

# Dynamic duo

Among the many varieties that Argentina cultivates, there are two lesser-known grapes that have the potential to take the UK on-trade by storm

## Bonarda: an Argentine quaffer

Malbec may have taken the crown as Argentina's most popular grape but it hasn't always been this way. Until the early part of this century, Bonarda was the country's most planted grape variety. It is now in second spot behind Malbec, but still way ahead of Cabernet Sauvignon and Syrah, so why isn't it seen on more lists?

Bonarda has traditionally been considered a workhorse grape variety but this is unfair. It is making really appealing wines today and is ideally suited to the growing demand for refreshing, fruit-driven wines with soft tannin. Forget tannic Nebbiolo or Cabernet Sauvignon, which require food: Bonarda is a rare red that can be enjoyed on its own. Its juicy red fruit flavours make it ideal for a gastropub by-the-glass offer, for example.

London wine bar Vinoteca serves a Sangiovese/Bonarda blend by the glass. Its co-owner Brett Wootton loves its rich and plummy character, and the price. "It is a great quaffer and great value. It isn't very well-known, unlike its Malbec and Cabernet Sauvignon cousins, but it is great value for money," he says. This makes Bonarda a prime candidate for house wine.

The Argentines often drink their Bonarda served chilled so it also ticks the elusive summer red box. Producer François Lurton goes as far as describing his Tierra de Luna Bonarda as a light, Beaujolais-style wine. If this is what you are after, be sure to find a producer making it in that style, as Bonarda can also become a densely coloured, structured wine with dried, rather than fresh fruit.

These 'serious' Bonardas need food, and are particularly well-matched to grilled meats and Italian dishes. Its affinity for Italian food is no surprise since immigrants from the Piedmont region originally brought the grape to Argentina.

While Bonarda has been making incursions into the off-trade, it has still to make an impact in the on-trade. It certainly has a place whatever the style and it offers real value for money.

At the moment, you are most likely to see Bonarda in the UK as a blend, with winemaker Susana Balbo one of many producers successfully combining it with Syrah. The Syrah grape adds depth and spiciness to the blend, adding flesh to



Bonarda

Words  
Rebecca  
Gibb

Bonarda's bones. It's also a great way to persuade your customers to try a new 'unknown' variety with the reassurance of an international big-hitter on the label.

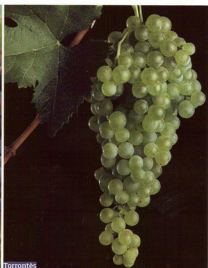
## Torrontés: A quirky white

Spain's Galicia region is better known as a producer of Albariño. But it is also home to the white variety Argentina now calls its own: Torrontés. If Torrontés could be as successful as Albariño has become in the on-trade, the Argentines would be dancing in the streets of Mendoza and beyond.

But it's still early days for Argentina, having only really started to make inroads on the international wine market since 2002, and Torrontés may take time to catch on. Thankfully, it's easy for customers to pronounce but awareness is low compared with international varieties such as Chardonnay and Pinot Grigio. This is why you'll see Torrontés in blends as well as single varietal wines.

If you want to add a Torrontés to your list and don't want to take the full 10-metre dive, a blend could be the way to test the waters. What's more, Torrontés is a very distinctive grape and a more neutral variety like Chardonnay can soften its powerful aroma.

However, if you have a customer base prepared to try new things, and willing to go beyond the safety of Sauvignon Blanc and Pinot Grigio then a 100 per cent



Torrontés

Torrontés is the way to go. It is highly aromatic with lots of floral notes reminiscent of rose petals as well as lime and white flowers. It is not shy and retiring by any means, as Laurie Webster of Argentine specialist Las Bodegas explains: "You will have a love or hate relationship with Torrontés. It has such a strong personality - and there's nothing wrong with that."

However, there are different styles of Argentine Torrontés and if you want to introduce a by-the-glass offer look out for a Mendoza Torrontés, says Solano Peña Lenz, managing director of HispaMerchants, whose clients include Nobu, Sketch and The Cinnamon Club. "Mendoza Torrontés is lighter and not so 'in your face'. You can sell this as an aperitif when it's in a light style without such an expressive nose," he says.

The grape reaches its apogee in the most northerly wine-growing region of Argentina - Salta. The most elegant, aromatic and fresh styles can be found from producers such as Colomé, Etchart or Domingo Molina. These are for your Anything But Chardonnay customers who appreciate something off the beaten track or want to progress from less aromatic Torrontés.

This style may well be successful by the glass but it is at its best with food. It's a fantastic pairing with the fragrant ingredients of Thai cuisine but it's equally at home with the sharp flavours of ceviche. **13**