

## SonVida Malbec 2007 Mendoza

22 Dec 2009 by Jancis Robinson

From \$22.99

The United Nations has been in the news recently. What a sickening shame that more was not achieved in Copenhagen. I don't know to what extent the producer of my chosen wine this week, ex ITN chief foreign correspondent David Smith, now a special advisor to the UN secretary general, has been involved with the climate- change discussions, but I'm sure he is more intimately involved with the niceties of weather now than he was when working for Reuters and British tv news. He chose not to go to Copenhagen because he was tied up on work related to the tragedy in the Congo, where he has spent part of this year. 'Sometimes I put the truly urgent ahead of the planetary', he explained.

He and his Argentine- born, Cambridge- educated wife Sonia, a former CNN newscaster, are based in Washington DC, David working with the United Nations, but their debut vintage **SonVida Malbec 2007 Mendoza** represents the fulfilment of a dream: to make wine. They dreamt of having a vineyard and house (shown here) in her native Argentina and ended up in what they call 'the heart of Malbec country, the Valle de Uco, in a small area known as Altamira, close to the village of La Consulta. Our neighbours are Chandon, Catena, and Achaval Ferrer. Close by, sharing the valley, are O Fournier, Clos de los Siete, Finca La Celia and Lurton.

'Our terroir is defined by the Andes. We are at 1,029 m above sea level. Snow melts high in the mountains, and waters our vines. The earth is strewn with rounded pebbles, carried down the Andes over millennia, by streams and glaciers. The sun shines brightly 330 days a year. The cooling nighttime breezes help the grapes keep their freshness and mature with full flavours.'

So much so similar to the story of many other Argentine producers, but I must say I was very taken by their first wine, which seems to have real freshness as well as the velvety seduction of high- altitude Mendoza Malbec. There's no excessive heat or sweetness to this wine. It has a really appetising quality - thoroughly wholesome and with a nice savoury note on the finish. This debut SonVida, named by (sort of) eliding their first names, is nicely restrained without being at all mean or thin, and the alcohol level is a kind 13.5%.

Their vineyard was planted in 2001 and the grapes were picked by hand between 29 Mar and 9 Apr with a yield of 40 hl/ ha. Ambient yeasts only, fermentation at 26-27 °C, two pump- overs, one punch- down and 28 days' maceration. Then 12 months in French oak barrels and no filtration. The final blend included 3% of their vineyard's Cabernet Sauvignon and a grand total of 3,000 bottles were made. Tiny production, I'm afraid, but there will be twice as much of the 2008 vintage.

I should warn you therefore that so far the wine is available only in the US (a change from some recent wines of the week that have apparently been available everywhere but the US). The importer is William- Harrison of Manassas, VA, and the only retailer I can currently find on wine- searcher.com is Calvert Woodley in Washington DC.

But this wine is worth looking out for. And it is fun at this holiday time of year to consider the story of the dream behind it.

