



ACHAVAL FERRER

2012 & 2011 VINTAGES, EN PRIMEUR

We are delighted to represent, exclusively, the wines of Mendoza-based Achaval Ferrer in the United Kingdom and Hong Kong. Although a very young company, Achaval Ferrer rapidly soared to worldwide recognition, with the wines produced enjoying widespread third party plaudits from the outset.

HISTORY

Achaval Ferrer is the result of a group of Argentinian and Italian friends coming together with one aim in mind. They had set their sights on producing world class wine in Argentina; wines which would offer exceptional quality, whilst remaining faithful to their origins.

This was 1998.

It is difficult, today, to appreciate the sheer scale of this ambition. At that time few people would have considered Argentina as anything but a volume “workhorse”, but Achaval Ferrer was clear on what their point of difference would be – wines from old, low yielding vines, with restricted production – both key to Achaval Ferrer’s iconic style.

The timing could have been better. 1998 marked the threshold of economic depression in Argentina, yet the Achaval Ferrer team, un-phased by the task ahead, passionately pursued their goal, undaunted. The company’s philosophy echoes that of so many of our principals; here, the vineyard is considered fundamental. Viticulture too often takes second place with commentators who tend to focus on winemaking skills – not so at Achaval Ferrer. That said, including Italian agronomist-come-winemaker, Roberto Cipresso, in the partnership was a significant and inspired coup. In a recent, very rare visit to London, Roberto spoke of the DNA running through Achaval Ferrer’s wines – intensity, complexity and elegance. That is what has attracted everyone’s attention.

VINEYARDS

The choice of vineyards was fundamental to the ultimate success of the Achaval Ferrer dream. Located very high in Argentina’s Mendoza province, at between 730 metres and 1,100 metres above sea level, the temperature gradient is perfect. Warm, sunny days and cool nights prolong the ripening season. This, allied to poor alluvial soils and low rainfall, sets the scene for the production of concentrated, mature grapes. These, in turn, make for impressive structure and complexity in the finished wines.

Over the past few years, Achaval Ferrer has developed something of a cult status internationally, winning a plethora of richly deserved awards.

We now offer five wines in total, each with very individual personalities. They transcend what we would ordinarily expect of Argentinean wines, offering a rare balance of opulence, accessibility, freshness and elegant classicism. These are a force with which to be reckoned in any arena – truly outstanding.

ALISON BUCHANAN

October 2013

2012 VINTAGE REPORT

"The quality of the wines is showing up as being equivalent to that of 2011. This is for us a major coup: we had believed from vertical tastings that 2011 was our best year ever!"

SANTIAGO ACHAVAL

August 2013

By the end of February, it looked as though the 2012 vintage would ease its way into the Mendoza norm. In 2009, 2007 and 2006, picking started in the first week of March. This was in contrast to 2008, 2010 and, as we will see, 2011, which had all been on the cool side, with harvest starting over a week later. The 2012 start date was delayed by three days, beginning on 7th March with Tupungato Merlot, destined for Quimera.

- The team are very happy with the results: The aromatics are intense and the tannins are very fine grained. Alcohol levels were held in check with the ingenious innovation spear-headed by Santiago Achaval himself, known as *aerated fermentations.
- On the 9th, picking started at Finca Bella Vista Malbec, with similarly exciting results.
- Unusually, there was then a cold spell, with two days a week of cool, overcast weather slowing down the final stage by the equivalent of 6 to 7 ripening days.
- In brief, what had seemed to be a pretty typical harvest, such as in 2009, ended up more like 2011 – a first in Santiago's experience! Whilst he modestly asserts his experience to be relatively limited, the Mendoza *cognoscenti* believe it to have been the coolest March in 20 years.
- Harvest was eventually completed on the 17th April, officially their latest harvest date ever. The fruit, however, benefited from the prolonged ripening period in terms of intensity, combined with freshness.
- Quantities were lower for Malbec, though normal for all other varieties.

MALBEC

In the rest of the Achaval Ferrer portfolio, Malbec is either a conduit for the expression of *terroir* or proves its worth as a complementary element in a blend. Here the aspiration is specific and ambitious – the goal set at producing a standard-bearing 100% varietal, which celebrates the grape itself in a pure, unadulterated form. Malbec does particularly well in Argentina. Sun-loving, the quasi-desert conditions are ideal, allowing for a long ripening period. The grapes, from ungrafted pre-phylloxera vines, are sourced from three distinct sites, under the direction of the Achaval viticultural team. A variety of altitudes, vine age, vine density and aspect adds considerable complexity. Promiscuous, younger vines have their exuberance restrained by rigorous pruning; whilst naturally low-yielding, sedate old vines of 66 and 86 years add intensity and depth. Roberto Cipresso has given Malbec its head, allowing it to show that it is so much more than just a reliable "carthorse". Achaval Ferrer is a perennial favourite amongst the Corney & Barrow team and an outstanding ambassador, placing both Malbec and Argentina firmly on the world wine map.

MALBEC, ACHAVAL FERRER 2012

Dark and sultry, this, typically for Malbec, is rich and intensely coloured. It is from old vines, with low yields and relatively high altitudes, which account for its heady perfume, the heightened aromatics and a delightful balance of berries, cherries and savoury nuances; pepper, juniper and pink pepper, making it highly attractive. Though very young, this will hit the ground running and will make people smile. The term “crowd-pleaser” is so overused as to be almost pejorative, hinting at a lack of seriousness. This, however, as well as offering carefree pleasure, can also produce contemplative ponderings and the setting of the world to rights – lovely wine.

CORNEY & BARROW SCORE**18****(RECOMMENDED DRINKING FROM 2013 – 2020+)****£129.80/CASE OF 12 BOTTLES, IN BOND UK****£49/CASE OF 2 MAGNUMS, IN BOND UK**

2011 VINTAGE REPORT

“2011 was another excellent vintage. I especially like how the 2011 brings together both the intense and bright fruit of the 2009 and the minerality of the 2010.”

SANTIAGO ACHAVAL**August 2012**

Santiago Achaval was almost apologetic as he proclaimed yet another excellent year – but this is hardly surprising as Mendoza is fortunate in having such a regularly good climate. That said, Santiago indulges us with some vintage variance detail... and it rained when Adam Brett-Smith and I visited...our particular gift.

Three major factors determined the character of the 2011 vintage:

- Late spring frost: Mendoza saw the worst late frost since 1992. Achaval Ferrer got off lightly. Though they did suffer, only small areas were affected across various vineyards. Not one vineyard was totally wiped out, which can happen. In addition, fruit set was patchy across the board, the frosted parcels the worst hit. Yields were destined to be down from the outset.
- In addition to the frost, this was the third year of drought, with rainfall even lower than the normal (“normal” being desert-like). The vines did suffer a degree of hydric stress although melted snow from the Andes helped.
- Moderate temperatures in January and February delayed harvest. For only the third time since 2002 (other years being 2008 and 2010) harvest did not start until the second week in March. Generally it is the first week and in 2003 it was the 28th February. Conditions were in no way adverse, with clear skies. It was simply unseasonably cool. Phenolic ripeness preceded optimal sugar levels though by harvest these had also accelerated. The resulting wines show lively intensity.

The single vineyard wines (Fincas) are impressive, as always, but Malbec and Quimera have excelled in these unusual conditions. We are very happy to be able to include the Malbec 2012 in this release and look forward to offering the 2012 vintage of Quimera and the Fincas next year.

QUIMERA

Quimera, meaning “the search for perfection”, is a blend, the name of which evokes the idea behind the wine – the pursuit of a perfect wine, perhaps the unattainable, where the finished wine is so much greater than the sum of its parts. The 2011 vintage is a blend of 38% old vine Malbec from Medrano and from Luján de Cuyo, 26% Cabernet Franc from Tupungato, 23%, Merlot from Tupungato, 10% old vine Cabernet Sauvignon from Medrano and Tupungato, and 3% Petit Verdot. The three sites vary in altitude lying between 750 and 1,100 metres above sea level. Yields were a mere 18 hl/ha – a scant kilo per vine. Restricting yields is, to a great degree, responsible for the quality and certainly the intensity of the finished wine. To put this in context, First Growth clarets regularly produce over 40 hl/ha. 6,877 cases of 12 bottles were made of the Quimera 2011. The wine was fermented in small tanks before blending and undergoing malolactic fermentation and maturation in wood, 40% new, 60% one-year-old, for 14 months. Early blending can be risky but it really facilitates the integration of the constituent parcels. In 2013 the team at Thomas More Street had the great fortune of a vertical tasting of Quimera, the better to understand the journey this wine has made – presented, live via Skype, from Mendoza, by Santiago Achaval himself – fascinating and inspirational. This is a wine to watch.

QUIMERA, ACHAVAL FERRER 2011

We feel that with the passage of time, Roberto Cipresso and his team draw closer to their almost unattainable goal. 2011 is arguably the best we have tasted. Jet-plum, intense and opaque, this presents a blend of ripe red and black fruit on the nose, sweet and exotic, with peppery vitality. The palate offers a similar marriage of rather lovely fruit, a spice blend, mineral discipline and yet the frivolity of violet and rose, pretty and fresh – a complex wine indeed.

CORNEY & BARROW SCORE

17+ - 18+

(RECOMMENDED DRINKING FROM 2014 – 2025+)

£105/CASE OF 6 BOTTLES, IN BOND UK

£80/CASE OF 2 MAGNUMS, IN BOND UK

THE FINCAS

Achaval Ferrer's third concept revolves around single vineyards – *Fincas*. This project is based on a very different set of ambitions from the other two wines.

Having already ascertained that Achaval Malbec's aim is to be the very best possible ambassador for the varietal, calling on a number of different origins to add nuances and complexity, the Quimera has a different brief. Here the goal is, put simply, to achieve perfection through creating a utopian blend. The Fincas, however, are in a class apart, centred upon the wines being faithful to a specific place, translating their individual *terroir* and altitudes.

There is one element here which is unusual within the concept of *terroir*; altitudes, aspects and specific plots notwithstanding. The soils of all three Fincas are essentially the same – rather impoverished alluvial silt, stones and clay. A very clear point of difference however in this arid, desert-scape is ‘imported *terroir*’, the varied geologies in the Andes, which provide irrigation water. This water, and the variety of rocks through which it passes, play a crucial role, defined in the differences in style between all the three Fincas.

When we taste the range, individual tasters tend to favour, rather stridently, one or other wine, with no clear front-runners emerging. This is not surprising, as they are all world-class wines and although each shows individuality and personality, the buying team's scores here are very similar. Please note that the Fincas are better decanted at least one hour before serving.

FINCA MIRADOR

Mirador is a 6 ha parcel of over 70-year-old, un-grafted Malbec, situated at 700 metres above sea level in Medrano, Mendoza, the lowest in altitude of the three Fincas. The vineyard lies on the west bank of the Tunuyán river, on sand and clay over sand and stone boulders. The vines were planted in 1921, at 6,500 vines per hectare. In common with the other single vineyard wines, yields are very low, with three vines required to produce just one bottle of wine – around 14 hl/ha. 1,122 cases of 12 were produced in total, aged for 15 months in 100% new French oak.

FINCA MIRADOR, ACHAVAL FERRER 2011

Deep plum-cherry in colour, this offers rather restrained cherry fruit compote, initially on the nose, allied to violet and rose potpourri and darker, savoury undercurrents. Richly-textured, this nonetheless has beautiful focus throughout, bright fruit and flowers underpinned by minerals and hints of salted caramel – fresh and uplifting.

CORNEY & BARROW SCORE

18+

(RECOMMENDED DRINKING FROM 2014 – 2025+)

£230/CASE OF 6 BOTTLES, IN BOND UK

£175/CASE OF 2 MAGNUMS, IN BOND UK

FINCA BELLA VISTA

This is 5 ha in size, in the heart of the Malbec region, in Perdriel, on the south bank of the Mendoza river. The vineyard here is set at 980 metres above sea level, allowing the vines to enjoy cooler nights. The soil is lime-sand over deep gravels. In common with the other Fincas, each vine produces about 1/3 of a bottle per vine. 1,077 cases of 12 were produced, aged in 100% new French oak for 15 months.

FINCA BELLA VISTA, ACHAVAL FERRER 2011

Jet-shot plum, with a tight, bright, cherry rim, this offers a rather smoky, savoury nose, meaty with dried black fruit and earthy, brooding minerality. The palate reflects the aromatics presented on the nose, with dark and spicy fruit emerging mid-palate, ebullient and generous with a mocha-rich finish. A persistent, mineral seam prevails throughout, adding definition.

CORNEY & BARROW SCORE

18.5

(RECOMMENDED DRINKING FROM 2015 – 2025+)

£240/CASE OF 6 BOTTLES, IN BOND UK

£180/CASE OF 2 MAGNUMS, IN BOND UK

FINCA ALTAMIRA

This was the first vineyard to capture Roberto Cipresso's imagination. Neglected, semi-abandoned and hideously overgrown, the imagination required was indeed considerable, but how well it paid off. The 5.5 ha Altamira vineyard sits at 1,050 metres above sea level, in the La Consulta region of the Uco Valley, 50 miles south of Mendoza. The soil is lime-sand with volcanic ash over eroded rock, rich in volcanic residue, just 20 metres or so from the Tunuyán river. Un-grafted, naturally low-yielding vines of over 80 years produce intense, concentrated fruit, but 3 vines are required for just one bottle of wine. 890 cases of 12 were produced in 2011, aged for 15 months in 100% new French oak.

FINCA ALTAMIRA, ACHAVAL FERRER 2011

Intensely coloured and silk-textured, this was initially rather subdued on the nose, gradually revealing fresh, brisk, peppered red fruit complemented by wild herbs - vibrant, primary and focused. This has something of a European classicism about it, a breezy, weightless character which belies innate power. The palate is supple and opulent, old vine fruit intensity clearly adding personality, complexity and focus.

CORNEY & BARROW SCORE**18+ - 19**

(RECOMMENDED DRINKING FROM 2015 – 2025+)

£250/CASE OF 6 BOTTLES, IN BOND UK**£185/CASE OF 2 MAGNUMS, IN BOND UK**

***Aerated Fermentations**

Fundamental to the philosophy at Achaval Ferrer is their belief that lower yields drive higher quality. In addition, good canopy management makes for a tighter, more rounded tannic structure, in Santiago's view. Together, these two elements left Santiago with the question how to extract the intensity and texture of the fruit, as well as the fine quality of the tannins, during fermentation? Trials revealed that fermenting at higher temperatures made for silky structures and a better defined mid-palate. This, however, presented a further paradox. High temperatures can be problematic, with the possibility of the cap drying out. Thus, the team pump-over for 12 and 16 hours a day rather than the more usual three times daily. They also make these pump-overs more aerated. An unexpected and happy by-product of this aeration is a higher evaporation of alcohol, with lower conversion rates of sugar into alcohol.

TASTING GUIDE

Our tasting notes provide full details but, at your request, we have also introduced a clear and simple marking system. We hope these guidelines assist you in your selection.

14 - 16 A VERY GOOD TO EXCELLENT WINE**16 - 18** AN EXCELLENT TO OUTSTANDING WINE**18 - 20** AN OUTSTANDING TO LEGENDARY WINE

Wines are judged within their peer group, eg. *Villages*, *Premier Cru*, *Grand Cru*. A definitive score of a young wine is almost impossible.

We usually offer a spread (eg. 14-16) that relates to a potential to achieve a higher mark. A '+' adds further to that potential.

A score is a summary only. The devil is in the detail, so please focus on the tasting notes.

TO ORDER

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