

Catena Institute of Wine and UC Davis Host “The Future of Wine Science,” A Joint Educational Conference

The Catena Institute of Wine, in partnership with the department of viticulture and enology at University of California, Davis, hosted “The Future of Wine Science,” a joint educational conference on August 31, 2015. Held at the Davis campus, the program highlighted the Institute’s 20-year journey to elevate Argentine wine and its collaboration with UC Davis in the study of Malbec and phylloxera.



The Catena Institute of Wine was founded in 1995 by Dr. Laura Catena, the managing director of Bodega Catena Zapata, with the vision to make Argentine wines that stand with the best in the world, to advance Argentine wine and its winemaking regions for the next 100 years, and to promote knowledge and understanding through its scientific endeavors with partners around the world.

Fernando Buscema, executive director of the Institute, presented what is considered to be the most extensive comparative and cross-continent study ever conducted on a single variety. Working with Dr. Roger Boulton, professor of viticulture and enology at UC Davis, Buscema compared Malbec between Argentina and the U.S. by studying twenty-six vineyard blocks in Mendoza and sixteen in California. Results show that Malbec from Argentina differs greatly in its phenolic composition and sensory characteristics from California Malbec, and that these differences can be seen as

“fingerprints” of the sites where the wines come from. “This is the largest single cultivar experiment ever done and one that I’ve wanted to do for twenty-five years,” said Dr. Boulton. “It would never have happened without the Catena Institute and it will have implications for vineyards everywhere. It’s very unique to have a winery with this level of interest in seeking answers in grape-growing and winemaking share this commitment. This study has already inspired a similar study of Pinot Noir which is already in progress.”

The program also included a comparative tasting of three Malbec wines from different plots in Catena Zapata’s high altitude Adrianna vineyard to illustrate how characteristics vary according to plot. With each wine showing such a different flavor profile, there was a lively discussion as to how three wines, all made with the same grape and vinified in the same way, could be so different. The discussion explored various hypotheses regarding the potential effect of soil types,

water movement, microbiomes, root temperature and sunlight intensity.

Josh Puckett, from UC Davis' Foundation Plant Services, led a vineyard tour of Malbec selections from France and from Catena in Argentina that were planted in 2007 as part of a long-term study to better understand the existing diversity of Malbec and the importance of maintaining virus-free plant material.

Dr. David Block, viticulture and enology department chair, announced with Dr. Catena the launch of the Catena Institute of Wine and UC Davis Internship Program. Each year, a graduate student from UC Davis' department of viticulture and enology will be selected to study at the Institute in Mendoza.

Dr. Andy Walker and Dr. Summaira Riaz of UC Davis' Walker Lab presented collaborative research with the Institute on the potential threat of phylloxera in Argentina.



Sharing this data not only gives the wineries of Argentina an opportunity to better prepare themselves for a phylloxera outbreak, but also raises some interesting questions about the potential threat of phylloxera in the presence of world climate change.

Institute and UC Davis staff also led a tasting of Catena's non-commercial research wines, including Criolla, Grenache, Cabernet Franc, Bonarda and Malbec Cortado. After a discussion among attendees about the tasting profile of each wine, Dr. Catena brought the tasting back to the Institute's mission by speaking about how creating an easy-drinking, low-cost wine with the local Criolla grape, for example, has the potential to lift the economies and livelihoods of entire communities where this grape is grown in abundance.

Staff and faculty from the Institute and UC Davis who also participated in the day's program, included: Daniela Mezzatesta, viticulture specialist, Catena Institute; Dr. Cecilia Agüero, associate specialist, Walker Lab; Chik Breneman, winemaker, UC Davis; and Scott Frost, sensory scientist. Invited guests included masters of wine, master sommeliers, wine buyers, professors, and members of the press.

"Today was an important day," said Dr. Boulton of the first-ever conference. "We raised more questions than provided answers, but there's a determination and energy to go and chase the questions."

"Winemaking is about learning from tradition and using science to elevate," added Dr. Catena. "You have to combine the two to bring out the best in nature. To see the enthusiasm of such a respected group of wine experts was truly heartwarming and makes me excited about the future of wine science."

The wines of Bodega Catena Zapata, founded in 1902, are imported into the U.S. by Mundo Vino, a member of The Winebow Group. ■

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