

WINEMAKERS OF THE WIND – PATAGONIA, ARGENTINA...

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Patagonia encompasses the extreme south of the American continent, mostly in Argentina, and represents more than a third of the land mass of Argentina. Argentine Patagonia consists of many provinces (states) of which **Neuquén** and **Río Negro** are located at the northern edge of Patagonia.

Neuquén borders the province of Mendoza (Argentina's primary wine region) directly to the south along the Andes Mountain Range. **Río Negro** is to the east and south of Neuquén extending all the way to the Atlantic Ocean.

The wine regions of Patagonia are located in **Neuquén** and **Río Negro**, and La Pampa. The vineyards are clustered primarily in the areas where the two provinces come together in their north, far from the Andes Mountains, and where the two rivers of Limay and Neuquén merge to

become the Río Negro.

What makes this agricultural region possible is these two very big rivers, the **Río Neuquén** and **Río Limay** (photo left page), bringing fresh water from the Andes to irrigate the vineyards, as well as the orchards of pears, apples and cherries.

Neuquén the city (capital of Neuquén Province) is located where these two rivers meet. It is the largest city in Patagonia with a population of 400,000 and growing rapidly as a result of huge oil reserves being discovered in the province.

Neuquén city is where the **Neuquén Airport (NQN)** is located that you will fly into to access the Patagonia Wine Regions.

As the southernmost wine region, Patagonia offers a cooler environment for the grapes that thrive in cooler terroir. As such, Patagonia is magic for **Pinot Noir** and **Chardonnay** as we

know from other parts of the world. Further, with the softness of **Merlot**, this environment works wonderfully in bringing out its delicate nature. And for a surprise, **Cabernet Franc** is thriving here, and will capture your taste buds in a way you will not forget.

Being farther south causes cooler nights, and it also means longer sunlight days in the summer, plus with a thinner ozone layer, the sun gets very intense. All of these create the greater thermal amplitude range (as much as a 65°F day/night difference) in which wine grapes thrive and produce higher concentrations of fruit, color and balance.

This intense sun also causes the grapes to grow thicker skins to protect themselves – from the sun itself, and of even greater importance, the high winds. During springtime when the grapes are forming, the winds here are regularly blowing at 50 mph, reaching

upwards of 100 mph in some places at certain times. Just picture how much the grapes need to protect themselves, and to do so, they grow very thick skins.

The skins are where wine gets its color. Thicker skins mean more intense colors in the wine, resulting in wines that are highly concentrated in color, aromas and flavors, and also giving greater balance to the acidity and tannins.

Different from the Mendoza and Salta Wine Regions, the Patagonia Wine Region is far away from the Andes Mountains at a much lower elevation of 850'. Being far away from the Andes, this region does not get snow, nor the devastating effects of summer hail. When you see leaf damage in the vineyard, this is from the intense winds.

The wind is a unique and intense aspect to winemaking in Patagonia. These ***Winemakers of the Wind*** are fond of the difficulty the winds bring them, as the results in their wines are magnificent.

Tight rows of Alamos trees are planted in a line along the water canals surrounding the vineyards. This is the common infrastructure agronomists use to protect their vineyards from the winds. Alamos trees grow fast and tall, ideal for blocking the winds and tempering the environment from the intensity that can destroy the vineyards.

Similar to the Mendoza and Salta Wine Regions, Neuquén and Río Negro are deserts with very little rainfall. As such, they also share this same disease absent terroir, poor soil quality, and the ability to control the

quantity and timing of water irrigating the vines.

To access the water from the three large rivers in this wine region, the vineyards are planted along the north sides of these rivers, where canals have been created to bring the fresh water directly to the vineyards.

Take a look at the map above...

In Neuquén, the wine region is very small and located in an area north of the city along the Río Neuquén. Neuquén also has one new winery that has begun along the Río Limay, southeast of the city.

In the Río Negro province, the wine region extends the full distance of the Río Negro (river) from Neuquén to the Atlantic Ocean. The primary concentration of wineries; however, is located in the upper valley of Río Negro next to Neuquén.

