

José Lovaglio

It may be the leisurely tone of his voice or his direct look, but nothing seems to be hidden behind the eyes of 31-year-old José Lovaglio, who is Susana Balbo's right arm at her eponymous winery. He also happens to be her son.

Balbo is one of the key figures in the Argentinian wine revolution of the past two decades, arguably at the same level as José Zuccardi or Nicolás Catena. Lovaglio, like many other young winemakers, learned with them and was inspired to make wines after seeing – from a close perspective – how things were changing, sometimes in a super-fast and radical way.

In 2002, aged 17, he decided to follow in his mother's path and devote himself to wine. But instead of staying in Mendoza, he opted for a change of air (and perhaps distance) by studying at UC Davis in California. Lovaglio says it was a time of great learning, but also a realisation that theory was just one part of winemaking. 'I learned that to focus too much on theory is like spending years studying for a PhD in geology, when what you really want to be is a sculptor,' he explains.

On his return, in 2007, he worked for various Argentinian wineries until finally, in 2011, he returned to his mother's winery, *Dominio del Plata*, established in 1999 and today known as *Susana Balbo Wines*. 'The most important things I learned from my mother are to recover from failures,

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to look forward and to trust my palate,' he says. 'But I've also learned from her that no one can teach you a style, because that style will only come from your own personal experiences.'

Perhaps this last lesson is the one that Lovaglio has used the most for his own project, *Vaglio Wines*: four wines that in total are no more than 24,000 bottles – very few when compared with the three million-plus that *Susana Balbo Wines* produces annually. 'It all started with the 2012 harvest, as a way of giving myself my own personal creative space,' he says.

Gradually, however, he realised that *Vaglio* could also be a way of telling stories of his own life. From being born in Salta, in northern Argentina (*Chango*), through his adolescence in *Agrelo* in Mendoza (*Chacra*), to his experiences at UC Davis (*Aggie*) and spending just over a year in China (*Temple*). These wines represent a timeline, featuring the key places in his personal history and the grapes that grow in those places.

'Although all four wines are based on Malbec, they come from very different areas, very different soils. A premise of the project was to find out which kind of Malbec was the favourite among consumers. That's what I would like to learn.'

At the moment, the *Vaglio Wines* project is made in a small winery in the Uco Valley. But that's just a fraction of his time. The rest of his energy is devoted to *Susana Balbo Wines*: visiting vineyards and importers, defining final blends, going to fairs: in short, preparing for continuity.

Two to try

Susana Balbo Wines, BenMarco Cabernet Sauvignon, Tunuyán, Uco Valley, Mendoza, Argentina 2014 94

£19.50 (2012) **Good Wine Online**

A collaboration between Susana Balbo, Edgardo del Popolo and José Lovaglio. This is one of the clearest expressions in Mendoza of Cabernet Sauvignon (90%) blended with Malbec, with its generous herbal and red fruit, details of flowers and a firm, electric, tannic structure.

Drink 2016-2020 **Alc** 14%

Vaglio Wines, Aggie, Gualtallary, Uco Valley, Mendoza, Argentina 2014 93

N/A UK www.josevaglio.com

Filled with violet tones and cherry aromas, this is a clear picture of Gualtallary Malbec, with its firm tannins, well-balanced acidity, good grip and profound, refreshing red fruit flavours. Everything is there to enjoy with meat empanadas.

Drink 2016-2019 **Alc** 14%

Patricio Tapia is the DWWA Regional Chair for Argentina

