

# CHACRA

PATAGONIA ~ RIO NEGRO



**WINEENTHUSIAST**  
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*Off the Grid in Argentina* [Excerpt]

## Cool-Climate Patagonia

About 1,250 miles to the south of Salta are the wine regions of Patagonia. Look not to icy southern Patagonia—complete with glaciers and penguin colonies—but northern Patagonia, specifically the wind-swept flatlands of Neuquén and the Río Negro Valley.

If Salta is rugged, often hot and perched near the sky, Patagonia is the opposite. It's mostly flat and is Argentina's coolest wine region.

For centuries, these areas were best known for growing grain, apples and pears, simple crops that could withstand staunch breezes, chilly weather and modest elevations.

But over the past 20 years, both subzones have matured with improved irrigation. Each is now home to wineries specializing in Malbec and, in one case, Pinot Noir.

Red wines from Patagonia, which span the spectrum of international varieties but highlight Malbec, tend to be crisp in feel and focused on red-fruit aromas and flavors. They offer less flamboyance and heft than those from Salta or Mendoza.

Patagonia has over a century's worth of winemaking history, but only in recent decades have several wineries in Neuquén and Río Negro emerged as quality-driven operations. Among the leaders has been Bodega Noemía de Patagonia, owned by Countess Noemi Marone Cinzano of Italy and the Danish winemaker Hans Vinding-Diers. Their first vintage in the Río Negro Valley came in 1999.

Several years later, the countess was joined in the region by her cousin, Piero Incisa della Rocchetta of Sassicaia



## **92** Bodega Chacra 2011 Cincuenta y Cinco Pinot Noir (Río Negro Valley).

A fine blend of cherry, leather and tea aromas leads to a round, yet crisp body with toasty, smoky oak framing red-fruit flavors. A fresh, precise finish holds onto the wine's generous but refined barrel component. Grand Cru Selections.

in Tuscany, who started **Bodega Chacra**. It has emerged as the premier Pinot Noir producer in Argentina, sourcing its fruit primarily from vineyards planted in 1932 and 1955.

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“The first benefit of Río Negro is no humidity, which allows us to grow vines without using any type of spray or treatment,” says Vinding-Diers, also the winemaker for **Bodega Chacra**. “It’s one of the only places in the world that allows for that.”

“But,” he says, “the secret here is the quality of the water. It’s extremely clean, mountain-fresh water,” something he insists is reflected in the purity of the wines.

In nearby Neuquén, it was also around the turn of the millennium that a modern wine industry began to take root, and only after vital water was diverted from a nearby river, thus allowing for irrigation of vineyards.

I Michael Schachner

