Malbrontes Malbec/Torront□s 2009 Mendoza

22 Feb 2010 by Jancis Robinson

From £8.99 for the Malbrontes

From €5.40, £5.49, $7.48 for the Catena Alamos

Find the Catena

For decades vignerons in Côte Rôtie have been adding a small portion of pale-skinned Viognier grapes to ferment with their northern Rhône Syrah to enhance colour, texture and flavour. For quite a few years now, Australian winemakers have been copying this recipe, pioneered in Australia by the Kirks of Clonakilla, so that Shiraz/Viognier has become a familiar Australian blend, only sometimes benefiting from the physical advantages of co-fermentation and more usually being a post-fermentation blend.

Perhaps it was only a matter of time before a similar blend would emerge from Argentina. UK importer Laurie Webster of Las Bodegas claims that **Malbrontes Malbec/Torrontés 2009 Mendoza** is the first commercially available blend of these quintessential Argentine varieties.

They were grown some distance apart. The overwhelming majority of the fruit is Malbec from the high-altitude Vista Flores vineyards in the Uco Valley while the 5% portion of Torrontés comes from the Famatina Valley in La Rioja. Torrontés shares with Viognier the fact that it is headily scented and quite full bodied, but I must say I am struggling to find many similarities between Syrah/Shiraz and Malbec, except perhaps that when grown in sunny climates they produce pretty full, luscious wines.

Mauricio Lorca (pictured here by Naked Wines, which describe him as a 'maverick rising star') made the wine, the Malbec comprising two parcels, with about 15% of the total aged in new French oak. The Torrontés was unoaked. The wine, in a screwcapped bottle that is not one of Argentina's monstrously heavy ones, and with retro label, is extremely friendly. It's young but already satisfying, with the Torrontés fragrance merely a grace note. I kept going back to the open (but re-stoppered) bottle over 10 days and found it had hardly deteriorated but offered very satisfying, well balanced, velvety fruit with just a lightly floral note.

The recommended retail price in the UK is £8.99 and it is so far stocked by the following independent retailers:
Barrica Wines (new Independent Wine Retailer of the Year)
City Beverage Company of Hoxton, London E1
Highbury Vintners of London N5
The Troubadour Café and wine store of Old Brompton Road, London SW5
Secret Cellar of Tunbridge Wells
New Forest Wines of Ringwood, Hampshire
Define Food & Wine of Cheshire
Old School Wines of Staffordshire

To be honest, I am not quite sure exactly what the Torrontés adds to the wine other than adding this vaguely floral note and distinguishing it from the hundreds of other Argentine reds labelled Mendoza Malbec, but this one certainly seems a good buy to me for drinking over the next year or two. It is even gentle enough to consider drinking without food. I wouldn't be surprised to see more blends like this emerge.

My apologies for choosing another wine that is available only in the UK. I also tasted the much more widely available and

more classic **Catena Zapata, Alamos Malbec 2008 Mendoza** recently and was extremely impressed by the value it offers. It is widely available in the US, Brazil, France, Spain and is on offer for £5.49 at Majestic in the UK until the end of April. It seems to me much more serious and complex than most wines at this price.

Find the Catena