

All images courtesy Wines of Brazil.

BEYOND

BY JULIANNE WILL

THE



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**IN BRAZIL, A
NASCENT WINE
COUNTRY IS ON
THE HORIZON**

BEACHES

Plan a trip to Brazil, & your friends will wax poetic about beaches, meat on a stick, beaches, Carnival, beaches, sunshine & beaches.

But Brazil is much more than Rio de Janeiro.





IN fact, Brazil is the fifth-largest country in the world, larger than the continental United States. Brazil is also the fifth most populous country in the world. It's diverse, geographically and culturally.

So perhaps it should not come as such a surprise that the southern part of Brazil has far more in common with Italian wine country than any beach. In the state of Rio Grande do Sul, near Uruguay, it is rolling hills, green countrysides and charming villages.

And the wines available in the United States this year from that region also have more in common with Europe than the big, bold Malbecs and Carmeneres earning fame for South American neighbors Argentina and Chile.

Yet they're every bit as representative of their place and their culture, their terroir. In Serra Gaucha, which produces 90 percent of all wine in Brazil, you're every bit as likely to find Italian cappelletti soup as a side of Brazilian beef. For those who only know the Brazil of lime and cachaca cocktails, sand and sun, these fine wines from Brazil will come as a surprise as they make their way to the States.

Roberta Boscato is speaking rapidly in Portuguese, so rapidly that her translator can't keep up. Roberta, daughter of Boscato Wines director Clovis Boscato and the vineyard's

young engineer, is describing the technology with which she monitors the microclimates in the family's high-altitude vineyards. And she's passionate about the family business.

She and her peers in Serra Gaucha come from a tradition of winemakers and growers, descendants of the Italians 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.

They arrived with vines and first grew grapes in their backyards to make wine for their own tables. Later, some began to sell their grapes to larger wineries, still keeping a little back for themselves. Many of the vineyard plots that dot the hills today are small and family owned, six acres or so.

By the late 1980s, however, it no longer was profitable to sell grapes to the big producers. Some grape growers began to produce their own wines and sell them directly to the consumer. They even brought a few of those wines to the United States. But the first exports 20 years ago were much more similar to the backyard, homemade variety, and not in a good way.





Today, however, the sophisticated examples—primarily red, with a few classic whites—hitting American soil bear much more resemblance to the restrained and complex wines of Europe, with lower levels of alcohol and fresh acidity. Even the Tannat grape, which can make notoriously scratchy and rustic wines, generally has smooth polish here.

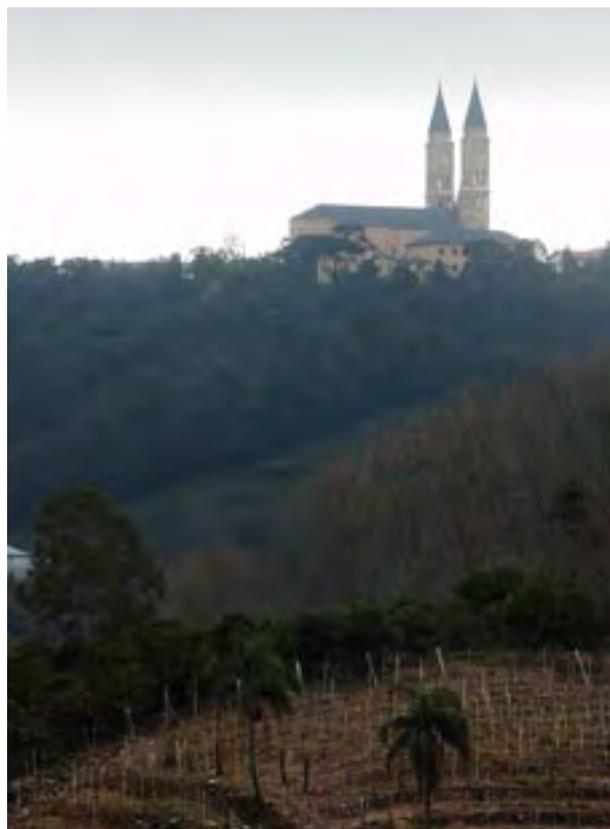
It's all thanks to multimillion-dollar investments in equipments and consultants—including the famous Michel Roland—by the same Italian families who brought those first little vines overseas. Brazil is today the fifth-largest producer of wines in the southern hemisphere, and its wine makers are poised to expand worldwide.

At Boscato, Roberta reads data from monitors installed at ground level and at root level throughout the family's vineyards that send back seven measurements such as dew, wind and sunlight every 15 minutes. Located in the southern part of Rio Grande do Sul, in the Rio das Antas Valley, Boscato's vineyards climb rolling hills to an altitude of around 2,600 feet. The changes in altitude and sun exposure from plot to plot make for drastically varied results. Roberta tracks those changes from 10 microclimates both to plan for the current season and beyond and to take immediate action if necessary.

The growers at Lidio Carraro Winery also have mapped the microclimates in their vineyards. This guided grape selection as they established new vineyards in 1998 and today helps them evaluate the need for pruning and fertilization. Patricia Carraro and her brother, pictured hand-in-hand with their parents in the family vineyards on the back of the winery's business cards, are poised to lead Lidio Carraro abroad, the fifth generation to make wine in their family but only the second to do so from these new vineyards with technology and quality controls.

And Miolo Winery has poured \$60 million into its operations since 1997—buying buildings, equipment, all the tools necessary to be sure its first impression in the United States is a good one. While the Miolo brothers still are at the helm, the staff has expanded to include an enologist and an international relations director.

Formal education in viticulture and winemaking has been key to taking tradition to the next level. These families have sent their sons and daughters away to school to learn enology,



management and marketing. The children have returned with educations and changes.

And yet some things never change. On a visit one sunny morning to Don Laurindo winery, Laurindo Brandelli himself was walking in the vineyards, inspecting the vines as he does every day despite his 77 years.

This marriage of tradition and quality is being carefully guarded. Six wineries in Vale dos Vinhedos, a sub-region of Serra Gaucha, came together in 1995 to form the Vale dos Vinhedos Wine Producers Association (known in Brazil as *Aprovale*). They applied for creation of a Denomination of Origin in 1998, and Vale dos Vinhedos was named the first Brazilian *indicación geográfica* in 2002. It was recognized by the European Union in January 2007. Wines with the Control Label IPVV must have been grown and bottled in the valley. They undergo tests and tastings to be sure they've met certain standards for quality. Only wineries who are members of *Aprovale* are permitted to submit wines for this label.

The result of all this organization, investment and interest in global markets? Some really beautiful wine.



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Red varieties include Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Merlot, Pinot Noir, Gamay, Tannat and some traditional Italian grapes such as Ancellotta. The bulk of the whites are made from Chardonnay, Muscat, Semillon and Sauvignon Blanc.

The region produces some sparkling wines that can compete on a world stage. Casa Valduga, which began using the champagne method 20 years ago, has one of the largest sparkling wine cellars in Latin America. Brazilians on the beaches in the north like the sweet sparklers. But we won't get to see much of that in the States—yet. Brazilian producers fear a lack of acceptance.

Instead, they come bearing mostly Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Chardonnay first. Alcohol levels are often moderate, at 11 to 12 percent compared with California's sometimes 15 percent versions. Reds have a little bit of tannin, but it's generally smooth and soft. Reds also are often barrel-aged in French oak for a more subtle influence than American oak. And most of the wines are food-friendly; their balanced flavors and acidity enhance food, rather than overtake it.



BRAZIL'S BEST WINERIES

CASA PERINI

www.vinicolaperini.com.br

The Casa Perini facility in the hills of Serra Gaucha includes the original home of Juan Perini, who first started making wine there. His father, Guisepe Perini, arrived from Veneto in 1876. In 1970, Benildo Perini, grandson of Guisepe, started making table wine under the brand Jota Pe (for Juan Perini). Casa Perini, their fine wine label, was launched in 1996. Guisepe's great-grandson Pablo Perini has joined his father in overseeing production.

LUIZ ARGENTA

www.luizargenta.com.br

Brothers Deunir and Itacir Neco Argenta bought the land for Luiz Argenta in 1999 and founded the winery in honor of their family patriarch, Luiz. The winery has invested heavily in research and technology recently, experimenting with canopies, pruning, soil drainage and terracing in its vineyards at 2,800 feet; it is importing technology from Italy and Spain for a new winery facility.

AURORA

www.vinicolaaurora.com.br

Aurora is the largest cooperative in Brazil. It began with 16 families in 1931; today there are more than 1,100 families producing about 10 million gallons (38 million liters) of juice and wine annually under several labels. Aurora gives tours of its cellars and tank rooms, which are more functional than fancy. Aurora affords very small producers a way to sell their grapes and make wine, and offers its members access to education, health care and research.

BOSCATO FINE WINES

www.boscato.com.br

Clovis Boscato started the winery with his brother, Valmor, in 1983. Clovis is the enologist; Valmor the grape grower. Clovis's daughter Roberta is the agricultural engineer. The Boscato vineyards sit at an average altitude of 2,300-2,600 feet, up a winding road above their winery, cellars and retail store down in the town of Nova Pádua.



In Rio Grande do Sul, the cultures of Latin America, Italy and the gauchos (cowboys) harmonize in great food, fine wines and gracious hospitality. Each winery, each family has its story. Here, just a few whose names you may see here in the States:

VINICOLA SALTON
www.salton.com.br

The Salton family arrived from Veneto, Italy, in 1878, bringing several grapevine sprouts. They were among the earliest to formalize operations, founding their company in 1910. Today, managed by the third generation, they produce 20 million bottles annually. Salton engages in a great deal of research—there are plots for testing varietals and measuring grape ripeness. Salton built a gleaming facility in 2004 housing the winery, tasting rooms, laboratories and a retail shop.

DON LAURINDO
www.donlaurindo.com.br

The property on which this small winery is situated belonged to director and enologist Ademir Brandelli's great-grandfather, who emigrated from Verona in 1887. The company is named for Don Laurindo Brandelli, Ademir's father, who founded the company in 1991. Don Laurindo hopes to increase exports of its fine wines from 5 percent to 20; most sales now come from boutiques, telephone and Internet orders, restaurants and purchases at the winery. Don Laurindo bottled a lush red blend for the family in 2005 to celebrate the 10th anniversary of its first Tannat in Brazil.

CASA VALDUGA
www.casavalduga.com.br

Casa Valduga firmly remains a family operation. The large, modern winery, which has expanded to include a restaurant, tours and guesthouses hosting as many as 25 couples, is run by brothers Pedro and João Valduga, and decisions require the approval of all family members. Pedro and João were the first in their family to be able to study enology. And Pedro always wears a straw hat as a reminder of the time when he was judged too poor to enter the nearby bank because of his peasant attire.

MIOLO
www.mioło.com.br

With ISO 9001 and 22000 certification, as well as the services of international consultant Michel Rolland, Miolo is a highly structured, progressive business. The company is just 20 years old, but patriarch Guiseppe Miolo came from Veneto, Italy, in 1897, and Miolo remains in the hand of his descendants. Brothers Paulo, Darcy and Antonio have proven business savvy, partnering with Villa Europa Hotel across the road and establishing nine tasting rooms around Brazil in an attempt to grow their domestic market.

Since 1988, when Aurora Cooperative brought the first Brazilian wine to the States, 18 members of Wines from Brazil, an agency designed to organize and promote international efforts, have begun exporting. Their first targets are the United States, Switzerland, Germany, the Czech Republic and Holland.

Wines from Brazil hopes to reach \$5 million in annual exports by December 2009, but its members were on track to reach that goal already in 2008.

With continued success, the United States might yet get to see Brazil's best wines, including a beautifully balanced Gewürztraminer; a different and distinct 100 percent Tannat; a fresh and fruity unoaked Cabernet Franc; and a range of sparkling Muscats.

Until then, these new wines bearing the influence of family pride and history are an excellent excuse to plan a trip to Brazil—no beach gear necessary. 🍷

Julianne Will is a writer specializing in food, wine, travel and fitness. She passed the Introductory Level of the Court of Sommeliers and regularly enjoys a nice glass of wine in Chicago.

LIKE EUROPE ... ON A BUDGET

Southern Brazil is accessible and beautiful for those who want to experience the wines in their place

Tourism centered on wine is increasingly bread and butter for the restaurateurs, artisans and retailers in the Serra Gaucha region of Brazil. Eno-tourism is even drawing new investments to the area as wineries develop tours, build tasting rooms and otherwise roll out the welcome mat. With more than 30 wineries in the Vale dos Vinhedos area within Serra Gaucha alone, wine country excursions in southern Brazil can be as easy and enjoyable as rambling around Sonoma County...and as intriguing as a trip to Europe. Even better, it's akin to a trip to Europe on a budget. The dollar does far better against the Brazilian *real* than the euro.

WHERE TO STAY

Villa Europa Hotel and Spa Do Vinho, just completed in 2007, sprung up in response to eno-tourism interest. This undertaking is a partnership with Miolo winery across the road and includes such reciprocal arrangements as a tour for hotel

guests at the winery and Miolo's wine for sale at the hotel.

Villa Europa's Spa Do Vinho also maintains a sense of place. It's the fifth French Caudalie spa in the world, and it uses grape products such as seeds and stems in its *vinotherapy* treatments. For more information, see the Web

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WHERE TO GO

If you wish to take a day trip, a Villa Europa concierge can help you rent a car or hire a travel agent to arrange an excursion. Casa Valduga,

Salton and other wineries in the region are a short drive and lure guests with tours, tasting rooms, gift shops and restaurants. Along the winding roads in the region, studios featuring the works of painters, cheese-makers (including the Italian pecorino) and other artisans beckon.

For more high-end shopping, visitors can head to Bento Gonçalves, a wealthy enclave of 100,000 with designer clothing boutiques and a fresh, blossoming downtown. Hand-crafted wood furniture runs a close second to the wine industry here.

There's often an English-speaker at tourist destinations, and Villa Europa always has an English-speaking staffer on duty.

WHAT TO EAT

Pasta and cappelletti soup provide a taste of the region's history. But you'll find more meat-from-a-spit than you can shake a stick at from churrascarias such as Castelo Benvenuto, between Bento Gonçalves and Garibaldi (www.giuseppe.com).



br/en/index.htm). Chicken hearts and wild boar come around along with the finest cuts of beef and lamb; enjoy a giant salad bar, too.

HOW TO GET THERE

Travelers to Brazil need a visa in addition to a passport. See the General Consulate of Brazil's website at www.brazilconsulate.org. Follow the instructions and allow at least a month to process the application. The fee is \$130 when applying in person; \$150 via courier or mail. Typically a visa will be valid for five years.

Delta flies direct from Atlanta to São Paulo. From there, TAM flies into Porto Alegre, the capital of Rio Grande do Sul where the Serra Gaucha region is situated.

Villa Europa can send a car to pick up visitors at the airport in Porto Alegre, which is approximately an hour and 45 minutes' drive. They will transport as many as four guests at a time for 200 reales (per trip, not per person) each way.

**Real men
don't go
to salons**

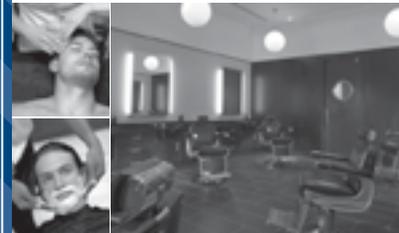


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