

## **BONARDA, A NEW APPRECIATION**

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The origin of Argentina's Bonarda Grape had for many years been the subject of much dispute. While many thought it to be the same varietal as Bonarda Piemontese, or even Bonarda Novarese, its actual roots seem to stem from Savoie, France where it was known as Corbeau. It is speculated that at one time it was transported across the Alps to Italy's Piedmont where, after many generations of cultivation by Italian winemakers and their families, perhaps its French origin was forgotten or its vines had simply been confused for another varietal planted nearby before being transported to the Americas in the late 19th century. By the time of its emigration, the vine would have taken on a number of local or regional denominations, which would not be untangled until the technological breakthrough of genetic testing one hundred years later. Today, despite DNA evidence stating otherwise, Argentina's Bonarda has steadfastly claimed its name and identity as something distinctly Argentine. But perhaps rightly so. After all, each grape grows differently under different environmental circumstances, and Bonarda's emergent popularity and critical successes in recent years are easily attributed to the grape's prosperity in Mendoza's ideal growing conditions.

Upon introduction to Argentina, the Bonarda perfectly acclimated to Mendoza's climate, soil, altitude and other variables, and its planting soon grew very popular. The vine tended to produce high yield and extremely vigorous plants; favored characteristics for early Argentine winemakers more concerned with quantity than quality. Because of this, incorrect pruning and conduction led to the vine over-shading the cluster. This would of course negatively affect the properties of the wine by today's standards, exemplified by being weak in color, light-bodied, herbal and low in alcohol. Nevertheless, it was quantity that mattered and in 1936, Bonarda covered approximately 15,000 acres (about 6,000 hectares), and by 2001 its cultivation had more than doubled to over 30,000 acres (about 12,000 hectares). At present, Bonarda is Argentina's most widely planted red grape, having recently surpassed the Malbec.

When Bonarda is handled with more refined viticulture techniques and is elaborated under skillful processes that are commonplace today, it can easily be crafted into high-quality wines. Until recently, the Bonarda variety was used only for bulk production, table wines, or to improve and balance blends. However it is now regarded with much more respect, and its elaboration into very attractive varietals and bi-varietals, such as the Syrah-Bonarda and Bonarda-Malbec, are clear evidence of this.

Bonarda grapes need hot weather, plenty of sunshine over the cluster, low yield and adequate ripening, which are conditions found throughout Argentina's prime winegrowing regions. However in San Rafael's Cuadro Benegas district, winemakers have discovered an additional advantage unique to its geography. The district is situated between the Diamante River to the north and the Atuel River to the south, and both are fed by the purest glacial runoff from the snowcapped Andes Mountains. The district's location between the two rivers has had a remarkable affect on the soil conditions in the area. It has been argued that Cuadro Benegas is the best place to cultivate grapes in the region, and it is repeatedly recommended to produce top wines due to the considerable benefits delivered from its mineral-rich loam.

In a recent private study carried out for Algodon Wine Estates by *Agronomía San Rafael*, laboratory analysis determined that the soil qualities in Cuadro Benegas are optimal for the cultivation of Bonarda and other red varieties. Soil conditions allow for healthy and prosperous root development, and provide the nourishment required for red varieties to complete their growth cycle and biological ripening of the fruit. Moreover, the presence of soil-required elements such as calcium, magnesium, nitrogen, potassium, phosphorus, and zinc, as well as pH values are all found in choice levels.

A good Bonarda is known for its intense ruby-red colors up to the violets, and continuing through purples. It is a wine with an intense nose. It is fruity-flavored with red and black fruit and ripe fruits of the forest such as strawberries, blackberries, cassis and cherries. It often presents a spiced aftertaste and aromas of vanilla and tobacco, if oak-aged. It has a pleasant mouthfeel, with a sweet entrance and good intensity. One of the most remarkable characteristics is expressed in the smoothness of its ripe tannins combined with the fruit.

**Color:** The Bonarda is well-known by its intense ruby-reds which go up to violets, going through purples.

**Nose:** The Bonarda presents an intense nose. Its primary aromas are red and black fruit and ripe fruits of the forest such as strawberries, blackberries, cassis and cherries. It often presents a spiced aftertaste and aromas of vanilla and tobacco if oak-aged.

**Mouthfeel:** Pleasant and sweet at first, with good intensity. Less tannic than the Cabernet Sauvignon. Its smooth tannins make it velvety and elegant. The oak-aging gives it excellent maturity in addition to the vanilla and toasty aromas.

**Maturation:** The Bonarda undergoes in-bottle evolution faster than the Malbec or Cabernet Sauvignon. Oak helps it reach an excellent maturation.

**Pairing:** Grilled meats and vegetables, spiced dishes, pasta, legumes, roast beef, and hard cheeses.

In only the past few years the traditional consensus of this variety has completely changed. The Bonarda has suddenly gained credence as a varietal, particularly in Mendoza where it is highly benefited by weather conditions, soil, altitude and rainfall. Appropriate labor on the vine combined with low yield control, result in exceptional quality. Some wineries have moved ahead by carefully producing the Bonarda utilizing the same industrial processes they customarily follow when elaborating wine from long established “fine” varieties such as the Cabernet Sauvignon or the Malbec. Bonarda is distinctive, it is a wine of great personality, apt for oak-aging, and obligingly willing to grow and grow.....

**To continue reading about Bonarda, WineSur.com has some glowing things to say as well;**

In recent article titled “[Bonarda: a new Malbec?](#)”, WineSur.com contributor, Gabriela Malizia, predicts that Bonarda has a bright future in the consumer world. “2008 could be remembered as the year of the ‘re-discovery’ of Bonarda,” she writes; “as exports of wine produced with this variety rocketed.” Malizia interviews a handful of winemakers with successful Bonarda production experience, and highlights a few notable Argentine wineries. Among them- Nieto Senetiner, who was, Malizia says; “the winery that triggered the turning point by making a super premium Bonarda wine.” The piece also touches on Bonarda’s Argentine history and European origins. You can read the [full article here](#).