

BODEGA ALTOCEDRO

Location: La Consulta, Uco Valley, Argentina

Presenter: Karim Mussi Saffie, winemaker/proprietor

Argentina might be known for its varietal Malbecs, but Bodega Altocedro winemaker/proprietor Karim Mussi Saffie believes that the La Consulta area within the Uco Valley subregion of Mendoza is capable of producing much more than this structured, blue fruit-driven wine.

The Uco Valley is regarded for its high-elevation vineyards, the majority of which are at 3,000 feet or higher. Within it, the area of La Consulta is coveted for its desert conditions, offering ideal factors like low rainfall, a cool continental climate, and high levels of sun exposure. Mussi told the audience that, generally, Bordeaux varieties and Malbec grow on alluvial soils in the north of La Consulta, while Tempranillo grows on the chalky, sandy colluvial soils in the south. Bodega Altocedro sustainably farms 17 different estate vineyards across the area, some of which still harbor their original rootstock.

Established in 1999, the family-owned winery is one of La Consulta's pioneering producers. Mussi, who's been with Altocedro since the beginning, prides himself on expressing the terroir to the fullest

while practicing sustainability in the vineyard. "What makes this area unique is that we are at the perfect level of efficiency in terms of phenolic concentrations. Tannins to anthocyanins are usually seen in a one-to-five ratio" in other regions worldwide, he said. "Here in La Consulta, we have a higher concentration of anthocyanins, so we ask for additional time with the oak." The oak supplies additional tannins, helping to polymerize longer chains that make the color more stable and polish the fruit-driven tannins.

One such example is the Altocedro 2018 La Consulta Select Red Blend, which consists of Malbec, Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Tempranillo, Merlot, and Syrah co-fermented in small concrete vats and aged 12 months in French oak. Mussi conducts native-yeast fermentation in Altocedro's gravity-flow winery, built in the 18th century, and eschews fining and filtration. These practices create wines with balance, elegance, and ageability, in his view. "[In Argentina as elsewhere], vineyard management, the oak regimen, the [timing of the] harvest, the macera-

tions, the temperature of fermentation, and [the length of] barrel aging are the key factors to building that beautiful [structure] of polyphenols that permit us to create elegant wines with a lot of balance and very bright acid."

Altocedro La Consulta Select Blend

(\$20) We were wowed by this blend of 40% Malbec, 19% Syrah, 15% Cabernet Sauvignon, 12% Tempranillo, 9% Cabernet Franc, and 5% Merlot grown on vineyards at 3,330 feet above sea level and aged eight months in (70% new) French oak barrels. Graphite and espresso notes are drying at first, but the palate then opens up like a wide double door, leading to velvety notes of big, bold, and tarry fruit. Blackberry preserves peek through black walnut and plum tannins. **92**

VINO DEL SOL



PHOTOS COURTESY OF BODEGA ALTOCEDRO



The entrance to La Consulta, a winegrowing area within the Uco Valley.

