



WINEMAKER'S DREAM

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FPablo Gimenez Riili, Michael Evans and David Garret gave life to an extremely ambitious project: The Vines. To give it a name, this private vineyard "community" is located in Vistaflores, in the Uco Valley; and it is composed of 200 hectares. There, the investors –so far mostly foreign- buy parcels between 1 and 4 hectares that have been planted with premium grapevines and a density of 5.000 plants per hectare. This premium project also features an irrigation system that regulates – by means of more than three manual valves per hectare- the amount of water between rows.

Gimenez Riili says that in a short time the project will also include a hotel, a winery, where each land owner would be able to make his own wine with the consultation of a group of enologists, headed by Santiago Achaval – from the prestigious Achaval Ferrer winery- and video cameras in each lot, so that investors will be able to monitor the evolution of their grapevines from any part of the world. The sale price of each hectare in The Vines is around 100.000 dollars, there have already been 100 hectares sold; 50 of which were planted in 2007, with the remaining 50 to be planted in September of this year. The rest – 100 hectares- are also in the process of being sold.

Gimenez Riili belongs to a family involved in the wine industry for over 60 years; he first met his American partners "almost by chance", he says, because of some friends in common. "With Dave and Michael we met in 2004. They immediately realized that the viticulture level in Mendoza was superior than the tourist infrastructure. That was the reason why we first thought about building a boutique hotel in one of the vineyards, with about ten or twelve bedrooms. But our investors kept saying that they would like to have their own vineyard.

As a result, the initial project changed" he says. The Vines, with a total dimension of 400 hectares, is located at 1,100/1.200 meters, having the same source of water as Eco de los Andes.

"This is relatively new worldwide. There are some other projects here in Mendoza and through out the world, for instance, wine clubs and others. But to own a lot, is less common. That is why we created the concept of Estate, winery and vineyard, all in the same place.

The winery will have enough space for each of the owners to be able to produce their own wine separately" asserts Riili.

The target client of this "community" is international, either foreign or Argentinean." That is the reason why, the one who purchases, knows the price of vineyards in Napa Valley, South Africa, Australia or Bordeaux. They are people who understand the value of vineyards in Argentina. The average purchase of 180, 000 dollars is much less expensive than in any other part of the world. These rates per hectare are around 50 per cent under the international ones" assures Riili.

Within the investors, says Riili, there is a great variety. "There are people who analyze the economic factor, and think about the value of the land in the future, and those who just believe it is simple a luxurious investment". During the last harvest, one of our clients settled here in Mendoza, loaded boxes of grapes, and drove trucks. He was very happy working here, however back in the States, he works as a graphic designer"

Of the initial project of Gimenez Riili and his partners –the one with the boutique hotel of twelve rooms- not much of the original plans remain. The second phase after the small lot purchasing phase, will include selling some bigger lots, out of the 200 remaining hectares.

There is also a possibility that a resort would be offered to a six star hotel chain, for them to take care of the management.

Apart from The Vines, in Mendoza there are three other entrepreneurship of this sort: Finca Los Amigos, located in Las Paredes; Villa Dolce Vita, situated in the Uco Valley, and Finca Calitina, in San Rafael. All of them are constantly receiving investors and were able to establish themselves as a sophisticated option, including excellent rates in relation to the international competitors. This is a luxury that, at first sight, is also a good business.

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The Vine's entrepreneurship has planted a bigger proportion of Cabernet Franc and Merlot in comparison to other places in Mendoza. The main reason is that these varieties are of the American preference. Michael Miller and Jack Davis, are from the outskirts of Boston, but are living in Germany. One of them is an insurance consultant and the other is a real estate broker in New York. Both of them say: "If we had to advise someone else where to invest, we would say Mendoza. The land rates here are still below the rates in comparison to other viticulture areas". The almost two hectares they own in The Vines have just been planted. They are already planning their house- "small, just for some days for vacationing", they say, and they firmly believe that this is their place in the world. "With the harvest we are going to make a wine for ourselves to enjoy or to give to our friends. We definitely don't want to make a business out of it. For us, it is a place simply to have a good time."

High quality. (Santiago Achaval's opinion)

In the world of wine, there are no limits to creativity and it is not predictable. I think that in the case of The Vines is a good example of this assertion. I wouldn't call it a tendency; instead, they were able to discover a latent demand that had no other channel of expression.

I believe that all the owners want to acquire a wine of a very high quality, and high selling prices. That is possible, even if the land is small. On the contrary, with the smallest of the parcels, the more attention can be paid to all the details as much in the vineyard as in the winery. This project has been rapidly welcomed by everybody because it combines esthetic, as well as historical and emotional aspects deeply settled in the human psyche. It also provides an integral solution to all the dilemmas in relation to being a vineyard/winery owner. This is not about investors playing to be winemakers; it is about making their own wines according to their particular tastes. It is about feeling proud of having settled in Mendoza, and being able to show its fruits to the world. I think that in the near future, other Argentineans will also be part of this project, simply because the boundaries of it does not change or differentiate because of the nationality or residence of the owner. In fact, I, myself have a lot there. The thing is, that our wines have nothing to envy of the Australians or those from the Napa Valley. Our top labels are at the same level of those belonging to the best producing regions in the world. We are rapidly catching up with the rest of the world. Of course there is a long way to go, though we already have many Argentine wines among the best appreciated and well ranked in the world.