vinetur

Argentine chardonnay gains global acclaim as Uco Valley producers embrace altitude and innovation

Familia Zuccardi leads a movement focused on terroir, sustainability, and site-driven wines that rival Burgundy’s finest whites

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In the Uco Valley of Argentina, a new chapter is unfolding for Chardonnay. The region, long celebrated for its Malbec, is now drawing attention for white wines that rival some of the best from Burgundy. At the center of this movement is Familia Zuccardi, a winery known for innovation and a deep understanding of its land.

Sebastián Zuccardi, the third generation in his family's wine business, believes that altitude is key to producing exceptional Chardonnay. Trained as both a viticulturist and agricultural engineer, Zuccardi has focused on high-elevation vineyards in San Pablo and Gualtallary. These sites, perched at the edge of what is possible for grape growing, offer cool temperatures and stony soils that shape the character of the wines.

During a recent visit to Zuccardi's winery, chief viticulturist Martin di Stefano explained how dramatically terroir can change within short distances in the Uco Valley. He noted that harvest dates for Chardonnay can vary by as much as a month between neighboring parcels just eight kilometers apart. This diversity allows winemakers to craft wines with distinct personalities from each site.

Zuccardi's approach to Chardonnay is deliberate. Unlike Semillon, which was often planted in less desirable locations, their Chardonnay vineyards were chosen specifically for the variety. The Finca Las Cuchillas vineyard in San Pablo stands out for its ability to produce wines with freshness and minerality. Meanwhile, the Gualtallary subregion yields Chardonnays with expressive citrus and floral notes.

Laura Principiano, head winemaker at Zuccardi, attributes much of the purity and mineral character in their Chardonnays to fermentation in concrete tanks. She explained that concrete allows for gentle micro-oxygenation and stable temperature control without imparting flavors from epoxy linings or excessive oak. The result is a style that emphasizes clarity and site expression rather than wood influence.

Sustainability is also central to Zuccardi's philosophy. The winery avoids herbicides and does not disturb vineyard soils with discing. High-elevation sites are surrounded by native plants, supporting beneficial insects and creating balanced ecosystems. The dry climate of the Uco Valley further reduces disease pressure, making organic practices more feasible.

Beyond viticulture, Zuccardi invests in its community by running schools for workers and their families. Last year, 90 people graduated from their adult high school program—a significant achievement in a country facing ongoing economic challenges.

The Chardonnays themselves are gaining recognition among critics and consumers alike. Wines such as the 2023 Zuccardi Botánico Gualtallary Chardonnay have been singled out for their complexity and freshness, with notes of lemon pith, white flowers, stony minerality, and even hints of smoked ham. The 2023 Zuccardi Fósil San Pablo Chardonnay offers taut acidity and a profile reminiscent of classic Chablis—fresh citrus layered over a backbone of minerality.

Other notable releases include the 2022 Zuccardi Finca Las Cuchillas San Pablo Chardonnay, which balances delicate Meyer lemon fruit with a salty finish, and the 2024 Santa Julia Mendoza Chardonnay—a more traditional style with toasty aromas and balanced citrus flavors.

For those interested in natural wines, the 2024 Santa Julia El Zorrito Mendoza Natural Skin Ferment Chardonnay provides an alternative expression with no added sulfites and a touch of tannin from skin contact.

As Argentina continues to evolve its wine industry, producers like Familia Zuccardi are demonstrating that high-altitude vineyards can yield world-class white wines. Their focus on site selection, sustainable farming, and careful winemaking is helping to redefine what Argentine Chardonnay can be—offering freshness, complexity, and a sense of place that stands alongside some of the best examples from France.