

Pascual Toso Malbec Reserve 2003 Mendoza

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Paul Hobbs of California (who looks eerily like Gyles Webb of Thelema in South Africa) is responsible for this well- distributed wine, which can be found quite widely from \$11.95 a bottle in the US and from £9.49 from UK importers Stratfords (www.stratfordwine.co.uk) who have also sold it in to a number of other retailers.

Hobbs was one of the first non- Argentines to make wine in Argentina and presumably knows where all the bodies are buried, or at least how to coax wine quality out of the extraordinary Argentine landscape (unlike his fellow Americans from Kendall Jackson who have retreated from Argentina after a substantial investment in an area without ready access to water and choosing a most unfortunate brand name – shades of the [outhouse](#) question discussed in [your turn](#) recently).

He first came to my attention between 1989 and 1997 when he was making some quite superb Argentine wines for Catena although he was already well known on the California wine scene, having started out at Robert Mondavi (didn't everyone?) with Helen Turley, who left after two or three weeks. He has consulted widely in California, making wines at Peter Michael, Lynmar and many more wineries. In 1991 he started up his own California label, by 1999 he had his own California vineyards, and in 2003 had established his own winery in Sonoma (he plans another, Bodega del Desierto, in Perdriel, Argentina for 2006).

His website opens with this which I find rather charming:

As close as we come to a mission statement

I come from a family of 13: two parents, two girls and nine boys. I'm telling you in case you wonder why I put my first as well as my last name on my labels. The drive towards individual expression, which I was forced to develop at an early age, also shows up elsewhere on my labels. Reading down, we come to the varietal, and then something much rarer: the vineyard designation.

I'm one of the few winemakers making single- vineyard wines. It's a challenge. In my case, obviously, an irresistible challenge. It exemplifies everything that attracted me to winemaking in the first place. I love to take the grapes from a particular site and let them show me different possibilities in the varietal, to make a wine in which the subtleties of the individual vineyard come through - a wine, you might say, with both a first and last name.

I not only do not add other wines, I don't add yeast. Each wine is fermented with the natural range of native yeasts found in the vineyard. Since I can't fall back on blending different wines, it puts the onus squarely on myself to make each vineyard sing year after year. It's a solo performance - no hiding the baritones in the choir. I don't pile on the oak and malolactic fermentation. I don't make huge butterbombs. Instead, it's a careful balance - in which high notes sparkle but nothing is overdone and nothing is lost - that gives my wines a definite family resemblance.

It's not so different from when I was growing up. Eager as I was to make my own mark, I was secretly pleased that everyone in town would take one look at me and say, "Yep, that's a Hobbs, all right."

He has also worked for Valdivieso, Odfjell and MontGras in Chile and in 2004 began some consulting work in Hungary. In 2000 he renewed his involvement with Argentina and began work for Pascual Toso in Mendoza who are renowned for the age of their vines. All the vines that made this **Pascual Toso Malbec Reserve 2003 Mendoza** are at least 40 years old.

I tasted this alongside the **Reserve Cabernet 2003** (Barrancas where Toso have their better winery is renowned for Cabernet) and their still- youthful top of the range **Magdalena 2002**, Malbec with five per cent Cabernet, but for me the Malbec Reserve is the best buy now by far. (Like most top of the range wines, the Magdalena seems overpriced to me.) The Malbec Reserve has the richness and intensity one associates with a good Mendoza Malbec but with real lift and excitement. The area it is grown in is slightly cooler than much of Mendoza, extending the growing season so that this wine has 13.5 per cent alcohol but really impressive extract.

Since I have always been particularly intrigued by the quality of many Argentine Chardonnays, I was particularly interested to hear Hobbs on the subject recently. He reckons that the land, especially in Agrelo, is notably well suited to Chardonnay where the land is especially stony. The Argentines don't know where their particular clone of Chardonnay comes from, but they recognise its value. Is this the clone known as Mendoza elsewhere, I wonder?

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