

WINE OVERVIEW



SOUTH AMERICA

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Closely review the syllabus for this wine level to determine just what items require your attention in each of the region/country overview documents.

The immense diversity offered by the viticultural promise of South America is tied to the same factors of all wine regions – climate, soil, varietal selection, and history. Differences occur in the extremes of these factors that are present. Near-desert zones, elevations in excess of 8,000 feet, alluvial deposits and wind-blown loam, centuries-old vines matched with new varietal introductions, and the historic and modern influence of experts from around the world have shaped the wine production of South America.

ARGENTINA

The main wine growing regions of Argentina have been influenced by European immigrants of the 16th century and modern viticulturalists who deal with soil science and advanced plant physiology. The principal regions are Mendoza, San Juan, La Rioja, Patagonia. Lesser zones exist in the Northwest.

MENDOZA

Malbec is the variety of choice in Mendoza. Here, broken into the two important general areas of Lujan de Cuyo and the Uco Valley, Malbec flourishes in the sandy alluvial soils at elevations up to 4,700 feet. Tough and dry, Mendoza is supplied by water from the sheltering Andes Mountains. Other red varieties grown are Cabernet Sauvignon, Pinot Noir, Merlot, Syrah and some Charbono, which is misnamed as Bonarda. Whites include Chardonnay, Torrontes, and sprinklings of Viognier and Sauvignon Blanc.

SAN JUAN

San Juan is next in size and importance. Hotter and drier than Mendoza, here Syrah and Bonarda are produced. In addition, there is a long established history of fortified wine production, though little of it is exported.

LA RIOJA

La Rioja is drier still, and this has greatly limited any expansion of planted acres. A Moscatel and a local Torrontes variety are the wines of note.



Mendoza



La Rioja



San Juan

PATAGONIA

Patagonia, well to the south of Mendoza, is home to Chardonnay, Torrontes, Pinot Noir, and Malbec. A cooler climate and a longer growing season have attracted expansion recently. Much of the sparkling wine production occurs in Patagonia.

CATAMARCA, JUJUY & SALTA

The Northwest regions include Catamarca, Jujuy and Salta. Salta, which produces only about 1% of the total Argentinean output, shows great promise. Here vines are cultivated to elevations exceeding 8,200 feet and in valleys so remote that there is no electricity. Despite these obstacles and the fact that there is on average less than 3 inches of annual rainfall, Torrontes, Cabernet Sauvignon and Tannat are gaining attention worldwide. The sub-region of Cafayate has drawn attention from foreign investors and international enologists, such as Michel Rolland and Donald Hess.

BRAZIL

Though possessing a long history and large grape production, Brazil's impact on the world wine scene has been very limited. Since much of the country is closer to the equator than other wine producing South American countries, most grapes are table varieties. The Southern-most region of Serra Gaucha is planted to some European varieties, but severe government restrictions on foreign involvement and exports have hampered the Brazilian wine industry.

CHILE

Now the ninth largest producer in the world, Chile's wine history can be traced back to the mid-16th century. Of particular note is that Chile has escaped the phylloxera devastation the rest of the world has endured. Initial Spanish influence coupled with the introduction of French varieties, spawned a recent expansion beginning in the 1980's. Foreign recognition and collaboration has been very instrumental in this growth. Embracing a climate similar to California and the Mediterranean, Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc, and Carmenere are the principal grape varieties. Early production provided inexpensive jug-type wines, but recently, the potential for world-class wines has surfaced.

Wine producing regions are relatively anonymous, with sub-regions often best recognized. Among these, the Limari Valley far to the north, borders on the Atacama Desert, the driest place on earth. Here Chardonnay shows great promise.

The Casablanca Valley enjoys an extended growing season due to its cool climate and produces Chardonnay and Pinot Noir that are approaching world-class status.

The Central Valley encompasses better know sub-zones of the Maipo, Rapel, Curico and Maule Valleys. Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, and Chardonnay are the grape varieties that dominate and the Central Valley is the most productive region of the country.

Far to the south, the Itata and Bio-Bio Valleys are best suited for cultivation of grapes for jug and box wines, as the result of more rainfall, colder climate, and fewer daylight hours.



Chilean vineyards with Andes Mtns.

URUGUAY

Ranked number four in production in South America, Uruguay's history is relatively short as compared to that of Argentina and Chile. Tannat was introduced in the 1870's and is the most prolific variety and shows the greatest potential. Other wine grapes include Chardonnay, Cabernet Sauvignon, Sauvignon Blanc, and Cabernet Franc. Most production is found in the hills north of Montevideo, the country's capital. Recent efforts to increase quality and production have resulted in an effort to keep pace with Uruguay's neighbors.



Uruguay