



ACHAVAL-FERRER

2014 & 2015 VINTAGES, EN PRIMEUR

“Does Argentina have a fine wine dimension? That’s a good question. I think I’d answer ‘yes’, and largely because of the amazing wines of Achaval Ferrer, which, for me, is Argentina’s most impressive producer.”

Jamie Goode, wineanorak.com

Driving from Mendoza airport into town on a parched summer afternoon feels more than a little like the wild west. I wound my taxi window down as far as it would go. The dusty *zonda* wind that blows from the Andes did little to take the edge off the intense heat. Dense, menacing skies in the distance and alarmingly flamboyant driving in the foreground.

An open air bar in the city centre was doing a brisk trade in Quilmes beer, served by the litre in thick brown glass bottles. Unlike the elegance of Buenos Aires I had left behind, Mendoza seemed elemental, carved from the landscape.

A half hour’s drive the next morning due south took me over the Río Mendoza, all but dry in March, just before the harvest. Achaval-Ferrer’s bodega is in Perdriel, in the Lujan de Cuyo subregion. It lies at a heady 980 metres above sea level.

The sunlight here is startlingly bright, the skies clear and blue on the morning I visited. The snow-covered, 6,000 metre high Cerro del Plata mountain dominates the skyline, and is flanked on the distant Chilean border by the even higher Aconcagua and Tupungato mountains.

Acidity is all-important at Achaval-Ferrer, which in addition to having enviable high-altitude vineyards, harvests 2-3 weeks before others. The house style balances dense fruit with juicy acidity. You could not get further from the prosaic ‘blockbuster’ Malbecs found in steakhouses the world over. These wines are must-haves of the new world.

Guy Seddon

October 2016

THE VINEYARDS

A severe green harvest sees at least half of the young berries sacrificed in the name of concentration. The ultra-low yields also mean ripeness is reached more quickly. At 12 hectolitres per hectare, it takes three vines to make one bottle of the Finca wines.

Hail can be a serious problem. In 2012, it wiped out Finca Mirador and there was a less dramatic smattering in 2015. *Mendocino* hailstones can be 3 centimetres in diameter, but Achaval-Ferrer shuns hail netting as it creates shade.

Without melt waters from the Andes, vines could not have been planted in this semi-desert. The Río Mendoza, which snakes its way up into the Andean foothills, is responsible for the area's alluvial soils. It also permits flood irrigation. Whilst the traditional method is to inundate the whole vineyard, Achaval-Ferrer practises the more precise furrow irrigation, in which earth channels direct melt water as required.

THE WINEMAKING

The winery itself, built in 2006, is utilitarian alongside some of the area's futuristic structures, a refreshing triumph of function over form. 24,000 litre epoxy-lined concrete tanks were chosen over stainless steel to better conserve fermentation temperatures.

Fermentation is warm, up to 32.5 degrees Celsius. This keeps alcohol levels in check, ethanol being dispersed along with evaporating water. Extracting tannins from the fermenting grapes is done very gently. There is no lack of body here. There is no extended maceration: the grapes skins are pressed the day after fermentation finishes.

The wine is then racked into oak barrels in April for the malolactic fermentation. The oak is French, mainly from the Boutes and Mercurey cooperages. Achaval-Ferrer now uses small 160 litre *cigarro* barrels for the Finca wines, which permit greater oxygenation.

2015 VINTAGE REPORT - ESTATE MALBEC

Winemaker Silvio Alberto described 2015 as a *cosecha desafiante* – a challenging harvest. Winter 2014 was cold and dry, with some intense frosts which helped to bolster water reserves throughout the region. Spring brought warm weather, still dry, which resulted in an early flowering, around a week earlier than average. Hail damaged one vineyard destined for the estate Malbec, but being early in the season, the only effect was on the size of the crop. Harvest was in the same week as 2014, starting on 16th March. 2015 has been characterised as a very aromatic vintage in Mendoza, with excellent perfume and freshness.

2014 VINTAGE REPORT - QUIMERA AND FINCA WINES

2014 was a dry year, requiring a lot of attention in the vineyards to ensure enough water for bud-break. Late frosts made for slightly abnormal fruit set, resulting in clusters with fewer grapes. Despite this limited production, the Achaval team further thinned out the clusters. Summer was slightly hotter than recent years, especially in December and January. Temperatures dropped in February and March, the cooler nights ensuring fresh acidity. The grapes were picked by parcel, with some vineyards demanding multiple return visits. Harvest started on the 14th March and ended by the end of the month.

THE WINES

MALBEC, ACHAVAL-FERRER 2015

A fresh, red fruited, textured nose, with some dark pepper and a hint of pithy orange zest. Juicy, mouth-wateringly so, with supple red berries on the palate and a darker seam to show it means business. This is a celebration of the Malbec grape, which as we all know, does rather well in Argentina (dare I say better than in its native Cahors...?) Mendoza's quasi-desert conditions allow for a long ripening period. The grapes, from ungrafted, pre-phylloxera vines, come from three sites. Low yields being *de rigueur* at Achaval-Ferrer, the ratio here is one vine per bottle – extraordinary at this price!

CORNEY & BARROW SCORE
(RECOMMENDED DRINKING FROM 2017 - 2023+)

17

£140/CASE OF 12 BOTTLES, IN BOND UK
£50/CASE OF 2 MAGNUMS, IN BOND UK

QUIMERA, ACHAVAL-FERRER 2014

Blood orange complements the ripe red berry fruit, with citrus peel and some exotic spices making this a complex nose. The signature acidity greets the palate upfront, with a whack (in the nicest sense) of fruit weight and grippy but supple tannins on the finish. Built around Malbec, with supporting roles for Cabernets Franc and Sauvignon, Merlot and Petit Verdot, Quimera is Achaval-Ferrer's 'Bordeaux blend'. The grapes come from three different sites. Two vines make one bottle of Quimera. After fermentation in tank, the wine is blended before being transferred to oak barrel for malolactic fermentation and 12 months' ageing. The barrels are 40% new and 60% one year old. Average production is 9,000 six-bottle cases.

CORNEY & BARROW SCORE
(RECOMMENDED DRINKING FROM 2018 - 2026+)

17.5

£130/CASE OF 6 BOTTLES, IN BOND UK
£90/CASE OF 2 MAGNUMS, IN BOND UK



THE FINCA WINES

The heart of Achaval-Ferrer is the single vineyards wines, or Fincas. This is where the concept of terroir really comes into play. More than just Malbecs, these are snapshots of the land from which they come. Wines with a sense of somewhere-ness.

Along with access to water, altitude is key to making wine in Mendoza. Generally speaking, the higher sites have greater differences between day- and night-time temperatures, which can result in wines of greater complexity. The three wines are set out below in increasing altitudes, from 700 to 1,050 metres above sea level.

All three Finca wines are made from very low yields, with three vines required to produce just one bottle of wine. They are all aged for approximately 15 months in 100% new French oak 160 litre *cigarro* barrels.

FINCA MIRADOR, ACHAVAL-FERRER 2014

The all-rounder. Svelte and naturally gifted, it all comes easily to Mirador. You can't help but admire its seamless balance of fruit weight and fresh acidity. Lush, silky violets, violets galore... but with streaks of darker berries and a peppery, saline finish lending definition. Mirador is a six hectare parcel of old, ungrafted Malbec, lying at 700 metres above sea level in the Medrano district. Average production is 2,750 six-bottle cases.

CORNEY & BARROW SCORE

18+

(RECOMMENDED DRINKING FROM 2019 - 2029+)

£325/CASE OF 6 BOTTLES, IN BOND UK

£220/CASE OF 2 MAGNUMS, IN BOND UK

FINCA BELLA VISTA, ACHAVAL-FERRER 2014

The prop forward. A full bodied, high octane style, with an impressive density of flavour, glycerol and tannin. Whereas the tannins in Mirador make themselves felt towards the end of the palate, here they grip you vice-like from the off. This will age majestically. Bella Vista is the seven hectare 'home block' adjacent to the winery. The vineyard here is 980 metres above sea level. The soil is lime-sand over deep gravels. Average production is 3,500 six-bottle cases.

CORNEY & BARROW SCORE

18

(RECOMMENDED DRINKING FROM 2019 - 2029+)

£335/CASE OF 6 BOTTLES, IN BOND UK

£230/CASE OF 2 MAGNUMS, IN BOND UK

FINCA ALTAMIRA, ACHAVAL-FERRER 2014

The over-achiever. Everything is rarefied about Altamira, from the air at 1,050 metres above sea level, to its 80 year old ungrafted vines. A pithy, lifted nose of blueberries and violets opens onto a palate marrying elegant, finely textured tannins with a powerful charge of thrillingly taut, silky fruit. Semi-abandoned when discovered by the Achaval-Ferrer team in 1998, the six hectare Altamira vineyard is in La Consulta. This region of the high-altitude Uco Valley lies 50 miles south of Mendoza. The soil is lime-sand, with volcanic ash over eroded rock. Average production is 1,600 six-bottle cases.

CORNEY & BARROW SCORE

18.5

(RECOMMENDED DRINKING FROM 2019 - 2029+)

£345/CASE OF 6 BOTTLES, IN BOND UK

£240/CASE OF 2 MAGNUMS, IN BOND UK

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.

Wines are scored out of 20; it has the benefit of simplicity.

We will often use a range of scores (e.g. 16.5 to 17) to indicate the potential to achieve a higher mark. When a '+' is shown it adds further to that potential. Wines from lesser vintages will, inevitably, show a lower overall score.

Wines are judged, in a very broad sense, against their peers. Why? Well, you cannot easily compare a Ford with an Aston Martin, other than they are both cars and have wheels. It is not that different with wine.

A score is a summary only. The devil is in the detail, so please focus on the tasting notes and, as always, speak to our sales team.

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