



THE EXPAT: MICHAEL EVANS

CV

48

From: Washington DC

Lives: Mendoza City

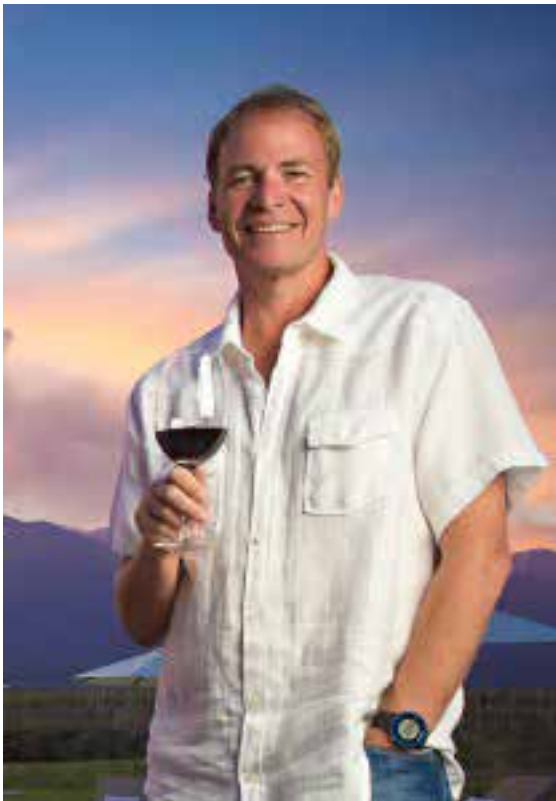
Profession: Co-founder of The Vines of Mendoza

Education: Political science at Arizona State University

Just read: The Quiet American

Just seen: Dallas Buyers Club

Gadget: My Nikon D800 camera, and anything Apple



After almost a decade living in Argentina, Michael Evans certainly has the right to opine on his fellow expats. "They fall into two categories: there are the people who are running away and want to have an adventure or teach English, and there are people who want to do something. And the people who really want to do something are really doing cool things."

Although he doesn't place himself in either category, the way his Argentine life has turned out slots him into the latter. A former political campaign manager with a passion for wine, a short holiday a decade ago led to a seamless permanent move and Michael co-founded The Vines of Mendoza, a private vineyard ownership project that now encompasses 500 hectares in Uco Valley.

He says: "The first time I came to Argentina was in 2000 for a business trip and I was in Buenos Aires for 36 hours. But I loved it. I had a five-hour lunch at Cabaña Las Lilas, finishing up with Malbec and cigars it was like going back in time. I was working at a telephone start-up at that point, dealing with Telefónica, and then four years later I was working on the John Kerry campaign. Once the election was over, I came to Argentina on vacation for three weeks.

"While I was in Buenos Aires, I went to a wine tasting and told the woman running it that I was going to Mendoza and asked her for some

suggestions. She said: 'You have to meet my friend Pablo Giménez, his family has a winery and he's a great guy, he'll give you the tips.'" It was the start of a beautiful relationship, both personally and professionally: Pablo Giménez Riili is co-founder of their joint enterprise The Vines of Mendoza.

Falling for Mendoza

"I met Pablo for coffee and thought it would be a 10 or 15-minute thing and that would be it. Not with Pablo. He took the next two and half days off work and we went to see wineries, mountains, we ended up at his mom's house for an asado, we went to a boliche and got home at seven o'clock in the morning. I fell completely in love with Mendoza and instantly became life-long friends with Pablo. That was November 2004."

Given that the political campaign had ended at that time and was in between jobs, Michael was essentially free to decide where his life went, and he never returned to the US to live, following that three-week holiday.

"I went back in late December to get more stuff but I've essentially been living here ever since. I didn't have any Spanish back then my recollection of those first few weeks was going to a restaurant and ordering something and if I didn't like it, order something else it was cheap at the time and I slowly learned what the dishes were that way!

"But I never thought I'd stay forever. Initially I thought I'd stay for six months, learn Spanish and see what the business opportunities in Mendoza were like. Then over the next six months, I decided that there was something happening in Mendoza, it was growing like crazy, it's beautiful, the wines are amazing, the people are fabulous, it's got huge potential and it was completely underdeveloped from a tourism perspective. So I thought that bringing what works in Napa, Italy and France could be really interesting. After a very hot and humid January in Buenos Aires, I moved to Mendoza in the February."

A vineyard of my own

A move to wine country was certainly attractive from a personal perspective Michael had lived in California and was very familiar with that terroir. He says: "I've also been a bit of a wine nut, and when I lived in Los Angeles I used to visit Napa all the time. Then I started to visit other places such as France and Italy I was also very passionate about wine but had never thought about being in the business.

"One of the drivers at that point was that I wanted my own small vineyard, and the idea was that Pablo's family would take care of it when I went back to the States after that initial six-month stint, then come down each year to make wine. And so as we started talking about that, I started to share that idea with friends back home and it turned out that quite a few of them also had that dream of owning a vineyard. So instead of a small piece for myself, I realized a lot of people wanted their own piece as well and that's when Pablo and I started up our private vineyard business."

Most foreigners who have set up a company in Argentina will never be able to say it was the most simple process thanks to all the unfamiliar red-tape, but Michael says his experience was less complicated given that he went into business with an Argentine.

"If I hadn't met Pablo I wouldn't have even considered setting up a business here. He's a lawyer, a home developer, a winemaker, he's got a lot of talents and that made it a lot easier it 's certainly not for the faint of heart. I think if we'd realized how difficult things would be at the time, and the hurdles we'd have to go over, we might have done things differently. But that was also part of the adventure at the time.

"The biggest challenge has been being patient, and in the wine business it's a long game. I originally thought I'd be here for three or four years before going back to the States, but what I came to realize is that both Argentina and the wine business are long-term. Working on campaigns and start-ups had much quicker timeframes so that shift from immediate gratification to building something for the long term has been challenging."

One professional challenges he has come up against in Argentina is the dedication to family time. "If you're building a hotel in the US you can pay people more so they will work on a Sunday to get the job done and meet a deadline. Here, there's no way you'll get anyone to work on a Sunday and not go to their asado with their family."

Mendoza lifestyle

Currently building a house on Vines terroir, Michael mostly resides in the city of Mendoza. "It's smaller than other cities I've lived in and I like big cities, but there are lots of people, great bars and restaurants, it's quite international in terms of

visitors although not so much with respect to expats. I tend to hang out more with locals than with expats, I had 40 years of that in the States! so I really enjoy going up into the mountains with my Argentine friends.

"I do a lot of photography in my spare time, so I take a lot of pictures in the mountains. I also started running about a year and half ago I did the New York marathon last November and I plan to do the Buenos Aires one either this year or next.

"I've also spent a lot of time in Salta, Patagonia and Iguazú. One of the projects I want to do is drive the whole Route 40 over six weeks and take pictures along the way to create a book about the whole drive I think that will be a lot of fun. And it's a bold statement, but I think I'm the best Yank asador in Argentina I've learned a lot from Pablo as well as a trick or two from Francis Mallmann (whose restaurant Siete Fuegos is on site at Vines) and I make a mean matambre de cerdo.

"But I'm really excited about the winemaking. We planted our first vineyards in 2007 and made our first vintage in 2010 so the next big challenge is how to make one of the best wines in Argentina. I make wine every year but not to sell, just to give to friends. I just did a co-fermentation of Malbec with Cabernet Franc, which I'm excited about, and I'm making blend of Grenache, Syrah and Mourvedre. Pablo and I have a bit of a friendly competition to see who can make the best wine in a given year so we keep some secrets! I had a 1977 Weinert the other night. It's an old wine but it was fabulous! And that's what I want to be doing: making a wine that people can enjoy 20 or 30 years from now."