

THE TASTING PANEL

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BLIND TASTING

with Deborah Parker Wong

Uruguayan Tannat

Sitting at the same latitude as Auckland, New Zealand, and possessing a warmer maritime climate than Bordeaux, Uruguay is the New World home of Tannat. With close to 5,000 hectares (15,000 acres) of Tannat planted across the country's diverse soils, Uruguay grows more of the variety than the rest of the world combined. As sustainable winegrowing goes, it's a pristine growing region that makes considerably more wine than either Finland or Norway which are ranked the cleanest.

For a late ripening, humidity-loving grape, Tannat is produced in a wide range of styles, with oak aging and blending being common factors. The variety made its way to Uruguay in the 1870s from the Madiran region of southwest France, where its high levels of polyphenols and resveratrol earned Tannat, and red wines in general, a nod of approval for healthy antioxidant properties. Uruguayan Tannats generally have a softer tannin structure, which is used by winemakers as a framework for blending and building



the aromas, flavors and intensities of wines in a blind tasting, serves as a benchmark.

- 1 Distinct cassis and mineral character; clean, bright and lean with black fruit, leather and spice on the palate and medium length; \$11.
- 2 Complex aromas and bright, alive varietal flavors with coconut notes and juicy acidity; \$14.
- 3 Red fruit aromas, smoky plum and tart berry flavors with medium weight and mineral notes on long finish; \$12.
- 4 Savory aromas and flavors with granular tannins and a bright, juicy finish; \$22.
- 5 Aromas of coffee and earth, dark fruit with elegant texture and lifted, medium-weight mid palate; \$35.
- 6 Rich and structured with intense, dark black fruit, pepper and caramel notes that taper towards a leaner finish; \$20.
- 7 Blend with 40% Tannat, elegant with driving, persistent varietal flavors showing development and complexity; \$50.
- 8 Clean, international in style with extracted fruit showing crisp cassis, overt coffee and lift on the mid palate; \$40.
- 9 Bright cassis nose with medium-weight fruit and soft berried flavors, plenty of vanilla, toast and cedar through soft finish; \$14. ■

of Uruguay tasting presented by David Furer and 15 of the country's top producers in September at San Francisco's Golden Gate Club, it's worth noting that brettanomyces was evident in many of the wines. My top picks are ranked using the Quality Threshold, a new metric I've developed that illustrates the threshold or "sweet spot" where quality and value are aligned in a like group of wines.

The premise behind the Quality Threshold is simple. Traditional scores speak to wine quality, but unless they're accompanied by a tasting note that addresses value, it's caveat emptor for anyone who hasn't done their homework. Like a fingerprint, everyone's Quality Threshold is slightly different, but the threshold of an expert taster, someone who can repeatedly identify



Uruguayan winemaker Francisco Carrau and consultant David Furer presented at the Wines of Uruguay tasting in September.

complexity in the wines with varieties that include Viognier, Pinot Noir, Merlot and Syrah.

Of the Tannats evaluated at a Wines

THE REVEAL: 1. Narbona 2010, 2. Pisano Family Vineyards 2011, 3. Bodegas Carrau 2011 Reserva, 4. Marchal 2011, 5. Pisano Family Vineyards 2009A, 6. Artesana 2011, 7. Pueblo del Sol 2009 Preldio, 8. Garzon 2011 Reserva, 9. Familia Inrutha 2008Km 0 Rio de la Plata Gran Reserva

Irman of Mongolian
Int Stock Company,
producer of Soyombo Vodka.

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