

# Bordeaux

## Ascends the Andes

CUVELIER LOS ANDES BRINGS FRENCH TRADITION TO ARGENTINA

by Anthony Dias Blue

Since I first went to Argentina well over a decade ago, I have never lost an opportunity to spread the word about what may be the planet's most ideal wine-producing country. As the name Argentina began to seep into the consciousness of wine-lovers worldwide like inky Malbec staining a Bounty paper towel, enologists from far and wide began to descend on this once-sleepy town and stake out their claim to the arid yet fertile terroir at the foot of the Andes.

Peripatetic consulting enologist Michel Rolland was among the first Frenchmen to jet in from Bordeaux. He was so impressed with what he found in Argentina that he began to envision a hugely ambitious and complex project involving his French compatriots. Clos de los Siete, as the project would soon be known, would bring seven Bordeaux winemakers to Mendoza to establish estates, each of which would contribute a portion of its fruit to the Rolland-signed release, while also producing its own wines.



PHOTO: MERIDITH MAY

Baptiste Cuvelier (left) with author Anthony Dias Blue and Bruno Laclotte, President of Regency Wines, which imports Cuvelier Los Andes to the U.S.



One of the first to share in Rolland's grand scheme was Bertrand Cuvelier, who joined Clos de Los Siete in 1998. The Cuvelier family's wine roots go back to H. Cuvelier & Fils, a wine merchant firm founded in 1804, and today they own two venerable Bordeaux properties: Château Le Crock in Saint-Estèphe (purchased in 1903) and Château Léoville Poyferré, the celebrated second growth in Saint-Julien that the family took control of in 1920.

Interestingly, a forebear, Paul Cuvelier, had trekked to Argentina in 1914, finding the wines "pleasant to drink," but not suitable for the French taste of the time. For the modern-day family members—including Bertrand's cousin, Jean-Guy Cuvelier, who joined the venture in 2001—things would be very different. The New World style had become hugely successful, and Michel Rolland himself had been a key influence in the evolution of style toward cleaner, fruitier, younger wines. The stage was set for something spectacular to happen under French hands in Mendoza.

In 1999, the family began planting vineyards 120 kilometers south of Mendoza in the Valle de Uco, one of the region's most promising sub-appellations, at an elevation of 3,300 feet. They specified 5,500 plants per hectare—a density favored in Bordeaux but rare in Argentina, where space is not as pricy or rare. Malbec, the once-forgotten Bordelais variety that has found a new life in Argentina, would be the estate's star, accompanied by Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Syrah and Petit Verdot. The estate, known as Cuvelier Los Andes, encompasses 65 hectares (156 acres), with half the grapes going to Clos de los Siete and the rest used for the estate's own wines.

Enologist Adrián Manchon, winemaker and GM at Cuvelier Los Andes, worked the 2005 harvest at Château Le Crock in order to learn the Cuvelier family style and tradition, which he was charged with translating into Argentine terms at Cuvelier Los Andes.

As the vineyards flourished, the *cadet* wine, **Cuvelier Los Andes Colección**, had its first vintage in 2003, and by the following year the vines were mature enough for the estate to release its **Cuvelier Los Andes Grand Vin**, a masterful example of French-style assemblage using all five varieties from the estate. The **Cuvelier Los Andes Grand Malbec**, a pure expression of Argentina's favorite grape, completes the trifecta. In addition, Cuvelier has ventured across the mountains into Chile, where they are producing an impressive and good-value organic blend in the Maule Valley.

I recently met with Baptiste Cuvelier, one of the next-generation family members who have assumed duties at the Argentine estate. He's a 30-something young man with rock star looks and loads of French charm. He is quite passionate about the family's South American adventure.

*Cuvelier Los Andes is imported by Regency Wines.*

Cuvelier Los Andes fits the Joël Robuchon wine program, and the wines pair well with the food by being very well-made. The spicy richness of the wines work fantastically with our beef rib eye and lamb dishes. It is a winery I always recommend when guests are looking at wines from Argentina.

—Harley Carbery



**Harley Carbery is Director of Wines, Joël Robuchon Restaurants, Las Vegas**



PHOTO: MERIDITH MAY

Here are my notes on the current Cuvelier Los Andes releases. —A.D.B.

**Cuvelier Los Andes 2009 Cuvée del Maule, Maule Valley, Chile (\$19)** Spicy, racy and bright with spice, plum and soft herbs; pure and dense, rich and balanced, long and intense. Organic. **90**

**Cuvelier Los Andes 2006 Colección, Mendoza, Argentina (\$25)** Velvety and lush with gorgeous black plum and cassis; spicy and ripe; a seamless blend with lovely texture plus notes of leather, forest floor and earth; long elegant and balanced. **92**

**Cuvelier Los Andes 2006 Grand Vin, Mendoza, Argentina (\$35)** Dark, dense with ripe black cherry, plum and cassis with depth, elegance and Bordeaux style; silky texture, complex and showing a long, rich finish. **94**

**Cuvelier Los Andes 2006 Grand Malbec, Mendoza, Argentina (\$70)** Smooth and fleshy with juicy cherry and bright spice; rich, ripe and deep with complexity, elegance and a long, lush finish. **93** ■■