**WINES OF ARGENTINA PART I: TANGO & MALBEC OR?**

“Tango is a vertical expression of a horizontal desire”

* G B Shaw

The essence of Tango is passion, elegance, originality AND Argentina.

These qualities should be reflected in wine matching. The first thought that comes to mind is Malbec given its body, intensity and color. Like TANGO, it is or can be, spicy, elegant, silky as well as sexy and complex. Plus both are MACHO! Moreover, it is a traditional grape of Argentina and Tango is a traditional dance of Argentina. But the more I asked “What wine do you drink while dancing Tango” at over 40 winery tastings on my wine press trip to Argentina this September, this simple conclusion grew and expanded.

My first real breakthrough came with the response:

I ask my partner what she prefers: “Tango is about making the woman happy.”

Next came another frequent answer: nothing. We eat and drink beforehand (and after), but not while dancing. Apparently Many Tango dancers would rather concentrate than drink. So when people would say that they’d go with high alcohol wines, I’d answer “You don’t dance tango, do you?” They would shyly demure.

The second most common response was sparkling white wine, especially one that is light and fresh.   Some winemakers suggested the Modern Malbec style, which is fruity and intense, best reflects the tango experience.

How to best reflect Tango’s complexity? One good way is a Grand Reserva Malbec. Last month I chided a NY winemaker’s choice of Bonarda with Tango. Why? Bonarda is a delicious wine but too simple. I liken it to the choice of drinking Beaujolais. In tango, one is “intertwined”: wine translation- “blended.” The most common choice is a Cab-Malbec blend. Others possibilities are Malbec-Syrah or Malbec-Cab Franc. Like Tango, high quality Blends are once again very popular in Argentina. Another way to reflect passion and depth is a blend of several Malbec plots. To me, this choice recalled early tango history of with men dancing with men…

As we left Buenos Aries and travelled to Mendoza, I found fewer wine makers danced the Tango. I had an interesting sidebar discussion based on the opinion of one Mendoza winemaker: “People from BA know tango but they don’t know wines!” But I will leave that discussion for another time. ☺

If they didn’t dance, I first asked what about “watching” Tango- but then I quickly realized that, like talking when dancing, that would be something ONLY a gringo would do. However, almost all winemakers did LISTEN to tango and that became my backup question when needed.

**LISTENING TO TANGO**

Overwhelmingly, the choice was a red wine. Malbec was the classic response.  Reasons ranged all the way from “Malbec is a complex inspiring wine” and “because it is romantic” to “This is what I like to drink.” Choices varied with each individual. Some liked a soft Malbec for easy drinking and relaxing. Others preferred an aged red, a Gran Reserva (Personally, I am in this camp.)

For the best listening experience, ideally one relaxes, stops thinking and senses more. But how one does this is as personal as is dancing Argentine Tango. The possibilities are endless. For some, drinking a stronger, high alcoholic wine helped them relax. Sparkling Wine was again a common choice as was a light, refreshing white. One enjoyed drinking a Malbec Reserve with cheese, salami and bread. While another would recline on his sofa drinking Malbec nibbling just soft goat cheese and jam. A third winemaker ate more: cheese, salami and empanadas. One drank Merlot because it was romantic, while another preferred Cab Frank due to its elegant and seductive qualities. The greater the distance away from Buenos Aries and among those not born in Argentina, the responses came even farther afield as how enjoyment and relaxation was cultivated, ranging from Pinot Noir for ALL times “because it is my favorite wine” to drinking Bailey “I love Bailey” to “I smoke a Cuban cigar and drink Bonarda.”

Many people in Argentina listen to tango as background music while doing something else, like driving a car, or preparing the fire for the Sunday barbeque. Naturally for the former situation, we do NOT recommend drinking ANY wine!

**MORE LISTENING RESPONSES**

* I drink Mate if working (I don’t drink alcohol at my office).
* I don’t care about the wine but with whom I am drinking!
* Pink champagne because reminds me of the lips of woman.
* Tannat- I am **Uruguayan.**
* Bonard wine because you can drink this without eating. Also my girlfriend loves Bonarda - she is a tango dancer.
* What is most important is one bottle to share. This the best point- one bottle for two!
* Which tango? How fast? With Neuvo tango, I relax best with Torontes or an easy blended Malbec.\*
* Dancing tango with or w/o clothes?

“If with clothes, it is a serious thing, but if naked, I drink sparkling rose so refreshing.”

\* This topic is too technical for this discussion. Do note: American tango, Finish tango, etc. can each benefit from a different drinking companion.

**SUMMARY**

In Tango, *one plus one = one*

I gradually came to the conclusion that the spirit of Tango might be reflected by a blend of two wines… but which? Later I encountered a new and unique organic blend of my two favorite red grapes- Pinot Noir (feminine) and Malbec (masculine) at Familia Schroeder in Patagonia. Was this not the essence of Tango! Why this blend? Their answer: “If your think in the fruit descriptors of the Pinot Noir and the fruit descriptors of the Malbec and you imagine a fruit salad it makes perfect sense, so why not attempt a blend of these two wines? The only doubt was how the blend hold after the years.  This is like a marriage between a 25 year old woman with a 55 years old man, it remains to be seen how will they age together". My opinion is so far so good. Their current 2007 release’s tasting note sings Tango: “This blend features a complex nose… Ripe red fruits Aromas…Spicy nuances…Delicate vanilla and chocolate tones… Sophisticated mouth-feel and remarkable elegance.” \*

But if I am asked what wine to drink with Tango, I recall the first principle of Cultural Addition:

Malbec-because it is Argentine.\*\* I strongly agree with the sentiment: “Malbec is the PERFECT Argentine wine and it (Tango) is our music.”

As for listening to Tango, drink whatever you enjoy and what relaxes you. Still, ideally for the best experience of Argentine Tango, I recommend drinking Argentine Wine with the taste of Argentine Terroir or “sense of place”. Think Torrontes, Bonarda and most especially Malbec. Happily today there are many good choices (to be continued).

In New York:

[Malbec & Tango House](http://malbechouse.com/) Malbec Wine Bar upstairs and downstairs Tango Show

[Strictly Tango NYC](http://www.learnargentinetango.com/) To learn Tango and for monthly wine and tango parties (more Tango than wine).

In Mendoza, Argentina:

[September Wine & Tango Festival](http://www.cultura.mendoza.gov.ar/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=5179)

Forthcoming:

**WINES OF ARGENTINA PART II: STEAK & MALBEC OR?**

**WINES OF ARGENTINA PART III: INVESTING IN ARGENTINA - NOW OR WAIT?**

\*Unfortunately, like grass fed Argentine beef, it is currently difficult to impossible to find this wine in New York. Fortunately, it is available elsewhere in selected markets in the US.

\*\*To enhance and deepen your cultural experience. Examples:

If going to a French movie, first eat French cuisine.

If visiting an Italian art exhibit, first enjoy an Italian feast or at least grab a slice of pizza.