



The Judicial Palate

By **Ciro C. Poppiti III, Esquire**



The Rise of South American Wines

Note: “The Judicial Palate” is pleased to present a special guest column this month on South American wines, presented by **Ciro C. Poppiti, III**. Until I spoke to **Ciro** the other day, I would never have guessed that Honduran wine was on the market these days! We hope you enjoy this excursion into the world of fine wine.

— *Michael Sensor*

If you have never tried a Malbec from Argentina, that is about to change. Indeed, there has never been as much interest in South American wines as there is today. For a number of interrelated reasons, the price of wine, like everything else, is going up. And, because everything else is going up, the average lawyer doesn't want to pay more for a simple table bottle of Chardonnay or Merlot. The solution lies in the wines of South America, where consumers find can exceptional quality for under \$15.

Traditional appellations are experiencing more than just temporary setbacks. Given the strength of the Euro, the cost of European wines is going through the roof, and the value of the Euro is not coming down anytime soon. On the other side of the globe, Australia is mired in a prolonged drought, causing a shortage of grapes. Wineries have been allocated to only one-tenth of their normal water usage. Big-name brands have actually been forced to import juice from Europe in order to fill production. California is also facing a grape shortage. Consolidation among the top wine manufacturers has reduced competition in the price bidding for grapes; in other words, there are few competitors bidding for the farmers' grapes, thereby dropping the price. As a result, California farmers have turned their fields over to

more lucrative crops, such as almonds and pears.

Enter countries like Chile and Argentina and yes, even Honduras, onto the American wine palate. While the value of South American wines has gotten attention in a tough economy, you will be pleasantly surprised to find that Chile and Argentina export varietals which you already know and enjoy, made in a style you already know and enjoy.

Over the past three hundred years, the Spanish, Italians, and French brought winemaking and their methodologies to South America. More recently, the corporate giants have invested billions of dollars in Argentina alone, seeing its potential on the global stage. As a result, you can find an inexpensive Chardonnay, Merlot, or Cabernet Sauvignon from South America, all of which can compete with any offering from California or France.

Oscar Zelaya, proprietor of Ward's Fine Wines in Wilmington, was born in Buenos Aires and has been a first-hand witness to consumer discovery of his cultural heritage. Oscar rightly points to two grapes, Malbec and Carmenere, which underscore the staying power of South America. Malbec and Carmenere were made famous in France as two of the blending grapes for red Bordeaux wine. However, unlike France, Argentina produces wine that is solely Malbec, not a wine of Malbec blended with other grapes. Consumers, drawn to Argentina by a familiar varietal like Cabernet Sauvignon, are discovering the magic of Malbec and its delicious silkiness. Similarly, Chile has found success with Carmenere as a single-varietal wine.

Here then are some favorites that Oscar and I agree on:

- Valdivieso Sparkling Brut (\$12, Chile). Consistently excellent. Made in a classic champagne style, but much lighter and more approachable than champagne. A great way to start or end any meal.
- Mars and Venus Chardonnay (\$9, Chile). Crisp and refreshing, with just a hint of butter. Perfect for sipping on a Saturday in spring.
- Concha Y Toro Carmenere (\$11, Chile). The deep red color underscores a fruity, almost cherry-like, taste. An easy pick for vegetarians, in that it pairs nicely with all sorts of vegetables and cheeses.
- Enrique Foster “Ique” Malbec (\$12, Argentina). A genuine example of the Malbec profile: smooth as silk, yet enough body to pair with any entrée.
- Lurton Bonarda (\$9, Argentina). For the adventurous, try the grape Bonarda, which is Argentina's most-planted red varietal. Bonarda has the smoothness of a good Malbec with a bit more zest and fruitiness.

One closing reminder: With Malbec (and most red wines), decant for a good fifteen minutes before serving.

Ciro C. Poppiti, III, is a partner in his family firm of Michael A. Poppiti, P.A. He is also the director of wines and spirits with NKS Distributors, Inc., a Delaware beverage wholesaler. For purposes of disclosure, Ward's Fine Wines is a customer of NKS; moreover, NKS sells the brands Valdivieso and Enrique Foster. ☞