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the drinks business

Malbecs and Malbec-dominated expressions frequently produce exceptional 'black wines'. The quality of those we judged in our 2022 Global Malbec Masters competition was remarkably high, from inexpensive to extremely high-priced. To use the much maligned phrase, Malbecs are by-and large 'food wines'. However, they are not only fit to accompany grilled Argentinian beef, they can be just as good with something like Cajun gumbo with a bit of home-made salsa.

This year, the lion's share of entries came from South America, with Argentina dominating the medals, especially Golds and Silvers. Chilean wines also showed very good balance and concentration.

Mendoza and, especially the cooler part of Uco Valley and Luján de Cuyo, produce stunning wines; intense but elegant, with abundant silky-textured tannins and aromatic overtones, crushed orange-coloured roses and hints of acacia honey. Weightier wines come from the lower, warmer slopes here, though the wines retain balance and integrity. At every price point, these wines deliver. Some of the biggest excitement among the judging panel this year, however, came from Malbec's birthplace – southwest France. Exceptional examples came notably from Cahors and the Dordogne. The latter is the home of Pécharmant, and these made up some of the most elegant wines we tasted, in particular, wines from the Georges Vigouroux group – that high-class, French Malbec extraordinaire.

The rest of southern France is also a good place to search out high-quality Malbec wines, with some superb styles from the Languedoc. Brisk acidity, wellcontrolled tannins and appropriate use of oak with high alcohol less evident are all attractive features in these wines, which did not envoke palate-fatigue, even at the end of an extensive 'black-wine' tasting day. More crowdpleasers this year came via blends of Malbec and other, mostly Bordelais, varieties, including Petit Verdot. Many of these blends are succulent and aromatic, showing how well Malbec can work with other grapes, adding extra dimension and filling the sometimes slightly hollow mid-palate, making the wines feel more complete. An interesting aspect of this year's Global Malbec Masters is that we received more blends from outside of France than previous years, from the likes of Argentina, Chile and other parts of the globe, including Australia, suggesting that it's not just single-varietal Malbec that producers are pursuing with earnest. Up in the more stratospheric price brackets, many of the wines were stunningly delicious, with great fruit, well-measured oak accents, bright acidity and velvet tannins. You can discover a number of these layered, complex wines over the following pages and they are worth every penny.

Famille G. Vigouroux