



Q&A

Going Rogue!

Rebel winemaker Michel Rolland bucks bottle trends by crafting wine in Argentina and India

| By Katie Kelly Bell |

Some call him the scourge of winemaking; others wish him sainthood. International wine consultant Michel Rolland is the villainous vintner behind the 2004 wine documentary, *Mondovino*. Accused of sacrificing individual *terroir* at the altar of high-alcohol, intensely fruity wines, he's the grape guy who wine snobs love to hate. Like him or not, ignore the oracular insights of Monsieur Rolland at your own risk. And at age 63, the spirited Frenchman still has his skin in the game with Clos de los Siete—an exclusive New World blend that he's crafting in Argentina. (His personal winery has yet to be named, so for now the wines are bottled under the Mariflor label.) During a recent visit to Mendoza, Argentina, Rolland held court at a vertical tasting of several Clos de los Siete vintages (velvety, and rich with notes of chocolate and earth), while waxing philosophical about current projects, his critics, why Argentina is the next Napa, and how he had the audacity to grow grapes in the backwaters of India.

Why, of all the wine regions in the world, did you decide to produce wines in India and Argentina?

Vision! But seriously, India was the result of a commission—plus I love a challenge. The Argentine project began over 10 years ago after I became convinced of Argentina's potential. Mendoza could be the next great region. It's really possible now with things like drip irrigation. Argentina might very well overtake the U.S. in wine production. There is so much space here to grow.

So you really think Mendoza could be the next Napa or Bordeaux?

Yes. Quite possibly.

Do you agree that you've had a global influence on wine? Of course not! I've had a long business life, making wine in over 17 countries; there isn't anyone else who has done that, so I sleep well. My head is big, but not too big.

You are growing Pinot Noir here too. What on earth possessed you to try and grow that grape in such a hot climate? I like to go off the wine map, it keeps me young. I have too much work, but that's my life. I don't like boredom.

Have you met your greatest challenge yet? Pinot Noir was nothing. Try making wine in India! They have no climate, no soil and no [wine] people. That was the hardest, but such fun.

How many wines do you taste in a day? Probably over 100. I taste about 25,000 to 30,000 a year.

How do you answer your critics who argue that your significant influence on winemaking worldwide results in wines that taste the same all over the globe? Well, what do *you* think?

I find it hard to believe one man can make wine everywhere taste the same. There's your answer! In the beginning the criticism bothered me, but after 37 years, not so much anymore. All this attention? All this press? I didn't ask for it, I don't want it. I'm not proud of all the wine I've made. Every night I ask myself, "What can I do better?"

If you were a wine, how would you be described? Strong, dense and concentrated! **A**

LIQUID COURAGE
Notorious winemaker Michel Rolland casts his spell on his new Argentinian varieties. *Below:* The sleek and modern Clos de los Siete winery in Mendoza, Argentina.



VINE FINDS What does Michel Rolland pop open when his palate is off duty? Wine, of course. Here are his current faves and raves:

VALUE
Petite Fleur
Argentine (\$10)
Clos de los Siete (\$18)



MID-RANGE
Château
Fontenil
(\$35)

LUXURY
Château le
Bon Pasteur (\$100)
Harlan Estate (\$500)