Melipal Malbec 2005 Luj□n de Cuyo and Argento Chardonnay 2006 Mendoza

12 Mar 2007 by JR

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Find the Argento

Melipal is a very new winery that so far exports only to the US and one Danish importer as far as I can see but I hope very much that we will be seeing its very sophisticated wines here in the UK before too long.

The property is situated in the hail danger zone of Agrelo, with Susana Balbo and Pedro Marchevsky's Dominio del Plata on one side and Ruca Malen on the other. It has a particularly eye-catching winery building, not quite finished, that reminds some of a ski jump. Its run by the young couple Santiago and Clarissa Santamaria. They're based in Buenos Aires where Clarissa is studying design (she designed the labels) and the wines are made by an Italian winemaker and a local agronomist.

Only three wines are made – a rather big, bold Malbec rosé, a regular Malbec and a Malbec Reserve. At the Wines of Argentina Awards we tasted, blind, the **Melipal Malbec 2005** and **Melipal Malbec Reserve 2004**, both from Agrelo fruit in Luján de Cuyo south of the town of Mendoza. I gave the Reserve 2004 a mark of 17.5 (worth a silver medal) and noted it was very sweet and voluptuous with particularly fine tannins which certainly delivers but the regular Malbec 2005 I gave 18.5 (worth a gold) and wrote: "Meaty, complex nose. Very rich and rewarding. Spreads right across the palate. Molasses and minerals with a dry finish. Not ready yet. Very long. Transparent, lively." Considering we tasted 120 wines a day, that one, written late in the afternoon, was unusually long and enthusiastic. In the event, the Reserve 2004, aged mainly in French oak, got a bronze medal and the regular 2005, aged mainly in American oak, got a silver once everyone else's marks were counted.

But believe me, this is definitely a bodega to watch. See their website for some more details. The 2005 is yet to be released but I urge you to look out for it!

Argento Chardonnay 2006 Mendoza is given away at the special price on offer at Majestic Wine Warehouses in the UK until April 30 if you buy at least two bottles of Argentine wine. I could point to hundreds of Chardonnays at twice the price that I would spurn in favour of this Argentine white from Bodegas Esmeralda, part of the Catena empire.

Argento is a stylishly packaged Argentina brand of Malbec and Chardonnay co-owned by Catena, UK importers Bibendum Wine and the Australian wine investment fund they work with. It has always been pretty good for the money and for long retailed at £4.99. UK supermarket Tesco is a longstanding stockist and apparently it was their buyer Phil Reedman MW who put pressure on Bibendum to put up the price (not something one hears of recently in supermarket/supplier negotiations) to £5.99 so that they could afford to source better quality fruit. They have therefore been able to include a much higher proportion of fruit grown at the higher altitudes of Tupungato (the label claims over 1,000 m altitude) and the result is a wonderfully subtle white wine with strong mineral elements as well some richness

underneath.

Like **J & F Lurton Chardonnay Reserva 2006 Valle de Uco**, not yet released as far I can tell, it tastes just like a top quality California Chardonnay at a fraction of the price. The Lurton wine is super-opulent whereas the Argento is rather tighter and more refined. I do find it pretty extraordinary that you can find so much sophistication at this price, presumably thanks to the efforts of winemakers Gerardo Cirrencione and Silvia Corti. The Argento had three months in French oak and has 'just' 13.2% alcohol. Drink now and over the next six months. I can't see this getting much better.

Regular price is £5.49 in Majestic and £5.99 at Tesco. It's also available, at a rather higher equivalent price, from the Norwegian monopoly.

The only downside is that both these wines are stoppered with plastic corks, though the Argento one at least (I haven't had a chance to inspect the Melipal one) is pretty malleable.

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