

Wine Spectator Insider

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A Members-Only, Weekly Publication

THIS week's *Wine Spectator Insider* newsletter features wines from three top wine producing regions, including Malbecs from Argentina, Champagnes and Spanish Riojas. This report leads off with James Molesworth's latest Malbec reviews from Mendoza and the Uco Valley, including a 96-point Malbec from Achával-Ferrer, which you'll find among this week's Hot Wines, on page 4.

Also in this issue, Bruce Sanderson reviews a collection of crisp, ageworthy vintage Champagnes, including a 94-point effort from Bollinger (which you'll also find among the Hot Wines) as well as the latest release of Louis Roederer's Cristal. Most of the Champagnes listed here have ample ripeness for early drinking but should last for 20 years or more. You'll also find outstanding Riojas reviewed by Thomas Matthews, including many fine values.

Argentina

LUCA

Malbec Altos de Mendoza Nico 2005
94 points | \$125 | 100 cases made | Red

Exotic, with intensely concentrated but remarkably creamy fig, raspberry, boysenberry and currant fruit, seamlessly stitched with mocha and fruitcake notes. Nice bittersweet ganache twinge and a racy graphite underpinning on the finish helps keep it all honest. Very impressive. Drink now through 2015.—*J.M.*

DOMINIO DEL PLATA

Nosotros Mendoza 2006
94 points | \$100 | 200 cases made | Red

Pulls no punches, with a torrent of crushed plum, raspberry and boysenberry fruit that pumps from start to finish, pushed by lush licorice, mulled spice, milk chocolate and mint notes. Long, pure finish is almost refreshing, despite its obvious weight. Very impressive. Malbec. Drink now through 2014.—*J.M.*

ALTA VISTA

Malbec Luján de Cuyo Alizarine 2006
93 points | \$50 | 50 cases imported | Red

Very intense, with crushed plum and currant fruit pumping over dark briar, fig sauce, dark chocolate bark and coffee notes. Rich and muscular on the finish, but with excellent underlying acidity. Let it round into form in the cellar. Best from 2009 through 2013.—*J.M.*

ALTA VISTA

Malbec Luján de Cuyo Serenade 2006
93 points | \$50 | 50 cases imported | Red

Very dark, nearly brooding, with fig paste, hoisin sauce, bitter-sweet cocoa, espresso and loam notes that are pushed by muscular, well-rounded tannins. Long, driven finish. Seriously gutsy style, but pulls it off. Best from 2009 through 2014.—*J.M.*

BODEGA CATENA ZAPATA

Malbec Mendoza Alta 2005
93 points | \$50 | 7,000 cases imported | Red

Very concentrated, with dark fig and currant paste notes, but it's also pure and driven, with intense mocha, bittersweet cocoa and melted licorice notes that stretch out the long, polished finish. Really gorgeous for its density and mouthfeel. Drink now through 2013.—*J.M.*

LUCA

Beso de Dante Mendoza 2006
93 points | \$50 | 200 cases made | Red

Very dark, with lots of fig, cocoa and ganache notes backed by coffee, black licorice and loam. Long and rich through the finish with raspberry and linzer notes echoing, but well-rounded and with enough freshness for balance. Should age nicely. Malbec, Cabernet Sauvignon, and Petit Verdot. Drink now through 2013.—*J.M.*

LUCA

Malbec Uco Valley 2007

93 points | \$35 | 1,700 cases made | Red

Really goes for the gusto and pulls it off, with dark fig sauce, melted purple licorice, mocha, fruitcake and crushed boysenberry and blueberry fruit all gliding along rich, velvety tannins. Long, mouthfilling finish. Drink now through 2012.—*J.M.*

ALTA VISTA

Malbec Uco Valley Temis 2006

92 points | \$50 | 50 cases imported | Red

Very rich, with a terrific range of blackberry, fig, blueberry and boysenberry fruit allied to a rich, creamy palate. Long and showy through the finish, with lots of mocha and spice notes, but not at all tiring too drink. Drink now through 2012.—*J.M.*

ALTOCEDRO

Malbec-Tempranillo La Consulta Desnudos 2004

92 points | \$85 | 84 cases imported | Red

Rich and concentrated, but focused, with a racy beam of raspberry ganache, blueberry, fig and plum fruit and freshly roasted coffee and vanilla bean notes. Velvety finish just sails on. Weighty but not at all tiring. Drink now through 2013.—*J.M.*

DOMINIO DEL PLATA

BenMarco Expresivo Mendoza 2006

92 points | \$35 | 700 cases made | Red

Dark and rich, with lots of fig sauce, black tea, bittersweet cocoa and plum notes running along the very toasty palate. Thickly layered on the finish, with the toasty edge taking over for now, but the vivid raspberry fruit and buried minerality is there for cellaring. Malbec, Cabernet Sauvignon, Syrah, Petit Verdot and Tannat. Best from 2009 through 2013.—*J.M.*

BODEGA CHACRA

Pinot Noir Río Negro Treinta y Dos 2007

91 points | \$120 | 620 cases made | Red

Juicy, with very inviting crush plu and cherry notes layered with sweet spice, red licorice, violet and graphite notes. Long, racy finish is elegant but has nice latent depth. Drink now through 2012.—*J.M.*

TIKAL

Júbilo Altos de Mendoza 2006

91 points | \$50 | 350 cases made | Red

Very dark, with a core of black currant and fig sauce held back for now by notes of bittersweet chocolate bark, black tea and espresso notes. Finish is focused with nice underlying purity. Cabernet Sauvignon and Malbec. Drink now through 2010.—*J.M.*

BODEGA CHACRA

Pinot Noir Río Negro Cincuenta y Cinco 2007

90 points | \$100 | 130 cases imported | Red

Very perfumy up front, with lilting rose petal, crushed cherry and sandalwood aromas that lead the way for supple, stylish cherry and red currant fruit. Puts on weight through the finish, with a nice lingering hint of plum sauce. Drink now through 2013.—*J.M.*

France Champagne

HENRI BILLIOT & FILS

Brut Champagne 2002

92 points | \$78 | NA cases made | Sparkling

Detailed and bracing, but full of vanilla pastry, coffee and citrus notes. It's refined and intensely flavored, with precision balance and a lingering butterscotch aftertaste. Best from 2009 through 2028.—*B.S.*

COMTE DE NOIRON

Brut Champagne Coeur de Cuvée 2003

92 points | \$55 | 5,000 cases made | Sparkling

Rich and powerful, this offers ginger, graphite and candied citrus notes surrounding the moderate structure. It glides to a long, clover honey aftertaste. A pleasant astringency helps shore up the finish. Drink now through 2020.—*B.S.*

PIERRE GIMONNET & FILS

Brut Champagne Paradoxe 2002

92 points | \$64 | NA cases made | Sparkling

Smooth and creamy in texture, just the right backdrop for its vanilla, butter pastry, candied citrus and peach notes. Compact right now, but shows balance and harmony, with a fresh finish. Best from 2010 through 2030.—*B.S.*

VILMART

Brut Champagne Grand Cellier d'Or 2001

92 points | \$92 | NA cases made | Sparkling

Very appealing aromas of vanilla, spices and coconut, with lemon, floral and apple flavors. It's high pitched and elegant, with a firm underlying structure and harmony. It finishes long, with an oak spice aftertaste. Best from 2010 through 2025.—*B.S.*

MAILLY

Brut Champagne 2002

91 points | \$59 | 100 cases imported | Sparkling

A dry style, elegant and intense, showing lemon, peach, pencil shavings and a hint of vanilla flavors. It's tightly wound, yet ripe and balanced, just needing time to blossom. Nice creamy vanilla aftertaste. Best from 2010 through 2030.—*B.S.*

MOËT & CHANDON

Brut Champagne Grand Vintage 2003

91 points | \$60 | NA cases made | Sparkling

Full bodied and rich, here's a concentrated bubbly sporting honey, dried apricot, baking spices and mineral notes. Though on the soft side, it firms up on the finish thanks to some light tannins. Nice length too. Drink now through 2020.—*B.S.*

PEHU-SIMONET

Brut Champagne 2002

91 points | \$102 | NA cases made | Sparkling

A pineapple and apricot scented bubbly, with citrus and mineral flavors and a vibrant structure. It's elegant and almost weightless, yet vivid and persistent. Fine length. Best from 2010 through 2032.—*B.S.*

DEUTZ

Brut Champagne 2002

90 points | \$70 | 90 cases imported | Sparkling

A firm, vibrant style, whose tightly-wound lemon, graphite and apple flavors are stingy now. It turns lean and austere on the finish, then returns with a vanilla accent. Be patient with this. Best from 2010 through 2027.—*B.S.*

RENÈ GEOFFROY

Brut Champagne Empreinte 2003

90 points | \$65 | NA cases made | Sparkling

A rich, sumptuous Champagne, with vanilla, honey, grapefruit and tropical fruit notes. It's balanced on the soft side, yet fresh, with a touch of tannins on the finish for structure. Fine length. Drink now through 2020.—*B.S.*

RENE GEOFFROY

Brut Champagne Voluptè 2002

90 points | \$84 | NA cases made | Sparkling

There are appealing whole grain toast and malt aromas and flavors accented by citrus and mineral. It's tight and firm, with a mouthwatering finish. Best from 2009 through 2024.—*B.S.*

MAILLY

Brut Champagne L'Intemporelle 2003

90 points | \$75 | 100 cases imported | Sparkling

Firm and tight, with a lemon underpinning and toast, vanilla and peach top notes. It's compact, yet balanced, with a refreshing mineral finish. Should develop well. Best from 2010 through 2025.—*B.S.*

LOUIS ROEDERER

Brut Champagne Cristal 2002

90 points | \$249 | NA cases made | Sparkling

A racy, crisp style, with apple, wheat beer and lemon notes. It tightens up, though the texture stays refined and silky. It's a bit lean, and could use some time to flesh out and gain complexity. Best from 2010 through 2028.—*B.S.*

Spain

Rioja

HEREDAD UGARTE

Rioja Martin Cendoya Reserva 2004

91 points | \$22 | 200 cases imported | Red

Rich and seamless, this red delivers black cherry, plum, leafy, mineral and licorice flavors in a thick texture over firm, well-integrated tannins. Balanced and polished, fresh and deep. Drink now through 2016.—*T.M.*

R. DE AYALA LETE & HIJOS

Rioja Viña Santurnia Crianza 2005

90 points | \$15 | 600 cases imported | Red

Fresh and firm, this red offers cherry, blackberry, tobacco and mineral notes over supportive but not obtrusive tannins. Sleek and polished, with an earthy edge that gives it depth. Drink now through 2015.—*T.M.*

BARON DE LEY

Rioja Gran Reserva 1998

90 points | \$39 | 200 cases imported | Red

Aromatic with spices and dried fruits, this silky, expressive red offers plum, raisin, coffee and orange peel flavors, with enough tannin for grip. It's fresh and balanced, with a perfumed finish. Drink now through 2012.—*T.M.*

R. LÓPEZ DE HEREDIA VIÑA TONDONIA

Rioja Bosconia Gran Reserva 1987

90 points | \$99 | 792 cases made | Red

Finely-etched flavors of dried berry, orange peel, walnut, cedar and dried herb mingle in this light yet firm red. Bright acidity keeps it lively, while the tannins remain firm. A fine example of the traditional style. Tempranillo, Garnacho, Graciano and Mazuelo. Drink now.—*T.M.*

R. LÓPEZ DE HEREDIA VIÑA TONDONIA

Rioja Viña Bosconia Reserva 2000

90 points | \$39 | 4,500 cases made | Red

Berry, spicy, leafy, vanilla and orange peel notes mingle in this lively red. It's light-bodied, yet has good grip and bright acidity. Expressive, clean and refreshing, in the traditional style. Drink now through 2010.—*T.M.*

MIGUEL ANGEL MURO BUJANDA

Rioja Amenital 2005

90 points | \$30 | 60 cases imported | Red

Black cherry, cola, tobacco and leafy flavors mingle in this solid red. Remains graceful, but has the structure to match with hearty dishes, and enough acidity to keep it refreshing. Drink now through 2015.—*T.M.*

BODEGAS Y VIÑEDOS ORTEGA EZQUERRO

Rioja Saxa Loquuntur Tres 2005

90 points | \$60 | 250 cases imported | Red

This dense red shows smoky and meaty accents to the plum, black cherry and leafy flavors. The tannins are restrained yet firm, giving way to tobacco and mineral notes on the finish. Drink now through 2014.—*T.M.*

HOT WINES

These are the most exciting discoveries from our editors' most recent tastings, published exclusively in *Wine Spectator Insider*. They are high-scoring, low-production wines from around the world that may be difficult to find, but are worth seeking out.

ACHÁVAL-FERRER

Malbec Mendoza Finca Altamira 2006

96 points | \$112 | 600 cases imported | Red

Piercing aromas of violets, iron and blueberry fruit are followed by a massively rich, yet amazingly pure, precise palate of boysenberry and blackberry flavors. Riveting finish is loaded with minerality and dark, velvety fruit. Still young, with loads in reserve. Best from 2009 through 2018. *From Argentina.—J.M.*

ACHÁVAL-FERRER

Malbec Mendoza Finca Mirador 2006

95 points | \$112 | 700 cases imported | Red

Stunning nose, with a high-toned violet note running through waves of warm blueberry, fig, boysenberry and raspberry compote. Intense palate is superracy, with superb underlying minerality driving the fruit through a long, seamless finish. Flaunts power without ever getting bombastic. A real stunner. Drink now through 2018. *From Argentina.—J.M.*

BOLLINGER

Brut Champagne 2003

94 points | \$125 | NA cases made | Sparkling

Inviting and seductive, this opulent Champagne features plenty of mineral, toast, butterscotch, citrus and vanilla pastry flavors, matched to lush texture. It's a bubbly you can relax into, like a plush pillow, yet it has surprising length. Drink now through 2020. *From France.—B.S.*

BODEGA CATENA ZAPATA

Malbec Mendoza Nicasia Vineyard 2005

94 points | \$105 | 400 cases imported | Red

Aims for power, with dark, dense layers of fig sauce, roasted plum and warm currant preserve all layered with dark Valrhona chocolate, espresso and black licorice. Long, dense finish is really well built. Best from 2009 through 2015. *From Argentina.—J.M.*

WINE SPECTATOR'S TASTERS

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Wine Spectator's tasting staff includes 15 people in four offices. They work together to review more than 15,000 wines each year, more than any other publication. Together, our seven senior tasters count more than 140 years of tasting experience.

We always taste wine blind in our offices in San Francisco, Napa, New York and Tuscany, and in the vineyard regions of Europe. This is your guarantee that our reviews are fair and objective, and that a wine's reputation or price does not influence its score. Each editor specializes in the wines of specific regions; their initials identify the taster of each wine reviewed. We score wines using the 100-point scale, explained below.

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Joined *Wine Spectator* in 1988. Tasting beat: New York, Spain

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Wine Spectator's 100-Point Scale

95-100	Classic
90-94	Outstanding
85-89	Very good
80-84	Good
75-79	Mediocre
50-74	Not recommended