

Your Calchaquí Valley Collection

from the Bonner
Private Wine Partnership



BONNER
PRIVATE WINE
PARTNERSHIP



America's Most Unique Wine Club

Dedicated to searching the world for astounding
wines from little-known winemakers

...Can We Ask A Small Favor?

Can we “compare notes” with you on these wines?

Maybe you picked up on aromas that we didn't. Maybe you just fell in love with a particular bottle. Or maybe the exact opposite. Whatever the case, we want to hear from you. Because you're part of this. And we can only keep this mission going if you're onboard.

Shoot us an email at feedback@bonnerprivatewines.com

Dear Member,

Ascensión was just 20 years old when her father, the General, died. Two decades before, in 1810, her family had found itself on the wrong side of the Argentine revolution – the General had been serving as colonial governor of Salta, the vast northwestern province that encompasses the extreme altitude Calchaquí Valley.

Returning home after standing trial in front of a military Junta in Buenos Aires (though some legends have it that he hid in a cave for years to avoid capture), the General had sought a quieter existence, establishing what is now the oldest winery in Argentina.

At 20, Ascensión had little choice but to keep the enterprise going. It was not without its difficulties, particularly when her husband died prematurely at the age of 50. But in the mid 1800s, Ascensión made a fateful decision. Realizing that the native Argentine vines (actually Spanish imports from the 1500s) couldn't produce high quality wine, she imported French malbec vines – hauling them over the rugged Andes by mule. Though she did not know it at the time, it was a decision that would alter the course of her fortunes, as well as the course of wine history. By 1871 Ascensión's extreme altitude malbecs had won gold at the 1871 World Wine Expo. A decade or more later, malbec in France was on its way to extinction (wiped out by phylloxera blight). Today, Argentina remains one of just a few places on earth where you can find not only pre-phylloxera French malbec vines, but pre-phylloxera European vines of any variety (vines in Europe must be grafted onto phylloxera-resistant American rootstocks).

It is to Doña Ascensión that we owe Calchaquí Valley malbec, the highest in the world. Our journey this year takes us from the far south of the valley, at the town of Tolombón, through the hip wine and golf town of Cafayate (a sort of Aspen of the Andes), then north and west through Pucará, Tacuil, the Quebrada San Lucas, and, finally, the great Cachi mountains.

In the wine business, people love to use the word “micro-climate” to differentiate one terroir from the next. Except that in the Calchaquí it’s a real phenomenon. We call the region the Calchaquí Valley, singular. But locally it is often referred to as the Calchaquí Valleys, plural, which is closer to the actual topography of the place. Thus, one cannot really say that a vineyard is in the Calchaquí Valley, but rather that it is in the valley of Tacuil, say, or Pucará. Visit these lone green dots, lost in a vast desert wilderness, completely self-sufficient and hours from the nearest neighbor, and each one feels like its own world, with its own history, customs, and, most importantly, its own soil and weather.

In this box, you will find six bottles:

- ① Tacuil Doña Ascensión 2019
- ② Sunal Salvaje 2019
- ③ Francisco Puga y Familia *L’Amitié Robusto* 2019
- ④ El Viticultor 2020
- ⑤ Arca Yaco Imagine 2019
- ⑥ Atypico 2018

Welcome back to the valleys of the Calchaquí.

Salud,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Will Bonner', with a large, sweeping flourish at the end.

Will Bonner
Founder, Bonner Private Wine Partnership

A Quick Note on Wine Tasting

On the next few pages, we've included tasting notes. Here's a quick tip on how to approach them.

What makes a "wine expert" is not just his depth of knowledge – which anyone can achieve – but his sensitivity to taste and smell. A great wine expert will find a hundred little aromas that most ordinary noses will never be able to detect.

Now. If you don't pick up on the same flavors, does that mean you're doing it wrong?

No. Tasting is subjective. Pronounced flavors on my palate may present themselves as secondary or tertiary notes for you. Remember, wines are always evolving in the bottle. That hint of cherry from a few months ago might present itself differently now. So, if you detect a flavor or aroma you don't see on the tasting sheet, add it. See what your friends say. Better yet, if you have a tasting that differs markedly from what's written here, send us your notes. We'd love to compare them!

2019 Tacuil Doña Ascensión (Tacuil)



8,530 ft.

94 pts (Atkin)

Malbec, Cabernet
Sauvignon

Five generations after Ascensión brought the first malbec grape vines to the Calchaquí Valley, her descendants, Raúl and Alvaro Dávalos, continue to make wine there. Their winery and vineyard, in a little valley called Tacuil, produces acclaimed, 90+ point wines such as previous Partnership favorites like RD and Mayuco, along with the Bonner family's wine, Tacana. All extreme altitude. All small batch. Rare in the US, if available at all.

This Doña Ascensión malbec is a tribute to their great, great grandmother, her land, and her vines. The grapes for this 2019 were hand harvested, then given a 25 day maceration to draw out the terroir of the skins and stems. The fermentation was left to bacteria naturally present in the Calchaquí Valley – no lab grown yeast.

The cabernet adds a dash of spice and elegance to the mix, softening the extreme altitude malbec's tannin teeth. Beauty taming the beast. If you can resist polishing off a bottle in a single sitting, leave it open for a few days to see how it shifts (watch the black fruit). Only 7000 bottles produced. 94 points (Atkin). Decant 20 to 40 mins.



2019 Sunal Salvaje (Cachi)



8,694 ft.

Single vineyard

Malbec

Augustín Lanús and his Sunal wines have been perennial all-stars since our adventure in Calchaquí wine began. But this “Salvaje” is special even by his standards.

As readers of The Wine Explorer’s Letter may remember, back in February we met up with Augustín in Cafayate where he told us about a limited, single vineyard wine from a new terroir. Augustín usually favors blending terroirs. Why do a single vineyard?

The answer is Cachi, a terroir at the northernmost edge of the valley, in the foothills of the snowcapped Cachi mountains. It’s the frontier’s frontier, bone dry except for snowmelt that drains easily through the sandy clay soil. To maximize Cachi’s impact, Augustín opted for no oak, and had the wine spend a year in a concrete egg. Despite its name, we found Salvaje to be surprisingly balanced, with cranberry and raspberry playing counterpoint to beets and fig. The noble savage. Only 6,000 bottles made.



2019 Francisco Puga y Familia *L'Amitié Robusto* (Cafayate/Molinos)



Blend of Altitudes
Only 4,392 bottles made
Malbec, Cab franc, Cabernet Sauvignon

In our Argentine Collection from last year, we included a bottle with an interesting shape. It's uncommon for Argentine winemakers to use a Burgundian bottle. Historically, Argentina takes its cues more from Bordeaux.

But winemaker Francisco "Paco" Puga began his career in Burgundy in 1999. His *L'Amitié*, the 2019 vintage of which we included in last year's collection, is a love letter to the region. With grapes from four different terroirs, we loved the delicate herbal nose, and the clean red and black fruit on the palate.

We liked it so much we decided to include *L'Amitié* in this collection, too. This time, we opted for the *Robusto* variation (like a reserve). The *Robusto* takes the same formula and adds 12 months, during which each terroir ages separately in French barriques, followed by 12 months with all the terroirs co-fermenting together. Co-fermentation is an old practice – the "ancient science" as some in the wine world call it. Where better to experience it than the ancient soils of the Calchaquí?



2020 El Viticultor 2020 (Pucará)



8040 ft.

Low Intervention
Malbec, Cabernet
Sauvignon

We've waited all year for this wine. Our man in Argentina, Diego, had tried to buy some from winemaker Daniel Guillen (Cafayate's rising star) for the 2021 collection. Alas, he didn't have enough to sell us (production is only 5520 bottles). When we got wind that the 2020 vintage was ready, we leapt at it.

Daniel is one of those rare winemakers who believes that if you put the effort into the vineyard, the best thing you can do in the winery is get out of the way. The vineyard in question lies in an iron-rich dale south of Tacuil called Pucará. During the growing season, the grapes soak up minerals from the soil. At harvest time, Daniel's family come to help pick the grapes, letting them macerate for 3 days before bacteria naturally present on the skins kick off the fermentation process with no need for artificial aids.

By all means taste it now to find wild blackberries, black pepper (from the iron in the soil), tobacco, and leather. But if you can grab an extra bottle, cellar it till 2026 to see El Viticultor reach its zenith. Only 5520 bottles made.



2019 Arca Yaco Imagine (Quebrada San Lucas)



6,889 ft.
Malbec

Looking out at a horizon of purple mountains covered in small cacti, you might miss a little patch of green at the bottom of a canyon (the “quebrada” San Lucas).

There, by a small creek, under the shade of fig and walnut trees, a tall figure in a burgundy red wool poncho walks along rows of malbec vines.

This is Matias Etchart. His family, the Etcharts, have been making wine in Cafayate since 1850. After the family sold their winery, Bodegas Etchart, to the French in 2015, Matias left Cafayate for a small farm at the bottom of the Quebrada San Lucas, where he released his first harvest, to critical acclaim, the following year.

We had his wine Amar y Vivir in last year’s collection. We return for his *Imagine*, an unoaked malbec (concrete, stainless steel), with notes of chocolate, black cherry, bramble berries, and a refreshing minerality. Decant 40 mins.



2018 Atypico (Tolombón)



6,069 ft.

Avg. vine age
50 years

Malbec, Cabernet
Sauvignon

We had the 2017 in last year's collection. We didn't hesitate to ask for the 2018. Notice the age of those malbec vines (the Calchaquí is known for exceptionally old vines). At Tolombón, the grapes get an early harvest (the reflective heat from the stony soil matures the grapes faster than usual). After that, it's 4 days of cold maceration in stainless steel, and 18 months of aging in new barrels by Vicard of the Cognac region – the last of France's great artisan tonnelleries (cooperages).

If you notice some subtle differences from the 2017, there's more than just the vintage year at play. At harvest, the winemakers use only the best plots – you seldom get the same vine twice. With blueberry and black olive on the nose; balsamic, mint, and thyme on the palate; and a balanced mouthfeel with a long finish. Decant 20-30 mins.





Our Mission

At the Bonner Private Wine Partnership, our mission is to bring you unique bottles from all over the world. We seek wines that are bursting with life and character – wines with an adventure in every bottle.

Your Next Quarterly Shipment

As you read this, we are already selecting and arranging to import wines for next quarter's shipment. We will be in touch to share what we've found with you when we get closer to the shipping date. Until then, enjoy your wine! (And let us know what you think!)

Problem with Your Shipment?

Please call our customer service, 9-5 Monday through Friday at 1-844-733-5249. We want everyone to get the most out of this club and these wines. So if there's a problem, we'll do our best to make it right.



Love tasting new wines? Have thoughts about flavor notes and styles? Become a wine tester for us and receive special offers & exclusive wines... in exchange for your tasting expertise! **Sign up at:** www.bonnerprivatewines.com/wine-testing