

Laura Catena

Catena Zapata, Mendoza, Argentina

This San Francisco physician is one of the leading figures on the Argentine wine scene.

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Catherine Fallis, aka "Grape Goddess," is the first person in the world to have earned both the Master Sommelier diploma from the International Court of Master Sommeliers and the Advanced Certified Wine Professional title from the Culinary Institute of America. She is founder and president of Planet Grape LLC (www.planetgrape.com), a wine consulting firm providing education, content, and sommelier services. Follow her on Twitter at twitter.com/planetgrape.

I've known Laura Catena for years through the wine industry and see her fairly often, since we live near each other in San Francisco. She leaves as much of a lasting impression as the wines produced by her Argentine family. She is obviously passionate about the varied aspects of her life, with wine, medicine, and family topping the list. Everything she does is carefully planned out far in advance. This is a reflection of the influence of her father, Nicolás, but also of her medical training: she is an emergency-room obstetrician/gynecologist at UCSF Medical Center and is as meticulous in her research of medical subjects as she is with wine-related issues.

As it happens, UCSF is where I gave birth to my son. From the minute my pediatrician and the prenatal nurses found out I was in the wine business, I was a popular patient. Nurses and other doctors would pop by to ask my advice on wines, restaurants, you name it. And of course, they all

mentioned that they had their very own wine-maker on staff: Laura Catena. They asked me often about her wines, bragging about how they had been gifted with a bottle here and there.

The wines of Catena Zapata have a loyal following not only at UCSF, but at top restaurants around the United States and the world. Sommeliers should take advantage of the strong relationship of the dollar to the Argentine peso as long as we enjoy it and go straight to the high end, where the wines cost less than half of what their quality would indicate. Even when prices start to creep up, these will remain some of the most intriguing, balanced, long-lived wines made anywhere in the world.

For this interview, I met with Laura earlier this year at her home in San Francisco.

CATHERINE FALLIS, MS, ACWP



Laura Catena (left); Bodega Catena Zapata in Mendoza, Argentina (above).

You have one of the more interesting educational backgrounds in the wine industry. How did your various passions develop, and how is your time divided among family, medicine, and winemaking these days?

I grew up in Argentina and then finished high school in Berkeley, Calif. (my father was a visiting professor at UC-Berkeley for a couple of years). Then I went to Harvard University. I had spent a lot of time in high school in France, and when I was 14, I spent an entire summer studying art by myself, living with a family, taking

the subway all over Paris; I don't know how my parents let me. So I was much more of a humanities-oriented person, but when I got to Harvard, the science was so interesting that I decided to study biology.

It was interesting to be at a place like Harvard. I had Stephen Jay Gould as one of my teachers, and it was so inspiring to see the impact of science on humanity. Volunteering at a psychiatric hospital for children really inspired me to do medicine. I decided I wanted to have the science as background, but I also wanted a job that was social, where you interact with peo-



Laura Catena with her father, Nicolás Catena.

ple. I didn't realize at that time that the family profession of making and selling wine had the same attributes, in that there is a lot of science along with the human side.

How did you get into emergency medicine?

The reason I picked emergency medicine is that I really like to be on my feet, thinking all the time. I can't sit down, so it would be very hard for me to be a doctor in an office, but the emergency department is perfect for me. I also like the variety of humanity. I like the fact that we see people who are living in the streets, people in all kinds of walks of life. I always say that my dream is to be a house-visit doctor like in the old days, going to people's homes and taking care of them.

Did your father try to talk you into working in the wine business?

My father was never one to try to get us to work for the family. For him, it was something that had to come to you. And he claims that had he not done that, I wouldn't be working with him today. I am not so sure about that; I sometimes say, "Dad, why didn't you tell me it was so much fun to make wine?" But maybe he's right.

When I was in my early 20s in medical school, my dad and I would get together and basically drink through Gaja, Vega Sicilia, Opus One—we tasted every great wine in the world together, with me never having any idea I would go into wine. My father and I are very close; he would always ask me questions about how Americans would respond to something or ask my opinion about labels. It was always this sort

of informal advice I would give him, because I was living here. My father is one of those people who never makes you feel that your advice is unwanted.

So by the time I was in my late 20s, I had finished my residency, and my family needed someone to go to a wine show. With my personality, I started thinking, "Well, why aren't they doing this?" and "I saw this really interesting thing they're doing in California or this interesting thing they're doing in France; why aren't we doing this in Argentina?" I started getting involved because I felt like I needed to help my dad. He'd done so for me, so I should be helping him. Little by little, I got more involved, and then I started working half-time as a doctor and half-time in the winery. Now, probably for the last five years, I work part-time as a doctor and then spend about four months in Argentina and the rest of the time between California and traveling to other parts of the world.

And you have three kids.

Yes. I take them to Argentina with me; they go to school there part of the year. It is a little hard on my husband because I leave a lot and he has to take care of everything, but I feel that what we are doing in Argentina is so important. I come from a country where every family can do well, but goes broke at some point in their generation because the economy is so unstable. The peso fluctuates, there's inflation, yet with all this instability, we have found this place where I think we can make the best wines in the world because of the climate and soil combination. For me to be involved in that is almost like a mission. It goes beyond our family or what Laura Catena wants to do—I have to do it. I am helping my country become a leader in something, and that is wine. We used to be the leader in soccer; let's be the leader in wine. I try to, of course, always put my family first, but in a business, unless you're working very hard, you're not working hard enough. So I try to do as much as I can to be good at everything, but as I always say, "If I'm not a good doctor, I will immediately stop," because that is the one thing that I have to be good at.

How has medicine affected your winemaking?

Medicine is what brings me down to earth. When you're working in a business, you're always looking at the cost of this, the cost of that, the profit, the sales numbers. When I go to the hospital, I see people suffering and how, in the

end, none of this is that important—it is each human and what we can do for our neighbors, our family, the people we see in the coffee shop. That is why I hope to be a doctor for a much longer time.

I spend a lot of my time reading journals, staying up-to-date in medicine, because in medicine, you have to. But that actually helps me in wine, too, because our winery is very rigorous with people. If somebody says, “I want to use this yeast or this rootstock—I don’t want to use SO₄, I want to use Paulsen,” I say, “OK, why?” They give me a reason, and I say, “I need more than that. Tell me the experience in Australia, in South Africa, in Chile, and in Europe. They all have different soils. Ours is probably more similar to Washington state. What is the rootstock in Washington state?” And everybody is shocked that I’m asking all these questions, but I’m trained to make a decision based on true information. In medicine, it’s called “evidence-based medicine,” which means that you choose to change your standard of care according to the latest research. If you can apply that kind of rigorous intellectual thinking to something like making wine, you are really ahead. So I feel that medicine has really benefitted me. I don’t take an answer lightly; I think a lot before doing something. The other thing medicine teaches you is “I don’t know.” In medicine, you never say you know something when you don’t, whereas I think that in the business world, there’s a lot of bluffing. I teach people at my winery that if they don’t know about something, it is much more honorable to say you don’t know.

How did your father discover that elevation was the secret to growing high-quality grapes in the Mendoza area?

This is really a great story, because today everybody talks about high altitude in Mendoza, and it seems like everybody always knew that. But I can tell you, because I was there when my father was doing this. In 1989 or 1990, I was a teenager, and my father had been invited by Jacques Lurton to go to France to visit the Bordeaux area. Since I spoke French fluently, my father asked me to come. Of course, it was great fun—in my family, there’s always a competition of who gets to spend the most time with my father, because he is just such an amazing person to be with. So Jacques took us to several first growths, the really high-end properties, and we asked, “Jacques, what do you think of the Cabernet Sauvignon that you tasted in Argentina?”



Catena Zapata winery.

He said, “Well, those wines make me think of the Languedoc.” When a French person says that, especially at that time when the Languedoc wasn’t making such great wines, they are basically saying it’s too hot. My father had already started thinking that was the issue, that the places we were planting were too low in altitude and too warm. I remember my father and I talking about it, and him going back and saying, “I need to know what is the perfect place to grow Cabernet Sauvignon, Malbec, and Chardonnay. We need to go cooler, and the way to go cooler is to go farther south or higher in altitude.” You can go south to Patagonia, but their vineyards are at 1,200 feet elevation. In Mendoza, we’re at 5,000 feet. If you’re farther south, since you’re lower down, you’re actually warmer than in some of the cooler areas in Mendoza.

So what my father realized is that he had to find the perfect latitude-altitude combination for each varietal. What we didn’t know at that time was that going high in altitude would have another very important factor: sunlight intensity. What we have learned for Malbec is that when you go higher in altitude, you can actually plant it. For example, our Adrianna Vineyard



Irrigation channel in Catena Zapata's Adrianna Vineyard.

was the first vineyard planted at almost 5,000 feet elevation in Mendoza. Everybody said, "God, there's no way Malbec's going to ripen." It's our best Malbec! There's nothing unripe about that wine, almost every year. But what's interesting is why we can ripen there, where it's a Burgundy climate in terms of temperature. It's because the plant has enough sunlight for photosynthesis. Also, the skins thicken, so you get more polymerized tannins—the ones that make you have a wine that's concentrated and smooth at the same time, which is what we all want, but is not easy to obtain. If it were warmer, we wouldn't have enough time to accumulate those tannins. So because it's cold, we get photosynthesis, lots of concentration, thick skins, and concentrated tannins, but we also get the slow ripening and retention of acid, because when it is very cold at night, the plant doesn't respire and you maintain acid. Your final result is this wine that is nice and crisp, not too alcoholic (because it's not so hot), with these rich tannins and concentration. That my father didn't know; he wanted to find the limit of cultivation for Malbec and Cabernet in Mendoza. It's been much higher than we thought.

What are the effects of soil type, clonal selection, and microclimate in Mendoza?

The one thing that we have worked on more over the past 10 years has been specific site character. What we've found is that not only are there tremendous regional differences between the Uco Valley and the Tupungato area or the different districts within Luján de Cuyo—Tunuyán, La Consulta, or San Carlos—but there are dramatic site-specific differences. This is something not many people know. The soils in Mendoza are called entisols. What that means is that the soil is mixed between lime, clay, and sand. Our soils are alluvial, unlike the French soils, which are in layers. So you could have a vineyard that is right next to another that is completely different, less fertile, with better drainage. It's not like in France, where the hillsides are better than the flat parts, and that pretty much defines who's got the best terroir. Over the last 10 years, we have done a lot of research to identify why one lot within our vineyards is a triple-A+ and another one is a B. That is what we are focusing in on right now—specificity of lots, specificity of plants.

Regarding plant selection, at our 145 vineyard, our best Malbec vineyard, we selected the best five clonal selections and planted them across the population, so we really have a lot of research on how to get the best qualitative clones of Malbec. We go for low yields, small berries, small bunches, and concentrated grapes. This has been one of our most important quality initiatives. We call them the Catena cuttings and planted them at different elevations. We don't sell them. Other wineries have done some selections, but nobody has done the clone-by-clone-selection study of populations that we've done.

In terms of microclimate, the latitude and altitude determine the exact microclimate of that vineyard, in combination with the soil. The microclimates in Mendoza are varied and different. If a winery studies and can understand the specific microclimate of each vineyard and farm it differently lot by lot, they have a huge advantage in quality. Yields are different, irrigation is different—we are a desert, so irrigation is everything. How much leaf removal we do depends on the sunlight, the exposition. Wind is a very big problem in Patagonia; in fact, they have to put their irrigation down by the ground, otherwise the water flies away. In Mendoza, we do have a hot wind called the *zonda* several times a year. The problem with that wind is if it comes when there is flowering, it can cause shot berries. But in general, it is not a problem.

Photo by Kevin Judd/Cephas

How did the various Catena brands develop?

Our first brand, released in 1992, was our Catena Cabernet and Chardonnay. Catena started out being a selection from our proprietary vineyards. Then, when we came out with Catena Alta, we started doing a lot of selection within our proprietary vineyards. The concept is that all of the wines from Catena Zapata that have our name are from our estate. The Catena Zapata single vineyards—Adrianna, Nicasia, Nicolás Catena Zapata, and the Malbec Argentino—are plant-by-plant selections; we identify the best plants by their foliage and their homogenization and actually mark them with little red strings. Every year, we usually keep about 80% of the same plants. If you look at any vineyard in any part of the world, there is a lot of plant variability. Some of it has to do with specific genetic composition, some with the soil or microclimate. In Argentina, because we are a desert, anything that happens in that tiny, little piece of soil affects the plant very much, because it is not getting a ton of water. In France, they have an underground aquifer that all the plants can access, so homogeneity may be a bit easier to obtain, but there are still variables. For these top wines, we need selection at the vineyard, then we sort again at the sorting table at the winery, then we sort another time with the barrels. The same thing happens with Catena and Catena Alta: if any wine is not good enough, it doesn't make the cut.

How do your various vineyard sites contribute to the wines' identities?

In terms of concentration, the Adrianna Vineyard, in a small subdistrict called Gualtallary in Tupungato, and Nicasia, which is in the Altamira region, are similar. They are both really big and rich, but the aromatic components and the style of the tannins are so incredibly different. If you compare them to Angélica, which is lower in altitude—it's the mother vineyard where all the Catena cuttings came from—you have another completely different character. Because we know that these are the same cuttings, the same genetic plants, the difference has to come from the terroir, from the specific soil of each vineyard.

The big question is do you blend or not? When we were first thinking of blending, a lot of people said you have to do one or the other for marketing. I don't care about marketing. I like to taste the individual vineyard, and I like to taste the blend. They are two different experiences. In

our winery, Catena Alta is a blend of five different lots—this really rich, beautiful, drinkable, ageworthy wine that tastes similar year to year. We make the blend with the core component being whatever vineyard was the best that year, but we want people to say, "This is the Catena Alta I remember." And then we have the Catena Zapata Adrianna that will taste a little different every year because it is a single vineyard.

In the end, I think if the wine tastes wonderful, people don't care if it is a blend or a single vineyard or whatever. They just want it to be an interesting wine, a beautiful wine, and a wine that you want to drink. What I tell people is, "Listen, every wine that comes from our winery I have tasted hundreds of times, and for the Catena Zapata wines, my dad has spent a lot of time retasting the blend, and you know that there is a human there who has fallen in love with this wine." You have that stamp of family. My dad and I like similar kinds of wines because we grew up tasting the same wines. That is a benefit. You're getting the family terroir effect.

How did the family enterprise expand into the Luca and Tikal lines?

Luca is my own project that I started in 1998 (the first vintage was 1999). I was convinced that great wines could be made from old-vine grower grapes, because over 40% of Mendoza's vineyards are owned by small, multigenerational families with less than 12 acres of land. Nobody else believed this in Argentina. So I spent one season driving around Mendoza and tasting grapes and making deals with growers. Today, I truly believe that we are making some of Mendoza's best wines from these gorgeous old vineyards, which, in the past, had been selling their grapes in bulk.



Laura and Nicolás blending Catena Alta wine.



Catena Zapata barrel cellar.

Tikal is my brother Ernesto's project, which he manages independently. His Patriota was the first high-priced Bonarda-Malbec to make waves in the U.S. I love his wines. He uses some grower grapes, but also has a gorgeous vineyard in the southern Uco Valley named Tikal.

Is Malbec the key to the country's success, or will other grape varieties become significant?

I think Malbec has been a very important phenomenon for Argentina. It happens to be a wine that has a lot of good qualities, like the color black. Red can be in, orange can be in, but black is always in. Malbec has lots of concentration, plush tannins, and really intense aromatics. It is ageworthy. It can be blended with Cabernet. It has so many good attributes that for a country to have 61,776 acres of Malbec that can be exported is a huge advantage. It is like if Argentina owned the color black and no one else in the clothing industry could use it. Malbec has helped Argentina, and we are the only ones who produce it in a certain style. You drink Malbecs from Chile, California, and Europe, and they taste different.

I think there are many other varieties that can be done very successfully. For a long time, we sold as much Chardonnay as we did Malbec, and now we sell two-thirds as much Chardonnay as Malbec. There is no other winery in Argentina doing this. Our Chardonnays are

incredibly popular because they also have very good characteristics. They have enough minerality and acidity, but they also have that lushness that people like about Australian or Californian Chardonnay, maybe with a bit more acid from the high altitude. Cabernet is another one. You can get extraordinary Syrah. And Torrontés. There's Bonarda, which is actually the French Charbono; it is not the Italian Bonarda. A lot of people love it.

Are producers looking more closely at organic and Biodynamic farming these days?

Absolutely. Because it is so dry, Argentina has organic farming almost by nature. There is not a lot of spraying going on; it is mostly sulfur. You do have that occasional bad year, like 1998, when it rained nonstop because of El Niño, when people do use chemicals like those used in most vineyards in the world. I think that in Argentina, just as in other parts of the world, people are realizing that if you treat the soil organically or biodynamically or what we call sustainably, you will have that soil in good shape for a much longer time. Whatever negative comes from something that you can't control, in the end it is all an ecosystem, and the long-term health of that vineyard is better if it is treated organically or biodynamically.

What we are doing now in all of our vineyards is applying sustainable practices. We try to only use sulfur. We have cover crops everywhere to keep nutrients in our very nutrient-poor soils—much poorer than Chile or France, for example, because we are a desert. We have mice and ants—I don't like the ants at all and would like to get rid of them, but I know they are essential, too, because they kill other insects. We recycle all of our water. "Organic" for us entails paying somebody else for a certification. We don't necessarily want to have to add that cost on to the consumer when we could have those practices without certifying, but we are doing a lot of investigation right now. "Sustainable" is a vague term. There is a certification in the U.S., but there isn't any in Argentina. So I actually have brought back to Argentina all the manuals from the California Growers Association, and we are applying those practices to all of our vineyards. We look to California a lot. I live here, and my father was inspired very much by Robert Mondavi and what all the great early growers of the Napa Valley did to establish a quality region. But we are thinking very strongly about Biodynamic and organic farming. Some of our vineyards are

Photo by Andy Christodolo/Cephas

organically farmed, but we haven't yet decided how wide the program is going to be.

What about your non-estate vineyards?

We work with growers for other brands that we make, like Tilia or Alamos, so we are actually creating checklists for all the growers who sell the grapes that go into these brands. We are trying to pretty much generalize sustainable growing, and we find that people are quite receptive to it. We try to show them that, in the end, they will save money because their vineyard will last longer.

What does the future hold for other appellations such as Salta, Río Negro, Neuquén, and La Rioja, and will Catena become more involved in these regions?

We currently do have a facility that we are renting in Salta, where we make a Torrontés wine for our Alamos and Tilia lines. The reason for this is that Torrontés Riojano, which we think is the best kind of Torrontés, is mostly grown in the Salta area. We do not like to transport grapes because that makes quality go down, so we felt that if we were going to make Torrontés, we had to make it in Salta. We have full control of this facility, and we are working with growers in the area and are very happy with the results. We think Torrontés is a very exciting wine. I personally love drinking it, because it has the aromatics, but a nice mouthfeel as well. So that is one region we are confident in. I think there are some producers making very good Malbec there, like Colomé or Yacochuya, but for us, it's been mostly the Torrontés.

Río Negro is a little cooler than Neuquén. They are doing some interesting things with Pinot Noir and the early-ripening varieties. There are some really good Malbecs from both areas. We are not yet convinced that we can get better quality there than in Mendoza, and there are still some areas that are not highly planted—for example, we have several new vineyards in the area south of San Carlos, which we think is more exciting than going to Patagonia, and it is closer to us. It is a very cool climate with lots of sunlight, and you don't have the wind problems that you do in Patagonia. The wines that are coming out of these areas are outstanding. The other region that I think is exciting is La Rioja, which is to the north of Mendoza and has some high-altitude areas that are very interesting.

What effect has the recent influx of foreign inves-

tors and consultants had on the Argentine wine industry?

I talk about this in my new book, *Vino Argentino* (Chronicle Books, September 2010). I think foreigners have had a very good impact on Argentina. I surveyed the last issue of *Wine Advocate* and found that 45% of the wineries were either owned by a foreigner or had a foreign wine consultant. The impact of foreign know-how and money is very significant. There is almost no credit in Argentina. When people here had their financial crisis and credit was short, I was telling them, "Hey, this is how we've been living for the past couple of centuries." So having these foreigners come and invest in Argentina has been very important, especially because they are all quality-driven. Look at the people at Clos de la Siete, with Michel Rolland—all they are thinking about is over-\$20 wines. From America, Paul Hobbs; from Switzerland, Donald Hess. You have José Ortega from Spain at O. Fournier. There is a total French influence. There have also been some Italian consultants like Alberto Antonini, Antonio Morescalchi, Piero Incisa della Rochetta, and the Contessa Cinzano in Patagonia. All these people are not interested in low-end wines. You don't make a lot of money exporting cheap wine. I'm ecstatic, because here these people have come, and they are promoting the quality sector all over the world.

Argentina has a very strong domestic consumption. Every wine region should make wine for its people. You shouldn't be making all \$100 wines. You should be making wines so that a middle-class Argentine family can enjoy a really nice bottle of wine for lunch and dinner, and a low-income family in Argentina can have a really good bottle for their dinner. For Argentines, wine is part of the culture, like for the Spaniards and the French and the Italians. Spaniards and Italians are not drinking expensive wine for lunch and dinner every day.

Angelo Gaja told me he drinks Barbera at home, not his own wine.

No, no, of course not. For me, Nicolás Catena Zapata is a huge deal. I have to slap my husband on the hand every time he goes to the cellar. What actually makes more sense financially is to export the more premium wine, and all the foreigners have helped us in that. They've brought know-how and technology, but what I particularly like about these foreigners is that they are training Argentines. When I was writ-





Bodegas Esmerelda tank room in Mendoza.

CATENA FAMILY EXPORT LINES

Alamos*

Malbec
Cabernet Sauvignon
Merlot
Syrah
Bonarda
Malbec Rosé
Sauvignon Blanc
Chardonnay
Viognier
Torrontés
Malbec Selección
Pinot Noir Selección
Extra Brut

Bodegas

Escorihuela*

Malbec Don
Miguel Gascón

Catena

Malbec
Cabernet Sauvignon
Chardonnay

Catena Alta

Malbec
Cabernet Sauvignon
Chardonnay

Catena Zapata

Nicolás Catena Zapata

Malbec Argentino
Adrianna Vineyard
Nicasia Vineyard

Luca**

Beso de Dante
Chardonnay
Laborde Double
Select Syrah
Malbec
Nico by Luca
Pinot Noir

Tikal**

Amorio
Jubilo
Locura
Patriota

Tilia***

Malbec
Cabernet Sauvignon
Chardonnay
Merlot
Malbec
Syrah

*Imported by E. & J. Gallo, gallo.com.

**Imported by Vine Connections, www.vineconnections.com.

***Produced by Bodegas Esmeralda, a Catena winery.

ing my book, I interviewed Michael Halstrick from Norton, Michel Rolland, and Paul Hobbs. All of them would talk about how much they liked to work with Argentines, how hardworking they were, how committed and loyal they were. I think Argentines have learned so much from these foreigners, because we are down there in South America, and it's really like sending this whole generation abroad to learn about the world. And the foreigners in turn have learned from the Argentines about where to plant Malbec and how to sell with passion!

What are Argentina's strengths and weaknesses in terms of marketing to Americans, especially the restaurant trade?

The strength is really the fact that we provide good value. People who put our wine on the list do well with their customers. The weakness is potentially that a lot of people still don't know about Argentina, so somebody might not order the wine because they've never heard of it. I think that is really changing, though. The exchange-rate crisis made it a lot cheaper to visit, and more people come back and tell their friends to try Argentine wines. In 2008, Argentine wine exports to the U.S. grew by 30%, and in 2009, by 20%. Argentine Malbec is the fastest-growing wine import to the U.S. today. How do you explain that? To me, it is the quality, plus the fact that it's become known. My mother-in-law is from Iowa, and she used to say, "Why is it that everybody is always talking about Chilean wine and nobody's talking about Argentine wine?" That was five years ago. Now, she's sending me articles all the time about Argentine wine. Another problem we have is that some Argentines have tried to market their wines using lifestyle themes such as tango. I deeply believe that consumers just want to drink a wine that tastes better than other wines out there that cost the same; they don't like being "sold to" or marketed to. So I think that focusing on our true story of our privileged terroir is best when marketing our wines in the U.S.

How would you advise American sommeliers to use your own wines?

I would just say that they should order a Catena Chardonnay, a Catena Malbec, and a Catena Cabernet. They should have one of my wines on every table, and they'd have a lot of repeat business because everybody is getting a wine that would cost double if it were from the States. People are willing to experiment, so if you list a Malbec or Torrontés by the glass, you're encouraging people to try that, and this could be their first introduction to Argentine wine. I think consumers love a restaurant that gives them something new that tastes spectacular—an ace in the hole. I think it's also important for people to realize that we provide extraordinary value in the over-\$20 category. I certainly would like for sommeliers to put our \$30 and \$50 and \$100 wines on their lists and to tell people about them and recommend them. I have a friend who, every time somebody orders a California wine that costs \$400, will say, "Listen, if you want something just as good for half the price, here is the Nicolás Catena Zapata." I always tell him, "Hey, I don't know if you should be doing that. Aren't you from California?" He says, "Yes, but I love their surprise when they taste it, and it makes me look so good." Sommeliers should realize that it makes them look really good when they give somebody a wine that surprises them by its quality, and I think that from \$20 to \$300, our wines provide value. Sommeliers can do this. I tell them, "You will never go wrong with my Nicolás Catena Zapata or my Catena Alta. You will always impress the customer." 🍷