

All hail King *Malbec*

Move over, shiraz. There's a new top dog when it comes to red wine. **Neil Fortes** explains why this Argentina gem is the new King of Reds



Wines are similar to the fashion industry: trends, trends and more trends. Malbec is the “it” wine of 2010.

Red wine trends have changed over the years. In the '90s Cabernet Sauvignon was the “it” wine, and then shiraz and now Malbec wins the popular vote.

Shiraz, the old King of Reds is a waning trend and pales in comparison to the blockbuster, robust taste of Malbec.

Now, before I continue, I must say that wine is subjective so buy the wine you prefer and not what fashion dictates, however it is hard to ignore the immense popularity of the Malbec grape. It's obvious that the market still wants a deep juicy red wine varietal to satisfy the palate especially from sun-filled southern climates, and this inexpensive robust red, is sure to be a hit on your wine list.

The Malbec grape is a thin-skinned grape and needs more sun and heat than either Cabernet Sauvignon or merlot to mature. Malbec is great blender with other red varietals such as Cabernet Sauvignon, shiraz and merlot. The grape is also blended with Cabernet Franc and Gamay in some regions such as the Loire Valley and other wine regions of France. Long known as one of the six grapes allowed in the blend of red Bordeaux wine, the French plantations of Malbec are now found primarily in Cahors in the South West France region. The Malbec varietal is sensitive to frost and therefore suits growth in warm climates such as Argentina and Chile.

Malbec has taste characteristics which fall between Cabernet and merlot and ripens midseason. Deep colour, impressive broad tannins and plummy flavours are part and parcel of the Malbec grape variety and give depth and character to the wine.

The Malbec grape should be picked late in the growing season in order to develop its full-bodied structure. If the Malbec is picked too early it tends to be green and herbaceous to the taste. Malbec was very badly affected by Phyloxera, a destructive aphid disease in Argentina at one time, but now the new Malbec rootstock has been grafted with resistant clones.

Malbec or Malbeck, as it is sometimes spelt, is well-ensconced in Argentina and produces show-stopping wines at great prices. In fact, Malbec is also produced in Chile, Uruguay, California, Australia, New Zealand and also in Canada.

There is no shortage of listings of Malbec throughout Canada at prices ranging from \$7.95 right up to \$100. Malbecs from Argentina tend to be those that are the most well priced and of good value. Malbecs from afar such as New Zealand, Australia and California tend to be more expensive. It is, therefore, possible to purchase all sorts of price possibilities of Malbec for your wine list.

I have written before about what wines to use by the glass and while previously shiraz was the must-have, Malbec now takes its place. There is some incredible value-for-money Malbecs available wherever you are situated in Canada. Just log onto the various Liquor Commissions websites and merely punch in Malbec under products and you will be amazed at what is available.

The range of foods that Malbec can be matched with is extensive – juicy steaks, lamb, chicken balsamic salad dishes, pastas and pizza. The versatility of Malbec is almost unending and if you find one at a price that suits your budget, then you are on your way to the bank.

You may say that we are an Italian eatery and we don't serve Argentinean wines. Well, there is a great Malbec from Italy called Spinelli at the incredible price of \$7.95 (Ontario) or you may say that we only serve Canadian and yes, there are some Canadian Malbecs as well, The Inniskillin Discovery Malbec at \$24.99 in B.C. and Legends Estates Reserve Malbec at \$18.95 (Ontario) are available.

The only way to experience Malbec is to taste it or if you are not wine inclined check out the best sellers. Fuzion from Familia Zuccardi first listed the Fuzion Shiraz/Malbec at \$7.45 in Ontario. The new Fuzion ALTA Reserva 100% Malbec at \$9.95 (Ontario#135475) is a superb, luscious wine with huge extract and length. There are a few Malbecs that are widely listed such as Trapiche Malbec which is listed in Ontario, British Columbia Nova Scotia and Saskatchewan.

Malbec can be consumed immediately by the glass in your restaurant. It can also be aged well if the wine has the structure to begin with – the acid, tannin and fruit.

There are some very serious Malbecs available at high prices and more sophisticated medium-priced Malbecs that may work on your vintage bottle wine list.

Remember that not having a Malbec on your wine list is not fashionable. The crowning of this new King of Reds only takes place with a listing on your wine list.

Here is a list of some Argentinean 100 per cent Malbecs (not blends) listed around Canada worth considering for your list:

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| Argento Malbec | \$9.95 |
| Concha Y Toro Casillero del Diablo..... | \$12.95 |
| Fuzion Alta Reserva | \$9.95 |
| Misterio | \$7.95 |
| Spinelli..... | \$7.95 |
| Trapiche..... | \$8.20 |
| J F Lurton..... | \$9.30 |
| Funky Llama | \$9.99 |
| Finca Flichman..... | \$10.99 |
| Trapiche Reserva..... | \$11.95 |
| Trumpeter..... | \$12.95 |
| Lotengo Bodega Norton..... | \$12.99 |
| Los Arboles | \$13.05 |
| Altos Las Hormigas..... | \$14.95 |
| Kaiken Ultra..... | \$19.95 |
| Familgia Bianchi Reserve..... | \$19.99 |
| Terrazas De Los Andes Reserva..... | \$22.99 |

I have steered you to 100 per cent Malbec wines. But, there are blends containing Malbec plus some other varietals listed above which may be more cost-effective but will not allow your clients to fully experience the pure Malbec varietal.

Happy Malbec hunting! 🍷



Neil Fortes is an industrial psychologist and certified mediator by profession, but a wine guru at heart. He has a 25-year history in the wine business, consulting for many wine companies and marketing wines across Canada and the U.S. Please visit www.wineguru.ca for more information.

WINES OF GERMANY



WINE TIP

SERVING IT RIGHT: TEMPERATURE; GLASSWARE

How wine is served speaks volumes about a restaurant's wine-savvy status. From the server repeating a customer's order, presenting the bottle and opening it efficiently and confidently, to using appropriate glassware and serving it at the proper temperature, all of the small details add up to a big impression. Customers confident that a restaurant knows what its doing order more wine, and the enthusiasm is contagious. Offering a delicately perfumed German Riesling in a thick-rimmed, cheap banquet glass, or serving a light, silky pinot noir from Baden so warm that it tastes soupy (keep in mind 15 to 16 C is recommended), is a sure-fire way of driving serious diners, and profits, out the door.

Source: John Szabo, vice-president of the Wine Writer's Circle of Canada and Member of the Court of Master Sommeliers. Look for more wine tips in upcoming issues, brought to you by Wines of Germany. For more information on German wines visit www.germanwinecanada.com or Twitter: [germanwineca](https://twitter.com/germanwineca)