant to be equivalent to their top vineyard-designated malbecs. **94(+?)**

2009 Chardonnay Zapata White Bones Mendoza (\$135) Slightly deeper yellow than the White Stones. Less stony and scented on the nose, hinting at gingerbread and an exotic honeyed quality today. Then distinctly thicker and creamier in the mouth, but with lovely acidity and a saline element giving the wine a three-dimensional texture. This very densely packed, ripe, butterscotchy chardonnay needs at least a couple years of patience. Weightier and fuller than the White Stones. **93**

2010 Malbec Mendoza (\$24) Bright red-ruby. Raspberry, licorice and fig aromas lifted by sexy oak tones. Vinous and refined on the palate, with dark raspberry, currant and fig flavors complicated by a saline nuance. Nicely balanced and not at all overly sweet. A slightly high-toned quality gives the wine lovely inner-mouth aromatic lift. Finishes with firm, fine, building tannins and excellent length. **91**

2010 Cabernet Sauvignon Mendoza (\$20) Good dark red. Pure aromas and flavors of currant, cherry, licorice, mocha and spices are lifted by a floral perfume. A nicely focused midweight, with bright acidity leavening the wine's sweetness and giving it a distinctly juicy character. Very harmonious cabernete with well-judged oak (the percentage of new oak is going down every year, notes winemaker Alejandro Vigil). **90**

2009 Cabernet Sauvignon Alta Mendoza (\$55) (includes a good bit of Adrianna Vineyard fruit, plus some densely planted--meter-by-meter--cabernet sauvignon and a bit of cabernet franc): Dark red. Perfumed aromas of currant, violet, licorice and graphite, plus a whiff of chorizo. Sweet, fine-grained and quite firm; in a very suave, elegant style. Finishes with excellent breadth, a fine coating of dusty tannins and terrific persistence. **92**

2010 Malbec Catena Alta Mendoza (\$55) Deep red. Classy, Medoc-like aromas of smoky currant, licorice, flowers and graphite. Intensely flavored and rather powerful, with a strong acid spine currently keeping the dark berry and saline flavors under wraps. Finishes with building tannins that will require patience. This represents a blend of four different vineyards, including a high percentage from Altamira and Nicasia. **91(+?)**

2009 Malbec Catena Zapata Nicasia Vineyard Altamira Mendoza (\$120) (includes bits of cabernet franc and viognier; fermented with 20% whole clusters): Bright ruby-red. Multidimensional nose combines blackcurrant, black cherry, brown spices, bitter chocolate, minerals and licorice, all lifted by a floral topnote. Sweet, creamy and deep, yet precise and energetic in spite of its utterly silky texture. Very ripe and very primary dark fruit and spice flavors carry through to an extremely long, vibrant finish featuring lush tannins, building sweetness and kaleidoscopic spice, floral and leathery qualities. Wow! **95(+?)**

2009 Malbec Catena Zapata Adrianna Vineyard Gualtallary Mendoza (\$140) (40% whole clusters; includes a bit of cabernet franc): Bright medium ruby. Tighter on the nose than the Nicasia bottling, hinting at black fruits and flowers. Then surprisingly smooth and suave in the mouth, with great class to the dark berry, game and bitter chocolate flavors. Penetrating minerality contributes to the impression

of precision and verve. Finishes smooth and classically dry, with noble, mouthcoating tannins and superb persistence. I applaud winemaker Alejandro Vigill's use of cabernet franc to contribute perfume to these immensely rich malbec bottlings and wonder why more estates don't do this. **95(+?)**

2009 Malbec Catena Zapata Argentino Mendoza (\$140) Bright saturated ruby. Reticent, pure, very primary aromas of blackberry, licorice and minerals, with a whiff of pepper emerging with air. Sweet, dense, chewy and powerfully concentrated, offering superb lift to the cassis and blackberry flavors. Tactile, sappy and extremely long on the finish, showing sweet tannins and superb lift. **94**
(Winebow Inc., www.winebow.com)

Bodega Chacra

2011 Pinot Noir Barda Patagonia (\$25) Medium red, a bit pale at the rim. Reticent but ultimately highly perfumed aromas of strawberry, raspberry, flowers, pepper and herbs; showed a darker cherry cola note with aeration. Precise, juicy and seamless, with a savory saline touch to the redcurrant and raspberry fruit flavors. On the light side but subtle, energetic and long for pinot in this price range. This bottling can be fascinating in the better vintages, and 2011 is obviously a strong year here. **90**

2011 Pinot Noir Cincuenta Y Cinco Patagonia (\$60) (13% alcohol): Moderately saturated medium red. Highly perfumed aromas and flavors of strawberry, peppery herbs, cinnamon, patchouli, orange zest and underbrush; reminded me of a top Dujac wine. Dense, ripe and spicy but virtually weightless, with outstanding focus and inner-mouth aromatic lift. There's a lovely core of sweetness here but the wine stands out today for its savory firmness. Finishes very subtle and long, with refined tannins. This retained its perfumed strawberry and spice character after 72 hours in the recorked bottle. Offers a strong argument for the pinot potential of Patagonia. **94**

2010 Pinot Noir Treinta Y Dos Patagonia (\$100) (12% alcohol): Medium red. Dark cherry, boysenberry, licorice, herbs and aromatic spices on the nose. Juicy, spicy and dense but the cola and chocolate flavors come off as rather foursquare and oaky following the 2011 Cincuenta y Cinco. Finishes savory and dry, with dusty tannins. Until recently, Chacra's two high-end pinots were released together. But this 2010 came out later: it spent 22 months in all-new French oak, and is currently in the marketplace along with the 2011 Cincuenta y Cinco, which aged for 14 months in all-used barrels. My scores should make it clear which approach to *levage* I preferred. **90**

2010 Merlot Mainque Patagonia (\$40) Bright medium red. Spicy perfume of red cherry, redcurrant, licorice and herbs. A juicy, lively midweight, with bright acidity framing the flavors of redcurrant, plum and spices. Good tension and mid-palate energy here. This attractive cool-climate merlot finishes with tongue-dusting tannins and good lift. **89**
(Kobrand, Inc., www.kobrandwineandspirits.com)

Chakana

2011 Malbec Estate Selection Mendoza (\$27) Saturated, deep ruby-red. Sexy, syrah-like aromas of raspberry, blackberry, blueberry and game. Dense, silky and sweet, with harmonious acidity giving clarity to the fine-grained dark berry, violet and game flavors. With aeration, redder fruits emerged. Finishes long and perfumed, with tannins dusting the front teeth. Already boasts superb appeal, but this has the constitution and balance to evolve gracefully in bottle. **91**

2011 Estate Selection Red Wine Mendoza (\$27) (60% cabernet sauvignon with 20% each malbec and syrah): Deep medium ruby. Blackberry, violet, menthol and spicy oak on the nose; fresher and less porty than the Estate Selection Malbec. Very rich and densely packed, with a medicinal coolness to the flavors of blackberry, bitter chocolate and menthol. Finishes with serious but ripe tannins and very good length. **89**

Also recommended: 2011 Ayni Malbec Mendoza. (Kysela Pere & Fils, www.kysela.com)

Chaman

2011 Red Blend Mendoza (\$20) (a 60/20/20 blend of malbec, cabernet franc and petit verdot): Good saturated ruby-red. Very ripe but not cooked on the nose, offering scents of blackberry, coffee, mocha, chocolate and fig. Sweet, creamy and lush but with good lift to the black raspberry, licorice and violet flavors. Finishes with tongue-dusting but suave tannins and very good building length. A very successful blend. **89**

(Vine Connections, www.vineconnections.com)

Bodega Cicchitti

2012 Chardonnay Mendoza (\$22) Bright pale yellow. Fresh peach, orange and flowers on the nose, complemented but not dominated by spicy vanillin oak. Supple, rich and round, offering generous stone fruit and spicy oak flavors. Satisfying chardonnay with good length. **88**

2011 Sangiovese Mendoza (\$22) Bright medium red. Smoky, musky aromas of sour cherry, strawberry, roasted coffee and truffley underbrush. Plump and sweet in the mouth but could use more lift and definition to its redcurrant, smoke and tobacco flavors. Finishes fairly tight, with dusty tannins. Not bad. **87**

2011 Merlot Mendoza (\$22) Good bright, dark red. Aromas of redcurrant, plum and chocolate accented by menthol and herbs. Round and easygoing, with seamless flavors of cherry, plum and licorice complicated by hints of truffle and herbs. Good solid, reasonably priced merlot with refreshing acidity. Finishes firmly tannic and persistent. **88**

2011 Red Blend Mendoza (\$22) (malbec, cabernet sauvignon and merlot): Bright dark red. Attractive perfume and lift to the aromas of cherry, redcurrant, plum and milk chocolate. A smooth, savory midweight with red berry flavors complicated by tobacco leaf, licorice and herbs. Finishes with broad, dusty tannins and a distinct green note, but with nice lift. **87**

2011 Malbec Mendoza (\$22) Good dark, bright red. Slightly high-toned aromas of ripe blackberry, mocha and chocolate, plus a hint of roasted dried berries. Sweet and fleshy on the palate, with nicely integrated acidity giving the wine life in the mouth. This supple, fairly broad malbec finishes with a light dusting of tannins and just enough licorice and herbs to provide lift. **88**

2009 Malbec Gran Reserva Mendoza (\$30) Good bright red-ruby. Aromas of blackberry, black raspberry, licorice and smoked meat are complemented by mellow oak tones. Seamless, concentrated and fine-grained, boasting good inner-mouth lift and definition to its fruit and smoke flavors. Not a particularly sweet style; in fact, this wine finishes classically dry, with a fine dusting of tannins. **89**

2011 Malbec Edicion Limitada Mendoza (\$44) Bright red-ruby. Very ripe aromas of redcurrant, plum and chocolate; just this side of roasted. Fat, rich and tactile in the mouth, but with sound acidity and a restrained sweetness to its flavors of plum, mocha, chocolate and coffee. This very mellow wine spreads out nicely to coat the palate. Finishes with ripe tannins and a touch of unabsorbed acidity. I like this wine's sophisticated texture but it's not quite complex enough to merit 90 points. **89**

Other wines tasted: 2009 Gran Merlot Mendoza. (The Artisan Collection, www.theartisancollection.us)

Clos de Chacras

2009 Malbec Clos De Chacras Mendoza (\$30) (aged for a year in second-use French and American oak; 15.1% alcohol): Bright

ruby-red. Cassis, blackberry and licorice pastille on the nose. Sweet and dense but a bit aggressive, with obvious sweetness and some alcoholic warmth to the nearly port-like flavors of black fruits and bitter chocolate. Tannins saturate the palate on the slightly medicinal finish. **88**

Other wines tasted: 2009 Cavas de Crianza Malbec Mendoza*, 2008 Gran Estirpe Red Wine Mendoza. (Detour Import & Distribution, www.detourid.com)

Clos de los Siete

2010 Clos De Los Siete Mendoza (\$19) (57% malbec, 15% each merlot and cabernet franc, 10% syrah and 3% petit verdot):

Saturated ruby. Pungent aromas of cassis, blackberry, licorice and violet pastille. Sweet, pliant and generous, with just enough acidity to give life and shape to the black fruit and bitter chocolate flavors. Finishes long and flavorful, with substantial chewy, ripe tannins and lingering notes of chocolate and minerals. This wine has benefited from the cooler year. **90**

(Thienot USA, www.groupe-thienot.com)

Vina Cobos

2012 Chardonnay El Felino Mendoza Bright lemon-yellow. Musky nectarine and spicy oak aromas are lifted by lime and orange oil and complicated by a sexy leesy nuance. Rich, fruity and sweet, with a glyceric texture and a lightly saline quality to its orange, lemon and tropical flavors. A tad warm on the end and not at all shy. Good chardonnay for the price. **88**

2011 Cabernet Sauvignon Bramare Marchiori Vineyard Mendoza Straw-gold color. Exotic aromas of pineapple, peach nectar and honey suggest a bit of noble rot. A densely packed, sweet fruit bomb on the palate, with a compelling roundness to its flavors of pineapple, orange, spicy oak and butterscotch. Full but not heavy, and much smoother than the Felino bottling. Has the strong fruit to buffer the pronounced oakiness on the finish. **90**

2011 Merlot El Felino Mendoza Good dark red. Plum, mocha, tobacco and nutty oak plus a hint of raisin on the rather low-toned nose. Quite sweet in the mouth, but with good supporting acidity to the very ripe plum and redcurrant flavors. This fat, lightly saline merlot is more serious than the 2010 version but less candied and spicy. **87**

2011 Cabernet Sauvignon El Felino Mendoza Medium red-ruby. Higher-pitched on the nose than the merlot, offering scents of blackberry, mint and violet. Juicy, supple and fresh, with sweet cassis and black cherry flavors leavened by nicely integrated acidity and a note of menthol. Smooth, approachable cabernet with ripe tannins and good length. Nicely done. **88**

2011 Malbec El Felino Mendoza Bright ruby-red. Aromas of crushed blackberry, leather, tree bark and dark chocolate reminded me a bit of mourvedre. Juicy, moderately sweet and intense, with noteworthy verve to its intense blackberry and black cherry flavors. Finishes with lovely floral lift and suave tannins. **89**

2010 Cabernet Sauvignon Bramare Marchiori Vineyard Mendoza Full red-ruby. Ripe nose delivers scents of plum, mocha, truffle, herbs and beefsteak tomato, lifted by a subtle floral quality. Plump, round and seamless; very ripe but not overly sweet. Plum and saline flavors show good glyceric depth. Finishes with smooth tannins and a slight alcoholic warmth. **90**

2010 Malbec Bramare Lujan De Cuyo (\$44) (15.2% alcohol): Bright, deep ruby-red. Enticing, complex aromas of blackberry, cassis, mocha, game, violet and pepper. Silky, tactile and soil-driven, with dark berry flavors complicated by meaty and saline nuances. A bit warm on the back end but the tannins are lush and smooth and the black fruit flavors linger impressively. This makes a very satisfying mouthful already but I'd wait a few years for it to absorb some of its baby fat. **91**

2010 Malbec Bramare Marchiori Vineyard Mendoza (15.3% alcohol): Bright medium ruby. Knockout nose combines blackberry, mocha, gunflint, smoke and clove. At once juicy and silky, with mellow plum and mocha flavors complemented by smoky minerality. Not exotic or overly sweet. Finishes a bit warm but long, with smooth tannins giving the wine a firm underpinning. **91**

2010 Volturmo Proprietary Red Wine Perdried Mendoza (\$240) (a 77/23 blend of malbec and cabernet sauvignon; 15.4% alcohol): Full, deep ruby-red. Polished aromas of blackberry, violet and licorice with sexy oak tones of bitter chocolate, cocoa powder and espresso. Wonderfully velvety and rich, with outstanding verve to the primary black fruit, violet and licorice flavors. Lush but balanced wine; dense but nicely extracted and harmonious. Finishes with outstanding rising length, well-integrated new oak and noble tannins. Offers a lot of immediate sex appeal but this will be even better in five years. **94**

(Paul Hobbs Imports, www.paulhobbsimports.com)

Colome

2012 Torrontes Salta (\$15) Very pale yellow. Subtly spicy aromas of lemon and grapefruit peel, flowers and mint. Juicy, dry and firm-edged, with spice and floral notes and a bit of unabsorbed CO2 contributing cut and lift. Ultimately a wine of modest material and length for this label. The clean finish features lingering, slightly tart citrus, mint and spice notes. The summer of 2012 brought heavy rainfall in the Colome area, said winemaker Thibaut Delmotte, and production of torrontes was lower than in past years.

88

2010 Malbec Estate Colchaqui Salta (\$30) (14.5% alcohol; malbec blended with 8% tannat, 3% cabernet sauvignon and 2% each syrah and petit verdot; aged for 15 months in new and once-used French oak): Full red-ruby. Musky aromas of cherry liqueur, blackberry, violet, roasted coffee and spicy herbs, along with a meaty whiff of reduction. Wonderfully fine-grained and plush on the palate but with no heaviness; perfectly integrated acidity gives the wine a vibrant quality. Finishes with serious but sweet tannins that spread out to coat the palate on the lively, subtle, long aftertaste. A lot of wine for \$30. **91**

2009 Malbec Reserva Valle Calchaqui Salta (15.9% alcohol; blended with 8% syrah and 2% petit verdot; aged for 24 months in new French oak): Full ruby-red. Port-like ripeness to the aromas of black raspberry, licorice, chocolate-cherry truffle and molasses, plus an almost PX-like suggestion of nut skin. Rich, layered and deep, in a distinctly thick style but a bit less aggressive than the 2008. Shows decent brightness, but will this gain complexity with time in bottle or will it become hotter? I'd rather drink this producer's regular estate malbec at a fraction of the price. **89**

(The Hess Collection, www.hesscollection.com)

Bodega Corvus

2010 Malbec Ala Negra Mendoza (\$15) Medium red-ruby. Slightly warm aromas of blackberry, black cherry, menthol and licorice. Plump, ripe and dry, with a slightly diffuse character to the dark berry and saline flavors. Finishes with a fine dusting of tannins. (In comparison to this wine, the 2008 Ala Negra Malbec Reserva was too dominated by chocolatey oak.) **87**

Also recommended: 2008 Ala Negra Malbec Reserva Mendoza (86). Other wines tasted: 2012 Ala Negra Torrontes Salta. (www.bodegacorvus.com.ar)

Coquena

2012 Torrontes Salta (\$20) Lemon yellow. Highly aromatic nose combines ginger oil, grapefruit, citrus zest and a mineral nuance. Spicy and quite dry, less rich and intense than the nose suggests. An easygoing torrontes with a slightly blurry finish. **87**

2012 Malbec Salta (\$20) Bright ruby-red. Blackberry, pepper, lavender and dark chocolate on the liqueur-like nose. Sweet, concentrated and fairly thick, but with surprising acidity and pepper and menthol notes enlivening the deep black fruit flavors. A bit youthfully rough but not dry on the persistent finish, with tannins that are ultimately lush. This needs a year or two to knit. **88(+?)**

2011 Malbec Salta (\$20) Good bright ruby-red. High-toned aromas of dark berries, licorice and gunflint. Nicely concentrated and serious, with intense dark and red berry flavors lifted by an herbal element. Finishes with suave tannins and very good length. (This bottle was slightly better--less sweet and jammy--than an earlier sample.) **89**

2012 Tannat Salta (\$20) Bright, full ruby. Very ripe aromas of blackberry liqueur and dark chocolate. Quite sweet and smooth in the mouth, even creamy, with blackberry and dried fruit flavors perked up by a hint of wild herbs. A rather elegant yet still powerful style of tannat, supported by a firm acid/tannin spine. Plenty of ripe black cherry and dark berry fruit on the finish. This youthfully muscular wine may yet harmonize and improve in bottle. **88(+?)?**

(Vine Connections, www.vineconnections.com)

Bodegas Cuarto Dominio

(Terlato Wines International, Lake Bluff, IL)

Cuvelier Los Andes

2010 Coleccion Blend Mendoza (\$20) Medium red-ruby. Aromatic, expressive nose offers blackberry, licorice, bitter chocolate and a touch of violet. Juicy and tightly wound but still pliant, with lovely energy and shape to the flavors of dark berries, dark chocolate and licorice. Finishes fresh and ripely tannic, with a youthfully medicinal quality to the lingering black fruit and licorice flavors. This very promising wine needs a few years in bottle to soften. **90(+?)**

2009 Grand Malbec Mendoza (\$60) (the label on my sample said 16% alcohol): Deep saturated ruby. Crushed blackberry, licorice pastille, violet and a whiff of tar on the nose. An essence of superconcentrated, very primary malbec on the palate, with intense cassis and blackberry fruit flavors complemented by chocolate and menthol. With its almost ruby port-like power and tannic spine--not to mention high alcohol--this is almost painful today. Seven or eight years down the road, it may well merit a significantly higher score. **91+**

2008 Grand Vin Blend Mendoza (\$35) (15% on the sample label): Bright, full medium ruby. Liqueur-like aromas of blackberry, cassis and licorice complicated by a musky truffley quality. Velvety and rich, with a saline nuance to the highly concentrated dark berry and fig flavors. Finishes with strong, dusty tannins and excellent length. **92**

(Park Street Imports, www.parkstreetimportsllc.com)

Dante Robino

2009 Malbec Gran Dante Mendoza (\$39) Full deep ruby. High-pitched aromas of cassis, espresso, licorice and chocolatey oak, complicated by hints of truffle and game. Sweet and seamless in the mouth, with lush black fruit, violet and mint flavors carrying a full load of oak. Finishes with slightly sweet tannins and very good length. Has the stuffing to support its 15% alcohol. **89**

Also recommended: 2010 Reserve Malbec Mendoza (85), 2009 Grand Dante Bonarda Mendoza (86). (Lieber Bros., Inc., Garden City, NY)

De Angeles

2010 Malbec Mendoza (\$24) Good bright full ruby. Sexy aromas of dark berries, espresso, smoke and mocha, with nuances of game and flinty minerality that reminded me of syrah. Then sweet, plush and wild in the mouth, with syrah-like perfume to the plum and game flavors. A very ripe style of malbec with an almost confectionery sweetness and a lot of personality. Finishes with soft, ripe tannins and lingering fruit. **89**

(V.O.S. Selections, www.vosselections.com)

Finca La Celia

2011 Malbec Pioneer Reserva Uco Valley Mendoza (\$16) Bright red-ruby. Plum and dark berry aromas complicated by very ripe hints of meat and molasses. Supple and sweet but a bit hollow, betraying a slight greenness to the dark cherry and menthol flavors. Shows modest definition and lift but more concentration than the Reserva La Consulta. **87**

2011 Malbec Elite Uco Valley Mendoza (\$20) Good red-ruby. Blackberry, licorice and mocha on the nose, lifted by violet and spicy oak. A step up in energy and clarity of flavor, offering flavors of blackberry, menthol and dark chocolate. Finishes juicy and ripe, with firm tannins and very good persistence. **89**

Also recommended: 2011 Reserva Malbec La Consulta Mendoza (85). (Big C Wines, www.bigcwines.com)

Finca Decero

2010 Cabernet Sauvignon Remolinos Vineyard Agrelo Mendoza (\$20) Dark red-ruby. Musky redcurrant, mocha and chocolate truffle on the rather oaky nose. Sound acidity gives shape and verve to the flavors of currant, plum, truffle and spices. Finishes with slightly dusty tannins and hints of menthol and minerals. I'd wait a year before pulling the cork. **89**

2011 Malbec Remolinos Vineyard Mendoza (\$20) Bright ruby-red. Slightly high-toned aromas of blackberry, *kirsch*, bitter chocolate, violet and spice cake. Densely packed and smooth but also lively and light on its feet thanks to harmonious acidity. Conveys a lovely restrained sweetness to its dark berry, licorice, violet and tobacco flavors. Finishes with smooth tannins and sneaky length; in comparison, the estate's cabernet sauvignon is a bit drier and more herbal on the back end. **90**

2010 Petit Verdot Mini Ediciones Remolinos Vineyard Mendoza (\$35) Saturated medium ruby. Very black, youthfully medicinal aromas of cassis, bitter chocolate, licorice and menthol lifted by a violet note. Densely packed, fresh and structured, with solid saline extract to the flavors of blackberry, cassis and minerals. Boasts a sophisticated texture and an enticing sugar/acid balance. This serious dry wine finishes with substantial fine-grained tannins. **91**

2010 Amano Remolinos Vineyard Agrelo Mendoza (\$60) (a blend of 65% malbec, 30% cabernet sauvignon, 4% petit verdot and 1% tannat; aged for 20 months in new French oak): Saturated bright medium ruby. Very ripe, high-toned aromas of black raspberry and sweet mocha oak. Sweet blackberry and blackberry fruit flavors are complicated by coffee and mocha notes and given a light touch by nicely integrated ripe acidity. Finishes with brisk berry flavors and good lift. A bit withdrawn today, in need of a couple years in bottle to absorb some more of its oak. **91(+?)?**

(Vintus Wines, www.vintuswines.com)

Del Desierto

2010 Syrah Patagonia (\$30) (15.1% alcohol): Good full medium ruby. High-toned aromas of blueberry, bitter chocolate, licorice and smoky oak. Suave on entry, then densely packed in the middle, offering dark berry and bitter chocolate flavors. Turns a bit aggressive on the back end, where the chewy tannins are accentuated by the wine's high alcohol. **88**

Also recommended: 2010 Desierto 25 Malbec Patagonia (86). (Select Fine Wine, www.selectfinewine.com)

DiamAndes

2011 Malbec/Syrah Perlita Valle De Uco (\$13) Moderately saturated red-ruby. Aromas of sour cherry, licorice and herbs. Smooth, suave and juicy, with pliant, subtly sweet red cherry, red berry and spice flavors complicated by an herbal element. Not a big wine but nicely balanced and fresh, and suggesting a rather gentle extraction. Finishes with good length and no rough edges. **88**

2010 Malbec Diamandes De Uco Valley (\$20) Saturated, bright ruby-red. Slightly reduced aromas of crushed blackberry, herbs and licorice. Juicy, spicy dark berry flavors come across as more herbal and less sweet than those of the Perlita Malbec-Syrah. The firm finish shows a touch of herbal dryness. **87**

Also recommended: 2011 Chardonnay Uco Valley Mendoza (86). (MHW Ltd., www.mhwLtd.com)

Domingo Molina

2012 Hermanos Torrontes Salta (\$15) Very pale straw-yellow color. Enticing spicy lift to the aromas of white peach, peppermint and floral oils. Juicy, spicy and aromatic, showing moderate depth but good mineral intensity and definition. Finishes quite dry, with a piquant peppery quality. **88**

2011 Hermanos Malbec/Tannat Salta (\$15) Bright ruby-red. Dried redcurrant and chocolatey, nutty oak on the nose. Supple, sweet and chocolatey, showing more smoke and soil tones than primary fruit. Finishes with dusty tannins and a slightly roasted character. I wanted a bit more verve. **87**

2011 Cabernet Sauvignon Salta (\$25) Good full medium red. Inviting, warm aromas and flavors of plum, redcurrant, mocha, dark chocolate and smoky minerals. Ripe and supple in the mouth, with moderate depth to the flavors of exotic oak, red pepper and minerals. Finishes with broad tannins but could use more energy and lift. **88**

2011 Malbec Salta (\$25) Good saturated ruby. Very ripe, liqueur-like aromas of dark berries, licorice, smoke and chocolate. Broad, supple, round and fresh, with a fine-grained texture and decent definition to its dark fruit and chocolate flavors; distinctly blacker in flavor profile than the 2011 cabernet. Finishes with smooth tannins, a mineral nuance and a chocolatey ripeness. **89**

2011 Malbec Molina M2 Salta (\$35) Bright full ruby. High-toned aromas of black raspberry, violet, licorice pastille and sexy oak. Saturates the palate with purple fruit and violet flavors, with harmonious acidity giving it a suave texture and a light touch. Finishes with sweet tannins and very good energy and length. From vines grown at up to 7,300 feet above sea level. **90**

2011 Rupestre Salta (\$45) (60% malbec, 30% merlot and 10% tannat from very high-elevation vines): Bright saturated ruby to the rim. Deep aromas of dark fruits, chocolate and smoky minerals. Rich, pliant and smooth, with a sexy sweetness to the dark berry and chocolate flavors. Finishes sweet, lush and rich but not overripe, with broad, mouthdusting tannins and excellent length.

91

(Vine Connections, www.vineconnections.com)

Don Cristobal

2012 Verdelho 1492 Mendoza (\$9) Pale straw-yellow. Slightly candied aromas of pineapple, spices and flowers, plus a suggestion of banana; I was reminded of both chardonnay and torrontes. Dry and citrusy, with firm acidity giving shape to the pineapple and floral flavors. Juicy, nicely subtle wine with a touch of oakiness. Finishes vinous, quite dry and firm, with good building length. An excellent value. **87**

Also recommended: 2011 Cristobal 1492 Bonarda Mendoza (85). Other wines tasted: 2009 Triana Red Wine Mendoza. (Eagle Eye Imports, www.eagleeyebrands.com)

Durigutti

2011 Bonarda Mendoza Bright, deep red. Perfumed aromas of currant, mocha, tobacco and nutty oak. Supple and sweet if a bit simple, with moderate density to the currant and licorice flavors. Finishes a bit green and thin. Not bad. **87**

2010 Bonarda Reserve Mendoza Bright red-ruby. Sexy aromas of currant, blackberry, licorice and violet, complicated by minerals and bitter chocolate; suave for bonarda. Then juicy, spicy and seamless in the mouth, with good energy to the blackberry and spice flavors. Finishes with ripe tannins and very good persistence. Nicely done. **89**

2011 Cabernet Franc Mendoza Bright red-ruby. Redcurrant, nutty oak, licorice and fresh herbs on the nose. Supple and seamless in the mouth, with a touch of minerality giving shape and lift to the black fruit and leather flavors. Nicely harmonious wine with lush, spreading tannins and very good length. A terrific cabernet franc bargain. **89**

2010 Cabernet Franc Reserve Mendoza Bright red-ruby. Complex nose melds blackberry, licorice, violet, menthol, herbs, pepper and chocolate. Broad, rich and smooth, with dark fruit, chocolate, pepper and herb flavors complemented by nutty oak. Finishes with substantial ripe tannins and subtle, lingering pepper and herb nuances. **89**

2011 Cabernet Sauvignon Mendoza (\$17) Bright red-ruby. Inviting aromas of currant, tobacco, licorice and exotic flowers. Fresh, juicy and intense, with almost grapey berry flavors lifted by a note of eucalyptus. Less lush than the cabernet franc and firmly tannic on the back. **88**

2010 Cabernet Sauvignon Mendoza (\$17) Good full red. Aromas of cassis, licorice and bitter chocolate. Juicy, spicy and a bit herbal initially, but took on a creamier texture with aeration. Still, this finishes a bit edgy. **87**

2012 Malbec Mendoza (\$16) Bright ruby-red. Enticing aromas of blackberry, licorice and mocha. Dense, lush and sweet, with a hint of leather to the dark berry flavors. Sensual, nicely made malbec with a roundness that makes it perfect for early drinking. **88**

2010 Malbec Reserva Mendoza (\$25) Bright, full ruby-red. Crushed black cherry, blackberry, mocha, violet, licorice and mint on the nose. Juicy, tight and youthfully restrained, showing a slightly medicinal aspect to the flavors of blue fruits, violet and licorice. Finishes intense and fresh, with a firm spine of tannins. This needs a couple years in bottle to gain in flesh and pliancy. **89(+?)**

2011 Malbec Hd Mendoza (\$15) Bright ruby-red; looks like a dark pinot noir. Sexy, aromatic nose offers dark berries and flowers, with hints of tobacco leaf and licorice; avoids the chocolatey side of so many malbecs. Juicy and sweet but shows lovely clarity of flavor and a subtly glyceric smoothness. Nice intensity and inner-mouth lift here. Finishes with a restrained sweetness and hints of leather and game.

The silky, juicy texture reminded me of pinot. Hector Durigutti makes his HD range from 100%-organic grapes grown at higher elevation, using a lot of cold maceration to extract more primary fruit and body. An excellent value. **89**

2011 Malbec Hd Reserve Mendoza (\$25) (includes 2% cabernet franc): Bright ruby-red. Wild, musky aromas of cassis and licorice pastille. Rich, silky and deep, with enticing blackberry fruit complicated by earth, game and leather nuances. Offers nicely restrained sweetness--and a step up in texture from the basic HD malbec. Finishes with serious but fine tongue-dusting tannins and a bit of positive funk. These HD bottlings are really completely different in texture from Durigutti's other wines. **90**

2009 Malbec Hd Gran Reserve Mendoza (\$45) Bright ruby-red. Very ripe aromas of blackberry, mocha and chocolatey oak. Fat, plush and very ripe, with obvious sweetness and a full dose of nutty oak. This round wine does not have the clarity or refinement of the two less expensive HD wines from vintage 2011. Finishes with moderate verve and a broad dusting of building tannins. **89**
(Southern Wine Group, www.southernwinegroup.com)

El Enemigo

2010 Bonarda Mendoza (\$30) (El Enemigo is a joint venture between historian Adrianna Catena and Alejandro Vigil, winemaker for Catena Zapata): Ruby-red. Pure, clean aromas of black cherry, licorice and dark chocolate lifted by a violet element. Supple, sweet and a bit youthfully medicinal, with a distinctly creamy texture and noteworthy depth to the flavors of black cherry, shoe polish and licorice. Finishes broad and sweet, with chocolatey tannins and lingering notes of licorice and menthol. An unusually classy example of this variety. **89**

2010 Malbec Mendoza (\$30) Bright ruby-red. Black fruits and pepper on the nose. Rich and densely packed, but less open-knit and sweet than the bonarda bottling. Serious, dry, ripe malbec with firm but fine-grained tannins. I'd give this a year or two in the cellar before pulling the cork. **88**

2009 Gran Enemigo Mendoza (\$90) Bright ruby-red. Musky aromas of currant, black raspberry and blackberry, complicated by hints of smoked meat and mocha oak. Rich, full and sweet but with harmonious acidity shaping and intensifying the flavors of blackberry, licorice and dark chocolate. Very concentrated and still a tad reduced. Finishes with big, ripe, tongue-dusting tannins and excellent persistence. I'd hold this for at least a couple years. **91**
(Winebow, www.winebow.com)

El Porvenir de Cafayate

2012 Torrontes Laborum Salta (\$18) Very pale yellow. Pungent, complex aromas of stone fruits, white pepper, mint and musky flowers, plus a hint of brown spices. Supple, sweet and essentially easygoing, delivering good texture and richness for the category (and for the vintage). Finishes dry and firm, with sneaky length to the lingering pineapple and grapefruit flavors. **89**

2006 Icon Salta (\$40) (45% malbec, 35% cabernet sauvignon, 12% tannat and 8% syrah): Dark red. Spicy aromas of redcurrant, cedar and mocha. Supple, sweet and seamless, with currant, mocha and earth flavors complemented by smoky and saline nuances. Finishes with sweet tannins and very good length. This mellow wine is perfect right now. **89**

Also recommended: 2011 Laborum Malbec Salta (86). (V.O.S. Selections, www.vosselections.com)

Ernesto Catena Vineyards

2011 Malbec Tahuan Mendoza (\$16) Bright, full ruby-red. Slightly porty aromas of cassis, blackberry, mocha and spices. Sweet, concentrated and creamy but with enough harmonious acidity to give shape to the flavors of black raspberry, licorice and spices. This very rich, even powerful malbec finishes with building, chocolatey oak tannins and noteworthy length. **90**

2010 Cabernet Sauvignon Siesta Mendoza (\$25) Medium red-ruby. Distinctly *sauvage* aromas of blackberry, espresso, licorice and leather, plus a hint of mocha reduction. Lush, sweet and deep, offering a glyceric texture that's nicely leavened by harmonious acidity. Dark raspberry and spice flavors show a slightly funky quality that I rather enjoyed. Finishes with big, broad, palate-saturating tannins and a touch of dryness. Not for the fainthearted. **89?**

2010 Malbec Siesta Mendoza (\$25) Bright ruby-red. Slightly port-like aromas and flavors of black cherry, fig, licorice and mocha oak lifted by a whiff of candied violet. Round, dense and glyceric, but with good verve to the plush, sweet middle palate. Finishes with sexy nutty and chocolatey oak tones and excellent length. Has the balance and firm tannic structure to reward at least few years of cellaring. **90(+?)**

Also recommended: 2011 Cabernet Sauvignon Tahuan Mendoza (86). (Vineyard Brands, www.vineyardbrands.com)

Bodegas Escorihuela

2011 Gascon Colosal Mendoza (\$15) (61% malbec, 16% bonarda, 13% syrah and 10% cabernet sauvignon): Full, bright ruby-red. Blackberry, licorice and spices on the nose. Sweet and seamless, showing an almost liqueur-like ripeness to its dark fruit and chocolate flavors. A bit aggressive on the back end, but the tannins are ultimately soft. Finishes with a note of licorice. **87**

2010 Don Miguel Gascon Reserva Mendoza (\$25) (includes 3% each petit verdot and cabernet franc): Bright saturated ruby. Slightly high-toned aromas and flavors of blackberry, bitter chocolate and licorice. Sweet, ripe and lush if a bit chunky on the palate. Finishes broad and slightly warm. **87(+?)?**

Also recommended: 2011 Don Miguel Gascon Malbec Mendoza (86). (E & J Gallo Winery, www.gallo.com)

Etchart

2012 Torrontes Privado Salta (\$10) Very pale color. Subtle aromas of jasmine, white peach and citrus peel. Floral and quite light on its feet, with a slightly tart edge to its flavor. Finishes with a touch of bitterness and good lift. Very good value. **87**

2012 Torrontes Gran Linage Cafayate Valley (\$17) Very pale yellow. Delicate aromas of peach, ginger and mint. Round, suave and spicy, if in a rather delicate style. A moderately complex torrontes that finishes with hints of pineapple and mint and good persistence. **88**

2010 Gran Reserva Arnaldo B Salta (\$25) (60% malbec, 25% cabernet sauvignon and 15% tannat): Bright medium ruby. Currant, licorice and strong oak tones of mocha and chocolate on the nose. A sweet, nicely extracted midweight with good energy and intensity to its flavors of dark fruits and licorice. Finishes with sweet tannins and good persistence. To enjoy now or over the next several years. **88**
(Pernod Ricard USA, www.pernod-ricard-usa.com)

Fabre Montmayou

2012 Torrontes Reserva Pale silver-yellow. Aromas of lemon, lime, pineapple, mint and white flowers. Supple on entry, then tart-edged in the middle, with a flavor of citrus peel dominating. Rather uncompromisingly dry finish shows a grapefruit pith bitterness

but decent texture. **87**

2012 Malbec Temporada Mendoza Bright, full red. Aromas of raspberry, musky tobacco, mocha and menthol; went into a shell with air. Supple, sweet and nicely vinous, with moderately intense red berry and herbal flavors. Finishes with fine-grained tannins and good lift. Not bad. **87**

2011 Cabernet Sauvignon Barrel Selection Patagonia Bright red-ruby. Aromas of black raspberry, fig and graphite, lifted by violet and peppery nuances. Concentrated, densely packed and bright, with racy acidity brightening the blackberry and bitter chocolate flavors. The lingering black-fruit finish displays a firm spine of dusty, horizontal tannins and lively acidity that calls for two or three years of aging. This nicely refined, fresh wine offers good density without any heaviness. Superb value. **89(+?)**

2011 Cabernet Sauvignon Reserva Mendoza Bright red-ruby. Aromas of blackberry, cassis and bitter chocolate. Supple and rich on the palate; can't match the Patagonia cabernet for racy acidity or inner-mouth tension but shows an inviting sweetness to its dark berry and dark chocolate flavors. Finishes with lingering notes of licorice and herbs and broad, dusty tannins that reach the front teeth. **89**

2011 Malbec Barrel Selection Patagonia Bright ruby-red. High-pitched aromas of blackberry, licorice, herbs and nutty oak, with an inviting floral topnote. Supple and fairly dense, with lovely berry sweetness and pliancy of texture. Nicely integrated acidity brightens the middle palate. Finishes broad and persistent, with sweet tannins that coat the tongue and incisors. These reds offer terrific value. **89**

2011 Malbec Reserva Mendoza Bright ruby-red. Initially a bit youthfully stunted on the nose, and dominated by low-toned nutty, chocolatey oak, but revealed black fruits as it opened in the glass. Then rich and firm-edged on the palate, with good density to the dark berry and bitter chocolate flavors complicated by licorice and herbs. Finishes with chocolatey, oak-driven tannins and repeating suggestion of herbs. I wanted a bit more sweetness of fruit. **88**

2009 Grand Vin Red Bright, saturated ruby-red. Dark berries and licorice on the nose, plus high-pitched notes of violet and juniper and exotic mocha oak tones. Silky and glyceric on entry, then utterly seamless in the middle palate, with harmonious acidity giving shape and grip to the dark berry and spice flavors. At once thick and alive, thanks to its felicitous balance of fruit sweetness and acidity. Finishes suave, savory and long, with building fine-grained tannins that coat the tongue and cheeks. Not a particularly modern style but varietally expressive and impressively concentrated. **92**

(Sussex Wine Merchants, www.sussexwine.com)

Familia Meschini

2010 Malbec/Syrah Premium Mendoza (\$15) (a 50/50 blend): Good ruby-red. Aromas of black fruits, licorice, mocha and game. Juicy, nicely delineated dark berry, licorice and herb flavors show a distinctly cool quality. Slightly herbal and cedary in an Old World way but the tannins are broad and the finishing flavors saturate the palate. **88**

2010 Malbec Reserva Agrelo 26 Vineyard Mendoza (\$25) Bright red-ruby. Musky, expressive nose offers currant and smoked meat scents. Pliant, smooth and fine-grained, nicely ripe for the vintage but lifted by a mineral element. Finishes broad and ripely tannic, with a syrah-like wildness. **89**

Also recommended: 2010 Premium Malbec Mendoza (85). (www.FamigliaMeschini.com)

Familia Schroeder

2010 Malbec Saurus Select Patagonia (\$18) Bright red-ruby. Musky, medicinal aromas of blackberry, cassis and black cherry. Sweet and pliant if a bit reduced in the mouth, with good energy to its dark fruit flavors. A bit simple and chunky but has plenty of fruit. **88**

Also tasted: 2010 Saurus Select Cabernet Sauvignon Patagonia (85). Other wines tasted: 2010 Saurus Select Pinot Noir Patagonia. (Ecosur Group, Salisbury, NC)

Felix Lavaque

2010 Felix Blend Cafayate Valley Salta (\$88) (70% tannat and 30% malbec): Full medium ruby. Very ripe aromas of black fruits and chocolate liqueur. Superripe, tactile and rich, with the liqueur-like chocolate truffle flavor carrying through on the palate. Undeniably sweet and generous but a bit exaggerated to my taste. Finishes with big, mouthcoating but sweet tannins and lingering fruit. **88**

Other wines tasted: 2012 Torrontes Salta, 2009 Malbec Salta. (Bronco Wine Company, www.broncowine.com)

Bodega Fernando Dupont

2011 Malbec/Syrah/Cabernet Punta Corral Maimara Jujuy (\$52) (from vines planted at around 8,000 feet in a region in the extreme northwest of Argentina): Bright medium ruby. Highly perfumed, wild aromas of black raspberry, smoked meat, aromatic spices (cumin?) and smoked meat. Lush, sweet and distinctly wild, with captivating floral lift to its red fruit, pepper and spice flavors. A hint of dried berries adds to the wine's complexity. Seamless, very sexy wine with soft tannins and lingering notes of raspberry, spices and pepper. **91**

2010 Pasacana Maimara Jujuy (\$66) (15.6% alcohol; 70% malbec and 15% each syrah and cabernet sauvignon; from a rocky vineyard at 8,000 feet): Saturated deep ruby. Aromas of black fruits and mocha suggest a liqueur-like sweetness. Sweet, creamy-rich and very ripe, with dark berry flavors complicated by crushed stone, roast coffee and truffley earth. Reasonably well balanced for 15.6% alcohol. Finishes with big, plush tannins and impressive lingering sweetness. **90**

(The Artisan Collection, www.theartisancollection.us)

Filus

2012 Torrontes Salta (\$13) Slightly high-toned aromas of tropical fruits, apricot, spices and rose petal. Supple and moderately concentrated, with modest nuance to its stone fruit flavors. Finishes dry and a bit skinny. **87**

2010 Malbec Reserve Uco Valley (\$20) Good full red-ruby. Aromas of blackberry, violet and licorice pastille. Sweet and fine-grained, with slightly aggressive, oak-influenced flavors of dark berries, coffee and mocha. Has the mid-palate stuffing to carry its 15.5% alcohol. Large-scaled, very sweet, slightly aggressive wine for fans of the style. **88**

Also recommended: 2011 Malbec Mendoza (86). (Bronco Wine Company, www.broncowine.com)

Finca 8

2010 Malbec Valle De Uco Mendoza (\$44) Medium ruby-red. Aromas of cassis, plum, smoky minerality and pepper, lifted by a floral topnote. Shows an intriguing saline nuance and a restrained sweetness to the juicy flavors of black cherry, mocha and tobacco. Not quite as complex as the nose suggests but I like this wine's fine grain and light touch. Finishes with smooth tannins and notes of bitter chocolate and dusty herbs. **89**

Also recommended: 2009 Malbec Reserva Valle de Uco Mendoza (86). (Paul Hobbs Imports, www.paulhobbs.com)

Finca Flichman

2009 Red Table Wine Paisaje De Barrancas (\$18) (a blend of 55% syrah, 35% malbec and 10% cabernet sauvignon): Good medium-deep red. Mellow aromas and flavors of plum, currant, mocha, milk chocolate and game. Suave and fine-grained, with harmonious acidity giving shape to the middle palate. Finishes with firm tannins and good grip and length. **89**

2009 Red Table Wine Paisaje De Tupungato (\$18) (65% cabernet sauvignon, 25% malbec and 10% merlot): Bright red-ruby. Claret-like aromas of dark berries, licorice, bitter chocolate and medicinal herbs. Broad, pliant and very ripe but classically dry, with lovely texture to the flavors of cassis, black cherry and menthol. Finishes with fine-grained tannins and noteworthy persistence. An outstanding value. **90**

2009 Dedicado Red Wine Maipu (\$25) (70% malbec, 25% cabernet sauvignon and 5% syrah): Good medium ruby-red. Plum, cassis, *kirsch*, fresh herbs and licorice on the nose, along with a good bit of sweet chocolatey oak. Ripe but dry, tactile and deep, and currently a bit dominated by its chocolate-minty oak component. Nicely integrated acidity and firm tannins give this blend a solid structural underpinning. This makes the Paisaje de Tupungato come off as a bit dry by comparison, and will merit an even higher score down the road if it resolves some more of its oak. **90(+?)**

(Evaton, Inc., www.evaton.com)

Finca Las Nubes

2012 Torrontes Salta Bright lemon-yellow. Highly perfumed aromas of green melon, white flowers, white pepper, licorice and wild herbs. Juicy, subtle and perfumed, showing a strong floral character and lively acidity. Not as complex in the mouth as the nose suggests but finishes with noteworthy sneaky length and classic dryness. And surprisingly strong for Salta torrontes in this tricky vintage. **89**

2012 Rose Of Malbec Salta (a blend of 85% malbec and 15% cabernet sauvignon; made via *saignee*): Bright pink color. Musky aromas of strawberry and flowers, with a slightly wild quality. Fresh and bright, offering intense flavors of flowers, spices and earth lifted by a faint resinous character. Has extract and guts. **88**

Also recommended: 2011 Malbec Mendoza (85). (Vine Connections, www.vineconnections.com)

Finca Sophenia

2010 Malbec Synthesis Tupungato (\$35) (aged for 12 months in new French oak; Michel Rolland is the consulting winemaker here): Bright medium ruby. Aromas of blackberry, licorice pastille, violet and high-toned nutty oak. Juicy, airy and not overly sweet, displaying a youthfully tight quality to the black fruit, violet and licorice flavors. Not particularly fleshy or generous today, and in need of time in bottle to harmonize. Finishes with slightly dusty tannins and a repeating nutty quality. **87(+?)**

(Craft+Estate/The Vintner Group, www.craftandestate.com)

Bodega Del Fin Del Mundo

2011 Pinot Noir Reserva Patagonia (\$19) Moderately saturated medium red. Redcurrant, red cherry and cola on the nose, with musky hints of white pepper and herbs. Juicy, spicy and dry, showing a distinctly savory quality and moderate intensity to the red fruit and mineral flavors. Finishes with firm tannins and a touch of dryness. (A second sample, which merited only 85 points, was duller on the nose.) **87**

2011 Malbec Reserva Patagonia (\$19) Bright red-ruby. Aromas of blackberry, black raspberry, chocolate, nutty oak, fig and gunflint. Fine-grained and savory, with decent cut and a hint of smoke to the blackberry and currant flavors. This moderately complex, rather soft malbec finishes with firm tannins, a note of nutty oak and a slight alcoholic warmth. **87**

(Testa Wines of the World, www.testawines.info)

Flechas de los Andes

2010 Gran Malbec Mendoza (\$20) Bright, medium red-ruby. Very dark aromas of blackberry, violet, mocha and licorice. At once pliant and juicy, with good herbal lift to the flavors of blackberry, cassis and menthol. The youthfully medicinal finish features black cherry and menthol flavors and a serious, broad dusting of tannins. **89**

2010 Gran Corte (\$50) (all malbec): Good full medium ruby. Brooding, inky, slightly port-like aromas of blackberry, bitter chocolate and licorice. Then thick, dense and deep, with a chewy sweetness and enticing violet lift to the flavors of blackberry, fig and sexy oak. Big and rich but lively too; a very pure expression of malbec. A bit youthfully clenched today on the fruit-driven back end but the wine's sweet, serious tannins should enable it to gain in texture and pliancy with several years in the bottle. **90(+?)**

(Monsieur Touton Selection, www.mtouton.com)

Gougenheim

2012 Torrontes Momentos Del Valley Mendoza (\$10) Pale yellow. Peach, spearmint and a whiff of flowers on the nose and palate. Leanish, juicy and penetrating, offering very good flavor intensity and cut. Not especially complex but very light and easy to drink. And an excellent value. **88**

2008 Blue Melosa Flores Del Valle Malbec Mendoza (\$22) Medium red-ruby. Blackberry and licorice aromas are enriched by chocolate and espresso. At once supple and vinous, with a fine-grained texture and harmonious ripe acidity giving shape and lift to its cassis and licorice flavors. Suave tannins saturate the mouth. **89**

Other wines tasted: 2011 Estaciones del Valle Malbec Mendoza*. (Vias Imports, www.viaswine.com)

Goulart

2011 Malbec Clasico Mendoza (\$13) (done entirely in stainless steel): Bright dark red. Fresh, intriguing aromas of sour cherry, dried herbs, pepper, minerals, smoke and meat. A juicy, sexy midweight with moderate concentration and flesh to its cherry and gunflint flavors. Boasts very good cut and lift, though, not to mention plenty of personality. Finishes with smooth tannins and sneaky length. I like this--especially at its gentle price. **88**

2010 The Marshall Malbec Mendoza (\$22) Bright, medium red-ruby. Plum, tobacco and spice aromas and flavors dominated by exotic oak notes of coffee and chocolate. Broad and classically dry, but the nutty oak component could be fresher. Finishes with substantial dusty tannins and little in the way of lift. Tasted twice with similar results. **87?**

2009 Malbec Grand Vin De Goulart Mendoza (aged for 14 months in new French oak): Bright, full ruby. Very ripe aromas of blackberry, cassis, licorice and violet, with a complementary oak element. Dense, seamless and very ripe, but with nicely integrated acidity leavening the wine's sweetness and framing its intense crushed cassis, plum and nutty oak flavors. Saturates the palate and builds

on the aftertaste, which features serious but rather sweet tannins and excellent length. **91**
(Opici Imports, www.opiciwines.com)

Graffigna

2012 Torrontes Reserve Centenario Cafayate Bright light yellow. Bracing aromas of lime zest, mint, quinine, juniper and white flowers. Juicy and brisk in the mouth, with an almost metallic minty quality to its citrus flavors. This softened up considerably with a bit of air, finishing with good lift and moderate thrust. **88**

2012 Pinot Grigio Centenario San Juan (\$13) Very pale, bright silver-yellow. White peach, orange and a note of petrolly minerality on the nose, lifted by a floral element. Brisk, firm and light on its feet, with peach and orange fruit flavors enlivened by flowers and spices. Finishes positively dry and persistent. **88**

2011 Cabernet Sauvignon Reserve Centenario San Juan (\$14) (half tank, half oak): Good deep, dark red. Cherry, currant, licorice and musky oak on the nose, plus a rustic whiff of leather. Supple dark cherry, currant and menthol flavors show a lightly medicinal quality but decent inner-palate energy. Finishes with slightly drying tannins and good length. I wasn't wild for the cooperage here. **87**

2011 Malbec Centenario San Juan (\$14) Bright, dark red. Musky black cherry, mocha, coffee bean and a whiff of flowers on the nose. Rounder and softer than the reserve cabernet, and more fruity too, with sweet red berry flavors accented by fresh herbs. The tannins here are a bit riper and more giving. **88**

2010 Cabernet Sauvignon Grand Reserve San Juan (\$20) Good dark red. Expressive aromas of currant, chocolate, pepper, tobacco, licorice and herbs. Smooth and fine-grained if a bit unforthcoming, offering good peppery freshness to the flavors of redcurrant, cherry, licorice and rose petal. Here the oak is much less intrusive than that of the reserve bottling. The firmly tannic finish offers lively red berry and spice flavors. **89**

2010 Malbec Grand Reserve San Juan (\$20) Good saturated medium red-ruby. Aromas of dark plum, mocha and woodsmoke. Supple, full and sweet but a bit low-toned, with sassafras and earth flavors dominating. Richer and chewier than the 2011 reserve malbec--more tannic too--but showing less floral lift and verve. **88**

(Pernod Ricard USA, www. Pernod-Ricard-USA.com)

Graffito

2011 Malbec Mendoza (\$22) (reportedly from 103-year-old vines; 70% new oak): Bright medium ruby. Slightly porty aromas of redcurrant, chocolate and exotic spices. Supple and very ripe but not overly sweet, with redcurrant and mocha flavors lifted on the back end by pepper and herb nuances. No shortage of brightness or flavor interest. The chocolatey oak component is apparent on the finish. Winemaker Jimena Lopez previously was in charge of making red wines at Bodegas Norton. **88**

(Vine Connections, www.vineconnections.com)

Hacienda del Plata

2011 Cabernet Sauvignon Zagal Mendoza (\$15) Bright medium red. Slightly weedy aromas of plum, redcurrant, licorice and flowers. Shows a sake-like, melting character on the palate, with good stuffing to its redcurrant, dried berry, herb and spicy oak flavors. Finishes with dusty, building tannins and a faint greenness. **87**

2011 Malbec Zagal Mendoza (\$15) Bright dark red. Aromas of blackberry, licorice and violet. Juicy, spicy dark berry and licorice flavors are nicely framed by bright acidity and complicated by licorice and herbal nuances. On the lean side but offers good focus and lift. Finishes with slightly dusty, moderately ripe tannins. **87**

2010 Arriero Blend Reserve Mendoza (\$22) Bright ruby-red. Aromas of blackberry, black cherry, licorice, herbs and menthol, plus a suggestion of dried fruits. At once dense and juicy, with good vinosity to the flavors of plum, chocolate, herbs and licorice. High-pitched wine with dusty, slightly drying tannins and a hint of finishing greenness. **87**

2009 Malbec Mayoral Grand Reserve Lujan De Cuyo (\$33) Bright dark red. Cassis, black cherry, licorice, coffee and mocha on the rather oaky nose. Juicy and intense, with a restrained sweetness, but a strong element of chocolatey oak keeps the dark fruit flavors a bit clenched and medicinal today. This wine has good depth but will it blossom with time in bottle? **88(+?)?**

Also recommended: 2011 Zagal Syrah Mendoza (85). (Cana Selections, www.canaselections.com)

High Note

2011 Malbec Mendoza (\$15) (13.5% alcohol): Medium red-ruby. Primary aromas of blackberry, licorice, bitter chocolate and green pepper. Dense and crunchy, with juicy acidity giving shape and lift to the dark berry and licorice flavors. Finishes firmly tannic and dry in a positive way. I like this wine's energy. **88**

(Winebow, www.winebow.com)

Huarpe Wines

2011 Cabernet Sauvignon Taymente Mendoza (\$16) Moderately saturated medium red. Aromas of plum, truffle and cedary oak are complicated by peppery herbs and underbrush. Supple, sweet and inviting but with a slightly funky quality to its plum, truffle and herb flavors. Finishes with good texture and a hint of warmth. **87**

2011 Malbec Taymente Mendoza (\$16) Good ruby-red. Pungent aromas of blackberry and dark chocolatey oak lifted by violet and crushed stone. Sweet, oaky and fine-grained, with good stuffing to the flavors of blackberry, blueberry, violet and bitter chocolate. Turns a bit dusty on the end with aeration, but this slightly rustic wine is not short on flavor. **88**

2010 Selection Mendoza (\$23) (an 80/20 blend of malbec and cabernet sauvignon): Full ruby-red. Aromas and flavors of cassis, smoky herbs, minerals, mocha and dark chocolate; soil-driven and showing its cabernet side. Round, seamless and sweet, offering good depth and generosity of texture. In a rather plump style, finishing with sweet tannins and an herbal quality that adds lift. **89**

(Michael Skurnik Wines, www.skurnikwines.com; Bottled Poetry Imports, www.bottledpoetrybrands.com)

Humberto Canale

2009 Cabernet Franc Gran Reserva Patagonia (\$25) (barrel-fermented): Moderately saturated dark red. Aromas of cassis, licorice and fresh tobacco leaf are complemented by oaky milk chocolate. Quite dry and tightly wound, but with noteworthy vivacity and sneaky intensity to the currant and herb flavors. Finishes with firm but slightly green-edged tannins that call for another year or two of patience. **88(+?)**

Also recommended: 2012 Old Vineyard Riesling Rio Negro (86). Other wines tasted: 2011 Intimo Cabernet-Merlot-Malbec Rio Negro*. (New England Wine & Spirits, Inc., www.newenglandwine.com)

Kaiken

2011 Malbec/Bonarda/Petit Verdot Corte Mendoza (\$15) (an 80/12/8 blend): Saturated medium ruby-red. Complex and inviting aromas of blackberry, mocha, violet and licorice. Sweet and lush, with a hint of minerality intensifying the seductive dark fruit flavors. A mellow, fine-grained midweight with attractive sweetness and very good balance--and a terrific value. Finishes with ripe tannins and very good length and lift. **89**

2010 Cabernet Sauvignon Ultra Mendoza (\$20) (blended with 5% malbec): Bright, medium red-ruby. Currant, mocha, smoke and a hint of herbs on the nose, complemented by mellow oak tones. Round, lush and sweet, with spicy flavors of plum, redcurrant and mocha. Initially seemed more open-knit than the 2011 blend but tightened up with air, finishing with dusty tannins. **89(+?)**

2010 Malbec Ultra Mendoza (\$20) (15% alcohol; includes 5% cabernet sauvignon): Bright, medium ruby. Very ripe but brooding aromas and flavors of blackberry, violet, licorice and bitter chocolate; very malbec! Densely packed and fine-grained but showing little in the way of easy sweetness today. Quite primary, even a bit clenched, finishing with youthfully tough tannins and notes of bitter chocolate and herbs. Seems rather energetically extracted: will this soften up with some time in bottle? **88(+?)**

(TGIC Importers, www.tgicimporters.com)

Lagarde

2010 Malbec Primeras Vinas Mendoza (\$49) Bright ruby-red. Primary, ripe aromas of blackberry, licorice, violet, herbs and bitter chocolate oak. Sweet, vinous and light on its feet, with dark berry and spice flavors lifted by peppery acidity and an element of herbs. Finishes with even, dusty tannins that will need a couple years to harmonize with the wine's fruit. This may ultimately merit a 90+ rating. **89(+?)**

2008 Henri Gran Guarda No. 1 Mendoza (\$75) (a blend of 30% syrah, 27% cabernet sauvignon, 25% malbec and 18% petit verdot): Bright full ruby. Cassis, black cherry, violet and herbs on the nose, along with strong bitter chocolate and licorice notes. Dense, plush and concentrated, but with excellent cut and vinosity too. Bright acidity intensifies the dark fruit, herb and game flavors. This very fine-grained wine communicates a strong impression of extract and has a serious tannic spine for aging. **91(+?)**

Also recommended: 2012 Lagarde Viognier Mendoza (86). (Dangerous Wine Group, www.dangerouswinegroup.com)

Bodega Lamadrid

2010 Bonarda Single Vineyard Reserve Mendoza (\$15) Good bright red-ruby. Pungent aromas of cherry liqueur, cassis, smoke, spices and licorice pastille. Dense, spicy and bright; simultaneously solidly built and light on its feet, with its sweetness leavened by a saline quality. Not the last word in complexity but velvety, fruity and well-done. Finishes fresh, with a firm spine of acids and dusty tannins. **88**

2011 Bonarda Single Vineyard Reserve Mendoza (\$20) Bright ruby-red. Blackberry, licorice, bitter chocolate and violet on the nose. At once dense and bright, with ripe acidity enlivening the flavors of black fruits, licorice and leather. Nicely concentrated and restrained in its sweetness. Finishes with firm tannins. Riper and clearly more complex than the 2012 Single Vineyard Bonarda. **88**

2010 Bonarda Single Vineyard Reserve Mendoza (\$20) Good saturated red-ruby. Aromas of crushed blackberry, licorice, bitter chocolate and violet. Dense, sweet and concentrated, with brisk acidity giving definition to the black fruit, smoke and dark chocolate flavors. Really excellent vinosity here. Finishes with lush, chocolatey tannins and very good length. **89**

2011 Cabernet Franc Single Vineyard Reserva Mendoza (\$20) Bright, full red-ruby. Subdued aromas of blackberry and violet, with a slightly raw herbal/peppery quality. Then supple and round in the mouth, but with a diffuse quality to the dark berry and chocolate flavors. Finishes with a soft dusting of tannins. **87**

2010 Cabernet Franc Single Vineyard Reserva Mendoza (\$20) Bright medium red-ruby. Redcurrant, licorice, spices and violet on the inviting nose. Densely packed but not overly sweet, with lively acidity framing the dark berry, spice and bitter chocolate flavors. More floral than the 2010 bonarda. Rich, seamless, suave cabernet franc with a light touch. Finishes ripe, dry and persistent. **89**

2012 Cabernet Sauvignon Single Vineyard Mendoza (\$15) Bright dark red. Perfumed, ripe aromas of redcurrant, tobacco leaf, graphite and beefsteak tomato. Sweet, supple and lush, with moderate complexity and no rough edges. Finishes with soft tannins. **87**

2011 Cabernet Sauvignon Single Vineyard Reserva Mendoza (\$20) Bright ruby-red. Aromas of blackberry, cassis and licorice. Juicy and lively, with an enticing sugar/acid balance and firm underlying spine to the dark berry and licorice flavors. Good fruity, gripping cabernet with solid tannins and very good length. Avoids the greenness displayed by the cabernet franc bottling. **89**

2010 Cabernet Sauvignon Single Vineyard Reserva Mendoza (\$20) Medium ruby-red. Pungent, expressive nose and palate meld currant, tobacco, mocha and smoky minerality. Sweet, plush and smooth but shapely too; not yet expressing its inherent complexity but nicely balanced from day one. An excellent value, this very round cabernet finishes with lovely sneaky length, a note of exotic flowers and plenty of ripe tannins. I'd give it another year or two in the cellar. **90**

2011 Malbec Single Vineyard Mendoza (\$15) Saturated bright red-ruby. Youthfully inexpressive nose offers scents of blackberry, dark chocolate, licorice, violet and beefsteak tomato. Dense, broad, pliant and ripe, with a subtle sweetness to the flavors of black cherry and licorice. Finishes broad and lively, with fine-grained tannins and a hint of minerality. Nicely balanced and complex malbec, especially for the gentle price. **89**

2011 Malbec Single Vineyard Reserve Mendoza (\$20) Bright, full ruby. Aromas of blackberry, chocolate and fig are at once roasted and lightly medicinal. Fat and ripe but dry in the mouth; boasts a mouthfilling texture but shows less class than the cabernet in this series. Finishes with tongue-dusting, slightly green tannins and notes of smoke and tobacco. A bit rough. **88**

2010 Malbec Single Vineyard Reserve Mendoza (\$20) Bright ruby-red. Aromas of blackberry, licorice and floral oils are complicated by a peppery note and a hint of maple syrup. Dense, round and lightly saline, with a suave, silky Old World texture to its flavors of blackberry and fig. Most impressive today on the long, rising finish, which features big but lush tannins and an impression of seamlessness. A lot of wine for the price. **91**

91

2009 Malbec Single Vineyard Gran Reserve Mendoza (\$80) Bright red-ruby. Lovely violet lift to the aromas of blackberry, licorice, chocolate and sexy oak. Plush, fine-grained and sweet, with concentrated flavors of musky blackberry and chocolate. Finishes long and firm, with tannins that reach the front teeth. I like this wine's complementary oak element and edge-free texture. **91**

2008 Malbec Single Vineyard Gran Reserve Mendoza (\$34) Bright ruby-red. Blackberry syrup, bitter chocolate, violet and exotic mocha oak on the nose. Silky-smooth, intense and very ripe, with harmonious acidity energizing the sweet black raspberry and spice flavors. Very good density of fruit here, with complementary oak. Finishes with suave tannins and noteworthy length. **90**

2007 Mathilde Malbec Single Vineyard Mendoza (\$80) (concentrated via a 30% *saignee*; aged 24 months in new French oak): Good

bright ruby. Complex aromas of black raspberry, licorice and menthol lifted by a floral topnote. Lush, thick and sweet but with ripe, juicy acidity energizing the very rich black fruit flavors. Really glossy, vibrant fruit here. Finishes with big, plush but firm tannins that coat the front teeth. This very impressive fruit-driven wine makes the 2008 Gran Reserva seem almost dry. **92**

2006 Mathilde Malbec Single Vineyard Mendoza (\$80) Bright, full medium ruby. Rich aromas of cassis and burnished chocolatey oak, with a whiff of raisin. Silky and suave in texture but less primary than the 2007 version. Not showing quite the density and verve to its currant and tobacco flavors as its younger sibling but this is fine-grained and mellow malbec. Finishes with substantial, slightly dusty tannins that reach the incisors. **91**

Also recommended: 2010 Single Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon Mendoza (85), 2012 Single Vineyard Bonarda Mendoza (85), 2012 Single Vineyard Malbec Mendoza (86). (Vino del Sol, www.vinodelsol.com)

Lariviere Yturbe

2009 Malbec/Cabernet Sauvignon/Merlot Don Yturbe Estate Mendoza (\$26) (a 60/30/10 blend): Bright dark red. Musky, gamey aromas of black raspberry, mocha and chocolate; almost syrah-like in its wildness. Lush, wild and smoky, in fact almost rustic, but with noteworthy texture and depth to its dark fruit and leather flavors. This rather funky wine finishes with ripe tannins and a lingering gamey element. Not for the fainthearted. **88**

Also recommended: 2010 Malbec Mendoza (86). Other wines tasted: 2009 Malbec Partida Limitada Mendoza. (SolStars Inc., www.solstars.com)

Larrain, Lasmartres, Toso and Undurraga

2008 Malbec Ultra Premium Mendoza (\$50) Bright, saturated medium ruby. Aromas of blackberry, violet, licorice and camphor, complicated both by herbal high tones and a hint of chocolatey superripeness. Concentrated and very ripe, but with black fruit flavors accented by an herbal quality and framed by strong acidity. Densely packed, intriguing malbec with a slightly gritty, green-tinged finish. Quite backward and tight today. **89(+?)**

(Quintessential Wines, www.quintessentialwines.com)

Luca

2011 Chardonnay G Lot Mendoza (\$32) (30% new oak): Bright straw-gold. Expressive aromas of peach, nutmeg, flowers and vanillin oak. Sweet, bright and subtle, with stone fruit and spice flavors framed by harmonious acidity. Lovely elegant, concentrated chardonnay with a suave, dry finish. **91**

2011 Pinot Noir G Lot Tupungato (\$32) Moderately saturated bright red. Complex aromas of cranberry, mocha, leather and chocolate complemented by a hint of truffley underbrush. Silky, supple and lush, with moderately concentrated red fruit and saline flavors nicely framed by ripe acidity. Finishes with broad, dusty tannins, good energy and noteworthy persistence. Gained in sweetness with air without losing its freshness. A very successful pinot noir from Mendoza. **89**

2011 Syrah Laborde Double Select Uco Valley Mendoza Good full, deep red-ruby. Dark berries, *kirsch*, blackberry, dark chocolate, mocha and smoked meat on the nose, plus a whiff of leather. Sweet, lush, pliant and full, with a strong chocolatey ripeness to the intense dark berry flavors. Chewy, mouthfilling syrah from 50-year-old vines (the vine cuttings originally came from the northern and southern Rhone Valley). Finishes big and broad, with furry tannins and a hint of game. **91**

2011 Malbec Mendoza Full bright ruby. Sexy aromas of blackberry, black raspberry, cassis and violet, plus a hint of caramel oak. Dense, creamy and concentrated; in a sweet style but nicely integrated acidity gives it balance. Finishes with tooth-saturating tannins, a hint of torrefaction and sneaky length. I'd drink this one before the Beso de Dante owing to its early sweetness. (An earlier sample of this wine seemed even sweeter, by the way.) **91**

2010 Beso De Dante Altos De Mendoza (\$41) (a 55/45 blend of malbec and cabernet): Good red-ruby. Aromas of black cherry, cassis and strong chocolatey oak. Dense, suave and nicely delineated, with a restrained sweetness to the blackberry, licorice and violet flavors lifted by spicy oak. Finishes firmly tannic and long, saturating the palate without leaving any impression of weight. This would be a terrific match for red meat. **91**

2009 Malbec Mendoza (\$125) (from vines averaging 51 years of age): Full ruby-red. Inviting aromas of blackberry, black cherry, licorice, menthol and mocha. Densely packed and silky, with superb intensity to the high-pitched dark berry flavors. Wonderfully sexy and velvety wine with terrific lift and sappiness. With its very firm spine of noble tannins and ripe acids, this beauty will mellow with time in bottle. The lush, very long finish makes the Beso de Dante come off as dry and lean by comparison. **93**

(Vine Connections, www.vineconnections.com)

Bodega Luigi Bosca

2011 Pinot Noir Mendoza (\$90) Moderately saturated medium red. Strawberry and a spicy hint of mocha oak on the nose. Supple and vinous on the palate, with moderate flesh and depth to the flavors of redcurrant, strawberry, spices and tobacco complemented by leather and earth. Relies as much on its acids as on its tannins for structure. Not bad. **87**

2010 Malbec Mendoza (\$20) Good dark red. Complex aromas of blackberry, spices, mocha, licorice and milk chocolate, with complicating hints of gunflint and herbs. Smooth and fine-grained, with harmonious acidity giving lift and vinosity to the plum and redcurrant flavors. A rather mellow yet energetic version of malbec. Finishes firm and suave, with enticing sweetness and a peppery naunce. Lovely sugar/acid balance here. **89**

2009 Cabernet Fincas Las Nobles Bouchet (\$70) (a 93/7 blend of cabernet sauvignon and bouchet): Medium red-ruby. Currant, tobacco leaf, cedary oak and aromatic spices on the nose and palate, along with a suggestion of roasted ripeness. Lush, sweet, concentrated and very ripe, displaying a hint of chocolatey *surmaturite*. Finishes with big, broad tannins. **90**

(Frederick Wildman & Sons, www.frederickwildman.com)

Luis Segundo Correas

2010 Cabernet Sauvignon Correas Valle Las Acequias Oak Mendoza (\$19) Good medium red. Good aromatic lift to the aromas of redcurrant, tobacco, black pepper, mocha and herbs; very cabernet in an Old World way. Savory and lively in the mouth, with currant and mocha flavors enlivened by pepper and spices. The persistent finish features fine-grained tannins and sound acidity. **88**

Also recommended: 2010 Valle Las Acequias Malbec Oak Mendoza (85). Other wines tasted: 2011 El Cipres Malbec Reserva Mendoza. (Pinnacle Imports, www.pinnacleimports.com)

Bodega del Rio Elorza

2012 Chardonnay Verum Patagonia (\$18) Bright pale yellow. Slightly liqueur-like tropical fruits dominate the nose. Bright, subtle

stone fruit flavors are lifted by flowers and complicated by a touch of vanillin oak. Supple, pliant, moderately concentrated chardonnay with understated stone fruit flavors and a slightly edgy finish. **88**

2010 Malbec Reserva Verum Patagonia (\$30) Bright medium ruby. High-pitched aromas of blackberry, minerals, bitter chocolate, licorice and fresh herbs. Sweet, pliant and juicy, with a dark fruit and truffle flavors complicated by hints of game and herbs. Nicely complex, ripely tannic wine with good mineral and herbal lift on the end. **88**

Also recommended: 2011 Verum Pinot Noir Patagonia (85). Other wines tasted: 2012 Malbec Patagonia*. (Vino del Sol, www.vinodelsol.com)

Mapema

2011 Malbec Mendoza (\$19) Bright medium ruby. Very ripe, slightly nutty aromas and flavors of black raspberry, chocolate and licorice. Sweet and soft on the palate, in need of a bit more clarity. Finishes with a fine dusting of slightly dry tannins. **87**

2008 Malbec Pz Mendoza (\$70) (13.5% alcohol; from 51-year-old vines; aged in 100% new French oak): Bright medium ruby. Black raspberry, bitter chocolate and licorice on the nose, complemented by sexy oak tones. Round and lush in the mouth, with dark fruit and chocolate flavors dominating. A very broad, sweet style of malbec, finishing with substantial ripe tannins. **89**

Also recommended: 2012 Sauvignon Blanc Mendoza (85). (Vine Connections, www.vineconnections.com)

Marcelo Pelleriti

2010 Malbec Sol Fa Sol Mendoza (\$15) (13% alcohol): Bright ruby-red. Sexy aromas of blackberry and cassis, plus a whiff of musky gamey reduction. Very sweet and primary, with lively acidity giving shape and lift to the sweet blackberry, black raspberry, game and violet flavors. Lovely fruit unsullied by oak (the wine spent only three months in wood). I like this juicy, vibrant, expressive malbec. Finishes with lingering notes of blackberry, black raspberry, spices, mocha and game. **89**

2008 Malbec Reserve Mendoza (\$22) Saturated ruby. Come-hither aromas of blackberry, blueberry, violet, cocoa powder and sweet, sexy oak. Rich, pliant and deep, already offering considerable charm to its flavors of dark fruits, chocolate, game and leather. Finishes with broad, ripe tannins that dust the tongue and front teeth. Slightly high-toned but this very suave, rich wine manages to hold its shape. Very impressive malbec, and a terrific value. **91**

2009 Selection Grand Reserve Mendoza (\$40) (93% malbec blended with 5% cabernet sauvignon and 2% syrah): Good bright, deep ruby. Strongly oaky aromas of cassis, licorice and bitter chocolate. Broad and chocolatey but not quite as sweet or stylish as the 2008, showing a bit less fruit to handle its oak. This big wine's serious, youthfully aggressive tannins call for patience.

90(+?)

(Belle Epoque Wine Imports, Miami, FL)

Marchiori & Barraud

2011 Cabernet Sauvignon Perdriel Mendoza (\$22) Bright, medium ruby-red. Slightly reduced aromas of currant liqueur, chocolate, tobacco leaf, licorice and herbs. Broad, seamless and rich, with a distinctly pliant, generous texture to its flavors of currant, smoke, milk chocolate and licorice. Finishes with round, fine-grained tannins. **90**

2011 Malbec Perdriel Mendoza (\$22) Dark red. Musky black fruit aromas are complicated by nutty oak and a suggestion of dried berries. Broad, round and mouthfilling but not heavy, with currant, chocolate and mocha flavors complicated by earthy and saline nuances. This very savory wine builds nicely toward the back, finishing with supple, sweet tannins and very noteworthy length. **89**

(The Artisan Collection, www.theartisancollection.us)

Bodega Margot

2011 Malbec Gran Caledonio Mendoza (\$35) Saturated medium ruby. Blackberry and cassis aromas accompanied by strong oak notes of chocolate and coffee. Sweet and concentrated, with good breadth to the flavors of black fruits, mocha, licorice and bitter chocolate. Finishes with chewy but sweet tannins and good lingering fruit. **88**

Also recommended: 2011 Maula Oak Malbec Mendoza (86). Other wines tasted: 2011 Maula Pinot Noir Mendoza. (Enye Group, www.enyegroup.com)

Masi Tupungato

2009 Corvina/Malbec Corbec Mendoza (\$25) (a 70/30 blend; made from dried grapes): Full ruby-red. Aromas of black fruits, mocha, menthol and exotic South American chocolate, complicated by slightly rustic smoke and soil tones. Deep and rich, with a slight warmth to the cassis, mocha and chocolate flavors. Finishes plummy, broad and dry. **88**

Other wines tasted: 2012 Passo Blanco Pinot Grigio/Torrantes Mendoza*. (Folio Fine Wine Partners, www.foliowine.com)

Matias Riccitelli

2010 Malbec The Apple Doesn't Fall Far From The Tree Mendoza (\$19) Good bright ruby. Varietally expressive aromas of blackberry, bitter chocolate and violet. Dense, juicy and pure, with lovely intensity and pliancy to the flavors of blackberry, blueberry and violet. With its enticing sugar/acid balance, this very primary fruit bomb offers a lovely combination of supple mouthfeel and inner-mouth energy. Finishes with firm tannins and impressive length for a wine from 15-year-old vines. **90**

2009 Malbec Vineyard Selection Mendoza (\$36) Bright medium ruby. Blackberry, violet and sexy oak tones on the nose. Plush, ripe and sweet, boasting round, mouthfilling dark fruit flavors complemented by chocolatey oak. Even suppler than the 2010 The Apple Doesn't Fall Far From The Tree, but the two wines are quite similar in flavors and glossy texture. Finishes with serious, ripe tannins that coat the teeth. **90**

(Face to Face Wine Imports, Los Angeles, CA)

Bodega Melipal

2011 Malbec Ikella Mendoza (\$14) Bright dark red. Lively, expressive aromas of redcurrant, cherry and licorice accented by menthol and herbs. Smooth and easygoing in the mouth, offering good balance but a slightly green cast to its medicinal licorice flavor. This straightforward malbec relies more on its acidity than its light tannins for structure. **87**

2010 Malbec/Petit Verdot/Cabernet Franc Melipal Mendoza (\$20) (a 60/35/5 blend): Saturated bright ruby-red. Cassis, licorice, violet and cocoa powder on the nose, with a very ripe *kirsch* note emerging with air. Sweet, dense and lively, with black fruit flavors nicely lifted by peppery spices. Finishes with substantial dusty tannins, an herbal nuance and serious spine. **88**

2009 Malbec Nazarenas Vineyard Mendoza (\$40) (reportedly from vines planted in 1923): Good bright, deep ruby-red. Aromas of cassis, blackberry, licorice and violet are complemented by sweet oak notes of spices and mocha. Fine-grained and broad, with a slightly medicinal cast to its dark berry and licorice flavors. Nicely concentrated but still a bit youthfully brooding. Finishes with a fine dusting of tongue-coating tannins and lingering notes of licorice and bitter chocolate. (This bottle showed better than a richer but less pliant sample that turned a bit green on the back end.) **89**
(The Artisan Collection, www.theartisancollection.us)

Mendel

2012 Semillon Mendoza Very pale yellow. Complex, subtle aromas of citrus zest, ginger, pungent dried herbs and musky oak. Broad more than filled in on the palate, with very dry ginger and quinine flavors dominating. Seems a bit less intense than the best vintages of this bottling. Finishes with lingering notes of orange peel and spices. **89**

2011 Malbec Mendoza (aged in 40% new French oak): Bright medium ruby. Musky cassis, plum and dark chocolate on the nose, lifted by minty and mineral nuances. Fine-grained and firm in the mouth, with a restrained sweetness to its black raspberry and smoky mineral flavors; conveys an impression of strong extract. Nicely integrated acidity extends the finish, which features chewy, ripe tannins and excellent lift. **90(+?)**

2010 Malbec Mendoza Good bright, full ruby. Aromas of plum, licorice, spicecake and nutty oak. Mellow, lush and sweet, with insidious plum and spice flavors spreading out to coat the palate. More open-knit and resolved than the 2011 version but less fruity. Finishes long and ripe, with broad, serious tannins and an invitingly suave texture. **90**

2011 Cabernet Sauvignon Mendoza (all French oak, one-third new): Good dark ruby-red. Cassis, licorice, black cherry, dark chocolate and fresh herbs on the slightly porty nose. Then sweet, dense and concentrated, with dark fruit, spice and mineral flavors nicely framed by harmonious acidity. Hints at dried fruits with time in the glass. Finishes with serious but sweet tannins and lingering spice character. This reminded me of a very ripe Bordeaux. **90**

2010 Unus Mendoza (a 70/30 blend of malbec and cabernet sauvignon): Bright, full ruby. Sexy but reticent aromas of blackcurrant, black cherry, mocha and smoke. Lush, smooth, generous and concentrated, showing a slightly porty ripeness to the flavors of cassis, blackberry and licorice. There's something primary about this blend, which really fills the mouth without coming off as heavy. Finishes with fine-grained tannins, sweet dark fruits and a distinctly creamy quality. **91**

2010 Malbec Finca Remota Mendoza (from 60+-year-old vines): Bright red-ruby. Aromas of blackberry, blueberry and licorice smell concentrated! Lush and sweet but nicely delineated too, with dark berry and violet flavors joined by complementary oak. Lovely fruit intensity and energy here (this is entirely from vines in the cooler Altamira area). Finishes very long and aromatic, with fine-grained tannins and strong, mouth-saturating extract. **92**
(Vine Connections, www.vineconnections.com)

Michel Torino Estate

2012 Torrontes Don David Reserva Salta (\$17) Pale, bright straw-yellow. Musky, piquant aromas of citrus peel, ginger, rose petal and mint. Rich, dry, gingery and tactile with extract. In a serious style, delivering palate impact and good weight (this is a relatively high-for-torrontes 13.9% alcohol). Finishes with lovely perfumed length and a light touch. **89**

2012 Finca La Primavera #3 Don David Torrontez Salta (14% alcohol; aged for six months in 100% new oak, 70% American and 30% French): Bright lemon-yellow. Lemon drop and white flowers on the highly aromatic nose, with the oak element obvious but not overbearing. Boasts a serious mouthfeel, with brisk acidity framing the lemon, floral and fresh herb flavors. A bit dried on the back end by the oak, but a strong performance for Salta torrontes in the 2012 vintage. **89**

2012 Chardonnay Don David Reserve Calchaqui Valley Salta Full lemon-yellow color. Pineapple, peach and soft citrus scents on the ripe, inviting nose, along with oak notes of vanilla and butter. Ripe, round and harmonious in the mouth, with well-integrated acidity giving shape to the orchard and soft citrus fruit flavors. Not especially complex but supple and easy to drink. Finishes with good persistence. **88**

2011 Malbec Don David Reserve Salta Bright medium ruby. Very ripe but lively aromas of blackberry, bitter chocolate and licorice. Sweet, suave and fine-grained, with a distinctly creamy character to the dark fruit and dark chocolate flavors. Well-integrated acidity keeps this plush malbec from coming off as heavy. Finishes with ripe tannins and very good length. **89**

2011 Cabernet Sauvignon Don David Finca La Urquiza #8 Salta (\$25) (aged in new French and American oak for 15 months): Good full medium ruby. Good lift to the aromas and flavors of blackberry, violet, bitter chocolate and wild herbs. Plush, smooth and quite concentrated, with attractive creamy sweetness leavened by the wine's energy. Sexy oak complements but does not overwhelm the wine's flavor. The ripely tannic finish offers very good length and lift. **90**

2011 Syrah Don David Reserve Calchaqui Valley Salta (13.9% alcohol; from vines planted at 5,500 feet): Bright, medium red-ruby. Musky aromas of black raspberry, mocha and smoke. Suave on entry, then juicy and smooth in the middle, offering an attractive combination of dark berry, chocolate, soil and smoky oak flavors in a medium-bodied package. The tannins spread out gently to saturate the palate. Nicely fresh, broad wine with a restrained sweetness. **88**

2011 Tannat Don David Reserve Calchaqui Valley Salta Bright, medium red-ruby. Expressive aromas and flavors of plum, red cherry, woodsmoke, mocha, pepper and herbs. Supple, round and sweet, with noteworthy intensity and lift thanks to nicely integrated acidity. Finishes with smooth tannins and very good fruity persistence. Nothing rustic about this tannat. **88**

2011 Cabernet Sauvignon Don David Reserve Calchaqui Valley Bright red-ruby. Varietally accurate aromas of plum, redcurrant, cedar and green pepper. Distinctly greener and more peppery than the Don David Tannat Reserve but boasts good texture and more energy and cut. There's a faint rawness here but with its intense currant fruit and firm tannic spine this cabernet grew on me as it opened in the glass. **88(+?)?**

2011 Malbec Don David Finca La Maravilla 6 Cafayate Valley (from vines on poor rocky soil at an altitude of 6,200 feet; aged entirely in new oak, 70% French and 30% American): Saturated medium ruby. Musky, slightly high-toned aromas of blackberry, mocha, licorice and violet, lifted by a peppery nuance. At once smooth and vibrant, with strong, harmonious acidity framing the penetrating flavors of blackberry, spices, violet, licorice and herbs. Plenty of oak here but nicely supported by intense fruit. Not at all a sweet style, but finishes with suave tannins, a whiff of herbs and excellent length. **90**

2010 Malbec/Merlot Ciclos Salta (\$30) Bright medium ruby-red. Wonderfully sexy, fresh aromas of black raspberry, cocoa powder, dark chocolate and violet, with syrah-like nuances of game and truffle. Subdued but quite pure on the palate; not thick or overly sweet but offers insidious intensity to its fresh, primary, crushed dark berry, licorice and violet flavors. Harmonious acidity gives this youthfully reticent, very smooth midweight a captivating early balance. Finishes with substantial but very fine tongue-dusting tannins and excellent subtle length. An extremely successful and seamless blend. **92**

2009 Altimus Cafayate Valley Salta (68% malbec, 25% cabernet sauvignon and 7% tannat, mostly from 40-to-50-year-old vines; aged for 18 months in new French oak): Bright saturated ruby. Precise aromas of black cherry, pepper, violet, licorice and herbs, with a note of milk chocolate emerging with air; showing its cabernet side today. Juicy, spicy and fresh but creamy too, offering a lovely balance of dark fruits, spices and herbs; a saline element contributes to the wine's complexity. Finishes with serious tongue-dusting tannins, hints of herbs and licorice and very good lift. **91**

(Frederick Wildman & Sons, www.frederickwildman.com)

Mi Terruno

2010 Cabernet Sauvignon Reserve Mendoza (\$17) (13.5% alcohol): Bright red-ruby. Aromas of musky plum, tobacco leaf, pepper and mocha; very cabernet sauvignon. Sweet and lively, with nicely integrated acidity giving lift and shape to the flavors of plum, redcurrant, licorice, spices and herbs. Turns a bit herbal and dusty on the back end, but finishes brisk and persistent, with lingering spice and herb notes. Good honest cabernet. **88**

2010 Malbec/Cabernet Sauvignon Limited Reserve Mendoza (\$22) (a 55/45 blend): Bright ruby-red. Expressive aromas of black cherry, licorice, bitter chocolate, tobacco leaf and spices. Glossy and sweet, with black fruit flavors given lift and punch by aromatic herbs. A suave, strong, long wine with very good intensity, harmonious acidity and serious building tannins. Late notes of spices and mint. **89**

2009 Malbec Mayacaba Mendoza (\$50) (reportedly from 100-year-old vines): Saturated full medium ruby. Very ripe aromas of cassis and chocolate. Broad and plush, but the slightly high-toned cassis, plum and coffee flavors are carrying a heavy load of spicy oak. Today the wine's chocolatey quality overwhelms its fruit. This sweet wine is sexier than the Limited Reserve blend but its varietal intensity is somewhat muddled by the wood element. **89**

(Copa Fina Wine Imports, www.copafina.com)

Bodega Monteviejo

2010 Petite Fleur Valle De Uco Mendoza (\$25) (50% malbec, 30% cabernet sauvignon and 10% each syrah and merlot): Full ruby-red. Sexy, deep aromas of black raspberry, tobacco, game, licorice and violet. Sweet, dense and supple, with lovely mineral lift to the flavors of black raspberry and coffee. Lovely tactile texture and flavor intensity for the price range; conveys serious structure without undue weight. Finishes broad and long, with chewy, resolved tannins that coat the entire mouth. Made by Michel Rolland, this wine spent 30 days in tank, with manual punchdowns. **90**

2009 Lindaflor Malbec Valle De Uco Mendoza (\$45) Saturated bright ruby. Aromatically pure but reticent nose offers blackberry, violet and dark chocolate. Deep, concentrated, chewy and sweet, with blackberry and cassis fruit complemented by strong, high-quality oak. The building tannins are substantial but ripe, with sweet black fruit flavors staining the palate on the aftertaste. **91**

2008 Lindaflor La Violeta Malbec Mendoza (\$140) (15.5% alcohol): Bright, deep ruby. Smoky oak, chocolate and mint on the nose. Large-scaled, rich and chocolatey but a bit primary and aggressive today. A wine of impressive scale but this will need time in bottle to gain in refinement. Almost too much of a good thing, and less agreeable today than the 2009 Lindaflor bottling. **90(+?)**

(Monsieur Touton Selections, www.mtouton.com)

Navarro Correas

2009 Malbec Alegoria Gran Reserva Mendoza (\$30) Bright medium ruby. Enticing lift to the aromas and flavors of cassis, blackberry, licorice and mint. Densely packed, supple and concentrated, conveying a strong impression of extract and sappy intensity. Really spreads out to coat the palate. Finishes with substantial ripe, building tannins. This very rich, serious malbec is balanced from the start but should also age well. **90**

2008 Alegoria Structura Ultra Mendoza (\$50) (55% malbec, 40% cabernet sauvignon and 5% merlot): Ruby-red. Musky, medicinal aromas of black cherry, cassis, blackberry, violet and menthol. Lush, creamy-sweet and broad; like the Gran Reserva Malbec, this really spreads out to saturate the palate. Still a bit youthfully medicinal but very light on its feet, and not at all heavy. Finishes with suave, toothcoating tannins and terrific persistence. **91**

Also recommended: 2011 Coleccion Privada Malbec Mendoza (86). (Diageo Chateau & Estate Wines, www.diageowines.com)

Bodega NQN

2010 Sauvignon Blanc Malma Patagonia (12.6% alcohol): Very pale yellow with a green cast. Delicate aromas of lemon zest, white pepper and white flowers. Juicy and light, even a bit tart, with modest intensity to its lemon and mineral flavors. Not bad but could use more texture and length. **87**

Other wines tasted: 2011 NQN Pinot Noir Malma Patagonia, 2007 Malma Blend Universo Patagonia. (Vias Imports, www.viaswine.com)

Las Perdices

2010 Cabernet Sauvignon Reserva Mendoza (\$20) (15% alcohol): Medium red-ruby. Musky plum, currant, tobacco leaf, licorice and bitter chocolate on the nose, along with spicy oak. Sweet and plummy in the mouth, showing a hint of greenness but also good concentration and fine-grained texture. Cassis fruit is complemented by mocha and bitter chocolate. At once plush and slightly herbal, and very cabernet. **89**

2009 Reserva Don Juan Lujan De Cuyo (\$30) (70% malbec, 11% syrah, 10% bonarda and 9% merlot): Medium ruby-red. Complex aromas of plum, cedar, tobacco, pepper and flowers. At once sweet and savory in the mouth, with a medicinal quality and a hint of game to the dark fruit, tobacco and chocolate flavors. Plusher than the Reserva Cabernet but firmly tannic and classically dry, and in need of more time in bottle to harmonize its very ripe elements and slight green edge. **89(+?)**

2008 Tinamu Lujan De Cuyo (\$75) (60% malbec, 25% cabernet franc, 10% petit verdot and 5% tannat; aged for 24 months in all new oak, 70% French and 30% American): Good medium ruby-red. Black raspberry, plum and strong oak notes of chocolate and coffee on the nose. Dense, oaky plum and chocolate flavors are nicely supported by ripe tannins but the finish shows some woody dryness. Boasts impressive material but I'm not sure where this can go. **88(+?)?**

(Bottled Poetry Imports, www.bottledpoetrybrands.com)

La Riojana

2011 Santa Florentina Signature Series Torrontes La Rioja (\$14) (12% alcohol): Very pale, bright yellow. Highly perfumed, almost muscaty aromas of peach, ginger, nutmeg oil and flower blossom. Juicy and intense, conveying an impression of solid extract and a tactile mouthfeel without any glycerol weight. Citrus and spice flavors lead to a slightly bitter-edged but gripping finish. Excellent value.

89

2011 Malbec Signature Series Santa Florentina Reserva La Rioja (\$15) (13% alcohol): Moderately saturated red-ruby. Nice lift to the very primary aromas of blackberry, blueberry, menthol and dark chocolate. Juicy, spicy and vinous, with modest flesh but very good definition to the clean flavors of dark berries and spices. Finishes with smooth tannins, good length and no rough edges. **89**

Also recommended: 2011 Signature Series Santa Florentina Syrah Reserva La Rioja (86). (Evaki Imports, www.evakiimports.com)

Rutini Wines

2009 Encuentro Barrel Select Mendoza (30% each malbec and cabernet sauvignon, 20% merlot, and 10% each cabernet franc and petit verdot): Bright ruby-red. Bitter chocolate and licorice complicate cassis, tobacco and leafy herbs on the nose. At once densely packed and penetrating, with a light touch and excellent lift to the currant and tobacco leaf flavors. Really perfumes the mouth on the long, brisk aftertaste. **91**

2009 Apartado Grand Malbec Mendoza (aged for 18 months in new French oak): Good medium ruby. Dark plum, cassis, bitter chocolate, licorice and strong oak notes of coffee and chocolate on the rather exotic nose. Sweet and vinous in the mouth if a bit oaky, showing tightly wound black fruit and herb flavors. Finishes with suave tannins that coat the teeth. Tighter today than the Encuentro and showing less early sweetness. This will benefit from aging but it's carrying a good deal of oak. The back label states: "nothing but kind and delicious." **90(+?)**

2008 Cabernet Sauvignon Mendoza Good full red-ruby. Aromas of *kirsch*, tobacco leaf, truffle and licorice accented by pepper and a note of herbs. Sweet, supple and fine-grained but with a light herbaceousness to its medicinal dark berry, licorice and herb flavors. Boasts good stuffing and density, but finishes with slightly drying tannins and notes of leather and game. **88**

Los Toneles

2009 Malbec Gran Tonel 137 Mendoza (\$29) Good saturated medium ruby. Musky aromas of blackberry, tobacco, coffee and chocolatey oak. Rich, ripe and vinous, with plum and dark chocolate flavors laboring under a strong veneer of oak. A bit simple and medicinal--the flavors could use more lift and definition--but finishes with good chocolatey breadth. **87**

Also recommended: 2010 Tonel 46 Malbec Reserva Mendoza (85), 2010 Tonel 46 Cabernet Sauvignon Reserva Mendoza (85). (Austral Wines, Atlanta, GA)

Nieto Senetiner

2012 Torrontes Salta Pale, bright yellow. Delicate aromas of lemon drop, spring flowers, spice and licorice. Juicy, fresh and supple, with a light citrusy flavor. Quite dry and laid-back. Finishes minty and slightly warm, with decent length and life. **87**

2011 Bonarda Reserva Mendoza Good bright ruby-red. Slightly port-like aromas of crushed dark berries, black cherry, licorice and herbs. Rich and creamy-sweet but the flavors of dark berries, black cherry and chocolate are nicely framed by juicy acidity. Very suave, well-balanced bonarda with fine-grained horizontal tannins and very good length. Clean and highly successful for the variety. **89**

2011 Malbec Reserva Mendoza Medium red-ruby. Primary aromas of cassis, blackberry, licorice, dark chocolate and spicy oak, lifted by a minty quality. A supple, suave midweight with a restrained sweetness to its blackberry, fig and spice flavors. Nicely integrated acidity and a fine dusting of toothcoating tannins give the wine a solid underpinning. Finishes with lingering nutty and figgy nuances. I find this less green than the 2010 version. In recent vintages, this producer has reportedly cut maceration times in an attempt to capture more fruit in their wines. **88**

2010 Malbec Don Nicanor Mendoza Medium ruby-red. Bright, slightly high-toned aromas of black cherry, cassis, licorice and violet, plus a hint of fig. Supple on entry, then moderately sweet and firmly structured, showing a creaminess of texture to the dark berry and spicy oak flavors. Today the wine's tannins shorten its fruit but this has more inherent richness and depth than the 2011 Malbec Reserva. **89(+?)**

2009 Terroir Blend Mendoza Bright medium ruby. Very ripe aromas of *kirsch*, bitter chocolate, licorice and spicy oak; slightly porty but fresh. Densely packed and broad but not overly sweet, with good inner-mouth energy to the black fruit, violet and licorice flavors. Much more vibrant than the 2010 Don Nicanor Malbec, thanks to nicely integrated acidity. Finishes with fine tannins and a nutty oak nuance. This wine is showing better than the bottle I reviewed back in Issue 161, hence the new tasting note.

89

Also recommended: 2012 Emilia Nieto Senetiner Malbec Mendoza (85), 2011 Nieto Reserva Malbec Mendoza (86). (Winebow, Inc., www.winebow.com)

Bodega Noemia

2011 A Lisa Malbec Rio Negro Patagonia (\$20) Bright medium ruby. Inviting aromas of blackberry, currant, plum, coffee and mocha, with a slightly liqueur-like quality. The palate offers excellent cut and precision, with a hint of wildness to the dark berry flavors. Real Patagonia acidity here to carry the fruit. Finishes with dusty, fine-grained tannins and excellent lift. (My two samples of this producer's 2011 J Alberto Malbec Patagonia bottling were too gamey and leathery to recommend, and one of them also revealed an offputting note of adhesive tape.) **90**

2010 Malbec Rio Negro Valley Bright ruby. Knockout musky nose combines blueberry, black raspberry, violet, spices, game and leather. Suave, silky and utterly fine-grained, showing a distinctly wild character to its intense flavors of black fruits and leather. Finishes with strong, dusty, palate-saturating tannins and outstanding persistence. I'm tempted to say that this remarkably sexy wine is not for everyone owing to its slight funkiness, but extended aeration brought out purer dark fruit and violet flavors along with an extraordinarily velvety texture. Yes, there are notes of game and leather, but they're overwhelmed by pheromones that I couldn't resist. **94**

(Vias Imports, www.viaswine.com)

Bodega Norton

2010 Privada Mendoza (\$25) (40% malbec and 30% each merlot and cabernet sauvignon): Saturated ruby. At once bright and lightly roasted on the nose, showing oak-driven aromas of blackberry, bitter chocolate and licorice. A plush, sweet mouthful of dark fruits and spices. Finishes with firm-edged but harmonious building tannins and a lingering note of dark chocolate. This may ultimately merit a 90-point rating. **89(+?)**

2009 Malbec Privada Mendoza (\$20) (aged for 16 months in new French oak): Saturated bright ruby. Very ripe, high-toned aromas of dark berries, mocha and black pepper, complicated by truffle and nutty oak. Fat, lush and sweet if a bit simple; both very ripe and a bit peppery. Finishes with substantial dusty tannins and plenty of acidity. Seems a bit disjointed today. **88(+?)?**

2007 Finca Perdriel Centenario Mendoza (\$30) (40% malbec and 30% each cabernet sauvignon and merlot): Full, deep ruby.

Aromas of cassis, violet and pepper, with a strong torrefaction component of coffee and chocolate. Supple, lush and sweet, with the concentration of dark berry and mocha flavors to support the oak and tannins. Finishes broad, smooth and long. More harmonious than the 2009 Privada Malbec. **90**
(TGIC Importers, www.tgicimporters.com)

O. Fournier

2012 Chardonnay Urban Uco Valle De Uco Mendoza (\$15) Pale, bright yellow. Fresh aromas of white peach, lime and fresh herbs, with a touch of nutmeg from a small percentage of oak aging. Supple, round and moderately intense, with a saline quality contributing a note of complexity. Dry, grown-up chardonnay but I'd like to have seen a bit more fruit and flavor intensity. Kept fresh on the finish by some unabsorbed CO₂. **87**

2012 Tempranillo Urban Uco Valle De Uco Mendoza (\$15) Good medium red. Sour cherry and redcurrant aromas complicated by hints of flowers and licorice. Sweet, musky red fruit flavors are given a juicy quality and a light touch by fresh acidity. Finishes with dusty tannins and good persistence. **87**

2012 Malbec/Tempranillo Urban Uco Mendoza (\$15) (a 50/50 blend; done entirely in stainless steel): Good medium ruby-red. Musky black cherry, minerals, smoke and licorice on the nose, plus a suggestion of chocolate liqueur. Quite primary on the palate yet suave and approachable, showing good volume to its crushed blackberry flavor. Finishes with building tannins and noteworthy length. A superb value. **89**

2012 Malbec Urban Uco Valle De Uco Mendoza (\$14) Good dark red. Blackberry, plum and a note of fig on the nose. Juicy, light and pliant, with modest concentration and sweetness to its dark berry, plum and spicy, toasty oak flavors. Round and easy to drink, finishing with a soft dusting of tannins and a late note of sour cherry. **87**

2009 B Crux Red Wine Valle De Uco Mendoza (\$27) (15% alcohol; 50% malbec, 35% tempranillo and 15% touriga nacional): Bright medium ruby. High-pitched perfume of blackberry, licorice and violet. Dense, pure and concentrated, with black fruit and spice flavors nicely framed by ripe, harmonious acidity. High in alcohol but not obviously hot. Finishes with noteworthy strength, precision and grip. **91**

Also recommended: 2012 Urban Uco Sauvignon Blanc Valle de Uco (85), 2011 Urban Uco Sauvignon Blanc Valle de Uco (85), 2010 Alpha Crux Sauvignon Blanc Valle de Uco (86), 2011 Urban Uco Malbec Valle de Uco (85). Other wines tasted: 2012 B Crux Sauvignon Blanc Valle de Uco, 2011 B Crux Sauvignon Blanc Valle de Uco, 2011 Urban Uco Chardonnay Valle de Uco, 2009 Alfa Crux Malbec Mendoza. (Craft+Estate/ The Vintner Group, www.craftandestate.com)

Pascual Toso

2011 Malbec Estate Mendoza (\$13) Bright ruby-red. Inviting, varietally expressive aromas of blackberry, violet, fig, coffee and licorice. A juicy, spicy, shapely midweight in an elegant style, offering a restrained sweetness to its intense dark berry and spice flavors. Slightly dusty but not dry on the end. A very good value. **88**

2010 Malbec Reserva Mendoza (\$20) Medium ruby-red. Pure aromas and flavors of blackberry, licorice, violet, pepper and dark chocolate. Quite sweet in the mouth, but nicely leavened by harmonious balancing acidity and gentle extraction. Rather graceful, fine-grained malbec with even tannins and very good sneaky length. Showed a bit more oak as it opened in the glass. **89**

2009 Malbec Alta Reserve Mendoza (\$35) (from Barrancas Vineyard): Good red-ruby. Tight nose hints at blackberry, licorice and mocha, along with pepper and leather nuances. Ripe, smooth and complex on the palate, with a slight dried-fruit quality. Just a touch of leathery rusticity in the mouth and on the slightly dry finish. **88**

(TGIC Importers, www.tgicimporters.com)

Piatelli Vineyards

2011 Malbec Premium Mendoza (\$15) (includes 8% cabernet sauvignon): Bright ruby-red. Exotic high tones lift aromas of dark berries and espresso. Sweet and supple, with slightly medicinal dark fruit flavors enlivened by tangy acidity and an emerging peppery element. Firmly structured malbec with dusty tannins and a lingering leathery note. **88**

(Vinocopia Inc., www.vinocopia.com)

Bodega Piedra Negra/Francois Lurton

2012 Pinot Gris Lurton Valle De Uco Mendoza (\$14) (12.5% alcohol): Pale straw. Rocky aromas and flavors of lemon, mint, anise and spices; smells dry! Supple, dry, rich and suave, displaying good lift in the mouth. This subtly complex and savory wine should be versatile at the dinner table. Finishes quite dry and uncompromising but with good texture and length. **88**

2011 Malbec Reserva Mendoza (\$11) Medium red-ruby. Plum, mocha and nutty oak on the nose. The juicy palate offers good spicy, peppery lift but modest flesh and sweetness. Finishes with peppery tannins and an emerging note of nutty oak. Not bad. **87**

2009 Malbec Mendoza (\$26) (15.5% on the label): Good bright medium ruby. Supertripe, slightly liqueur-like aromas of black fruits, menthol, licorice and spicy oak. At once sweet and vinous, with harmonious ripe acidity giving life and shape to the blackberry, violet and spice flavors. Firmly structured wine with a classically dry finish. This should reward a couple years of patience. **88(+?)**

2009 Chacayes Red Wine Mendoza (\$30) (15.5% alcohol; an 85/15 blend of malbec and cabernet sauvignon): Good bright ruby-red. Deep, liqueur-like aromas of plum, cassis, mocha and smoky, nutty oak. Big, ripe, broad and sweet, with rich currant and plum flavors complemented but not overwhelmed by mocha oak tones. Finishes with horizontal tannins and a lingering note of caramel. I like the added element of finesse brought by the cabernet component. A bit sweet for a red from this producer, but I'm not complaining. **90(+?)**

(Monsieur Touton Selections, www.mtouton.com)

El Porvenir de los Andes

2011 Malbec/Cabernet/Syrah Amauta I Cafayate Salta (\$22) (a 60/30/10 blend): Bright red-ruby. Slightly reduced, musky aromas of cassis, black raspberry, dark chocolate, smoked meat and animal fur. Plush, fat and round on the palate, with lovely sweetness and a slightly gamey funkiness to the dark berry and saline flavors. Finishes with a fine dusting of tannins and a bit of unabsorbed acidity. Slightly rustic but satisfying wine with noteworthy persistence. **89**

Also recommended: 2009 Tannat Mendoza (85). (V.O.S. Selections, www.vosselections.com)

La Posta

2012 Cocina Blanco De Blancos Mendoza (\$13) (70% chardonnay and 15% each torrontes and sauvignon blanc): Bright yellow. Peach, melon and flowers on the nose, complicated by a leesy nuance. Supple in the mouth, even a bit glyceric, but with a nicely restrained sweetness to its lime skin and green apple fruit flavors. Finishes ripe but quite dry, with an enticing hint of pineapple. Made

entirely in stainless steel, but the leesy element gives this intriguing white blend unusual complexity for its price point. **88**

2011 Cocina Blend Mendoza (\$15) (60% malbec with 20% each syrah and bonarda; 13.5% alcohol; 20% new French and American oak): Good ruby-red. Blueberry, mocha and oak spices on the nose. Sweet, pliant and nicely balanced, with good juicy lift to the dark fruit flavors. Hints at a chocolately ripeness on the back half without going over the top. **88**

2011 Malbec Cocina Mendoza (\$15) Good bright ruby. Lively aromas of cassis and blueberry, complemented by a subtle hint of smoky minerality. Sweet, supple and rich, with good depth to its dark berry, chocolate and mocha flavors. The firm finish features ripe tannins and strong lingering fruit. This attractive wine conveys an impression of a bit of residual sugar. **89**

2011 Bonarda Estela Armando Vineyard Mendoza (\$18) (no new oak): Bright ruby-red. Smoky, slightly porty aromas of black raspberry and black cherry. Sweet, pliant and generous, with lovely depth of dark berry and chocolate flavors. Pretty for bonarda and not a bit rustic. A big mouthful of wine, kept lively by brisk acidity. Finishes with substantial fine-grained tannins and an impression of seamlessness. **89**

2011 Malbec Angel Paulucci Vineyard Mendoza (\$18) Good bright, full ruby. Very ripe aromas of black cherry, black raspberry and chocolate. Rich, ripe and substantial, with sweet red and dark berry and chocolate flavors nicely supported by a firm spine of dusty, horizontal tannins. Finishes broad and chocolately, with sneaky length. Subtly sweet malbec from a warm site. Superb value. **90**

2011 Malbec Pizzella Family Vineyard Mendoza (\$18) Bright full ruby. Aromas of dark fruits and bitter chocolate are complicated by smoky minerality and lifted by floral and spice notes. Fine-grained, generous and sweet; fuller-bodied than the Angel Paulucci offering but sound acidity gives it lovely life in the mouth. Finishes dense and long, with soft, even tannins and lingering notes of red and darker fruits. All of these new La Posta releases offer very good value.

90

(Vine Connections, www.vineconnections.com)

Proemio Wines

2009 Cabernet Sauvignon Reserve Mendoza (\$20) (aged for 18 months in new French oak): Medium red. Musky, slightly reduced nose offers redcurrant, leather, roast coffee and mocha oak. Nicely concentrated and pliant, with a lightly dusty quality but good lift to the flavors of smoky red fruits and tobacco. The firm finish features licorice and herb notes and smooth tannins that reach the front teeth. **88**

2009 Malbec Reserve Mendoza (\$20) Dark red. Attractive lift to the aromas of blackberry, licorice, mint and violet. A juicy, bright midweight with good precision to its fruit-driven flavors of blackberry, cassis and licorice. Higher-pitched and darker in its flavor profile than the cabernet sauvignon from the same vintage. These tannins are sweeter too, but the energetic dark berry fruit is still a bit clenched today. **88(+?)**

2010 Malbec Grande Reserve Mendoza (\$28) (15.5% alcohol): Medium red-ruby. Complex nose offers scents of plum, currant, licorice, violet, dark chocolate and spicy oak, along with nuances of game and leather. Lush, suave and sweet, with harmonious acidity giving shape and verve to the flavors of currant, plum, mocha and tobacco. This is balanced to offer early pleasure but should gain in complexity for at least four or five years. Dusty tannins saturate the palate and tongue. **90**

(Vitis Imports, Inglewood, CA)

Pulenta Estate

2012 Pinot Gris Xiv Mendoza (\$16) Good pale yellow-straw color. Subtly spicy aromas of peach, orange oil and flowers, plus a brisk grassy nuance reminiscent of sauvignon blanc. Supple, understated and dry, with good intensity to the orange zest and ginger flavors. The firm finish shows good length and lift. **88**

2012 Malbec La Flor Rose Mendoza (\$15) Pale pinkish red. Watermelon and strawberry aromas and a hint of yeasty complexity on the nose and palate. Supple, moderately concentrated and fresh; attractively dry but pliant. Finishes with good length and grip and a late note of fresh herbs. **88**

2012 Cabernet Sauvignon La Flor Mendoza (\$16) Bright medium red. Aromatic nose offers scents of redcurrant, cherry, licorice, mint, herbs and flowers. Sweet, fine-grained and light on its feet, with attractive floral lift to the red berry and spice flavors. Finishes with a fine dusting of tannins and good length and lift. I like this wine's perfume and light touch. **88**

2012 Malbec La Flor Mendoza (\$16) Bright red-ruby. Musky dark cherry, berries and mocha on the nose. Suppler and sweeter than the La Flor cabernet but without quite that wine's definition and lift. Finishes a bit medicinal and bound-up, with broad, dusty tannins. **87**

2010 Cabernet Sauvignon Alto Agrelo Mendoza (\$26) Good full, bright red. Perfumed aromas of red cherry, redcurrant, spices and flowers. Smooth, suave and juicy, with a fine grain and enticing floral lift to the flavors of red berries, licorice, mocha and herbs. Harmonious acidity and supple tannins won't get in the way of enjoying this very attractive wine right now. **90**

2010 Malbec I Mendoza (\$29) Bright medium red-ruby. Subdued but pure aromas of redcurrant, cherry, mocha and lilac. A spicy, nicely delineated midweight with juicy currant fruit accented by menthol and herbs. A rather polite style of malbec but ultimately a bit more tannic than the cabernet, finishing with oak notes of nuts and chocolate. **89**

2010 Gran Malbec X Mendoza (\$40) Medium red-ruby. Sexy oak complements aromas of currant, spices and mocha. Sweet, pliant and smooth, with good depth to the redcurrant, tobacco and floral flavors. The broad finish shows sneaky length and fine, sweet, building tannins that dust the tongue and teeth. Plenty of mellow oak throughout but supported by mid-palate material. **90**

2009 Gran Corte VII Mendoza (\$45) (37% malbec, 25% cabernet sauvignon, 23% merlot, 10% petit verdot and 5% tannat): Good medium red-ruby. Inviting, high-toned aromas and flavors of cherry, currant, dark chocolate, mocha and glossy oak, with a suggestion of dried berries. Lush, broad and sweet, with lovely sappy depth and pliancy. Full and very ripe but not heavy. Finishes with suave tannins and excellent building length. A very attractive successor to the 2008 version, and balanced from the start. **91**

Also recommended: 2012 Sauvignon Blanc VI Agrelo Mendoza (86). (Paul Hobbs Imports, www.paulhobbs.com)

Recuerdo Wines

2011 Torrontes La Rioja (\$15) Pale, bright straw. Perfumed, bracing aromas of quinine, ginger, mint, flowers and white peach struck me as slightly riesling-like. Dry and intense, with lemon and dusty stone flavors nicely framed by integrated acidity. Good texture here. **88**

2011 Malbec Mendoza (\$22) Good bright ruby-red. Aromas of blackberry, licorice pastille and bitter chocolate are complicated by a flinty note. Sweet dark berry flavors are leavened by integrated acidity. Generous, pliant, expressive wine with good inner-palate lift and a saline clinging quality. Finishes with a sound spine of acids and dusty tannins and very good length. **89**

(Blackbird Vineyards, www.blackbirdvineyards.com)

Bodega Renacer

2011 Cabernet Sauvignon Reserva Punto Final Mendoza (\$15) (blended with 10% cab franc): Good dark red. Black cherry, plum, currant and licorice on the nose, along with a whiff of meat. Concentrated, supple and juicy, offering a fine-grained texture and good depth to its dark fruit and licorice flavors. (An earlier sample was showing more of its herbal cabernet franc side.) Not hugely complex but quite stylish, finishing with smooth but gripping tannins. Very cabernet, and very good value. **89**

2011 Punto Final Malbec Mendoza Bright medium ruby. Blackberry and licorice on the nose. Boasts a subtle sweetness in the mouth but lacks the normal concentration, flesh and flavor depth of this bottling. Firmly structured but a bit dry on the end. I prefer the cabernet sauvignon version in 2011. **87**

2010 Punto Final Malbec Reserva Mendoza (\$22) Full, deep red-ruby. Aromas of blackberry, black cherry, violet, licorice pastille, coffee and smoky oak. Sweet, pliant and accessible, with musky black fruit, mocha, licorice and game flavors perked up by pepper and spices. Sweet, round, rich and fine-grained, and clearly deeper than the regular 2011 malbec bottling. This rather powerful wine finishes impressively long, with ripe tannins nicely supported by fruit. **91**

2010 Enamore Red Wine Mendoza (\$28) (this joint venture with Allegrini is a blend of 60% malbec, 30% cabernet sauvignon and 5% each bonarda and cabernet franc, made from grapes partially dried by wind on the vines): Medium ruby. Sexy, slightly high-toned aromas of blackberry, mocha, cedar, violet and bitter chocolate lifted by a peppery note; hints at dried fruits without showing any raisiny character. Sweet, silky and seamless if a bit youthfully reduced, offering lush yet utterly fresh flavors of currant, plum and chocolate nicely framed by harmonious acidity. This very rich wine finishes with plush, ripe tannins and terrific length. In a distinctly European style. Always a delicious bottling and a big success in 2010. **92**

2009 R De Renacer Mendoza (\$70) Bright ruby-red. Sappy, high-toned aromas of black raspberry, dark chocolate and licorice. More tightly wound and less giving than the 2010 reserve malbec, showing a firm underlying structure and a complicating saline element to the inky dark fruit and fig flavors. Finishes with powerful building tannins that call for at least two or three years of patience. **90(+?)**
(Winebow, Inc., www.winebow.com)

Riglos

2010 Gran Malbec Las Divas Vineyard Mendoza (\$32) Deep, bright ruby. Oaky aromas of blackberry, licorice and celery seed. Juicy black fruit and dark chocolate flavors show good sweetness but also a slightly dry, extractive character, with some oak preventing the fruit from coming alive in the mouth. Finishes with substantial palate-dusting tannins. **88**

2010 Gran Corte Las Divas Vineyard Mendoza (\$50) (a 50/50 blend of malbec and cabernet sauvignon): Good saturated ruby. Blackberry, dark chocolate, licorice and a whiff of sexy oak on the nose. Dense and sweet, with excellent intensity to the fruit-driven cassis, blackberry and bitter chocolate flavors. Finishes with firm but ripe building tannins and lingering cassis and bitter chocolate notes. **89(+?)**

Also recommended: 2010 Gran Cabernet Sauvignon Las Divas Vineyard Mendoza (85). (Paul Hobbs Imports, www.paulhobbsimports.com)

Bodega Ruca Malen

2011 Malbec Reserva Mendoza Red-ruby. Aromas of blackberry, spices, vanilla and menthol are enlivened by notes of herbs and pepper. Juicy, moderately dense and sweet, with a light touch to its straightforward flavors of medicinal dark fruits, licorice and menthol. Boasts a light touch but falls down a bit on the back end, finishing with a note of cough medicine. In need of more verve. **87**

2010 Cabernet Sauvignon Reserva Mendoza (\$20) Bright ruby-red. Aromas of blackberry, spices, licorice and pepper, plus a whiff of marzipan. Rich and tactile, but with strong acidity framing and lifting the black fruit, licorice, pepper and cedar flavors. This intensely flavored, youthfully bracing wine may well mellow in bottle. The tech sheet on this wine claims 36.59 grams per liter of dry extract, a very high quantity. **88(+?)**

2009 Malbec Kinien Mendoza (\$55) (aged for 14 months in all-new *barriques*, 90% French and 10% American): Bright, saturated medium ruby. Crushed blackberry aroma lifted by exotic oak spices; shows an almost porty ripeness on the nose. Then dense, lush and sweet but with harmonious acidity and a violet element lifting the black fruit and chocolate oak flavors. Finishes firmly tannic and bright. Built to age but will this wine absorb enough of its oak to merit an outstanding rating? **89(+?)?**

2009 Cabernet Sauvignon Kinien Mendoza (\$55) (aged for 16 months in all new French oak): Saturated bright, deep ruby. Crushed dark berries, licorice pastille and violet on the aromatic nose. Densely packed and extremely primary, with a distinctly high pitch to its flavors of violet, herbs and spices. Rather fine-grained if backward in the mid-palate, then powerful and chewy on the long, lively, firmly tannic finish. The label boasts very high dry extract of nearly 39 grams per liter, but this wine and the Kinien malbec also seem quite heavily *extracted*. Both have firm acidity. **89(+?)**

Also recommended: 2010 Petit Verdot Reserva Mendoza (86). Other wines tasted: 2011 Yauquen Bonarda Mendoza, 2011 Malbec Reserva Mendoza. (Opici Imports, www.opiciwines.com)

Bodegas Salentein

2012 Torrontes Killka Mendoza (\$15) Pretty, floral aromas of white peach, orange zest and mint. Juicy, dry and penetrating, with good texture and intensity to its mint and floral flavors. Displays a hint of oiliness but this is essentially a brisk and energetic viognier. Finishes firm but not hard, with good length. Nicely done--and an excellent value. **89**

2011 Malbec Reserva Mendoza (\$19) Good medium ruby. Musky, gamey aromas and flavors of black raspberry, licorice, chocolate and violet face powder struck me as northern Rhone-like. Sweet, lush and wild, showing a slight reduction but enlivened by good vinosity and peppery lift. Finishes with sweet, dusty tannins, good energy and lingering sweetness. **89**

2010 Numina Gran Corte Valle De Uco (\$41) (65% malbec, 14% cabernet sauvignon and 8% each merlot and petit verdot): Bright medium ruby. Lively aromas of blackberry, cassis, licorice and spicy oak. Concentrated and creamy on the palate, with noteworthy intensity and supporting spine to its black fruit flavors. Really captivating sugar/acid balance here. Finishes with suave tannins and excellent persistence. Structured to reward aging. **90**
(Palm Bay International, www.palmbay.com)

San Pedro de Yacochuya

2012 Torrontes Salta (from vines averaging 60 years of age): Pale, bright yellow. Somewhat exotic aromas of lemon ice, orange oil, fresh herbs, nutmeg and caraway seed. Rich, broad and slightly sweet, with a distinctly glyceric quality for torrontes. This atypically big version of the variety, done entirely in stainless steel, finishes a bit warm. **88**

2010 San Pedro De Yacochuya (an 85/15 blend of malbec and cabernet sauvignon, from vines averaging 50 years of age; 15.1% alcohol; this is a joint project of Arnaldo Etchart and Michel Rolland): Bright red-ruby. Blackberry, licorice and herbs on the nose, perked up by black and green pepper. Juicy and imploded, with brisk acidity keeping the dark raspberry and pepper flavors under wraps today.

Densely packed and distinctly peppery, but the wine's firm, fine tannins suggest it will age well. (A second bottle of roughly equal quality was rounder and fleshier in the mid-palate but could not quite hide its elevated alcohol.) **89(+?)**

2007 Cafayate (15.7% alcohol; 100% malbec; aged for 18 months in new French oak): Bright, saturated ruby-red. Black raspberry and nutty oak on the nose, complicated by smoky minerality and a whiff of mocha. Sweet, lush and smooth, with a distinctly wild quality to its very ripe dark berry and mocha flavors. Finishes broad and lush, with a saline element and substantial ripe tannins. (I must note that a second, less good bottle of this wine was more porty, and showed a suggestion of nutty evolution on the back end.) **91**

2011 Malbec Apreciado Cafayate Valley Salta (\$20) Bright dark red. Blackberry and licorice aromas lifted by high-toned cedar and fresh herbs. Savory, saline and concentrated, with a distinctly sappy quality to the flavors of redcurrant, darker berries, licorice and spices. A bit youthfully medicinal but sweet and pure. Ripe, integrated acidity and supple tannins give this persistent wine a solid structural underpinning. (This item is imported by The Artisan Collection; www.theartisancollection.us) **89**
(Vine Connections, www.vineconnections.com)

Septima

2011 Malbec (\$10) Musky, ripe aromas of currant, leather, chocolate and espresso. Supple and generous in the mouth, with sweet currant and tobacco flavors lifted by a note of pepper. Easygoing, varietally expressive malbec with soft tannins and good length. A very good little wine for ten bucks. **87**
(Aveniu Brands, www.aveniubrands.com)

Serrera Wines

2010 Malbec Reserva Mendoza (\$20) Red-ruby. Currant, licorice and a whiff of bonfire on the nose. Lovely vinosity to the expressive flavors of redcurrant, tobacco, mocha and truffle. Finishes with building, ripe tannins. **88**

2008 Malbec Gran Guarda Mendoza (\$48) (100% malbec): Dark red. Musky aromas of redcurrant, mocha and coffee. Sweet, supple and plush, offering rich, claret-like flavors of plum, mocha and spicy oak. Not quite the intensity for an outstanding rating but there's very good material here, and plenty of sex appeal. **89**
(Taste Vino Selections, www.taste-vino.com)

Sottano

2011 Malbec Clasico Mendoza (\$14) Medium red-ruby. Primary aromas and flavors of crushed blackberry, plum, licorice, mocha and pepper. Sweet, generous and fine-grained; in an elegant style but with plenty of varietal intensity. Perked up by insidious peppery acidity. Finishes long and scented, with suave tannins, a suggestion of wildness and excellent lift. Superb value. **89**

2011 Malbec Reserva Mendoza (\$24) (aged for 12 months in 70% French and 30% American oak, all new): Full medium ruby. Sexy aromas of black raspberry, cherry, mocha and licorice, lifted by a violet topnote. Sweet, pliant and densely packed, showing a hint of smoky reduction but also excellent vinosity. More serious than the Clasico but also more oaky today and in need of a year or two of patience. **90**
(Dangerous Wine Group, www.dangerouswinegroup.com)

Susana Balbo

2012 Torrontes Crios De Susana Balbo Mendoza (\$15) Pale, bright silver-yellow color. Highly perfumed aromas of lemon drop, white flowers, peppermint and white pepper. Supple, pliant and easygoing, with citrus, herbal and floral flavors joined by a hint of licorice. Shows a touch of heat on the finish. Offers good weight in the mouth but seems less intense than the 2011. Susana Balbo declassified a lot of fruit in the difficult 2012 harvest, making this wine mostly from Mendoza vines planted to the Salta clone of torrontes, as she finds the Mendoza clone's flavors too fleeting. **88**

2012 Chardonnay Crios De Susana Balbo Mendoza (\$15) (25% barrel-fermented): Pale, bright greenish-yellow color. Peach, brown spices and a touch of leesy complexity on the nose. Fleshly, dry and perfumed in the mouth, with peach and nutmeg flavors enlivened by a mineral firmness. Finishes brisk, dry and persistent, with a lingering note of fresh peach. An excellent chardonnay value. **89**

2012 Rose Of Malbec Crios De Susana Balbo Mendoza (\$12) (made via *saignee*): Bright, light cherry color. Spicy red berries and cherry on the nose. Light in body, juicy and nicely intense, with a touch of sweetness to its strawberry flavor. Finishes with good grip and lift. Attractive rose. **88**

2012 Chardonnay Crios De Susana Balbo Mendoza (\$15) (40% each malbec and bonarda, with 15% tannat and 5% syrah): Bright, deep ruby-blue. Aromas of blackberry and licorice. Excellent energy and grip to the flavors of dark berries and spices. A very successful blend and a standout value--to drink now or over the next few years. **89**

2012 Rose Of Malbec Crios De Susana Balbo Mendoza (\$15) Bright medium ruby. Spicy aromas of raspberry and blackberry with hints of coffee and game. Lush but also juicy and pure on the palate, with attractive balance and sweetness to its dark berry and violet flavors. This rather wild malbec's ripeness and supple texture are enlivened by very good balancing acidity. An excellent value. **89**

2011 Cabernet Sauvignon Crios De Susana Balbo Mendoza (\$15) Cassis, blueberry, violet, licorice, menthol and herbs on the pure nose. Creamy-sweet in the mouth, but nicely integrated acidity and a touch of herbs give the wine good energy and lift. Finishes firm and fresh, with fine-grained, supple tannins and plenty of structural support. A juicy, brisk, refreshing cabernet. **89**

2011 Syrah/Bonarda Crios De Susana Balbo Mendoza (\$15) Good bright, dark red. Black raspberry, game, flowers and licorice on the nose, plus an exotic hint of white fruits and a whiff of maple syrup. Smooth and rich but a bit stunted and medicinal on the palate, in a bonarda way. Finishes with a fine dusting of tannins and no shortage of acidity. **88**

2011 Cabernet Sauvignon Mendoza (\$15) Good bright, medium ruby. Cassis, licorice and menthol aromas are lifted by minerals and violet. Seamless but youthfully tight on entry, then opens up spectacularly on the back half, showing superb noble tannins, excellent peppery lift and outstanding persistence. Susana Balbo attributes both the wine's fine-grained tannins and its peppery element to fully ripe grapes in 2011. Incidentally, she noted that the white netting used to protect the cabernet vines from hail and birds has the effect of reducing sunlight on the fruit by 10%; the black netting used for malbec cuts ultraviolet light by as much as 40%, extending the growing season by up to 15 days. **92**

2011 Cabernet Sauvignon Signature Mendoza (\$25) (aged in 80% new French oak): Good saturated ruby-red. Aromas of blueberry, blackberry, violet, leather and herbs. Sappy, juicy and attractively sweet, with rather claret-like flavors of dark berries, herbs and spices. Nicely combines an Old World silkiness of texture with the ripeness of Mendoza cabernet. The long, rising finish features very smooth tannins. Classy juice, and long on personality. **92**

2011 Malbec Mendoza (\$15) Deep saturated ruby. Ripe, sweet nose offers black cherry, cassis, plum and licorice, plus hints of dried fig and chocolatey oak. Plush, velvety and ripe, with an invitingly pliant texture and captivating sweetness. Finishes with suave tannins and

excellent length and grip. This is excellent. Susana Balbo is now toasting her barrels with convection, which she says gives sweetness to the wines without an overbearing oakiness. **91**

2011 Malbec Signature Mendoza (\$25) (includes 5% cabernet sauvignon): Full, saturated red-ruby. Very pure, soil-inflected aromas and flavors of blackberry liqueur, mocha, truffle and smoky minerality, complicated by hints of milk chocolate and crushed herbs. Juicy and spicy but a bit youthfully imploded, with enticing sweetness leavened by brisk acidity. Most impressive today on the long, energetic, firmly tannic finish, which leaves behind notes of blackberry, black cherry, espresso and dark chocolate. Give this at least two or three years in the cellar before pulling the cork. **91**

2008 Nosotros Malbec Mendoza (\$150) (14.5% alcohol): Good bright red-ruby. Cassis on the nose, dominated by nutty oak; there's something a bit evolved here. Chewy, smooth and quite sweet, with raspberry, currant and graphite flavors joined by exotic oak tones. The long, palate-dusting finish features plush tannins and good juicy lift. **90**

2011 Torrontes Late Harvest Mendoza (\$30) Bright lemon-yellow. Carnal aromas and flavors of apricot pit, candied lemon peel, lichee and honey are lifted by a bracing note of grapefruit. Dense and lush in the mouth but remains just short of unctuous thanks to a lemony edge and a whiff of jasmine. I'm not yet convinced that this utterly delicious wine equals the complexity of the 2010 version, but the finish is strong and very long. **92**

(Vine Connections, www.vineconnections.com)

Bodega Tacuil

2011 Rd Malbec/Cabernet Salta (an 80/20 blend of malbec and cabernet sauvignon; fermented with wild yeast): Bright ruby-red. Highly aromatic, multifaceted nose melds cassis, licorice pastille, black olive, coffee, gunflint, tobacco and a whiff of green pepper. Concentrated and lush, showing an exhilarating balance of sweetness and bright acidity. Intense black fruit flavors are lifted by pepper on the broad, sweet, firmly tannic finish. The Davalos family's winery, established in 1831, was the first registered winery in Argentina. Just prior to selling Colome to Donald Hess, Raul Davalos took cuttings from the vineyard to plant at Tacuil, the remaining part of his property. The "new" operation has no electricity, just a generator. **90**

2011 33 De Davalos Salta (15.2% alcohol, like the RD blend; 80% malbec and 20% cabernet sauvignon): Bright medium ruby. Aromas of raw cassis, blackberry, licorice pastille and game accented by flowers and pepper. Sweet, highly concentrated, seamless and superripe but fresh too, with nicely integrated acidity and a light peppery quality giving lift to the explosive middle palate. Finishes with sweet, building tannins and superb fruity persistence. This is remarkably rich, pliant and distinctive for a wine made without oak influence. In fact, without the wood element in the way, this communicates a strong impression of soil character. **93**

2011 Vinas De Davalos Salta (\$100) (15% alcohol; an 80/20 blend of malbec and cabernet sauvignon): Bright saturated ruby. Superripe, slightly porty aromas of cassis, licorice pastille and exotic flowers. Large-scaled, pliant and lush, with hugely ripe dark berry and chocolate flavors leavened by strong acidity. This smoky, meaty wine will need time to harmonize. It's hard to believe that this was made without oak. The crop level for the Tacuil wines is reportedly around 1.5 tons per acre, and the tiny berries are rich in tannins. **91(+?)**

(Vine Connections, www.vineconnections.com)

Tamari

2011 Malbec Ar Mendoza (\$20) Full medium ruby. Musky currant, coffee, mocha and nutty oak on the nose. Sweet and supple on entry, then a bit dry on the back half, with strong oak and pepper notes currently dominating underlying fruit. Finishes with building peppery tannins. Not bad. **87**

Also recommended: 2011 Reserva Malbec Mendoza (86). Other wines tasted: 2010 Zhik Malbec Mendoza. (Terlato Wines International, www.terlatowines.com)

Bodegas Tapiz

2011 Cabernet Sauvignon Tapiz Alta Collection Mendoza (\$20) (13.9% alcohol): Bright ruby-red. Wild, musky aromas of black cherry, crushed blackberry, shoe polish, spices, chocolate and licorice pastille, with a whiff of meaty reduction: very Old World. Then fat, ripe and sweet in the mouth, with a sexy leesy complexity to the deep flavors of blackberry, mocha, chocolate, herbs and licorice. Creamy, mouthcoating wine with substantial ripe tannins and lingering notes of cassis, licorice and herbs. Legendary Pomerol winemaker Jean-Claude Berrouet, who made more than 40 vintages at Chateau Petrus, is now involved at Tapiz. An extraordinary value. **91**

2008 Malbec Black Tears Mendoza (\$60) (aged for 24 months in new French oak): Saturated bright ruby. Deep, slightly high-toned aromas and flavors of black raspberry, blueberry, camphor, fig and exotic coffee oak. Intensely flavored, spicy and deep, but with penetrating acidity giving a bracing character to the middle palate. Has a firm backbone of acids and building tannins but those two elements have not yet harmonized. This will need several years in bottle. (I should note that an earlier sample, which I rated 91 points, was more chewy and harmonious.) **90(+?)**

(Vino del Sol, www.vinodelsol.com)

Tempus Alba

2010 Malbec Mendoza Medium red-ruby. Subdued aromas of currant, plum, coffee and menthol. Supple and juicy on the palate, with a slightly grapey character but good intensity to the flavors of plum, currant and smoke. Finishes with a firm acid/tannin spine, saline and chocolate notes, and a hint of youthful aggressiveness. **88**

2008 Cabernet Sauvignon Mendoza Dark red. Aromas of redcurrant, black cherry, mocha, chocolate and smoky oak. Supple and fine-grained, with a minty greenness and modest complexity to the currant and mocha flavors. Could use a bit more precision. Finishes with a lightly green edge, smooth tannins and decent length. **87**

2009 Pleno Mendoza (a blend of 50% malbec, 30% cabernet sauvignon and 20% merlot): Bright, dark red. Aromas of redcurrant, blackberry, cedar, mint, tobacco and mocha. Fresh black raspberry flavors show slightly streaky acidity and a touch of dryness but also a tactile saline quality. Broadens out on the finish, closing with tongue-dusting tannins and notes of herbs and menthol. **88**

Also recommended: 2012 Rosado de Malbec Mendoza (85). (Wade & Clarke, New York, NY)

Terrazas de los Andes

2010 Malbec Reserva Mendoza (\$18) Good medium ruby. Crushed blackberry, licorice, violet and a hint of pepper on the nose and palate, plus a subtle dried fruit quality. Shows an almost pruney chocolatey character in the mouth, but this superripe malbec boasts a creamy, sophisticated texture and is nicely perked up by a peppery element. Finishes with fully ripe tannins and sneaky length. **89**

2009 Malbec Single Vineyard Las Compuertas Mendoza (\$60) Saturated medium ruby to the rim. Superripe aromas of *kirsch*, black

raspberry, bitter chocolate and nutty oak. Juicy, sweet and very ripe, with an almost liqueur-like quality to the superconcentrated flavors of *kirsch*, smoke, spices and minerals. This fat, seamless wine finishes with palate-coating fruit, very good lift and tannins that reach the front teeth. **91(+?)**

2008 Cheval Des Andes Vistalba Mendoza (\$80) (a 50/50 blend of cabernet sauvignon and malbec): Good full, bright ruby to the rim. Complex nose melds black raspberry, violet, mocha, chocolate, sexy oak tones and a lightly leafy herbal character. Sweet, creamy and suave in the mouth, with intense dark berry fruit complicated by game, truffle and pepper nuances. Broad tannins arrive late, allowing this very rich wine to expand on the back end, which echoes with tangy pepper. Already shows great sex appeal but this will be even better for five or six years of additional cellaring. **92(+?)**

(Moët Hennessy USA, www.mhusa.com)

The Argento Wine Company

2011 Malbec Mendoza (\$13) Medium ruby-red. Aromas of blackberry, black cherry and spicy oak accented by pepper and herbs. Juicy, leanish and moderately intense, with a restrained sweetness to the medicinal flavors of licorice, spices, herbs and pepper. The tannins are smooth but the finish comes across as a bit green. **87**

Also recommended: 2012 Pinot Grigio Mendoza (86), 2010 Reserva Malbec Mendoza (86+?). (Distinguished Vineyards & Wine Partners, www.dvwinepartners.com)

Tierra Divina

2010 Malbec Ancient Vines Mendoza (\$13) Good full ruby-red. Aromas of blackberry, cocoa powder and nutty oak show a liqueur-like ripeness as well as notes of pepper and herbs. Fat and lush in the mouth, but could use more lift to its dark fruit, licorice pastille and saline flavors. Finishes with slightly drying tannins and a lingering saline character. **87**

2010 Malbec Vale La Pena Mendoza (\$28) (from 80-year-old vines): Bright ruby-red. Blackberry, cassis and nutty, chocolatey oak on the nose. Musky dark berry, licorice and fresh herb flavors show a medicinal menthol aspect but also a juicier character and a more restrained ripeness than the Terra Rosa Ancient Vines bottling. Finishes savory and dry, with a hint of smoky minerality, firm tannins and a slightly roasted quality emerging with air. **88**

2009 Old Vine Malbec Mendoza (\$17) Bright red-ruby. Blackberry, cherry and plum liqueur on the nose, complicated by wild notes of musky chocolate, leather and earth. The freshest and most structured of this set of releases, with firm tannins dusting the tongue on the nutty aftertaste. My score was held down by a suggestion of adhesive tape on the finish. **88?**

(Tierra Divina Vineyards, www.tierradivinavineyards.com)

Tikal

2011 Patriota Mendoza (\$23) (60% malbec and 40% bonarda): Bright saturated ruby. Dark berries, plum, mocha and chocolate on the very ripe nose and palate. Sweet, lush and seamless, but with a hint of minerality and solid acidity enabling the wine to maintain balance and freshness. A mouthfilling and very successful blend, finishing broad and long, firmly tannic but not at all dry. **90**

2011 Natural Red Wine Mendoza (a 60/40 blend; just 10% new oak): Bright, full, deep ruby. Aromas of blackberry, licorice, violet, minerals and toasted marshmallow show an exotic liqueur-like quality. A penetrating, youthfully tight bomb of dark fruits, with black cherry, blackberry, cassis and boysenberry flavors framed by strong acidity. This very firmly structured wine is almost astringent today and should be cellared for at least a couple years. Serious wine for the price. **90(+?)**

2011 Malbec Amorio Mendoza (\$30) (85% malbec and 15% petit verdot): Good bright, deep ruby. High-toned aromas of black cherry, bitter chocolate, licorice pastille, sweet oak and leather. Very sweet and lush, with black cherry and dark berry flavors complemented but not overwhelmed by sexy oak. Finishes broad, thick and long, with lots of chewy, sweet, tongue-dusting tannins. **91**

2010 Jubilo Mendoza (a 60/40 blend of malbec and cabernet sauvignon): Saturated bright ruby. Black cherry and licorice on the nose, plus a hint of tea leaf. Sweet and creamy in the mouth but with harmonious acidity giving shape and definition to the concentrated black cherry, dark berry and chocolate flavors. Finishes with a firm spine of fine chocolatey tannins and fresh acidity. I'd give this a few years in bottle to express itself more fully. **92(+?)**

2008 Locura Mendoza (bottled in magnums; 85% malbec, 10% bonarda and 5% torrantes): Saturated bright medium ruby. Dark berries and black cherry on the nose, complemented by sexy oak tones of chocolate, coffee and nuts. Like liquid silk on entry, then dense, lush and powerfully built, with flavors similar to the aromas. This plush, layered wine is quite sweet but not over the top. Finishes with huge, broad, fine-grained tannins and excellent chocolatey length. The Tikal wines are made by Ernesto Catena, who also bottles wines under his own label.

92

(Vine Connections, www.vineconnections.com)

Tilia

2011 Chardonnay Mendoza Medium straw-yellow. Peach, lemon and spicy, smoky oak on the nose. Round, soft and dry, with exotic fruit and peach flavors complemented by oak notes of vanilla and spice; could use a bit more intensity and definition. Finishes broad, dry and slightly warm, but shows good texture and mouthfeel for an entry-level wine. **87**

2011 Merlot Mendoza Medium bright red-ruby. Lively aromas of dark plum, chocolate, herbs and menthol. Juicy, fresh and supple, with black cherry and dark berry flavors lifted by a light peppery note. Finishes juicy and persistent, with sweet, firm, dusty tannins and notes of licorice and pepper. This nicely made midweight merlot revealed a touch of sweetness with air.

88

2011 Bonarda Mendoza Bright, deep red-ruby. Aromas of raspberry, pepper, roasted herbs and licorice. Supple and sweet on entry, then a bit peppery in the middle; can't quite match the merlot or cabernet for flavor interest. Good honest bonarda but chunky and fairly tannic, and a bit herbal and dry on the aftertaste. **87**

2011 Cabernet Sauvignon Mendoza Good red-ruby color. Cassis, smoke and a hint of roasted herbs on the nose. Nicely concentrated and dry, and less open-knit than the merlot today. Cassis, bitter chocolate and fresh herb flavors show a restrained sweetness. Firmly built cabernet with good lively persistence and dusty tannins. This wine expanded nicely in the glass, revealing a mounting sweetness of fruit. Like the merlot, it's an excellent value.

88

2011 Malbec Mendoza Medium red-ruby. Blackberry, black cherry, licorice and a whiff of tar on the nose. Sweet, smooth dark fruit and licorice flavors are given shape by ripe acidity. Nicely creamy in the middle. The tannins lightly dust the teeth on the long finish. A real overperformer: this appealing malbec is better than a lot of chunky, overripe and/or overextracted examples of the variety at considerably higher prices. **89**

2011 Syrah/Malbec Mendoza Bright ruby-red. Complex aromas of cassis, blackberry, menthol and flint, along with subtle hints of leather and game. Supple, sweet and mellow but with nicely integrated acidity brightening the dark berry and cherry flavors. Finishes with refined tannins and good life. A superb value. **89**

Also recommended: 2011 Torrontes Salta (85). (Winebow, Inc., www.winebow.com)

Tintonegro

2010 Finca La Escuela Malbec Altamira Mendoza (\$50) Bright medium ruby. Slightly high-toned inky blueberry on the nose. Sweet and creamy in the mouth, with an intense crushed berry flavor given a firm edge by a hint of minerality but also weighed down by aggressive coffee and chocolate oak notes. Finishes with a strong milk chocolate flavor and oak-driven tannins that turn a bit gritty with air. **87**

Also recommended: 2011 Malbec Uco Valley Mendoza (86), 2011 Malbec Co-Ferment Mendoza (86). (Vineyard Brands, www.vineyardbrands.com)

Trapiche

2009 Malbec Mendoza Vina Domingo F. Sarmiento (\$50) Bright, full ruby. Vibrant aromas of cassis, blackberry, blueberry, violet and graphite. Dense, fine-grained and sweet, with an attractive light touch and a slightly high-toned quality to the flavors of dark fruits, violet, bitter chocolate and sexy oak spices. Finishes bright, brisk and very long, with serious tannic spine, plenty of sweet oak and excellent lift. **91**

2009 Malbec Vina Jorge Miralles La Consulta Mendoza (\$50) Aromas of cassis, blackberry and bitter chocolate. Large-scaled and brooding, displaying densely packed, very backward flavors of black fruits, bitter chocolate and black tea accented by fresh herbs. Plenty of texture and extract here. Finishes very long, with broad, tongue-coating tannins, a note of bitter chocolate and an element of elegance that suggests this wine will evolve gracefully. **91(+?)**

2009 Malbec Vina Suarez Lastra La Consulta Mendoza (\$50) Good bright red-ruby. Sexy coffee and chocolate scents of new oak dominate the nose. On the palate, sweet cassis, black plum and licorice flavors are lifted by an element of peppery herbs. Finishes powerfully tannic and youthfully dry, with slightly green suggestions of licorice, pepper and mint. **89(+?)?**

(The Wine Group, Livermore, CA)

Trivento

2012 Torrontes/Viognier/Chardonnay Amado Sur Mendoza (\$15) (an 80/10/10 blend): Aromas of lemon zest and flowers along with a musky gingery perfume. Understated, almost tart flavors of peach, lemon and flowers display brisk acidity as well as good texture from the chardonnay element. Lacks only the nuance for a higher score. **87**

2009 Malbec Eolo Lujan De Cuyo (\$75) (15.5% alcohol): Saturated bright ruby. Pure, dark aromas of blackberry, bitter chocolate, violet, menthol and licorice. Large-scaled and quite sweet in the mouth; a no-holds-barred fruit bomb of dark berries and bitter chocolate. Saturates the entire mouth with flavor and finishes with building tannins, a more restrained sweetness and a slight alcoholic warmth. Outstanding in its idiom. **90**

(Excelsior Wines, www.banvivintners.com)

Val de Flores

2008 Malbec Mendoza Bright full ruby. Rather exotic, high-toned aromas of cassis, black raspberry and licorice complemented by chocolatey oak. Ripe, plush and broad but not overly sweet, with mouthfilling flavors of black fruits, licorice, chocolate and spices, plus a suggestion of almost tarry oak. Big, full malbec with plenty of life. **91**

(Vine Connections, www.vineconnections.com)

Vina 1924 De Angeles

2009 Malbec Mendoza (\$22) (14.7% alcohol): Full medium ruby. Deep, superripe aromas and flavors of blackberry liqueur and *kirsch* complicated by hints of fig, smoked meat and chocolate. Plush, pliant and sweet; not the last word in complexity but creamy and ready to go. The strong finishing flavors of black cherry and licorice convey an almost porty ripeness. Finishes very long, with serious broad, dusty tannins. Michel Rolland consults here. **91**

2007 Gran Malbec Single Vineyard Lujan De Cuyo (\$40) Good full, medium ruby. Aromas of blackberry, licorice and nutty oak. Plush and open-knit if a bit less fruity and fresh than the 2009 malbec offering, offering dark berry and nutty oak flavors. More oak tannins here too, and a bit less verve than the '09 malbec is showing today. **89**

(V.O.S. Selections, www.vosselections.com)

Viniterra

2009 Malbec Single Vineyard Mendoza (\$26) (aged for 24 months in new French and American oak): Saturated medium ruby. Aromas of blackberry, violet, dark chocolate and sexy oak complicated by graphite minerality. Stuffed with sweet dark berry and oak flavors. Finishes with firm oak-powered tannins and very good lingering sweetness. Remains just this side of overbearing. **88**

Also recommended: Carmenere Select Mendoza (86). Other wines tasted: 2011 Serie Terra Malbec Mendoza*. (CW Imports, Plainview, CT)

Vinorum Winery

2011 Malbec Premium Mendoza (\$25) Medium ruby. Cassis, blackberry, licorice, chocolate and herbs on the nose, along with a whiff of bonfire. Supple, dense and sweet, with cassis and chocolate flavors complemented by an element of smoky minerality. Plenty of oak here, plus a lightly herbal nuance on the back, but the tannins remain sweet. **88**

2011 Victorio Altieri Gran Reserva Mendoza (\$48) (malbec blended with 14% cabernet sauvignon): Full medium ruby. Oaky aromas of blackberry, cassis, bitter chocolate and menthol. Sweet, lush, chewy black fruit and chocolatey oak flavors saturate the mouth. Finishes with good length and a layer of oak that's just short of bitter. Impressively tactile blend. **89(+?)?**

Other wines tasted: 2010 Premium Cabernet Sauvignon Mendoza*. (Vici Wine & Spirits, www.viciwineandspirits.com)

Bodega Vistalba

2012 Tomero Torrontes Salta (\$14) Pale straw-yellow. Very shy aromas of white peach, ginger and quinine. Dry, spicy and sharply delineated, with enticing musky perfume. On the tart side but with no shortage of intensity. Distinctly light-bodied, delicate torrontes. **88**

2011 Malbec Tomero Mendoza (\$15) Good medium red. Expressive nose offers plum, currant, mocha and tobacco, with complicating hints of sandalwood and pepper. Supple, sweet and rich, showing excellent volume and peppery verve to the plum and redcurrant flavors. Finishes with suave tannins, sneaky length and lift, and surprising complexity. Serious and sophisticated malbec for such a gentle price. **89**

2011 Corte C Mendoza (\$16) (an 80/20 blend of malbec and cabernet sauvignon): Bright medium ruby. Complex aromas of *kirsch*, blackberry, licorice and dark chocolate. Sweet and plush but with lovely inner-palate mineral lift to the dark berry and herb flavors. This tightened up in the mouth as its slightly green cabernet component, substantial dusty tannins and firm underlying structure became more apparent. May yet merit an outstanding rating, but this will need patience. These wines are very reasonably priced. **89(+?)**
(San Francisco Wine Exchange, www.sfwe.com)

Bodega Weinert

2006 Malbec Mendoza (\$25) (reportedly from vines between 70 and 110 years of age): Good dark red. Dried redcurrant, red plum and cherry on the nose, with notes of leather, geranium, licorice and old barrel. Juicy and intense, with strong acidity giving a penetrating character to the flavors of red cherry, plum, currant and leather. Finishes with smooth tannins, good cut and length, and a building dusty oak quality. Very old-style malbec. **88**

2005 Cabernet Sauvignon Mendoza (\$24) Good medium red. Varietally typical nose offers redcurrant, tobacco leaf, green pepper and fresh herbs. Juicy and brisk, demonstrating noteworthy intensity to its flavors of currant, pepper, herbs and leather. Gained in sweetness and texture as it opened in the glass without losing its tension. Finishes firmly tannic and long, with lovely spine and thrust. With its distinct element of green pepper, this wine will be far more likely to please Europhiles than fans of New World cabernet. **89**
Also recommended: 2007 Carrascal Mendoza (85), 2006 Merlot Mendoza (86). (Broadbent Selections, www.broadbent.com)

XumeK

2011 Malbec Valle De Zonda San Juan (\$17) Good bright red. Aromas of blackberry and licorice are complicated by nuances of game and violet pastille. Supple, ripe and nicely dry, with a sexy note of animal fur. Offers modest nuance and depth but an attractive pliant texture. Finishes with a fine dusting of tannins. **87**

2011 Syrah Valle De Zonda San Juan (\$17) Bright medium red. Sexy aromas of raspberry, mocha, roast coffee and game. Broad, spicy and light on its feet, with modest flesh to the flavors of raspberry, currant and spices. Good ripe acidity and fairly fine tannins nicely frame the wine's lingering sweet fruit. **88**

2010 Malbec/Syrah Reserve Valle De Zonda San Juan (\$30) (a 60/40 blend): Bright dark red. Black cherry and violet aromas along with exotic oak notes of roast coffee and mocha. Moderately sweet and fine-grained, with dark cherry, smoke and game flavors complemented by vanillin oak. Finishes with sweet, pliant tannins. Oakier than the 2009 version, and also distinctly less wild. **89**

2009 Malbec/Syrah Viuda Negra Black Widow Valle De Zonda San Juan Good bright ruby-red. Deep, expressive aromas of black fruits, tar and chocolatey oak. Densely packed and still folded in on itself, showing currant and spice flavors complicated by pepper and herbs and lifted by a note of violet. Sound acidity and substantial dusty tannins give this wine a solid structural underpinning. It will merit a higher rating if it expands with bottle aging. **88(+?)**
(Cana Selections, www.canaselections.com)

Zolo

2010 Malbec Reserve Valle De Uco Mendoza (\$20) Bright, saturated ruby-red. High-pitched, fruit-driven aromas of raspberry, blackberry, licorice, herbs and bitter chocolate. At once dense and juicy, offering enticing savory complexity to its berry and chocolatey oak flavors. Has the stuffing and sweetness to handle its oak element. Finishes with chewy, ripe, mounting tannins and very good persistence. **89**
(Vino del Sol, www.vinodelsol.com)

Familia Zuccardi

2012 Serie A Torrontes Salta Bright, pale yellow. Floral aromas of white peach, pear and orange blossom. Supple, saline and round if slightly diffuse, offering good sweetness of fruit along with a faint heaviness. Lacks the verve and *eclat* of the best examples of torrontes. A bit dry-edged on the back end. **87**

2010 Cabernet Sauvignon Q Mendoza (aged for 12 months in new French oak): Bright dark red. Perfumed aromas of cassis, blackberry, black tea and spicy oak, complicated by hints of menthol and licorice pastille. Vinous and smooth, with licorice and mint notes lifting the flavors of currant, menthol and graphite. Savory more than sweet, and suave in an Old World way. Finishes with a fine dusting of tannins and very good length. **89**

2011 Malbec Q Mendoza (aged for 12 months in new French oak): Bright, full ruby-red. Rather bound-up nose hints at blackberry, bitter chocolate and violet. Then round and broad on the palate, with dark berry, violet, oak and herb flavors showing little in the way of easy sweetness. Still a bit youthfully aggressive today, finishing with plenty of dusty tannins and lingering saline, herb and menthol notes. **88**

2011 Bonarda Emma Zuccardi Mendoza Good bright, saturated ruby-red. Blackberry, leather, mint and menthol on the nose. Nicely sweet and smooth on the palate, with supple dark berry flavors complicated by mocha and coffee. Not especially complex but shows the suave side of bonarda. Finishes with fine-grained tannins and lingering sweetness. This almost makes the Q Malbec seem dry on the back. **89**

2009 Zeta Mendoza (66% malbec, 20% cabernet sauvignon and 14% tempranillo): Bright red-ruby. Aromas of blackberry, fig and chocolatey oak are lifted by a floral topnote. Suave and restrained on the palate, with tactile, well-delineated flavors of dark berries, coffee and chocolate. Nicely restrained sweetness here. Finishes with solid tannic grip and length. **90**

2009 Malbec Aluvional La Consulta Mendoza (100% malbec, from a 1974 planting in alluvial soil; just 12.5% alcohol): Bright ruby-red. Vibrant nose offers blackberry, cassis, licorice, violet and menthol. Juicy and fresh, with a firm acid spine but also a fine-grained, generous, accessible texture. Perfumed and not at all overly sweet in the mouth. Finishes with refined tannins, sexy oak notes and impressive length and chewy depth. A very classy malbec. **91**

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