

# Stirring the Lees with James Molesworth



James Molesworth

## A Sit Down with Argentina's Carlos Pulenta

Posted: 10:54 AM ET, February 20, 2009

I sat down recently with Carlos Pulenta, owner of Argentina's [Finca & Bodega Carlos Pulenta](#). It's been a couple of years without samples being sent since the winery's impressive debut bottlings, so I was happy to get caught up with this experienced winery owner.

Pulenta, 60, has been in the Argentine wine industry his entire life—his family owns nearly 1,000 acres of vines in the Tupungato area of Mendoza and his father is still growing grapes today. Pulenta was in the Peñaflores hierarchy (the large company which owns the [Trapiche](#) brand, among others) from 1972 until 1997, when the company was sold. From there he helped set up [Bodegas Salentein](#) in the emerging Uco Valley for a group of Dutch investors. His experience showed there. The winery got off to a good start, but since his departure in 2004, the wines have been stuck in neutral.

Both Peñaflores and Salentein are large-scale operations, so for his latest effort, Pulenta decided to downsize a bit. The new winery had its first harvest in 2003 and released its first wines into the U.S. market in 2006.

The new venture is based in Vistalba, on the western edge of the Luján de Cuyo portion of Mendoza. Vistalba is both the area's name and a name that Pulenta holds the trademark on, so you won't see it listed on other winery bottlings. Pulenta has hired consulting winemaker [Alberto Antonini](#) to oversee the 20,000-case annual production, which comes from a total of 123 acres of vines. The winery produces three reds.

All three wines are red blends, with Malbec the dominant grape. The wines are selected based on structure and density, the Corte A being the biggest of the three, down to the Corte C, which is designed for more immediate consumption.

The **Vistalba Corte C Mendoza 2006** (\$15), an 80/20 blend of Malbec and Merlot, is juicy, with a nice compact core of plum sauce and fig that should unwind nicely in the

near term. The **Vistalba Corte B Mendoza 2005** (\$25) is a lush and round blend of 70/30 Malbec and Cabernet Sauvignon, with velvety tannins carrying layers of plum sauce, crushed currant and fig fruit, but it stays admirably fresh on the hefty finish, with a nice buried black tea hint. The **Vistalba Corte A Mendoza 2005** (\$60) is showy and ripe, with layers of crushed plum, boysenberry and blackberry fruit gliding over rounded, well-integrated tannins, backed by fig, licorice and sweet spice notes. The mostly Malbec bottling (with about 10 percent Cabernet Sauvignon) also sports a very long finish but shows admirable purity despite its heft as well.

Both of the latter two wines show outstanding potential, and are being released now. As usual, official reviews, based on formal blind tastings, will appear in the near future.