

Uncorked: Argentine vintners make wine a family affair

There are plenty of winemaking couples, but not that many in Argentina, and none as high profile as Susana Balbo and Pedro Marchevsky.

Balbo is Argentina's most famous female winemaker, and Marchevsky is arguably the country's most knowledgeable viticulturist. They produce three labels at their Dominio del Plata winery in the region of Mendoza. The Susana Balbo reserve wines are the top of the line, while the Crios ("offspring") de Susana Balbo are everyday wines. In both cases, she uses the latest winemaking techniques and a skilled hand with French oak to produce wines that show the best of Argentinean grapes, notably Malbec but also Cabernet Sauvignon and even a blend of Syrah and Bonarda, a grape native to Italy (though Argentine Bonarda may actually be Charbono).

Balbo also works with Torrontes, the white grape that has become Argentina's answer to Sauvignon Blanc. Her Crios Torrontes comes from a 5,775-foot elevation vineyard in Cafayate, in the northern province of Salta. Marchevsky's BenMarco label, a tribute to his father Marcos, highlights Mendoza's potential for red wines.

The two met 14 years ago and have been developing their family business ever since. Marchevsky, 60, got his start in 1972 teaching soil and irrigation studies, later working for influential vintner Nicolas Catena on the way to becoming one of the country's most sought-after vine experts.

After getting her enology degree in 1981, Balbo, now 51, worked for several wineries before designing Catena's new facility in 1998, which helped launch an international consulting career. Now they have their own facility in the city of Agrelo.

UC Davis and her daughter Ana, 21, is studying business administration. (Marchevsky also has a son, Emilio, 32.) Given the "Brady Bunch"-like arrangement, it's a safe bet that the winery will remain a family affair.

They are frequent Bay Area visitors thanks to their importers, Ed Lehrman and Nick Ramkowsky, who run Vine Connections in Sausalito. We caught up with Susana Balbo and Pedro Marchevsky during a recent visit.

Q: You specialize in a grape variety that's still something of a mystery here. How can you make Americans drink more Malbec?

Pedro: I think first it's important to understand Malbec is very special. It's the best varietal to show what Argentina is as a country. We're very high - 3,000 feet elevation - (and) it's very dry. The variety can show a very beautiful concentration of fruit. Because we have a very, very long hang time, we can get very ripe tannins. You get a very broad, ripe mouthfeel.

Susana: When I was reading about the most favorite wines for Americans, and what happened with the flavor profile and the tannins, I realized Malbec was one of the most approachable varieties out there. As soon as people realize they have another option, they have only to fall in love with Malbec.

Q: So would that solve the Merlot/Pinot battle?

Susana: Yes, maybe we should make a movie.

Q: I was surprised how much oak I tasted during my last Malbec tasting.

Pedro: I am a viticulturist. And it's really a pity when you put in the bottle more French oak than grapes from Argentina. You should use the oak to show the capacity of the wine, but not to hide the beautiful fruit. It's something to give the wine complexity and durability for the future.

Q: What attracted you to Torrontes?

Susana: Torrontes, as you know, is the most widely planted white grape in Argentina. It's a cross of two varietals, one from Italy and one from Spain (Muscat of Alexandria and Criolla Chica, known in California as the Mission grape). You are able to make wines with great flavor concentration. Our Torrontes ... has some of the most elegant lines. But if it gets to be too strong in flavor, it gets to be a bit much.

Pedro: It was a challenge to make a really fine wine from this variety.

Q: So what wines are you buying?

Susana: We spend lots of money on wine ... We like to know what people are doing, what's happening. We buy wines \$50 and above in price. I like some Bordeaux - the most expensive, unfortunately. In Spain we love Priorat and Ribera del Duero. California we like very much. We have good friends here.

Pedro: I try to taste wines from the Rhone Valley. I'd like to introduce wines from the Rhone Valley into Argentina. I like to taste wines from Spain and sometimes Italy, because we have a lot in common, with the sunshine.

Graciano is the first varietal in Spain that I like. Albarino, Carinena, Monastrell, which is the same as Mourvedre. In the south of Italy is Sagrantino, Nero d'Avola. And I think the Greek varietal Xinomavro is something we have to try, but for the future, for my son.

Q: What's your favorite food and wine pairing?

Susana: Well, I like everything. This is my problem. This is why we're always gaining weight. Argentina doesn't have too much natural cuisine. Our cuisine has the influence of Spain and Italy. Our meat is wonderful so we usually make dishes influenced with meat. ... And what am I drinking with this? Usually I like our Cabernet.

Or the Torrontes is wonderful with spicy food.

Q: How did you get interested in wine?

Susana: It was serendipity. I was in the right moment in the right place. I was the youngest daughter in an Italian-rooted family. My only chance was to study ... engineering. I wanted to make an engineering-based career. The key moment was when I started to study biology, and I liked it very much. Wine is in evolution all the time; it's alive. I compare making a great wine to raising a child. You need to take care and be soft and loving with them to achieve the best results.

Q: How did you meet?

Susana: Through a friend of ours. I met him 14 years ago for my birthday. I was divorced. Pedro was divorced. My friend asked what he was going to do next Saturday. I said, "I don't have any plans." We became good friends and we fell in love and we've never been separate.

Q: Who tastes wine better?

Susana: I think women. It's proven by science. Women can taste 2,000 different flavors. Men can taste about 1,000. After training, men can taste 2,000 like us, but we have the skills.

Pedro: Not every person has the threshold to taste the same things. When I taste something, I need to have Susana taste for bitterness, because she has more sensitivity to it.

Susana: I can taste TCA (cork taint) at a very low concentration, or brettanomyces or microbiological defects.

Q: What's the best wine you ever had?

Susana: Myself, I was able to taste the '89 Chateau Latour, and for me it was wonderful. The '90 Haut-Brion. And the 2000 (Penfolds) Grange was beautiful!

Pedro: And the Ornellaia. But it's really about the moment.

Susana: And Caymus Special Selection.

Pedro: Was it the '94 or the '91?

Susana: I don't even remember the vintage.

Pedro: And Cask 23 from Stag's Leap (Wine Cellars) is so nice.

Susana: Sometimes it's not the wine, it's the circumstance.

Pedro: In 2000, we had the Haut-Brion. Do you remember the restaurant in Bordeaux?

Susana: The Lion d'Or.

Pedro: You can never forget those circumstances. And the wines are so good. And of course, for your birthday, we open 20 different bottles.

Q: How did you come to create the Crios label?

Susana: It's a sad story. In December 2000, we were working with (our importers) Ed and Nick in our blending. Something very shocking with my first husband happened. (I felt that) I should take care of my children. I left those guys alone. I said, "You do what you want." He passed away 40 days later.

Pedro: At that moment, she said, "My crios come first, my children."

Susana: Ed sent me a letter and said he always knew me as a businesswoman and not as a mom. He said, "Susana, let's name the new wine Crios. You love your children like you love your wine." And it was a very nice name.

Pedro: And after that, my daughter, she developed the label.

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Typical consumption upgrade concept stocks to Wuliangye

represented by the wine is a typical plate of food consumption upgrade concept stocks, including two implications:

First, after growth of income on health increased the degree of concern, therefore, the health of 4:45 for a stable growth in demand.

Second, with the income of residents upgrade to the high-end products, the demand has increased, for example, total consumption of liquor in recent years has maintained a relatively stable level, but in the high-end brands of spirits and liquor products continued to grow, the performance of Luzhou Laojiao The growth impetus is the high-end products of the 1573 bestseller by the cellar. Industry sources, brought about by the consumer upgrade the driving force is a continuous, it will become a market adjustment of the Chinese University of funds safe haven.

Second-line weight typical of blue-chip

EMC Corporation, the investment theme of the next six months should be financing Securities Lending, the two financial innovation index futures product, can be sure, stock index futures and other institutional changes will weight indicator is the weight of the Special Unit blue chip offers great opportunities.

It can be said that weight + + underestimated blue-chip features, the weight of blue chips become the most scarce investment resources.

After early rising continuously, the current frontline heavyweights has been fully tapped, Duizhang will continue to have a short-term risks, however, some second-tier valuation significantly underestimated the weight of blue chips are still cause for concern, Wuliangye, Luzhou Laojiao represented 4:45 Plate part in the second-tier blue chip stocks are the typical examples.n

Bulletin from the third quarter of the Fund, the Fund held by the company MORE wine food stocks nearly 200 billion yuan, of its holdings obvious Shuijingfang, Guizhou Maotai shares recent innovation has high statistics show that at the end of the third quarter, QFII Awkwardness 10 in Tsingtao and Yanjing Beer accounted for two seats this year Fortis Bank, Citibank and two way QFII holdings Yanjing Beer, at the end of the third quarter, holders of Citibank Yanjing Beer 5380.5 million, or Liutongpan 11 per cent, institutional stocks in the food and consumer preference is evident.

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