

Obra Prima Malbec Reserva 1999 Mendoza, Familia Cassone

8 Nov 2004 by JR

It will seem to you that I have an obsession with Argentine Malbec in my choice of two of them, both from Mendoza and selling at about the same price, within so few weeks but this is very far from the case. In fact the other day I took part in a blind tasting of nearly 70 South American reds for British Airways business class and the Argentine Malbecs were distinctly disappointing, with only Catena's Alamos Malbec 2001 and a Barrel Select 2000 from Norton (who made Lo Tengo featured as wine of the week last month) meriting much enthusiasm.

The reason I am featuring another Malbec so soon after Lo Tengo is because it is a) one that I singled out as being one of the most exciting Malbecs I tasted on my visit to Argentina last year and b) its British importers H&H Bancroft have just slashed its price by half because they are de-listing the wines of this producer.

This is a great shame as Familia Cassone, I believe, is a name to look out for. This year, 1999, was the very first year (hence *obra prima*, or first piece of work) that the Cassone family made wine themselves from the produce of 30 hectares of vineyard planted by the grandfather of the current winemaker Federico Cassone. The Malbec vines are more than 90 years old and the Cabernet 15 to 20 years old. Vineyards, at 950m of altitude, are in the evocatively named Mayor Drummond district of Luján de Cuyo, acknowledged as Malbec's perfect spot.

The Cassones are a professional family with most family members either doctors or professors. (In fact Federico's father, a distinguished medical man in the city of Mendoza, is now rather miffed to be asked whether he is related to his winemaker son rather than *vice versa* - a sign of wine's new respectability). Federico worked at Pine Ridge in California before coming back to take charge of a wine operation for the family.

What I love about this wine is that with its dark chocolate flavours and velvety texture, it could not be anything other than a Mendoza Malbec, but it is very much more sophisticated than most. It has a lovely savoury finish, a convincing (but not uncomfortable) amount of sediment, was obviously the product of some sophisticated ageing in French oak, and all in all tastes like a bottle that should be selling at £15 and not £5.

www.wine-selections.com.

Elsewhere in the world, I see I was told that MHW Imports imported some into the US through the Southern Wine Group, which operates as SWG Imports and is not related to the truly huge Southern Wine & Spirits. SWG lists some Familia Cassone wines at very reasonable prices - try the regular Malbec and the Reserva (which is the same as Obra Prima). Bodegas De Mendoza in Montgomery, Alabama is also currently selling Cassone's wines in Alabama and will do shortly in Texas, South Carolina, Louisiana and Mississippi.

The German site [04/02/03 - updated 17/02/03](#)