



Aurora production facility (above), retail area (top right), and tasting room (bottom right).

JULIANNE WILL

Julianne Will passed the introductory level of the Court of Master Sommeliers last summer. She left a career in marketing and publishing this spring to pursue freelance writing full time, covering food, wine, fitness, travel, and other subjects. She has also authored or co-authored four best-selling Catholic children's books. She lives in Chicago and can be reached through her website, www.juliannewill.com.

It was a devastatingly beautiful morning as Ademir Brandelli greeted us in front of Don Laurindo, his family's winery in southern Brazil, where he is director and enologist. The breeze was pleasant, the sun warm in a sky so blue it was almost unreal. A perfect day for working in the vineyards—and Brandelli's father, Don Laurindo, was doing just that, as he does every day at age 77.

The vineyards and wineries here in the Vale dos Vinhedos, in the Serra Gaúcha region of Rio Grande do Sul, have grown and thrived from the hard work of Italian immigrant families who have owned and operated them since the first settlers arrived from Verona and Trentino in the late 1800s.

But those families are now expanding to include professionally trained enologists, consultants, marketers, and lab technicians, as Brazil prepares to take its fine wines to markets around

the globe. Deep-pocketed investors are buying buildings and equipment—Vinícola Miolo, for example, has poured \$60 million into its winery operations since 1997—to make sure the world's first impression is a good one.

Investing for the Future

Traveling south past the beaches of Rio de Janeiro and the cultural sophistication of São Paulo, you may think you have discovered the rolling green hills of Europe. So did the German and Italian immigrants who came to the state of Rio Grande do Sul in the latter part of the 19th century, seeking land and the promise it held. Each was assigned a *lote* ("lot"), on which future generations established enterprises far greater than their ancestors ever dreamed of.

Although the latitude of Serra Gaúcha is 29° south, the terroir is actually similar to that

Photos by Roali Majola





Vinhos Don Laurindo director and enologist Ademir Brandelli (above left); Don Laurindo Brandelli (above center).



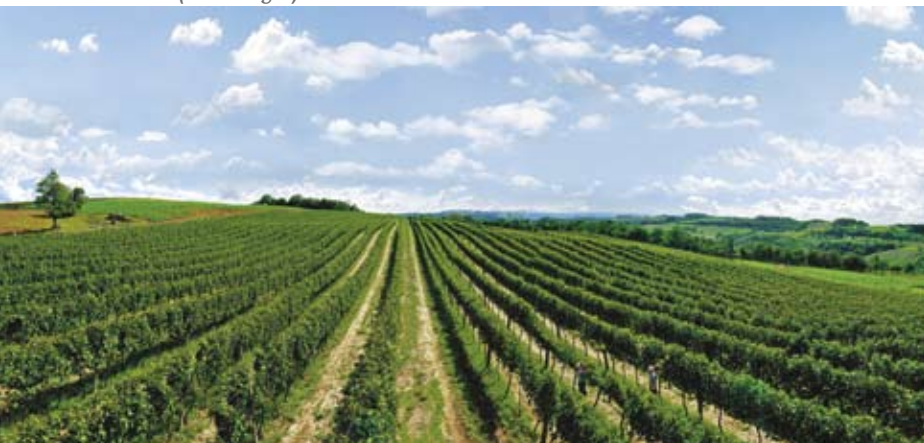
of northern Italy. The early settlers found a temperate, four-season climate, enough elevation (2,100-2,400 feet) to ensure cool nights, and enough sun, heat, and rain to make humidity a problem in the summer. In the winter, below-freezing temperatures help keep the vines dormant. Today, in fact, the region does a brisk tourist business thanks to Brazilians from the north who want to experience cold weather. There is little snow, but frosts pose a challenge from April through September.

Grapes ripen with low acidity and high natural sugar. Most growers now remove leaves from their canopies to allow the grape bunches plenty of sunlight above the damp soil. As they plant new vines, many producers are switching from horizontal to vertical trellises. They have also been taking steps such as green harvesting to reduce yields for better quality.

These viticultural efforts are being matched by technological advances. Boscato, for instance, has installed monitoring systems throughout its vineyards, at ground level and root level, to send back measurements such as dew, wind, and sunlight every 15 minutes. Roberta Boscato, the vineyard engineer and the daughter of director Clovis Boscato, tracks these results from 10 microclimates, both for planning purposes and to take immediate action when necessary. Lidio Carraro has also mapped the microclimates in its vineyards; the producer used this information to guide its planting choices when it established new vineyards in 1998 and to evaluate the need for canopy management, pruning, and fertilization.

Brazil's winemakers have invested in production upgrades as well. Miolo brought on Michel Rolland as a consultant in 2003 and re-

Boscato vineyards (below left) and director Clovis Boscato (below right).



Photos by Julianne Will (top); photos courtesy of Boscato (bottom)



Boscato production facility (far left), vineyard engineer Roberta Boscato demonstrating her monitoring system (left), and vertical trellises (above).

vamped its facilities so it could take advantage of gravity when grapes are delivered, among other changes. Last year, the facility achieved ISO 9001 and ISO 22000 certification—and visitors must wear protective clothing as required by these rigorous standards.

The vintners have sent their sons and daughters away to school to learn enology, management, and marketing. Now they're anticipating the time when all their investments will pay off.

A Group Effort

The pioneering Italian families sold their grapes to larger wineries, keeping a little back for themselves. Today, many of the plots are still small, 6 acres or so, and family-owned. When it

was no longer profitable to sell to the big boys in the late 1980s, however, some grape growers began to produce their own wines and sell directly to the consumer.

This sparked a revolution in practice, education, technology, and organization in Serra Gaúcha, a region that accounts for nearly 90% of all the wine produced in Brazil—or about 5 million cases of fine wine annually. Six producers in the Vale dos Vinhedos—Casa Valduga, Cordelier, Dom Cândido, Don Laurindo, Júlio Brandelli, and Miolo—banded together to form the Vale dos Vinhedos Wine Producers Association (Aprovale) in 1995. Three years later, they applied to the National Institute of Industrial Property for an official appellation. Caxias do Sul University and the Brazilian Agriculture

Lidio Carraro family (bottom left) and home (bottom right).





Casa Valduga winery (top left), guesthouses (top right), and cave (middle); operator João Valduga (above).

Research Company (Embrapa) Grape and Wine division produced the necessary topographical, soil, and climate studies, and in 2002, the Vale dos Vinhedos was the first region to be awarded Brazil's "Indication of Origin" designation, recognized by the European Union in January 2007. Wines labeled Indicação de Procedência Vale dos Vinhedos (IPVV) must have been grown and bottled in the valley. Moreover, only members of Aprovale are permitted to submit wines for the required testing and tasting by both Embrapa and Aprovale.

Founded with the mission of encouraging wine and grape research, conservation, and tourism, Aprovale now numbers 31 member wineries and 28 associated members such as hotels, cheesemakers, and artisans. Its current leaders, Aldemir Dadalt of Villa Europa Hotel and Spa and Adriano Miolo of Vinícola Miolo,

reflect the partnership between tourism and wine production.

In a parallel effort, the Ibravin Brazilian Wine Institute was established in 1998 by a grape-grower organization, a wine-industry association, a grape-and-wine workers' union, the federation of wine cooperatives in the state, an enology association, and the state secretary of agriculture and supply. This group addresses issues of promotion and marketing, technology, and legislation.

Finally, the Wines from Brazil organization was formed in 2002. Its first task was to consolidate 2003 exports to the United States and Europe, beginning with Miolo and followed by the Aurora and Salton wineries. Its members realized a 48% increase in exports in 2003 compared to the previous year. Wines from Brazil signed an agreement with APEX (the Brazilian



Casa Perini's Pablo Perini (right) and Y-shaped trellises (far right).



Photos courtesy of Casa Valduga (top left, top middle); photos by Julianne Will (top right, bottom middle, bottom)



Salton estate (left), production facility (top right), and Cave do Talento (above).

Brazilian Wines

Trade and Investment Promotion Agency) in 2004 to promote Brazilian wines in international markets, and it has begun to bring buyers and journalists into the country and to display its wines at tastings and fairs outside Brazil. In 2008, its members accounted for 85% of Brazil's wine exports.

The 18 members of Wines from Brazil have been exporting primarily to the United States, Switzerland, Germany, the Czech Republic, and Holland. The group is seeking not only to increase the number of exporting wineries, but to increase the number of countries to which they export from 22 to 30 over the next two years. Although it was aiming to achieve \$5 million in annual exports by December 2009, it was already on track to reach that goal in 2008, with a 127% increase in export volume in the first half of 2008 compared to the same period in 2007.

The result of all this organization, investment, and promotion in global markets has been the planting of nearly 30,000 acres of *Vitis vinifera* in Serra Gaúcha. Overall production leans slightly toward more red wines than whites. Red varietals include Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Merlot, Pinot Noir, Gamay, and some grapes traditionally grown in Italy, such as Tannat and Ancellotta. The bulk of the white wines are made from Chardonnay, Muscat, Sémillon, and Sauvignon Blanc.

What the country has begun to share with the world is unlike most of the other wines com-



Miolo vineyards (top), winery (above), barrel room (above right), and estate (far right).



ing from the Southern Hemisphere, where Brazil is the fifth-largest producer. Most are food-friendly, European-style wines with moderate alcohol levels, typically 11-12%, and smooth, soft tannins. Reds are often barrel-aged in French oak.

The region has also become known for the production of sparkling wines. Casa Valduga, which began using the *méthode champenoise* 20 years ago, has one of the largest sparkling-wine cellars in Latin America.

OUTSTANDING RECENT RELEASES

Casa Perini Prosecco Brut, Vale Trentino N.V. \$18

Pale yellow, with a soft effervescence. Clean citrus fruit; slightly sweet; smooth, with an acid backbone. After 50 days of Charmat-method fermentation, the wine rests in the bottle for 30 days. 11.6% alcohol.

Don Laurindo Malbec Reserva, Vale dos Vinhedos 2005 \$42

Ripe grapes lend a sweetness to the red fruits, balanced by notes of nutmeg and cinnamon. Well-integrated tannins result from aging in French oak, then in bottle in the Don Laurindo caves, before distribution. 13.5% alcohol.

Salton Talento, Bento Gonçalves 2004 \$35

60% Cabernet Sauvignon, 30% Merlot, 10% Tannat. Bright ruby in color, with a nose of black fruits and plum followed by hints of earth, chocolate, coffee, and wood. Acidity and tannins provide a structure that should mature well. Aged in French oak for a year, then stored in bottles for nine months. 13% alcohol.

Miolo Gran Lovara, Vale dos Vinhedos 2005 \$30

This blend of 40% Cabernet Sauvignon, 40% Merlot, and 20% Tannat achieved a rare 14% alcohol level in the hot, dry vintage of 2005, though you wouldn't know it from tasting. The opaque ruby wine has a rich nose of plum and oak, picking up some smokiness on the palate, with modest tannins.

Casa Valduga Cabernet Franc P Collection, Vale dos Vinhedos 2005 \$14

A bit floral and fruity on the nose, this 100% Cabernet Franc is spicy and pleasantly earthy. It rings in at 14% alcohol, yet plays it cool. Aged in oak, it could use a little more aging in your cellar. Watch and hope for Casa Valduga's 2008 Gewürztraminer, a real stunner.

Dal Pizzol Merlot, Serra Gaúcha 2005 \$28

Jammy, dark, rich, and fruity. The aromatic nose features red fruit, spices, and a slightly floral note. Well-rounded tannins result from 12 months of oak aging. An excellent food wine.

Lidio Carraro Quorum Grande Vindima, Vale dos Vinhedos 2004 \$98

A delicious blend of 35% Merlot, 30% Cabernet Sauvignon, 20% Tannat, and 15% Cabernet Franc, coming in at 12.7% alcohol. The Grande Vindima line is only bottled in top vintages. This one offers red fruits deepened with coffee and chocolate, a supple body, and balanced structure.

Prices are estimated retail.



KEY PRODUCERS

Boscato Indústria Vinícola

VRS 314, Km 12.5
Nova Pádua 95275-000
+54-3296-1377
www.boscato.com.br
Importer: Rolf
and Alvis, Inc.
Linden, N.J.

Casa Valduga

Linha Leopoldina
P.O. Box 579
Vale dos Vinhedos
95700-000
Bento Gonçalves
+54-2105-3122
www.casavalduga.com.br
Importer: Brazilian
Training Solutions, Inc.
Boca Raton, Fla.

Cooperativa Vinícola Aurora

Rua Olavo Bilac, 500
95700-000
Bento Gonçalves
+54-3455-2000
www.vinicolaaurora.com.br
Importer: Brazilian
Wine Connection, LLC
brazilianwineconnection.com

Dal Pizzol Vinhos Finos

RST 431, Km 4.8
Faria Lemos
Cx. Postal 520
95700-000
Bento Gonçalves
+54-3449-2255
www.dalpizzol.com.br
Importer: Roger
Twardowski
San Francisco

Lidio Carraro

RS 444, Km 21
Vale dos Vinhedos
95700-000
Bento Gonçalves

+54-2105-2555
www.lidiocarraro.com
Importer: Marble
Hill Cellars
www.marblehillcellars.com

Vinhos Don Laurindo

Estrada do Vinho
8 da Graciema
Vale dos Vinhedos
95700-000
Bento Gonçalves
+54-3459-1600
www.donlaurindo.com.br
Importer: Brazilian
Wine Connection, LLC
brazilianwineconnection.com

Vinícola Miolo

RS 444, Km 21
Vale dos Vinhedos
95700-000
Bento Gonçalves
+54-2102-1500
www.miolo.com.br
Importer: Wonderful
Ethnic Imports LLC
www.wonderfulethnic.com

Vinícola Perini

Santos Anjos
Cx. Postal 83
Farroupilha 95180-000
+54-2109-7300
www.vinicolaperini.com.br
Importer: All Brazilian
Import & Export, Inc.
www.allbrazilian.net

Vinícola Salton

Rua Mário Salton, 300
Distrito de Tuiuty
95700-000
Bento Gonçalves
+54-2105-1000
www.salton.com.br
Importer: Tri Vin
Imports, Inc.
Mount Vernon, N.Y.



Sweet sparklers, in particular, are favored by Brazilians in the hot north. Unfortunately for the local industry, a Brazilian zero-tolerance law prohibiting any level of consumption before driving went into effect in June 2008. This has apparently diminished an already low level of domestic consumption, which reached a high of a little less than 2 liters per person per year in 2005. That figure compares to more than 11 liters per capita in the United States in 2006, according to Vinexpo, and roughly 62 liters per capita in France.

Some growers are still small, family operations, served by cooperatives such as Aurora, the country's largest, which brought the first Brazilian wine to the United States in 1988. Aurora began with 16 families in 1931; today, there are more than 1,100 families producing about 2 million cases of bottled wine a year under several different labels. Aurora offers education and health care to its members and shares research gleaned from its technological centers, staffed by teams of enologists.

Other wineries have grown exponentially under the oversight of their founders. The Salton family arrived from Veneto in 1878, bringing several grapevine sprouts. Their company was founded in 1910; today, managed by the third generation, Salton owns 185 planted acres and oversees nearly 1,500 acres held by its suppliers, producing 1.7 million cases annually. In 2004, Salton completed a gleaming new facility to house its winery, tasting rooms, laboratories, and a retail shop.

The stories of these families are the story of Brazilian wines. The immigrants have brought their Italian tastes and style and integrated them with the South American culture. Soft, balanced reds can harmonize with pasta, yet have enough backbone to handle course after course of salted meat. Fresh, aromatic whites are cool on a hot day, but don't drown food in syrupy sweetness. Traditional Italian grapes are handled with modern technology to manage tannins and improve consistency.

Brazil is bringing a conservative lineup to the United States in 2009, dominated by Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, and Chardonnay. More varieties may follow, says Paulo Sérgio Kroeff, brand manager for five of the wineries, but for now, wines like a beautiful Gewürztraminer; a funky-in-a-good-way 100% Tannat; a fresh and fruity, unoaked Cabernet Franc; and a range of sweet-but-solid sparkling Muscats will remain in Brazil for local consumption.

Brazil's major producers are serious about improving the world's perception of fine wine from their country, and they've put their money behind the effort. If they can maintain quality, consistency, and availability throughout the export process, they may surprise buyers not only with the polish and sophistication of their wines, but with the unique flavors from those Italian families who brought pieces of home to the New World. 🍷