



Charles Tyler

DIRECTOR, PALADAR



Chris Losh samples the wine offering at Paladar and asks the man in charge what leaves Argentina is taking out of Chile's vinous book

Charles Tyler set up Paladar restaurant two and a half years ago with the intention of creating a "showcase for the best of Latin America", from art to food to music – and of course wine. His list covers bottles from Mexico to Patagonia, via most points in between, part of a mission to surprise his customers with the unexpected. From País to sparkling Malbec, he's an expert on – and a tireless advocate for – the continent's vinous diversity.

Give us one big trend you're seeing in Latin America.

They're pushing the limits and moving outside traditional winegrowing areas – certainly as far as Chile is concerned. New grape varieties, too – trying to get away from the idea of just Malbec and Torrontés from Argentina, for instance.

Not so easy, I'd imagine – they seem so in hock to Malbec.

We're steering away from Mendoza – we have a Malbec from Salta in the north, for instance, and a lovely Pinot from Patagonia too. I'm very keen on trying to get a spread of producers from right across Latin America – we have Mexican, Peruvian, Brazilian and Uruguayan wines. They aren't so well known, but they produce really good stuff.

All very well listing them, but can you sell them?

The guests who come here tend to be slightly more experimental anyway,

and with a little help from myself or our sommelier, Rafa, we've been very successful in introducing people to different countries and styles across the continent. South America's oldest winery is in Mexico, and the conquistadors were hugely successful at making wine in Peru in the mid-to-late 1500s.

Is that history element something that people tend to overlook?

It is. The grape variety that the conquistadors planted in the 1500s was País and there's a lot of that being rediscovered in southern Chile. With a little care and attention it can make some super wine.

Southern Chile is on a bit of a roll at the moment isn't it?

We have a number of interesting wines from Itata and Maule. That's where a lot of these somewhat overlooked grapes are, like Carignan and Cinsault. You've got some producers doing really interesting things with them. Also, some very good blends. It's about pushing the limits out of that Central Valley area.

Could Argentina learn from that?

Yes. There's a lot of Argentina that could be explored further. I found a wine the other day called Costa y Pampa from the east coast, a vineyard near Buenos Aires. I fully intend to get it on my list this spring.

How about Uruguay? It seems rather under-represented in the UK.

It is. It's a small country so the volumes are smaller. We have some wines from Bodegas Garzón at the moment but we're looking to bring some more in from the Colonia region.

Should the UK trade explore Latin America's potential more?

Oh god, yes. Bang for your buck, there's some really fantastic wines coming out of Latin America. It's just so underrepresented here. Even high-end Latin American restaurants don't recognise that there are some brilliant wines coming from their part of the world. It's why we made the decision to have an all Latin American wine list.

Perhaps that is because many of the icon wines that hit the market 20 years ago were so disappointing?

That's possibly part of the reason. Reputation takes a long time to build. People still think that all you get from here is those big heavy reds. But it's changed a lot in the last few years. There's such a big variety of styles and grapes, and if wine buyers would open up to that it's all waiting there for them.

Any one thing that the region's wineries could improve?

Sometimes the labelling can be an issue. Especially at the lower end of the market they can look really naff. It shouldn't matter, but it's part of the whole package.

Any advice for the gatekeepers?

Just experiment. Be adventurous. The place has changed. There's a lot more innovation than there used to be and it's just really good value for money. ■

