

# Opening the Door to Argentina: 2020 to 2024

By [Virginie Boone](#) | May 22, 2025

Regrets, I have a few. My biggest wine regret is that it's taken me this long to pay serious attention to Argentina. Many say Spain is the most exciting place for wine right now; I'd wholeheartedly add Argentina.

Why? Because everyone talks about capturing freshness in their wines. Argentina is doing it, without losing either the power or the concentration the red wines of this historic wine country are known for.

How? By going to even higher altitudes within the folds of the Andes, where conditions are as extreme as one can imagine, but the combination of cooler temperatures, intense UV light, and wild soils are leading to exciting, unexpected wines. Not just Malbec, Cabernet Sauvignon, and Cabernet Franc, its most well-known varieties, but Pinot Noir, Chardonnay, and the native red, Bonarda.

The bulk of this report focuses on Mendoza, where 76% of the grapes are grown in Argentina and the vast majority of wines are made. A good chunk of the wines were tasted in Mendoza in November of last year, with the remaining tasted in California, including at a comprehensive tasting in April set up by Wines of Argentina with a focus on newer releases.



Trivento chief winemaker German di Cesare's dog at the Eolo Vineyard in Lujan de Cuyo

The Andes themselves are a marvel, running the length of South America. It's hard to describe just how awesome they are to see and explore in person. They border Mendoza to the west and contain some of the highest mountains on earth, including Aconcagua at 22,800 feet above sea level.

With agriculture made possible by melting Andean glaciers, which created five rivers, including River Mendoza, most Mendoza vineyards sit between 1,600 and 5,400 feet elevation. The high sunlight intensity at elevation increases antioxidant compounds in the skins and a higher concentration of tannins

and color compounds, helping to extend the aging potential of the wines. But this is also important because at higher altitude, the grapes ripen more slowly due to lower average temperatures.

Volcanic activity and erosion have combined for some highly varied soils in a wide-ranging set of climates that make Mendoza such a compelling setting for growing grapes. It is one of the only places on earth to run from a Winkler I (as cold as Champagne and Burgundy) to a Winkler IV (Châteauneuf du Pape).

As the major wine region, Mendoza is further divided into five sub-regions. The best-known is the Primera Zona, which includes Maipu and Lujan de Cuyo (*cuyo* meaning “country of deserts” in a native dialect), especially the districts/Geographical Indications (GIs) of Agrelo and Las Compuertas in Lujan and Lunlunta in Maipu.

The other well-known part is Valle de Uco, a 90-minute drive from the city of Mendoza. Vineyards here are planted in what is essentially a high desert in diverse soils, including limestone, where the grapes ripen slowly and the intense sunlight ensures thick skins. In the right hands, you get wines defined by freshness and concentration.

One of Mendoza’s most exciting emerging GIs within the Valle de Uco is the Gualtallary Highlands (at 4,950 feet above sea level), a Winkler I, where stunning Pinot Noirs and Chardonnays are being grown. Other GIs to know include Tupungato, Los Chacayes, Vista Flores, San Pablo, and within San Carlos, Paraje Altamira and La Consulta.



The mountains are always in sight

North of Mendoza is remote Salta and Catamarca, while to the south, Patagonia is producing some impressive Pinot Noirs. While I was able to taste a few wines from each, they are not the main focus of this report. There are also a handful of wines here from neighboring Chile and Uruguay.

Above all, Argentina is a place drenched in wine, with a long history of wine growing, producing, consuming, and exporting that's still being written, driven as much by its past and present as its future. Within the last couple of decades Argentina has been in an innovative period, pushing the boundaries of what a high-altitude growing environment can achieve.

Ranking fifth in the world in wine production, in 2010 the Argentine government declared wine the national drink through Decree 1800. November 24 is celebrated annually as Argentine Wine Day, a substantial embrace of wine's relevance vital to the table on equal footing with food.



As mentioned, Mendoza is the heartbeat of Argentine wine. In the foothills of the Andes Mountains, it's a geologic wonderland unique for its southern latitude, high altitude, slope, and mixed alluvial and colluvial origins, where soils were carried down by both water and gravity. European immigrants from Italy and Spain arriving in the late 19th century found it the perfect place to make wine.



The important water canals, or “acequias” of Mendoza, crucial for irrigation near a vineyard in Gualtallary.

The country's long isolationist periods through much of the 20th century have turned out to be a blessing. Over 90% of the country's vineyards are ungrafted and planted and reproduced through massal selections (taking cuttings from select plants in the vineyards and planting them in a new site). Many of its pre-phyllloxeric selections have been lost in Europe; Argentina abounds in genetic diversity. The Catena Institute of Wine started by Dr. Laura Catena of Catena Zapata is doing a huge amount of work researching, propagating, and sustaining this diversity.

International interest has followed. American-based global winemaker Paul Hobbs first came to the country in 1988, at a time when Malbec was not revered. With Nicolas Catena he created Alamos, which remains the leading Argentine wine brand in the United States.

Hobbs launched Viña Cobos in 1999 to study Malbec as a noble grape. He says this period of the 1990s and 2000s marked the country's greatest period of change, the most dynamic in terms of investment, with wine becoming popular and Argentine culture fashionably sexy worldwide, Argentina emerging out of a long isolationist period.

French winemaking consultant Michel Rolland first visited in 1988, creating Clos de la Siete with six partners not long afterwards. In the Valle de Uco, reaching up to 3,600 feet elevation, he felt its pebbly, sandy, clay soils were perfect for red Bordeaux grapes in addition to Argentine Malbec.

In 1999, the pioneering Catena family partnered with Domaines de Rothschild Lafite to create Bodegas Caro, while Cheval Des Andes is a project of Pierre Lurton of Château Cheval Blanc.

The late Donald Hess brought new attention to the northern reaches of Salta's Calchaqui Valley in buying Bodega Colome in 2001, the oldest operating winery in Argentina, dating back to 1831.

Italian wine consultant Alberto Antonini works with a number of wineries. Chilean legend Aurelio Montes came to Argentina to start Kaiken, while Chile-based Concho y Toro founded Trivento, its only winery in Argentina. Spain's Raventos Codorniu came to Mendoza in 1999 to launch Septima.



One of Argentina's most famous vineyards

Argentina focused so long on red wines that it lost momentum with whites and may have put undue emphasis on Torrontés. That's changing, with 20% of total production today represented by white varieties. Torrontés remains the highest producer, followed by Sauvignon Blanc, Chardonnay, and Semillon. The potential to make more whites at a high level is huge.

Today the goal of many Argentine winemakers is to talk about place, then finesse and elegance, and to show precision from vineyard to cellar. I'd say Catena Zapata, Zuccardi, and Viña Cobos are doing this exceptionally well across the board and at a range of price points, from collector level to retail.

El Enemigo, a partnership between Alejandro Vigil and Adrianna Catena (Laura's sister), is an exciting newer brand with a particular focus on elevating Cabernet Franc and Bonarda; they are succeeding at this. The Colomé continue to tell the Salta story through excellent wines, while Corazon del Sol remains a pioneer in Rhone varieties grown in the Valle de Uco.





Concrete egg vessels at Terrazas de los Andes

2024 – A long growing season and very special harvest, 2024 is considered an excellent year despite wind problems affecting shoot growth and cluster sizes from the dry, hot, high-speed Zonda winds that blew between October and January. Zonda winds gust down the Andes Mountains from the Pacific Ocean bordering Chile to the west. Help was on the way in the form of significant late winter snowfalls in the Andes (snow cover averages were up 105%) which increased water availability for irrigation.

Summer was very hot, with a low temperature diurnal and there was good vigor. The long harvest of 90 or so days was also really hot, which Cabernet Sauvignon handled better than Malbec. Whites like Sauvignon Blanc were picked on the early side to avoid sunburn. Yields were balanced compared to 2023. Chardonnay and Cabernet Sauvignon were particularly high to exceptional quality, but overall this is considered a vintage for the record books qualitatively, with winemaker Sebastian Zuccardi saying, “Although the temperatures resembled those of a warm and dry summer, in the winter we



find an expression of a cool year: freshness with excellent natural acidity, balance, and elegance.”

2023 – A warm, very dry, and short harvest with quick a ripening window, starting 10 days before normal in many cases. Low yielding due to spring frost and hail storms. But quality is high, and this is a concentrated and ripe year overall, where winemakers did a good job managing the heat, and ripeness was balanced. Superior quality for Chardonnay, Malbec, and Cabernet Franc in particular. The wines are considered some of the most age-worthy of recent vintages, with powerful minerality and texture.

2022 – Considered another exceptional vintage with wines of optimal acidity, great concentration, ripeness of polyphenols, and balanced ripeness and alcohol levels, but it was a rollercoaster season by most accounts, with unpredictable weather patterns and less rain in the Valle de Uco, but low humidity and two big frosts. A cold summer allowed slow ripening but with rain during March and April, canopy management was crucial. Yields were higher than in 2023; Malbec and Cabernet Franc prospered and there's energy to the wines.

2021 – A great season, cooler than average and with increased rains, considered one of the best vintages in recent years, low and slow. Yields for red wines were normal, whites were down due to October frost. The coolness helped the reds achieve concentration and ripeness of the skins with moderate sugars, outstanding tannin structure, and optimal acidity.

2020 – Short and warm. In Chile, a super dry, hot, extreme year that yielded powerful wines.

2019 – A classic, stellar vintage, with cool temperatures and a slower ripening process, like 2021.