

# Argentina's New Future In Patagonia

James Suckling, 2015

The recent eruption of a volcano in the South American region of Patagonia highlights the robust nature of this unique winemaking region in Argentina. To be sure, the volcano was hundreds of miles away from where the best



vineyards are located, but the landscape is equally barren and desolate with an outback character that few may imagine.

As one winemaker there said, "I feel like I am at the end of the world sometimes. You hear your heart beat because it is so quite here."

My wife, image editor/tasting coordinator and I luckily missed the volcanic eruption by about a week, or we may have been going to Chile by bus. In other words, it would have taken a few days to get to Santiago instead of a few hours by plane.



I tasted about 100 wines during our three-day trip to Patagonia, a small proportion of the more than 700 wines I tasted in Argentina overall, and I continue to be intrigued by the subtle intensity of Patagonia wines. It's no doubt a result of the southern geographic location of the growing region that

delivers a very cool climate for vine growing. I also appreciate the valor and dedication of the winemakers there.

I still remember walking along the desert-like vineyards of one of the most famous wineries in Patagonia, Bodega Noemía. While we looked out south over the high, arid terrain, the winemaker and owner Hans Vinding-Diers exclaimed: "From the edge of this vineyard, go 2,500 kilometers south and you reach Antarctica." Vinding-Diers came to the region in the late 1990s to

make wine after growing up and developing his winemaking skills in Bordeaux. "I could have stayed in Bordeaux. But making wine here really keeps me going."

Given that the region of Patagonia is known for its agriculture and high-desert terrains, in many ways it reminds me of parts of California's Central Coast. Thousands of acres of fruit trees, vineyards, dusty towns and stray dogs stretch for miles. The best vine-growing region is near the town of Neuquén in the municipality of Rio Negro, named after the river that allows the crystal-clear waters of the Andes to transform the dusty and arid desert into fertile agricultural land. About a dozen or so major wineries are here with many more small ones that produce wine from about 8,000 hectares of vineyards.



Malbec thrives here like in the rest of Argentina, but makes a distinctly subtle and refined style compared to the robust likes of the Mendoza – those that most wine drinkers are familiar with. But everything grows well here in Patagonia and one of the most compelling wines is a Pinot Noir from an estate called Bodega Chacra, which is owned by one of the shareholder of Italy's famous Tuscan estate of Tenuta San Guido, producers of Sassicaia.

"What more could I do in Italy?" says Piero Incisa della Rocchetta, one of the owners of Chacra. All of his vineyards are biodynamically cultivated. "This is a unique place and I am trying to make a unique wine. This is something I need to do," he continues. Indeed, the purity and energy of Incisa's pinots are

persuasive that Patagonia is a Garden of Eden for vines and making wines. But so many other wines showed wonderful potential from brisk and minerally sauvignon blancs to even an odd but delicious trousseaux.

Although many winemakers still have not come to grips with reducing grapes yields and clean winemaking methods, the possibilities seem limitless when it comes to the winemaking in Patagonia. Taste the wines of Patagonia and understand the future of Argentina.

Below are all the wines I tasted during my three-day trip including intensive verticals of Bodega Noemía and Bodega Chacra. Some of the older wines may not be available anymore for retail.

## 2014 Bodega Chacra Pinot Noir Patagonia Barda

- **Score 92** A well-structured pinot noir with a solid core of fruit, firm tannins and bright acidity. Lots of iodine, blueberry, strawberry and floral character. Better in 2016 but delicious already.

## 2014 Chacra Pinot Noir Patagonia Cincuenta y Cinco

- **Score 94** Wonderful purity to this wine with dried strawberry and iodine plus rose petal and cherry undertones. Full and ultra-silky. Bright acidity too. Whole berry fermentation with pinot noir that's biodynamically grown. Wonderful excitement and potential. Better in 2018.

## 2013 Chacra Pinot Noir Patagonia Barda

- **Score 91** Plenty of dried strawberry, fresh rose petal, and fruit. Rich with an herb undertone. Full and long. Slightly hollow center palate but outstanding. Pretty biodynamically produced pinot noir. Drink or hold

## 2013 Chacra Pinot Noir Patagonia Cincuenta y Cinco

- **Score 93** Fabulous aromas of light cloves and other spices plus dark fruits and citrus fruit. Full body, with super structure and richness yet plenty of tannin tension and bright acidity. Very vibrant. Whole berry fermentation with pinot noir that's biodynamically grown. Needs three or four years to come around, but superb.

## 2013 Chacra Pinot Noir Patagonia Treinta y Dos

- **Score 94** Complex aromas of rose blossom, cherry blossom, and more flowers. Bright strawberry and cherry fruit too. Full-bodied, very structured and powerful with layers of ripe fruit, yet balanced and fresh. Firm and formed with muscle. Made from 83-year-old vines that are biodynamically grown. Aged two years in 30% new oak. Try in 2019

## 2012 Bodega Chacra Pinot Noir Patagonia Barda

- **Score 92** A purity of ripe fruit with dried strawberry and fresh leather. Medium to full body, fine yet chewy tannins and a long finish. A rose petal and citrus undertone. Goes on for a long time. Gorgeous pinot from biodynamically grown grapes.

## 2012 Chacra Pinot Noir Patagonia Cincuenta y Cinco

- **Score 93** An opulent and rich pinot noir with spice, berry and dried strawberry. Full and powerful. Lots of fruity, flavorful character. Very Burgundian. Whole berry fermentation with pinot noir that's biodynamically grown. Drink now.

## 2012 Chacra Pinot Noir Patagonia Treinta y Dos

- **Score 97** A superb pinot noir with strawberry, iodine, stone, and even blueberry. Medium to full body, ultra-fine tannins and bright acidity. Starts slowly on the palate and then builds. Superb finish. Made from biodynamically grown grapes. About 30% new wood aging for two years. Old vine splendor. Better in 2017. But great.

## **2010 Chacra Pinot Noir Patagonia Barda**

- **Score 91** A soft and silky pinot noir with berry, strawberry and light cedar character. Medium body, fine tannins and crisp finish. Iodine and stone undertones at the end of the palate. Drink now. From biodynamically grown grapes.

## **2010 Chacra Pinot Noir Patagonia Cincuenta y Cinco**

- **Score 91** Aromas of earth, spice, stems and dried cherries. Full body, chewy tannins still, and a long and powerful finish. Whole berry fermentation with pinot noir that's biodynamically grown. Drink now

## **2010 Chacra Pinot Noir Patagonia Treinta y Dos**

- **Score 93** A sexy pinot with smoky, dark berry, mushroom and dried strawberry character. Full body, velvety tannins and a long and delicious finish. From biodynamically grown grapes. Drink now.