

Masi Passo Doble 1999 Tupungato

8 Nov 2004 by JR

Sandro Boscaini of Masi describes this extraordinary debut wine as 'wine with Argentinean [sic] soul and Venetian style'. I make no apologies for nominating a third Argentine red as wine of the week so far this year - Argentina is drawing ambitious wine producers from all over the world like a magnet. (I am just about, for example, to taste the first fruits of Michel Rolland's labours in the new Vista Flores vineyards in land high in the hinterland of Mendoza co-owned between seven partners.)

This is a unique, double-fermented blend of the Valpolicella grape Corvina Veronese with Argentina's famous Malbec. In fact there is apparently a much more expensive version with the distinctly inelegant name of Corbec, but this seems great value to me. It's made from vineyards in fashionably high Tupungato (around 1000 metres of altitude) and comes complete with dinky little envelope round its neck containing a photograph of the snow-covered Andes and some background to the wine.

It was re-fermented on the lees, Venetian style, and the result is a deeply rich wine with 13.5 per cent of alcohol combining the bite of Valpolicella with the velvet of Mendoza Malbec. The nose is savoury - rich without being unappetising and the finish is drier, more sophisticated and more sprightly than most Argentine reds. Long, sweet, black cherry flavours have somehow been retained even though I'm told the wine was shipped in bulk across the Atlantic to be bottled at Masi in Verona.

This vivacious wine, with no shortage of structure, is made mainly from 40-year-old vines in La Arboleda vineyard owned by an Italian family. The wine was further concentrated by a *saignée* (some of the lighter juice was run off the skins) and then apparently spent 22 months in new Allier casks, though how they managed that for these selling prices I am not sure.

The wine, easiest to find in eastern Switzerland thanks to a particularly enthusiastic importer there, is described as an experiment. The next major vintage will be 2002, available from this autumn in the US where the importer will be Rémy Amerique (tel +1 450 646 9990).

In the UK it can be found on many a restaurant wine list and at [Philglas & Swiggot](#) for £9.50.

The following is the importer information supplied by the producer:

EUROPE

Switzerland - Bindella, Zurich (tel +41 1 2766262)
Austria - Meraner, Innsbruck (tel +43 512 586124 - 585850)
Italy - distributed direct through Masi (tel +39 45 6832511)
Britain - Berkmann Wine Cellars Ltd (tel +44 20 7609 4711)
Sweden - Philipson & Soderberg, and SAS trading (tel +46 86709670)
Czech Republic - Silenos, Brno (tel +420 602759955)
Poland - Centrum Vina (tel +48 22 7168670)
Russia - Sovagroimport (tel +7 095 1959104)
Denmark - Dansk (tel +45 89 303030)

ELSEWHERE

Japan - Japan Europe Trading, Tokyo (tel +81 3 35821490)
Singapore - Dapis (tel +65 62789002)
Venezuela - Di Masi, Caracas (tel +58 212 2377053)
Costa Rica - Holtermann & Compania, San Jose (tel +1 246 4259921)
Israel - French Israeli Quality Wine (tel +972 3 5408387)

They add that the 2000 vintage will be available from:

Greece - Amphion, Athens (tel +30 21 239363 245909)

Germany - Winland Ariane Abayan, Hamburg (tel +49 40 48003520)

Canada - Maxxium Canada, Toronto (tel +1 416 5357899), Vancouver (tel +1 604 2513366), Quebec (tel +1 514 9082472)

Norway - Sternberg & Blom