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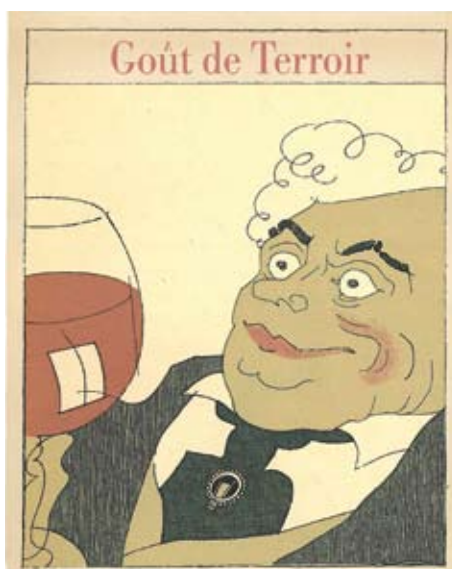
DOUBLESPEAK *COUP DE CAHORS,* OR THE HAND OF GOD?

Is the making of French Malbec in Cahors being covertly influenced by the success of Malbec in Argentina? **Tim Atkin MW** finds lots to talk about during a blind tasting of Malbecs from Cahors and Argentina, in conversation with **Gerard Basset MS MW** and **Anthony Rose**

Do grape varieties retain their essential personality as they trot across the globe? Most of the time the answer is yes, even if some—Pinot, Sangiovese, and Tempranillo, for example—are more likely to mutate than others. Terroir, climate, vine age, yields, and the purple-stained thumbprint of the winemaker will also influence style, but the grape's basic character—its nature as opposed to nurture, if you like—is a constant.

The most striking case of a grape going native is surely Malbec. The contrast between the Malbec-based reds of Cahors (the minimum required for the appellation is 70 percent) and those of Argentina is extreme. The former are famously dense, black, and chewy, while those produced in Mendoza, Salta, San Juan, and Patagonia are aromatic and fleshy. Only color, and to a lesser extent tannins, are shared by the two interpretations of the grape. Tasting a Cahors alongside an Argentinian Malbec, they sometimes appear to be made from different grapes—at least, that's the theory.

Malbec has had more than a century and a half to get used to the more arid conditions of Argentina's desert-like climate. The irony is that the so-called *uva francesa* was brought in by a Frenchman, Miguel Aimé Pouget,



albeit acting under instruction from the Argentinian government, in the 1850s. It is unlikely that the French erected a statue in his honor. Today, there is roughly eight times as much Malbec in Argentina as there is in Cahors.

But what about the stuff in the glass? Are the wines of these two countries as easy to tell apart as people say? Cahors has certainly been influenced by Argentina's success—not least in the sense that it is keen to promote itself as the home of the “original Malbec” rather than just a southwest French blend of, typically, Malbec, Tannat, and Merlot. But what impact has that had on its wines, specifically

on levels of ripeness and the hair-shirt tannins that used to characterize the appellation?

To find out, Gerard Basset MW, Anthony Rose, and I blind-tasted 40 wines (21 from Cahors and 19 from Argentina). Almost without exception, these were varietals—another sign of the growing renown and popularity of Malbec. Vintages ranged from 2004 to 2008, with Argentina providing most of the younger wines.

The lineup included many of the leading names from the twin poles of Malbec production, namely: Achaval Ferrer, Bodega Noemía, Catena Zapata, Trapiche,

Yacochuya, Cobos, Alfa Crux, and Alta Vista from Argentina; Château du Cèdre, Clos Triguédina, Château de Chambert, Château Lamartine, Clos de Gamot, and Domaine La Bérangerie from Cahors. Some producers submitted more than one wine, and this could justifiably be considered the best Malbec tasting ever held in London.

This was confirmed by the quality of wines. Gerard Basset felt that “there were a few wines that had faults, most notably reduction and some Brett, but overall the quality level was very good.” Anthony Rose commented that some of the wines were “overripe to the extent of being Porty” and criticized others for being overoaked, but he, too, felt that the general level was very high. For

Chambrées de la Bérangerie, or the Michel Rolland-inspired Château Lagrézette, in Cahors.

The Argentinian wines were also less of a caricature than we expected. Amid all the oak, dense purple color, and alcohol, there was welcome evidence of greater balance, finesse, and understanding of phenolic ripeness. We were confident that several of the top wines (Achaval Ferrer, Noemía, Catena Zapata’s Argentino, and Trapiche’s Viña Domingo F Sarmiento) would age well in bottle rather than collapsing in a puddle of pruney self-importance three years hence. Argentina’s top wines are still improving.

What did the tasting teach us? Three things. First, that while Cahors and Argentina make very different styles of Malbec, the differences are not as marked as they once

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my part, I gave five wines 18.5 points. As a group, we scored only three wines below 15 points.

Malbec is capable of a greater range of styles in Argentina than in Cahors, mainly because of differences in latitude and altitude, but this was harder to identify in this tasting, because the majority of the South American wines came from Mendoza. For all that, the two top Argentinian Malbecs were more “elegant” than many of their counterparts: Achaval Ferrer, sourced from three distinct zones in Mendoza; and Bodega Noemía from Patagonia. Both showed considerable complexity.

I expected the Argentinian wines to trounce their French rivals in a blind tasting, partly because they are the sorts of reds that don’t need tannin-taming food to show at their best. But that was very far from the case. Argentina took two of the top three spots, but Cahors has four wines in the top ten.

Were we always confident of distinguishing between the two countries’ wines? To our surprise, we were not. “I came with definite prejudices,” said Anthony Rose. “I was confident that I could distinguish Argentina from Cahors. There was a distinction, but not always. I found that there were some Malbecs from Cahors which have a lovely ripeness. They were sufficiently opulent and rich to be Argentinian.”

We all agreed that the best Cahors were riper and suppler than we expected, though tannins levels tended to be higher and drier in the French wines. But the fruit levels weren’t far behind the Argentinian Malbecs in some instances. It would certainly take a brave taster to place the Domaine La Bérangerie Les Quatre

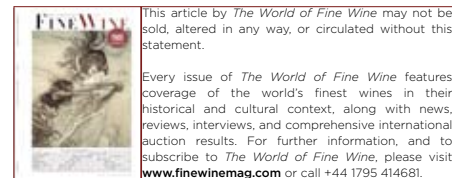
were, largely because Cahors is making less austere wines. This may be related to warmer seasons or just to later picking. Second, the success of Argentinian Malbec has encouraged some producers in Cahors to change their style, though many of the best wines are still quintessentially French. And third, that Malbec is potentially a world-class grape—wherever it’s grown.

Average and range of scores

	Average	Range
Tim Atkin	16	12–18.5
Gerard Basset	16.5	10–19.5
Anthony Rose	16.5	13–18.5
All wines	16.5	10–19.5

Tim Atkin’s top wines

Trapiche Viña Domingo F Sarmiento Malbec 2007	18.5
Achaval Ferrer Malbec 2007	18.5
Château de Chambert Grand Vin 2007	18.5
Clos Triguédina Probus 2006	18.5
Bodega Noemía Patagonia Malbec 2007	18.5
Clos de Gamot Cuvée des Vignes Centennaires 2005	17.5
Château Lamartine Expression 2007	17.5
Catena Zapata Malbec Argentino 2006	17.5
Château de Haute-Serre Cuvée Prestige 2005	17.5
Château de Mercuès 2007	17.5
Domaine La Bérangerie Les Quatre Chambrées de la Bérangerie 2008	17
Fabre Montemayou Gran Reserva Malbec 2008	17
Yacochuya 2004	17



GERARD BASSET'S VERDICT

I thought that many of the wines here showed very well, and the overall quality was excellent.

It was an interesting tasting and a great illustration of how good a grape Malbec can be in the right hands.

Top wines

Domaine La Bérangerie Les Quatre Chambrées de la Bérangerie 2008 19.5	Château de Haute-Serre Malbec 2005 17.5
Château de Mercuès Cuvée 6666 2005 18.5	Trapiche Viña Domingo F Sarmiento Malbec 2007 17
Clos de Gamot Cuvée des Vignes Centennaires 2005 18	Château La Caminade Esprit 2005 17
Achaval Ferrer Malbec 2007 18	Château La Caminade Esprit 2006 17
Fabre Montemayou Gran Reserva Malbec 2007 18	Cobos Bramare Marchiori Vineyard Malbec 2006 17
Alta Vista Grande Reserve Malbec Terroir Selection 2005 18	Familia Zuccardi Q Malbec 2006 17
Château de Mercuès Malbec 2007 18	Susana Balbo Signature Malbec 2007 17
Clos de Gamot 2005 17.5	Bodega Noemía Patagonia Malbec 2007 17
Catena Zapata Adrianna Vineyard Malbec 2006 17.5	Catena Zapata Malbec Argentino 2006 17
	Catena Zapata Nicasia Vineyard Malbec 2006 17

Achaval Ferrer Malbec 2007 (Mendoza) - 18.5

TA: Mid-purple, touch of development. Lovely, aromatic, spicy, Syrah-like nose. High-altitude style. Beautiful, balanced, complex palate. Fine-grained tannins, red fruits; silky, aromatic, and refreshing. Very elegant, despite the alcohol. I could drink a bottle of this. Delicious! Drink now. **18.5**

GB: Medium-deep red ruby, with purple rim. Full intensity. Sweet berry and floral notes; very elegant. Concentrated on the palate, with a good blend of black fruit and spices. Long finish. **18**

AR: Attractive ruby hue, nicely perfumed red-fruit nose, with a hint of rhubarb in the background. The fruit is rich and concentrated, nicely opulent dark-cherry and blackcurrant richness, with very fine, supple tannins and a good refreshing damsony acidity, giving this wine a very nice balance, while the oak is fine and well integrated, adding a supple roundness of texture. A lovely wine that, while drinkable now, should age well for up to ten years. **18.5**

Domaine La Bérangerie Les Quatre Chambrées de la Bérangerie Cahors AOC 2008 - 18

TA: Bright, inky purple. Perfumed: violets and blackberries, well-integrated oak. Lush, rich, succulent fruit sweetness, medium-weight tannins. Slightly drying finish, some licorice, but lots of personality and flavor. Needs food. Three to five years. **17**

GB: Deep black-ink color, with thin purple rim. Very expressive. Floral and a lot of black fruit. Violet and jasmine. Lively and juicy, with fresh fruity character in retro. Long finish. **19.5**

AR: Dense, youthful, inky purple; slightly vegetal, attractively floral perfume on the nose, this has a fine-boned, structured succulence of fruit and a hint of chocolate. Very nicely balanced and concentrated, with chocolaty dark fruits, richness, and a well-proportioned structure of supple tannins and fresh savory acidity. The oak is nicely integrated. Still youthful, it has a touch of astringency that needs time to settle down, but it should be excellent. **17.5**

Bodega Noemía Patagonia Malbec 2007 (Rio Negro Valley) - 18

TA: Very dense, concentrated color. Aromatic, concentrated, alluring. Sweet tannins, nice oak integration; still youthful but complex. Supple. Firm tannins, complex, sweet red fruits and vanilla. Subtle wine, very good length. Alcohol a little high, but this is a smart wine, with notes of tobacco, vanilla, and red fruit, and with considerable depth and complexity. **18.5**

GB: Deep ruby with a blackish rim. Medium-deep intensity. Pastry nose, baked damson with cinnamon. Round and rich; chocolate in retro. Medium-long finish. **17**

AR: Good opaque violet-ruby hue; very nice violet fragrance, intense and concentrated black-fruit flavors. Juicy, ripe, and opulent, with deftly handled spicy oak—not straying over the boundary of too much oak, alcohol, or extraction. This is a wine that delivers a lovely succulent quality of blackberry and damson fruitiness that's approachable and in balance. **18**

Catena Zapata Malbec Argentino 2006 (Mendoza) - 17.5

TA: Mid-purple garnet. Aromatic red fruit

and some oak. Good structure, mature, complex, developed red-fruit and vanilla notes. Very Rhône-like, spicy, mature, harmonious; some savory/spice, good length. Multilayered flavors. **17.5**

GB: Deep inky color, with purple. Medium-deep nose. Strong pastry character with summer-pudding touches. Full body with a firm but ripe texture; black cherry and spices. Medium-long finish. **17**

AR: Good colors, a hint of evolution, very attractive nose of red fruits and spice. Lovely red-cherry and rhubarb-fruit concentration, fine, nicely evolved tannins, and juicy acidity. Resolved, finely balanced juiciness. This is a lovely wine, in fine balance, its rich red-fruit quality held in check by very nicely poised tannins and acidity. **18**

Trapiche Viña Domingo F Sarmiento 2007 Malbec (La Consulta, Mendoza) - 17.5

TA: Very dense, youthful vermilion/purple. Aromatic yet still very youthful. Plush, harmonious, well-balanced nose, with scented cedar and vanilla oak, plum, and blackberry fruit. Silky tannins, very fine, well balanced. A beautiful wine that will develop over the next 5-8 years. Essence of fine Malbec. **18.5**

GB: Deep purple color, with pink rim. Full intensity. Summer pudding with cinnamon. Round and full on the palate, with black fruit. Medium-long finish. **17**

AR: This is dark and inky in appearance, fresh and attractively aromatic, with an appealing quality of juicy, ripe, almost opulent dark fruit. The tannins are supple and juicy, and the acidity nicely balances the enterprise. Oak is present but in the background, bringing a degree of texture and complexity to the wine, whose structure is deceptive. Should improve with a few years' aging. **17.5**

Clos Triguédina Probus AOC Cahors 2006 - 17.5

TA: Mid-purple. Roasted coffee-bean nose. Some Cabernet? Almost a claret-like tone to this. Very oaky, sweet, mocha notes, but with stylish fruit, sweet tannins, and good balance and length. Cahors meets the Médoc. Complex, long, fine tannins; nice acidity and finesse. Class act. **18.5**

GB: Medium-deep black-ink color, with a purple rim. Medium-deep intensity. Fruitcake and sweet spices. Very firm texture but ripe. Medium finish. **16.5**

AR: Deep youthful ruby; a dry and savory nose of black fruit. This is pretty big and chunky and dry on the palate, albeit with good blackberry-fruit concentration and fresh acidity. This is a wine that badly needs food to bring out the undoubted dark-berry astringent fruit qualities that are enhanced by classic fresh acidity. **17.5**

Susana Balbo Signature Malbec 2007 (Mendoza) (10% Cabernet Sauvignon) - 17

TA: Deep, dense color. Walnutty nose. High

alcohol, slightly prune. Fruit starting to fade a little. Some sweet oak, high alcohol. Ripe, savory, spicy, coffee-bean oak. Dry tannins on the finish and a Porty note. Picked too late again. **16.5**

GB: Deep ruby with a violet rim. Medium-deep intensity. Russian leather to start, but a strong underlay of black fruit. Ripe texture, with a retro of black fruit and chocolate. Medium-long finish. **17**

AR: Good, deep color; smoky paprika and chorizo-like aromas. Intriguing; a tad Syrah-like. Very nice supple, textured, rich dark-berry-fruits quality. Approachable, juicy, and inviting, this is classic Malbec, with dark-fruit and chocolaty undertones, firmish tannins, and savory fresh acidity. Overall, fine-tuned, almost delicate fruit quality. **17**

Catena Zapata Adrianna Vineyard Malbec 2006 (Gualtallary, Tupungato) - 17

TA: Super-dense color. Bold, aromatic, high alcohol; masses of fruit, sweet oak. Starting to morph into secondary characteristics, some sweet spice, but also some firm tannins and drying finish. Interesting wine. **16.5**

GB: Deep ruby color; purple rim. Medium-deep intensity. Black fruit, baked-plum tart. Round and rich, with a black-fruit retro-olfaction. Medium-long finish. **17.5**

AR: Good, rich, still youthful ruby hue; undertones of spearmint and oak spice on the nose. This is quite spicy on the palate, with a lovely quality of ripe, red-fruit flavors and richness. Nicely evolved succulence of texture and juicy acidity; lovely purity of Malbec fruit character. Very well done; beautifully balanced. **17.5**

Château du Cèdre Le Cèdre AOC Cahors 2005 - 17

TA: Very, very dark: Think bottom of the ocean. Very powerful nose—lots of alcohol, but concentrated, too. A blockbuster of a wine. Not subtle, very ripe, very oaky, quite dry, but the quality of the fruit is excellent here. It's a huge wine, but it has its virtues. Violets, plums, some oak. Three to five years. **16.5**

GB: Extremely deep black-ink color, with a purple rim. Medium intensity. Herbal and candy-fruit character. Ripe and round on the palate, with plenty of dark plum. Medium finish. **16**

AR: Very dense opaque ruby; a rich nose with licorice spice and dark chocolate. This is quite richly concentrated, dark chocolaty, and powerful, with good intensity of flavor and an almost thickly concentrated texture of dark berry fruits. Well-integrated oak and smooth tannins; quite powerful in alcohol; and there is an astringency backed by a firm structure of tannins that are almost chunky. This needs time to soften down and integrate, but it's a good wine. **18**

Fabre Montemayou Gran Reserva Malbec 2007 (Mendoza, Argentina) - 17

TA: Very dense, dark color. High alcohol,

roasted, slightly prune nose. Super-ripe, sweet, Michel Rolland-style. Good fruit picked too late. Super-ripe raisin-and-oak palate. I wish this had 14% alcohol and was not in this overripe style. **16**

GB: Deep purple, with a pink rim. Medium-deep intensity. Black fruit with sweet spices. Rich and ripe, with some licorice in retro. Long finish. **18**

AR: Deep youthful ruby, almost opaque; very nice spiced-plum and blackberry fragrance. Good, richly concentrated cassis and blackberry-fruit opulence, bordering on sweetness. This is very richly fruited, with deftly applied oak spice and firm tannins—a big wine that just manages to keep all its powerful elements in proportion, even if at this stage it could do with a couple more years' aging and will continue to improve for 10 years. **17**

Clos de Gamot Cuvée des Vignes Centennaires AOC Cahors 2005 - 17

TA: Mid-garnet/ruby. Complex, leafy, spicy nose, with hints of sweet, faintly gamey fruit. Bright raspberry and cherry fruit, fresh acidity, nice balance, no oak interference. Elegant, fine tannins. Good length and complexity. **17.5**

GB: Medium-deep red ruby, with a purple rim. Medium-full intensity. Roasted-fruit and dark-chocolate character. Lovely texture, with silky tannin; excellent retro of blackberry and almond chocolate. Medium-long finish. **18**

AR: Good, youthful ruby; attractively sweet and chocolaty on the nose, with red fruits in the background. This is a succulently ripe and juicy style of Malbec, with an attractive cherryish juiciness and good balance of supple tannins and fresh acidity; the tannins end up a tad chalky and dry, so it clearly needs food. **16**

Château de Haute-Serre Cuvée Prestige Géron Dadine de Haute-Serre AOC Cahors 2005 - 17

TA: Deep color. Sweaty, mature nose. Palate firmer, high acid, firmish but lots of fruit. Aromatic, modern-style Cahors, some tannin but not overwhelming. Should develop. Ripe style; complex. **17.5**

GB: Deep ruby color, with a purple rim. Medium-deep intensity. Black fruit: blueberry and damson. Firm and solid, but with ripe tannin. Retro full of black fruit, with a spicy underlay. Medium-long finish. **16.5**

AR: Deep color; fresh, invitingly peppery, and spicy aromatic quality. Lovely, fresh, clean—pure pepper and spice, almost Syrah-like. Really juicy, if lean, palate with chunky tannins and good savory acidity. Finishing dry and savory. **16.5**

Château Lamartine Expression AOC Cahors 2007 - 17

TA: Very youthful crimson/purple. Aromatic, attractive, intense. More tannin than you'd expect from the nose and the initial

impression: sweet fruit, firm mid-palate. Highish alcohol. Sweet oak. Needs more time to settle into itself. Three to five years. I think this has potential. **17.5**

GB: Deep purple, with a pink/blue rim. Very intense. Blackberry and black prune, with Asian spices. Foursquare but ripe on the palate, good black fruit in retro. Medium-long finish. **16.5**

AR: Deep youthful ruby; pleasant red-berry-fruit fragrance. This is an attractive cherry and red-berry-fruit style, with undertones of dark chocolate. It's only just starting to be approachable, though with this level of concentration and substantial chunky tannins—albeit with good fruit richness and oak that's well integrated—it could do with more time. **16.5**

Château de Mercuès Malbec AOC Cahors 2007 - 17

TA: Deep purple color. Very aromatic. Masses of oak, quite tannic, dense. Good underlying fruit, but firm tannins. Still, I think the combination works, with some smoky, violet fruit, good concentration, and length. Five to eight years. This will improve with time. **17.5**

GB: Deep black ink, with a purple rim. Deep intensity. Beautiful black fruit and also some herbal notes. Foursquare with ripe tannin; baked black fruit in retro. Long finish. **18**

AR: Good vivid color; very nice spicy fragrance, with a touch of spice and pepper. Firm, chunky tannins and astringency here. Lovely spice richness and damsony rich fruit quality, with quite high astringency. This needs food. **16**

Yacochuya 2004 (Cafayate, Salta) - 17

TA: Mid-ruby/purple. Strange, faintly resinous nose. Palate mature: sweet, but quite old-fashioned style. Mature, savory, Rhône-like. Pepper and spice. More Syrah than Malbec, but none the worse for that. Sweet spice. Leafy, gamey, mature, complex; good length and complexity. Drink now. **17**

GB: Deep ruby, with a garnet rim. Medium intensity. Slightly tobacco character, with some cherry notes. Supple on the palate but with a marked acidity. Medium finish. **16**

AR: Rich dark ruby; smoky dark-chocolate and peppery Syrah-like sweetness on the nose. This is attractively rich and concentrated. Smoked meats, tar and dark berry fruit—quite Syrah-like in some ways. This is complex and rich but at the same time peppery, spicy, and savory, with a nicely evolved, if slightly chewy, structure of tannins and acidity. **17.5**

Achaval Ferrer Finca Mirador Malbec 2005 (Medrano, Mendoza) - 16.5

TA: Mid-purple. High alcohol; faintly raisiny nose. Palate ditto. Fruit picked too ripe. The oak just adds to the sweetness. The wine lacks acidity and balance and finesse. Okay with a barbecue, but otherwise rather OTT. Drink now. **15.5**

GB: Deep red ruby, with a purple rim.

(*goût de terroir*)

Medium-deep intensity. Smoky and very ripe black fruit on the nose. Rich and luscious on the palate with sweet pastry in retro. Medium-long finish. **16.5**

AR: Mid-ruby in color; the nose is attractive, with just a smidgen of oak spice showing through the red-berry-fruit character. The palate is sweetly ripe and juicy—a hint of bittersweet chocolate, with an attractive balance of dark-berry and damson fruits. Good structure of savory acidity and supple tannins. Good wine that could do with a few more years' aging but is just about drinkable now, as long as it's with a good roasted haunch of venison. **17.5**

acidity nicely balancing out fruit and tannins, but this is a wine that needs food to absorb those tannins. **16**

Catena Zapata Nicasia Vineyard Malbec 2006 (Altamira, San Carlos) – 16.5

TA: Dense purple color; meaty nose. Leafy, some alcohol, some VA. Very alcoholic. Ripe, a little Porty, fruit sweetness. Thick flavors, sweet, red fruit and Portiness. High-alcohol finish. **15**

GB: Very deep black-ink color, with a purple rim. Medium intensity. Oven-baked meat, with fresh fruit but also chocolate coating. Round and ripe, with smooth tannins; lots of

baked black fruit. Rich and juicy, with some black cherry wrapped in chocolate in retro. Medium-long finish. **17**

AR: Deep, youthful ruby, with an almost kirsch-like sweet red-cherry fragrance. This has a dark plum and prune-like opulence that's powerful, rich, sweet, and almost brandied on the palate, with substantial spicy oak. It's powerful, to the verge of Portiness. The tannins are a tad chunky and dry. **16**

Château de Haute-Serre Malbec AOC Cahors 2005 – 16.5

TA: Mid-ruby/purple; meaty, aromatic, some resin. Very tannic, dry, powerful, but almost

“Good acidity, some tannin, but folded into the structure of the wine. Classic Cahors style. Beautifully balanced, complex, harmonious. Good length. Will age. Stylish, perfumed, touch of austerity, but this is a stunning wine”—Tim Atkin on 2007 Château de Chambert

Alta Vista Grande Reserve Malbec Terroir Selection 2005 (Mendoza) – 16.5

TA: Super-dark color. Very concentrated. Some late-picked, dead-fruit character. Tannic, dry, prune-y. Thick, dense, concentrated, quite prune-y again. Impressive in a blind tasting, showy, but not sure I could drink a bottle of this. Roasted coffee bean, high alcohol, dry finish. **16**

GB: Very deep blackish color, with a purple rim. Very open nose. Sweet pastry nose, with strong licorice and dark chocolate covering some black fruit. Very ripe, with a retro that mirrors perfectly what was on the nose. Medium-long finish. **18**

AR: Dense, inky, youthful color; some treacle-toffee sweetness on the nose, which borders on the baked and overripe. Ditto the blackberry-fruit palate. The chunky tannins make this wine rather chewy. Overripe and a bit lifeless. **15**

Château La Caminade Esprit AOC Cahors 2006 – 16.5

TA: Youthful purple. High alcohol; oaky but concentrated. Nice, ripe fruitcake notes; some sweetness, both from the alcohol and the oak. A little prune-y, but good in a very ripe way, with a savory undertone. Medium-weight tannins, attractive oak. Drink now or over the next year or two. **16.5**

GB: Deep inky color, with purple rim. Medium intensity. Black fruit and wild spices on the nose. Very powerful on the palate, with a firm but ripe structure. Chocolate and mocha in retro. Medium-long finish. **17**

AR: Good color; very ripe, sweet, violet nose bordering on the overripe. Good opulent, almost sweet, nicely rounded and textured black-fruit flavors. Plenty of richness and concentration, with good oak integration. The tannins are quite firm and chunky, the

chocolate raisin in the mouth. Medium-long finish. **17**

AR: Good color; fragrant, spicy, and aromatic. Very nice quality of sweet blackberry and damson-rich fruit; juicy supple tannins and good savory acidity. Lovely purity of dark berry fruits, very juicy and ripe and succulent, with a lean, mineral, dry aftertaste. **17**

Château de Chambert Grand Vin AOC Cahors 2007 – 16.5

TA: Very dark color; leafy, complex, lovely, alluring nose. Good acidity, some tannin, but folded into the structure of the wine. Classic Cahors style. Beautifully balanced, complex, harmonious. Good length. Will age. Stylish, perfumed, a touch of austerity, but this is a stunning wine. **18.5**

GB: Deep inky color, with a purple rim; medium intensity on the nose. A touch of reduction but not unpleasant. Cassis and also notes of hung animal. Fairly lean, with a slightly reduced retro. Medium-long. **14**

AR: Deep ruby color; vegetal hints of horseradish on the nose. Good dark-berry-fruit quality here, with a lovely freshness and fragrance. Very nice, supple, rounded tannin, bittersweet chocolate, and a savory acidity balancing this wine out nicely. It has character, concentration and good overall balance. **17**

Cobos Bramare Malbec 2006 (Marchiori Vineyard, Mendoza) – 16.5

TA: Super-charged purple; very aromatic. Lush, plush, quite sweet. Okay, if a little obvious. Residual sugar, some oak, lots of bramble and blackberry fruit. Not very complex, super-ripe, but I suspect this would be a good punter style. Chocolate and fruitcake and ripe fruit. A little confected? **16**

GB: Deep inky color, with a violet rim. Very intense on the nose. Prune in alcohol and

Italianate tannins. Dry, quite austere. Firm finish, dryish tannins. Extraction and dryness on the finish. Brunello-like. **16**

GB: Deep ruby, with purple rim. Medium intensity. Sweet black fruit, with pepper and other spices. Firm and square, but with ripe black fruit, especially cassis, in retro. Long finish. **17.5**

AR: Deep color; quite tough and lean tannins here. Very chunky, chewy, and unyielding; too lean for its own good. **15.5**

Château de Mercuès Cuvée 6666 Malbec AOC Cahors 2005 – 16.5

TA: Dense, deep purple. Big, Porty, ultra-ripe style. Nasty dry tannins. Overextracted, dry tannic, dry Porty, foursquare. Baked, faintly oxidative style. Very dry finish, dominated by tannin. **14**

GB: Extremely deep black color, with a pink rim. Medium-deep intensity. Sweet pastry nose with some licorice. Solid but ripe texture, with a retro packed with black fruit and dark chocolate. Long finish. **18.5**

AR: Deep color; fine, intense, aromatic quality, with lovely spicy oak intensity. Good, rich, peppery, dark-fruits quality, with lean, savory acidity. Mineral character, chunky finish, and needing food, but this has both intense terroir character and serious quality. **17.5**

Trapiche Viña Fausto Orellana de Escolar Malbec 2007 (La Consulta, Mendoza) – 16.5

TA: Super-charged red. Showing a little more age. Old-vine concentration. Oaky but dense, powerful, and almost a little raisiny. Ripe, even super-ripe, but has the concentration and acidity for balance. Acidic finish, but an impressively dense, compact, flavorsome red. Three to five years. **16.5**

GB: Deep black color, with marked purple

rim. Medium-deep on the nose. Strong smoky and coffee character. Very luscious texture. Medium finish. **16**

AR: This is opaque and inky in color, very youthful in appearance; quite rich, with licorice, spice, and dark chocolate on the nose, which is fragrantly aromatic. The fruit is nicely balanced in the blackberry and damson spectrum. The tannins are supple and almost juicy, thanks to good refreshing acidity, which is needed to counterbalance the hefty alcohol. This is of a style whose balance, while already approachable, suggests it will age nicely for a good five years plus. **17**

Château Pineriaie L'Authentique AOC Cahors 2008 (France) - 16

TA: Inky purple; big, powerful, black-fruit nose. Is this slightly one-dimensional? Big, bold fruit ripeness—lots of tannin, lots of fruit, but it lacks polish and balance. Sweet middle, ripe, but quite foursquare in style. Firm finish. **16**

GB: Deep black-ink color, with a purple rim. Medium-full intensity. Dark chocolate dominates the nose, with summer pudding. Round and rich, with a retro repeating the nose. Medium-long finish. **16**

AR: Deep, opaque ruby/violet in color; sweet blackberry fruit and spice on the nose. Plenty of opulent dark berry fruits here, with firmish but resolved tannins and good savory acidity. An attractive, bright, fresh Malbec whose chunky tannins demand food. **15.5**

Pulenta Malbec X 2007 (Alto Angelo, Mendoza) - 16

TA: Mid-ruby/purple. Sweetish raspberry nose. A little confected and simple. Ripe; chocolate and coconut notes. Like an old-fashioned Rioja but with more alcohol. Sweet middle. Okay but fairly simple. **15.5**

Alfa Cru Malbec 2006 (Valle de Uco, Mendoza) - 15.5

TA: Inky, dark, opaque; big, ripe, powerful, concentrated nose. Lots of oak, lots of concentration, slightly prune. Dry finish. Picked too late. It's a shame, because the underlying fruit here is very good. Some oxidation. **14**

GB: Deep black-ink color, with purple rim. Medium-deep intensity. Roasted coffee with blackberry. Round and creamy, with ripe tannin. Blackberry and smoky in retro. Medium-long finish. **16.5**

AR: Deep ruby color; attractively aromatic in super-ripe vein, with licorice spiciness and good concentration of dark-berry/blackberry fruit. Incisive acidity and rounded tannins; very nicely balanced fruit quality. Serious stuff, with an excellent overall balance in which the sum is greater than the parts. **16**

Château La Caminade Esprit AOC Cahors 2005 (France) - 15.5

TA: Very dense, very dark; slightly prune nose—some VA. Aussie-style red. Barossa Malbec? High-toned, tannic, masses of oak; some VA on the palate, too. Just too much for me. Supercharged. Hard to drink more than a glass. **14**

GB: Deep red-black color. Very intense. Slightly volatile, with cherry-in-alcohol nose and fruit cake, too. Firm and solid but ripe. Medium-long finish. **17**

AR: This is very dense, opaque, and youthful in color; it smells like a dry Port with a sort of spicity, alcoholic baked character, but also lashings of coconutty oak. The fruit is very rich and concentrated, with licorice spice but a powerfully alcoholic, sweet Porty character that some might like but I find excessive, especially since the tannins are also rather unyielding and chunky. **15**

tannins and firmish, slightly astringent red- and prune-fruit flavors. Just starting to yield nicely into a resolved spicy/peppery red whose chewy tannins demand food. On its own, this is still a tad chewy and dry, but with the right kind of Gers food, it could be very good. **15.5**

Cosse-Maisonneuve La Fage Vin de Table (Cahors) - 15.5

TA: Mid-ruby/purple; reductive, almost Chilean nose. Ditto palate. Reductive, meaty, Maule notes. Highish acidity, old-fashioned style, nice freshness. Balanced, aromatic, with some mint. Good freshness and length. **16**

GB: Medium-deep inky color, with a purple rim; fairly open on the nose. Red-fruit and herbal notes. Relatively lean, but with ripe tannin. Medium finish. **14.5**

AR: Good color; slightly minty/spicy nose. Good red-fruit flavors, with cherry and a hint of rhubarb. Nicely evolved, juicy ripe-fruit quality, with succulently textured tannins and fresh savory acidity. All nicely balanced and very approachable now, but the savory Old World chewiness will not appeal to everyone. **16**

Clos de Gamot AOC Cahors 2005 - 15.5

TA: Mid-garnet/ruby; grubby, dry nose, with some evidence of rot? Old-fashioned style. Pretty tannic stuff—quite lean, high acid. There is a little bit of fruit, but you need a trowel to get at it. Dry, mean finish. Unimpressive. **13**

GB: Medium-deep ruby, with black-cherry rim; expressive nose, with red and black fruit. Herbal nuances. Very juicy and lively, soft tannin, excellent retro-olfaction of stony fruit. Medium-long finish. **17.5**

AR: Mid-ruby; pleasing violet floral aroma, with slight vegetal undertones, and even a

“The fruit is nicely balanced in the blackberry and damson spectrum. The tannins are supple and almost juicy, thanks to good refreshing acidity. A style whose balance suggests it will age nicely for a good five years plus”—Anthony Rose on Trapiche 2007 Viña Fausto Orellana de Escolar

GB: Medium-deep red/ruby, with a purple nose. Medium-deep intensity. Black fruit but also some cream cake. Round and smooth, with velvety tannin. Spicy and baked plum tart in retro. Medium-long finish. **16.5**

AR: Deep ruby color; sweet coconutty oak on the nose. Plenty of sweet dark cherry fruit on the palate; very nice ripe opulence, richness, and spicy characters, with well-integrated coconutty oak. Nicely balanced tannins and juicy fresh acidity. Overall, charming, approachable, and while it will benefit from aging for a year or two, it is drinking beautifully now. **16.5**

Cosse-Maisonneuve Le Combal AOC Cahors 2006 - 15.5

TA: Mid-purple; aromatic, quite alcoholic. Red-fruits nose. Palate dry and tiring out, with the tannins starting to take the upper hand. Dry finish. Leafy, some sweetness, but age is an issue here. **14.5**

GB: Deep ruby, with a purple rim; medium intensity. Black fruit, with blueberry and blackberry, followed by herbal undertones. Ripe and juicy; nice retro, with predominantly black fruit. Medium-long finish. **16.5**

AR: Good mid-ruby freshness of color; nicely evolved aromatic profile. Quite chunky

light beefstockish undertone, too. This is juicy and approachable; ripe and cherryish on the palate, with very supple, easy tannins and nice balancing acidity. Not a blockbuster, but with its slight licorice spiciness and dark-cherry fruit, this is a very pleasing, approachable style. **15.5**

Fabre Montemayou Gran Reserva Malbec 2008 (Mendoza) - 15.5

TA: Big, dense, blocky purple; super-ripe, alcoholic, super-concentrated. Masses of oak, violets, plums, blackberries. Not subtle, a little Porty perhaps, but this is still a

ANTHONY ROSE'S VERDICT

I had been looking forward to this tasting because there's nothing quite like a blind tasting to reveal your own prejudices to you. And I will admit that I came to this tasting with a couple of distinct prejudices. On the one hand, I believed that, at the higher levels, Argentina was now producing Malbec that would always outshine Cahors. On the other, I also thought that it would be fairly easy to tell Argentinian Malbec from that of Cahors. How? Because I believed that, with its greater degree of sunshine, Argentina was producing a richer and better-balanced style compared to the wines of Cahors, which I felt generally showed a greater degree of astringency. I made a note of which I thought was which, and I was wrong a third of the time.

Looking at my first prejudice, I was delighted to see that three of the wines I marked highest in my top ten were not Argentinian Malbec but were from Cahors, while five of the next ten were also from Cahors. Thus, while it's true that the weighting for me still came down in favor of Argentina, Cahors performed better than I'd expected. As for the second prejudice, I found it was by no means an automatic process to tell the two apart. If there was one word each to define Argentinian and Cahors Malbec, it was opulence in the case of Argentina and astringency in Cahors'

case. Generally, higher and more savory acidity was a factor, but a wine like Argentina's Achaval Ferrer, two of which were top ten for me, achieves a natural freshness that could easily be mistaken for European, while Bérangerie Les Quatre Chambrées could have been from Argentina. There seems little doubt that, helped by good recent vintages and improved *savoir faire*, Cahors is getting its Malbec riper.

I felt that the wines showing higher alcohol and more oak would probably be from Argentina, but in fact that was not always the case. There were some very high-alcohol wines from Cahors, one or two verging on the Porty, and overoaking was also a feature in Cahors, so no easy answers there. Comparisons are, as they say, odious, so in the end what counts is what's good, and there was plenty that was good—excellent, even—from both Argentina and Cahors: a richness and purity of fruit flavor, excellent tannin management and oak handling, and some wines with superb balance. Many of these were quite young, and while the Argentinian Malbecs were perhaps more approachable generally at a young age, it was again not always the case. As a believer in Malbec's quality potential, I was heartened by this tasting; it showed that this potential is now being realized on both sides of the pond.

Top wines

Achaval Ferrer Malbec 2007 18.5
Château du Cèdre Le Cèdre 2005 18
Bodega Noemía Patagonia Malbec 2007 18
Catena Zapata Malbec Argentino 2006 18
Domaine La Bérangerie Les Quatre Chambrées de la Bérangerie 2008 17.5
Trapiche Viña Domingo F Sarmiento Malbec 2007 17.5
Achaval Ferrer Finca Mirador Malbec 2005 17.5
Yacochuya 2004 17.5
Clos Triguédina Probus 2006 17.5

Catena Zapata Adrianna Vineyard Malbec 2006 17.5
Château de Mercuès Cuvée 6666 Malbec 2005 17.5
Domaine La Bérangerie La Gorgée de Mathis Bacchus 2007 17
Trapiche Viña Fausto Orellana de Escolar Malbec 2007 17
Château de Chambert Grand Vin 2007 17
Fabre Montemayou Gran Reserva Malbec 2007 17
Susana Balbo Signature Malbec 2007 17
Catena Zapata Nicasia Vineyard Malbec 2006 17

complex, concentrated wine. I'd drink it now rather than wait. 17

GB: Deep inky-black color, with a vibrant purple rim; medium-deep nose. Slightly volatile but not unpleasant. Black fruit such as plum and black cherry. Rich and ripe, with really rich chocolate in retro. Long finish. 14
AR: Big, hefty, Porty; browned rice-pudding nose—this smells slightly cooked and

overalcoholic. Ditto on the palate, where chunky tannins collide with massive brandied alcohol in a wine that is simply too hefty and Porty for its own good—unless, of course, you like your reds to be Port. 15

Château Lagrèzette Le Pigeonnier AOC Cahors 2005 - 15.5

TA: Saturated purple color; very

concentrated. The biggest wine of the tasting: huge! Dense, blocky, concentrated—but who would drink this, apart from the staff of *The Wine Advocate*? Very tannic, very extracted, chewy. 15.5

GB: Extremely opaque, dark, black-ink color, with almost no rim variation; medium-deep nose. Black fruit: blackberry and damson. Rich and round. Medium-long finish. 16

AR: Very dark, dense color; masses of coconut oak spice and blackberry-pastille sweetness on the nose, which verges on the Porty and overalcoholic. Better on the palate, but it's still big, rich, immense. Blackberry sweet and coconutty, with huge, chunky, monster tannins. To me, this is a caricature, but I recognize that some might actually enjoy this level of sweetness, oak, and alcohol. Good luck to them! 15

Trapiche Viña Adolfo Ahumada Malbec 2007 (Villa Bastías, Mendoza) - 15.5

TA: Medium purple; youthful, faintly Porty, overalcoholic nose. Heat. Very high alcohol on the palate, too. Some pepper, firmish tannins, some sweet oak, but it finishes hot and a little prune. Less oak would be preferable, ditto alcohol, but there is enough concentration here for the wine to age for 3–5 years. 16

GB: Deep purple, with violet rim; medium-high intensity. Blackberry and damson and some smoky touches. Solid and ripe on the palate. Slightly sweet aftertaste. 15.5

AR: Good youthful color; it has a slightly sawdusty, oaky, rice pudding-like nose that also, if not offensive, seems to suggest a wine with almost cooked, baked characters. It's not quite baked on the palate, but it teeters between opulence and overripeness. Very powerful, suggesting high alcohol, while the tannins are quite firm and extracted, the perky acidity preventing the wine from falling flat. 15.5

Familia Zuccardi Santa Julia Reserva 2008 (Mendoza) - 15.5

TA: Mid-ruby; lighter style. Simple, light, aromatic. Dry tannins; lacks complexity. Sweet; a little confected. Also starting to show a little age. Strangely gutless. A touch of prune on the finish. 15

GB: Medium-deep ruby, with red-purple rim; medium-deep nose. Candy fruit with rich chocolate coating. Round and full, with strong pastry in retro. Medium-long finish. 15

AR: Mid-ruby; Worcester sauce spiciness and confit tomato on the nose. This is nicely approachable now, very supple and juicy, with good underlying spicy flavors and easy-drinking, supple tannins. It's just starting to dry a little on the finish. 16

Familia Zuccardi Q Malbec 2006 (Mendoza) - 15.5

TA: Mid-ruby/purple; very ripe, firm tannins. A little dry, slightly lacking in fruit complexity.

Dry, aging, foursquare. Quite short on the palate. All oak and prune—and dryness. Needs more fruit. Touch of VA. **13.5**

GB: Medium-deep ruby, with a purple rim; medium intensity. Black fruit and licorice. Smooth, with a rich texture and some blueberry ice cream. Medium-long finish. **17**
AR: Deep color; prune-sweet nose. Super-ripe notes of dark chocolate on the palate, with a refreshing twist of astringency and nicely rounded if slightly chunky texture. Good wine, with nice fresh, juicy, terroir-y Malbec showing through. **16.5**

Domaine La Bérangerie La Gorgée de Mathis Bacchus AOC Cahors 2007 - 15

TA: Saturated youthful purple; raw, lumber-yard nose, very oaky. Rather unbalanced: lots of alcohol and oak, slightly raw acidity, and then the fruit seems to be component parts rather than working together. May improve with time, but the clumsy oak is a worry. **14.5**

GB: Very deep purple, with small pink rim; extremely pronounced nose. Mocha, tar, and spices. Robust but ripe, with black fruit in retro. Medium finish. **14**

AR: This is a dense, saturated, inky ruby color, very youthful in appearance; powerfully spicy oak and coffee-bean aromatic quality that, at this stage, seems a tad overoaky. The palate is opulently blackberryish, with lashings of vanilla and coconut oak. The tannins are supple, if a tad chunky, and there is good balance of acidity. Still far too youthful to drink with this level of oak and tannin, and one hopes that the tannins and oak will integrate down the line, because this is undoubtedly a good wine. **17**

Domaine La Bérangerie Cuvée Maurin AOC Cahors 2007 - 14.5

TA: Dense, opaque purple; aromatic red-cherry and plum nose, no obvious oak. Medium- to full-bodied, fresh acidity, good balance; cherry fruit, bright flavors. Not a huge wine but well balanced and harmonious. Three to five years. **16.5**

GB: Deep inky color; medium intensity, with a distinct smell of reduction. Herbal notes and some greengage. Lean and a bit hollow in retro. Medium finish. **10**

AR: Dense color, youthful appearance; a rich, warming, violet, spicy nose, with a touch of oak that diminishes on the palate. This is rich, with full-flavored dark fruits—damsons and plum—a touch of bittersweet chocolate, initially with a nice suppleness of tannin, and a twist of good fresh astringency and balance. But as the tannic grip takes hold, it suggests it needs a good couple of years for the elements to knit together. **16.5**

Cosse-Maisonneuve Les Laquets AOC Cahors 2004 - 14

TA: Mid-purple; sweaty-armpit nose. Simple, sweetish fruit but very dry tannins. Simple,

one-dimensional, starting to dry out. Tannic. Bitter finish. **12**

GB: Deep ruby, with a purple rim; medium-deep intensity. Matured black fruit and also some leather. Slightly austere, with ripe fruit. Medium finish. **14.5**

AR: Good rich ruby; very nice, spicy nose. Nice underlying evolved spice and pepper. Good fragrant elements suffusing this wine, which is rich in black fruits, spice, and savory qualities, the tannins rounded and resolved, with a slightly dry aftertaste. Overall, quite nicely balanced and approachable. **16**

Château Pinerie L'Authentique AOC Cahors 2007 - 12

TA: Rich, dark purple; oak- and alcohol-dominated nose, but with hints of underlying fruit concentration. Touch of cork taint? Cork taint drying out the wine, plus a little Brett; sour finish. Second bottle has more fruit but still some weird characters. Dusty oak, with some Brett. Not a joy to drink. **12**

GB: Deep purple, with violet rim; medium intensity. Light black-fruit character, with some cured-meat undertones and also a horsey smell. Some leather, too, in retro. Medium intensity. **11.5**

AR: Deep color; slightly grubby, farmyard whiff of the stable. Rich dark-berry fruit shaped by chunky tannins. Powerful alcohol and savory acidity, with feral, animal undertones. Potentially good fruit, but rather too grubby and feral for its own good. Second bottle has more fruit but is still leathery on the nose and palate, with that whiff of the stables. **13**

Commentary (after the wines' identities had been revealed)

TA: I suppose the first thing is general impressions of the tasting.

GB: It really was a very good level. There were a few wines that had faults.

TA: What did you think their faults were?

GB: There was reduction, and I think some Brett, too.

TA: Do you think that the Argentinian wines and the French wines were easy to distinguish?

GB: I would say not 100 percent.

AR: I agree. And I think that that was the most interesting thing, in a way. I came with definite prejudices. I came feeling that I was confident that I could distinguish Argentina from Cahors, and just looking now at what is Argentina and what is Cahors, I think that generally speaking there was a distinction, but there wasn't always. I am finding that there are some Malbecs from Cahors that have a lovely ripeness that I might have thought were sufficiently opulent and rich to be Argentinian.

TA: I found that the top wines are really, really, really good. I think that Cahors and Argentina are closer together than I thought. Like Anthony, I thought that

Argentina was going to smell of violets and have 15% alcohol, while Cahors was going to have 13% alcohol and be a bit drier and a bit leaner. But I think that that is a caricature of both styles. The best Argentinian wines were quite supple, and the best Cahors were riper than I expected.

AR: My feeling was that there were one or two wines that were overripe to the extent of being Porty. I haven't checked which ones were Argentina and which ones were Cahors, but there were definitely some wines that were marked down for being too ripe, too alcoholic, and in some instances too oaky, so I think that was a distinct problem. And there were some that were borderline, and you thought, "Is it, or isn't it?"

GB: My favorite wine was Domaine La Bérangerie Les Quatre Chambrées de la Bérangerie 2008. It was not really Malbec; it was almost Côte-Rôtie.

AR: Yes, it had that lovely sort of floral quality. Succulent, chocolaty...

TA: I thought it was Argentinian.

AR: That was the kind of wine where you couldn't quite tell. It could have been one or another.

TA: Don't you think that it is actually quite hard to spot the difference between high-altitude, cool-climate Argentina and Cahors—that is, Cahors that is made in the modern style?

AR: Very. That is the really interesting thing—it was not immediately obvious. There are some wines where it *is* immediately obvious. They are very alcoholic, kirsch, oaky. But there are others that have a lovely ripeness, a lovely substance, that could almost be Argentinian, but it's not—it's actually Cahors. I think that there is a coming together of styles—isn't there?—where the vintage is right, the winemaking is right, and the balance is right.

TA: I think that the success of Argentinian Malbec is influencing the styles of wines being made in Cahors. The fact there were two or three Cahors wines that I thought were Argentinian suggests that they are picking later, they're using more new oak, they're extracting less tannin, and they're trying to make lush styles.

AR: I don't think there is any doubt about that. The question is whether it is actually Argentina influencing Cahors or whether Cahors is getting a grip on hope to improve its wines.

TA: Do you think Cahors is influencing Argentina?

GB: No.

AR: No, not yet. What did you think of Château Lagrézette, which is Rolland? I scored only 15 for that.

TA: I found it to be the biggest wine of the tasting—a wine for the staff of *The Wine Advocate*. I thought that was Argentinian.

AR: Yes, exactly. I also thought it was Argentinian. ■