



## Stirring the Lees with James Molesworth

### Steak for Dinner, Steak for Lunch: 36 Hours in Buenos Aires

My final visit in Mendoza was with Susana Balbo and Pedro Marchevsky, the husband-and-wife team behind [Dominio del Plata](#). The winery produces the Susana Balbo and BenMarco brands, the former in Balbo's preferred supple, velvety style and the latter in Marchevsky's preferred structured and more muscular vein.

Balbo doubles as the head of Wines of Argentina, the winery- and government-funded trade organization that works to promote Argentina's wineries. It's an unenviable job since the Argentine wine industry is notoriously competitive within itself—the wineries have been unable to come together consistently to promote themselves as a group, something that the wine industries in Chile and Australia, for example, have done very well. Balbo is passionate about quality and has been trying to impress upon the winemakers and winery owners of Argentina that the nation's wines need to be competitive in the high-quality segment of the wine business. She's even set up seminars for new wineries (with 100 new wineries in just the past two years, the industry now counts 900 and growing) to help them navigate the intricacies of exporting to the U.S. and other markets. The result was grumbling from some of the larger wineries who complained she was training the smaller wineries to take some of their market share. That narrow and shortsighted approach is exactly what has to change if Argentina wants to take the next step. (Balbo is up for re-election soon.)

As for Marchevsky, he's one of the most demanding men in the business. He's all about precision in the vineyards and when it comes to renting parcels, he pays by the hectare as opposed to volume, and then wants the vineyard worked his way. Marchevsky is also grappling with the search for *terroir* and diversity in Mendoza and notes that one of the big obstacles right now isn't the *terroir* factor, but the human factor.

"We're still figuring out what things are here, and it's very difficult. Look at any two parcels—the vine rows are usually aligned differently, the irrigation is different, the trellising is different. They could both be in Luján de Cuyo for example, but they will provide two totally different kinds of fruit," he said.

I tasted through the newest lineup of wines, including the '06 Crios de Susana Balbo line, the value-priced choice from Dominio del Plata. These wines, from the Cabernet to the Malbec to the fun Syrah-Bonarda blend offer dark colors, juicy textures and seriously tasty fruit. The BenMarco Malbec Mendoza 2006 offers its typically grippy profile with lots of raspberry and

spice notes, while the Susana Balbo Malbec Mendoza 2006 is rounder and fleshier, with boysenberry fruit and a long, creamy finish. The top wines here include the BenMarco Expresivo Mendoza 2005, a muscular but polished blend of Malbec, Cabernet Sauvignon, Syrah, Bonarda and Merlot that has a well-rounded core of currant, plum and blackberry fruit. It's surprisingly pure despite its heft. We also retried the Nosotros Mendoza 2005, Balbo's top cuvée made from 90 percent Malbec along with Cabernet Sauvignon. It's a wine she admits to feeling a bit forced to make due to pressure from her importer—apparently on the marketing side of the business, it's good for wineries to have small-production, high-priced wines. The wine has now settled into itself, with the toast starting to meld into the plum, black cherry, briar and mineral notes. It's hitting its stride and should drink well over the next few years, consistent with my official review of it.

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