



ACHAVAL-FERRER

2014 & 2013 VINTAGES, EN PRIMEUR

BACKGROUND

It must be around 15 years since we first discussed working with the team at Achaval-Ferrer. Argentina was somewhat in the doldrums economically at that time, the peso was far from healthy, and the depression between 1998 and 2002 had seen riots, soaring unemployment and the fall of government, just for starters. In the midst of all this chaos, a group of Argentinian and Italian friends got together to pursue what must have seemed like an impossible dream at the time. Bedlam notwithstanding, the country on its knees, the group were intent on producing world class wines in Argentina - luxury wines which would offer exceptional quality, remain faithful to their origins and capture the world's imagination.... potential castles in the air!

Against all odds, they did indeed turn heads from the outset. We were tipped off by a Swiss merchant, Ludwig Martel, co-agent for Domaine de la Romanée-Conti, made the introduction and the rest is history.

We are delighted to represent, exclusively, the wines of Mendoza-based Achaval-Ferrer in both the United Kingdom and Hong Kong.

Achaval-Ferrer's philosophy echoes that of so many of our own principles; their valuing relationships, their irrepressible spirit and their pursuit of excellence. Here, the vineyard is considered fundamental. Viticulture too often takes second place, with commentators who tend to focus on winemaking skills; this is not the case at Achaval-Ferrer. That said, the including of 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. This is what has attracted everyone's attention.

Here we have a collection of wines using 3 concepts per blend, Malbec - a search to make the best straight Malbec, Quimera - all efforts going to make the perfect blend and then, three wines focussing on three very different, individual vineyard sites - the Finca portfolio.

2014 VINTAGE REPORT

2014 was a dry year, demanding a lot of attention in the vineyards to ensure enough water for bud-break. Late frosts made for slightly abnormal fruit set making for clusters with fewer grapes. Despite Nature already having limited production, the Achaval team thinned out the clusters to ensure top quality and intensity. Summer was slightly hotter than recent years, especially in December and January, with the temperatures dropping in February and March so that fresher nights ensured that fresh acidity was preserved. Santiago Achaval and Roberto Cipresso, as always, tasted their way through the vines, the better to understand the forthcoming harvest. The grapes were picked when they achieved optimum ripeness and, predictably, never in an order to suit the pickers – some parcels in a vineyard being totally ripe and ready to pick whilst others, more stubborn, demanded longer on the vine. Harvest started on the 14th March and ended at the end of the month with Cabernet Sauvignon coming in last.

2013 VINTAGE REPORT

“Another fantastic year, in the guise of 2011 and 2012. Up there with our best.”

SANTIAGO ACHAVAL

August, 2014

2013 started well, with some much needed rain, there having been almost no snow over winter. Although the melting snows of the Andes provide welcome irrigation, nothing is better than proper rainfall, which contains dissolved nitrogen, much appreciated by the vines. The growing season, therefore, got off to a fine start at Achaval-Ferrer, continuing through to good fruit-set during the second half of November. Happily there was no frost.

Summer started with warm weather, quite similar to 2009, and continued in the same vein, with no heat spikes. This made for even ripening with the grapes changing colour (*véraison*) very quickly. Given that the fruit had set well, green harvesting was targeted not only on dropping bunches, but also thinning out the individual bunches and snipping off tips and shoulders of prolific fruit. Whilst hail at the end of January in Mendoza has been well-documented, Bella Vista, the closest, missed it by about half a mile. The storms, in addition, were not totally destructive, as they brought with them some desirable rain, helping with *véraison*.

Farmers are never happy, however, and their concerns then became focused on the possibility of a super-early harvest. These fears were assuaged by cooler nights arriving in mid-February. Harvesting was completed on 16th April, after 6 days of intense cold weather – circa 16°C – but with no rain. 2013 is officially the latest harvest ever, with the grapes benefiting from this prolonged ripening period, gaining intensity, whilst retaining freshness.



ALISON BUCHANAN

October, 2015

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 to celebrate the Malbec 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-phyloxera 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 provide intensity and depth. One vine-worth of fruit is required per bottle – crazily restrictive, given this price level. 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 2014

Dark purple-ruby in colour, firm to rim, this presents plum and cherry on the nose, laced with white pepper. The palate is rather lovely already, mineral, rounded, rich in fruit and yet curiously savoury. Complex, with underlying power, this is all the while driven and focused, lifted and fresh, with a profusion of red, primary fruit and flowers on the finish. Thinking steak? ... this is a no-brainer.

CORNEY & BARROW SCORE

(RECOMMENDED DRINKING FROM 2015 - 2022+)

18

£120/CASE OF 12 BOTTLES, IN BOND UK

£45/CASE OF 2 MAGNUMS, IN BOND UK

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. Founders Santiago Achaval and Roberto Cipresso, winemaker, trawl the various vineyard sites, tasting the grapes, deciding on the blend they will create. In essence it is based on Malbec, with Cabernet Franc, Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon and Petit Verdot from 3 different sites, which vary in altitude, lying between 750 and 1,100 metres above sea level. Yields are kept deliberately and extraordinarily low, so that 2 plants are required to produce 1 bottle of wine - a quality decision resulting in lovely intensity. The wine was fermented in small tanks before blending and undergoing malolactic fermentation and maturation in wood, 40% new, 60% one-year-old, for 12 months. Early blending can be risky, but it really facilitates the integration of the constituent parcels. This is a wine to watch.

QUIMERA, ACHAVAL-FERRER 2013

Quixotic in ambition, Quimera represents Achaval-Ferrer’s unattainable goal to produce the perfect wine - but they edge closer year on year. Quimera 2013 is a wonderfully intense colour. The nose, when we tasted, was initially rather taut, but gradually opened up to reveal a dark, cherried character with a firm mineral backdrop. The palate is altogether more gregarious, wafts of floral sweetness allied to marmalade, citric tones, shades of peach melba and chocolate cherry liqueur. It ought not to be possible, but this works, a perfect, elegant accompaniment to game birds and red meats, poised and ripe throughout - a very fine wine indeed.

CORNEY & BARROW Score

17.5 - 18

(RECOMMENDED DRINKING FROM 2017 - 2026+)

£100/CASE OF 6 BOTTLES, IN BOND UK

£80/CASE OF 2 MAGNUMS, IN BOND UK

THE FINCA PORTFOLIO

Achaval-Ferrer’s third concept revolves around single vineyards – Fincas. This project is based on a very different set of ambitions from the other concepts.

The Finca wines are in a class apart, centred upon the wines being faithful to a specific place, translating their individual *terroirs* 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; comprising 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 water for irrigation. This water, coupled with the variety of rocks through which it passes, plays a crucial role, defining the differences in style between the three Fincas.

When we taste the range, individual tasters tend to favour, rather vociferously, one or other wine, with no clear front-runners emerging. This is not surprising, as they are all world-class wines, and although each one displays 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 hectare parcel of old, ungrafted, Malbec, situated at 700 metres above sea level in Medrano, Mendoza. In common with the other single vineyard wines, yields are very low, with 3 vines required to produce just 1 bottle of wine. This is aged for 15 months in 100% new French oak.

FINCA MIRADOR, ACHAVAL-FERRER 2013

This is very concentrated, revealing a spicy, briny nose with dark chocolate and orange notes. The palate reflects the aromatics presented on the nose, with red, black and stone fruit all playing a role – then a citrus lift and floral back notes add further complexity. Richly textured, silken and seductive, there is something rather decadent about this wine, perfumed, spiced and very tempting, but with an innate power, too.

CORNEY & BARROW SCORE**18****(RECOMMENDED DRINKING FROM 2018 - 2028+)****£235/CASE OF 6 BOTTLES, IN BOND UK**

FINCA BELLA VISTA

This is 6.88 hectares in size, in the heart of the Malbec region, in Perdriel, on the southern bank of the Mendoza river. The vineyard here is set at 980 metres above sea level, thus 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 a third of a bottle per vine.

FINCA BELLA VISTA, ACHAVAL-FERRER 2013

Inky-plum, with a tight, firm, bright rim, this was very closed on the nose when we tasted, dark and brooding, giving little away other than some hot fruitcake notes. The palate, grippy and earthy initially, is like a taut spring, obviously concentrated fruit reined in by tannins at this stage. Suddenly berries and cherries throw off their shackles, abundant and expressive on the mid-palate, promising a superb future. This is a keeper and will age beautifully. It finishes harmoniously, fresh and long.

CORNEY & BARROW SCORE**18****(RECOMMENDED DRINKING FROM 2018 - 2028+)****£245/CASE OF 6 BOTTLES, IN BOND UK**

FINCA ALTAMIRA

This was the first vineyard to capture Roberto Cipresso's imagination. Discovered on a research trip, it was neglected, semi-abandoned and hideously overgrown, requiring both considerable imagination and nerve. How well the gamble has paid off!

The 5.67 hectare 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. Ungrafted, naturally low-yielding vines, of over 80 years, produce intense, concentrated, fruit. Three vines are required for just one bottle of wine.

FINCA ALTAMIRA, ACHAVAL-FERRER 2013

An impressive jet-ruby in colour, this presents a really lovely nose, very expressive, rich and full, peppery and yet so lifted and floral, with attractive focus, weight and depth. The palate reveals abundant fruit, opulent and ripe, complemented by bitter orange, dark chocolate notes and stony minerals. Dark cherry compote, pepper spiced on the focused, upbeat finish - a lovely wine, seductive and feminine.

CORNEY & BARROW SCORE**18.5 - 19****(RECOMMENDED DRINKING FROM 2018 - 2028+)****£255/CASE OF 6 BOTTLES, 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. Customers seem to like it and 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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