



## FRANCIS MALLMANN SETS MENDOZA ON FIRE

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In The Vines of Mendoza's private vineyard estate, as from March the new restaurant is being launched amidst the vines to enjoy the best of Argentine BBQ with the finest views in Mendoza. A unique opportunity to try seven different cooking techniques on seven different fires, the filling set lunch menu offers a rare glimpse into the different Asado techniques from around the country and boasts some great recipes from the famed Argentine chef.

The menu kicks off with juicy meat empanadas and Torrontes and Campari cocktails as you adjust your eyes to the stunning view and build up a hunger looking at the roasting meats. Then it's time to take a seat and enjoy the parade of dishes that greet the table. First off is a tender salt-crusted salmon. An entire salmon is cooked with a thick two-inch layer of salt around it which leaves the flesh juicy, tender and full of flavor; delightful with cherry tomatoes, avocado and a touch of spring onion. Then it is onto the grilled rib eye steak with chimichurri and roasted lamb with roasted vegetables; and in case there was any room left out comes a delicious goat which is cooked underground in a sand pit on hot stones (which they start cooking 12 hours beforehand) and takes on an amazing flavor of rosemary and jarilla.

All of this is accompanied by a stunning wine collection from the Uco Valley including a gorgeous barrel fermented Chardonnay (by Nunum), a red blend by Achaval Ferrer, wines by Recuerdo and a stunning Gran Reserva Malbec by Gimenez Rilli. After seriously delicious food and wines, a lighter dessert makes its way to the table and you can enjoy grilled peaches and plums with dulce de leche pancakes.

There can't be many better ways to spend an afternoon in Argentina...

Q&A with Francis Mallmann

Over roasted goat and tempting Malbec, Amanda Barnes interviewed Francis Mallmann to talk about the twisting paths of his life and about being a rebel.

**You started managing a restaurant at the age of 20, how important is it to take risks in one's career?**

*It was a partnership with two friends, but it was a seasonal restaurant with the summer for fishermen and the winter for skiers. In between I started travelling and developed a passion and admiration for the French life related to cooking and drinking. I felt had to go there and live and learn.*

*Risks are everything if you don't take any there's no growing. The edge of uncertainty is very important in human development. It makes you think, it makes you wonder, it makes you stumble, it makes you fall and it makes you fight for something. Roosevelt said he would rather spend his time talking to people in failure trying dearly than with people who were sitting on a sofa doing nothing. Adversity and risk is a very important ingredient in my life and always has been. I left school when I was 13... I went to the US when I was 16 and I stayed there working odd jobs around the States. When I was 18 I came home and decided to open a restaurant.*

**You obviously had quite an adventurous youth, are you still a rebel today?**

*Yes, very much.*

**What sort of revelry do you commit today?**

*I think that growing up has a lot to do with choosing what you embrace. When you are young you get tempted, you feel perfumes, when you grow up it has to do with choosing, looking at a table of people and deciding I don't want to talk to them, I have nothing to say to them. I am very strong with my intuition - it is a very important tool in my life. That intuition makes me a rebel still and I protect the child that lives in me, and I would never like to lose that.*

**What has been your biggest career break?**

*There are so many of them... Maybe when I was 40 I won a prize in France that made me think first of how fragile and untrue our price is. I realised that I had gone a long way and reached this place and award, and that it was time for me to find my own voice and that's what I did. It was a prize that made me laugh and cry of sadness. I had worked really hard and it was a time for changes.*

**Your cooking for the last few years has been very much back to basics and using more outdoor cooking techniques. Why is it important to you to respect more 'natural' or 'native' ways of cooking? Can you explain your transformation from French haute cuisine to BBQ?**

*It was slow. I had a childhood surrounded by fire [in Bariloche his family home had a cooking stove, wood heating etc] then I went to the best chefs of France for many years living in Paris. When I was 40, I did the switch. I had the techniques of classic cooking but wanted to learn the language of my own and tie up the tools from my childhood, the cooking of the gauchos and natives of Argentina. Not just the north, but from the forests and the Litoral. I came up with seven techniques of fire cuisine.*

**Who are you culinary heroes?**

*Many. Many of the people in the late 70s in France. Fernand Point is one. I never met him but he influenced all the chefs who changed cooking in France at that time, he trained them. These chefs became very important, they were the people I was learning from. Also Alice Waters, Magnus Nilsson, the late Rose Gray from river cafe, a great friend of mine and great chef. And Roberta Sudbrack from Rio de Janeiro.*

**What is the most interesting place for food at the moment?**

*It's very difficult to say. Cooking is so related to the thoughts and thinking of a human being that it could be anywhere really. I admire chefs who besides having the technique and 'know how', you can read an intellectual thought. There are many of them, and they are spread throughout the world. Cooking is a way of living and for me, a way of making a living, but in first place we need to fight and defend the romance of cooking in order to keep us happy and enthusiastic about our work. If you only think about money you lose the contact with this craft that is cooking.*

*I am a very big critic of the corporate world - I think it is very related with the insecurities of human beings.*

*I am quite frivolous as well, I enjoy spending money and staying in nice hotels etc but I can sleep under a tree too.*

*I think that the corporate world has been very hard trying to hide all the beautiful aspects of creativity of human beings.*

Siete Fuegos will be open from the beginning of March from Thursdays till Sundays for lunch. Visit [www.vinesofmendoza.com](http://www.vinesofmendoza.com) for more information

Amanda Barnes is a freelance writer currently living in Mendoza. For more information, visit [www.amandabarnes.co.uk](http://www.amandabarnes.co.uk) or [click here](#) to see her profile.